The Government of Timor-Leste (GOTL) faced numerous challenges that restricted its ability to govern, finance, and deliver health services effectively and sustainably. Among the challenges in the health sector is a lack of community participation. Various Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) exist in Timor-Leste but are not empowered to advocate for the needs of the community and are limited in their capacity to communicate directly with the Ministry of Health (MoH). There was a lack of effective feedback mechanisms between the community, CSOs, and the MoH.

The USAID Health System Sustainability Activity (Activity) identified a need to facilitate empowerment of CSOs working in the health sector to better represent their communities and allow greater advocacy for their health system. By facilitating this, the MoH was able to strengthen the roles of these CSOs as a necessary step towards developing a relationship with the MoH and building more effective communication among the key activities. This was a key building block to strengthening the health system in Timor-Leste.

The Activity was conducted through regular activities of the REBAS network, which involved training, building networks, and promoting advocacy. The REBAS network was initially formed in 2018 and was able to stay active until 2022, focusing on the exchange of information and experiences among CSOs and the MoH. The network was launched in May 2022, and the network's objective was to coordinate the CSO efforts, receive a collective voice on behalf of their constituents, and advocate for policies to strengthen the health system's ability to offer high-quality, accessible, and inclusive health services.

The Activity successfully contributed to the strengthening of the health system by focusing on the components of governance, local ownership, and the role of key actors. Numerous CSOs existing but not empowered to speak for their communities had little awareness or understanding of their role as advocates. There was little to no communication between the community, CSOs, and the MoH, which there was no coordination among the CSOs and the MoH, which allowed greater government to action. Strengthening these CSOs was necessary for effective communication. Improving CSOs' capacities to use more evidenced-based advocacy will contribute to a stronger role to help monitor and report key health systems building blocks to ensure health equity, quality, and resource optimization. Building greater collaboration between the MoH leadership and CSOs will ensure that capacity development and ownership will continue engagement beyond Activity project implementation.

Evidence
The Activity worked with the REBAS consortium to identify and bring 42 active health CSOs together to the REBAS network. The network included the country's leadership and key stakeholders including the MoH and the USAID-supported project. The Activity provided technical assistance to REBAS to facilitate its internal structure and governance, identify priority areas of engagement, and advocate both at the national and sub-national levels and facilitate its activities.

The Activity assisted the MoH to finalize a partnership manual that will institutionalize MoH and CSO engagement.