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Natural Dyes as a Pathway to Boost Biodiversity and Women's Economic Empowerment in Timor-Leste

Project coordinator : RELOKA, Foundation Re-Inventing Local Production

IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

August 2025 – March 2027

AMOUNT OF FUNDING

€ 49,670

The population of Timor-Leste is heavily dependent on agriculture, with 70% of families relying on some form of farming activity for their livelihoods. The country is vulnerable to natural hazards such as droughts, floods, landslides and soil erosion.

The project aims to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities including women, by developing sustainable natural dye resources through permaculture, diversified trees and crops, and water source restoration.

Specific objectives:

- Promote the development of climate-resilient private gardens, empowering community members to improve food security and adapt their practices to environmental challenges.
- Restore degraded gardens to generate immediate and long-term livelihood opportunities, and showcase practical models that inspire replication across the community.
- Improve access to water for participating families, enhancing their ability to maintain productive gardens and secure essential resources for daily life and resilience.
- Support women's empowerment by strengthening their confidence and capacity to grow natural dye businesses, fostering economic independence, and transmitting traditional knowledge.

Theme

Agroforestry and Sustainable Agriculture

Main co-benefits, in addition to climate change adaptation

- Socio-economic resilience
- Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
- Water resource availability and quality

Ikat weavers in Timor-Leste washing their natural dyed yarns during RELOKA training on natural dyes, Ilatlaun
H. Bouwman © Kiwa Initiative - Oct 2024

Subregion: ■ Melanesia/Timor-Leste ☐ Micronesia ☐ Polynesia

Timor-Leste

RELOKA's main office is based in the capital city, Dili, and the project will be implemented across 3 sites: a demosite in the Hera village of Dili municipality, in Taiboko village of Oecusse municipality, and Humboe village of the Ermera municipality.

- **Direct beneficiaries:**

100 community members, including 30 women and 10 youth.

- **Indirect beneficiaries:**

Around 2,640 community members, of whom 53% are male and 47% female.

Key progress activities:

Awareness and practical trainings held

- Till date, 141 community members have been trained with theoretical and mitigation knowledge to support and implement climate resilient gardening and ecosystem interventions. 47 community members were trained on water restoration techniques. 75 participants engaged in trainings focused on organic and regenerative farming techniques.

Women-led governance

- 2 Women's groups have been able to establish their own governance structures and commence their business plans.

Processing and dye production

- 14 women successfully managed to conserve, harvest and process Usaki leaves into 1kg powder bags. 15 members of the group participated in an intensive training with knowledge focused on processing Indigo as they created their own indigo extract and learned how to dye. Both groups received tools and production shelters. In Hatali, training on Uskai harvesting and processing supported production of 100 kg of Usaki powder, while in Taiboko women produced their first 3 kg of indigo paste and continued to strengthen their group structure and business planning.

Watershed management and conservation initiatives

- Rainwater tanks and house gutters were installed as part of project activities in Taiboko. The creation of dams and water ponds and irrigation channels would communities to be prepared for dry seasons. Pilot gardens were established on barren land with the goal of improving soil fertility through organic composting and mulching practices. A total of 530 seedlings and 25 seed species were planted, supporting biodiversity restoration and resilient home gardens.

Nature-based Solutions implemented and how they benefit to communities

- **Water supply restoration**

Restoring natural water sources benefits at least 40 nearby households by reducing walking distances, supporting garden irrigation, and improving crop yields.

- **Natural dye business for women**

Introducing natural dyes offers women a new income stream, promoting financial independence and indirectly reducing household stress and domestic violence.

- **Resilient farming and nutrition**

Improved farming methods and resilient crops enhance food security and nutrition, leading to better health for both children and adults.

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