

case study



Krista Brandt/IFRC

Timor-Leste: Working with communities to increase safety and adequacy of houses

What is participatory approach to safe shelter awareness?

Participatory approach to safe shelter awareness (PASSA) is a method of disaster risk reduction related to shelter safety. It has been modelled after the participatory hygiene and sanitation transformation methodology and officially launched by IFRC in 2011. The aim of PASSA is to develop local capacity to reduce shelter-related risk by raising awareness and developing skills in joint analysis, learning and decision-making at community level. Its purpose is to raise awareness of the “everyday vulnerable” of the “everyday risks” related to the built environment and foster locally appropriate safe shelter and settlement practices. PASSA is a tool that strengthens

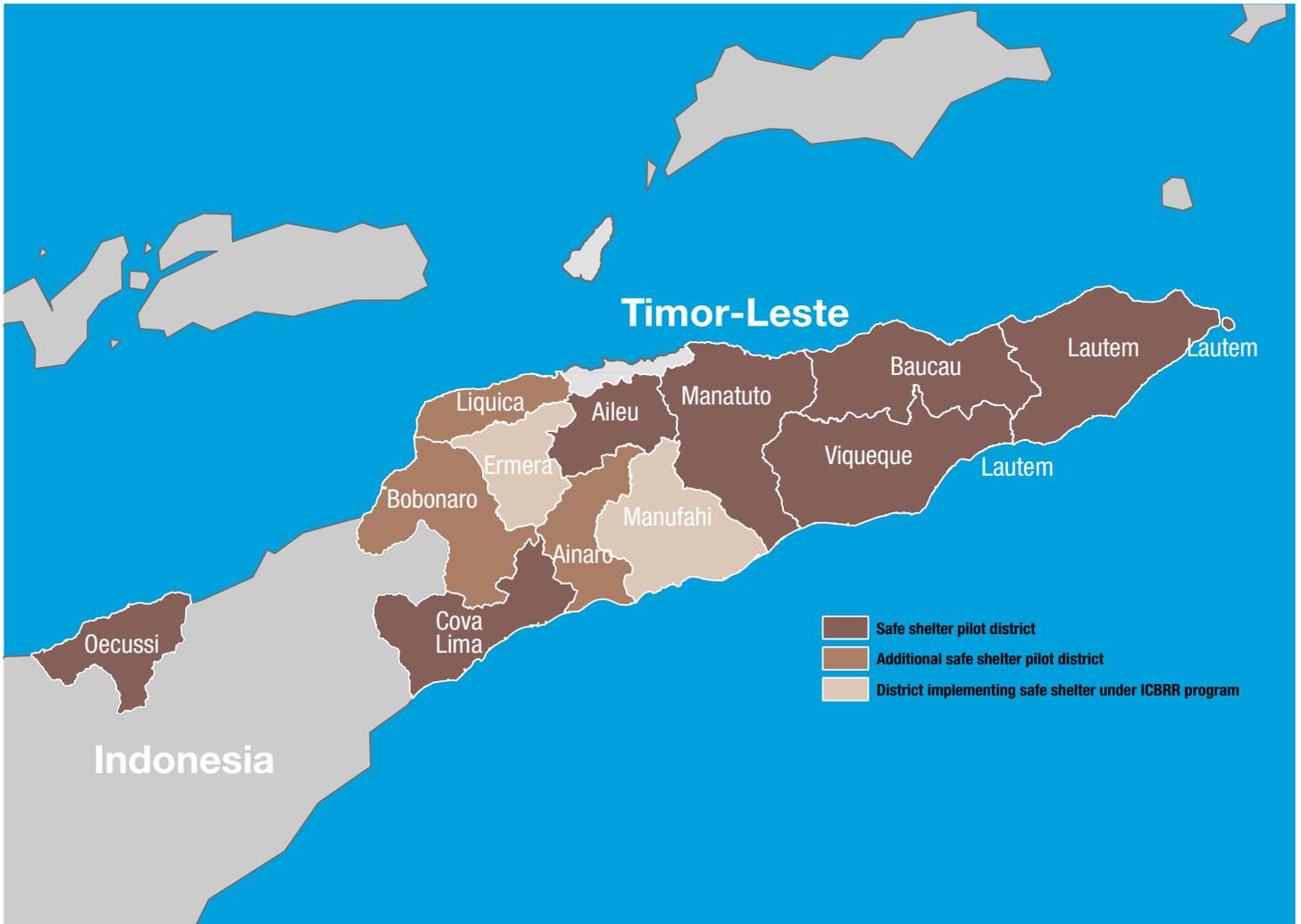
both the “software” (knowledge and skills within the community) and the “hardware” (physical improvement of housing and infrastructure). It is a powerful approach to employ when working towards increased community resilience.

As such, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste decided to adapt PASSA to the local context. The aim is not only to increase safe shelter awareness and work towards making improvements to existing houses but also to advocate that new structures are built following safe shelter principles.

Context

According to World Bank’s poverty survey almost 50 per cent of the population in Timor-Leste live in poverty. For many people in-country access to shelter, safe water and basic sanitation, food and other resources is not reliable. This hinders communities from living in a safe, healthy and secure environment and sustaining their livelihood. This situation, coupled with natural hazards, such as regular floods, landslides, droughts and occasional earthquakes increases the vulnerability of the communities and negatively impacts their resilience.

The Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste works together with vulnerable communities to increase their access to safe water, improved sanitation and empower them with knowledge to facilitate better health outcomes, reduce disaster risks and create sustainable livelihoods. Implementing these projects has enabled the National Society not only to build community safety and resilience but also develop its capacity to work effectively and efficiently in programming, advocacy and delivery of services.



Eight activities of PASSA:

- Activity 1: Historical profile
- Activity 2: Community mapping and visit
- Activity 3: Frequency and impact of hazards
- Activity 4: Safe and unsafe shelter
- Activity 5: Options for solutions
- Activity 6: Planning for change
- Activity 7: Problem box
- Activity 8: Monitoring plan

Adopting an integrated approach to address complex risks

One of the key lessons learnt from implementing various projects is that each community faces a complex set of risks that are inter-connected. To have a lasting impact, these risks are best addressed by adopting an integrated approach to service delivery.

Translating this lesson learnt into action, the Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste has been implementing the **integrated community-based risk reduction (ICBRR)** programme since 2012. ICBRR is designed as a package of priority actions that links service delivery across various sectors in a systematic way.

The Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste aims to strengthen community resilience by:

- building capacity
- improving health and living conditions
- generating sustainable livelihoods
- raising awareness about the environment and risk
- empowering communities with knowledge in regard to disaster prevention and emergency preparedness.

Uma metin: Safe shelter

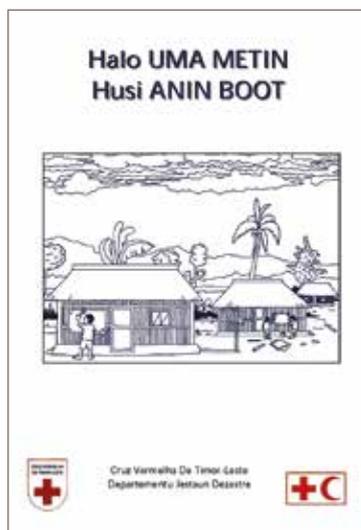
The need to raise awareness around safe shelter was identified as a priority area following a training of trainers held in May 2013. High winds are common across the country and negatively impacts many



people, their livelihoods and the infrastructure. Based on prior vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA) carried out at community level, the National Society identified high winds as a risk – top in the list of priorities to address.

Having acquired new tools and skills to jumpstart the programme, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste set out to adapt PASSA methodology and to design a pilot safe shelter programme, *uma metin*. Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste also expanded its VCA tool and processes to include safe shelter.

Cover of the safe shelter booklet for communities



To raise awareness about safer shelters, the ICBRR team set out to develop a series of related materials – manual for staff and volunteers, booklet for communities, a poster and flipcharts. This included illustrations depicting safe and unsafe shelter practices to withstand high winds. To ensure messaging on shelter practices resonate with communities, the illustrations were developed by two local artists.

To fit the local context, messages were adapted from the principles highlighted in the [shelter safety handbook](#) accompanying the [PASSA manual](#).

In November 2013, the safe shelter training was piloted in Asubilitoho-Aileu district with the participation of 21 community volunteers and local carpenters (13 male and eight female participants). This training focused on five of the eight steps of PASSA, merging activity one – historical profile and activity seven problem box with the VCA. The site visit, planned as part of the pilot training, helped gather further information on local practices and validating safe and unsafe options with tradesmen.

Following the facilitators training with the disaster management staff, safe shelter trainings were conducted at community level in the districts of Baucau, Viqueque, Lautem, Aileu, Manatutu, Cova Lima and Oecussi in December 2013.

During the training, local builders were given the opportunity to share their knowledge, especially in regard to building traditional houses. This was especially important, as the communities had observed that *uma duut* (traditional houses) are more resistant to high winds than houses built with modern techniques and materials (concrete blocks). Communities also realized that when building their homes they were not paying attention to simple but fundamental considerations that could significantly reduce damage from high winds, such as the wind direction or the depth of the post holes.

By the end of the training, 40 families in target communities made a commitment to repair or build their houses according to their newly-acquired knowledge and started work. Progress of works was monitored by community volunteers with additional support from branch volunteers and disaster management staff, as necessary.

In order to assist families to make improvements, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste provided the communities with 240 shelter tool kits. To ensure that the tool-kits were appropriate for use in the Timor-Leste context, adjustments were made to

the [standard IFRC tool kit](#). Considering that the toolkits are to be used repeatedly by the communities, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste approved the purchase of durable and high quality kits (costing 120 United States dollars). Additional stock of the toolkits is maintained at Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste's branch offices and headquarters.

Table 1 – Contents of the Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste shelter tool kit

	Items	Description	Unit	Quantity
1	Nail for roofing	75mm long with umbrella type with rubber washer for roof sheets	Kg	½
2	Nail	5cm	Kg	½
3	Nail	7cm	Kg	½
4	Nail	10cm	Kg	½
5	Handsaw	400mm blade	Pieces	1
6	Shovel	Round point with Y handle	Pieces	1
7	Hoe		Pieces	1
8	Machete	Curved blade 16" (405mm)	Pieces	1
9	Claw hammer	0.75kg	Pieces	1
10	Post hole digger		Pieces	1
11	Shears	260mm long	Pieces	1
12	Trowel		Pieces	1

The toolkits were handed over to the community for safekeeping. The community collectively decided where the toolkits would be stored – at times these were kept in a community volunteer's house and

in other instances with the community leader. Households that decided to make improvements to the structure of their house could sign out a toolkit as required. Since then, a few villages have experienced high winds. As a result of the improvements made to the structure, families faced no damage to property and lives.

Learning from the pilot phase

An evaluation meeting took place in October 2014, marking the end of the pilot phase. The aim of the meeting was to:

- share the progress of the *uma metin* activities
- capture the lessons learnt
- highlight the challenges faced
- plan ahead.

Uma metin related activities will continue as part of the ICBRR programming. The programme was expanded to include two additional districts – Ermera and Manufahi.

The experience of the pilot phase and the recommendations from the evaluation meeting provide a strong impetus for the future of the safe shelter programme in Timor-Leste. High in the list is the need to address other common hazards, such as floods and landslides. Additional technical expertise will be required to address these hazards, as well as any other specific risks faced by target communities (e.g. tips to build safely in rocky areas).





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Thinking back to the pilot phase, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste realizes the importance of engaging technical expertise throughout the programme cycle, instead of only at the beginning to develop the messages and trainings. Securing the support of a shelter expert along the entire extent of a PASSA process or safe shelter component of an integrated programme enables the correct implementation of the safe options by target communities. In addition to providing essential technical support on shelter safety, the shelter expert should engage in resolving any relevant issues that are beyond the volunteers' or the branch personnel's capacity to manage.

Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste should also consider increasing the frequency of the monitoring visits to communities, particularly when families embark on the task of making improvements to their houses. In some locations, the remoteness of the

villages and difficulty of accessing these during the rainy season, impacted the regularity of the visits. This meant that the volunteers were not always on time to catch and rectify mistakes/ineffective measures, such as short bracing.

In order to address this short coming, the National Society would like to collaborate with the local construction school or training centre to provide additional training to the tradesmen to enhance their technical skills and to provide basic construction training to the communities (e.g. how to cure concrete, etc.). However, due to funding issues no progress has been made in this area so far.

Looking ahead

Since the end of the pilot programme, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste has expanded its safe shelter activities, to the remaining districts of the country (with the exception of Dili). Refresher trainings are also to be carried out in the initial locations. In collaboration with the shelter experts from the IFRC, safe shelter messages for additional hazards identified by Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste staff are being developed.

Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste was established in 2000 and formally recognized by IFRC in 2005. It is functional across the 13 districts in-country. Over the years, it has developed significantly in size, its reach and impact. Today, it has close to 3,750 volunteers and 140 staff. The Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste works with vulnerable communities to improve their health outcomes, safety and secure livelihoods. In situations of emergency, the National Society coordinates emergency response as and where necessary.



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Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

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