

### Background

CRS is working with partners to help rural families increase their income and improve their diets in remote areas of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. With funds provided by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the Agriculture for Basic Needs Project (A4N), aims to help 15,765 households through increased agricultural production. The project also promotes savings-led credit groups, provides guidance on how to successfully manage a savings group and encourages members to invest their savings wisely to build their family assets.

To achieve these objectives, the project focuses on developing five basic skills among the participating families: innovation and learning, sustainable agriculture, savings and lending,



An A4N savings group treasurer collects contributions from group members. Ashley Rytter/CRS

marketing, and group management and organization. The project puts special emphasis on women and youth since they are increasingly more prone to unemployment, emigration and violence.

### Sustainable production

A4N promotes sustainable production through training on efficient use of water, introducing promising crop varieties, providing technical support for crop production and storage systems, and supporting communities to participate in their local political processes to advocate for allocation of resources, rights to resources and land possession. Farmers work together to experiment with new technologies, drawing their own conclusions about what works best according to their local conditions.

### Agricultural incomes

The project works to increase agricultural incomes by developing the capacity of savings groups to manage



A4N helps improve agricultural production to increase the incomes of rural household. Ashley Rytter/CRS



Santos Everina Ortiz Hernández helps interested community members set up savings groups in El Salvador. *Ashley Rytter/CRS.*

themselves and implement lending processes. It also helps facilitate farmer-to-farmer information exchange techniques and works to increase the abilities of community members to increase the value of their crops post-production.

Lastly, the project helps increase the availability of information about prices and agricultural products for farmers.

## A4N Savings Groups in El Salvador

Santos Everina Ortiz Hernández is helping community members achieve their goals through savings. She is a *promotora* working with the A4N project in El Salvador. Promotoras promote economic strengthening by setting up savings groups within their community and teaching them how to increase their savings by working together.

As a *promotora*, Santos Everina informs community members about savings groups and the opportunity they provide to increase financial stability. She helps interested community members form savings groups and teaches them about group savings methodology. The groups then decide when and how often they want to meet, how much they want to save, and when they will divide their savings. Santos Everina has successfully started five savings groups.

One of Santos Everina's savings groups, "Ahorrando con Amor", has been coming up with new ways to increase their savings. They worked together to organize a tamale sale with donations from group members, and sold tamales to community members. Group members plan to use their savings towards building their own homes, sending their siblings to school, and buying Christmas presents for their families.

## Looking Ahead

This year, A4N will reach the half-way mark of its current funding round. The project staff will join together in December to share their achievements, innovations and challenges in a regional Learning Fair. A participatory study tour will also research the application of the project's theory of change in the field, examining the adoption and interaction of the five skill sets in the communities.

The second half of the project will concentrate on building and consolidating group capacities in order to strengthen their ability to manage local development initiatives upon project conclusion.