

NEW MARKETS FOR CACAO PRODUCERS

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“Exchanging experiences is the best way to learn more about how to do things better.”

“CDAIS does not give us money, but it opens spaces for cacao producers, associations and industry to work together,” said Sergio Segovia, President of the ASOPROCCAN association. Actors in the cacao value chain of Atlántida on the north coast are, thanks to CDAIS, now achieving quality standards and promoting entrepreneurship. This was the vision of this innovation partnership, to focus actions on fulfilling their dream of strengthening their organisations and applying good agricultural practices in cacao cultivation. And, as Bernarda Moya, a cacao producer in Balfate, La Ceiba explained, “the relationships that CDAIS helps to create, benefit us all.”

Cacao in Honduras

The ‘Atlantic’ (Caribbean) coast of Honduras has the perfect climate for growing cacao, though 80% of the estimated 4000 cacao producers grow on less than one hectare. And only 10% of the 1500 tonnes annual production is currently exported as high-quality cocoa, and only 5% of the income made in the whole value chain goes to the farmers. The problem is the reluctance of producers to acknowledge the benefits of increasing quality and to take the necessary steps. The solution? To build capacities of producers, processors and traders, and to support the production and marketing of high-quality cacao.

Identifying needs

CDAIS chose to accompany the cacao innovation partnership on the Costa Atlántida as this is where the crop is most widely grown. The idea was to create a space for reflection where independent producers and associations find support from other actors that have a relationship with what they do. Many producers suffer from poor farm and post-harvest management. But through the partnership, they were able to expose these weaknesses and others responded. For example, staff

from the Regional University Center of the Atlantic Coast (CURLA), part of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), became interested in designing training, opened university classrooms for producers, and even created a specialised curriculum for an intensive cacao diploma that is now offered to producers nationally and internationally.

Those in the cacao partnership seek to accompany each other to find solutions or alternatives to problems related to market access, product quality, post-harvest handling, storage infrastructure, product image, processing, financing, availability of technologies, and more.

Producers dream of becoming influential players in export markets and presenting a first-class product. For this, they have determined that organisation opens opportunities for them. By improving their productivity of fine cocoa, from their cacao, they know that they will increase their profits. This will generate opportunities to improve production and their overall quality of life. The process is also serving as an example for producers in other cacao-producing areas such as Olancho, Gracias a Dios and El Paraíso.

Insight

The partnership proposes building capacities in marketing strategies, cost-of-production analysis, administration and accounting, value addition, organisational legality, equipment and infrastructure such as collection and processing micro-centres, undertaking a cacao census, and certification of timber lots. “CDAIS is strengthening the coordination between actors in the cacao chain,” explained Liliana Fernandez, a Technician of the Directorate of Agricultural Science and Technology (DICTA). “It brings many benefits for all, including access to new information through training, sharing experiences among producers, understanding legal frameworks, and it helps to develop capacities in many other ways.”



“CDAIS has given us a space for us to grow, share and work together.”

Liliana Fernandez Extensionist with the Directorate of Agricultural Science and Technology (DICTA)



HONDURAS



From harvested pods to cacao ready for sale, CDAIS has been supporting cacao producers in the innovation partnership throughout the process, especially in the important step of drying.

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“CDAIS has helped us to focus on our problems and look for our own solutions,” said Blanca Garcia, of the Lancetilla association of artisanal women producers. “We attend CDAIS meetings because we want to strengthen ourselves and find support to develop various projects, such as new markets for our products. In this space we relate to others and this helps guide us in how to obtain financing and infrastructure for a new factory with a cold room, and training for developing innovative products.”

“New knowledge from CDAIS benefits each of us and our municipalities, because we learn to take advantage of our strengths, and make more profit and generate employment for others in our families,” added cacao producer Bernarda Moya. “CDAIS makes us take advantage of partnerships and, thanks to that, today we have the support of organisations like Rainforest Alliance, Aprohacacao and others. We also have access to logistics, facilities and knowledge from the local university (CURLA). And how I wish all cacao producers in Honduras could also share this knowledge!”

“CDAIS gives us knowledge to meet our needs, solve our problems, and make our work more efficient by connecting us so that we support each other.”

Oscar Cerna Farmer and member of the Pico Bonito cacao producer association, San Francisco, Atlántida

Linking with learning

“Before, knowledge remained in the classroom because there was no university–producer relationship,” explained German Bulnes, Professor of Agricultural Economics at CURLA. “Then CDAIS came and raised the concern as to why our students did not participate in the field. Now they get involved, they learn together with producers, and their education has been enriched by field experiences and sharing knowledge.” Evangelina Trejo, Head of the Liaison Department added, “CDAIS helped show us the need to work in cacao and strengthen ourselves.

This project is important because it made us reach out to the many cacao growers around us. And because of this opening, we designed a new diploma in cacao production within agroforestry systems, which made us reflect on our teaching skills, improving our educational offers, bringing new knowledge to communities and reinforcing our strategic alliances.”

José Ruiz, a Support Facilitator of the cacao innovation partnership from CURLA, emphasised the new-found motivation among producers since CDAIS started: “Producer organisations always come to each meeting they are invited to, talking about their experiences as farmers and cooperatives, and the importance of working together to improve their plantations, product quality and sales. And the new link with the university is a new experience for producers, because no organisation showed any interest in their development until now. The associations understand that they don't receive funding or material things but are very happy to have new knowledge in processes for strengthening their organisations, improving governance, and plantation management.”

“CDAIS offers us so many things!” said Oscar Cerna, member of the Pico Bonito association. “It brought us an IFAD [International Fund for Agricultural Development] workshop on increasing the profitability of our cacao cultivation where I learnt such a lot. It also opened doors with the university [CURLA], and their new diploma is great, being adapted to our time availability. Now I produce better cacao, know how to prune my trees, and use local waste for organic fertilisers.”

Moving forward

“My involvement with the CDAIS process allowed me to see the importance of organisational issues, and so I have opened the association to more producers,” said Sergio Segovia, President of ASOPROCCAN, originally an association of 40 cacao producers in the El Cangrejal basin that now aggregates other associations with more than 300 producers in all. “We have plans to establish micro-predrying processing centres and a larger secondary centre for drying, but also to extract cacao oil, which is easy to produce and with ready markets in Central America, Canada and the Netherlands.”

The cacao coaching plan

Workshops for reflection on and revision of the coaching plan during 2017 and 2018 allowed the innovation partnership to agree the focus of training based on producers' needs. At each meeting, they reviewed past work and the effectiveness of commitments, and made readjustments to future plans where considered necessary. Coaching includes training on improving production through the use of organic fertilisers, fiscal regulation, financing, certification of agroforestry systems, needs of the chocolate market, value addition, and bar-code registration. Cacao producer Bernarda Moya spoke positively about the results: "the workshops and training have raised awareness of our issues and what we need to do to deal with them. But importantly, they have shown that our goals are achievable." She added, "the most beautiful thing is that everything that has been captured comes from a consensus of everyone's views. Nothing is imposed – it is just a continuation of the reality that we live." During the latest meeting in April 2018, Support Facilitator José Ruiz from the university concluded that important resolutions were agreed, prioritising training on organic fertilisation for example, as traders and exporters are demanding this. "Furthermore, it was agreed that we will present

proposals to Rainforest Alliance and the Business Development Centre for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises to join our cacao innovation partnership," he said.



A meeting of the cacao innovation partnership in the CURLA centre, La Ceiba, April 2018. Farmers and representatives from producer associations, processors, the university and other stakeholders agreed a detailed and dated plan for training and exchange visits in the following months.

“CDAIS enriches our mind. In the mountain we collect four ingredients for producing organic compost, but there is a ‘secret’ fifth ingredient, that is CDAIS...”

Oscar Cerna Cacao farmer and member of the producer association of Pico Bonito, San Francisco, Atlántida

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Cacao 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 Agency for Development Cooperation (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo), Italy, FAO Honduras and the Honduras Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería (SAG).

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