Resilient Central America (ResCA)

El Salvador

El Salvador was once the leading coffee producer of Central America and the coffee agroforestry systems protected farmers and other downstream users from the impacts of deforestation, such as landslides and drought.

However, severe land degradation has occurred in the past few decades, resulting in increased risk of disasters and threatening the population’s water security. By partnering with local organizations Catholic Relief Services and ACUGOLFO, and farmer organizations, Restorative Agriculture in Critical Ecosystems (RAICES) will support the implementation of sustainable land and water use systems to benefit over 160,000 people, building their resilience to the impacts of climate change, increasing land productivity and promoting conservation and restoration of the natural landscape.

THE PROBLEM

El Salvador’s landscape holds great potential for land productivity and ecosystem service production. However, like other countries of this region, El Salvador is highly vulnerable to climate change, with an expected reduction in precipitation of up to 40%. But the country is already facing new climate conditions. For instance, the government was forced to declare a national emergency in 2016 due to a drought.

The RAICES intervention area, which includes the Cacahuatique Mountain Range and the northern hills of the department of Morazan, is a key site for water provision. The coffee lands and forests of these mountains are very important in terms of water security, considering that this area is part of the “Central America Dry Corridor”.

The main driver of land degradation in this area is the conversion of coffee to other non-forest crops, as well as the poor land management practices implemented by farmers, who lack adequate training and technical support, and, most importantly, face difficulties to access proper funding. Underlying factors for the current situation are poor social cohesion, high rates of migration and a historical lack of an appropriate agricultural policy.
El Salvador’s landscape and ecosystems have been severely degraded by unsustainable agricultural practices, with only 5% of the country’s forests remaining intact. This degradation results in low levels of productivity, but also makes farmers highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

For instance, 40% of El Salvador is highly prone to landslides. Also, deforestation and land degradation are enhancing the climate change-induced drought, bringing about water security issues, both for human consumption and for agricultural use. Fifty of El Salvador’s most important rivers have lost an average of 30% of their dry season flows, and in 2016 only, the country’s agricultural sector lost roughly $100 million following an El Niño event.

Degraded ecosystems, extreme weather events, dysfunctional value chains and the incidence of drought have significantly weakened El Salvador’s once thriving coffee production, which is currently at its lowest point in fifty years.

**The Urgency**

Policy development with public and private sector partners to scale-up water governance and resource management efforts to implement sustainable landscape practices. By taking a double approach: strengthen local networks for landscape restoration for training and co-investments and review and implementation of policies to serve as a framework for sustainable landscape management, RAICES will implement a soil restoration strategy for climate resilience.

Increase farmers’ and producer organizations’ access to value chain. Quality is a key factor that enables farmers to access value chains with fair prices. This component aims to train farmers to assess and increase the quality of their coffee. They will also receive technical assistance to understand costs of production and manage market volatility. This pillar aims to identify and target buyers that value quality as well as climate change resilience interventions.

**The Solution**

In recent years, there have been reasons for hope, such as the signing the National Coffee Agreement signed by the government and major coffee producers to renovate the coffee sector, as well as several government- and donor-funded initiatives aiming at creating opportunities for sustainable landscape restoration. To promote resilient livelihoods and water security, TNC is partnering with local organizations in an effort called RAICES. By transferring knowledge and practices to local governments and farmers, RAICES aims to create resilient rural communities who are also stewards of sustainable landscapes. The program builds on previous efforts and leverages partnerships with national and municipal government agencies, farmers, and coffee companies. TNC and partners are proposing to address this through three key pillars:

1. **Policy development with public and private sector partners**
   - to increase farmers’ resilience to climate change in 400 hectares. Farmers will implement water-smart agriculture practices with a focus on healthy soil to maximize productivity and water-efficiency. Building on existing farmer knowledge and available data sets, RAICES will achieve sustainable coffee production. Stakeholders will also focus on protecting water recharge areas on both public and private lands, securing water resources for the long-term.

2. **Increase farmers’ and producer organizations’ access to value chain.** Quality is a key factor that enables farmers to access value chains with fair prices. This component aims to train farmers to assess and increase the quality of their coffee. They will also receive technical assistance to understand costs of production and manage market volatility. This pillar aims to identify and target buyers that value quality as well as climate change resilience interventions.