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Effective Seed Storage in Timor-Leste (ESS) Funded by USAID, Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance - OFDA

Quarterly Report October 1 – December 31, 2015



A SILC Group Meeting in October 2015, in Baucau

Country Contact	Headquarter Contact	Project Summary	
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Program Summary

Since August 2011, Mercy Corps and partners through the USAID/OFDA funded Effective Seed Storage (ESS) in Timor-Leste program have successfully developed a market system for a metal-based seed storage system that is customized and locally manufactured. The program is designed as an intervention that addresses seed system insecurity, and ultimately food insecurity, in Timor Leste. The program is an effort to mitigate post-harvest storage losses of farm-saved seeds and also helps maintain better quality seeds to reduce underlying risk factors of availability, accessibility and utilization of productive seeds. This is in line with priority action four of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Since the program's first inception phase, there has been successful replication in 10 out of 13 districts in the country through an initial expansion in February 2013. Starting from February 2014, the program incorporated a member-based financial institution model called Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) to expand access to credit and promote a culture of savings among poor farming households.

While the seed storage system proved to effectively improve food self-sufficiency, SILC membership provides savings-led financial services to communities that have little or no access to formal financial services and contributes to strengthening resilience among vulnerable families. In April 2015, Mercy Corps, its partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and five local NGOs worked to leverage the success of the program by expanding the improved storage system and SILC activities to further 'off-grid' communities and started promoting keyhole gardening as a diversified production system, with a special focus on vegetable production. The expansion of SILC and seed storage activities are targeting underserved communities within the existing target and neighboring districts/sub-districts. The inclusion of keyhole garden systems will not only further increase food self-sufficiency but also serves as a nutrition sensitive agriculture component of ESS.

Performance Summary

Sector 1: Agriculture and Food Security	Objective: Increased food self-sufficiency through access to post-harvest storage system and promoting keyhole garden production system			
Beneficiaries Targeted	300,000 (IDPs: 0)	Overall budget (for all sectors): US\$4,522,499		
Beneficiaries Reached	272,346 (IDPs: 0)	Amount Spent (for all sectors): US\$2,923,227		
Geographic Area (s)	At least 10 out of 13 districts of Timor-Leste			
Sub-Sector 1: Seed System Security				
Sub-Sector 2: Improving Agricultural Production/Food Security				
<i>OFDA Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Last update</i>
Projected increase in number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed systems activities/agricultural input for beneficiary households	2.5 month ¹	>0	To be reported at the end of program ²	June 2015
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex	0	300,000	272,346 ³ (47% female)	January 2016
Additional Indicators (adjusted according to Phase III proposal)				
% of farmers reported increase of knowledge and practice in seed	0	80%	To be reported at the end of	June 2015

¹ Recalculated from the baseline data during the Phase II Final Evaluation, especially to make adjustments from number of food security months into food self-sufficiency months.

² The Final Evaluation of Phase II reported that the surveyed respondents experienced an increase in number of months of food self-sufficiency by 2.1 months (84% increases from the baseline). The data for the Phase III beneficiaries will be collected during the survey at the end of program.

³ Calculated from total household accessed the storage system and/or accessed to promoted good practices (BCC) multiplied by average number of household members, during previous phases (5.7).

selection, drying and storage			program ⁴	
Number of farmers with access to improved seed storage system	0	52,200	37,844 (silos) plus 9,936 (GrainPro bags)	January 2016
Increase of Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS)	7 ⁵	9 ⁶	To be reported at the end of program	October 2015
Number of households with properly used keyhole garden	0	690	129	January 2016
Number of households replicating keyhole garden	0	690	0	June 2015

Sector 2: Economic Recovery and Market Systems		Objective: Increased resilience through access to credit and promoting culture of savings		
Beneficiaries Targeted	4,840 ⁷ (no IDPs)			
Beneficiaries Reached	1,382			
Geographic Area (s)	Ainaro, Manufahi, and Baucau			
Sub-Sector: Microfinance				
<i>OFDA Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Progress (to date)</i>	<i>Last update</i>
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	0	4,840 (including also 1,000 of previous target)	1,990 members – 59%	January 2016
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	0	100%	100% of reported SILC groups	January 2016
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	0	0	0	January 2016
Additional Indicators				
% of participating households that have sold assets in the last 6 months to purchase foods or other basic needs	31%	Reduced by 50% from the baseline	To be reported at the end of program	June 2015
% of participating household saving every month	2%	100%	100% of reported 1,990 SILC members	January 2016
Average amount of household income	\$114.61	Increased by 30% from the baseline	To be reported at the end of program	June 2015

Sector Summary (Activities)

This quarterly report covers the ESS implementation period from October 1 through December 31, 2015. During this reporting period, the program continued implementing activities related to improved seed storage systems, keyhole gardening promotion and providing capacity building to Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups. During this reporting period, the program team started utilizing e-vouchers on a limited basis, to test the system while familiarizing the process to program staff and beneficiaries.



Mario, one of the blacksmiths scans a voucher with his phone.

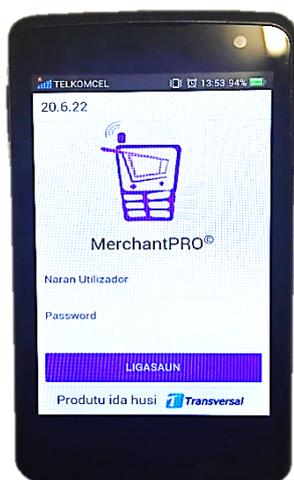
⁴ On average 74% of farmers were reported adopting improved techniques by the Final Evaluation of Phase II. For the farmers supported during the Phase III, the progress will be included in the Final Evaluation at the end of program.

⁵ Baseline HDDS is average of all survey respondents.

⁶ Target based on upper percentage of all respondents' HDDS.

⁷ The majority of these will likely overlap Sector 1 beneficiaries

A. Improved Seed Storage (ISS) Activity



The e-voucher app in Tetum (Timorese language)

Update on the Electronic Voucher System

As previously reported, the program has been preparing to use an electronic voucher system to ease voucher distribution and reporting by field staff, the M&E team and blacksmiths, while at the same time improving “governance” or compliance to finance and operations procedures and increasing transparency to beneficiaries. During this reporting period, Transversal, the pre-selected e-voucher app developer, has customized the e-voucher system – called MerchantPRO, so that it’s suitable with ESS requirements. The program team was then tested and feedback was provided to Transversal. Manuals, both for users and web admins were finalized in November 2015. Incorporating feedback from the field, the app was finalized in December and was immediately used on a limited basis by the blacksmiths – to try and to familiarize itself with the system. Training to blacksmiths have been conducted since November while one-on-one assistance by trained program staff have been continued and expected to be provided to all blacksmiths until the next reporting period.

Community Mobilization, BCC Training, Voucher Distribution, El Niño Information Sharing

From October to December 2015, Mercy Corps and CRS also continued to work with local partner organizations to mobilize communities, lead the beneficiary selection process and provide Behavior Change Communication (BCC) training to target farmers. In total for Phase III, the program has reached communities throughout 44 of the least developed sucos across the country⁸. A total number of 2,714 vulnerable households have been identified and selected as direct beneficiaries of ESS. Among those households’ number, 95% have been trained on BCC and have received vouchers for buying the introduced seed storage. A total number of 1,391 vouchers were redeemed during the reporting period, bringing a total number of farmers with access to silos to date to 37,844 silos.



A woman carries a silo that she bought from the blacksmith at a local market in Covallima

The new BCC flipbook/training guide has also included messaging recommended by the Designing for Behavior Change (DBC) frameworks that were identified previously. The additional messaging included: i) Simplified key steps in storage practice and inclusion of a message that good airtight storage minimize weevil infestation; ii) The updated seed selection process with two key messages of selecting the biggest available cobs and economic benefits of investing in doing proper drying; iii) A statement of ‘food security started with seed security and seed security started with seed selection.’

To anticipate the expected impacts of El Niño, the team has also shared information on the phenomenon and presented key messages that were developed by the government and the development partners during the trainings. This year, El Niño is reported to be on par with the one in 1997-98, one of the worsts El Niño’s on record. In November 2015, Mercy Corps in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and

⁸ This is an additional to the total number of 202 rural communities (sucos/villages) across 10 districts reached by end of Phase II.

Telemor (a telecom provider), distributed a key message on El Nino via SMS to 339,182 recipients across the country.

B. Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) Activity

608 individuals joined and participated in SILC groups as a result of Field Agent outreach

Mercy Corps and CRS continued to provide technical assistance to Field Agents to form and provide capacity building to SILC members in the target districts. During this reporting period, 608 individuals (60% female) were organized in 32 SILC groups. The total number of farmers involved in the SILC activities by end of the reporting period was 1,990 (59% female).

Selected 5 SILC Private Service Providers (PSP) received marketing training

Following up the technical training and certification process of the PSP that was done in May and June 2015, the program conducted a two-day marketing training to PSPs. The objectives of this training were to train the PSPs on how to market their services to rural customers, including skills to determine price, to negotiate and to manage income. Training was facilitated by CRS Country Manager, who is also a SILC Master Trainer.

Savings Group Technical Working Group

CRS and Mercy Corps are active members of the Savings Group Technical Working Group (WG) together with other local and international NGOs. CRS is currently hosting the WG and have organized a field visit among WG members to share experiences and learning. In November, the WG members visited Mercy Corps SILC groups in Maubise and Ainaro. The SILC was selected as the visit location mainly because other NGOs would like to learn more about the 'share out' system at the end of a SILC cycle.

C. Keyhole Gardens (KHG) Activity

Farmer Field School (FFS) KHG training to target groups

In this reporting period, both Mercy Corps and CRS teams started to facilitate FFS training to target beneficiaries. At least 54 trainings were done in 54 communities, which resulted in a total of 129 keyhole gardens established. These gardens are mostly the 'example' gardens that were established together by farmers as part of the FFS training. It is expected that following this FFS training, each individual farmer will establish their own garden. Staff will regularly monitor the development of keyhole gardens in each of target areas, and whenever possible will provide support to each individual farmer as needed.



Goretti Oliveira, ESS Program Manager (white shirt, middle) provided training to Peace Corps volunteers in Dili

Provision of training of new Peace Corps volunteers

In October, Mercy Corps' ESS Program Manager was invited by Peace Corps to provide on-the-job training to their new volunteers. Peace Corps has identified keyhole gardens as one of several technical skills that can be further introduced by the volunteers to Timorese communities. The training also included practical sessions at a community in Dili. Seven keyhole gardens at seven different households were established at the end of the training.

Participation at the Perma-Youth Camp

During this reporting period, Mercy Corps was also invited to show-case the keyhole gardens technique to the participants of the 2015 Perma-Youth Camp in Aileu in November 2015. The Perma-Youth Camp is an effort to promote sustainable agriculture practices to the youth

by holding a five-day camp located in a rural farming setting. During this event, a keyhole garden was established in one school nearby where the camp is located.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Monitoring visit by Field Staff

The monitoring visit that was performed in November and December 2015 by field staff identified two key issues hindering adoption of keyhole gardens to date: i) A ‘wait and see’ stance of farmers, who want to see if it works sustainably or not; ii) some key materials (i.e. stones, ash) are not always available and/or accessible as required by target beneficiaries. Realizing this, Mercy Corps and CRS will start to identify target households who are interested in establishing keyhole gardens to provide assistance and materials. and assist Alternative materials will also be explored, i.e. bamboo and woods as alternative materials for garden walls, and coffee or paddy husks to replace ash.

OFDA Regional Advisor visit

During the reporting period, Harlan Hale, OFDA Regional Advisor visited Baucau and Manatuto to see different sites of OFDA funded projects in the country, including ESS. During this visit, Harlan met with supported farmers (users of silo and keyhole gardeners) and SILC groups. Harlan also visited other OFDA funded project sites, including the Conservation Agriculture project by FAO and a Disaster Risk Reduction project implemented by IOM.

From the Field

(1)

Mr. Anselmo Baptista is a member of SILC group called *Lolo Liman Hamutuk* in Tirilolo, Illiomar, Lautem. He explained that prior to joining SILC groups he had no savings. Now after joining SILC, he feels that he’s “encouraged to save money regularly with an added bonus of easy access to cheaper loan when needed to overcome the difficult times”. Mr. Batista stated that before the SILC project, people received loans from cooperatives with very high interest rates.



He further proclaimed that “SILC has another benefit as its members will get group earnings back to them after the shares-out of each cycle”. In his group, Anselmo is the chairman and very proud of SILC’s transparency and accountability. He also recognized that SILC increases trust among the members. *(Story and Photo by CRS team)*

(2)

Mario Dias is 46 years old, married, and with two children. He is one of the successful keyhole gardeners of CRS partner organization, Caritas Diocesana de Baucau in Laisorulai de Cima village of Uai-Daba sub-village. Before engaging with the ESS Program, Mario grew vegetables on his farm such as cassava, spinach, eggplant and mustard greens. He faced challenges, however, in growing these crops, due to the fact that his farm land is very far away from his residence and there is a limited water supply.



He stated “We don’t have vegetables during the dry season and have to purchase from the market which is far from my house, but, involvement in this project has allowed me to receive knowledge and experience on how to build a keyhole garden and also how to use a local pesticide and organic compost to increase the fertility.” In his keyhole garden he has lettuce, mustard greens, onion and carrot. “Look, they are very green and growing well despite the fact that it has been very dry this season.” he said proudly. He explained that keyhole garden system is built with a simple composting technology, using a basket filled with stones, so that he can use ‘grey water’ to water the plants.

He added that “[as it is elevated] keyhole garden is likely more resistance to pest and also livestock attack, like sheep.” He also suggested that keyhole gardens are easy to maintain. “We are so happy, as we have been an example for communities in this Suco by actively growing vegetables in our home. Currently there are eight people in this area who have built keyhole gardens in their homes with the help of Caritas Baucau. I also encourage and help them to build their gardens and, in the future, we will continue farming with keyhole garden technology for our own consumption and to sell to the market as necessary. The important thing for me is to ensure nutrition for my family members,” he concluded with a happy face. *(Story and Photo by CRS team)*

(3)

“I built the keyhole garden by myself, supported by the girl [a field staff] from OHM [Mercy Corps local NGO partner] after I attended the training at the *Sede Suco* with other community members” that was the answer of Madalena Goveia Leite resident of Suco Guenolai, Cailaco, in Bobonaro, when asked who build the keyhole garden in her yard. She established her garden in October 2015.



When further asked the main driver of her enthusiasm to build the garden, she explained “because I can’t [have] access to the market to buy some vegetables [regularly], market is only once a week here”.

With her keyhole garden she can now take vegetables from her garden. Madalena is 45 years old, a farmer, with 6 children. She promised: “I’m going to have another keyhole garden after harvest the maize”. She also mentioned that that second garden will be to plant *Capcoy* (a Chinese cabbage) simply because her children like it. “And it grows very fast, only 2-3 weeks” she added. *(Story and Photo by Goretti Oliveira, ESS Program Manager).*

(4)

Hamutuk Ita Bele is one of ESS supported SILC groups in Betano, Manufahi. The group was formed since 7 November 2014 with 26 members. During the year one, the saving reached \$ 3,354 from the 48 weeks transaction and by end of that first round each member approximately received a share out of \$129.

Last November 2015 the group started new SILC cycle, and the members have since grown into 65 members. Sandra Pereira (pictured) is the group’s treasurer. “As trust has been developed,



members had also increased the starter savings from \$10 as previously into \$20, with minimum regular savings of \$2 per member". Sandra added that just 2 months after they started the second cycle, the group has booked total productive loans of \$3,150. *(Story and Photo by Goretti Oliveira, ESS Program Manager).*