The road to becoming a role model and leader for young and old alike has been a long one for Manuel Mendonca, who serves as Chefe do Aldeia in Cabasfati, Aileu District. In his hamlet, Manuel is the first point of contact regarding conflicts and disputes ranging from domestic violence to youth unemployment, and animal property. In addition to his duties as mediator, Manuel is also a proactive supporter of village development, having recently submitted proposals for clean water access and village rehabilitation initiatives in the hopes of creating opportunities for further community improvement.

But he wasn’t always the upstanding young man he is today. “Before I entered PAS, I was a troublemaker,” he explains. “I used to hang out at the market, drinking, throwing rocks at people’s houses and sometimes demanding money from them at night... I knew I needed to change.” Through a friend, Manuel heard about the PAS program in his area and registered through the Fundasaun Cristal Learning & Livelihood Center in Aileu District. Over the course of the eight-month program, Manuel learned not only about conflict resolution and work readiness -- he also learned he could do more than he ever thought possible. An elementary school drop-out prone to shyness, public speaking -- even in front of his peers -- seemed a nearly insurmountable obstacle to him. It had always been easier for him to express himself in a group, acting out and causing trouble. In PAS, he learned what leadership is and how to communicate his ideas more directly. His transformation did not go unnoticed. “Before PAS he was so shy. When you asked him a question he would just laugh and look away,” reflects PAS trainer and mentor Alibere Martins. Seeing the challenges facing Manuel and the young man’s interest in overcoming them, Alibere spent extra time with Manuel, having him stand at a lectern and practice public speaking.

His hard work at the lectern paid off as, with newfound confidence, Manuel would eventually campaign for the post of Chefe do Aldeia - and win, being elected in 2009. These days, it’s hard to imagine he was ever shy about speaking in front of people. Given his role as a local expert in conflict resolution, Manuel can be proud of his transformation. “If it hadn't been for the PAS program, no one would have considered me for a position like the Chefe de Aldeia,” he remarks. One year into his five-year term as Chefe de Aldeia, Manuel is excited at the possibilities of bettering his community. “People need peace and calm [in their communities]. Being Chefe de Aldeia is hard work, but if people still have faith in me after five years, I would be ready to continue serving the people [in this role] in the future.”
Adelina is an elected women’s representative on the local council for Clakuk suco in Manufahi District. A graduate of the PAS-supported ETADEP Learning & Livelihood Center in Fatuberliu, she says she joined the PAS program because she wanted to change her life and “stop sitting at home”. Realizing the access to information and experience to be gained in PAS could be the key she was searching for, she enrolled with Etadep.

During Phase II of the program, she chose to expand her chicken-selling business as her pathway option and joined a chicken cooperative upon graduation. With over 30 chickens, her group is looking to invest in the future, using information recently seen on the “Bulletin de Oportunidade” from PAS that included instructions for agricultural groups to submit proposals to MAF for additional assistance. They intend to put in a proposal for vaccines and materials to improve the chicken coop.

At the end of 2009, while she was in the PAS program, the Suco Chefe candidate approached Adelina about joining the slate for the election in January 2010. Continuing the journey she began in PAS to go beyond her bounds, Adelina agreed to run for the position of representative and summon the courage to help women in her community. Over the course of the five-day campaign, she proved to herself that she could by speaking in public to villagers, explaining what she would do for women in the area if elected. Looking to create a broad base of support, she also highlighted proposed initiatives for the elderly and veterans in the community. Not only was she able to speak in public, she was elected Women’s Representative!

Upon election, she and PAS colleague Clara Ribeiro – also elected Women’s Representative – began holding discussions with local women on organizing business cooperatives. To date, they have helped create a tais-weaving group, a basket-weaving group, a sewing group and a livestock group. Since graduating in May, she and Clara have also attended a workshop on cooperatives hosted by the Alola Foundation and are currently gathering local products made by women to prepare to sell in fairs in Same on November 3rd – National Women’s Day. Hoping to encourage private sector development, they will facilitate linkages between local producers and buyers, with a portion of the proceeds going into a cooperative fund for the groups and a portion going to the individual producers directly.

In addition to working on women’s economic empowerment, in her role as representative Adelina has also been called to mediate a domestic violence dispute. Asked to join the intervention by the Chefe de Suco, Adelina provided counseling to the couple to try and resolve their differences peacefully and says that to this day, there has not been a repeat of violence in the home in question.

Well on her way as Representative, Adelina can be proud of her accomplishments since graduating from PAS and confident she will rise to meet the challenges ahead of her as an elected community leader.
Twenty-eight-year-old Jacob Eco is a busy man. In between serving as the youth representative for Lifau suco and the secretary for a collective rotating credit fund, he finds time to take care of two children, run a kiosk and improve a fishing business. It was back in October 2009, while he was in the PAS program, that he was approached by the Chefe du Suco to run for the position of youth representative. When asked why he thinks the Chefe chose him, Jacob is quick to answer, “The chefe thought I was a good person, because he could see the kind of activities I was involved in.” During the election campaign, the PAS graduate from the FEEO Learning and Livelihood Center spoke to community audiences about the importance of youth being involved in local affairs. Reflecting upon his election as Youth Representative, Jacob says, “I was very happy because I had never taken a leadership role before,” he says of his election, adding that the post carries a special responsibility. “Youth need to have a voice in the community,” he explains. “And they need to voice their opinions to leaders.”

Jacob has had limited exposure to formal education, having finished only the second year of middle school but, like a lot of program participants, he entered PAS with a specific idea of what he wanted to learn: financial management. After absorbing the business development training offered in Phase I of the program, he chose to use his PAS seed grant to diversify his income sources and start a second business rather than trying to expand a pre-existing fishing venture. “Fishing can be very unstable,” he says, explaining that while fisherman in the remote area of Maquelab can earn up to $50 a day by selling their catches to buyers in the district capital of Pante Makassar, it requires good weather and contacts who can link suppliers to buyers. To create multiple streams of income, Jacob also started a kiosk, which is open every day and nets around $100 a month. Reflecting on his experience in PAS, Jacob says one of the most important financial management lessons he learned was the importance of separating business and family affairs. “Money for business is for business and not for private things,” he says emphatically.

Now a local leader and entrepreneur, he says he looks forward to getting more young people involved in Lifau’s development, including through more youth-friendly activities such as a singing competition and sporting events.

Shop Talk: PAS Micro-Entrepreneurs in Action

While some catch fish, others farm them! That’s what Fernando, Guilhermina, Josefa and Domingas (pictured right) have done. Graduates of the FC Aileu Learning & Livelihood Center in Aileu, they pooled together their Phase II seed grants and worked with local landowners to dig and stock two fish-breeding ponds: in one, they raise full-grown fish sold to community members as food, while in the other they breed hatchlings sold to NGOs interested in starting their own breeding programs. “We started small, but we’re optimistic that in a year, we’ll each have our own pond,” says Ikan Emas group member Fernando Soares.
In my experience, PAS helps youth understand responsibility. Confidence and responsibility have to be a part of everyday life and PAS is very good at making youth understand that. It’s an important part of civic education – but one a lot of people don’t really pay attention to. To get a job, you need to have a sense of responsibility and a belief in yourself.

Arnaldo Suni, Chefe Juventude Oecusse District and General Manager, MTCI Warehouse (PAS employer)

As Chefe do Juventude for Oecusse district, Arnaldo Suni is one of the many valued stakeholders who have worked together with the Secretary of State of the Special Region of Oecusse, SEFOPE Oecusse, the District Office of the Ministry of Education/Non-Formal Education, the Oecusse District Administrator’s office, PAS partners, local NGOs and other community institutions to improve learning and livelihood opportunities for Oecusse’s rural youth – particularly in the marginalized areas in which PAS works, including Miquelab, Pune and Passabe sub-districts.
On the first day of his very first job, Gregorio Coa was understandably a little bit nervous. “I didn’t know what I was supposed to do or what the job would involve,” he says. The 23-year-old quickly learned to fit in with others and says the training he received on the job put him at ease. Plus, as a PAS participant, he had interned for four months with Oxfam, learning about agriculture, childhood nutrition and water & sanitation – useful skills that would later transfer to his job as a Health & Hygiene Promoter for Haroman Timor Lorosae (HTL), a local NGO implementing water and sanitation programs funded by USAID DWASH. “I felt confident because I had interned [with Oxfam] during the PAS program and so I knew what NGOs do and how programs work,” he explains.

Like many program participants, before enrolling in PAS, Gregorio’s only source of employment was subsistence agriculture on his family’s farm. “Before I joined PAS, I had no idea how to go forward or build my future,” he says. “I had no job experience and nobody would hire me.”

When his Team Leader from the PAS-supported FPWO Pante Makassar Learning Center alerted him to a vacancy at HTL, he put together a CV that highlighted his background in water and sanitation, applied, and got the job.

These days, he works with local communities to promote proper hygiene while collecting community health and sanitation data, such as the number of families with children under five, the number of toilet facilities in a given community, and the prevalence of hand washing with soap. “I like sanitation,” he says with a laugh. “You start with basic questions, to make people think about the importance of sanitation. I like that – making people think about how important that is.” Reflecting a bit, he says he’s seen first-hand the difference hygiene can make. “Sanitation is important because it helps prevent disease in the community,” he explains. “Simple things like toilets can help save lives.”

“Before I joined PAS, I had no idea how to go forward or build my future. I had no job experience and nobody would hire me.”

Gregorio Coa: A Way Forward

“The youth that come from the PAS program are very different from other youth who have done vocational training programs. Most vocational training programs are very specialized… but PAS really gets youth ready for work because it encompasses everything”

Mario Salu, Director, SEFOPE Oecusse
PAS graduate Deolinda Ximenes has recently come back to Pante Makassar to start a new life. A high school drop-out, Deolinda has had to overcome many obstacles on her way to becoming a business owner. With limited schooling, no prior work experience, and three children to raise on her own, she initially enrolled in PAS to supplement her education. “PAS turned my life around. It taught me how to look at my future and believe that I could succeed,” she explains. The CV-writing, interview and business skills she acquired during the Livelihood Preparation phase would soon prove very useful, as Deolinda applied for an extremely competitive SEFOPE-sponsored beautician/salon operator training internship. After a rigorous selection process, which consisted of five interviews, Deolinda was chosen to attend the three-month training program in Dili – becoming one of only 13 women selected across Timor-Leste, one from each of the country’s districts. In doing so, she joins PAS graduates Marta da Conceicao from Baucau and Emalita Cardoso from Manufahi. Now back in Oecusse, she has opened her own business, the Ninuji Salon, with material support from ILO and already earns up to $80 a month. With her new income and the financial management skills she acquired in PAS, Deolinda is saving and budgeting in the hopes of completing a second room for the salon, buying a generator to increase her operating hours and eventually expanding into a bridal hairstyling and wedding dress rental outfit.

Deolinda’s colleague, Terijinha Taqui, is employed by Forum Peduli Wanita Oecusse (FPWO) as a hygiene and sanitation promoter for the USAID DWASH program in Passabe sub-district. She says her favorite part of her job is meeting directly with community members to explain the benefits of proper hygiene. “It’s really important how you talk to the community about hygiene,” she says. “You start with families and explain hand washing. Then we practice together.” The youngest of seven children and without parents since the age of 14 (her mother died delivering her while, followed by her father in 1999), Terejinha explains that her motivation for joining the PAS program was simple: to improve her chances of getting a job and look after her siblings. Now earning $290 a month in the first job she has ever had, the 23-year-old has become the sole provider for her entire family. In addition to caring for her brothers and sisters, in her capacity as a WASH promoter she also looks after two bairos in Passabe, comprising a population of nearly 350 community members. Terejinha meets with them regularly to discuss disease prevention and the importance of healthy behaviors. And while teaching others, she’s learned something about herself. “I’ve learned to be confident,” she says. “You need to be confident to stand up and speak to communities.”
“PAS has been good for Oecusse. Before youth had no work and were often in the streets playing instead of going to school. Now the same kids that used to be in the street are going back to school and finding work”

--Ramila da Costa, PAS Trainer

Name: Ramila da Costa
Title: Head Trainer, PAS Program
PAS-Supported Partner: Forum Peduli Wanita Oecusse (FPWO)
Favorite PAS Success Story: Fredolino "Lafu" Sila

"Lafu used to get drunk and bother people in the street, running around with friends and coming into the office just to harass the staff here. We kept advising him to change his behavior and one day he asked me to help him find a job. He said he realized his actions were wrong and he wanted to turn his life around. I wanted to give him a chance [with PAS]. Now he's changed his life and has found work on his own."

Today, Lafu is a supply manager at an MTCl warehouse, where he earns $164 a month. He also returned to school with the support of the Oecusse District Administrator, who was so impressed by Lafu's transformation, he wanted to help him. In addition to his work, Lafu now studies at the Dili Institute of Technology's Oecusse campus.

He recently brought back his university test scores to show Ramila: Lafu earned the highest grade in the class.

“Before PAS we didn’t hire youth because there was no one to train and organize them. There was nobody making sure that youth had the experience and work training needed to start work.”

Jose Tasae, Program Coordinator FFSO, Oecusse District

Petrus Oki:
A member of the FEEO Learning & Livelihood Center in Maquelab, Petrus is a primary school graduate who contributed his PAS money toward buying a motorcycle. He now transports the fish he catches in Maquelab to Oecusse town, where he can sell his catch and make up to $140 a month.

“Net” Income
It’s hard to believe that in just four short weeks Veronika Ulan Oki went from being a shy, introverted 24-year-old to an integral member of a social theater troupe bringing laughter and smiles to villages across Oecusse district. Veronika is a member of FPWO Passabe’s Klase Kreativu, an eight-week refresher course for the very low skilled in PAS. In Kreativu, PAS youth learn to communicate their ideas and overcome shyness and social inhibition through a series of active teaching/learning techniques co-designed by PAS staff and local NGO training partners. Class activities include group projects and performances involving content both familiar and important to youth in Oecusse. Even after completing the PAS program, Veronika continued to face extreme shyness when speaking to others in public. To assist her with overcoming this basic barrier to employability, PAS staff invited the elementary school graduate to join this special class. In a few short weeks, Veronika – and everyone around her -- began to see changes. Working with fellow “Kreativus”, Veronika wrote, directed and acted in a thirty-minute skit on the importance of hand washing that was performed for elementary school students in her rural village of Passabe. Soon after, she learned that her skills were being requested by USAID DWASH to promote better hand washing practices throughout Oecusse. And so, Veronika is now “on the road” with nine other “Kreativus”, bringing her newfound talent to support social marketing initiatives that improve health and hygiene in rural communities throughout Oecusse.

Throughout November, Klase Kreativu will be bringing their mission to delight, inform and transform to 20 villages across Oecusse.
As literacy teachers earning between $85.00 and $150.00 a month for the Ministry of Education’s “Yes, I Can” and “Literacy For Life” programs, Madalena, Rosita, Veronica, Gabriel, Domingas, Korneliu, Jose, Domingos, Helena, Cosmas and Octavianus had a direct hand in bringing about an important moment in their nation’s development: Timor’s first-ever campaign to end illiteracy across the country. These graduates of PAS’s eight-month, integrated classroom and on-the-job work readiness training program understand from personal experience what it is to overcome marginalization and barriers to formal education and seek pathways to a better life. For them and many PAS youth, those pathways include service to their communities and country -- service that, for these teachers, meant going out and recruiting students themselves and sometimes turning their own homes into classrooms. “I went from door to door to find my students, asking everyone who was eligible if they were interested in the program,” explains 20-year-old Helena Seco (bottom right). “The most important thing I’ve done is to try and motivate my students. They couldn’t read and write but they are motivated to learn because it gives them new opportunities.” Her colleague, Domingas Ulan (bottom left), agrees, saying the challenges involved are worth it for her students, the majority of whom are elderly. “Some of the people we teach have never held a pen before,” she remarks, adding, “We have to hold their hands and the pen and teach them how to write their own names for the first time in their lives.” And that, says Cosmas Neti (above center), is the best part of the job: “Seeing people who can write their own name instead of having to use their fingerprint,” he says proudly. Whether it’s taking part in the 2010 Census, representing youth and women on local councils, serving as chefes do aldeia, or helping organize communities around health and hygiene, PAS youth in Oecusse and eight other districts across Timor-Leste are not only transforming themselves – they’re giving back to others to ensure a better future for their nation.

Learning is the liberating force in human development

EDC
Education Development Center, Inc.
Through a unique partnership between PAS, SEFOPE, and Don Bosco, 17 women and 13 men from four sub-districts of Oecusse were selected to join a special training program at the Don Bosco facility in Dili. Through this 56-day accelerated course, PAS graduates will gain invaluable skills in three areas of expected labor market growth: 1) plumbing/canalization; 2) electricity with a focus on refrigeration; and 3) IT & office administration, with a focus on bookkeeping.

After registering with SEFOPE Oecusse, the “Don Bosco 30” were presented with ceremonial scarves and boarded the Nakroma vessel en route to Dili. They arrived in the capital on 2 October 2010, settled into their new homes, and got to work...