Agriculture

Sustainable crop production and management in Timor-Leste

“I am very happy with the support I have received through this programme. I used to plant seeds using the traditional method, just throwing them on the ground and leaving it to nature, but I now have the knowledge to plant seeds and look after my crops properly and I can produce much more grain to feed my family.”

Augustina Bianco from the Ainaro District

Context

Timor-Leste is the poorest country in Southeast Asia and one of the least-developed countries in the world, with 70% of the population living on less than $2 a day and 65% of people being chronically malnourished. The economy is essentially agriculture-based and, since output is very low, most of the country suffers from food shortages for about four months each year. The SECURE Programme aims to "increase food security and incomes for vulnerable communities in the Ainaro and Manufahi Districts of Timor-Leste" by supporting the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, (MAF) extension workers and farming groups with agricultural training, access to improved seeds and microcredit facilities.

Objectives

• The specific objective is "to improve agricultural production and storage and develop market links for food insecure communities while increasing household resource management skills".

Impact

• 4,500 farmers have improved production and storage techniques.
• 4,500 households are now able to manage household resources more effectively with the support of local NGOs and suco councils.
• 30% of target households have increased their income from the sale of crops.
• 59 MAF extension workers are able to provide specialised technical support to farmers in their geographic areas.
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This planting season through the EC funded SECURE programme, the Ailuma Farming Group multiplied a high yielding improved variety of corn (called Sele) in demonstration plots which have resulted in more than five times the yield that they got from traditional varieties.

Through comprehensive training on better corn production and soil conservation techniques facilitated by the SECURE programme, the group has been able to demonstrate that with proper planting methods and better quality seeds they are able to dramatically increase production. Thanks to visits arranged through the SECURE programme other farmers are now practicing the new techniques and acquiring their own Sele seeds for the next season.

The programme has also provided farming groups with access to better grain storage facilities. This new storage is essential to ensure that the increased amount of corn produced can be safely stored throughout the year. Weevil and mice attacks are one of the main causes of post harvest losses of corn. Traditionally farmers would hang their cobs in the eaves of the house and smoke it regularly to reduce weevil attacks. Regarding this, Francisco commented “we are happy that finally our house will be free from smoke as we don’t need to hang and smoke our corn cobs on the ceiling of the house anymore.”

Initial studies carried out in the SECURE programme showed that each year most of the people in the area suffer from at least three months of food shortage called the “hungry season”. Through the combined approach of access to better seeds, better production methods and improved storage systems, the programme aims to eradicate the hungry season in the near future.

“We are very proud to be part of this programme that makes us some of the first farmers in the area to try this new improved variety of corn. We have better seeds, knowledge of better farming systems and improved grain storage and we have proven to ourselves that we can produce and store more than enough food for our family throughout the year.”

Francisco Tilman in his field of Sele maize