



PRESS RELEASE

To'os ba Moris Di'ak (TOMAK), the Australian Government's flagship agricultural livelihoods program, promotes disability inclusion in agriculture in Timor-Leste

Dili, June 29, 2023 – The results of TOMAK's Disability Prevalence and Inclusion Report in Agriculture were officially launched at Timor Plaza on June 20, 2023 alongside key stakeholders: the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI), the Secretary State of Equality and Inclusion (SEII), and Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO). *"Studies such as these are important for us to better understand people with disabilities and how to effectively provide support according to their unique needs"*, stated Director General of SEII, Armando da Costa, in his remarks during the launch.

Recognizing that many people with disabilities are often hidden or are less visible within their households and communities due to social norms, structures and systems that marginalize and disempower them, TOMAK worked closely with Organizations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) and community leaders to cultivate the relationships necessary to secure support in identifying people with disabilities. This included working closely with Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO) a key partner for TOMAK to ensure the assignment committed to a central tenet of the global disability movement: "nothing about us without us".

The study was conducted between September and October 2022, in 65 aldeia and 14 suku across TOMAK's implementation municipalities: Baucau, Bobonaro, and Viqueque. A total of 585 people were interviewed with 85% being people with disabilities and approximately 50% were female. The research recorded seventy-five percent of respondents as being economically active in the agriculture sector, primarily engaged in smallholder farming. However negative assumptions over capacity and productivity are seeing many persons with disabilities excluded from collective community farming. Difficulty accessing services such as markets, agriculture extension workers, and financial and social welfare services persist. Despite these challenges, the research uncovered clear evidence of momentum on inclusion of persons with disabilities with a permissive environment creating a timely opportunity for TOMAK to increase support in this space.

This research has provided TOMAK and partners foundational information on local level findings to provide recommendations for best-practice strategies and approaches for inclusion that can be integrated into program activities to support equal participation and program outcomes for people with disabilities. During the launch, MAF, MSSI, and SEII reiterated their support and commitment to inclusion. All will work with TOMAK on how best to integrate the information from the study into their relevant action plans to ensure they are able to effectively support disability inclusion according to their mandates.

MAF's Director General Maria Odete Do Ceu Guterres remarked in her opening speech that *"MAF is committed to creating a resolution that will ensure Ministry programs are inclusive and benefit people with disabilities. MAF is unable to do this alone and needs partnerships from programs like TOMAK and organizations representing people with disabilities such as RHTO."* This is an important step towards the implementation of the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities and demonstrates Timor-Leste's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified in Timor-Leste in January 2023.

"TOMAK is actively forging partnerships to increase awareness and promote the rights of people with disabilities, whilst improving access to services by people with disabilities. Our research will help our TOMAK program and MAF to include people with disabilities in our agricultural work in Baucau, Bobonaro and Viqueque." Renato Zrnic, TOMAK Team Leader. TOMAK has already signed a cooperation agreement with RHTO and SEII and is exploring collaboration arrangements with MSSI, in addition to its existing partnerships with MAF and MoH.

TOMAK is a 10-year agricultural livelihoods program with a total funding of AUD50 million funded by the Australian Government which works closely with Government, NGO, and private sectors in Timor-Leste. It aims to improve Timor-Leste's rural communities' food systems through sustainable agricultural livelihoods.

Contact: Silvia Ximenes, Senior Communications Officer, TOMAK

Tel: +670 7715 5516 | WhatsApp: +670 7527 6904 | Email: silvia.ximenes@tomak.org