



Sweet Collaboration

Lutheran World Relief's partnership with cocoa cooperative ADIOESMAC

The Association of Integrated Development "OX EEK" Santa Maria Cahabón (ADIOESMAC) is situated in the Tzalamtun community of Guatemala, perched on a mountaintop overlooking the beautiful forests of the Cahabón region.

The association of 43 smallholder cocoa farmers, which includes 17 women, was founded in 2004 after encouragement from the local Catholic Church. By 2007, they established a centralized fermentation and processing center. Now, with 33 hectares of cocoa operating under certified organic agroforestry systems, the group has an average yield of 700 to 800 kg per hectare of dry cocoa.

ADIOESMAC, whose members are indigenous Q'eqchi' Maya, champions inclusive leadership, with women, men and youth involved in all areas of cocoa production, from business administration to community production processes. Having collaborated with brands like Scharffen Berger Chocolate and Dandelion Chocolate, ADIOESMAC's focus on partnership building has led to improved community livelihoods with a business model based on fine cocoa cultivation for diversified markets.

Local capacity strengthening

Since 2016, Lutheran World Relief has accompanied ADIOESMAC in local capacity strengthening initiatives to improve production processes and organizational capabilities. Oscar Pachum Ica, president of ADIOESMAC, recounts, "Before Lutheran World Relief's support, our members did not have training in various types of pruning to rehabilitate cacao plants or in the application of organic fertilizers. Now, youth are trained, and we established a clonal garden and have learned management and harvesting processes, which allows all of our members to plant and establish their crops under an agroforestry system and increase production."



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ADIOESMAC takes part in the [Maximizing Opportunities in Coffee and Cacao in the Americas \(MOCCA\)](#) project, a five-year, \$36.4 million initiative across Latin America funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with Lutheran World Relief leading cocoa value-chain activities. Lutheran World Relief supportedADIOESMAC to establish a clonal garden close to their processing center that allows farmers to graft highly productive and disease resistant local trees onto their farms for higher cocoa yields and greater resiliency. With training in cocoa grafting, seed systems and analysis of agroforestry models for cocoa, the association has improved bean quality and enhanced planting and production methods.ADIOESMAC producers also utilize Lutheran World Relief's Mobile Cocoa (Cacao Móvil), a smartphone application that provides farmers access to a comprehensive guide to cocoa cultivation, covering subjects from planting and pruning, to grafting and treating plant diseases.

Youth lead the way

Youth leader and secretary ofADIOESMAC Maria Luisa Tiul Ico states, "It is because of all of this that we have been able to increase production and improve the quality of the cocoa because we know that the members are already putting into practice what they have learned about the management of the plantations."

In 2019, a sample ofADIOESMAC's cocoa was selected as the best cocoa in Guatemala and represented the country at the Paris Cocoa Fair. It was selected as one of the 50 best cocoas worldwide.

"It has been 17 years of effort, dedication and hard work. It is a process that has been carried out in collaboration with many cocoa producers, with the goal of improving the lives of all members and their families in the association," says Oscar.

ADIOESMAC has established a network of youth community trainers who provide support and comprehensive technical assistance to partner families, allowing them to share their agricultural knowledge and the cooperative's progress. The young leaders of the association are beginning to take the lead on cocoa production and processing, an important advance for the sustainability of cocoa agriculture.

Maria Luisa remarks with a smile, "The goal is to continue to involve more cocoa producers and increase productivity and market demand. We are working for a future where we can generate employment and where men and women can be part of community development."



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