

FROM POTATO PESTS TO POLICY PROCESSES

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Héctor García National Innovation Facilitator for the potato partnership

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16



“From a problem arose a strategy, and all the links of the chain have now come together.”

“The CDAIS project brings an innovative methodology because it creates capacities in us as human beings,” explained Carlos Valladares of the Intibucá farmers network. “This has improved our understanding of our situation, we have taken full responsibility for it, and are now better able to obtain and manage information to improve producer organisations.” Associations in the region have appreciated the spaces created by CDAIS that allow them to link with other stakeholders, find solutions to common problems and, now, even take issues to the national policy level.

“From a problem arose a strategy, and all the links of the chain have now come together to find solutions to the issues posed by the potato psyllid,” explained Héctor García, National Innovation Facilitator for the potato partnership in La Esperanza. “Now those involved do not act alone, are all aligned to a shared vision and combine efforts to achieve their goals. Before there were conflicts and competing interests, but now there is a motivated, orderly alliance that is working towards solutions – and achieving them!”

The potato situation

National annual potato production is more than 40,000 tonnes (895,000 quintals), grown on around 2500 hectares by more than 6000 smallholder producers – this satisfies most of the national demand and also generates some 15,000 permanent jobs with 35,000 indirect beneficiaries. Based mostly in upland areas of Intibucá, Ocotepeque, La Paz and Francisco Morazán departments, 85% of growers produce on less than a third of a hectare, and are mostly from the Lenca and Chortí ethnic groups. During the January–June dry season there are risks of severe damage by pests, especially the potato psyllid, known locally as paratrioza. Losses can be up to 80%, with control costs significantly reducing profitability. Also, potato production depends almost entirely on imported certified seed

potatoes, mainly from the Netherlands, making up 40–45% of production costs, so developing national certified seed potato production is a further goal.

PRONAGRO had started working within the partnership to improve the competitiveness of the potato sector through management and facilitation of decision-making processes among key actors, but something was missing. Actors attended meetings to talk about their own problems, but did not share a common vision. This partnership was selected by CDAIS in 2016, and a multi-stakeholder dialogue and capacity needs assessment identified the need to create and strengthen leadership, organisational and business skills around three common objectives. The key aims were to: (1) strengthen links between producers, traders, local government, universities and financial institutes; (2) establish an integrated strategy to control potato psyllid; and (3) improve producers’ access to required resources. Also, Edwin Flores, Secretary of PRONAGRO and a key partner said, “the self-analysis facilitated by CDAIS generated a common vision, identified strengths and weaknesses, and the need for links, cooperation and dialogue to help find solutions. And we have progressed well along this road.”

“An impact of CDAIS is that we have adopted a new way of looking at things, developing people’s capacities to learn to work together, as we can only get so far by walking alone.”

Héctor García National Innovation Facilitator for the potato partnership, La Esperanza



Potato stakeholders receiving training in good agricultural practices as a result of links made through CDAIS, and also making good use of the opportunity to share experiences among themselves.

Improving harvests

The potato partnership has seen great changes since its inception in 2016. Through CDAIS's work, a technical committee was established, and an action plan developed and validated. Nine community-level organisations were formalised furthering collaboration among actors, and they began to get their voices heard in decision making. As Carlos Valladares of the Intibucá Farmers Network explained, "CDAIS supports processes that have improved internal organisation in producer groups and the whole potato chain, also improving technical assistance by getting individuals and groups to agree on common needs."

"With the capacity development started through CDAIS, we have advanced our technical, marketing and organisational skills," said José María Pineda, a potato producer in Bethlehem, Manazapa, Intibucá. "And now we have better knowledge, especially in managing potato psyllid which destroyed my entire crop two years ago. Today, we know how to cope, and my plot is the best in the area." But he added that benefits are not just technical: "belonging to the partnership is a great help because we all meet to consult, share, listen, debate and resolve our problems – we are no longer alone. Before we were at the mercy of middlemen, or 'coyotes' as we call them. Now we have a new marketing system and have secured a fair price. Oh, to be organised, and woe be to me if I leave the partnership!"

“CDAIS contributes to strengthening the potato partnership by integrating processes to generate an environment of understanding, and the availability of ‘support to all’ to address their common issues.”

Edwin Flores PRONAGRO, La Esperanza, Intibucá



"CDAIS is different from other development projects because it works with people and not just with materials and equipment, increasing individual capacities," said National Innovation Facilitator Héctor García.

Building a policy dialogue, from the roots upwards

In April 2018, fifteen actors from the potato partnership met at a centre in La Esperanza, Intibucá. The aim – to identify policy issues that hamper them in achieving their common vision, what changes they would want to see, and how they might do this. This policy dialogue process in the eight CDAIS pilot countries builds on previous work carried out in each of the innovation partnerships, such as supporting the identification and agreement of common visions and problems, and finding means themselves to overcome them. But some issues such as national laws and regulations would normally be beyond their abilities to address, so this process will build capacities in how they can bring their issues to the national government. But, Carlos Valladares explained, “we definitely need policies to regulate the market, reduce impacts from oligopolies and revise imports and tariffs, but this may be more feasible through local government because they are more aware of our situation.” These and other views help CDAIS and its partners consider how best to take them forward.



CDAIS creates a space for representatives of smallholder potato producers, service providers, traders and local government to get together and decide what they want to see changed at the national policy level. Left: Carlos Valladares of the Intibucá farmers network sharing his views; Right, producer associations agree on their common issues.

Innovation breeds innovation...

One member of the partnership is ASOFAIL, the Intibucá Association of Artisanal Farming Families, established in 2011, with 139 members mostly from the indigenous Lenca people. “We now have ten certified farms and a collection centre, and sell to supermarket chains including Walmart,” said association member Arlis Zepeda. “Farmers talk more now, and share information, with positive effects regarding production, post-harvest and marketing issues. But we also had another big problem,” Zepeda revealed. “Many children of potato farmers think their only option in life is to emigrate north and abandon their agricultural heritage. So, we started providing another panorama for them, with an innovative programme of training and motivating. And skills I learnt through CDAIS help me to empower this generation of young producers with micro-entrepreneurial capacities, giving them a new attitude of hope and pride, through education, gender equity, maintaining family unity, and reducing emigration by providing dignified agricultural work.”

Another unexpected benefit of the capacity building is the new awareness of environmental pollution caused by indiscriminate disposal of agrochemical containers. The partnership played a part in the establishment of a network of special bins where farmers now bring their empty containers, instead of just throwing them away in their fields or rivers.

Moving on

“The approach that CDAIS uses is new and it took time for us to understand it, though it has since helped everyone in the partnership understand the situation faced by the potato industry through the spaces that the project has opened. We have all accepted the challenge of the work plan, accepted our commitments, and hope to continue with CDAIS in organisational strengthening, including the emergence of a new sub-sector of specialised seed potato producers,” explained Edwin Flores, a member of PRONAGRO, La Esperanza.

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> “A new municipal regulation on handling empty containers and training is contributing to less environment pollution,” said farmer. “We now know we must collect and take them to a collection centre so they can be disposed of properly.”

v Two farmers from the ASOFAIL producer association bringing in their harvest to the collection and processing centre, where it will be washed, sorted and packed for sale to supermarkets.



Arlis Zepeda, ASOFAIL, Intibucá.

“With CDAIS we now know each other better, and how to express our needs and aspirations. We learnt to reassess our skills, empower ourselves, build our businesses, and make new commercial, financial and strategic alliances.”

Arlis Zepeda ASOFAIL, Intibucá

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Potato is one of four innovation partnerships in Honduras being developed as part of the CDAIS project. For more information, visit <https://cdais.net/home/pilots-countries/honduras>. CDAIS is implemented in Honduras by Agrinatura represented by the Italian Cooperation Agency (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione), Italy, FAO Honduras, and the Honduras Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería (SAG).





“The CDAIS project brings an innovative methodology because it creates capacities in us as human beings.”

Carlos Valladares Intibucá farmers network



As well as pests, no local production of certified disease-free seed potatoes is another major constraint. But with support, this is changing and farmers are hoping to reduce the cost of buying imported seed by up to 60%.