



Effective Seed Storage in Timor-Leste (ESS)

Funded by USAID, Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance - OFDA

Annual Report

October 2013 – September 2014



Insert: A farmer on bike with a silo he just bought in Betano, Manufahi

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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) 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 strengthen 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: 173,557 ²	Amount Spent: US \$1,584,150	
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 update progress 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	173,557 ⁴ (33% female)	September 2014
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	24,993 ⁷ (training) Plus 3,000 ⁸ (radio program) (39% female)	September 2014
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)	22,518 (silos) and 9,873 (GrainPro bags) (43% female)	September 2014

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 (note the majority of these will likely overlap with existing program beneficiaries) <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</i>	<i>End of</i>

⁴ Calculated from total household accessed the storage system and/or trained on BCC multiplied by average number of household members = (24,993 + 3,000) x 6,2 = 173,557

⁵ Indicators have been adjusted based on the expansion proposal

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

⁷ Calculated from number of households (HHs) trained up to previous Quarterly Reporting period (20,211 farmers) plus trained farmers during this reporting period (4,782 farmers)

⁸ Additional farmers benefited from the awareness campaign activities via Radio. This number is a very moderate projection based on report produced by the radio station contracted to deliver the activity

			<i>date)</i>	<i>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)	September 2014
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	September 2014
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	0	0	0	September 2014

Sector Summary (Activities)

This report covers the project implementation period from October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014. As the program continued expanding activities related to improved seed storage system nationwide in this reporting period, OFDA granted the ESS Modification Number 3 to include Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC) promotion activities. SILC serves savings-led financial services to remote communities where access to formal financial services is limited due to high transaction costs and other entry barriers. In addition to the benefit of increasing financial assets through loans, savings and profit generation, SILC provides training to group members in new skills such as bookkeeping, savings and lending policies, accountability, and good governance.



This report covers activities to continue facilitation of access to improved seed storage systems as well as SILC start up and implementation.

A. Improved Seed Storage

Continued training & mentoring to local NGO partners

Both Mercy Corps and CRS continued to work with local partner organizations to increase community mobilization and provide Behavior Change and Communication (BCC) training to the target beneficiaries in target sucos/villages within all target districts. At the same time, the program worked to address the organizational and staffing capacities of these local partners to effectively implement their programmatic activities effectively. To increase the capacity of local NGO partners, both CRS and Mercy Corps conducted trainings to those organization’s respective field staffs. Between April and June 2014, CRS conducted a series of BCC Training of Trainers (ToT) in Los Palos, Viqueque, and Baucau for Together in Development, Kolegas da Paz, and Caritas Baucau. Separately, Mercy Corps conducted a similar ToT to Ida Mos Maunfahe and Organizasaun Haburas Moris in Dili. A total of 27 participants (18% women) from local NGO

partner field staff attended these trainings. After the sessions, participants noted that the trainings helped build both technical and facilitation capacities, especially by (i) focusing more on three main messages of seed selection, proper drying and improved seed storage systems; (ii) ensuring women's participation, and (iii) incorporating adult learning principles into BCC training to farmers (problem-based and collaborative rather than didactic teaching approach – goal and relevancy oriented, practical based on life experiences and knowledge). Post training, Mercy Corps and CRS staff supervised several BCC trainings conducted by the local NGO staff to the target farmers, ensuring high quality training delivery.

An additional 15,479 farmers have accessed silos as a result of the community mobilization, behavior change communication training and voucher distribution

From October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014, Mercy Corps and CRS continued to work with local partner organizations to increase community mobilization, lead the beneficiary selection process and provide behavior change communication (BCC) training to target farmers. The trainings are held in communities by local partner staff and/or program officers, often accompanied by Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) Suco Extension Officer. To date, a total number of 541 aldeias/hamlets in 202 sucos/villages in 11 (out of 13) districts have participated in activities implemented by the program. In the past year, 18,311 farmers participated in the BCC trainings bringing the total to 24,993 trained farmers (39% female).

This year, to promote the use of GrainPro bags to farmers, the product was bundled with the large opening 75kg silo, where farmers with vouchers were required to contribute \$10.00 for these combined storage systems⁹. Blacksmiths are available within the community at the end of the training to sell silos with vouchers and the complete cash contribution. The blacksmiths continued to assume all responsibility for silo and GrainPro bags transportation and costs. The products were also available for farmers to redeem their vouchers at a later point at participating kiosks. During this reporting period, 15,479 farmers utilized vouchers to purchase silos. In addition, 2,475 additional farmers bought silos at full price, bringing the total to 22,518 farmers with access to silos (43% female).

An additional 9,837 GrainPro bags were accessed by farmers

As reported previously, Mercy Corps has successfully linked Loja Agricultura, an input supplier in Dili with GrainPro Inc. in the Philippines for making the GrainPro bags available in the country. The bags have a proven record to be used either as an individual container or as an internal container to be combined with a sturdier outer container (in this case large opening silos – by doing so, farmer will be able to save different varieties of seeds inside the silos). To date, a total number of 9,837 GrainPro has been sold, whereby 60% were bundled with the large opening 75kg silo – sold through local blacksmiths, while the rest were sold through Loja Agricultura networks to farmers¹⁰. It is important to note that at some points this year, there were delivery problems encountered by GrainPro Inc. that resulted in delays in the order's shipment. As a result, the program allowed the sale of 75Kg silos without the GrainPro bags.

⁹ Selected vulnerable farmer require participating in the BCC trainings on post-harvest handling practices. Once trainings are completed, farmer determine if she would like to purchase a silo and she receive a voucher for its purchase if she is committed to providing a contribution of \$3.00 for a 35kg silo or \$6.00 for a 75Kg silo and \$4.00 for a GrainPro bag. The pricing was then modified so that farmers purchasing a 75Kg silo must contribute \$10.00 as the Silo and GrainPro bag are sold as a package.

¹⁰ This based from import and sales record of Loja Agricultura

The BCC training emphasized that it was essential to use the 75Kg silo with an internal hermetically sealed container, such as recycled water bottle, jerry can, etc. as alternatives to introduced GrainPro bags. During last quarter partners' coordination meeting, it a decision was made to stop the bundling of the GrainPro bags with the silo to give farmers a 'freedom' to select and use appropriate internal containers¹¹. This decision will be effective as of October, 2014.

Product diversification of local manufacturers was supported

The ESS Program has supported interested blacksmiths to diversify their products by facilitating new product designs as well as facilitate sharing of different product samples between different blacksmiths. A total of nine (9) blacksmiths have been diversifying its production, including producing water containers, different storage units for different commodities (i.e. for rice or legumes/beans), simple cool boxes with Styrofoam inside, watering cans, etc. Product diversification and linkages with sales merchants in addition to linkages with materials has intended to sustain blacksmiths' businesses and therefore will result in sustained access to customized and locally produced storage systems for farmers.



New design of silo for legume-beans seeds

Supported business management and market activities

In order to assist manufacturers and retailers in marketing the new storage system, the ESS Program developed a brand, "SILO" [pronounced locally *see-lo*] with a tagline of "*Fatin Fini Foun!*" which means "New Seed Storage", to use in different marketing/promotional activities. The brand was developed in consultation with all partners, manufacturers and retailers. The decision to name it "SILO" was simply because it is catchy and that there's still no specific term for silo in Tetum, the local language.

Starting in February as part of the promotion process with blacksmiths, Mercy Corps and CRS provided all blacksmiths and kiosks with a branded signboard, with USAID's logo included. In addition, ESS also provided a bookkeeping book so that each blacksmith could record expenditures, revenue and income on a monthly basis as well as calculate income before and after the project.



Design of billboard with silo branding on it

This year, the ESS team has started to focus on market promotion to encourage farmers to buy silos directly from blacksmiths.

¹¹ It is reported by field staff that in many events, farmers have complained about the bundling of GrainPro with large opening silo.

Promotion events were held in local markets in different districts led by local NGO partners. During this reporting period, 17 events were facilitated. However, in most markets, these events resulted in only few sales to the farmers. Moving forward, the program has decided to focus more on developing linkages between blacksmiths and retailers/kiosks, while promotional activities will be developed and delivered to kiosks to support as points of sale. To date, a total of 18 kiosks have been selling silos and products of the blacksmiths.

From April to August 2014, a radio program was developed by ESS team and broadcasted through Radio Maubere, one of two local radio stations with nationwide coverage. It is projected that the program has reached at least 3,000 households in the country. The BCC highlighted three behaviors for performing proper seed selection, appropriate drying as well as storing in an airtight, protected storage system. A TV program is still in the development and to be finalized during the next quarter. Market events, radio and TV programs are also promoting storage systems sold through kiosks, rather than directly by the manufacturers (except in areas immediately near blacksmiths' locations).

Participation at USAID Expo: CRS and Mercy Corps also showcased the ESS Program as part of the USAID Expo held in Dili's Timor Plaza on March 15, 2014. Silos and other blacksmith products were displayed during this expo together with exhibitions from 17 other USAID projects. More than a thousand visitors, including many families, found out about the breadth of the U.S. partnership with Timor-Leste in the areas of security, economic growth, health, and democracy and governance.



ESS booth at the 2014 USAID Timor-Leste Expo in Dili

B. Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)

In February 2014, Mercy Corps submitted a proposal for a program modification to include Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) into ESS. This modification built on the successes of ESS implementation and introduced a SILC component with a set of existing program beneficiaries in at least three target districts to expand access to credit and promote a culture of savings among poor farming households. The inclusion of SILC was based on CRS' experiences in other countries and built on Mercy Corps' previous work in Timor-Leste. A total number of 1,000 beneficiaries are targeted (to be formed in at least 50 groups) in three districts of Baucau, Manufahi and Ainaro.

SILC activities kick started

After the Modification of Assistance Award number 3 was granted by OFDA in mid-May 2014, Mercy Corps and CRS initiated an amendment to their agreement to include the changes as per this modification. As CRS was also working through one of their local partners for SILC, an amendment to their agreement was also established especially to expand the scope of work to introduce SILC. The amendments were finalized and signed in June 2014 but before the

amendments were finalized, the teams met several times to discuss the SILC implementation plan, specifically to reach agreement around the short project timeframe.

SILC target communities were selected based on the least developed sucos¹² in target districts of Baucau, Ainaro and Manufahi. These districts are existing sites of the ESS program. When selecting these sucos, the population density was also taken into account, ensuring that there will be enough scale for each SILC Field Agent to provide her service. Starting from June 2014, SILC was promoted to stakeholders and community leaders in the districts, sub-districts and sucos. During the socializations, the SILC approach was presented and the plan for the program to recruit Field Agents as SILC trainers was communicated. As per experiences in Timor-Leste and other countries, members of savings and lending groups are mostly women. Considering the local context where women trainers are better suited for women trainees, therefore women was specifically targeted as Field Agents. During the mobilization process, ESS staff specifically asked the local leaders to encourage women to apply as Field Agents including stay-at-home mothers. In addition, the recruitment process did not include insensitive criteria for majority of women, i.e. formal education level is not required, but rather basic literacy and numeracy skills. By doing so, recruitment of Field Agents was done in a transparent way to attract many female candidates to apply.



Field Agent Domingas Gusmao in Sagadati shows the secretary of a SILC group how to correctly record a savings entry while members watch

9 Field Agents were recruited and trained, 31 groups were formed and trained benefitting 570 members

The SILC Training of Trainers (ToT) was carried out for a total of 26 individuals from Mercy Corps, CRS and Caritas Baucau, as well as Field Agent candidates in June 2014. The ToT was facilitated by the new CRS Head of Office in Baucau who is also an experienced SILC trainer. The initial plan was to invite a master trainer from CRS headquarters for this ToT, but it was decided that the project would benefit from having an expert on staff. The project design was slightly modified to include the process of recruiting Field Agents as a volunteer or trainers (not as project staff) as a way to develop them as Private Service Providers (PSPs) of SILC.

During the duration of the project (up to February 2015), the program will provide performance based remuneration to the Agents (depends on the number of groups established and supported) while building their capacity and outreach. It is expected that after the program is

¹² Those sucos where living standards are the lowest have less access service and resources

finalized finish, Agents will be able to serve as independent trainers and charging their services directly to the supported groups. Post training, Field Agent candidates were tested and, among them, five were selected by Mercy Corps and four by CRS based on the final exam scores as well as their attitudes and facilitation skills. Field Agents acted as SILC trainer at community level. To date, a total number of 31 groups were established benefitting 570 members (76% female).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Review ESS M&E system. CRS and Mercy Corps reviewed the program monitoring and evaluation system during the second quarterly meeting and identified data collection and monitoring forms requiring modification. CRS and Mercy Corps' M&E Officers modified the forms and trained local partners and blacksmiths on the modifications. One significant finding was the omission of signatures of program beneficiaries when they receive vouchers and silos. These revisions have improved monitoring of program activities.



A Mercy Corps staff monitors the use of silo

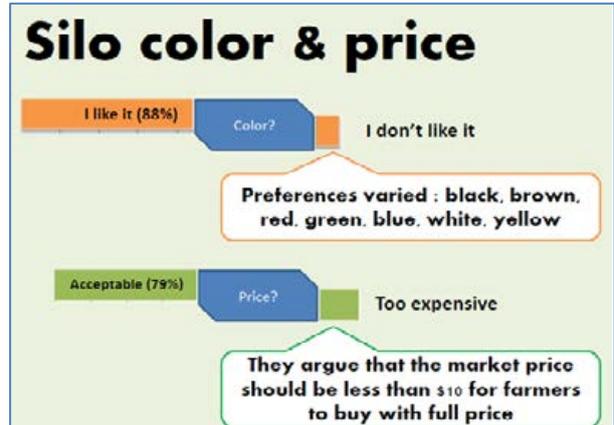
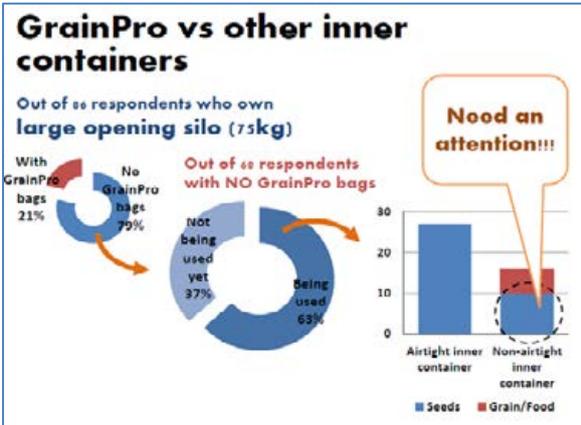
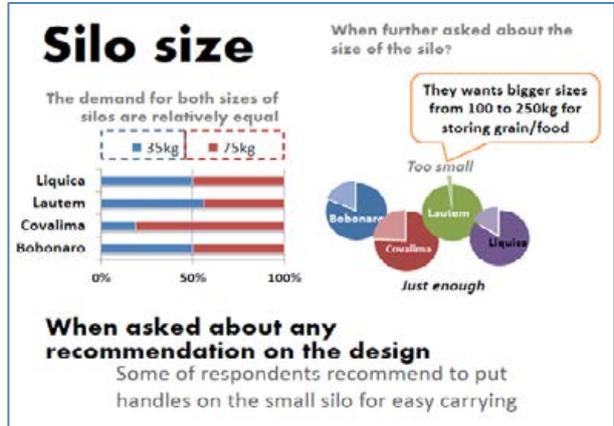
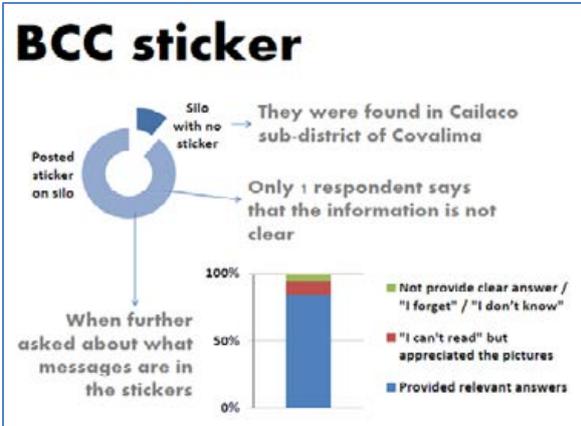
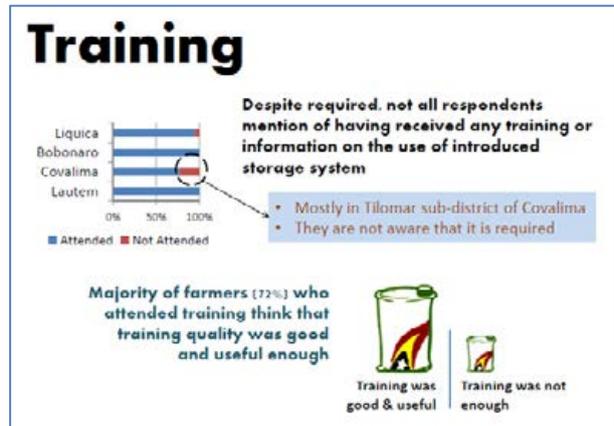
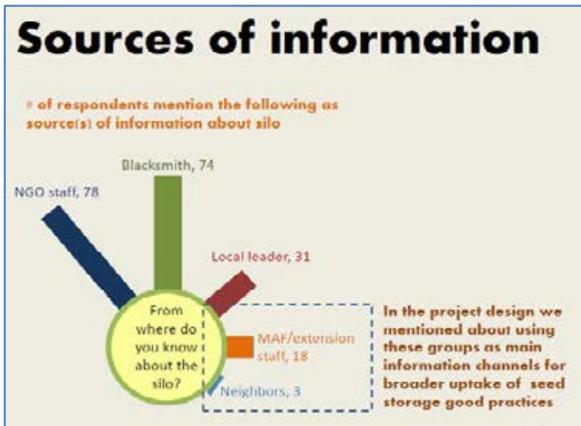
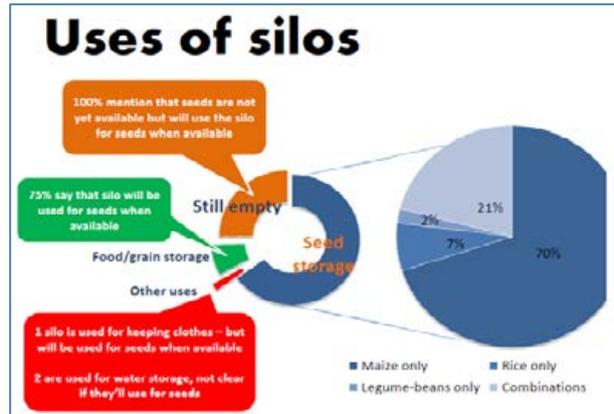
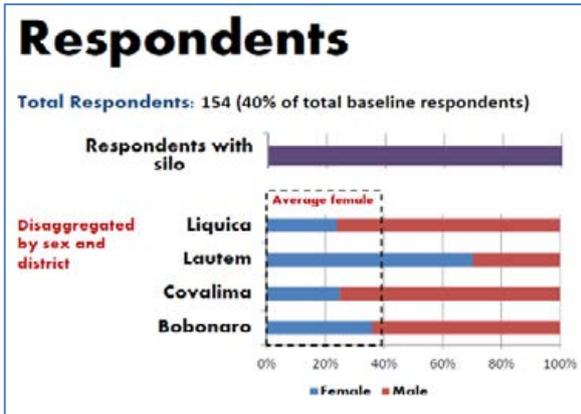
Update of SOP for voucher distribution. In February 2014, Mercy Corps updated the Standard Operating Procedure for vouchers and silos distribution and associated forms were improved and incorporated feedback from Mercy Corps' internal auditor. The M&E Officers also continue to conduct cross checks of the voucher and silo distribution lists to verify accuracy using beneficiary forms submitted by the local NGO partners. Payment to blacksmiths for vouchers is managed based on verified data.

Monitoring Visit by OFDA Regional Advisor. In March 2014, OFDA Representative Harlan Hale visited ESS sites in Bobonaro, Ermera, Baucau and Lautem districts, in coordination with FAO and IOM. During the visit, the team highlighted the uptake of the silos and the institutional strengthening efforts Mercy Corps and CRS are doing with their partners and the silo manufacturers.

Customer feedback survey. Mercy Corps and CRS conducted a Customer Feedback Survey during May to June 2014. The survey was administered to silo customers from four districts, with 150 farmers responding (39 women). The survey's purpose was to obtain feedback from the users of the purchased silos. The results of the survey was presented to the team during last quarterly meeting to provide feedback for both Mercy Corps and CRS team to strengthen the program implementation. These results were also shared with all blacksmiths during the coordination meetings to improve the design of the silo. The summary of the survey results is below.

Baseline for SILC. During the month of August and September 2014, Mercy Corps and CRS conducted baseline survey for SILC. The baseline was done using two main data collection methods, which surveyed 213 respondents and six focus group discussions (FGDs). The baseline report is still in the development and will be presented during next quarter reporting period.

Summary Results of 2014 Silo Customers Feedback Survey



Coordination

Quarterly Coordination Meetings

Blacksmiths Coordination Meetings. On a quarterly basis, two separate one-day meetings were held with the blacksmiths, one at the CRS Baucau office and another one at Mercy Corps office in Dili to discuss successes and to identify obstacles and its solutions. CRS coordinated the meetings for the five blacksmiths located in the eastern region of Baucau, Lautem and Viqueque districts, while Mercy Corps is doing similar activities for the rest of the blacksmiths from the western, central and southern regions. These meetings were very important for cross sharing amongst blacksmiths and identify lessons and challenges as well as additional support needs. The followings are highlighted meeting notes from each quarter:

- Quarter 1: GrainPro bag being standard and mandatory with 75Kg Silo was explained and agreed upon by blacksmiths. Discussions were held and initial ideas developed on market promotion and starting non-voucher sales for new manufacturers.
- Quarter 2: This quarterly meeting was used to share experiences in producing diversified seed storage design (i.e. storage for legume seeds) and coordination of bulk purchasing for materials (i.e. metal sheets, PVC caps, etc.) between blacksmiths. Short refresher training on product pricing was also provided to blacksmiths.
- Quarter 3: The program clarified that there's no blacksmith had exclusive selling rights to a specific area, as previously some blacksmiths had been under the impression that they had a monopoly on certain geographical areas. This was largely accepted as some blacksmiths were unable to meet local area demands and other blacksmiths were able to produce a surplus, thus allowing free sale of silos to meet beneficiary needs promotes healthy competition.
- Quarter 4: ESS staff shared the updated data on total marketed silos, presented the results of the customer feedback Survey and provided feedback on the need to maintain high quality silo ensuring customer satisfaction and to increase production to meet ESS target as well as demand from kiosks.

Partners Coordination Meeting. CRS and Mercy Corps staff is in constant communication to ensure programmatic synergy. Regular quarterly meetings were done to discuss emerging learning, challenges and solutions.

- November 27, 2013: Discussed successes and obstacles of ESS implementation. Successes identified include (i) start-up activities for ESS nation-wide expansion; (ii) start-up assistance for additional 15 manufacturers/blacksmiths nation-wide; (iii) linking Loja Agricultura with GrainPro Inc.; and the (iv) development and implementation of standardized M&E forms.
- March 14, 2014: Reviewed successes and obstacles encountered during program implementation. Challenges discussed included improving the demand forecasting for GrainPro bags, local NGO partner staff capacity building (especially on silo quality control), and improving the Household Tracking Sheet form to include voucher recipients' signatures as well as Quality Checklist form to include raw material minimum standard checklists.
- April 2014: Discussed several issues, including market events and marketing activities, development of the SILC implementation plan and a review of project targets and next steps.

Post meeting, CRS and Mercy Corps held coordination meetings with their respective local NGO partners. The meetings were conducted to share progress of the program, identify obstacles as well recommendations for better implementation, and action planning.

- August 2014: Presented the results of the Customers Feedback Survey and develops follow up actions to incorporated feedbacks into program implementation, discussed about the start-up of SILC activities and preparation of SILC baseline survey and identified activities for next phase and established Results Framework for ESS expansion.

Coordination with relevant organizations

During this period, the program staff attended various coordination meetings both with other INGOs and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF). The following summarizes the coordination meetings attended:

- November 6, 2013. FAO held a roundtable discussion on Conservation Agriculture (CA) with MAF and development partners in which the Project Coordinator participated. The introduction of CA is expected to increase farmers' production and thus enhance the need for access to effective storage systems which manufacturers should be able to tap in. Follow up meetings including the establishment of the CA working group was held by FAO and MAF in 2013 where Mercy Corps is one of the group members.
- November 23, 2013. The Project Coordinator presented the ESS project to the Permascout participants (permanent agriculture scout – a program to promote sustainable agriculture through scout camping events – where more than 1,500 youth farmers from different districts participated).
- December 10, 2013. INGO food security working group meeting. The Program Manager presented an ESS project update to the other working group members.
- Quarterly, CRS and Mercy Corps participated in the quarterly harmonization meeting to help improve the coordination and communication between the government and development partners. Harmonization meetings are part of the quarterly activity progress updates held both at the district and national levels.
- From May to August 2014, Mercy Corps has also actively participated in the formulation of the Zero Hunger Challenge¹³ action plan of the KONSSANTIL (Inter-Ministerial Council of Food Security and Nutrition of Timor-Leste) where ESS activities and targets are incorporated into the plan.

¹³ Zero Hunger Challenge (ZHC) is an internationally acclaimed planning platform initiated by the UN Secretary General at the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 in response to the global problem of hunger and malnutrition. The platform provides a guidance for governments and other stakeholders to address hunger and malnutrition through its five pillars (100% access to adequate food all year round; zero stunted children less than 2 years of age; all food systems are sustainable; 100% increase in smallholder productivity and income; and zero loss or waste food). Timor-Leste is one of the first countries in the region who has signed up to the platform and utilizes it – through KONSSANTIL to develop action plan to fight hunger and malnutrition in the country. ESS activities and targets are well-suited into Pillar number one and five.

From the fields

(1)

Sra. Aquina Monteiro is a 25-year-old woman from Bahalarawain, Viqueque. She is the breadwinner for her family of three. She is a very hard working farmer who is always looking to improve her way of life.

In the past she has experienced many problems with how and where to store her seed from harvest to planting season. She was storing her seed in the traditional method, which is to leave the maize on the cob inside the husk and place above fire place or hanging in trees, or inside of a sack. She had tried many different methods in the hopes it stayed protected for next season. Most years her seed would be infested with weevils, or the cobs saved for seed were not the best quality as she hadn't inspected the seed. She did not know where to gain knowledge on how to best store and protect her seed.



Sra. Aquina Monteiro attended a training conducted by ESS Program and says that the training was extremely informative and that now she will be able to protect her seed. She was happy that the training not only provided opportunity to learn about silos and how they protect the seed, but also about how to select and dry seed. She purchased a silo, using a voucher, and is now planning on incorporating the new knowledge at harvest this year. She was thankful for the opportunity to participate and considered the training to be very helpful for herself and her community.

(2)

Petrolina Magno Ximenes is a SILC member from Sagadate Suco, Sub district of Laga, Baucau district. Petrolina has 6 children and she has been actively involved with her SILC group, Haburas, since it was established in July 2014. Haburas was established with the help of Domingas Gusmao, a Field Agent from Sagadate, with support by ESS Program.

Within 3 months of being a member, Petronila has recognized that SILC is unique and "is really benefiting the communities in the rural area." She said that before she joined SILC she faced many challenges with savings "including losing \$800 of savings from being involved in another microfinance enterprise which was badly managed. However, within the first month of SILC I noticed that SILC is different because I see my money every week, and I know what is going on with the money in the box. I am happy being a part of the SILC group," she said.



Petrolina also mentioned that there are no other NGOs or government agencies that support saving and lending in her community. She said that through the presence of the Field Agent in their community and with the support of ESS Program, she considers SILC an enduring solution for savings and lending in

Sagadate. Petronila wants to thank CRS, Mercy Corps and Caritas Diocese of Baucau for supporting her in financial management. “I know in the future we will become an independent group but we also recommend that technical support continue for the SILC groups established within our Suco,” she concluded.

(3)

Sebastiao Ximenes, a 38-year old male, has a family of five and lives in Queliboro-Uai, Uma-Ana-Ico-Venilale of Baucau district. Sebastiao attended the Behavior Change and Communication (BCC) training as part of the ESS Program. He was very impressed by the seed-storage specific training and expressed that he looks forward to use his newly acquired knowledge. He acknowledged farmers have needed this sort of information for a long time. Sebastiao plants 2 hectares of maize every planting season; however, he routinely loses many of his seed stores, and buys from the local market in order to fulfill his planting needs.



Sebastiao had a severe problem with seed loss every year. Even though he stored seed from each harvest, it was hard to guarantee the quality as traditional storage methods (i.e. in husk and hanging in the trees) resulted in insect infestation, fungus growth and rodent attacks. Things changed after he attended the BCC training conducted by ESS Program. Following the training, Sebastiao hopes he will no longer need to purchase seed as he knows how to select seeds and mitigate loss—he stated that this project is good in promoting more effective alternatives to traditional practices.

(4)

Alberto Laca-Bere, a 47-year old and father of 6 children, is one of the ESS-supported local silo manufacturers. He lives and produces silos and other metal-based products in Manapa, Kailaku, Bobonaro.



He started producing silos in 2008 after receiving technical training from FAO through their silo project. However his silo production stopped in 2010 when the FAO project finished. Now, with support from ESS, Alberto re-established his workshop and has developed linkages with input suppliers as well as retailers to build a sustainable business. Alberto says that the silo business is booming, and that demand continues to grow. “The community here really needs these silos to keep the grain and seeds they produce and there are a lot of villages that haven't accessed them yet,” he says.

It was Alberto, who provided a ‘clue’ to ESS staff on the need for blacksmiths to diversify products to sustain business. “In addition to making silos, I also produce other metal-based products, like buckets, watering cans, water tanks, and others,” he added.