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## Honduran farmers create just and resilient markets for local beans

Small-scale farmers in Honduras have successfully created an organic bean market through collective research and networking. Farmers have been able to boost their production by using participatory plant breeding and agroecological practices, and generate income from the sale of their organic beans. This is part of an agroecological approach to creating fair markets that values farm diversity and sustainable farming practices.

### UNJUST CONDITIONS FOR SMALLHOLDER BEAN PRODUCERS

Small-scale farmers in Honduras are the main growers of beans, however, they have little control over the value chain and often must sell to intermediaries at low prices. Compounding this problem is the fact that most commercial seeds are not adapted to the diverse and highly vulnerable Honduran hillside conditions. The higher cost and lower resilience of these commercial varieties can lead to family food insecurity and economic uncertainty when crops fail, resulting in a bean market that is neither just nor resilient.

For small-scale Honduran farmers, there are many reasons for inequality. As in many countries in Latin America, there is highly unequal access to land. The majority of land is used for monoculture production, such as plantations, while local farmers have been forced onto more marginal lands, often at higher altitudes. Hillside farms experience greater impacts from climate change, as erratic rainfall patterns cause soil erosion and landslides and drought conditions exacerbate poor soils. Growing in these conditions requires specialized bean varieties, but these farmers' seeds are also facing challenges from climate change impacts such as new crop diseases.



Local varieties that may have served farmers well for generations are now facing new pests and growing conditions that can make farming even more uncertain than it was in the past. Many of the commercial bean varieties require the use of agrochemicals, but these contribute to environmental and health problems including contaminated water and the loss of soil fertility over the long term.

Honduras has also experienced a loss of government rural extension services over the last three decades. Over the same period, communities have felt the impacts of economic changes due to trade liberalization. The lack of support and the economic uncertainty have contributed to emigration by many rural youth, leading to negative social impacts that are threatening food security in Honduras. Women are often impacted the most by these social and economic changes as they are often the most vulnerable and the least mobile. The solution to these problems requires multiple levels of action but the work to create just and resilient markets begins with CIALs.

## FARMER-LED RESEARCH: BUILDING SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR COMMUNITIES

Local farmer research committees, called CIALs, address economic and climatic challenges by training participants in research methods, engaging in participatory assessment, and organizing members socially and politically. Farmers assess their own findings, results are shared in the community, and research results inform collective actions. A major focus of this work has been the development and dissemination of new maize and bean varieties adapted to local conditions and climate change impacts through participatory plant breeding (PPB).

PPB is a low-cost and effective method that supports seed selection based on farmers' own criteria and local growing conditions. It is estimated that spending \$141/year per household enables smallholder farmers in Honduras to practice participatory plant research in community-based teams, resulting in diversified plant genetic resources and new climate-resilient varieties. Collaboration on PPB between FIPAH, the CIALs, the Pan American Agricultural School El Zamorano and other partners, has resulted in the development of more than 23 locally-adapted bean varieties thus far, many derived from the communities' traditional varieties.



Photo: Beatriz Oliver/SeedChange

## WHO WE ARE

SeedChange, formerly USC Canada, is a nonprofit founded in 1945 by Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, rooted in the notions of human dignity and equality. Today, we are part of a global movement fighting for justice, health and sustainability by shifting the way our food is grown. We work with farmers in 12 countries around the world, including Canada, to strengthen their ability to grow food sustainably, using locally adapted seeds. By harnessing the power of good seeds, farmers' leadership and global solidarity, we help communities thrive.

The work in Honduras is directed by the Foundation for Participatory Research with Honduran Farmers (Fundación para la Investigación Participativa con Agricultores de Honduras, FIPAH). Using a highly grassroots and participatory approach, women, men, and youth in CIALs (Comités de Investigación Agrícola Local) carry out research and training to address agricultural challenges by working collaboratively with dedicated field technicians and facilitators.





*Developers of Chepe (far left) and Almicar (far right) bean varieties, of the CIAL La Esperanza, Yoro, Honduras.*

Photo: Dana Stefov/SeedChange

CIALs also grow diversified agroforestry systems, create microenterprises, manage community seed banks, produce agroecological farm inputs, and promote soil and water conservation. CIALs are gaining increasing attention due to their demonstrated results improving food security. They have also strengthened women's leadership and gender equality, with women representing over half of CIAL participants. There are now CIALs in 179 communities, directly benefiting more than 22,000 people in five regions of Honduras.

## THE CASE OF YORO BEAN PRODUCERS

In the Department of Yoro, the Seed Committee of the regional CIAL association (ASOCIAL Yorito-Victoria-Sulaco) was founded in 2009. The use of PPB varieties has increased yields and provided income for bean seed producers from sales at the local level. The CIALs of Yoro department created the bean varieties of Almicar and Chepe that can be successfully grown up to 1,600 metres above sea level, unlike commercial

varieties. Chepe beans are a favourite among small-scale producers in Yoro since they not only grow well at higher altitudes, but they also have a great flavour. These locally-adapted varieties, together with ongoing seed selection and improved ecological growing practices by the seed producers, are giving excellent results: their bean yields are two to three times the national average.

As a result of this work, many seed producers were able to improve their homes with the increased income they themselves generated. After applying CIAL methods to research and adapting agroecological inputs, such as biofertilizers and biomineral mixes, the farmers are producing these for their own use and local sale. Recently, young farmers from the CIAL La Esperanza in Yoro were also able to buy land for expanded seed and organic bean production.

### Marketing improvements

In 2016, a small but effective project focused on marketing enabled the ASOCIAL in Yoro to pay for a market study and set up a revolving fund to increase



the number of bean seed producers by 21, including 11 women producers, with a view to selling organic seeds and beans. This led to important learning and concerted efforts by the ASOCIAL and FIPAH to improve the conditions for smallholder marketing of beans. With the support of the Seed Committee, the farmers now sell high quality seeds in the communities, while at the same time contributing to local seed and food security. They are also selling both the Almicar and Chepe beans nationally and are in the process of becoming certified organically. Beginning in 2017-2018, the Yoro ASOCIAL signed contracts with guaranteed prices for the sale of more than 22 tonnes of organic beans. This is set to increase by 100% in 2018-2019. This includes direct agreements with the National Institute of Agricultural Marketing (Instituto Hondureño de Mercadeo Agrícola, IHMA), the processing company DIPROVA for a brand of refried beans called “Frijoles Doña Marta”, as well as with independent purchasers. Frijoles Doña Marta is marketed as “natural”, which helps differentiate the product, and the goal is to acquire organic certification. Finally, the regional ASOCIAL is active in the Yoro Department committee of the newly created National Bean Chain (Cadena Nacional de Frijol), which has provided them with

access to new markets as well as necessary market information for negotiations with buyers, resulting in better prices for Yoro farmers and the reduction of intermediaries.

### Challenges and dreams of Yoro bean producers

Some challenges were encountered in 2017 related primarily to post-harvest damage in a year of excessive rains. This contributed to FIPAH and the CIALs planning for greater investments in storage and seed drying in order to be able to offer the consistent high quality product that buyers seek. Another constraint is that about half of the seed producers with the Yoro ASOCIAL rent their lands, which has an impact on long-term

## How do seed laws and policies affect small-scale bean producers?

Due to the growing interest in CIAL varieties, the regional CIAL associations created seed committees to improve and coordinate seed production. Most CIAL seeds are sold locally and are not formally certified. However, the committees are also working towards overcoming some of the factors that limit broader seed marketing by smallholders, including the lack of accommodation of local seed systems in national seed policies, and constraints to farmer-led registration of new PPB varieties. This policy advocacy work is being done in collaboration with research institutes and other organizations involved in seed development and marketing in Honduras.

Through efforts in the National Bean Chain and other collaboration platforms related to smallholder marketing, there is growing interest and recognition of the importance of local seed systems to preserve the agrobiodiversity needed for quality agricultural production, as well as to sustain rural livelihoods and prevent youth emigration. In 2015, the Honduran government identified FIPAH and the CIALs as partners for seed and technology development, a unique opportunity being seized to scale-up agroecological approaches and create an enabling framework for farmer-led policy change.

FIPAH and the CIAL associations have played a national leadership role in the seed law review underway in



Photo: Beatriz Oliver/SeedChange

*José Lorenzo Orellana and his brother Pablo, two brothers that produce organic beans and agroecological inputs such as multi-mineral mixes with beneficial microorganisms.*

Honduras. These initiatives are important to increase recognition of local seed systems and have the potential to improve the conditions for smallholder seed and grain marketing. FIPAH and the CIAL associations are also expanding networking to access better information and support for the marketing of other CIAL products, such as sesame products, avocado and coffee. For example, CIALs have also made an agreement to market maize and bean seeds from the formal sector through the Honduran Network of Artisanal Seed Producers (Red de Productores Artesanales de Semilla de Honduras, RED PASH). Through the SoS network, they are also applying new training methodologies to strengthen CIAL marketing efforts, such as gender-based value chain analysis, and intercultural business training for community organizations.



agroecological farm improvements. For example, seeing the higher yields produced on their land, some owners take back the land, an action that often discourages other farmers who are renting land from transitioning to agroecology. Nevertheless, Yoro farmers have several goals for the future, including the development of other value-added products, the integration of greater numbers of women and youth, seeking more solutions to lack of land ownership, the development of entrepreneurial leadership of members, and identifying new sources of financing.

## NATIONAL BEAN CHAIN: NETWORKS TO IMPROVE SMALLHOLDER MARKETING

Many of these opportunities for producers in Yoro were created through a value chain study and networking efforts between the CIALs, FIPAH, SeedChange and supportive organizations in the public and private sectors in Honduras, such as through the National Bean Chain. FIPAH helped lead this collaborative effort in 2017 to bring together more than 116 farmer organizations from seven Departments across the country to coordinate production and marketing assistance, as well as provide

a platform and stronger voice for smallholder bean producers. With support from SeedChange, FIPAH is working throughout Honduras to provide technical advice and has championed the recognition of local varieties and for participatory approaches to crop improvement including PPB. These efforts are already facilitating direct linkages between farmer's organizations and national and even international buyers.


Farmer-led research in Honduras is improving climate change adaptive capacity and increasing and protecting agricultural biodiversity which are at the heart of resilience. By maintaining greater control over their seeds and the value chain of their crops, CIALs are also generating income that stays in rural communities. The experience of Honduran CIALs demonstrates the importance of national farmer-researcher associations and their policy and marketing networks for the scale-up of agroecology and agrobiodiversity. Investing in farmer-led seed diversity not only results in more secure incomes for farmers, it also supports agroecological farming that builds resilience. As a result, SeedChange and FIPAH are supporting the development of just and resilient markets in Honduras. 



Photo: Paola Orellana/SeedChange

*Ana María Castro, from the community El Plantel in Yoro, is one of the bean producers. She sold her beans on the local market, along with coffee and plantain from her diversified farm. For her, organic production means not having to buy chemicals, and improving soil quality without compromising her family's health.*

Learn More

weseedchange.org/honduras

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## Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

This case study exemplifies how SeedChange's work addresses Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy as well as many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### GROWTH THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

SeedChange is improving economic opportunities for the resilience of rural women in Honduras through their participation in CIALs.

### GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

By working with our partner in Honduras, FIPAH, SeedChange is supporting local women's organizations and movements.

PROGRAM UNDERTAKEN WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA PROVIDED THROUGH GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA.

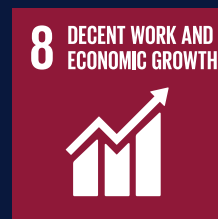
Canada 

## Sustainable Development Goals

SeedChange's work in ecological agriculture helps meet 15 of the 17 SDGs.



Developing organic bean seeds ensures sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.



By working with FIPAH to support the development of just and resilient markets, SeedChange is promoting policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises.



Organic bean seeds are part of a strategy for the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources and achieves the environmentally sound management of chemicals by significantly reducing their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment.



By supporting just and resilient seed markets, SeedChange is promoting fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promoting appropriate access to such resources. At the same time, these markets are integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, and poverty reduction strategies.