



Monthly Update – December 2011

BACKGROUND

This is the ninth edition of the USAID-ACCESO monthly update with information on current and planned project activities. USAID-ACCESO is a four-year initiative funded by the people and government of the United States of America through the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The project is part of the global Feed the Future initiative of the United States government and is the main investment by USAID in Honduras.

USAID-ACCESO will assist more than 30,000 clients in the departments of Copán, Intibucá, La Paz, Lempira, Ocotepeque, and Santa Bárbara. The project is working to lift 18,000 rural households out of extreme poverty and malnutrition conditions through economic development and increased incomes.

EMPLOYEE INDUCTION, SANTA BÁRBARA

In December, USAID-ACCESO welcomed IHCAFE as an implementing partner, bringing eight field technicians to staff a Community Technical Unit in Santa Bárbara. With this addition, the USAID-ACCESO technical consortium of 13 organizations is now complete and the project is fully staffed.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING WORKSHOPS AND FOCUS GROUPS

USAID-ACCESO held gender mainstreaming training workshops in December in each of the six departments where it is working. The goal of the workshops, attended by regional managers, department managers, and departmental specialists, was to introduce the USAID-ACCESO Gender Mainstreaming strategy and tools to facilitate access to training and technical assistance for women. Field visits and focus groups of USAID-ACCESO clients were carried out for project beneficiaries in Intibucá, Lempira, Ocotepeque, and Copán. The focus groups explored the roles men and women play in economic development and nutrition, and facilitated brainstorming of ways to increase the participation of the whole family in project activities.



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Growers inspect pests in bell pepper plants with assistance from a USAID-ACCESO trainer, Copán.



High-density beans planted in sloped, raised beds, Lempira.

Baseline profile of USAID-ACCESO families to date

- 6,574 of the 10,752 household clients (61%) are in extreme poverty and 639 household clients (6%) are poor.
- 5,675 of the 45,428 beneficiaries (12%) are children less than 5 years in age; 12,501 (28%) are children between 6 and 14 years old; 22,361 people (49%) are between 15 and 49 years in age; 11 percent are adults over the age of 50.
- 52 percent of the beneficiaries are men (23,654) and 48 percent are women (21,774).

USAID-ACCESO client households, beneficiaries and other clients, December 2011

Departament	Household clients	Beneficiaries	Other Clients*
Copán	1,430	3,405	153
Intibucá	2,128	11,547	117
La Paz	1,809	7,989	234
Lempira	2,444	11,005	172
Ocotepeque	1,387	4,694	125
Santa Bárbara	1,529	6,747	192
Others	25	41	88
TOTALS	10,752	45,428	1,081

*Includes: MSMEs, buyers, input and service providers, municipal corporations and counterpart organizations among others.

This monthly update was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The content is Fintrac's responsibility, the main implementing partner of USAID-ACCESO, and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of USAID or the United States government.

PRODUCTION

- An additional 92.4 hectares were planted in December, for a cumulative total of 7,102 hectares of production area under the technical assistance program. Of the total, 3,912 hectares are planted in coffee, 2,489 hectares in basic grains, and 700 hectares in horticultural crops (includes vegetables, fruit, and ornamental plants).
- 3,754 participants were trained in 466 training events in agricultural production. The trainings introduced technologies for coffee and basic grains, which represent 90 percent of the area planted under the technical assistance program.
- Twelve training events were held for 189 participants in animal production. Participants received training in good feed practices and USAID-ACCESO staff made field visits to improve confined poultry production and sanitary conditions, and promote the use of recycled materials in the construction of chicken coops and feeding and drinking stations.
- Eleven field visits were carried out with 76 participants to promote the adoption of best practices and improved farming technologies. Lead farmers gave testimonials and demonstrated the impact of improved practices on their own plots.
- Project staff visited Guatemala to explore the potential to export snow peas produced by clients in Intibucá.
- 98 participants were trained on postharvest handling in nine training events. The trainings focused on increasing the storage life of produce without reducing quality. Two events were held for 47 participants on farm certification.

ACCESS TO MARKETS

- The project conducted a market visit to El Salvador where staff established market linkages with 15 buyers, including two exporters and a spice processor. Some of these buyers visited USAID-ACCESO producers in December to coordinate calendarized planting programs to supply four truckloads (10 tons each) a week to cooperatives, wholesalers and exporters.
- Conducted four training events for 72 participants. Three community markets were inaugurated to provide new opportunities for small-scale farmers and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that cannot afford the logistical costs to gain access to markets in cities or larger towns.
- In January, USAID-ACCESO will facilitate contracts between producers of plantain, fresh herbs, and Asian vegetables, and US-based buyers. These contracts will not only secure client producer access to a new market, they will allow for more stable prices throughout the year.



Women receive training in bean planting, La Paz.



First farmer's market stall in Unión, Lempira.



US Ambassador to the UN, US Ambassador to Honduras, and representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and USAID with ACCESO-assisted farmers, La Paz.

THE US AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS VISITS THE USAID ACCESO PROJECT

Ambassador Ertharin Cousin visited the small community of Marcala, La Paz, where she learned about the activities of the USAID-ACCESO project. Ambassador Cousin was accompanied by Lisa Kubiske, the US ambassador to Honduras; Jacobo Regalado, the Minister of Agriculture; and William Brands, Director of USAID/Honduras. The tour included stops to observe nutrition and health activities and home garden vegetable production in Las Pavas, Santa María. The mayor of Santa María, Gabino Argueta, affirmed that the objective of USAID-ACCESO activities is "to improve the lives of our citizens and families." Additionally, the group visited a farm specializing in commercial carrot production and a business that sells potatoes. The tour group was able to appreciate the full range of activities carried out by USAID-ACCESO and the project's integrated approach to poverty reduction and income generation in the poorest regions of Honduras. Minister Regalado emphasized that the project has already assisted approximately 9,873 Honduran families, and he hopes that figure will grow to 30,000 by 2012.

BUSINESS AND FINANCE SKILLS

- Business and finance skills specialists held 45 events to train 447 participants in best business practices such as the use of logbooks. They introduced an agricultural logbook to help farmers record and analyze costs, including comparative analysis of actual and budgeted costs, income, and expenses. A business logbook was introduced to help MSMEs record income, expenses, and processing costs, which will allow them to better evaluate their competitiveness.
- Nine workshops were held for 113 participants in finance and credit, focusing on rural and cooperative savings associations, and the advantages of community saving efforts.

NUTRITION AND HEALTH

- Trained 688 participants in 51 events on breastfeeding and basic nutrition. Participants were taught that mothers should nurse for six months in order to provide their babies with the necessary nutrients for adequate growth and development as well as to strengthen the baby's immune system. In addition, participants were taught how to prepare nutritious food for children using local ingredients.
- Efforts are ongoing to improve knowledge of children's nutritional requirements, healthy food preparation, and identification of sources of iron and vitamin A, which are crucial nutrients in preventing growth problems and anemia.

VALUE ADDITION AND MICROENTERPRISE

- Processing and value addition specialists provided technical assistance to 59 micro-, 57 small-, and five medium-sized businesses. These businesses will create new jobs, bringing qualified personnel, new investments, and increased demand to the local economy.
- Project staff carried out 153 technical assistance visits to client households, MSMEs, and service provider clients.
- 439 participants were trained in 34 events. Topics covered include: bread making; the steps and requirements for forming MSMEs; efficient stove use; strategies to reduce gas usage when making flour tortillas; cost and pricing analysis; business planning for flour tortilla and pickled vegetable producers; winemaking; roasting and packaging coffee; good manufacturing practices; and the importance of maintaining clean, organized work areas.
- USAID-ACCESO clients invested \$13,963 in infrastructure improvements and processing equipment for dairy, fruit, and vegetables.
- Clients received technical assistance to diversify market opportunities, improve logistics, and reduce distribution costs.

USAID ACCESO CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information or if you are interested in receiving assistance, you can request it from the following contacts:

La Paz	Cristóbal Montalván	9978-7117
Intibucá	Denis Ramírez	9996-8903
Lempira	Ali Valdivia	9996-9360
Ocotepeque	Eddy Flores	9949-6747
Copán	Hugo Ávila	9923-6826
Santa Bárbara	Leopoldo Aguilar	9997-0130

PRINCIPAL GOALS OF ACCESO

- Bring 30,000 rural homes living in poverty and extreme poverty above the poverty threshold;
- Generate \$ 73.95 million in net profits for clients assisted by the project; and
- Create 10,425 permanent jobs in the assisted communities.



Training mothers in hand-washing and hygienic food preparation, La Paz.



Low-cost chicken coop made from recycled materials, Copán.

Trainings December 2011

Area	Participants	Events
Renewable Energy	23	3
Business Skills/ Finance	560	54
Natural Resource Management	153	14
Postharvest	98	9
Processing and Value Addition	439	34
Production	3,943	478
Project	67	11
Market Information	72	4
Nutrition and Health	688	51
Other	200	6
TOTALS	6,243	664

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- USAID-ACCESO staff continued to establish alliances with municipal authorities and community associations to improve the effectiveness of natural resource management (NRM) interventions.
- Trained 153 participants in 14 events; made 48 technical assistance visits.
- 53 participants received training in monitoring and analysis of water quality, with support from members of 21 water management boards and a representative of the Municipal association of Copan Ruinas, Santa Rita, Cabañas and San Jerónimo (MANCORSARIC). Thanks to USAID-ACCESO support for the construction of water chlorination systems, 150 families from Tomalá, and 36 families from Los Arcos-Belén Gualcho now have access to treated water.
- Trainings were held for 40 members of 10 water management boards from Trinidad (including the director of the municipal environmental unit and a technician from environmental health), and 11 water management boards from Nueva Frontera, Macuelizo, and Santa Bárbara on water management board administration. Topics included income and expense tracking, fee calculation, contract development, how to handle requests for water service, and environmental issues.
- Twenty-five participants were trained in micro-watershed management, the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, and how to develop proposal applications for *Declaratoria de Micro-cuencas* for presentation to the National Institute for Conservation and Forest Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife.
- Thirty-five participants (majority of which were coffee producers) received training in effluent management techniques to mitigate pollution, including the treatment of coffee to pulp and processing runoff. Participants were also trained on practices to accelerate decomposition of coffee waste to create compost that can be used to reduce fertilization costs and improve soil quality.

NATURAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT & MITIGATION

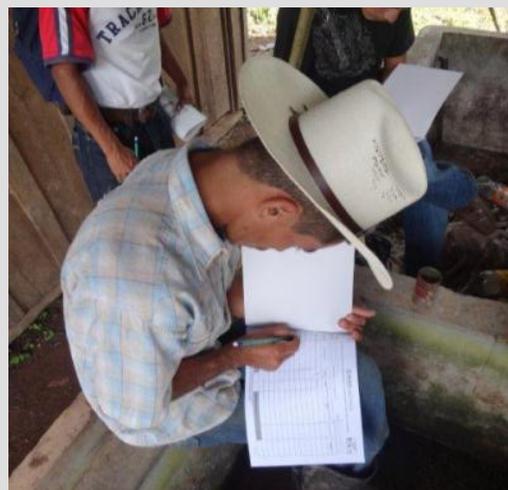
- 148 participants were trained in three events focused on risk management and the formation of disaster preparedness teams. Participants included the Organization of the Local Emergency Committees (CODEL), comprising community leaders, members of the Municipal Development Council, municipal board members, local health and education authorities, and NGOs working in the communities. The workshops were co-sponsored by the MANCORSARIC technical unit and Plan Honduras.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- With the goal of conserving quality, thus enabling clients to obtain better prices for grains and coffee, USAID-ACCESO trained seven producers and the Santa Bárbara technical team to construct solar dryers. Three dryers were constructed at a cost of \$362 per dryer.



Training producers in postharvest management and best handling practices for carrot, Intibucá.



Training producers in the use of logbooks, Copán.



Reviewing the chlorination in the potable water system, Santa Bárbara.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION

USAID-ACCESO is working to lift rural households out of poverty and undernutrition through access to economic development opportunities and improved health and nutrition practices. The project is increasing sales and incomes by introducing basic production practices and market-driven programs for high-value cash crops, as well as expanding off-farm microenterprise and employment opportunities.

USAID-ACCESO is working to ensure that increased incomes result in improved health and nutrition, not only for the 30,000 families receiving direct technical assistance, but also for the entire population in the project's target areas. To do so, the project integrates nutrition and health into its core agricultural production and economic development activities. These activities help to improve nutrition by:

- Increasing **AVAILABILITY** of micronutrient-rich foods through improved and diversified household production.
- Increasing **ACCESS** to nutritious foods by raising income through commercial production and new on- and off-farm employment opportunities.
- Improving **UTILIZATION** of local ingredients by providing training in food preparation and use, balanced diets, nutrition practices, and basic hygiene and sanitation.

USAID-ACCESO is also implementing small-scale home improvements to prevent and reduce respiratory and intestinal illnesses, which are large contributors to undernutrition. These include improvements to firewood stoves, floors and walls, latrines, water chlorination, garbage disposal, and basic home sanitation practices, such as keeping livestock out of the house.

Guiding Principles

The key to USAID-ACCESO's success is direct interaction with households. Nutritionists and health volunteers make regular visits to clients' homes and *all* project staff – including the 110 agronomists who visit their clients regularly – receive training in key health and nutrition messages. This allows agronomists to continually reinforce important messages to farmers. In addition to this direct and ongoing messaging, the nutrition strategy is based on the following guiding principles:

- **Integrating nutrition activities** with agriculture activities to maximize synergies and ensure increased incomes translate into improved health and nutrition outcomes.
- **Empowering women** as agents of change to improve household food security and health outcomes, while continually reinforcing the message with men.
- **Leveraging partnerships** with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and other service providers, particularly the Atención Integral a la Niñez en la Comunidad (AIN-C) groups.
- **Concentrating efforts** on the critical 1,000 day window of opportunity from pregnancy to two years of age.
- **Targeting interventions** to reach the most vulnerable households (using data from MOH and AIN-Cs), to provide individualized, tailored training to parents, focusing on preventing illnesses and recuperating undernourished children.
- **Building capacity** of AIN-C and other health volunteers by providing better training, tools, and incentives.
- **Monitoring and evaluating** the impact on nutritional status using indicators such as child weight, infant and young child feeding practices, and diet quality, diversity and quantity.

Building Trust, Changing Attitudes

Many of the changes that are necessary to improve health and nutrition among rural families are behavioral, which can be difficult to achieve. ACCESO is tackling this goal in three principal ways:

1. By building confidence with families by focusing on agriculture assistance first. Once families see quick results in crop productivity, they are more likely to trust the project's advice in other areas.
2. Providing ongoing support – by working directly with the families – until the benefits of the changes are fully demonstrated and implemented.
3. Helping families earn more money so they have greater access to better nutrition and health options.

USAID-ACCESO nutritionists provide regular training and support in:

- **Healthy diets and nutrition practices:** Feeding children under two years of age, food groups for a balanced and diverse diet, micronutrients.
- **Health:** Monitoring growth of the children, providing immunizations, caring for children with diarrhea and/or acute respiratory infection.
- **Hygiene and sanitation:** Chlorinating water, hand washing, safe handling and preparation of food, managing waste disposal, and improving living conditions.



Mothers participate in local food preparation trainings.



Children taste the new, healthy recipes.



Preparation of tortillas fortified with mixed greens and broccoli, La Paz.