

CRS F2F Timor-Leste

Farmer-to-Farmer assignment leads to new investment in Timor-Leste cooperative

PROJECT LOCATION	Timor-Leste
TIMEFRAME	2019-2023
COUNTRY PROJECT	Modernizing Agriculture
HOST	Centro Desenvolvimento Comunitario (CDC)

PROGRAM STATISTICS

302

Number of assignments conducted

17,282

Number of people directly trained

145

Number of hosts supported



CDC Director Vicente Belo shows U.S. Ambassador Blackstone the trees planted on a demo plot. The trees were funded by GIZ. Photo by CRS F2F Staff.

How can a training facility carry out its mandate without supplies, equipment, or the funds to purchase them? This was the challenge facing Centro Desenvolvimento Comunitario (CDC) in Timor-Leste when it turned to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for help. Thanks to CRS' Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) program and the recruitment of two dedicated F2F volunteers, CDC's fundraising fortunes were reversed and they found themselves the recipients of seven grants in two years with a combined value of \$229,337. Funding from Timor-Leste's Secretary of State for Vocational Training and Employment (SEFOPE), the German Development Agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been a lifeline for CDC.

CDC is a horticulture training center serving unemployed youth in Baucau, a municipality in north-eastern Timor-Leste. The organization trains students in horticulture theory and practice, preparing them for careers in farming in their home villages. As part of this process, the farmers also earn a certification that qualifies them to apply to be seasonal workers in Australia.

In addition to materials and equipment, CDC needs funding to cover the training center's operating costs and to provide support to students after they complete their courses. Support comes in the form mentoring or the provision of agricultural tools like hoes, crowbars, sheers and horticulture seed. Prior to this F2F assignment, CDC had made a number of unsuccessful attempts to raise funds through grant applications. Despite these rejections, CDC staff were not ready to give up and were convinced that, with the right kind of guidance, they would be able to secure funding.

Ms. Neelam Dhinsa Canto-Lugo is an adjunct professor at Yuba College, California, teaching communications and cultural studies. She has considerable experience delivering workshops in Nepal, Myanmar and Bangladesh, including as an F2F volunteer. For this assignment, Ms. Canto-Lugo teamed up with local volunteer Dr. Jennifer Leech, an Australian-British citizen who has been working in Timor-Leste for the past five years in roles related to project management and monitoring and evaluation.

Dr. Leech told CRS, “I have worked voluntarily with a number of local NGOs focusing on gender, environment and social change, but I’ve also provided support with grant and proposal writing.” The latter was just the experience CDC was seeking to help it achieve its fundraising goals.

Through a two-week training held in person by Dr. Leech at CDC’s Bacau offices and supported via Zoom by Ms. Canto-Lugo, the volunteers assessed CDC’s strengths, weaknesses and most urgent needs, provided practical guidance on identifying donors and writing funding applications. In their opinion, CDC was in a very competitive position thanks to its long history of successful programming across several funding areas including agriculture, women’s empowerment, education, climate change, tourism, employment and business development. Some of the volunteers’ key observations were that CDC needed to diversify its sources of income, improve its staff’s English language skills, and build better networks.

CDC was evidently delighted with the assignment. The organization’s director, Vicente Belo, told CRS, “The training was so impactful that, as you can see, over the following two years we received a lot of funding from different donors. We now have a new auditorium, students continue to register and [receive] training, and we [are] expanding our coverage to different municipalities with a variety of activities. Some [of the] knowledge we learned from the volunteers we shared through [a] mobile training activity. We have an agroforestry demo plot now and soon we will have a new office building.”

In response to the applications that were written with Ms. Canto-Lugo and Dr. Leech’s support, CDC won funding from two separate sources for three activities in 2020. The first grant of \$14,000 came from GIZ and was used to plant 38 different types of trees (3,600 in total) on CDC land. The idea behind this was to show which trees grow successfully in the local environment and to create a local microclimate at the CDC compound. The second grant of \$31,160 came from the Government Agency SEFOPE and was used for mobile training activities on post-harvest handling, cost analysis, soil management, and composting. The SEFOPE grant also paid for the purchase of seedlings for 80 participants from four villages (known as *sucos*): Baucau-Bucoli, Buruma, Uma Ana Ico, and Uma Ana Ulo. The third grant, worth \$35,163 also came from SEFOPE and was used to build a 12-by-20-meter auditorium.

SEFOPE donated \$28,050 to cover the cost of mobile training in post-harvest handling, cost analysis, seedling and soil management, and composting in eight villages in Baucau, Viqueque and Lautem municipalities. For its part, the FAO contributed \$18,799 which, combined with another \$45,978 from SEFOPE, financed training for 134 people from the agribusiness sector on chicken and pig farming, horticulture, crop production and food processing. A final SEFOPE grant of \$56,187 will pay for the construction of a new 12-by-34-meter office building for CDC.



Auditorium funded by SEFOPE. Photo by CRS F2F Staff.



Mobile training activities conducted with assignment participants. Photo by CRS F2F Staff.

An enthused and optimistic Director Belo told CRS, “Having received this training, we can now compete for local funding. Currently, we have received seven grants from different donors. We have a new auditorium building, an agroforestry demo plot growing well that has been used to train 20 people as extension officers on agroforestry in Baucau and Manufahi. CDC is now attracting students from different municipalities because we have more funds to cover the running costs of the center.” With its new injection of resources, the future looks bright for CDC.