Welcome to HAMETIN, a monthly bulletin of the ERA-AF project, funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the ILO as a component of the Partnership Support for Agro-Forestry (PSAF) Ai ba Futuru. This edition will continue to update you on efforts being made to improve access to markets through rural roads, capacity building of institutions, contractors and the resulting impact on improved roads, decent employment, improved livelihoods, skills development and community empowerment. Our aim is to inform you on how the project is being implemented together with the people and for the people, its impact and other every day issues. We welcome your feedback. Hoping you enjoy this issue of HAMETIN....

Enhancing Rural Areas Agro-Forestry (ERA-AF) Project Activities in April 2021:

01. Tender For Maintenance Work

Following orientation training to eligible Contractors on electronic bidding process, contractors from Viqueque and Manatuto who had performed well in previous contracts, were invited to participate in a Virtual Pre-Bid Meeting held on 19th April 2021. Participants were further briefed on the modified process and also visited the site online by being oriented on site aspects. The bidders are to prepare bids which are to be encrypted and submitted and opened online on another Virtual Bid-Opening Meeting to be held on 3 May 2021. Efforts have been made to provide application tools that can be assessed by all eligible contractors. Also present virtually were the Public Works Municipal Directors from Manatuto and Viqueque who witnessed and participated in the entire process for capacity-building. Ownership, transparency and accountability as the road owners.

Following the current lockdown owing to rise of COVID-19 cases, the project has been compelled to orient and adapt to alternative work methods and systems, so as to ensure continuation of deliverables. This has included adapting conventional tendering procedures to electronic tendering procedures to procure Contractors who are to carry out Maintenance of ERA-AF roads in Manatuto and Viqueque.
02. ERA-AF Project COVID-19 Prevention and Mitigation Activities.

ERA-AF project continues to remind its stakeholders including staff, contractors, workers and implementing agents to abide to COVID-19 Mitigation and Prevention Measures and Guidelines. The Guidelines include those issued by Government, WHO and project-specific guidelines issued by the ERA-AF project. The ERA-AF COVID-19 Guideline which were developed when the pandemic first emerged in 2020 have been updated with further information as the country continues to experience rising cases. This has involved ensuring safety of project staff, and providing and enforcing compliance in the field by issuing guidelines to contractors and workers to adhere to guidelines provided which focus on preparatory and preventive measures for COVID-19 compliance on ERA-AF project sites. The interventions relate to Project Preparations, Contractor Obligations and Worker Specific Actions. Meanwhile, the project also reminds its dearest friends and stakeholders reading this HAMETIN Newsletter to Stay Safe and Well by observing preventive guidelines provided by Government. WHO including Practical Distancing, Wearing Masks, Sanitary Measures including Frequent Washing of Hands and other good practices.

03. ERA-AF Activities Continue with COVID-19 Precautions.

Following imposition of sanitary fence, maintenance and rehabilitation activities in the field within all four municipalities of Baucau, Viqueque, Manatuto and Lautem were affected, owing to travel restrictions. Despite this, the project has been able to realize some works on some sites, owing to the use of work methods that are compliant to COVID-19 compliance. Scope and nature of the road activities allow for limited contact amongst workers. The allocation of tasks for labour-based works, if well planned also ensures that the necessary practical distancing is adhered to. Efforts are also made to ensure that all those who step on to site are temperature screened, where those found with high temperature are advised to seek medical help.
While there are many stories of women who have made it through hard work, the story of Mrs. Joanina da Costa Soares, Director of Tula Eli Unip. from Suco Builale, Baucau Municipality is quite fascinating. The mother of five children, with a high school background, but not completed owing to lack of fees always dreamt of being an entrepreneur. Whenever she looked at other successful entrepreneurs, she reassured herself, that “if those people can have enterprises and be successful, why can’t I.”. A typical day in her family involved working with her parents in the rice-field. This continued until she got married. After being married, Joanina realised that marriage life was quite different from being single, as married life, carried more responsibilities for the family’s needs.

It is against these responsibilities and background, and with the zeal to make it in life and full support from her husband, that Joanina established Tula Eli Unip. Lda. in 2010 which engaged in Government and other agency projects. The enterprise started by engaging in small contracts for constructing drains, but which revealed the firm’s values of commitment, hard work, timely delivery and quality. In 2013, they got a school rehabilitation contract from UNICEF With the profit, the firm diversified into a motorcycle workshop business.

In 2018, Tula Eli applied to participate in the Training Programme of ERA Agro-Forestry project for Viqueque Municipality, where it was selected as one of the contractors to undergo training. ERA Agro-Forestry Project is funded by the European Union and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Joanina together with an engineer and 2 supervisors, participated in the contractor training course that involved classroom and field practical training provided by Don Bosco Training Centre (DBTC) and Institute for Business Development Support (IADE). DBTC and IADE are accredited training institutions which provided training on various aspects of road construction and business including; Construction of Rural Roads using Labour Based Methods, Pavement Construction, and Contracts and Business Management.

As part of the practical training trial contracts, Tula Eli Unip. Larigutu constructed a section of the Lariguto – Builale road in Ossu Decima, Viqueque municipality. Feedback from the monitoring and evaluation conducted by the project and community revealed satisfaction with the work carried out, and which was able to be done in a timely manner. The community lauded and commended Mrs. Joaninha, and her team for not only implementing the works well, but also giving back to the community through corporate social responsibility, where a section of road that was not covered by the ERA Agro-Forestry project was improved at Tula Eli’s own cost. When asked what led her to give back to the community, Joanina responded that she feels obliged to return to the community, based upon the success she has achieved. It is also worth mentioning that Joanina has also been able to procure a Light Sit-On Compaction Roller that is now being used for company works and also hiring out. Indeed, we have not seen the end of the dream for Joanina, as she continues to show that with determination, a woman can make it.