
El Salvador: Mangrove Rehabilitation

Operating Unit: USAID/El Salvador

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Related Strategic Objective:

SpO 7: Reduced vulnerability of the rural poor to natural disasters in targeted areas.

In a joyous atmosphere, a group of teenagers who live in Cuche de Monte and Salinas del Potrero in the Municipality of Jiquilisco, as well as representatives of the local non-governmental organization CODECOSTA (Association for the Integrated Development of the Coast) and CI-IF (Cooperative Housing Foundation), clamber into small boats in the lush mangrove swamp. USAID is financing the work of CHF and CODECOSTA to reforest the mangroves in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch.

Every few hundred yards, two or three young people climb out of the boats and into the waist-deep water, carrying large sacks. Their goal is to collect over one million mangrove tree seeds floating among the roots of this coastal forest. The seeds that are collected, shaped as long, daggers that drop from the trees and anchor into the mud to sprout, are later sorted by the group; only the best *candelas* are selected for planting.

The following morning, the teenagers, over 30 of them enjoying their summer vacation under the sun, are back in the boats, off to reforest over 17 hectares of denuded and illegally harvested mangrove forest. CODECOSTA and CHF are on the scene, teaching the young people and other community members how to pick and plant the *candelas* and care for the resulting seedlings. The Environmental Committee of Cuche de Monte will carry on the work to protect and care for the reforested areas and help guarantee their sustainability.

Through this activity, USAID is helping to mitigate erosion and flooding, and to protect and expand the forest upon which the coastal fisheries industry and local community members depend. During Hurricane Mitch, floodwaters and high tides combined to inundate huge areas of these communities, destroying homes, infrastructure and crops. However, many understand that the devastation could have been much worse if the mangrove forests, although somewhat damaged by human activity, had been completely deforested and unable to provide any protection from the flooding and erosion caused by the storm.

In a country rife with gang activities and social breakdown, the participation of young people in this activity was a key and highly successful goal. Summer vacation is the perfect time to provide new experiences and structure to the daily routine of these teenagers. Their enthusiasm and dedication have been admirable. Covered in mud and swimming through the forest with sacks of *candelas* creates a lasting impression of the new sense of environmental consciousness they have acquired.

When a young man participating is asked how this project will benefit him? He answers: "If

the reforestation of the man groves is increased, we will reproduce in greater amounts the clams, crabs and other seafood our families need to survive and increase our income. We are in a learning process that will allow us to take care of our environment”.