



Where forests grow, water flows: Strengthening indigenous village communities and ecosystems in western Honduras

Project background

The indigenous Lenca population at the edge of the Pacayita volcano in western Honduras lives self-sufficiently from subsistence agriculture. Many live in poverty. Improper agricultural practices and lack of crop rotation cause erosion, loss of humus, depleted soils and low crop yields. Although partially protected, the surrounding mountain forests are coming under increasing pressure. These forests, however, are of existential importance for the regional water balance and ecosystems. Their disappearance directly threatens the water supply of the local population, who has few means to act against this threat.

Our solution approach

Our project supports 120 smallholder families to improve farming on their existing land using agroecological methods in such a way that they do not fell any new forest areas. In addition, we strengthen the organisational capacities of the communities, in order to secure their right to control the water conservation areas, through community land purchases. Furthermore, we work on jointly elaborating water and land-use plans with the communities, to ensure the security of water supply for the future.

Project goals

Improve the living conditions, water supply and food security of the farming families in six indigenous Lenca village:

- The food security of 120 Lenca families is improved through agroecological production and diversification.
- Land-use planning and water management in four valleys is strengthened and transferred to communal ownership.
- 150 Lenca families have better access to drinking water and sanitation infrastructure and contribute to the protection of the natural resources of water, forest and soil.

Project activities

Increased yields with agroecology and agroforestry

Experienced local agronomists train the farmers in agroecological production methods and develop farm management plans with them. The farming families learn how to manage their fields more sustainably and prevent soil fatigue through erosion control measures, organic fertiliser production and diversification. This enables them to achieve better yields on their existing land. They also learn to gradually improve their poultry management so that they can provide themselves with eggs on a regular basis.

Project location

Six village communities in the municipalities of San Manuel de Colohete, San Sebastián and Belén Gualcho, Honduras

Topics

Sustainable water and agriculture, protection of natural resources, empowerment

Vivamos Mejor Programme

"Food & Water"

Duration

01.01.2023–31.12.2024

Project costs

CHF 240,701

Vivamos Mejor

Thunstrasse 17, 3005 Bern

Zurich office,
Ausstellungsstrasse 41, 8005 Zurich

info@vivamosmejor.ch
www.vivamosmejor.ch
Phone +41 (0)31 331 39 29

Berner Kantonalbank, CH-3001 Bern
IBAN CH34 0079 0016 8757 8007 3

ZEWO-certified since 1992.



**Your donation
in good hands.**

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

Land and water use in the valleys and surrounding forests is regulated and controlled by community councils, village water committees and inter-community local committees. However, these have organisational weaknesses, which is why the project team is providing them with further training in technical and organisational areas. This will enable them to perform their tasks and responsibilities competently in the future

Securing forests through land purchase

In the project area, about 20 hectares of private pasture are located on land that is of strategic importance to the water supply as headwaters and groundwater supply areas. In an orderly process, our partner organisation facilitates the purchase process of these areas to the municipalities. Later, the areas will be afforested with native tree species.

Sanitation infrastructure and wood-saving stoves

Where appropriate, we support the families latrines and sinks. to allow them to prepare their meals more hygienically wash dishes and take care of their personal hygiene. We also enable 60 families to have wood-saving stoves. This reduces firewood consumption by 50% and protects the children and mothers from harmful smoke particles and respiratory diseases. We also support two village communities in repairing and rehabilitating their water supply.

Target group

Direct: 20 members of the village community and water committees;
120 farming families in agroecology;

150 families for sanitation infrastructure and stoves;
2,155 inhabitants for water supply.
Indirect: 7,500 inhabitants of the 14 village communities in four valleys

Costs

The project costs amount to CHF 240,701. 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

The total costs do not include personal contributions, local contributions and contributions from third parties totalling CHF 53,765. The beneficiary families provide materials and labour and bear 15% of the costs (CHF 9,871 in total). Local contributions from the municipalities totalling CHF 22,236 are estimated for the land purchases. The purchase of a vehicle is 70% financed by the MIVA (CHF 21,658).

Project partner on site

Our project partner is the grassroots Honduran NGO "Asociación Ecológica de San Marcos de Ocotepeque" (AESMO), which was founded in 1990. Its work focuses on improving the living conditions of the local population and sustainably developing the protected areas in western Honduras by integrating the local municipalities into decision-making processes. AESMO received, among others, the Honduran Environmental Award for its work.

Impressions



The last tree on Cerro Negro near the project area.



A group from the village of El Aguacatillo reforests areas with native tree species.



Farm management plans show the farm from a bird's eye view.



Improved stoves not only save firewood, but also serve to protect health.