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## SUCCESS STORY

# The Key to Success in East Timor

**USAID is teaching farmers new gardening techniques, building their resilience to natural disasters that threaten productive harvests.**



IOM

*“Keyhole gardening has helped us get fresh vegetables for our families, and has especially helped the mothers to improve family nutrition.”*

*- Antonio, the chief of Ariana, a sub-village in East Timor’s Bobonaro District*

In the hamlet of Heda in East Timor’s Viqueque District, alternating floods and droughts have left farming families with limited access to food, contributing to malnutrition and depriving households of income to purchase basic necessities.

This scenario is common throughout East Timor, where frequent heavy rains and hilly terrain leave communities vulnerable to floods, landslides, and river shifts, all of which can result in decreased agricultural production and impact livelihoods.

USAID, through partner the International Organization for Migration (IOM), is addressing these risks by equipping rural communities with the skills and resources required to plant and harvest vegetables despite severe weather patterns, through an alternative farming technique known as keyhole gardening.

Keyhole gardens are named after their shape—a circular garden with a section cut out to enable access to a composting basket in the middle. Families can use everyday kitchen and garden waste to nourish their keyhole gardens, and the nutrients and water in the compost increase the garden’s resistance to drought. Gardens are also raised to waist level, allowing the sick and elderly to easily access their vegetables and strengthening the gardens’ resistance to floods.

With USAID assistance, IOM is working across five districts in East Timor to help 12 at-risk communities, like Heda, to establish keyhole gardens. Farmers are applying their newly acquired skills to build and maintain individual garden plots, producing vegetables that contribute to more nourishing family meals. Vegetables from keyhole gardens are also supplementing household income, with one garden earning a farmer as much as \$8—equivalent to a week’s pay, for some—per monthly harvest.

Paulo, the head of Purugua village in Bobonaro District, is pleased that his family no longer needs to travel to purchase produce. “They just go straight outside and within 10 meters they can get fresh vegetables.”