Resilient Central America (ResCA)

INTEGRATING A CLIMATE RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL APPROACH THROUGH PRACTICES AND POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

THE PROBLEM

Central America is a region that boasts emblematic landscapes, tropical forests and historically rich cultures. From the ancient Mayan civilization to the diverse wildlife, it is a region ripe with potential.

However, starting in 2015 with the El Niño climatic event, the region has begun to see insufficient and erratic rainfall which has led to the loss of staple grain crops and thousands of cattle deaths. Already dealing with alarmingly high poverty and malnutrition rates, the effects from climate change have impacted the most vulnerable: small-scale subsistence farmers.

THE SOLUTION

To improve the livelihoods of these subsistence farmers, Resilient Central America (ResCA) aims to tackle two principal challenges: food security and vulnerability to climate change.

Through piloting innovative solutions and by working across different scales, this program will develop new agricultural models that build resiliency to climate change, conserve natural habitats and strengthen local economies. With partnerships across the private and public sector, ResCA will promote systemic change and deliver scalable results across the agricultural sector.

This program will work to adopt climate resilient policies and strategies, while piloting sustainable production practices through lands and fisheries. This is a multiyear program supported by the US State Department, and led by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). As the world’s largest conservation organization, TNC has worked for over 30 years in Central America by implementing a science-based approach to ensure that people and nature can thrive together. As part of AgroLAC 2025 - a multidonor platform led by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) that aims to propel Latin America agriculture into a new era – ResCA will unlock finance to develop replicable models that can address the food security and climate challenges at unprecedented scale.

Through bringing together a broad range of public and private sector donors, this program will identify and support sustainable agricultural practices and market systems in the Central America region. By providing smallholder farmers access to innovative tools and techniques, we will be able to mitigate these future opportunities and secure more sustainable livelihoods.

THE URGENCY

Climatic projections estimate that the average intensity of tropical cyclones will shift towards stronger storms, which places the Central America region in danger. Already facing extreme poverty, high levels of malnutrition and spreading insecurity, the effects from climate change could potentially destabilize the region even further. The Agricultural sector is one way to solve the problem and promote economic development to the region.
THE CHALLENGES

1. **Weak policies that promote a climate resilient approach in agriculture.** Although important steps have been taken to design climate change adaptation plans, the challenges are still considerable. National and local governments need stronger support to work on forest protection, wetlands, and other sensitive ecosystems that prevent encroachment and unsustainable agricultural practices.

2. **High Habitat loss.** The development of agriculture over the last 50 years in Central America has caused critical environmental impacts. The highest deforestation has been in tropical forests with high biodiversity. The high use of agrochemicals and soil erosion caused by farming has had a major impact on terrestrial, aquatic and marine biodiversity systems.

3. **Soil degradation.** Mesoamerica accounts for 26% of global soil degradation, and the main causes are: water erosion, an intense application of agrochemicals and deforestation. In Central America, the agricultural frontier is expanding at high speed rates into more humid areas such as the Atlantic coast in Honduras and Nicaragua.

TNC’S PROPOSAL

1. **Promote policy changes that build capacity and mainstream a Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA) approach.** The program will work directly with governments and the private sector to mainstream Climate Resilient Agriculture policies and strategies that improve productivity, intensify sustainable production and enhance value chains. It will aim to impact core government policies such as National Determined Contributions (NDCs) or National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), expenditure and planning frameworks.

2. **Strengthening and scaling up sustainable value chains.** The program will foster productive diversification and expanded production structure throughout an inclusive and sustainable value chain approach that contributes to systemic change.

3. **Promote productive land and seascapes approaches for water conservation.** In Central America, most potable water sources are the mountain ranges. Working under the principles of soil restoration and fertility to increase yields have improved water infiltration, and reduced nutrients runoff, practices that ResCA will adopt.

4. **Strengthen social and economic livelihoods for farmers and fishers.** Policy makers across the region are increasingly recognizing that helping smallholder farmers adapt to climate change will be critical for maintaining agricultural production, ensuring food security and alleviating poverty. ResCA will identify those adaptive capacities that need to be built and reinforced to reduce vulnerability to climate change, identify adaptation strategies and to increase the economic potential for small farmers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
- Mauricio Castro Schmitz, Strategy Lead, Healthy Agricultural Systems in Latin America – mcastro@tnc.org
- Jesse Festa, ResCA Program Coordinator, Latin America – jesse.festa@tnc.org
- Moraima Guzman Bambaren, TNC Latin America – moraima.guzman@tnc.org

www.resilientcentralamerica.org