

Women Working for Their Future

By Eithel Estrada and Wilson Salinas



In Los Rios province of central Ecuador, at the foot of the Andes, the SUCCESS Alliance provided support for a newly formed women's association that has blossomed into a nationally recognized cocoa nursery. The association is from the village of Moradores de Pasaje, which is home to about 500 people. Most residents are involved partially or wholly in farming cocoa, or the "food of the gods." In 1991, farmers organized themselves into the village's first associations and joined a national association to run shared facilities for fermentation, processing and exporting at premium organic prices.

In 2005, 12 women from the community decided to form a new association to launch a commercial cocoa nursery. Through dedication and hard work, the women grew 125,000 cocoa seedlings that year. The seedlings were selected varieties for use as rootstock onto which improved cocoa budwood will be grafted. The association, however, found itself in need of more technical knowledge in order to carry out the grafting process.

The same year, the SUCCESS Alliance began providing Farmer Field School (FFS) training to producer associations in Moradores de Pasaje. FFS participants received training on cocoa management and renewal and how to improve production through improved cultural practices.

Some of the FFS participants from the women's association turned to the SUCCESS Alliance project for additional training. In early 2006, the association received a five-month practical training workshop through which they learned to manage the nursery, prevent and control pests and diseases and utilize different methods of grafting. The group also received training in accounting, cost/benefit analysis and calculating optimal plant sale price.

The women then applied this training and did a tremendous job grafting and selling the 125,000 cocoa plantlets. Forging ahead with an unfamiliar process, members achieved a new level of confidence and cohesion. The successful sale of these plantlets directly benefited association members and made improved cocoa varieties available to producers in the community. The activity became a major milestone for the association and ensured their cohesion.

Since 2006, the women's association has produced and sold over 1,500,000 improved, grafted cocoa plantlets and currently has supply arrangements with several individuals and producer organizations. The nursery has earned a reputation for excellent quality, which is reflected in sales to cocoa organizations throughout the country. The association's organizational structure has grown to include regular activities, meetings and an association board and chairperson. Some members of the nursery grow additional plantlets at home have averaged 4,000 a year, resulting in a total of 150,000 additional plants over the last three years.

Lucia Chocho, one member of the group recently stated: "At the beginning, my husband did not want me to work in the nursery; he thought it was a waste of time; he wanted me to just take care of the house and our poultry. I told him that I trusted ACDI/VOCA and I believed in the success of the nursery. Now my husband is happy with the results and fully supports my efforts."

As Lucia tells it, "All these enterprising women now see life with real optimism; they feel quite happy about working on their own business and helping their families to improve their income and entire future."



Ecuador



Farmers Can Now Visit 29 Demonstration Farms Throughout the Philippines

The SUCCESS Alliance (SA II) has established 29 cocoa demonstration farms in 17 provinces and six regions of the Philippines. ACDI/VOCA spearheaded the establishment of the farms, which demonstrate various farming systems that incorporate cocoa as well as fruit trees, forest trees and rubber. Initial reports indicate that over 600 farmers and employees of government agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Agrarian Reforms and Science & Technology, have visited the farms. The farms have raised interest in SA II cocoa technology and have resulted in several inquiries to the ACDI/VOCA and CocoaPhil offices regarding cocoa production and market access.



Philippines

CocoaPhil field technicians and training facilitators have overseen the implementation, supervision, monitoring and provision of technical assistance. The selection process and establishment of the demonstra-

tion farms started with the identification of interested farmers and cooperatives. Then, the land or farms of the interested farmers or cooperatives were inspected and validated, based on selection criteria such as: the farm's proximity and accessibility to other farmers; how well drained it was; how much permanent shade it had; and the cooperator farmer's willingness to adopt the SA II cocoa technologies. Selected demo farmers then attended a farmer's field day and Demo Farm orientation.

ACDI/VOCA Chief of Party Nic Richards explains:

"All of these farms serve multiple purposes. They are training sites for the conduct of Farmer Field School sessions, sites where farmers can see cocoa being established or mature plantings, places where field side grafting methods are on show, sites where

good agricultural practices can be seen in action and learned, locations where basic data of climate, pest and disease problems are recorded, and sites where farmers can see new technology and methods being validated and tested. Last, but not least, the demonstration farms also act as real-time, problem-solving centers. For example how can farmers see better ways to control cocoa pod borer? Or how can they plan their farm better, manage existing trees and crops, and decide where to plant new cocoa seedlings? "

Cocoa plant stands range from 300 to 1,000 plants per hectare, with 22 sites interplanted under coconuts. The remainder are established with fruit trees, forest trees or rubber. All sites feature diversified cropping and some SALT (sloping land agricultural technology) practices, and several are agro-forestry sites.



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Workshop Helps Traders Assess Cocoa Quality



On May 27 and 28, 2009, more than 40 traders and consolidators of cocoa beans took part in a cocoa market development workshop at the Mars Cocoa Development Centre. The workshop emphasized the importance of bean quality in accordance with the Philippines National Cocoa Standards' (PNCS) benchmark. Traders were presented with quick and efficient methods of assessing bean quality, using low and high technology equipment. They were also given an accurate and detailed assessment of bean prices, costs of production and costs of marketing. At the workshop, the participants also determined the type of information that they require for successful market integration.



Program Highlights

As of May 31, 2009, more than 12,448 farmers have graduated from Farmer Field School (FFS) support, with 361 cocoa clubs formed. For year three, 1,289 new cocoa farmers and 2,800 additional farmers are receiving cocoa rehabilitation support. This brings the overall total of SUCCESS Alliance II direct beneficiaries who are farmers to 15,060.

At the end of May, SA II supported 69 nursery operators. Operators have planted a total of 1,020,000 seedlings, which is 95 percent of the target goal. 692,000 plants have been grafted and 490,000 of these plants have been distributed. A total of 73 bud wood gardens with the approved National Seed Industry Council (NSIC) clones have been established or rehabilitated.

Two-Prong Initiative to Connect Export Prices to Quality Improvement

Under the LIFE project, ACIDI/VOCA is conducting several activities to improve cocoa quality and grading from farmgate to port, before the end of the September-December cocoa harvest. The activities will facilitate cocoa bulking and marketing for 10 sponsored farmers' associations formed in 2008, which represent over 2,000 member farmers. Activities include providing technical assistance, moisture meters, balance scales and key materials to construct solar dryers, fermentation box sets and small warehouses. ACIDI/VOCA is also working with the Liberian government, its partner the Sustain-



able Tree Crops Program, cocoa exporters, international survey companies with experience grading cocoa, and cocoa-quality-control and grading enterprises that can work at the farmgate to reinstitute international grading standards for Liberian cocoa. Cocoa exported from Liberia is currently graded only as "fair to average quality" or FAQ, which is viewed as sub-grade by international buyers and causes it to be discounted by as much as \$300/MT, even though some of it is of high quality. Institution of the international grading system in Liberia would remove the arbitrary discount on international markets, encour-

age cocoa farmers to produce high-quality cocoa, allow farmers to receive a premium for quality. Additionally, removal of FAQ will provide more incentive and income to every player in the value chain.

This two-pronged initiative will ensure that farmers have the knowledge and facilities to process and grade their cocoa at the farmgate. In turn, farmers will receive the best possible prices for their cocoa. It will also ensure that the LIFE project achieves maximum impact in its last full season of operation under its current USDA funding.



Fruits of Hard Work

By Wilmer Toapanta

In Ecuador's Chimborazo province, smallholder farmer Manuel Tenecela's cocoa farm is a testament to the benefits that can arise from hard work, dedication, and a little help from the SUCCESS Alliance Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Manuel participated in a round of ACDI/VOCA farmer field schools from June to December 2007. Throughout the hands-on training, Manuel's interest and enthusiasm was highly visible. The skills he practiced included pruning and rehabilitating cocoa trees, tree grafting and controlling diseases such as frosty pod and witches' broom.



On his own farm, he immediately began implementing what he had learned. Manuel quickly showed high proficiency with the difficult task of tree grafting. This skill requires agility, patience and hand strength, and Manuel considers himself fortunate to be able to undertake this delicate task.

Since he began, Manuel has rehabilitated some 1,200 cocoa plants representing 50 percent of his four hectares of cocoa. He has utilized various bud grafting techniques and uses select buds from the highest-yielding trees on his farm, or "supertrees." The first half hectare Manuel rehabilitated has reached a harvesting point and is "fully loaded" with healthy cocoa. More recently rehabilitated areas show signs of health and strong growth. These developments will have a direct impact on his income and the living standards of his family.

Following FFS training recommendations, Manuel regularly walks his farm and controls diseases. Also as a result of the training, he now dedicates more time and attention to intercropping and parallel crops such as corn, bananas and citrus fruits, and he has increased the yields and subsequent income from these plantings.

Manuel is known to happily and loudly state that "the training received by the ACDI/VOCA project has been a great success in improving my life."



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Beneficiary Profile: Nguyen Huu Hao

By Nguyen Ngoc Anh



Mr. Nguyen Huu Hao joined the SUCCESS Alliance in 2005 and planted 600 cocoa trees intercropped with 170 coconut trees on one of the three hectares his family has for farming. The other two hectares are rice field for his family's consumption. He had always intended to use the income from the 1 hectare of coconut to support his daughter's university expenses in Ho Chi Minh City. In 2005, he earned approximately 8 million VND (\$470 USD) per year from selling coconuts, which was barely enough to cover living expenses, and certainly not enough to pay for university fees.



Mr. Hao has strictly followed the technical instruction learned from SUCCESS Alliance Farmer Field Schools and the cocoa trees began to bring in income after two years. In 2007, his revenue from 600 intercropped cocoa trees was 10 million VND (\$588 USD), in addition to the regular income from coconuts. In 2008, it was 23 million VND (\$1,352 USD), and in 2009-2010 harvest season, it is expected to be 36 million VND (\$2,118 USD) from the sale of 1 ton of cocoa beans. Moreover, he has applied good farming practices he learned through the SUCCESS Alliance training to his coconut crop as well, doubling his income from coconut from 8 million to 16 million VND. "People usually don't fertilize coconut trees, now we know how to calculate the fertilizer needed for both coconut and cocoa for the best profit and sustainability" he explained. He is very happy that from his one hectare, his income is now over six times more than before.

Mr. Hao confirmed that many farmers in the project as well as non-project farmers benefit from the coconut/cocoa combination, as they have increased income from coconut and created a new revenue source from cocoa. By the end, he expressed: "Living in town is expensive for my daughter, especially in this economic crisis, but our family is confident to support her. We are doing well with our cocoa farming, and so is she with her study in the future".



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