LEOPOLD BACHMANN
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Mértola, a Regenerative Lab for the future of semiarid territories

Annual Report 2025

TERRA SINTRÓPICA

Comprehensive Final Report	Date	31/01/2026

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1.0 General information

Leopold Bachmann Foundation grant number	TER-18-076
Reporting organisation	Associação Terra Sintrópica
Implementing organisation	Associação Terra Sintrópica
Contact person for the grant	Marta Cortegano
Project title	Mértola, a Regenerative Lab for the future of Semiarid
Time span of the grant agreement	01.2023 – 12.2025
Country/Countries	Portugal
Total grant amount from LBF	600.000,00€

2.0 Project details

2.1 Local situation

The project was implemented in a semi-arid Mediterranean context marked by increasing climatic instability, characterised by prolonged droughts, rising temperatures and growing water scarcity. Although 2025 registered higher overall rainfall than previous years, precipitation remained highly irregular and concentrated in short, intense events, offering limited contribution to long-term soil moisture and water availability. These conditions continue to place structural pressure on agricultural productivity, ecosystem resilience and rural livelihoods.

The project adopted a regenerative agriculture and climate adaptation framework, recognising water as a central design variable. Investments made in previous years in water storage and landscape-based water harvesting infrastructure improved short-term resilience and reduced vulnerability during critical periods. However, water management remained a key limiting factor shaping land-use planning, species selection and production strategies.

An adaptive management approach was applied throughout implementation, prioritising soil regeneration, increased infiltration, reduced evaporation and enhanced biodiversity. Rather than maximising short-term outputs, the project focused on building long-term ecological resilience as a foundation for climate adaptation.

2.2 Course of the project

During 2025, the project entered a phase of consolidation and expansion. Existing agroecological and successional agroforestry systems at Horta da Malhadinha / CARES reached increased levels of maturity, while pilot areas within the Mértola Forest Perimeter advanced towards greater ecological complexity through the introduction of native climax species.

Local regenerative food systems were strengthened through continuous agricultural production, regular distribution via AMAPs, and the provision of daily meals through the PREC community canteen. A new AMAP was established in Castro Verde, delivering 48 vegetable baskets per month, and has demonstrated steady growth in membership since its launch.

Project activities expanded through the provision of professional consultancy services, engagement in international cooperation initiatives (including Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and UNCCD-related processes), and strengthened collaboration with educational institutions. Throughout the year, CARES consolidated its role as a living laboratory, combining agricultural production, applied research, training activities and landscape regeneration.

Through the TUI Field to Fork Portugal: Regenerative Alentejo initiative, the project launched a Community of Practice and a Lighthouse Farms Network targeting individuals and organisations working at the intersection of regenerative farming, food systems, tourism and community development. Several community-focused events were organised around regenerative farming, food and tourism. In parallel, a learning journey on regenerative entrepreneurship was implemented through the Food Revolution Program, and preparatory work began on the design of Regenerative Food Tours.

In 2025, three new projects were initiated:

Germinar, developed in partnership with ALSUD (vocational school), focusing on training, hands-on experimentation and the co-creation of resilient public gardens in local senior care facilities, adapted to semi-arid conditions.

MAPPING – Mobilizing Agroforestry Practices through Participation, Innovation, and Networking for Growth, a collaborative education and research project exploring participatory and place-based learning methodologies for agroforestry and regenerative practices.

Root2Fork - a European research and innovation project assessing multi-strata agroforestry systems through Living Labs in Portugal, Germany, Finland and Norway, linking on-farm production with short value chains and local consumption.

Additionally, during the reporting period, approval and funding were secured for broader territorial initiatives, including TerrAlimenta 2.0, ARCo – Collaborative Rural Academy, and the Holistic Landscape Plan, laying the groundwork for future implementation beyond the current project phase.

2.3 Opportunities and risks

Key opportunities emerged through increased demand for regenerative consultancy, the establishment of international partnerships, and recognition through awards, research collaborations, and participation in global knowledge networks. These developments enabled the organisation to diversify income streams, strengthen its credibility, and extend its impact beyond the local scale. By leveraging these opportunities, the organisation was able to influence broader regenerative agriculture and climate adaptation practices, positioning itself as a reference for innovative approaches in sustainable land management.

At the same time, several risks were identified. Long-term climate uncertainty remained a persistent challenge, affecting planning, resource allocation, and the reliability of ecosystem services. Dependence on external funding posed financial vulnerability, while the operational challenge of scaling activities with limited human resources constrained the organisation's capacity to respond rapidly to emerging opportunities and demands.

These risks were addressed through proactive and adaptive planning, diversification of activities, and strategic investment in organisational development, including staff training, process optimisation, and strengthening partnerships. This approach ensured that both ecological outcomes and institutional resilience were maintained.

Insights gained through project implementation are actively shared via regional and international networks, training programmes, workshops, publications, and other dissemination activities. By documenting and communicating lessons learned, the organisation contributes to knowledge exchange, supports the wider adoption of regenerative practices, and fosters collaboration across sectors. This approach not only amplifies the project's impact but also reinforces its long-term sustainability and capacity to adapt to evolving environmental and socio-economic conditions.

3.0 Project impact

3.1 Achieved outcomes and overarching goal

To demonstrate and scale regenerative agroecology and successional agroforestry systems as viable responses to climate change, biodiversity loss and rural socio-economic decline in semi-arid regions.

Outcome	Impact	KPIs
Consolidation of CARES as a living laboratory	Increased regional and international recognition	Over 450 people visited us this year, leading to 65 new partnerships, the development of six new projects, and the implementation of one Sustainability Plan (CARES). We were also recognised among the Top 50 Farmers and awarded the ODS Prize.
Expansion of local food systems	Improved access to local regenerative food	62 AMAP members, 94 fixed baskets and 30 additional baskets, delivered monthly. Implementation of one Sustainability Plan (PREC) and recognition through the PRIMA Award 2025.
Strengthened agroforestry systems	Enhanced soil health, biodiversity and resilience	5 hectares locally regenerated, with an increase of over 50 plant species in overall species diversity
Professional consultancy services	Knowledge transfer and replication	Two contracts have been implemented, and three additional clients are currently under contractual review.
Capacity building and training	Enhanced local and regional skills in regenerative agriculture	Total of 17 workshops/learning sessions with a total of 265 participants
Water management and resilience	Improved water use efficiency and reduced vulnerability to drought	In a region with an average annual rainfall of approximately 350 mm, rainwater harvesting and infiltration capacity were significantly increased through implementing 33 swales totalling 1.32 km in

		length. These infrastructures enhance soil moisture retention, reduce runoff losses and strengthen long-term drought resilience at farm and landscape scales.
Community engagement and participation	Stronger social cohesion and local ownership of projects	Over 1,100 community members engaged, including 80 households through AMAPs, more than 180 visitors, and 942 people directly involved in new projects. Continuous volunteer contribution supporting field activities, community events, educational and artistic programmes. Local initiatives launched: 6 new projects, 1 Community of Practice and Lighthouse Farms Network, 2 Learning Journeys, and 5 community-building events.
Research and monitoring	Evidence-based decision-making and adaptive management	Monitoring protocols were co-developed in collaboration with the University of Seville, with dedicated monitoring plots established on site. Data collection to be carried out through a final-year student research project, contributing to the systematic assessment of agroforestry and regenerative practices. In parallel, monitoring and research protocols were established with the Technical University of Munich (TUM) within the framework of the Root2Fork research and development project, ensuring scientific rigour, comparability of data, and alignment with international research standards.

Beyond its immediate outcomes, the project strengthened its role as a reference platform for regenerative agroecology and climate adaptation in semi-arid contexts. By integrating on-the-ground implementation with knowledge sharing, training activities and professional consultancy, the initiative established concrete pathways for replication and scaling across different territories.

The project's approach, which combines ecological regeneration with social engagement and economic viability, contributed to enhanced local resilience while simultaneously reinforcing institutional capacity and organisational maturity. This integration enabled the project to respond effectively to complex environmental and social challenges, while maintaining operational coherence and strategic focus.

As a result, the initiative is increasingly positioned as a living laboratory for regenerative practices, capable of adapting to climatic uncertainty and supporting long-term learning and innovation. Through its applied, multi-actor methodology, the project contributes to broader systemic transitions in food systems, land management and rural development, both at territorial and international levels.

3.2 Target group(s)

The project engaged diverse target groups at local and regional levels, reflecting its integrated approach to regenerative agroecology and climate adaptation. Activities combined land regeneration, food systems strengthening, capacity building and knowledge exchange. This multi-actor engagement supported both local impact and broader dissemination of regenerative practices.

Target group	Impact	Number reached
Local consumers (AMAP Beja & Castro Verde)	Improved access to local regenerative food and increased awareness of sustainable practices	During 2025, 80 households received monthly baskets, with over 6,000 meals served through community activities, food tastings, and awareness events. In addition, more than 180 visitors, both in groups and individually, participated in on-site visits and project activities, further expanding the reach and impact of the initiative
Farmers and land managers	Capacity building, technical support, and adoption of regenerative agroecology practices	160+ farmers trained, 66 of farm visits and 6 on-site consultations, 96 hectares under improved management and 520 hectares under Development. In Mértola, 3 partner farmers are regenerating almost 1600 ha.
Students and educators	Experiential learning and environmental education	Over 70 children from local school visits, 82 university students in workshops visits,

		12 educational sessions delivered
Volunteers and interns	Skills development and hands-on experience	In 2025, 26 volunteers contributed a total of approximately 5,390 working hours, corresponding to 49 cumulative volunteer months. Participants contributed to project activities while acquiring and sharing new skills in soil management, agroforestry techniques and water harvesting through 6 structured peer-to-peer skill-sharing sessions.
Local communities	Strengthened social cohesion, participation in sustainable projects, and community-led initiatives	During 2025, the project launched 6 new initiatives at regional and international levels, including 1 Community of Practice and Lighthouse Farm Network. Two Learning Journeys were developed, alongside 5 community-building events. These activities engaged 45 local and international entities and directly involved 942 participants.

3.3 Stakeholders and network

The project was supported by a broad network of collaborators, including municipalities, schools, research institutions, non-governmental organisations, and international networks. Through its implementation, Terra Sintrópica consolidated strong local, regional, and international partnerships with farmers, associations, cooperatives, municipalities, and regional and national agencies.

Terra Sintrópica is an active member of the Iberian Network for Regenerative Territories, an initiative launched with the support of Commonland and other international partners, which promotes cooperation and peer learning across regenerative territories in the Iberian Peninsula. In addition, Terra Sintrópica is a partner organisation of EARA – the European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture, contributing practical experience to the development of European policies, governance models, and initiatives that support the dissemination of regenerative agriculture across Europe.

These partnerships played a key role in enabling effective project implementation and amplifying its impact. They facilitated access to land and infrastructure, technical and scientific expertise, educational support, dissemination channels, and alignment with local and regional policy frameworks.

At the international level, Terra Sintrópica engaged with platforms such as Hub del Norte and the UNCCD ecosystem through the participation of its farmer and consultant, contributing to knowledge exchange on

regenerative agroecology, land restoration, and climate adaptation in semi-arid contexts. This engagement supported peer learning, increased institutional visibility, and strengthened alignment with international frameworks on land degradation neutrality and resilient food systems.

Collaboration with academic and research institutions reinforced the project's evidence-based approach, supporting monitoring activities, methodological development, and applied research. Engagement with schools and educational actors enabled experiential learning opportunities, raising awareness among younger generations and embedding regenerative principles within educational contexts. Municipal and institutional partners supported territorial integration, aligning project activities with broader strategies for rural development, climate adaptation, and sustainable land management.

Through these collaborations, a multi-actor regenerative network gradually emerged, fostering continuous knowledge exchange and cooperation across disciplines and territories. This network strengthened the project's capacity to respond to environmental uncertainty, increased its visibility at regional and international levels, and reinforced its long-term resilience by embedding regenerative agroecology within a wider social, institutional, and knowledge ecosystem.

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of project activities was carried out through a combination of regular field observations, participatory evaluation with beneficiaries, and the systematic collection of both qualitative and quantitative indicators. These indicators captured multiple dimensions of impact, including agricultural production, biodiversity enhancement, community engagement, and the strength of partnerships. By combining direct observation with participatory feedback, the project team was able to continuously assess the effectiveness of interventions, identify areas for improvement, and adapt management practices in response to emerging challenges and opportunities.

A key component of this monitoring approach was the collaboration with the University of Seville, which supported the development of robust monitoring protocols and the establishment of dedicated monitoring plots. Data collected through these plots, including contributions from final-year student research projects, enabled a more rigorous assessment of agroforestry and regenerative practices at plot and landscape scales. This collaboration strengthened the scientific validity of the monitoring process while facilitating knowledge exchange and capacity building among students and project staff, reinforcing the role of CARES as a living laboratory for regenerative agroecology.

The adaptive nature of this monitoring framework enabled the project to refine interventions in real time when necessary, ensuring that ecological, social, and economic objectives were effectively addressed. By integrating systematic observation, participatory evaluation, and applied research, the project supported evidence-based decision-making, enhanced resilience to climatic variability, and contributed directly to the achievement of its overarching goal: demonstrating viable regenerative agroecology and agroforestry systems in semi-arid contexts.

In parallel, the partnership established with the Technical University of Munich (TUM) provided strong scientific coordination and applied research expertise within the framework of the Root2Fork project. As project coordinator, TUM leads the overall scientific design, ensures integration of results across countries, and oversees quality assurance processes, ensuring that work carried out in the Living Labs translates into robust and comparable evidence. This partnership is characterised by close collaboration between TUM researchers and practice-based partners, including the joint design of field trials, development of indicators

to assess ecological, economic, and social performance, data analysis, and synthesis of results into actionable recommendations. Through this collaboration, TUM supports the translation of on-the-ground agroforestry practice into scientifically grounded knowledge capable of informing policy development, innovation, and wider adoption across Europe.

4. Implementing organisation

4.1 Major changes, challenges and/or opportunities

The main challenges faced by the project were associated with scaling operations under conditions of increasing climatic uncertainty. Semi-arid environments, characterised by prolonged droughts and irregular rainfall, required constant adaptation of production systems, water management strategies, and landscape design. Limited human and financial resources added further complexity to scaling efforts, making it necessary to prioritise interventions and adopt flexible planning approaches.

At the same time, several opportunities emerged that strengthened the project's impact and sustainability. Growing institutional recognition at local, regional and international levels enhanced credibility and visibility. Increased demand for consultancy services allowed the project to share knowledge, replicate practices in other contexts, and diversify income streams. Participation in international research collaborations and networks facilitated knowledge exchange, capacity building, and the co-creation of innovative solutions, reinforcing both the project's reach and its long-term resilience in the face of climatic and socio-economic challenges.

4.2 Organisational development

During the project, Terra Sintrópica strengthened its internal capacities in key areas such as fundraising, project coordination, and communication. Enhanced fundraising skills allowed the organisation to secure more diverse and stable funding sources, reducing dependence on single streams and increasing financial resilience. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to continue identifying and developing additional financing mechanisms to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project, with fundraising being one of several complementary strategies.

Improvements in coordination facilitated more efficient planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities across multiple sites and teams. Strengthened communication capacities enabled the organisation to engage effectively with local communities, stakeholders, and international partners, supporting knowledge exchange and advocacy.

During this year's project, it became necessary to seek advice from an external consultant to reassess and develop new approaches to sustainability for both CARES and PREC. This process involved rethinking work methods, service provision, and scheduling to enhance operational efficiency and financial viability. Together, these developments contributed to improved long-term organisational resilience, ensuring that Terra Sintrópica is better equipped to sustain regenerative agroecology initiatives, respond to future challenges, and scale its impact both locally and internationally.

5. Financial reporting

The financial report for the project indicates that overall budget management was sound, with only minor deviations observed. These deviations were primarily related to additional investments in climate adaptation measures and higher levels of project activity than initially planned, reflecting the adaptive and responsive nature of the project. Importantly, no structural budget overruns occurred, and all core activities were delivered as intended.

Any income generated through consultancy services or other project-related activities was fully reinvested into ongoing project operations, supporting both implementation and the consolidation of regenerative practices. This careful financial stewardship ensured the effective use of resources, maintained organisational sustainability, and reinforced the project's capacity to achieve its ecological, social, and economic objectives.

Total Income ATS 2025	Budgeted	Actual spended	Variance- available
Own contribution	48 000,00 €	27 200,00 €	0,00 €
Local contribution- House for volunteers	13 200,00 €	13 200,00 €	0,00 €
Local contribution- Team travel in own vehicles	2 100,00 €	2 100,00 €	0,00 €
Local contribution office for the team	7 800,00 €	7 800,00 €	0,00 €
Funds by Leopold Bachman Foundation	200 000,00 €	200 600,52 €	-622,12 €
TUI Field to fork Alentejo	109 000,00 €	57 392,78 €	51 607,22 €
Municipio de Mértola - Hortas Floresta	1 176,50 €	1 176,50 €	0,00 €
TerrAlimenta	1 980,00 €	1 980,00 €	0,00 €
Produts and services Terra Sintrópica	9 105,00 €	9 105,00 €	0,00 €
IEFP	14 836,38 €	14 836,38 €	0,00 €
CCDESERT - Municipio de Mértola	6 000,00 €	6 000,00 €	0,00 €
Mapping	25 000,00 €	0,00 €	25 000,00 €
Environmental Fund	16 749,80 €	16 749,80 €	0,00 €
Donation	9 834,91 €	9 834,91 €	0,00 €
Prima award	5 000,00 €	1 334,66 €	3 665,34 €
Aland Fundation	25 000,00 €	25 000,00 €	0,00 €
Total Expenses	494 782,59 €	394 310,55 €	79 650,44 €
Expenses regarding LB budget 2025	Budgeted	Actual spended	Variance- available
G General Expenses	86 434,00 €	84 201,65 €	2 232,35 €
1 Pilot & Demonstration Center Agro-Ecology	83 487,60 €	88 027,11 €	-4 539,51 €
2 Capacitação e apoio equipa	25 056,80 €	21 943,97 €	3 112,83 €
3 Unforeseen	5 000,00 €	6 427,79 €	-1 427,79 €
Total Expenses	**199 978,40 €**	**200 600,52 €**	**-622,12 €**
Deficit			**-622,12 €**

6. Project summary

6.1 Adaptions and innovations

Innovations implemented during the project encompassed multiple dimensions of regenerative agroecology, education, research and community engagement. A key innovation was the intentional integration of wildlife management into agroforestry systems and landscape design, strengthening biodiversity, ecosystem functionality and resilience to climatic variability. This focus emerged through collaboration with a local vocational school, the specific territorial context of semi-arid Mértola, and the expressed interest of farm landowners, enabling the development of approaches that support productive systems while simultaneously enhancing habitat restoration, ecological connectivity and soil health.

The project also adapted its operational model by expanding professional consultancy services in regenerative and syntropic agroforestry. These services provided tailored technical guidance to farmers, land managers and institutions, supporting the design, assessment and transition of agroecosystems towards regenerative models. In addition to facilitating replication and scaling beyond the core project area, this innovation contributed to the diversification of income streams, reinforcing the organisation's financial sustainability and long-term resilience.

Another innovative element was the integration of education, artistic practices and experiential learning into regeneration processes. Educational programmes, creative methodologies and artistic interventions were embedded within field activities, strengthening engagement with students, volunteers and community members. This approach enhanced understanding of complex ecological processes such as soil regeneration, hydrological design and biodiversity dynamics, while fostering emotional connection, motivation and stewardship.

At a broader scale, participation in European cooperation and research projects (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, UNCCD-related initiatives) introduced new methodologies, monitoring frameworks and collaborative tools, enabling continuous adaptation and improvement of practices. Through these combined innovations, the project advanced a holistic, adaptive and multi-actor model of regeneration, consolidating its role as a living laboratory for experimentation, learning and innovation in semi-arid contexts. *[max. 1/2 page]*

6.2 Successes

The project achieved significant successes across ecological, social, and organisational dimensions. One of its most notable achievements was the consolidation and maturation of agroecological and successional agroforestry systems at Horta da Malhadinha / CARES, alongside the progressive ecological enhancement of pilot areas within the Mértola Forest Perimeter. The introduction and successful establishment of native species, improved soil conditions, and increased ecological complexity demonstrate the effectiveness of regenerative practices applied in a semi-arid context.

Another key success was the strengthening and expansion of local regenerative food systems. Continuous production, regular distribution through AMAPs in Beja and Castro Verde, and the daily provision of meals through the PREC community canteen improved access to local, healthy food while reinforcing short value chains and strengthening producer–consumer relationships. These activities increased the visibility, legitimacy, and practical relevance of regenerative agriculture within the region.

The project also succeeded in positioning CARES as a recognised reference centre for regenerative agroecology, education, and applied research. High levels of participation in training activities, field visits, educational programmes, and international exchanges reflect growing interest from farmers, students, institutions, and policy-related actors. Formalised consultancy contracts, together with participation in European research and cooperation projects, further demonstrate the project's credibility and its capacity to operate across local, regional, and international scales.

At an institutional level, the project strengthened its organisational structure, partnerships, and networks. Recognition through multiple awards, including the Top 50 Farmers distinction, the PRIMA Women Greening the Food System Award, and the ODS Award, alongside active participation in European and Iberian regenerative networks, and sustained collaboration with municipalities, universities, and civil society organisations, represent key milestones.

Together, these successes underline the project's capacity to generate measurable impact, foster multi-actor collaboration, and contribute meaningfully to ecological regeneration, resilient food systems, and sustainable rural development.

6.3 Lessons learnt

The project reinforced several key lessons regarding the implementation and scaling of regenerative agroecology in semi-arid contexts. One central learning was the importance of adopting a long-term, adaptive approach. Ecological regeneration, particularly in challenging climatic conditions, requires patience, continuous monitoring and flexibility in management practices to respond effectively to environmental variability and unforeseen constraints.

Another important lesson was the value of integrating multiple dimensions of regeneration, ecological, social and economic, within a coherent operational framework. While ecological outcomes are fundamental, sustained impact depends on strong community engagement, viable economic models and institutional capacity. The diversification of activities, including food production, education, consultancy and research, proved essential in enhancing resilience and reducing dependency on single funding sources.

The project also highlighted the need for robust planning and resource allocation when managing multiple sites, partnerships and programmes simultaneously. Coordinating field implementation, educational activities, research collaborations and external engagements required clear internal processes, role definition and communication mechanisms to maintain operational efficiency and team well-being.

Collaboration emerged as both a strength and a learning process. Partnerships with municipalities, universities, schools and international networks significantly enhanced impact, but also required time and effort to align expectations, methodologies and timelines. Establishing clear agreements, shared objectives and continuous dialogue proved crucial for effective cooperation.

Finally, the project reaffirmed the importance of documentation, knowledge transfer and capacity building. Reliance on highly skilled individuals highlighted the need to systematise knowledge, develop training materials and strengthen collective learning processes, ensuring continuity and scalability beyond individual roles. These lessons will inform future project design, organisational development and the ongoing evolution of CARES as a living laboratory for regenerative agroecology.

6.4 Outlook

Building on the outcomes, successes and lessons learned during the project period, the initiative is well positioned to continue consolidating and expanding its impact in the coming years. The focus will remain on strengthening CARES as a reference centre for regenerative agroecology in semi-arid regions, combining food production, ecological restoration, applied research, training and consultancy within an integrated and adaptive framework.

In the next phase, priority will be given to deepening the consolidation of existing agroforestry systems, enhancing biodiversity management, soil regeneration and hydrological design, while improving monitoring and evaluation processes in collaboration with academic and research partners. These efforts aim to further strengthen evidence-based practices and support informed decision-making at both farm and landscape scales.

The project also intends to expand its contribution to local and regional food systems by reinforcing community-supported agriculture schemes, strengthening relationships with public institutions, and increasing the supply of locally produced, regenerative food to schools and community facilities. In parallel, professional consultancy and training activities will continue to be developed as key mechanisms for knowledge transfer, replication and financial sustainability.

At a broader scale, continued engagement in national and European cooperation frameworks, including research, education and policy-oriented initiatives, will support the scaling of regenerative agroecology beyond the immediate territory. By combining local action with international collaboration, the project aims to contribute to systemic transitions in food systems, land management and rural development, while remaining responsive to climatic uncertainty and emerging social and environmental challenges.

7. Learning stories

One farmer supported through our advisory activities reported a marked increase in confidence when transitioning towards regenerative agricultural practices, highlighting the value of tailored on-site technical support and participatory assessment. Through direct engagement, the farmer was able to identify site-specific challenges, experiment with agroforestry layouts, soil regeneration methods, and water management strategies, and implement changes with greater assurance and effectiveness. The participatory nature of the consultancy process fostered a sense of ownership and empowerment, reinforcing the farmer's commitment to long-term regenerative practices. This individual experience reflects a broader pattern observed across the programme, demonstrating that combining technical expertise, adaptive guidance, and participatory evaluation can accelerate the uptake of regenerative approaches. By documenting and sharing such experiences, the project not only supports the scaling of best practices but also contributes to building a community of practitioners capable of responding to semi-arid climatic challenges with confidence and resilience.

A second farmer involved in our advisory activities successfully implemented a series of swales and small-scale water harvesting structures on their property, following technical guidance and participatory assessment. These interventions improved soil moisture retention and reduced runoff, allowing the farmer to diversify crop species and introduce perennial plants. The farmer reported increased understanding of agroecological principles, including the integration of biodiversity into productive systems, and expressed greater confidence in making adaptive management decisions under drought conditions. This case demonstrates how site-specific technical support combined with hands-on experimentation enables farmers to adopt complex regenerative strategies while enhancing landscape resilience.

A young volunteer working with the project highlighted significant skill development in soil management, agroforestry design, and participatory monitoring. Through structured training, on-site practice, and on the peer-to-peer learning sessions, the volunteer gained practical knowledge and applied it in community demonstration plots. They reported a strengthened sense of agency and motivation to continue working in regenerative agriculture, and subsequently shared their knowledge with local school students during educational visits. This experience illustrates the project's capacity to foster experiential learning, empower new practitioners, and amplify impact through knowledge dissemination beyond immediate participants.

Together, these individual experiences demonstrate the multi-dimensional impact of the project on farmers, volunteers, and community members. They highlight how technical support, adaptive management, and participatory approaches can enable the adoption of regenerative practices, enhance ecological resilience, and build both human and social capital. By integrating these insights into monitoring, training, and future project planning, the initiative reinforces its role as a living laboratory and a reference centre for regenerative agroecology in semi-arid contexts.

8. Final remarks

The project demonstrates that regenerative agroecology is both a viable and necessary pathway for semi-arid territories facing complex ecological, social, and economic challenges. By combining agroforestry, soil regeneration, water harvesting, and participatory approaches, the initiative has shown that productive landscapes can be restored while enhancing biodiversity, ecosystem services, and local livelihoods. The integration of education, volunteer engagement, and consultancy services further reinforced the project's capacity to build knowledge, skills, and local ownership, creating conditions for long-term resilience and sustainable impact.

We would like to acknowledge that the support provided by the Leopold Bachmann Foundation was fundamental to the implementation and success of this project. The financial backing enabled us to carry out critical activities on the ground, consolidate pilot agroforestry sites, expand community-supported agriculture initiatives, and strengthen educational and consultancy programmes. Without this support, many of the achievements described in this report, from biodiversity enhancement to participatory training and international collaboration, would not have been possible. We are deeply grateful for the Foundation's trust, vision, and commitment to supporting innovative approaches to sustainable development in semi-arid regions.

Through adaptive management, monitoring, and multi-actor collaboration, the project has established a model for scaling regenerative practices under climatic uncertainty. It has strengthened institutional capacity, diversified income streams, and fostered international and local partnerships, ensuring both the sustainability and replicability of its interventions. The outcomes highlight that regenerative agroecology not only addresses immediate environmental pressures but also offers a framework for social cohesion, community empowerment, and the long-term sustainability of rural systems.

Ultimately, the project serves as a living laboratory and reference centre, providing evidence, methodologies, and inspiration for future initiatives in semi-arid contexts. It underscores the critical role of integrated ecological, social, and economic approaches in addressing the challenges posed by climate change, biodiversity loss, and rural socio-economic decline. By demonstrating tangible impacts and scalable solutions, the project contributes to the broader agenda of sustainable and resilient land management in the Mediterranean and other semi-arid regions.

9. Further information and attachments

https://www.fct.pt/en/investigadora-portuguesa-vence-premio-prima-woman-greening-food-systems-in-the-mediterranean/

https://odslocal.pt/projetos/centro-de-agroecologia-e-regeneracao-para-o-semiarido-cares--367

https://www.top50farmers.org/top-50-farmers-2025-cohort/ant%C3%B3nio-coelho?