



CONVERSATIONS OF CHANGE

HONDURAS



The CDAIS project has been an accelerator of processes, with results that have spread from community to governmental levels. Those who have been involved consider that CDAIS was a key reason for these changes, having arrived as a springboard in 2015. Of the four partnerships in Honduras, these conversations explore the experiences of potato producers in La Esperanza, Intibucá, home to almost 70% of national potato production. Since 2015, much has changed for them: from a small group of growers, eight associations have become consolidated organisations. Supported by the government's Agriculture and Livestock Secretariat (Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería, SAG) and accompanied by CDAIS, the process has shown the relevance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, farmer-to-farmer communication, organisation, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. And from this, there have been organisational and national-level changes, with a new ministerial agreement that guarantees future government support to the innovation niche partnership, providing space for the producers to engage in strategic and political processes.

“Before CDAIS, I worked without clear objectives, I worked just to work. But now I look towards the future, and learnt that you have to abandon certain practices in order to innovate.”

Santos Méndez potato producer, CEDROS association Facilitator

From seed potatoes to national policies

“Through CDAIS, we have learnt about the importance of our capacities, and sometimes that as a small producer and because of a lack of training, you can't develop these on your own”, said Santos Méndez, a farmer and member of one of the eight producer organisations in the potato innovation niche partnership. Appropriation of the CDAIS methodology empowered the producers and gave them a better understanding of the needs of the different actors as well as what was required to improve potato yields and quality. Another potato farmer, Rodolfo Hernández offers

a youth perspective: “On a personal level, my participation in the training processes with CDAIS has allowed me to reorganise my work in the field and outside it, to understand the importance of being organised to achieve our common goals. I have opened my mind to other things too, and this has allowed me to develop, to communicate better, to build relationships with others, and that is extremely valuable.”

Amalia González from the La Rinconoda Monquecagua association was clear about the benefit to her and her fellow farmers: “Through CDAIS I was able to expand my horizons by visiting other farmers, and took part in the struggle to become an organisation. This was not only to earn money, but also to create work and seek a better quality of life. There were also many other changes in our organisation thanks to CDAIS, including the opportunities we had to participate in exchange study tours, which were important for us to be able to improve our agricultural practices. And this also dynamised the ways we are working together, collaborating to achieve higher levels of production and better-quality potatoes.” And she added that improved seed production was a key element for them, and they are now selling quality seed potatoes to other farmers in the area.

Santos Gutierrez, President of the APROMIL potato producers' association has a longer-term vision: “For us it is important to better market our product, and with the new partnerships we hope to start improving our sales. Through CDAIS we have been able to understand the relevance and implications of organisation, and this has allowed us to see the next steps – a need to unify pricing and packaging. And we will soon have our own brand.”

Stakeholders have seen huge progress since CDAIS first met with some small groups of potato producers in 2016, with more actors from various sectors becoming involved during the capacity development. PRONAGRO (national agri-food development programme) and the mayor's office in Intibucá became key partners for the operational leap that potato producers have had. Edwin Flores, Technical Secretary at SAG noted that “CDAIS came as a glove, because at PRONAGRO we were trying to consolidate a potato value chain and it helped us.”

“Now after coordinated work and dialogue with government authorities and cooperatives”, continued Flores, “the Agriculture and Livestock Secretariat is about to publish

HONDURAS



“Through CDAIS it was possible to create training spaces on good agricultural practices, almost three thousand producers were accompanied during these three years”, said Hector García, National Innovation Facilitator, and researcher with the government’s Directorate of Agricultural Science and Technology (Dirección de Ciencia y Tecnología Agropecuaria, DICTA).

“I am now organising seedbeds in a different way after my experience talking to farmers in Guatemala with CDAIS”, explained farmer Abelardo Fiallos. “I learnt something new, and I’ve made my investment calculations and launched my seed production operation. I have a new passion, and a motivation to try new things.”



a ministerial agreement that enables better articulation of actions needed for improved production and marketing between the various actors.” Strongly influenced by the CDAIS policy dialogue process, it proposes strategic interventions aimed at increasing the competitiveness and sustainability of the potato sector, including the need to continue the strengthening of functional capacities at all levels.

Building partnerships

“At the start, few actors would regularly communicate with each other”, explains Hector García, National Innovation Facilitator of the potato partnership. “But, the main result of the analysis we made during the last reflection workshop was the strengthening of relationships. It is extremely valuable to see how the interactions have evolved, and how they share what they have achieved thanks to new knowledge and the changes in how they handle seeds and crops, and how they are now building experimental greenhouses.”

“From the construction of alliances that have developed over the years of CDAIS intervention, it is important to note the leading role taken by the Municipality of Intibucá”, said Arlis Zepeda, assistant National Innovation Facilitator. “They supported by offering an assistant technician called Elder Meza”, added García, “and financial support through the provision of agricultural inputs, among other activities.



Learning to share experience and work together starts in the field, but those capacities can also be transferred to building broader partnerships.

Two subsequent mayors were interested in the methodology that CDAIS shared with us, which led to an appropriation of the approach. This served to strengthen the relationship between farmers and the municipality, and, through the technician, there is better coordination between actors and government authorities that allowed us to achieve the successes we have seen and [ensures] that the work will be sustained into the future.”

““When I asked other members if they would lose the benefits after all they have learnt from CDAIS, their answer was immediate and came from all their mouths at the same time – ‘no, because we see how this allows us to achieve our objectives’.””

Amalia Gonzalez farmer from La Rinconada Monquecagua association

In addition to the stronger links with the municipality, input suppliers also now offer technical assistance and the promotion of environmental conservation programmes in addition to selling products. Thus, the input suppliers not only contribute to improved agricultural yields, but also generate increased awareness about the needs of potato and the impacts of crop production. This means that from having no help at all, some smallholder producers now have the technical assistance of up to three agricultural technicians. The Directorate of Agricultural Science and Technology (DICTA) also has links with producers. This included the delivery of the first domestically produced seed potatoes to satisfy market needs and in which small-scale producers participate, at an acceptable price and better adapted to local soil and climate conditions. This allows producers to feel more comfortable with the crop they produce, and it is accompanied by technical assistance for the good management of the improved seed they have themselves helped to develop.

“The project has greatly strengthened the producers’ understanding of each other”, said Carlos Valladares, representative of the Horticultural Network of Intibucá. “You see them more empowered in the different spaces

they participate in, such as meetings with the mayor or with government authorities, and they are much more aware of the roles they have, and can have, within the potato value chain.” The process of strengthening productive organisations through the development of capacities has allowed producers to identify the deficiencies involved in working only with the public sector or only with the private sector. “The vision has changed”, explained Valladares, “by understanding that to grow we need to participate in multi-stakeholder processes that link us more widely and not exclusively with private or public contracts, because in the long term this becomes a limitation.”

“The CDAIS project has opened doors to a different panorama in how to ensure that innovation arises when functional capacities develop well.”

Erick Martínez National Project Coordinator and Director of PRONAGRO (national agri-food development programme) of the Agriculture and Livestock Secretariat (SAG)

Learning from CDAIS

CDAIS has had impacts on many individuals, but especially on the National Innovation Facilitators. Here are their thoughts in their own words.

“CDAIS methodologies and tools allowed me to change my ways of working, and it is impressive how one can evolve. I spent 15 years working in the same way, but now in three years working with this project, I have changed. I understand how we can build things collectively, and that in the long run this leads to better results for everyone. And I now firmly believe in the development of capacities as a crucial element to improving the lives of our people and our crops.”

Hector García, National Innovation Facilitator, potato partnership

“I have worked a lot with actors at the field level, but throughout the CDAIS project I have realised the importance of giving people a voice, and also of letting them guide this process. Because, at the end of the day, they are the ones who must own it. They also have the best understanding of their own context. Though I as a facilitator can help them build a better environment for themselves.”

Arlis Zepeda, assistant National Innovation Facilitator, potato partnership

“I have been a person who likes to follow methodologies, and be strict with the steps that have to be followed to reach certain objectives, but with

CDAIS I learnt to be more flexible. But this does not mean abandoning the approach, but rather, it has allowed me to get closer to other realities, and from that, build knowledge with people. That has been a very significant change for me.”

Julia Cruz, National Innovation Facilitator, bean partnership

“As a teaching professional, the CDAIS project has allowed me to make changes in the topics I teach, and focusing on the development of functional abilities has been important for me. Another valuable aspect for me was to be able to abandon the idea that one is the foreman, and understand that we are people who can work together – [this] is certainly a key lesson from the project.”

José Ruiz, National Innovation Facilitator, cacao partnership

“Although the project focused on the development of capacities of partnership actors, as a facilitator I also had to progress on a personal level. And for me, what was very revealing is that we can work together and move from top-down management to self-management of activities. I say this because we reached a point where once the action plan was defined, it was no longer necessary for the facilitator to be there, regardless of what activities were to be carried out, as actors took ownership and the leadership was shared.”

Rudy Mejía, National Innovation Facilitator, coffee partnership



During the January–June dry season there are risks of severe damage by pests, especially the potato psyllid, known locally as ‘paratrioza’. Crop losses can be up to 80%, with control costs significantly reducing profitability. But through new collaboration promoted by CDAIS, impacts of this pest have been greatly reduced.

Organisational changes

Organisational dynamics in Honduras are extremely relevant for the innovation niche partnerships with which the CDAIS project has worked during the past three years. Another part of the CDAIS approach is to work with key innovation support service providers. The national team helped organisations to identify capacity gaps, develop visions and set priority objectives. These showed that positive outcomes could result that were not only sustainable but also likely to be scaled out after the project ends.

For Evangelina Trejo, member of the Regional University Center of the Atlantic Coast, the CDAIS project has been a valuable learning process, mainly because of the focus on value chains with which there are some research and collaboration relationships. “Although we are dedicated to the agricultural sector,” he said, “the CDAIS project has allowed us to improve our understanding of the needs in the cacao sector for example, and we are beginning to address these by developing functional capacities.”



By working with potato producers in the Intibucá area, CDAIS built an atmosphere of collaboration and integration.

“Through CDAIS, farmers have developed a much greater value of association, are much more participative in spaces for dialogue, and are more aware of their needs, which has allowed them to abandon contemplative attitudes and become protagonists of their own process of change.”

Carlos Valladares representative of the Horticultural Network of Intibucá

One of the most important things that occurred was the elaboration of the ministerial agreement for the potato value chain, following coordination from the farmers in the field, through the CDAIS facilitators and the country team, to government – leading to extremely valuable results for potato producers. This agreement now offers a concrete opportunity for farmers and other stakeholders to revitalise activities in the potato sector and open the possibility of a process of organisational strengthening on a scale that will go way beyond the Intibucá area.

Other targeted organisations include the Directorate of Agricultural Science and Technology (DICTA) and the Agricultural Education, Training and Agribusiness Development Service (SEDUCA). DICTA was also a key institution that worked alongside CDAIS activities with the innovation niche partnerships, by helping with the development of improved seed potato production

techniques, increasing the number of technicians in the field, and facilitating technical advances among actors in the bean innovation niche partnership. A key element of this coaching was that a designated facilitator from the Directorate served as a bridge between the objectives of CDAIS and those of DICTA, which over time became aligned to obtain better results.

Innovation partnerships in Honduras



Potato

Facilitator: Hector García

The potato partnership underwent significant changes at various levels, from the consolidation of eight farmer groups, to their members that also promoted a new and common vision. Today, there is a group – organised and coordinated in conjunction with the Mayor of Intibucá – that has established municipal ordinances for the management of stubble. The empowerment that has taken place in different actors is impressive: many are doing experiments at the level of plots with seeds, nurseries and soils, and some are working on an improved marketing process that includes product packaging. In the long term many producers plan to work in the process of transformation to give added value to the potato.



Beans

Facilitator: Julia Cruz

“Many things have changed since CDAIS arrived, we have evolved as an agricultural chain and we are stronger now that the project is retired. For me as a facilitator it has been satisfactory to participate in processes such as the creation of the bean chamber that has legal status, this has allowed us to improve the practices in the field: we now have a sowing plan that allows us to better forecast market prices and this has put us within the spectrum of the great national agro-industries. The bean innovation niche partnership has established new purchase–sale agreements in which producers have been able to better capitalise their annual bean production. This was something that hardly happened before.”



Cacao

Facilitator: José de la Cruz

“The development of capabilities that CDAIS put on the table has contributed to the consolidation of processes that for various reasons sometimes slow down more than expected. But after the project you can see significant changes. Cocoa farmers have a better idea of how to manage the finances of their field. The incorporation of new young actors and also a strong group of women has also been evident and key. Regional and technical committees have been created to accompany and advise producers. This allows the activities within the innovation niche partnership to be stimulated not only by the input of youth but also by the valuable contribution made by appreciating the gender perspective. A crucial point during the development of the CDAIS project, and one which was supported by PRONAGRO, is that the process of product transformation has been consolidated through a legally registered trademark.”



Coffee

Facilitator: Rudy Mejía

“Honduras is a country with a coffee tradition that, during the implementation of the CDAIS project, has been able to take advantage of the spaces that have gradually been opened and strengthened after three years of work. If we think of a large-scale innovation niche partnership, we can think of the coffee one: the work that CDAIS did contributed greatly to establishing new alliances and international trade agreements, which has boosted export levels ... Thanks to the participation of diverse actors and the strong influence of CDAIS, the certification of 100 farms of 100% organic coffee.”

Key lessons learnt

There have been clear outcomes of the CDAIS approach at individual, partnership and organisational levels. But at the national level, senior national country team members considered that more time would be needed to have a significant impact, as the project ended just when they had got the full taste of CDAIS and everyone began to appreciate it. At a local level, the support provided by CDAIS to the region of La Esperanza, Intibucá has contributed to significant changes in day-to-day activities in potato cultivation. The active role of youth has also been an important element that has gained relevance over time not only in the potato partnership, but also in the other three innovation niche partnerships, which have each understood the importance of finding ways to promote the sustainability of the achievements made, and not to lose the momentum already generated.

“Although it was difficult for all of us at the start because of the abstract concepts that the project presented to begin with,” noted Country Project Manager Edgardo Navarro, “for me and my colleagues, reinforcing the importance of constant reflection on what was done and what was achieved has changed all our perspectives, and I am now an ambassador of reflection. I apply it constantly and ensure that those in the partnerships also continue to apply it regularly.” And this certainly led to significant change over time.

This dynamic of multi-stakeholder integration has been strongly influenced by the policy dialogue that CDAIS promoted during the implementation of the methodology. As a result, local government have been incorporated into the activities of the innovation niche partnerships, and the participation of state representatives has promoted the creation of municipal ordinances, and officials are responsive to requests from actors of the potato and other partnerships. And perhaps the main contribution is best expressed in the words of National Project Coordinator Erick Martínez: “the mayors and different parts of government have promoted the hiring of agricultural technicians to give better coaching in the field, which is a practice that now adopted will not be abandoned.”

“In Honduras many things have changed”, said Navarro. “And a key moment was when we understood the relevance of reflecting, allowing actors of the different partnerships, and especially potato producers and other stakeholders, to actively participate in spaces for dialogue with key institutions,

municipalities, state secretariats and, more recently, international cooperation. And here, CDAIS was crucial as a multi-stakeholder connection and collaboration tool.” And the influence and impacts of strengthening soft skills was well accepted at all levels, though challenges remain of course. “Working with the nation Honduras CDAIS team has allowed me to understand the importance of functional capacities also at the core team level”, explained Nury Furlán, Agrinatura Focal Person. “And it is inspiring when you can testify to the successes of collaboration towards achieving a common goal, which for us is to see a better country for all Hondurans.”

“The contribution of the CDAIS approach has been very valuable, and achieved important results not only for the partnerships but also for the country.”

Edgardo Navarro Country Project Manager and FAO Honduras

This story of results from the work of the CDAIS Honduras country team is, based on interviews with them, CDAIS National Innovation Facilitators and various other partners.

Edgardo Navarro (FAO) – Country Project Manager; Erick Martínez (PRONAGRO) – National Project Coordinator; Stefano Del Debbio (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, AICS) – Agrinatura Focal Person; Nury Furlán (AICS) – supporting Agrinatura Focal Person; Jair Escobar (consultant) – Lead Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Coordinator; Per Rudjebber – FAO HQ Technical Support; Interviews – Jair Escobar (consultant); Photographs – Hector García and Jair Escobar/CDAIS unless otherwise stated.

See also: *From potato pests to policy processes* (Villeda. M. and García. H.), pp 124–131, in: Agrinatura and FAO. 2018. *Building Competence and Confidence in Agricultural Innovation Systems. Stories of Change*. Agrinatura, Paris, and FAO, Rome. 196 pp.

CDAIS is implemented in Honduras by Agrinatura, represented by the Italian Cooperation Agency (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, AICS), Italy, FAO Honduras, and the Honduras Secretaria de Agricultura y Ganadería (SAG).



This project was implemented with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union. © 2019