

COMMUNICATING WOMEN-LED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

MULTIPLYING WATER AND REFORESTING THE MOUNTAIN: the strategies of enterprising women to guarantee crop irrigation.



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MULTIPLYING WATER AND REFORESTING THE MOUNTAIN

Difficulty in accessing drinking water is one of the main problems facing the community of San Francisco Menéndez, located in the municipality of Ahuachapán, about 10 kilometers from the Santa Rita Nature Reserve. "Climate change is affecting us with drought, this last year was very hard," warns Alicia Rivas, from the "Organización de Mujeres Emprendedoras de Santa Rita" (Organization of Women Entrepreneurs of Santa Rita), which is part of the "Red de Ambientalistas Comunitarios de El Salvador" (RACDES).

RACDES is a space in which Salvadoran communities and organizations work together to defend the environment in order to influence public policies on women's rights, access to water, waste management, deforestation, and organic fertilizer production, among other environmental issues.

Alicia explains that to guarantee water for the collective family food gardens, they have implemented a series of initiatives for water management in dry ecosystems: micro irrigation systems, water reuse and soil restoration to ensure that they can retain more water.

"The micro irrigation system is called, ojos de punta. We buy a pump, and we drill the soil to get the water and with that we irrigate when it doesn't rain," says the Central American leader. Although she explains that the disadvantage of this system is the cost of the irrigation pumps. That is why they have only been able to implement it in some collective plots of the organization of women entrepreneurs.

Additionally, they implement a series of agroecological practices to guarantee soil quality in the face of prolonged droughts. "We do soil restoration with leaf waste and everything organic, we apply that in the plots and also in the family food gardens because that way more water is retained," adds Alicia.

In addition, they make sure to reuse or give the water a double use. "What we do is irrigate the house plots with the water we collect when we wash our corn. We also reserve the water used for washing clothes, but in this case, we don't use it directly in the plant, but near the plant's furrows," Alicia assures.

"Sometimes people say, "why we do all this", but through the training and the work done in the plots we realize that what we harvest is for our families. We no longer have to go out and buy it, and that dollar will help us buy vitamins or a notebook for the children," she explains. Households that do have access to potable water must pay high bills for their consumption.

"What people do is limit themselves to planting just a few plants, let's say if it's chili, three or four plants, then four tomato plants and one or two cucumber plants because in the summer there isn't as much harvest, so they don't have to make as much of a sacrifice," she says.



The organization of women entrepreneurs also produces its own organic fertilizers that are later used on the plots. "We make bokashi fertilizers, liquid fertilizers for pest control, foliage. All the crops are grown with organic foliar fertilizers prepared by the women," says Alicia.

The transition from the use of agrochemicals to the use of organic fertilizers is not easy: "It takes time, but we talk about it during training, we are the ones who are going to consume what we sow and what we are applying on it. That fertilizer or chemical product we end up eating ourselves," says Rivas.

That is why today they already have native seeds. "We no longer depend on modified seeds. For years now, everyone has been taking their own seeds, saving them, and using them to sow again. We also make exchanges where we take seeds and products to exchange. In this way, the local experience transcends communities, directly and positively impacting the food sovereignty and security of the families.

The work of the organization of women entrepreneurs does not end at their plots of land. The women are also reforesting the mountains surrounding the Santa Rita Nature Reserve. "We also reforest agricultural plots with orito, jocote and morro trees. This contributes to the families because when the jocote is in season, they can harvest and sell it. Everything contributes to the economy," says Rivas.

The organization also carries out community cleanups every three months. "When we started, there was a lot of garbage everywhere. Garbage collection was very difficult for us, but ever since we taught them to separate the waste, it has been easier," says Alicia. "They separate cans, bottles, old clothes. They already know what they can sell the bottles and cans for. So now when we go to do the cleaning, they only hand in what they really don't need; the rest they recycle or sell," she adds.

Waste management is also one of the main problems in the community of Cuisnahuat, municipality of Sonsonate. According to RACDES, the impact of contamination from clandestine dumps affects one of the community's most important resources: water. People are forced to ingest contaminated water and also use it for household chores.

It is the women who are leading the call for an end to clandestine dumps and promoting proper waste management. They campaign to recycle and reuse some waste and to only discard garbage that they know will degrade.

From RACDES they led initiatives to publicize the problem through posters and banners. The organization also reached the mayor's office to publicize the problem of clandestine dumps and to advance solutions to prevent the contamination from continuing its spread to other communities.

RACDES was supported by Tierra Viva and GAGGA with workshops on agroecological practices and environmental campaigns. For the women farmers in the area, these initiatives contribute to the recovery of the soil; they harvest native seeds and share them with other groups so that they too can promote agroecology. In this way they use native seeds that do not contain chemicals and through this exchange agroecological practices are replicated from one group to another.

