FROM POTATO PESTS TO POLICY PROCESSES

Miriam Villeda Communications Officer of the Department of Agricultural Science and Technology in partnership with CDAIS Honduras
Héctor García National Innovation Facilitator for the potato partnership
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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, Ocotpeque, 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
**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

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**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 Garcia.**

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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.
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.
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.

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“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

Prepared by
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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).
Potatoes

Location: Intibucá and La Paz

Aim: Increasing the average income of potato producers by adapting the crop production to climate change and plagues (such as the «paratrioza», Bactericera cockerelli); Improving producers organisations on negotiation skills, best practices application, added value process and commercialization channels.

Facilitators: Héctor García, Arlis Zepeda (Facilitator support)
“The CDAIS project brings an innovative methodology because it creates capacities in us as human beings.”

Carlos Valladares Intibuca 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%.