



Protecting mangroves, preserving habitat: smallholder farming families in Southern Honduras use forest, water and soil sustainably

Project background

The people on the hot and dry southern coast of Honduras live on what they can grow in their small fields and extract from nature. However, the natural resources of forest, water and soil are often overused, also by large landowners and shrimp farms. The ecologically valuable and sensitive mangrove forests of the Gulf of Fonseca, an internationally protected wetland, are acutely endangered. Forests are dwindling and with them the freshwater reserves. Village communities possess neither the knowledge nor the organisational structure required to steer this development in a different direction and to conserve the mangrove forests and their resources.

Our solution approach

We support the farming families in improving their farming methods through agroecological practices. They thus reconcile resource conservation with higher crop yields. Together with the communities, the project team is committed to preserving the mangrove forests and the natural resources of the Gulf of Fonseca, as well as the sustainable management of the natural resources. It supports the village population to better organise and making their concerns visible to decision-makers. The project also contributes to improving the water supply of the villages.

Project goals

Improving the living conditions of smallholder farming families in 8 village communities in the municipality of Namasigüe:

- The population of 8 village communities in Namasigüe is well organised to sustainably manage their natural resources (soil, forest, water).
- 30 farming families achieve better harvests and protect their soil by applying agroecological practices.
- 25 ha of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems (10 ha of tropical dry forest and 15 ha of mangroves) have been restored and protected, and the water balance is stabilising.

Project activities

Agroecological farming methods

Experienced agronomists provide 30 farming families with agro-ecological cultivation methods. They work with them to develop farm management plans and offer agricultural advice that is carried out in practice, directly in the fields of the farmers. Farmers are learning how to manage their corn and bean fields more sustainably by means of erosion protection measures, the production of organic fertiliser and diversification and preventing soil fatigue. The project team also supports the families with the necessary seedlings and small products to improve the barns.

Project location

8 village communities in the municipality of Namasigüe, department of Choluteca in the Gulf of Fonseca, Honduras

Topics

Sustainable water and agriculture, protection of natural resources, empowerment

Vivamos Mejor Programme

"Food & Water"

Duration

01/07/2022-31/12/2023

Project costs

CHF 216'315

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Regional approach

The project is part of our Central America regional program, in which we implement projects in the same thematic area in a context-appropriate manner, together with partners in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua. We bring together local experiences and share them with our partners and applied research institutes in regional meetings. Through the shared experiences, we learn from each other to continuously improve our projects at a local level. In addition, we are working with all partners and with the technical support of the CATIE research institute* to establish a climate monitoring system that also documents the local impacts of climate change on agriculture, ecosystems and biodiversity in the different project regions.

* Renowned research institute Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE), Costa Rica

Our mission

With our “Food and Water” programme, we provide the rural population with the necessary expertise and empowerment for the future. Thanks to modern, sustainable agriculture and water resource management, they can grow their products in harmony with their natural resources and are able to feed themselves as well as their environment.

Our vision

Our vision is for rural areas to provide future generations with a sustainable environment thanks to future-proof development.

We base our actions on the 2030 Agenda. With this project we are making an active contribution to the following SDGs:



Ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, as well as promoting sustainable agriculture



Taking immediate action to combat climate change and its impacts



Protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of land ecosystems, managing forests sustainably, combating desertification, halting and reversing soil degradation and putting an end to biodiversity loss

Strengthen self-governance and dialogue

The project team work together with the village community committees, water committees and women's networks. They support the committees in improving their structure, working methods and administrative skills. There are numerous conflicts of interest over land and water use in the community. By setting up dialogue forums, the project team creates a space in which conflicts can be debated and dealt with.

Reforestation of essential areas

In Namasigüe, valuable forest areas have been lost. We want to reforest degraded land where forests are essential for groundwater protection. The project team works together with village community committees and water committees to reforest degraded land in hydrologically significant locations. They thus stabilise the water balance without detriment to the important arable land. We place great value on planting only native, site-appropriate tree species. In addition, degraded mangrove forests are being reforested in specific locations.

Restoring water supply systems and raising awareness among the population

The capacity of the villages' water supply systems is not sufficient to provide the population with an adequate supply of drinking water. The project team supports the community in repairing and restoring their water supply and protection of the spring catchment. We are also preparing the water committees to ensure that pipelines and storage tanks are maintained in the future. In addition, the project team members raise awareness about waste prevention and the protection of water and resources on the radio at events and in schools.

Target group

128 members of the village community and water committees, 30 farming families, 20 women from a women's network, 4,170 inhabitants of the village communities (water supply)

Costs

The project costs amount to CHF 216,315. We are counting on various donors such as companies, cantons, foundations, municipalities and church communities. The project is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), within the context of the program contribution.

Local contributions

Not included in the total costs are local contributions to the value of CHF 27'144. The beneficiaries do voluntary work for reforestation and provide local equipment for the construction and repair of water pipes. The time required for the project by the local employees of the Forestry Authority is borne by these authorities themselves.

Project partner on site

Our project partner is the Honduran NPO “Comité para la Defensa y Desarrollo de la Flora y Fauna del Golfo de Fonseca,” or CODDEFFAGOLF for short. It is a professional, well-known and renowned NGO. CODEFFAGOLF is a member of the association of NGOs with a state mandate for the co-management of protected areas. Local associations of smallholding farmers and fishermen founded the organisation in 1988. As a result, the organisation remains firmly rooted at the grassroots level. Vivamos Mejor is working together with the NGO for the first time.

Impressions



Agricultural advisory for smallholders take place directly on their fields.



Mangrove reforestation: two deforested mangrove stumps can be seen in the middle of the picture.



Maria Zelaya, Chairman of the Village Community Committee of El Jiote



Farmer Isabel Zelaya wants to improve his farming methods.