

Effective Seed Storage in Timor-Leste (ESS)

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Quarterly Report October 2014 - December 2014



Insert: A government Suco Extension Officer (Mr. Rosalino de Andrade) explains to a group of farmers in Holpilat, Maucatar in Covalima District on how to use the improved seed storage.

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Program Summary

The majority of farmers in the target districts of rural Timor-Leste rely on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate on-farm storage combined with poor seed quality often results in a high percentage of post-harvest seed loss. These factors, in conjunction with other challenges such as climate change, low soil fertility, poor access to water, low levels of livelihood diversification, and the dominance of traditional farming practices, put seed system security at increased risk over time. To address these problems, Mercy Corps is implementing the USAID/OFDA funded Effective Seed Storage (ESS) in Timor-Leste Program since August 2011. The program is designed to be sustainable through an innovative market-based approach to increase access to improved storage systems linked with capacity building of farmers and extension workers, and through supporting activities to connect farmers with viable input and output markets. The program has been successfully developing a market system for a metal-based seed storage system that is customized and locally manufactured.

Based on the success of the program and the continued need for seed system security throughout rural Timor-Leste, Mercy Corps, in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and five local NGOs, implemented a nation-wide expansion of the ESS program. The expansion targets neighboring districts/sub-districts of current target areas that can be easily scaled-up through the program's current manufacturers. Starting from May 2014, the program has incorporated a Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) component with a set of existing ESS beneficiaries to expand access to credit and promote a culture of savings among poor farming households. While introducing a seed storage system has proven 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 that contribute to strengthening resilience among vulnerable families.

Performance Summary

Sector: Agriculture and Food Security		Objective: Sustainable post-harvest protection of seeds and grain stocks improve crop production and livelihoods in rural Timor-Leste		
Beneficiaries Targeted	Original: 27,503 IDPs: 0	Expansion: 240,000 (no IDPs)	Budget: US \$2,522,499	
Beneficiaries Reached	Original: 34,993 ¹ IDPs: 0	Expansion: 249,562 ²	Amount Spent: US 1,919,058	
Geographic Area (s)	At least 10 out of 13 districts of Timor-Leste			
Sub- Sector: Seed System Security				
<i>OFDA Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Progress (To Date)</i>	<i>End of reporting period</i>
Projected increase in	46.6% of HHs are food	30% reduction in	End-line	July 2013 ³

¹ Calculated from number of households (HHs) buying the seed storage system plus additional farmers/HHs trained in post-harvest training times average number of HH members in the target areas ((3,378 HH + 2,266 HH) * 6.2 Individual/HH) = 34,993 individuals)

² See footnote 4

³ This means that there is no progress update for this indicator since July 2013 (where the baseline report was available). The progress will be available during the end-line at the end of the program

number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed systems activities/ agricultural inputs for beneficiary households	insecure with 2 months of average food shortage	food insecure HHs and 30% reduction in average food shortage		
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural inputs activities, by sex	0	240,000	249,562 ⁴ (47% female)	January 2013
Additional Indicators⁵				
Percentage of beneficiaries reporting decreased post-harvest losses for seeds	93% for improved variety ⁶ growers report losses and 95% report losses of other varieties during storage	80% reduction from the baseline	End-line	July 2013
Increase in availability of quality seed during planting season	39% of improved variety seeds are lost during storage and 45% of other varieties	80% reduction from the baseline	End-line	July 2013
Number of farmers with access to BCC materials/training	0	40,000	31,252 ⁷ through training; 3,000 reached by radio program; and an additional of 6,000 from TV shows ⁸ – 34% female	January 2015
Percentage of farmers adopting improved technique(s)	0	80%	End-line	July 2013
Number of farmers with access to improved seed storage system, by sex	0	40,000 (silos and/or GrainPro bags)	35,703 (silos) and 9,936 (Grain Pro bags) ⁹ – 26% female	January 2015

⁴ Calculated from the total number of households (HH) who accessed the storage system and/or promoted good practices (Behavior Change Communication (BCC)) multiplied by the average number of household members. HHs who accessed the promoted seed storage systems may have overlapped with those who trained/exposed to the promoted good practices. As the number of HHs who accessed BCC is bigger than those who actually accessed the introduced seed storage systems (after taking into account that farmers with silos and GrainPro bags are likely overlapped), and to avoid double counting of reached beneficiaries; thus this indicator is only using data of HHs who have accessed the BCC = $(31,252 + 3,000 + 6,000) \times 6,2 = 249,562$

⁵ Indicators were adjusted based on the expansion proposal

⁶ This refers to Sele, the maize variety introduced by the government Seeds of Life program

⁷ Calculated from number of HHs trained from the previous quarterly reporting period (24,993 farmers) plus farmers trained during this reporting period (6,259 farmers)

⁸ Additional farmers benefited from the awareness campaign activities via radio (in 10 districts) and TV (nationwide 13 districts). This number is a very moderate projection based on reports produced by the radio and TV stations contracted to deliver the activity. Any potential overlapped in terms of audiences has accounted for.

⁹ Farmers who accessed silos and Grain Pro bags likely overlapped.

Sector: Economic Recovery and Market Systems		Objective: Increased resilience to external shocks through enhanced financial capacity among target communities		
Beneficiaries Targeted	<u>Number of People Targeted:</u> 1,000 <i>(note the majority of these will likely overlap with existing program beneficiaries)</i> <u>Number of IDPs Targeted:</u> N/A			
Beneficiaries Reached	0			
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>End of reporting period</i>
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	0	1,000	570 (76% female)	January 2015
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	0	100% (target 50 groups to be formed)	Currently 31 groups are formed and functioning	January 2015
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	0	0	0	January 2015

Sector Summary (Activities)

This quarterly report covers the ESS implementation period from October 1 through December 31, 2014. Given that Mercy Corps submitted a proposal to OFDA for a follow-on Phase III to the program, this quarter was the last quarter for partner implementing organization for their ‘formal’ engagement for Phase II of ESS program.

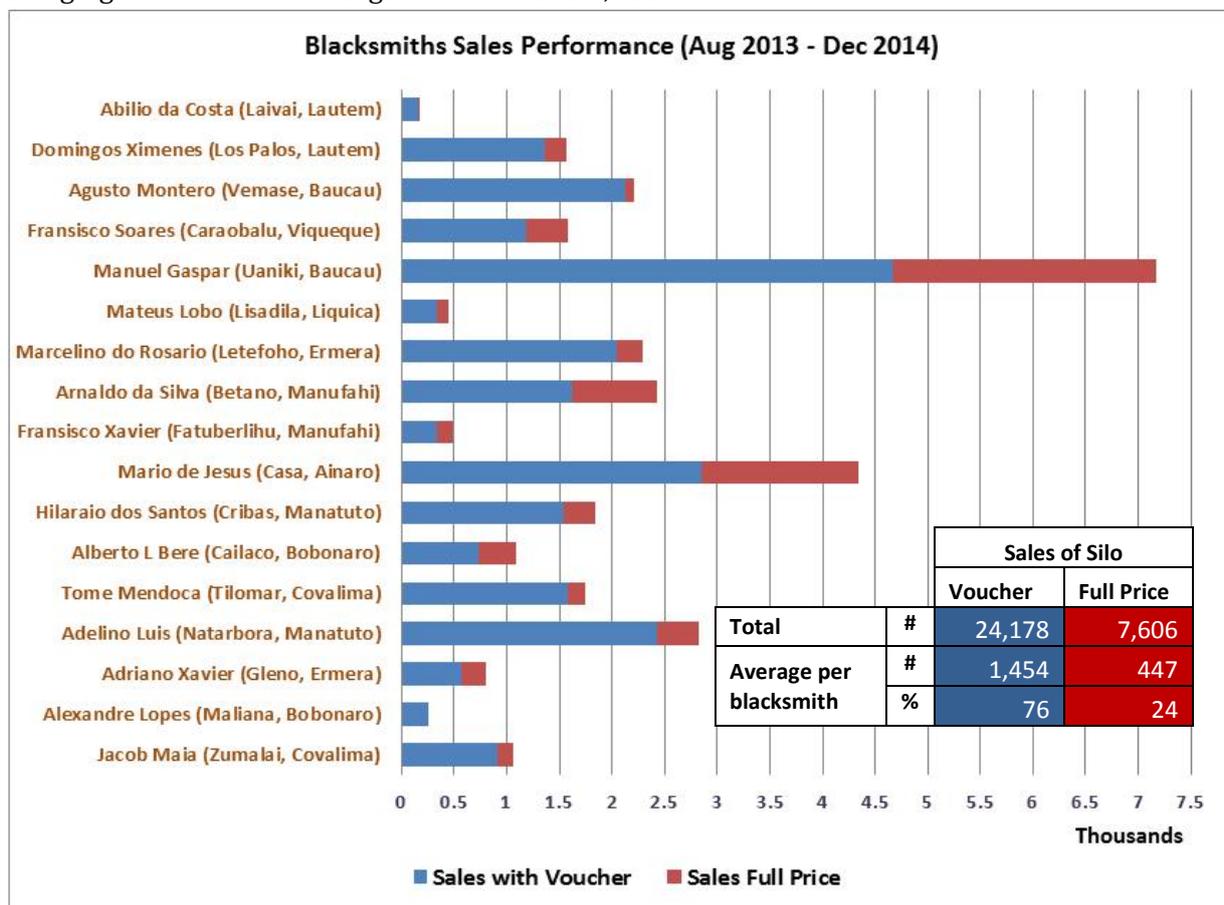


During this reporting period, the program continued implementing activities related to improved seed storage systems and providing capacity building to Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups, while also working to document lessons learned together with all implementing NGOs and the supported blacksmiths. In addition, the team also started to prepare the final evaluation of the second phase.

A. Improved Seed Storage

An additional 6,259 farmers accessed silos as a result of community mobilization, behavior change communication (BCC) training and voucher distribution

This reporting period was the last period for the ESS program to carry out voucher distribution for this phase. Mercy Corps and CRS continued to work with local partner organizations to increase community mobilization, lead the beneficiary selection process and provide BCC training to target farmers. During this reporting period, the ESS team reached a total number of 155 aldeias/hamlets in 126 sucos/villages in ten districts. During this reporting period, **6,259 farmers** (47% female) participated in BCC training activities and utilized vouchers to purchase silos. Up to end of the 2014 (this reporting period), **32,325 silos** (24% at full price) were sold to farmers during the second phase of ESS program – bringing a total number of **farmers with access to silos to 35,703** (total Phase I and Phase II). The sales data per blacksmith (both sold through voucher and at full price) can be seen in the graph below. During this reporting period, the Loja Agricultura (agricultural input supply store) recorded sales of 63 GrainPro bags, bringing the total number bags sold to date to 9,936.



Supported market activities

The team continued to support linkages between blacksmiths and retailers/kiosks – to act as points of sale for the seed silos. To date, a total of **18 kiosks** sold silos and diversified products from the blacksmiths. During this reporting period, Mercy Corps commissioned the production

of a video clip to air on national television (TVTL) – the only TV channel which airs nation-wide (another TV channel only aired in Dili and its surroundings). The video clip (*can be viewed on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/l9rftD7xjnA>*) showcases and promotes general good practices in seed storage and promotes the improved seed storage systems produced by the blacksmiths and sold in participating kiosks. The TV promotion provides general visibility for the ESS program to broader audiences throughout Timor-Leste.

Review post-harvest BCC flipbook and facilitation guide

To incorporate and document Mercy Corps' consumer feedback as well as the results from CRS' internal monitoring review, the program decided to review and revise the BCC flipbook and the facilitation guide. This was agreed during the Mercy Corps and CRS quarterly meeting in Dili in August 2014 and will be used to prepare for Phase III of the program. The new document was reviewed by CRS' and Mercy Corps' technical staff and feedback from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) extension department were incorporated. A technical meeting was held in Baucau on November 11 and was attended by Program Managers (both Mercy Corps and CRS) and relevant staff to finalize the document. This new flipbook and facilitation guide was also presented to and discussed with all program field officers (for all implementing partners) during the ESS Partners Reflection Meeting on December 18, 2014.



A silo sale transaction in one of the participating kiosks in Lolotoe, Covalima District

B. Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)

Nine (9) Field Agents continued to provide capacity building to 31 SILC groups, benefitting 570 members

During this reporting period, the program continued to provide capacity building to 31 SILC groups through nine recruited Field Agents. Across three target districts, a total number of **570 beneficiaries** were reached despite SILC activities having just started in July/August 2014. There was no additional group and beneficiary reached during this quarter, as the program focused their efforts to train field agents on written record keeping and to introduce them to the supported groups (detail below). There were no new groups formed during this quarter, as the focus during the period was on ensuring that Field Agents become skilled at the SILC system and confident in delivering capacity building to groups.

Workshop and training on written record keeping

Initially it was planned to promote the use of oral record keeping across supported SILC groups. Oral record keeping was believed to 'level the playing field' both for literate and illiterate members to actively participate in the SILC activities. This was also meant to avoid any misconduct due to any literate member abusing their 'power' (capacity to write and record information on book) for personal interest against the group's benefit. However, based on the internal monitoring activities conducted by SILC Program Officers/Coordinators, it was found that in most SILC groups, Field Agents as well as members were starting to make their own personal written record keeping which carried its own risk of inconsistencies. It was also

learned that supported SILC groups had enough literate members so that the possibility of them abusing their 'power' was minimal. The program team then acknowledged the need for the program to introduce group written record keeping to complement the existing oral one.

From October 7-9, Mercy Corps and CRS conducted a workshop on written record keeping with all Field Officers. During this workshop, the team reviewed standard SILC written record keeping formats and made adjustments as necessary and as per Timor-Leste's context. This activity was led by CRS' Baucau Head of Office who is also a SILC master trainer. Following this, on October 12-15, ESS conducted a Training of Trainers in Baucau to all Field Agents.

ESS Phase III Proposal Development

During this reporting period, Mercy Corps and implementing partners submitted a proposal/cost-modification to OFDA for a Phase III of ESS. Phase III will expand the improved storage system and SILC activities to further 'off-grid' communities while also promoting keyhole gardening as a diversified production system, with a special focus on vegetable production – as both sources of nutritious foods as well as income for vulnerable households. The expansion of SILC and seed storage activities will target 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 serve as a nutrition sensitive agriculture component of ESS.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring visit by USAID Timor-Leste and update meeting with OFDA Regional Advisor

On December 16, Dennis Wesner – the Director of Economic Growth of the USAID mission in Timor-Leste - visited project sites in Baucau. During this two-day visit, Dennis visited the Uaniki Blacksmith and a project site. In addition, during this reporting period, Harlan Hale – OFDA Regional Advisor - also visited Dili and held an update discussion with both Mercy Corps and CRS.

Preparation for Phase II Final Evaluation

Mercy Corps developed a detailed Scope of Work for the ESS Phase II final evaluation consultant and initiated the recruitment process in December. The objective of the consultancy is to collect data and information and to conduct an analysis to evaluate the ESS Phase II achievements. As activities related to SILC only started in June/July 2014 with the baseline data for this component collected in August 2014, the assessment of SILC activity will be limited to identifying and documenting any emerging learning from the beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders. There are two parts of the evaluation: (i) survey to assess program performance against indicators and (ii) key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to evaluate program relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Mercy Corps will use this evaluation report as a basis to improve strategy and approach of the program going forward and will share findings and lessons learned with all key stakeholders.

Coordination & Collaboration

Partners Quarterly Coordination Meeting

CRS and Mercy Corps staff collaborate closely to ensure programmatic synergy. Regular quarterly meetings are conducted to discuss emerging learning, challenges and solutions. During this reporting period, a quarterly meeting was held in Dili on October 21. During this meeting, the team discussed achievements to date and strategized to speed up program implementation and spending towards the end of second phase.

ESS participated in the World Food Day Expo in Dili

On 12-13 October 2014, Mercy Corps participated in the World Food Day Expo in Dili. During the event, the ESS program was highly visible and promoted silos and other blacksmith products with a blacksmith on site. The Expo was organized by the KONSSANTIL (Inter-ministries Council for Food and Nutrition Security in Timor-Leste) and was spotlighted by national media. During this expo, Mario de Jesus – the blacksmith from Ainaro – showcased his products.



Mario de Jesus (left) explains his product to an interested visitor during the World Food Day expo

Blacksmith Experiences-Sharing Workshop

Mercy Corps and CRS organized a two-day workshop with all supported blacksmiths to share their business development experiences on November 24-25. During this meeting, the blacksmiths presented their production record to date and held discussions on specific issues such as suppliers and quality of materials; key diversification and new products; and shared challenges and future plans. On the second day, the group visited the Uainiki Blacksmith (Mr. Manuel Gaspar) in Baucau as he is one of the successful supported blacksmiths and they continued to hold discussions especially on lessons learned there. Documented lessons and recommendations from the workshop included: (i) the need to behave and think like businessmen (they should not depend on the project); (ii) strengthen collaboration by proposing to form a blacksmith association; (iii) recognize product diversification as the key for sustaining business; (iv) maintain relationship with existing suppliers and, if possible, add more suppliers to ensure a reliable quality source for materials; (v) promote their products through savings and lending groups and to possibly to work together with the groups so members can get credit to access expensive products (i.e. water or grain storages); (vi) the blacksmiths also recommended to the project to further assist them in developing their business and entrepreneurial skills.

Partners Reflection Workshop

On December 7-8, all ESS implementing partners and both international and local NGOs (Mercy Corps, CRS, IMM, OHM, Caritas, KdP, and TID) participated in the final program reflection workshop in Baucau. The workshop aimed at (i) presenting project achievements and sharing updates on the Phase III proposal plan; (ii) discussing the draft of the new version of the flipbook and facilitation guide; (iii) reviewing SILC monitoring forms for Field Officers and presenting the updated data and information; (iv) documenting lessons learned and identifying

key success factors for the next phase. This workshop was also a farewell for IMM as they will not join Phase III of the program. Five top key highlighted learning and recommendations included: (1) refresher training for field staff required especially for the rolling out of the new flipbook and facilitation guide; (2) be more realistic with the target areas to be covered by field staff – detailed implementation plan and targeting for new areas – including criteria selection, must be agreed on as soon as Phase III started; (3) to prioritize the more vulnerable communities, not just the one close to the blacksmith’s locations; (4) customer feedback survey was very important, if possible to do it more regularly – this to be linked with regular monitoring to supported farmers; (5) community mobilization is key for success of program implementation, and strengthening community mobilization of field staff is strongly recommended for Phase III.

From the field:

(1) Marcelino Rosario Soares, father of seven children, is a blacksmith from Ducurai, Letefoho in Ermera. In addition to being a coffee farmer, Marcelino runs his silo making business in his village together with his family. Since August 2013, he joined the ESS program to produce seed storage silos and has expanded his production and sales capacity. “Before ESS, I was only able to produce and sell around 400 drums in a year, but now I can triple this capacity, especially due to [the supported] linkages both to input and output markets,” says Marcelino.



The ESS program assisted him by developing linkages with different suppliers to make the needed quality materials available on a more regular basis. ESS also helped him with business training and access to the market through voucher distribution to vulnerable farmers and through marketing activities. He also learned simple management techniques on how to run a business and helped him recognize the importance of diversifying his products. As a result, Marcelino say, “Now I am also producing other products like household utensils, water tanks, and other metal-based products.”

When asked what his biggest take-away from ESS to date was, he replied “I think I learned a lot, but as you asked only the most valuable one, I think understanding of doing this [making silo and other products] as a business and not just as a labor waiting for orders from customers [as previously done]. I guess I feel a shifting in [my] mentality to be a true businessman.” *(Photo and story by Gerry Monteiro, Mercy Corps ESS Program Officer)*

(2) Amelia Cardoso is a typical mother of a rural farming household in Timor-Leste. Together with her husband, she raises eight children. They all live together in Matai-Cunain in Suai. She was selected as one of the ESS beneficiaries in her community and participated in the post-harvest training in February 2014.

After the training, she was not convinced that she should get the silo, but she decided to buy it anyway with the



voucher provided by the project plus additional cash from her pocket. She tried the smallest silo (35kg) to start with and started to use the silo after the harvest for the second planting season sometime around April 2014. At the same time, she managed to store a portion of her seeds by hanging cobs on the kitchen. "Just in case. I was not so sure yet if the silo is good or not," she said.

When the day came for her to sow her seeds in her field last October, she found that the stored seeds in the silo far outweighed the quality of seeds hung in the kitchen. "I decided to throw away the seeds from the kitchen as I clearly saw the differences [from the one stored in silo]." Amelia said that she plan to buy another silo before the next harvest season around January 2015. ***(Photo and story by Goretti Oliveira, Mercy Corps ESS Program Manager)***