



KFW



El Santuario

LOW CARBON COMMUNITY
IN HONDURAS



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El Santuario is a humble community located in the Municipality of Choluteca, Honduras, at an average altitude of 634 meters above sea level. It borders to the north with Mount El Majastro, to the South with Mount Los Moledores, and to the East with Mount Encuentros.

The majority of houses are made out of bahareque (a type of wattle and daub technique), without washbasins or latrines, with mud floors and clay roof tiles. Houses are isolated standalone structures connected through cobblestone pathways. The majority of families own low-yield farming parcels.

The population in general is basically dedicated to farming activities, mainly basic grains, such as corn, beans and sorghum. Women are responsible for domestic chores, as well as maintaining and collecting eggs from the “Communal Chicken Coop Economic Initiative”

It is worth mentioning that this community has always lived in harmony and peace; the villagers do not recall any criminal activity or homicides; most of the villagers have died of natural causes or old age.

Even though villagers at the El Santuario community do not have access to basic services, such as education, health, electrical power and potable water, their main concerns have been centered on the destruction of the forest, scarcity of food or resources to purchase food, and the low availability and quality of water.

Sitting on a wooden bench in the corridor of a small grocery store in the village, Mr. Concepción Martínez, President of the Multiple Service Unit, Faith and Hope Company

(ESMUFES, for its Spanish acronym) shares a bit of history regarding the village and mentions the support received by the Central American Community Farmer’s and Indigenous Agroforestry Coordination Association (ACICAFOC, for its Spanish acronym), and the German Development Bank (KfW) from the Federal Republic of Germany.



Mr. Concepción explains that deforestation has been one of the most difficult challenges faced by the community. He also mentions that, the land was burned in order to prepare it for planting, but also burned away all vegetation from beyond the outer limits of the land. People did not really appreciate the services provided by the forest and had the terrible custom of burning away with all plants, even if it was not going to be used for firewood or anything else.

“People would look at a beautiful small tree, without understanding that that same tree would be able to provide a service, and would cut it down.”

- Concepción Martínez.
ESMUFES President

Regarding the loss of vegetation, the villagers would face serious hardships due to the low availability of water, either for farming or for human consumption. This region has been severely affected by a draught, climate variability and change; but also by severe land deforestation, particularly over its watershed recharge zone caused by inadequate agricultural and livestock practices, and the need for firewood for cooking.

The villagers of El Santuario completely depended on the Mangón micro-basin; which was declared as a protected zone by the Forest Conservation Institute of Honduras (ICF, for its Spanish acronym). This conservation area was previously the property of one of the villagers who would cut down trees and burn the land in order

to plant corn, but in time, he was convinced otherwise, and to stopped such practices and sold his land.

This micro-basin generates very little water, and is simply insufficient to cover the needs of all families; depending on the season, water needs to be rationed and equally distributed amongst the villagers.

The villagers of this community were constantly affected by food and nutritional insecurity that were caused by several factors including very low crop yields due to the limited availability of water, an extremely irregular terrain and difficulties in supplying water to the land, and a very limited diversification of products (limited to basic grains).

Crop yields in this community, as indicated by the villagers, depend completely on climate conditions. Corn and bean production are strictly limited to the rainy season; crops which have also been historically planted by the villagers. The community has been limited to planting corn and beans because other crops require special care and a permanent water supply.

During the summer, the villagers of El Santuario could not produce anything, which caused many families to disintegrate when the men would leave in search of better opportunities – albeit poorly paid – by migrating to the city and abroad.

The villagers of El Santuario formed a Multiple Service Unit, Faith and Hope Company (ESMUFES, for its Spanish acronym) in 2018, an organization legally and formally constituted and integrated by all villagers of El Santuario; a total of 86 families (61 men and 25 women).

The intention of the company is to help the community develop its environmental, social and economic areas, as well as developing infrastructure, mainly to improve the access to the village.

ESMUFES and with the support of the Indigenous Natural Resource Integrated Management Program, funded by the KfW, carried out in 2019 a sub-project called “El Santuario: Low Carbon Community in Honduras”, with a total investment of EUR€ 75.000, a third of which came from contributions from the benefitted community.

This sub-project had the intention of promoting the creation of a low-carbon community by advocating the conservation of its forest, implementing sustainable practices in community agro-forestry, and directly benefiting 86 families.

Specifically, the project established an agro-forestry and silvopastoral system in areas of high degradation and scarce forest coverage, by fostering the regeneration of forests, improving natural-sourced water flows near the community.

Furthermore, several native trees were planted to be used as fuel, with the intention of reducing the pressure on the forest when collecting firewood by the villagers and therefore providing a potential bioenergy alternative to be used in the generation of renewable energy for the community.

Also, the sub-project facilitated a sustainable crop production system with a complementary irrigation system for the dry season, which would harvest water and prepare organic fertilizer to improve crop yields. Additionally, support was provided to 16 family gardens that included onion, green beans, watermelon, bell peppers, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, hot peppers and squash.

A relevant aspect of the sub-project is that during its implementation, the members of the community formed workgroups responsible for developing the required works, mainly physical effort for the construction of water reservoirs. These actions had the technical support from ACICAFOC.

The sub-project resulted in the villagers establishing more than 50 hectares of land under the agroforestral system by planting fruit trees, mainly cashew tree, as well as native timber trees that managed to increase the area of the forest, as well as increasing their income from the sale of fruits and timber.



Furthermore, practices were developed that improved the pastoral system, each family owned one or two cows, which provided enough milk to cover the needs of the families.

Over ten thousand rapid-growth trees were planted that were to be used as biomass fuel and firewood. Ten hectares were established under a silvopastoral system, that in addition to increasing the cattle production capacity, it would also help reduce soil erosion and mitigate the environmental impact.

In order to improve food and nutritional security of the families in the community, the project helped establish 2 hectares of land with different vegetable crops; 7 rain harvesting systems were built, a gravity irrigation system and an organic fertilizer production station was also built. These actions were complemented with further training for farmers on crop production and fertigation techniques, food safety measures, among others.

"I started to harvest rainwater because the biggest problem we have here is with water; you go in early, and sometimes you see production begin to flower, so we manage to finish with that"

-Marianela Carranza
Subproject beneficiary.

When the subproject implementation phase was completed, we started to see the main effects or impacts in the quality of life of the beneficiaries, primarily an improvement in the organizational capabilities of the community, reduced

chauvinistic behaviors, empowering women and youth through active engagement and participation in the productive and decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the development of sustainable production practices and actions that protect the environment, by improving the forest coverage has started to generate the first effects in terms of protecting the water basins and obtaining a greater water production during the rainy season.

The economy of the benefitted families has also improved; families have started to sell their surplus back into the community, allowing them to increase their income and purchase better products to feed themselves; as well as providing villagers with healthier and safer products with higher nutritional content.

Similarly, farming diversification and the promotion of vegetable crop and fruit tree production has generated greater production dynamics, creating new employment possibilities in the community, which in turn helps to reduce the emigration of villagers to neighboring areas.

In conclusion, thanks to the support of the German Cooperation Agency and ACICAFOC, the villagers of El Santuario have been able to significantly improve their conditions of livelihood, by empowering the women in the community, protecting the forest, using sustainable natural resources with varied and nutritional food production, improving the food and nutritional security for future generations.

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