

# Desarrollo Alternativo e Investigación A.C.



**Ecosystem:** Forest

**Area Impacted:** 1,500 ha

**Production Quantity:** 1,500 tons

**People Employed:** N/A

**Population Impacted:** 1,500 people



## The Situation

Chiapas State is one of the most important agrobiodiversity spots of the world. However, over several decades, local governments and companies have provided (often as a “gift”) conventional seeds and agrochemical packages to smallholder farmers. In the last four years, the “Maíz Sustentable” program supplied 663,538 technological packages and one hybrid to 165,884 producers on average per year, with an investment of 34 million USD dollars. This activity dramatically reduced plant diversity resulting in negative consequences on human and environmental health. It has also disrupted the community’s social organization & local economy, negatively impacting smallholders’ livelihoods.

These current agricultural policies are ignoring the agrobiodiversity potential in the state, changing agricultural vocations from traditional to conventional farming. In contradiction, farmers keep using their seeds and knowledge to cultivate the traditional Milpa system (mixed farming system composed at least by maize, beans and squashes); for them farming for food sovereignty is the way to keep autonomy and local governance in place, generating local responses to cope with the uncertainty of the global world.

## The Solution

Desarrollo Alternativo e Investigación A.C. began by collecting 300 local seeds of maize and beans to launch a Participatory Seed Dissemination program. This process increased local maize and beans yields by at least 10%. Using seed selection practices and farming diversification, Chiapas families adopted new soil management techniques and increased the number of species managed in the plots. The process happened in two phases: first, 220 farmers (from 20 municipalities in 5 indigenous regions) came together at a Diversity Seed Fair to select seeds for their own home trials. Then, through the experimentation process, farmers shared results with others and formed the Red Maíz Criollo – a platform for strengthening local varieties and supply seeds all over the Chiapas State. The second phase expanded this process to include 11 new research and development organizations and train 75 champion farmers as Agrobiodiversity Pollinators.

As a result, farmers across the region began forming relationships and working together. They stopped using herbicides and allowed some non-crop species to begin growing. This change, combined with the increased variety of maize and beans, diversified the family diet and also gave families the autonomy to drive their food production.



# Farming for Biodiversity

Unsustainable agricultural practices remain one of the greatest threats to ecosystems and biodiversity. As the world population is expected to reach nine billion by 2050 and climate change further threatens livelihoods, we have to find ways of agricultural production that support farmers and the environment we all rely on.

The good news is these solutions already exist: From modern beekeepers who work on reviving ancient local wisdom to phone apps connecting rural farmers with urban consumers.

With Farming for Biodiversity, we are on a global mission to surface these local solutions, celebrate them and bring them to scale.

Our vision is to make these community-led initiatives shine and reach:

- Over 200 million globally through media impressions and publications
- Over 100,000 active website participants and readers of online publications
- 200 selected agriculture & biodiversity pioneers through eight technical and campaign trainings, hosted across the globe
- 800,000 farmers, conservationists and other land users at the community-level



Through our crowd-sourcing contest Solution Search, we have identified over 300 innovative and replicable ideas that connect agriculture, livelihood and the environment. These selections were assessed by our renowned panel of expert judges from leading organizations around the world.

Based on the solutions surfaced, we will host eight in-country workshops to introduce the most promising approaches to local influencers. Trainings will equip participants with the skills to implement locally driven solutions in their own communities. Longer term grants will provide an additional incentive to continue their work. These efforts will expand these approaches globally, reaching 800,000 people!

Throughout the project, we will gather, analyze and publish lessons learned. An online peer-to-peer network will connect all solution providers and facilitate interactive exchange across countries and themes. We will actively engage in global environment and agriculture policy processes – such as the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) meetings, drawing attention to community leaders and local champions.