

Skills training providing blacksmiths with tools for success

Two years ago, Manuel Gaspar, a third generation blacksmith, in Baucau Kota, Baucau, Timor-Leste, together with one to three employees, was only able to produce seven pieces of agricultural and construction equipment per week. He is now able to produce 140 tools per day, and is employing 45 workers, 23 of whom are permanent workers. He has successfully expanded his business and established a group called "Blacksmith." To date, Blacksmith has produced a total of 6,000 tools, earning a total of \$50,000 – 60,000 dollars.

"Before participating in the skills training course organized by the ILO/UNDP STAGE Programme together with the Secretariat of State for Vocational training and Employment, in 2006, I had learnt the traditional blacksmith skills from my father, who learnt the skills from his father. The skills have been passed down for generations. Since joining the training, I have improved the quality of my products and have expanded my business," he said, smiling. Blacksmith have produced a variety of tools, ranging from shovels, hoes and harrows, to blades and machetes.

Not only is Manuel expanding his business, he has also become a dedicated trainer. As a trainer, he has conducted courses in other districts, such as Viqueque, Manatuto and Lautem. "My ambition is to conduct training in all thirteen districts, sharing my expertise in producing tools so that others can also develop their own businesses and improve their living conditions as I am experiencing now. I am not afraid of competition. The market will decide as I have the quality and everything that matters," he remarked.

The work of Blacksmith has also been promoted to the President of Timor-Leste, Dr Jose Ramos-Horta. Impressed with their work, the President funded the establishment of a new workshop - a spacious building for a workshop and office. The new workshop will allow Blacksmith to produce more tools. "We are going to stamp all of our products with the official Blacksmith brand. After initially focusing on the production side, we are now concentrating on promotion and marketing," said Manuel, adding that he is going to put up a sign soon.