

# Innovations in Agriculture

## Boosting income of rural families in Central America

### Background

CRS is working with partners to help families in remote rural areas of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to increase their income and improve their diets. With funds provided by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the Agriculture for Basic Needs Project (A4N) project aims to help 15,765 households by promoting savings-led credit groups, providing guidance on how to successfully manage a savings group and encouraging members to invest their savings wisely to build their family assets.

To achieve these objectives, the project focuses on developing five basic skills among the participating families: innovation and learning, sustainable agriculture, savings and lending, marketing, and group management and



An A4N savings group treasurer collects contributions from group members. Ashley Rytter/CRS

organization. The project puts special emphasis on women and youth since they are increasingly more prone to unemployment, emigration and violence.

CRS provides training to small-scale producers in processes that increase the economic value and consumer appeal of agricultural commodities.

### Sustainable production

A4N promotes sustainable production through training on efficient use of water, introducing promising crop varieties, providing technical support for crop production and storage systems, and supporting communities to participate in their local political processes to advocate for allocation of resources, rights to resources and land possession.

### Agricultural incomes

The project works to increase agricultural incomes by developing the capacity of savings groups to manage themselves and implement lending processes. It also



A4N helps improve agricultural production to increase the incomes of rural household. Ashley Rytter/CRS



Santos Everina Ortiz Hernández helps interested community members set up savings groups in El Salvador. Ashley Rytter/CRS.

helps facilitate farmer-to-farmer information exchange techniques and works to increase the abilities of community members to increase the value of their crops post-production.

Lastly, the project helps increase the availability of information about prices and agricultural products for farmers.

Recently, an A4N Project Share Fair was held in Central America. The fair, held at the mid-term of the project, was an opportunity for participants to share the ways they are using communication and knowledge sharing to improve their work. For more information about this event please visit <http://ictkm.cgiar.org/2011/02/03/the-central-american-a4n-project-share-fair-%E2%80%93-a-story-of-impact>.

## A4N Savings Groups in El Salvador

Santos Everina Ortiz Hernández is helping community members achieve their goals through savings. She is a *promotora* working with the A4N project in El Salvador. Promotoras promote economic strengthening by setting up savings groups within their community and teaching them how to increase their savings by working together.

As a *promotora*, Santos Everina informs community members about savings groups and the opportunity they provide to increase financial stability. She helps interested community members form savings groups and teaches them about group savings methodology. The groups then decide when and how often they want to meet, how much they want to save, and when they will divide their savings. Santos Everina has successfully started five savings groups.

One of Santos Everina's savings groups, "Ahorrando con Amor", has been coming up with new ways to increase their savings. They worked together to organize a tamale sale with donations from group members, and sold tamales to community members. Group members plan to use their savings towards building their own homes, sending their siblings to school, and buying Christmas presents for their families.

## Looking Ahead

The most important challenges that the project faces at this point are related to climatic conditions and sustainability of the processes initiated. In the first case, the zones where the project is being implemented have been heavily affected by recurring climatic events such as drought and heavy rains. The project has begun to construct a framework for risk analysis and guide for risk management in agriculture, tools which will be applied in the project's second year.