

Kitchen Gardens for Uma Tolu Final Report Executive Summary

The Kitchen Gardens for Uma Tolu (KGUT) project, co-funded by ADRA Australia and ADRA New Zealand, helped pave the way for rural farmers to increase access to food security measures in rural Viqueque. Community mobilisation and orientation helped form 5 farmer groups and also located 5 suitable plots and thus begin the various processes that are necessary for kitchen garden development.

This project has relevance for the Uma Tolu because of the community is primarily engaged in subsistence farming but lacks a local produce market. This community regularly faces challenges with food security and this situation is exacerbated by the El Niño drought-like conditions. The project has been effective in mobilizing and training the targeted participants. As the produce has not been harvested at the time of writing, the food production data has not yet been gathered. Efficiency was a challenge for the project in that the construction of each garden's water system was a significant cost, was labour intensive and time consuming. Although we were able to utilize our water technical staff to set up the water pump and plumbing, the process was slow because it was the job of one skilled staff member. Administrative costs were kept to a minimum. The project's impact is difficult to determine as the planting to harvest cycle has not yet completed, however, based on project activities and observations to this point it is expected that impact has been observed in the transfer of knowledge and skills to project participants and agriculture extension agents. It is expected that with a successful harvest of the produce, that there will be greater food security with an increased access to nutritious foods in Uma Tolu. The participants and agriculture extension agent's increased knowledge and skills increase the sustainability of project's impacts if they continue practicing and sharing their skills. Additionally, sustainability is added through the permanent water systems and ADRA's continuing presence in the area. The farming practices that have emphasized returning nutrients to the soil, conserving water and avoiding harmful chemical inputs has contributed to environmental sustainability.

Several risks to the project's success were identified and addressed including the lack of reliable water sources, which was dealt with through the creation of shallow wells, simple water pumps and tanks. The project timeframe was too short to complete the plant's life cycle so ADRA TL arranged for a three-month extension to the project. ADRA TL identified the risk of lack of participation and ineffective training and so we proceeded with a rigorous recruitment process for the Agriculture Officer and hired a local social mobilizer and arranged for some agriculture training for him. The risks that the participants will not eat or be able to sell their produce will be met with group discussions and further education. The risk that they will not save their seeds for another planting will be met with guided training and instruction from the Agriculture Officer.

The most significant cost to the project was found to be the cost of setting up the water systems for the five gardens.

The efficiency has not been as good as it could have, the project got off to a slow start, a lot of learning for all, but things picked up towards the end of it and in full swing even now after the project has officially finished. ADRA Timor-Leste has worked in this community for a number of years with WASH activities (hand pumps and latrines), and generally ADRA is liked by persons and community and village leaders, and so this makes it a great point for continuing activities. ADRA Timor-Leste is working on developing a large livelihoods program, and is considering this community due to its resiliency, willingness to give it a go, and also its remoteness and vulnerability aspects.

Some of the main risks that emerged from this project was that some beneficiaries were involved in daily labouring jobs as a means of earning a stable (but short term based) income for their households and livelihoods. During the start of the project it was seen that 86 persons signed up for the project, but at the end of the first quarter, only 54 remained. The staff however found that in each group there were a set of champion farmers who were up to the challenge of being involved in the labour intensive activities that this project had to offer, they were determined to see it through and reap the benefits of their hard earned labour. Having more rigorous orientations and stricter assessments may help, also having a large number is also another easy way to achieve a smaller but stronger target of committed farmers.

Another risk that was associated with this project is the short project life time which had potential risks for leaving farmers high and dry, however ADRA Timor-Leste decided to continue funding an extension, and is currently continuing the project so that farmers can go through the whole process with ADRA staff. Funding is coming from Avondale College's student based association "COSMOS" that supports development and social issues.

Another expounding factor to add onto the short life time is the real issues of what will happen to crops once harvested and small scale markets. The extension of this project (3 month) hopes to deal with this issue and start having formal meetings to discuss such main issues.

Relevance

This project is relevant for the community of Uma Tolu where the majority of its people are subsistence farmers grow crops such as maize, rice or cassava. Diets lack nutrient diversity and food insecurity is common especially during months between planting and harvest when families' food stores dwindle. There is currently no small-scale food market system in Uma Tolu; the closest market is 17km away.

This project is especially pertinent during the 2015-2016 wet season as Viqueque municipality has experienced significantly reduced rainfall due to El Niño, leading to crop failure in many areas relying on rain. The kitchen gardens, with a reliable source of water, offer an opportunity for participants to learn how to grow nutritious food and increase the food security of their families.