



SANSECO

**FOOD & NUTRITIONAL SECURITY IN THE CENTRAL
& SOUTH AMERICA DRY CORRIDOR PROGRAM**





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INTRODUCTION

In the Americas, the dry forest areas are among the most threatened and degraded habitats. Due to human actions and climate change, these areas are very vulnerable to more damage and decline as communities struggle to obtain minimal livelihoods amid ongoing poverty. Heifer International, committed to ending hunger and poverty while caring for the earth, focuses on empowering vulnerable, small-scale agricultural producers to achieve sustainable livelihoods. The Heifer Americas Area program has designed a comprehensive program to address the problems facing communities who live within these dry forest ecosystems. The program, *Food and Nutritional Security in the Central and South America Dry Corridor (SANSECO)* is a ten-year integrated program that will work with thousands of families and key stakeholders at various levels to bring clear, concrete, and meaningful change to families to secure more productive livelihoods and to restore ecosystems. Built on a foundation of in-depth analysis, key strategies, and implementation activities, SANSECO reflects the Heifer International commitment to inclusive partnerships, community capacity building, and sustainable results.



By 2024: 30,025 families and their communities in the dry forest ecosystems in eight Latin American countries have improved their quality of life in a context of climate change.

-SANSECO program objective

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

Along with fragile and diverse ecosystems encompassing a rich range of flora and fauna, these areas experience near constant effects of various natural disasters. This includes ongoing droughts characterized by long dry seasons, minimal rainfall and El Niño effects. High community food insecurity and undermined biodiversity resources are a basic reality. Communities are further negatively affected not only by malnutrition and disease, but also by surrounding industrial impacts: poor big-business agricultural practices such as soil contamination and large-scale pasture clearing further stress their livelihoods. At the household level, they work at subsistence levels to meet basic needs and as possible sell other products to cover non-food needs. Overall, communities in the dry forests experience numerous obstacles: low local food production, due mainly to soil erosion and lack of access to water; high dependency on subsistence agriculture, where minimal income diversity further strains their livelihoods; vulnerabilities to the elements and a lack of broader economic opportunity; as well as minimal capacity to cope with the negative effects of climate change.

But there is significant potential for communities to secure sustainable livelihoods through improved overall resilience. *SANSECO* will help communities to strengthen their livelihood resilience and productivity to better protect, restore, and heal the fragile ecosystems in these dry forest areas in several areas:

The dry forests of Latin America, and the communities who live within them, are considered among the most vulnerable places on the planet.



1 Economic Production: The targeted areas hold significant potential for productive enterprises in ways that support conservation and human development. A healthy ecosystem provides more secure water sources, more fertile soil for agriculture and livestock pasture and offers more viable livelihood options¹.

2 Environmental Potential: A healthy dry forest ecosystem helps to regulate and ensure a more stable agricultural production environment that is critical for communities' livelihoods. It also provides a pristine base for important technical research and future bio-tech opportunities².

3 Political/Institutional Capacity and Engagement: Strong networks and collective organizational capacity are critical for the indigenous communities living in the targeted areas. In order to effectively engage in, advocate for and understand the broader political and legal environment in which they live, communities in the dry forest areas need support to position themselves as meaningful actors in shaping the policies that affect their lives.

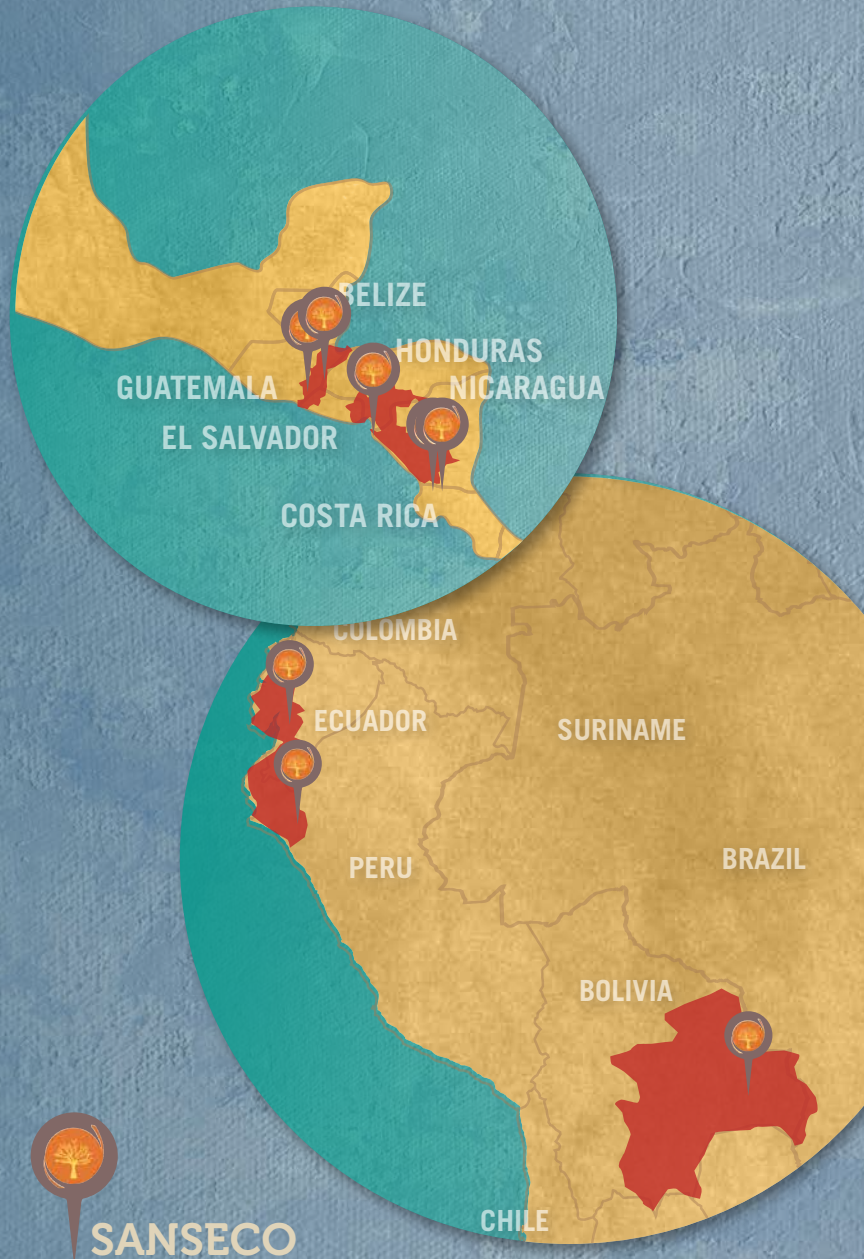
1. Possible economic interventions include beekeeping, tourism, handicrafts, wood, fruits, essences, oils, fibers and food.

2. This capacity is particularly relevant with regards to climate change and *SANSECO* will work with communities to build this.



IMPACT GROUPS

SANSECO targets the communities with the highest vulnerability in two main geographic areas: 1) select dry forests in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia; 2) the “Dry Corridor” which is a tropical dry forest area beginning in Mexico that extends to the lower Pacific coastal areas of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and the Caribbean coastal sections of Honduras. The vast majority of these communities represent diverse indigenous communities characterized by high poverty, food insecurity, and vulnerability. Due in large part to long-standing belief systems that strongly exclude women and children from development opportunities, women and children in these communities also face disproportionately higher discrimination and exclusion regarding educational, professional, and personal opportunities; this often keeps them in a cyclical poverty state.



As working farm families, all the target communities face challenges of low productivity, limited agricultural, and nutritional diversity. They also share other similar characteristics: weak processing and marketing capacity, low utilization of forest products and by-products, deteriorating collective organizational and action capacity, along with weak public policies. While some of these communities may have previous experience with Heifer International, the majority are expected to be new participants.

Heifer International uses a multi-dimensional selection system for target group selection: sub-subsistence families who are the most vulnerable (Type A) and represent 50 percent of the *SANSECO* target community;

subsistence families with some degree of diverse productivity and assets who remain vulnerable to further shocks (Type B) and represent 30 percent of the target group and; surplus income families (Type C) who as 20 percent of the target group have achieved a degree of stability and play an important stabilizing role for their own livelihoods but also serve as a kind of anchor for other target communities to join these more productive ranks. By 2024, *SANSECO* expects to reach a total of 120,625 families. *SANSECO* has various approaches targeting these communities: distributing through existing platforms, recruiting others to deliver solutions, using technology for larger scale, focusing on driving demand and new capabilities.

PROGRAM ANALYSIS

S *ANSECO* has a comprehensive and evidence based Theory of Change (TOC) proposing that “vulnerable, smallholder farmers and small-scale producers can attain sustainable and resilient livelihoods if their capacities are enhanced to increase income, to access adequate food, and to engage in environmentally sustainable production.”



By working closely across partner and stakeholder platforms, with a sustained core focus on women's empowerment and improved social capital amongst producer organizations, the *SANSECO* teams expect this TOC to be a reality by 2024.

There are several central development issues facing targeted communities relevant to the TOC: 1) low family farming productivity, production and income; 2) high food insecurity and vulnerability; 3) poor social and community forest resource management; 4) limited knowledge of climate change vulnerability and adaptation. Ongoing, prioritized gender analysis will help to understand the unique constraints facing women and girls – and also to unearth additional opportunities. Several related action fronts serve as implementation pathways to address these issues; they are listed below along with correlating analysis:



- ▶ **The integrated management of the dry forest ecosystem for sustainable management, conservation, and restoration to improve adaption capacity.** Concentrating on community based sustainable forest management of dry forest ecosystems helps to create more productive and diverse agricultural and water management techniques. *SANSECO* will apply the proven “ecosystem based adaption analysis (EBA) to design the most relevant activities. EBA uses biodiversity and ecosystem analysis services to help communities build climate change adaption strategies.
- ▶ **Increase in income and assets by promoting eco-agriculture diversification and livestock sources and other non-agriculture activities.** A plethora of codes, standards, and regulations seek to codify farm level practices, ensure food chain safety, manage market opportunities, and to improve overall natural resource management. These Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) have been developed by a global range of stakeholders and *SANSECO* will use the most relevant practices³. In addition, *SANSECO* includes plans for collaborative research and evidence-based technical cooperation to strengthen targeted communities’ food security in environmentally sound ways.
- ▶ **Improved food security and nutrition by increasing availability, access, and consumption of agriculture and livestock**

3. Specifically, Heifer International will promote those practices understood as “practices that address environmental, economic and social sustainability for on-farm processes and result in safe and quality food and non-food agricultural products.” (source: FAO COAG 2003 GAP paper)

food sources with high nutritional value that are produced or purchased locally and the implementation of agro ecological systems adapted to droughts and recovery and conservation of natural resources.

A main aspect of *SANSECO* is improved food security for the most vulnerable rural populations in the targeted areas. This is most effectively achieved through the improvement and/or diversification of current crop yields, land use practices as well as policy engagement. *SANSECO* has numerous strategies to achieve this: increasing income and property through improved value chain and market participation and interventions on diversified production, nutrition training and improved food processing/preservation.



▶ **Linkages with markets under the value chains approach.** Target communities will work in varying degrees with agricultural business activities such as selling or growing products for markets. They often face constraints to secure competitive prices for products, ensure fair participation in value chains and to access broader markets and profits for their products. *SANSECO* will support communities by continuing to do more value chain and market linkages analysis for improved food nutrition and small-scale farmer incomes. There are two main steps to this analysis: 1) value chain mapping/analysis: using a participatory approach, teams will assess which value chains hold the most relevance and promise in the dry forest ecosystems where communities live. Stakeholders will focus on many kinds of capital analysis:

financial, social, individual, intellectual, political, and established. Additional analysis on the broader operating political policy and legal environment will ensure an integrated program design.

▶ **Advocacy and management capacity in public policy.** As mentioned, a main component of *SANSECO* is to advocate at multiple levels for pro-poor policies, legislation, and inclusion. This means working with communities on everything from building awareness about current policies and legal rights to strengthening their collective capacity to formulate positions and messages. It also includes collaborating more effectively amongst their own collectives, organizations, etc. regarding dry forest ecosystem management and improved livelihood and food security.

TECHNICAL APPROACH

The objective of *SANSECO* is to “directly contribute to improving the quality of life of 30,025 families and their communities in the dry forest ecosystem in eight countries in Latin America in a context of climate change.”



The total broader beneficiary population is 120,625 families. There are several key expected results:

- 1 Eighty percent of program families have increased and diversified their income up to thirty percent through the sustainable use of products, by-products and services and the implementation of productive value-added enterprises of forest goods and services with linkages to the market;
- 2 At least eighty percent of program families have improved their access, availability and stability of nutritious food through the conservation of biodiversity and the promotion of various agricultural systems by using local knowledge and maintaining the genetic diversity in agricultural crops and by consuming healthy and nutritious food;
- 3 Local organizations increase their ability to advocate for the design of public policies at the regional level regarding climate change and planning processes for social and sustainable management of dry forest resources;
- 4 At least sixty percent of organized families increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change through access to tools for planning and implementation of warning and adaptation systems and community response to climate hazards.

Technical activities will include: building technical agricultural and other natural resource management yields; launching appropriate social enterprise efforts using selected products, building processing and business acumen skills; improving adaptation and resilience capacity to climate change; generating thought leadership via evidence -based leadership and strengthening organizational advocacy capacities.

In addition, several drivers of change will help to achieve the overall program objectives:

- ▶ improved social capital to create stronger community cohesion and effectiveness; this is one of the

most important drivers to help build inclusion of communities into the broader development process;

- ▶ broadened supplementary activities for improving livelihoods and income increases the resiliency base;
- ▶ increased ecosystem resilience provides social benefits and stronger food security;
- ▶ improved integration into value chain approaches to strengthen business benefit;
- ▶ ongoing application of key Heifer International techniques in Cornerstone training and Passing on the Gift (POG) and gender analysis⁴.

4. These are proven Heifer International tools that build the personal and community transformation of target groups. POG allows individuals and families to pass on assets and skills they have received to others, fostering strengthened self- esteem, accountability and community cohesion.



MONITORING, EVALUATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Just as *SANSECO* as a program connects to the Heifer International program approach and theory of change (TOC), it also integrates with a program-approach monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge-management framework. Fostering reflection, quality implementation and overall impact and accountability, this framework will serve as the roadmap for *SANSECO* to work towards the program vision and overall objectives. Knowledge management will be a continual process of sharing and learning within the Heifer International organization, focusing on the full cycle knowledge-management of identification, acquisition, application, sharing, development, creation, preservation and measurement.



RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

As a ten-year regional program, *SANSECO* has a financial goal of USD \$98 million to generate the anticipated breakthrough changes and sustainable impact that the program has set to achieve. The financial support needed to reach this goal is being fundraised by Heifer International, development agencies, governments, foundations, corporations, and other public and private sources.



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