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## SUCCESS STORY

# Livelihood Opportunities in East Timor

**USAID is improving livelihoods and food security by supporting farmers to learn new skills and seed storage techniques.**



Harlan Hale/USAID

*A beneficiary of a USAID-funded livelihood and seed storage program in East Timor creates a metal silo.*



Mercy Corps

*“When I was a farmer it felt like things would never change... now it seems anything is possible.”*

— *Mario, a beneficiary of the USAID-funded program in East Timor*

U.S. Agency for International Development  
[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

Prior to 2012, the future for Mario and his family was uncertain. With high unemployment in rural East Timor, Mario seemed destined to be a subsistence farmer—like many others in his community—for the rest of his life. Faced with unpredictable droughts and floods, Mario and his family’s food security was often at risk.

In August 2011, USAID supported Mercy Corps to launch the Effective Seed Storage (ESS) program in East Timor, working with local farmers like Mario to develop a market system for high quality, affordable metal storage silos. Silo production has provided an alternative livelihood to subsistence farming, as well as transformed farmers’ ability to store seed and grain and keep it safe from rodents, rot, and insect infestation. Proper storage helps protect East Timor’s farmers—who would otherwise sustain an approximate 30 percent post-harvest loss—from stresses in the food system resulting from severe weather, drought, and floods. Initially piloted in two districts of East Timor, the ESS program has rapidly expanded and now works with silo manufacturers and farmers across 10 districts.

Mario’s business is booming—he has sold more than 1,300 silos since the program began. Some of his silos are subsidized and sold to the most vulnerable farmers at a lower price, but Mario has also built a steady retail trade and is selling full-priced products in local markets and nearby villages. Mario’s success has allowed him to employ five local men and expand his business to include new products, such as rainwater harvesting containers and cold-storage boxes for fish. Mario reports that he is putting his share of the profits toward his children’s schooling and home improvements. He is currently laying the foundation for a larger, more durable home behind his family’s wooden shack.

Mario says the experience has changed the way he approaches problems—he now sees solutions where once things seemed impossible. Through USAID support, the ESS program is expanding the livelihood opportunities of subsistence farmers, helping families become more resilient to food system shocks, and improving the food security of farming villages in East Timor.