

# AclF | Almanac of the Future

*Get inspired, get involved, take action*

Motivational Experience No. 57



**I didn't think it  
would be a big deal**

*"It is not much," says Alfredo Echeverría during the meeting in his home in the community of San José Los Delgados in El Salvador, adding, "but I am happy with what we are doing as REPASAIL". REPASAIL is a network of women and men promoters and environmentalists who, with the support of Caritas San Vicente, are dedicated to sustainable agriculture. The organization, although very young, already has delegates from 16 villages. The motivation to participate, according to Roberto Rivera, current president of the organization: "It's not about what they give me, but what I can do." From self-saving and participatory plant breeding to increasing agrobiodiversity.*

in Central America. The Salvadoran government has eliminated tariffs on food imports from neighboring countries, making the situation even more difficult for many farming families. Against this backdrop, the network of promoters and environmentalists for sustainable agriculture of Ilobasco, when born in 2019, prioritizes contributing to food security and sovereignty through sustainable agriculture and

with a comprehensive agroecological approach, achieving harmony of people's lives with the planet.

### *Dependence or Sovereignty*

Faced with the avalanche of cheap food from abroad, REPASAIL opts for its food sovereignty. **Which path do you choose, buying or growing, since eating and consuming are political and co-responsibility issues?**



## The Beginning

'It seems that food production is not a priority in the country'. This phrase is often heard when discussing agricultural issues in El Salvador, the smallest but most densely populated country



## From savings to plant breeding

In many of the villages, economic savings groups have emerged as an organized community response to the lack of access to bank credit. Generally, members of the group - more women than men - save modest amounts of money each week. This capital is used to grant small loans to interested individuals, most of whom are involved in small productive projects. There is considerable interest among the farming families to work and participate in the community.

They are small local groups of peasant women and men from different rural areas of the Ilobasco district, in the municipality of Cabañas, who, with the support of Caritas, have organized themselves into a network to promote and voluntarily coordinate actions related to agroecological production, diversification and defense of the environment. Each local group sends people as delegates to represent the group within the

network. In this way, they are able to coordinate and synchronize their actions. REPASAIL currently has 28 promoters, 13 of them women, and brings together groups from 8 cantons of the district of Ilobasco, in the department of Cabañas. The objective of the network is the participation and exchange of knowledge, practices and seeds, in the territory, achieving the inclusion of different age groups.

Native or creole seeds are frequently shared and exchanged within and between groups. The network practices participatory peasant plant breeding. A group of 10 people act as promoters, dedicated to recovering native seeds. In this way, 10 varieties of corn and 20 varieties of beans have been rescued. These varieties have already been mass-marketed through seed bartering, even José Elías Rauda Gutiérrez, diocesan bishop, participa-

tes in this seed exchange: "Plants are not enemies, but they have put us in the head of using poisons to fight what they call weeds". Part of the work of plant breeding is also the recovery of appropriate ways of saving seeds.

"When we held the first courses on sustainable agriculture, many people were still using agro-toxins," recalls Henry Rodriguez, coordinator of Caritas' Pastoral Campesina y de la Tierra. It is noteworthy that in order to avoid the use of plastic and the production of waste, when people attend courses or meetings, they bring their plates, glasses and cutlery; most of the time, the meetings include the organization of an altar of abundance and agrobiodiversity. Everyone brings what they can in the form of seeds, fruits and plants, homemade processed foods, biological remedies for pest control. The altar has multiple purposes: to share and give thanks as a community, to visualize abundance and biodiversity in a tangible way, to stimulate abundance in an emotional and motivational way, and to allow everyone to take something from the altar at the end.



## A hook for the young

The network has identified the risk of losing young people due to frequent migration. Roberto Rivera and Carlos

Avendaño, share on this issue: "We parents often make sure that young people leave; this must change. Young people are more interested in processing raw materials, beekeeping and selling locally than in working in the fields". There are REPASAIL families who process the fruits of sago (a type of palm tree) to obtain starch, for example for baking or biscuits. Yam and malanga are other crops that have been saved, ideal ingredients for soups.

### Rurality and Future

**We think we know what young people prefer. Do we really know?** It helps to build imaginaries of rural futures from the young people's point of view: in Ilobasco, more than agriculture, they like to process the harvests, beekeeping and selling locally.

Roberto, recalling the principles of the network and thinking about the challenge of arousing young people's interest in rural life and in agriculture that respects nature and living beings, tells us with a smile: "For those who begin



*the process, it is a torture to learn, but then the same person feels the reward. We must share this with young people”.*

## Necklace of challenges

REPASAIL, currently a de facto organization, i.e. not yet formalized as a legal entity, has identified challenges like pearls on a string. With the support of Caritas and through a project sponsored by Misereor, but also with other allies such as universities, NGO's, etc.,

they work with soil and water, native seeds and forests through sustainable and agroecological agriculture. At the territorial level, and with the firm support of the diocese and the clergy, led by Father René Valle, they have been able to support the sensitization of the population and decision-makers to ask the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly and the central government to pass the law banning metallic mining, and knowing the harmful consequences of mining in neighboring Honduras, extractive activities have not been allowed.

### Recovery and Diversity

**Recovering what has been lost takes time, but much more if you don't start.** Why don't you start, together with others, to recover the native seed varieties that are best suited to your area?

The climate crisis and prolonged droughts are another front of the network's work, introducing rustic drip irrigation techniques. The production of organic fertilizers, pesticides, etc. goes hand in hand with a drastic reduction in the volume of solid waste.



The epicenter of the activities of the network and the participating families is focused on organic home gardens, using chicken manure and microorganisms from the mountain as compost, mulch and mineralization of plants. And from the garden to the processing and preparation of typical foods for family enjoyment and sale. These antojitos, as Alfredo Echeverría would say, "are no big deal...". The moral of the story: if every no big deal had the same scope as what REPASAIL has done, the world would be a different place.

What other tips do you apply in your agroecological work, diversification and defense of the environment?

**Leave us a message on our social networks to share it with the community!**



## Messages to the Future

1

The saying goes: Better an egg well eaten than badly sold! The commitment to food sovereignty, to an agriculture respectful of nature and living beings, and to the sale of short distances, allows the dignity of the farmer and, at the same time, the construction of a desired future from the present.

2

Mutual exchanges and visits to family initiatives and enterprises keep motivation high and strengthen the organizational fabric with social cohesion. This constellation, coupled with intergenerational coexistence strategies, has motivated more than one young person to consider their future in the field.

3

The articulation between the groups in the villages has made it possible to broaden the socio-geographic threshold of knowledge management, since the promoters and delegates replicate what they have learned in the courses at the local level. At the same time, it makes it possible to work on environmental, political and regeneration issues, to defend the territory and to achieve greater resilience.

# Almanac of the Future

The text was prepared based on conversations with women and men, members of the Network of Promoters of Sustainable Agriculture and Environmentalists of Ilobasco - Cabañas - REPASAIL in the communities of Los Delgados and Guadalupe, among them Alfredo Echeverría, Micaela Abrego, Roberto Rivera, Consuelo Mercado, Silvia Paredes and Carlos Avendaño and people from Caritas of the Diocese of San Vicente, among them Henry Rodríguez, Valentina López and Rubén Reyes. José Elías Rauda Gutiérrez, Bishop of San Vicente, also came to greet the group. During the day we were also able to visit orchards and plots of land. The interviews during the visit in July 2024 were conducted by Jorge Krekeler (coordinator of the Almanac of the Future - facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo). Thanks to the people and families of REPASAIL as well as the Caritas of the diocese of St. Vincent for their time, interest and trust in the Almanac of the Future. Special thanks to Guillermo Navarro of Caritas El Salvador for his support and accompaniment throughout the tour of the country, generating complicity around the weaving synergy to build the future from the present.

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