



THE CHAIN
collaborative

2023

Community-Led Development

Incubator

Report



About Us

The Chain Collaborative (TCC) is a US-based 501(c)(3) that co-creates opportunities and strengthens capacities for community-led change in the coffee sector. We identify and invest in local leaders and their community-based organizations in coffee-producing regions, putting change-making power into the hands of under-resourced leaders who are the most equipped to drive impact in their own communities. Our unique and innovative approach recognizes the multi-faceted needs in coffee-growing communities beyond improved coffee production, and intentionally resources local leaders to develop culturally-specific solutions that create social, economic, and environmental impact.



Community-Led Development Incubator Program

Through our 18-month Community-Led Development Incubator program, we build relationships with emerging organizations in coffee-growing regions of Latin America and East Africa, providing access to first-time funding for their community-driven initiatives. Participants complete three program phases over the course of 18 months, which allows them to design a community-led development project, implement it with TCC funding and robust support, and report on its impact. Finally, participants are able to join an ongoing TCC-led alumni network of change-makers in the coffee sector. Most importantly, this work allows global communities to combat intergenerational poverty and marginalization in the coffee sector on their own terms, and according to their own visions for change.



How It Works

Community-Led Development Incubator Program Phases



Our Impact

Incubator participants have implemented community projects in the following areas:



Transformative
Infrastructure



Education



Food
Sovereignty



Alternative
Income



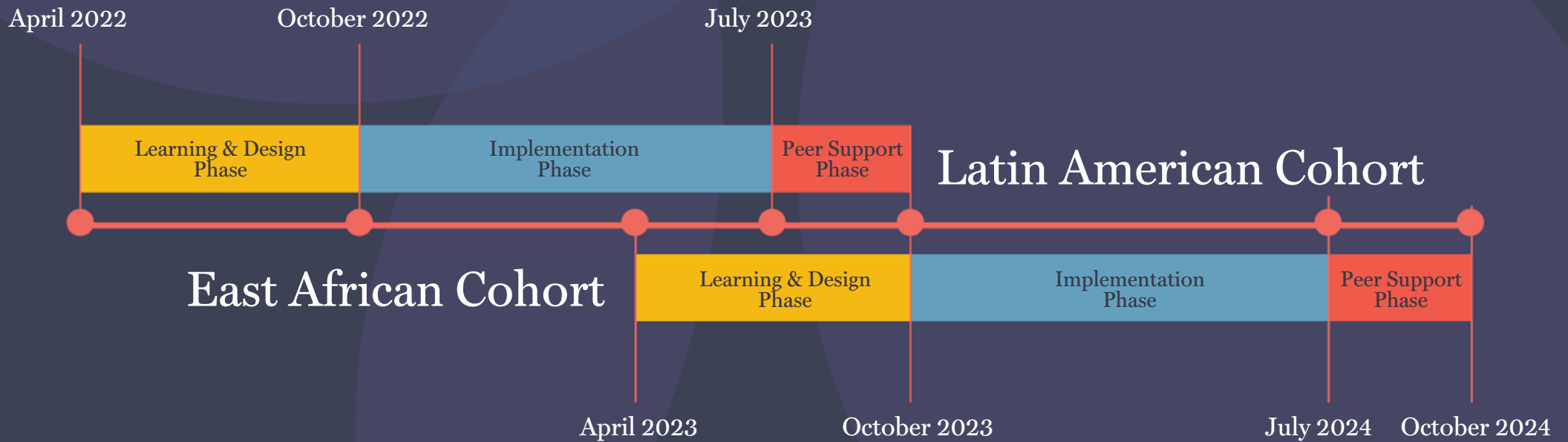
Clean Water,
Carbon & Climate



Gender
Equity

Since 2022, each April has marked the start of a new CLD Incubator cohort, so while the previous year's groups are implementing their projects, the next cohort begins the Learning & Design Phase.

CLD Incubator Program Timeline





Meet the Cohorts: **Latin America** 2022 - 2023

Jovemcafé (Guatemala)
Vicafé (Guatemala)
Biblioteca Girasol (Nicaragua)
Colectivo Rokunín (Mexico)
Asoamazonas (Ecuador)
Asoseykún (Colombia)

As the inaugural cohort of The Chain Collaborative's Community-Led Development Incubator program, this group of local leaders and their community-based organizations will hold a special legacy in the memory of our organization. Since they graduated the program in September 2023, we have looked back on all of the participants' projects, their self evaluations, and our conversations together. This has been full of positive learning and reflection. In the next section of this report, you will first find descriptions of each organization's project as well as the data they provided about implementation. Second, we have summarized our key learnings and takeaways.

Jovemcafé

Guatemala



“I feel a sense [of independence] because all of us in the group are women [who] do not depend on men. We as women can work like men without their help.”

Isabel Rodríguez Salucio

Jovemcafé is a group of 25 young female coffee entrepreneurs from the Com community of Jacaltenango, Guatemala. This women-led group was created in 2017 with the goal to support its members through a range of projects, including the provision of microcredit and training in finance and market access. During the Incubator, the group carried out two projects: an egg-laying hen business and a plant nursery. Both projects sought to help members achieve financial stability and create jobs within the community. To date, Jovemcafé has purchased 200 egg-laying Highland hens and has begun selling their eggs within the Com community and beyond; group members are now earning alternative income during coffee's off-season. The plant nursery is a longer-term project due to the time it takes for seedlings to reach the maturity they need to be sold. However, Jovemcafé is on track to having a garden center with at least six different types of tree and plant seedlings, and they expect more income to result in the years to come.

Nursery Project Indicators

- **10,000** plants and trees purchased for the garden center.
- **23** community members participated in this project (**15** of them are between the ages of 15 and 22).
- **87%** of community participants are women.
- **50** future clients were acquired/confirmed over the last year; **7** other groups are interested in purchasing in the future, including 2 cooperatives, 2 associations, and 3 municipalities.

Hen House Project Indicators

- **20** jobs created through this project (**100%** of them are women between the ages of 15 and 22).
- **325** Com families now purchase eggs from Jovemcafé; **15** other people in nearby communities also buy eggs from them.
- **85%** of the families in the Com community have achieved greater food security through the hen project because they now have access to fresh, quality eggs.
- The skills acquired by the members of Jovemcafé have allowed them to manage other types of personal and community projects, including a bakery and a minimart to sell fruit and vegetables. **20** women were also trained in hen rearing.

Vicafé

Guatemala



["Thanks to the collaboration with TCC] we have seen an increase in women's participation. We are leaders in our communities and we are the ones who are organizing and requesting support from organizations to manage projects in our communities."

Amalia Saquic

Vicafé is a group of young coffee professionals from the department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. They are committed to improving the commercialization of their community's coffee, creating local career opportunities for youth, and demonstrating the potential of youth-led coffee production in their region and beyond. While their project for the Incubator originally included establishing a nursery to grow and sell fruit, timber, and coffee tree seedlings locally, and setting up a compost system to process organic fertilizer, the latter was hampered by supply-chain issues. They quickly turned this setback into an opportunity by using the funds to purchase more tree seedlings and expand their tree plant nursery. So far, they have established 20,000 tree seedlings, which they hope to start selling to their local community in the second quarter of 2024. The coffee varieties they're now supplying thanks to this project include San Ramon, Caturra, Bourbon, and Gesha.

Project Indicators

- 7,000 seedlings for timber trees have been purchased and potted so far, including eucalyptus, pine, and 'palo blanco'.
- 3,000 fruit tree seedlings have been purchased and potted, including oranges, lemons, and avocados.
- The organization also purchased 10,000 coffee tree seedlings, including 4,000 San Ramon, 3,000 Caturra, 2,000 Bourbon, and 1,000 Gesha.

Biblioteca Girasol

Nicaragua



"We have formed a very nice family; we support each other. We leaders have a dream to have a career, a better life, and to support the library afterwards to say thanks for what it has done for us."

Jubelkys Ramos

Biblioteca Girasol is a community library in the coffee-growing region of Matapalo, Nicaragua run by a team of youth leader volunteers who are dedicated to creating a safe space in their community for children to learn, play, and dream. Despite their commitment to education in their community, most of Biblioteca Girasol's youth leaders are not able to attend high school due to the financial burden of buying school supplies and paying bus fares to reach the nearest public school. To respond to this challenge, Biblioteca Girasol decided to launch a program that i) offers scholarships to students to cover their bus fares and school supplies, and ii) provides academic assistance and mental health services. The program ensures that the library's motivated youth leaders can complete high school, and supports them to continue giving back to their community through after-school programming at the library. Alongside ongoing mentoring young children, each youth leader is now able to pursue their dream of higher education.

Project Indicators

- **12** youth leaders received scholarships to cover bus fares and school supplies so they could attend high school.
- **3** youth leaders graduated high school with support from the library, one of whom was the first ever in their family to get a high-school degree.
- **4** library coordinators received scholarships to continue their education at the university or high school level (some returned to high school as adults).
- **15** youth leaders led games and after school classes at the library, and lent books to young children, improving their leadership skills.
- Over the 18 months of the Incubator, **72** youth-led community meetings were held to make collective decisions about priorities for the library's ongoing projects and activities.

Colectivo Rokunín

Mexico



“I felt very supported by the entire group; knowing that there are more people in the world who want to improve coffee farmers’ lives gave me a lot of strength.”

Itzel Mendoza

Colectivo Rokunín is a community-centered collective that works alongside coffee growers from indigenous communities in the Sierra de Zongolica of Mexico. They lead projects that centralize art, sustainable agriculture, cultural preservation, and gender equity. Through the Incubator, Colectivo Rokunín partnered with a group named Diez Familias (10 Families) and developed a multi-faceted project. First, in the realm of coffee, they conducted soil analyses, provided technical assistance to their members, and expanded processing infrastructure so that producers could improve their coffee quality and achieve higher prices. Second, youth in the community launched an initiative to offer Nahuatl classes for young people to help preserve their community’s native language and culture. Lastly, Colectivo Rokunín listened to community members’ concerns around food security and launched a backyard vegetable garden initiative.

Coffee Related Indicators

- **11** farms were able to complete soil analyses to determine areas for improvement.
- **27** people participated in **13** training sessions focused on best practices for the production of high quality coffee.
- **10** families now have access to drying beds and a depulper to process their own coffee in their communities and maintain more control over the quality and price of their product.
- **5,000** kilograms of coffee will be processed in 2024 using this new infrastructure.

Community Related Indicators

- **27** people participated in **12** hours of Nahuatl classes taught by a community member.
- **27** people participated in **52** hours of training on backyard vegetable gardening and set up gardens in their own homes. The community organized **16** additional meetings for collective decision-making and planning as part of the Incubator process.

Asoamazonas

Ecuador



"Having the resources for this project has allowed us to delegate responsibilities and structure work areas (for example, technical assistance and the reading club); we now see more leadership, motivation, and responsibility from other community leaders. You see a different spirit in them."

Andrea López

Asoamazonas, founded in 2018, is a youth-led group from the community of Loreto, in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Their aim is to rescue agricultural activities in their region and add value to local products - especially cacao and Robusta coffee - by growing and processing them in a sustainable way. In addition to their work with coffee and cacao, Asoamazonas is passionate about offering educational programs to children and youth. With their Incubator project, Asoamazonas provided personalized technical assistance to 15 farming families so they could improve their yield and quality, and therefore increase their incomes. In addition, they supported an after-school program for youth and children to promote reading, creativity, and coffee-brewing skills.

Project Indicators

- 15 coffee-farming families have new tools and knowledge for environmentally-friendly coffee production.
- 15 families received personalized technical assistance and agricultural inputs for their farms. 5 additional families received inputs without technical assistance.
- 17 children signed up and participated consistently in Asoamazonas' reading club, and experienced improved listening and public speaking skills.
- 17 children took part in workshops about the coffee value chain and beginner barista skills.
- Asoamazonas received 20% more coffee from the families participating in their technical assistance program.
- 4 farms achieved an important local certification for their organic farming practices (*Certificación de Buenas Prácticas Agrícolas*, Best Agricultural Practices Certification).

Asoseykún

Colombia



“What differentiates TCC from other organizations is they support community proposals and initiatives; they support ideas that come from us, with total freedom for change. TCC’s vision is not to impose from the outside but rather to support ideas coming from the community. We feel happy with the process.”

Seyaru'kwingumu

AsoSeykún is an Arhuaco community from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region in Colombia. Since 2008, they have worked to recover, reforest, and protect their ancestral land. Through the Incubator, they developed a strategy to meet this goal by processing and selling their coffee collectively at a fair price, ultimately increasing internally-generated income. With this income, they will purchase more land. The first stage of AsoSeykún’s project was a diagnostic of 23 coffee farms in their community to assess tree quantity and health as well as soil health. The second stage focused on infrastructure and training. Based on the diagnostic and on the guidance from an expert trainer they selected, they decided to build a set of drying beds as well as a storage space to ensure the quality of their green coffee. As a result of this project and their learning, they were able to sell their coffee as dry parchment for the first time in 2023. In total, they processed and sold 2,000 kilograms, and plan to increase this amount each year as they build client relationships.

Project Indicators

- **96** people participated in collective decision-making meetings and training.
- **23** farms (**52** hectares) participated in a diagnostic to best determine the focus of training and processing infrastructure investments.
- **17** full days of training received on best practices related to producing and processing high-quality coffee.
- **4** drying beds with **72** sections accommodating **2,500** kilograms of coffee were built.
- For the first time, AsoSeykún was able to sell **2,000** kilograms of dry parchment in 2023, which meant an additional **\$1,200** in income for the community.
- **25** families directly benefiting from increased compensation for their coffee.
- **25%** increase expected in coffee to be processed and sold collectively in 2024.

Learnings & Takeaways

Latin American Cohort

In addition to the individual evaluations that each participating organization in the Incubator led to measure the impact of their projects, TCC also leads a post-Incubator evaluation process. This consists of i) interviewing the leaders of participating organizations as well as ii) surveys to individual community members impacted by Incubator projects. The following reflections are based on the results of this post-Incubator evaluation process. For more information on results from the Incubator's mid-term evaluation, please refer to our Year One Incubator Report for 2022.



Community Participation and Engagement

During year one of the Incubator, organization leaders reported an increase in engagement and participation from community members during project planning processes. In year two (2023), leaders observed even greater engagement during project implementation. Five of the six participating groups attributed this to the process of community members seeing their own ideas for change coming to life. Five of six groups also mentioned that other community members who did not take part in their project, or people from surrounding areas, reached out asking how to get involved or replicate something similar in their own contexts. In surveys completed by community members, the majority of respondents shared that they felt an increased sense of pride due to the growth and unity of their community groups.



Importance of Flexible Resources

During interviews, multiple leaders brought up the importance of flexible funding. First, one leader referred specifically to challenges they had faced finding funding for training and educational projects that required covering staff time. Thanks to the Incubator's unrestricted funding model, this group was not only able to move forward a technical assistance project that had been on their docket for years, but they were able to strengthen their leadership team by hiring community members onto their staff. Meanwhile, the leaders of two other participating organizations in the Incubator shared that funding flexibility allowed them to adapt to community needs. They felt free to make shifts and be transparent about changes to ensure their projects were as relevant as possible to their communities. Lastly, another participating leader shared that funding flexibility helped them face logistical challenges, such as unexpected needs for increased travel.



Ownership and Decision-Making Power

One key learning for TCC that we will take into future recruitment is that the most successful projects were led by leaders who were deeply invested in their organizations prior to entering the Incubator. Existing investment is demonstrated in many ways, such as through long-term connections with community members, and time spent on on existing initiatives. Additionally, it is important that the leader representing their organization in the Incubator has support from the rest of their group to prioritize community needs; this ensures that there is broad support for collective decisions to be turned into action. In interviews with the leaders of the participating groups, five out of six mentioned the trust and support they felt from their communities throughout the project planning process. In surveys with community members, many people also shared that they felt trust in organizational leaders. They attributed this trust to the fact that leaders followed through on their promises to the community, and ensured projects came fully to life despite challenges.



Alumni Experiences Enriching Future Cohorts

In interviews with participating organization leaders in 2022, they shared that they valued the opportunity to connect with and learn from other leaders in coffee-producing communities through the Incubator. As a result, in 2023, TCC made an effort to facilitate more connection and co-learning between leaders/Incubator participants. Moving forward, these leaders will now be part of the TCC-led Alumni Network. In addition to continuing to support each other, we hope that they will be able to support the incoming leaders participating in the next cohort of the Latin American Incubator. For example, alumni can share their experiences holding strategic visioning exercises in their communities and provide recommendations for how to do so successfully.





Meet the Cohorts:

East Africa

2023 - 2024

Kyaffe Farmers Coffee (Uganda)

Girl Power Foundation (Uganda)

Abateraninkunga Ba Sholi (Rwanda)

FEMAC-Development Sarl (DR Congo)

Kyaffe Farmers Coffee

Uganda



"TCC's tools enabled me to envision the project's trajectory more clearly, highlighting key milestones and the interconnections between different components. This will be instrumental in guiding our actions and decision-making as we move forward with the project."

Elizabeth Nalugemwa

Kyaffe Farmers Coffee, founded in 2017, is a social enterprise partnering with women coffee farmers, working to bring them better prices and using coffee as a tool for development. Kyaffe has impacted 90 women directly and benefitted 1,500 indirectly through ventures such as a Savings and Loans group, support with agricultural inputs, and coffee purchases. The organization also runs the only community primary school in the area, where 350 children of farmers have access to quality education.

Through their Incubator project, 'Empowering Young Girls Through Barista Skills Training and Mentorship,' Kyaffe will work on opening a barista academy and training the first cohort of baristas. Young mothers and girls who have had to drop out of school will have the opportunity to start their careers in coffee as professional baristas after participating in the training and mentorship program. In addition to the barista academy, Kyaffe is also looking to expand their current coffee shop enterprise in Kampala, which returns profits to their primary school.

Kyaffe Farmers' Hopes and Ambitions

"Our mission at Kyaffe Farmers Coffee is to empower and transform the lives of women coffee farmers and their communities. Through sustainable and socially responsible business practices, we strive to advance economic opportunities, promote gender equality, and create lasting social change."

Girl Power Foundation

Uganda



"We believe that when people feel part of the development process and believe they and their descendants will benefit from it, they join efforts to address today's development challenges."

Winnie Ainembaabazi

Girl Power Foundation Uganda (GPFU)'s mission is to uplift adolescent girls and young women to utilize their skills and break the patterns that prevent them from thriving. Through a range of initiatives, the organization addresses topics such as women's rights, mental and physical health, gender equity, and economic independence to encourage young women to discover their potential, make informed decisions, and create positive change in their communities.

Through their Incubator project, GPFU will engage 500+ community members - including women and girls both in and out of school - to increase women's economic empowerment, enhance gender equity, and create a shared space in the community to support and be a part of these conversations. GPFU has designed three main focus areas for their project: vocational skills for women and young girls that are out of school; sports activities for sensitization on mental and physical wellness; and music, dance, and drama for raising awareness on important topics in the community.

GPFU's Hopes and Ambitions

"A world where every girl grows to her fullest potential. To raise girls into responsible, empowered, self-sustaining women."

Abateraninkunga Ba Sholi

Rwanda



“As a result of TCC engagement, I have learned about community leadership and participation of our members - [and the importance of] thinking about inclusivity of the people benefitting from the project. Not only will leaders make decisions but [they will] also allow participants to make decisions.”

Gustave Nikomeze

Abateraninkunga ba Sholi originally started out as a small association of about 30 women who put in place a money rotation system to help each other grow. Over time, the association’s mission shifted and expanded based on its members’ needs and wishes, eventually becoming a cooperative. Currently, the cooperative is composed of 40% women members and cultivates 267 hectares of coffee. Aside from having its own washing station, Sholi offers health insurance and a loan system, and has established a medical center, a water source, and a conference hall in the village.

As part of the Incubator, Sholi is developing a project to support young single mothers within their community and reintegrate them into the local economy. The project has two main components. First, they are providing land and a comprehensive training program surrounding coffee and sustainability for a group of 80 women to increase their incomes through coffee production. Second, to supplement the women’s income until they see the profits from the new coffee production, Sholi is fostering alternative income options through skill development in artisan crafting and goat farming, two areas the women identified as being viable and interesting to them.

Sholi’s Hopes and Ambitions

“To produce high-quality specialty coffee through capacity building, high quality standards, and establishment [of good] relationships with our partners. [We wish] to integrate youth and women in coffee farming to achieve sustainable agriculture, create opportunities for the youth, sell the amazing Sholi coffee at the international level, and maintain the current potential buyers for a long time.”

FEMAC-Development Sarl


DR Congo

Historically, many coffee producers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been over-exploited by intermediaries who buy their products at low prices and on credit. In response, the FEMAC cooperative works to i) break the hold of these intermediaries in the value chain and ii) produce better-quality coffee in order to generate income for small producers. They aim to bring together 40,000 farmers across several villages on the island of Idjwi in the DRC.

As part of the Incubator, FEMAC is working on a project to improve socio-economic outcomes in their community through collective coffee processing and improved sales. The initiative includes building a coffee washing station as well as providing training to farmers on best practices to ensure high coffee quality and greater opportunities within the international specialty coffee market. With more control of their value chain through processing, FEMAC hopes to retain more of their crops' value and return greater income to their farmer members. More broadly, after years of conflict and loss, FEMAC is also passionate about including widowed women and orphaned youth in their efforts. Individuals from both these populations are now fully engaged in the washing station planning and trainings. In the future, FEMAC would like to complement this work by also offering mental health services for community members recovering from trauma.

FEMAC's Hopes and Ambitions

"To promote the shift away from extreme poverty towards resilient and sustainable livelihoods through a fair value chain that does not exploit coffee farmers' work."



"The support we received from TCC helped us increase our capacity, as they respect our needs and commitments. What we learned in the Incubator was easily transferable."

Pascal Kahule

Participants' Feedback

East African Cohort

Upon completing the initial six-month Learning and Design Phase for the East African cohort, TCC led a mid-Incubator evaluation process to collect feedback from participants and measure our qualitative impact throughout the program to date. These are the primary findings:

Strengths



Improved Community Participation & Inclusivity

Participants expressed having a better understanding of their communities and their roles as leaders as a result of their participation in the Incubator. While most had been involved in their groups' leadership before joining this cohort, they felt that TCC's "collaborative way of working" gave them the chance to design projects alongside their communities and bring about an enhanced "sense of belonging." One of the leaders claimed his community, once demotivated and discouraged by limited opportunities, had "experienced a rebirth" thanks to the Incubator, which had also "allowed for deep reaffirmation" of their work. Similarly, the majority of participants reported a change in their leadership style, describing it as now more "intentional" and "inclusive." They expressed a desire to engage more youth in their activities and make a more meaningful impact in their communities.



Development of relevant, transferable skills

A key aspect of the Incubator involves supporting the development of each participating leader's project planning skills to ensure positive outcomes for their current and future community-led projects.

During the Learning and Design Phase, participating organization leaders were exposed - in some cases for the first time - to a range of tools that they described as "useful, important and helpful." Two of the tools that the leaders found most aligned with their needs were the logic model and the monitoring and evaluation framework, deemed crucial for comprehending their projects' activities and objectives in a more holistic manner. In particular, one of the participants expressed how these tools helped them ask good and important questions, which, in turn, allowed them to provide clarity about the project to community members and show them what to expect. Two other participating leaders stated that the Incubator's assignments helped them be more organized, and all participants provided highly positive feedback about the sessions overall. Specifically, two out of the four participating groups emphasized the importance of the Incubator's peer-learning opportunities, and noted their increased awareness of shared interests and challenges in the East African region. All participants also stated that their newly acquired skills could be applied to other projects.



Respectful peer-to-peer approach among participants and with TCC

At TCC, we see local leaders as modern professionals fully equipped to define what sustainable change means to them and their communities - a perspective that resonated with Incubator participants. They all expressed appreciation for TCC's community-led approach, noting that they felt respected and listened to. Additionally, three participating organization leaders shared satisfaction, along with a sense of pride and freedom, derived from their ability to design their own project alongside community members. Overall, the Incubator was described by one participant as a "peaceful and friendly environment that [gave] people the chance to learn." Relatedly, another leader shared that the Incubator was the first time they felt like they were an integral part of a development project, attributing this to the open, honest communication among participating organizations and TCC. This organization leader also expressed satisfaction with the way the TCC team approached interactions with local leaders in general, and reported feeling comfortable enough to share challenges and questions as they arose. Such self-confidence also extended to this participant's exchanges with other leaders in the Incubator and even to external groups, with whom all members expect to build stronger relationships and partnerships thanks to Incubator-related learning.

Areas for Improvement



Enhanced opportunities for personal connections and personalized learning

One of the participating organization leaders expressed hope for additional opportunities to build more personal connections with fellow Incubator participants. Taking advantage of the cohort's regional composition, this participant suggested planning in-person meetings at the beginning and end of the program in an effort to foster the discovery of synergies. Although part of these suggestions have already been incorporated into our 2024 plans with the establishment of the Alumni Network [see below for details], the TCC team is eager to discuss the opportunity to provide additional platforms for more personal interactions among participants.

Another leader suggested conducting a pre-assessment at the beginning of the Incubator to better understand each group's needs for the Learning and Design Phase, specifically as it relates to their coffee business development. They expressed satisfaction with the process and proposed this as a way to enhance the program's effectiveness further. TCC's goal is to ensure that all leaders derive as much benefit from the Incubator as possible and will explore opportunities to provide more targeted content and material going forward.



Conclusions

The second year of the Community-Led Development Incubator program brought a wealth of learning and shared experiences, and reaffirmed the efficacy of TCC's mission. By accompanying local leaders to launch their own projects and initiatives for sustainable change, we are able to have a more significant impact and spark the regeneration of leadership in coffee-growing regions.

Our evaluation interviews, conducted with all Latin American and East African Incubator participants, showed that our partnership model resonated with them and helped them to foster stronger connections with their community members. It also led to increased confidence to seek other partnerships. After completing the Learning and Design Phase, the Latin American cohort eagerly embraced the Implementation Phase and the Peer Support Phase of our 18-month program. Throughout these periods, we continued to meet with the cohort to foster group bonding, share knowledge, and hear updates on each participant's progress. To continue offering valuable learning opportunities, we organized two webinars on topics the participant groups had expressed interest in exploring further, including coffee processing and social media for coffee enterprises. These sessions were led by independent experts in their respective fields.

During one-on-one interviews held at the closing of the Peer Support Phase, Latin American participants further reported that TCC's approach to partnership gave them an enhanced sense of self-confidence and pride in their work. It was the first time that most of the leaders were able to spark a project that was conceived of, designed, and implemented entirely by the community - a change that they described as welcome as it differed from typical top-down models of development. Two participant leaders highlighted how crucial it had been for their communities and their projects to have freedom in deciding what to use funding for, as it allowed them to overcome unexpected challenges and/or put money towards key elements of their strategic plans that other organizations were not open to funding, such as the salaries of their members.

This feeling was also shared by East African participants, who expressed an appreciation of TCC's trust in them and their communities. This trust was built over the first six months of the Incubator through group sessions and individual monthly check-in calls, where we discussed project plans and answered questions arising from various Incubator assignments.



Participating organizations in both cohorts actively engaged with other groups in their region and sought ways to explore synergies. This helped reaffirm one of the Incubator's main goals, which is to enable regional connections, peer-learning, and co-creation opportunities. Among Latin American participants, the strongest connections were built around project similarities, in particular, between Biblioteca Girasol and Asoamazonas, whose focuses are, in part, to foster education and community among local youth via the establishment of community libraries. Meanwhile, in East Africa, one organization leader was particularly eager to explore ways in which Incubator participants could discuss collaboration opportunities. This is a goal of ours at TCC in the months to come. Going forward, Latin American participants will have the chance to establish stronger ties with one another and exchange knowledge through the Alumni Network. Simultaneously, the East African cohort will continue to meet monthly for co-learning and collaboration before they join the Alumni Network themselves upon completion of the Incubator.

Finally, in the next few months, we will welcome a new Incubator cohort from Latin America and continue to accompany the East African groups in their project implementation and reporting processes. We will also use the learning from this report to better serve the needs of Incubator participants and alumni.

Thank you for your ongoing support. We look forward to sharing updates in the coming months.





Next Steps

East African Cohort moves onto the Implementation Phase

After completing the Learning and Design Phase, the four groups in the East African cohort are now leading their own projects as part of the Implementation Phase. During this nine-month period, each group will carry out the project they designed alongside their community, based on their own strategic plans, project proposals, project budgets, and associated monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The groups will meet monthly with TCC, both as a cohort and individually, to discuss the progress made and questions that may arise.

Onboarding a New Latin American Cohort

In parallel to supporting the East African cohort during their Implementation Phase, we have launched a call for applications for the Incubator's next Latin American cohort. We have already received a number of applications for the 2024-2025 Incubator and have begun interviewing potential candidates. We are excited to meet all of these candidates and expect to onboard six new groups for the 2024-2025 cohort. The selected participants will begin the six-month Learning and Design Phase in April 2024.

Alumni Network

This year, we launched the TCC Alumni Network, a virtual space for learning and connection. So far, all Latin American groups have joined and will now have the opportunity to foster long-term relationships with TCC and other Incubator alumni. These groups will also have the chance to further their community initiatives, expand their networks, continue learning, and work together to create more opportunities and engagement with other professionals in the coffee sector. The Alumni Network will additionally offer alumni the opportunity to i) apply for grants to further their community-led initiatives, ii) receive mentorship from industry professionals, iii) provide mentorship to other Incubator participants, iv) utilize TCC fiscal sponsorship, v) take part in webinars and learning opportunities, and vi) receive discounts on coffee education courses.

Themed Incubator

Partnerships

In the past year, the TCC team has discussed innovative ways to tailor the Incubator experience even further and better meet the unique needs and desires of coffee-growing communities. This has led us to consider the possibility of introducing theme- and country-specific Incubators in collaboration with specific partners. We are excited at the prospect of customizing the program further and are open to considering any variant that still aligns with our core mission to invest in locally-designed projects. As we envision growth in this direction, we invite our partners, funders, and allies to share their proposals and ideas. You can reach us at tessa@thechaincollaborative.org.

Get Involved

Support the Program

There are many ways to support TCC! If you are passionate about investment in local leaders and challenging top-down power dynamics in the coffee sector, please consider:

- Becoming a financial donor: We partner with individuals, companies, and foundations at all levels of support.
- Providing in-kind donations: Even if you can't support financially, companies support us by providing in-kind donations for our auction fundraisers.
- Applying for our Fellowship program: Become part of our team and directly support incredible local leaders.
- Support our Alumni Network: Through mentorship, workshops, course discounts, and more.

To learn more about these options, contact us today.

We are Always Looking for Future Incubator Participants

Do you know a local leader of a community-based organization in a coffee-growing community? If so, we would love to meet them.

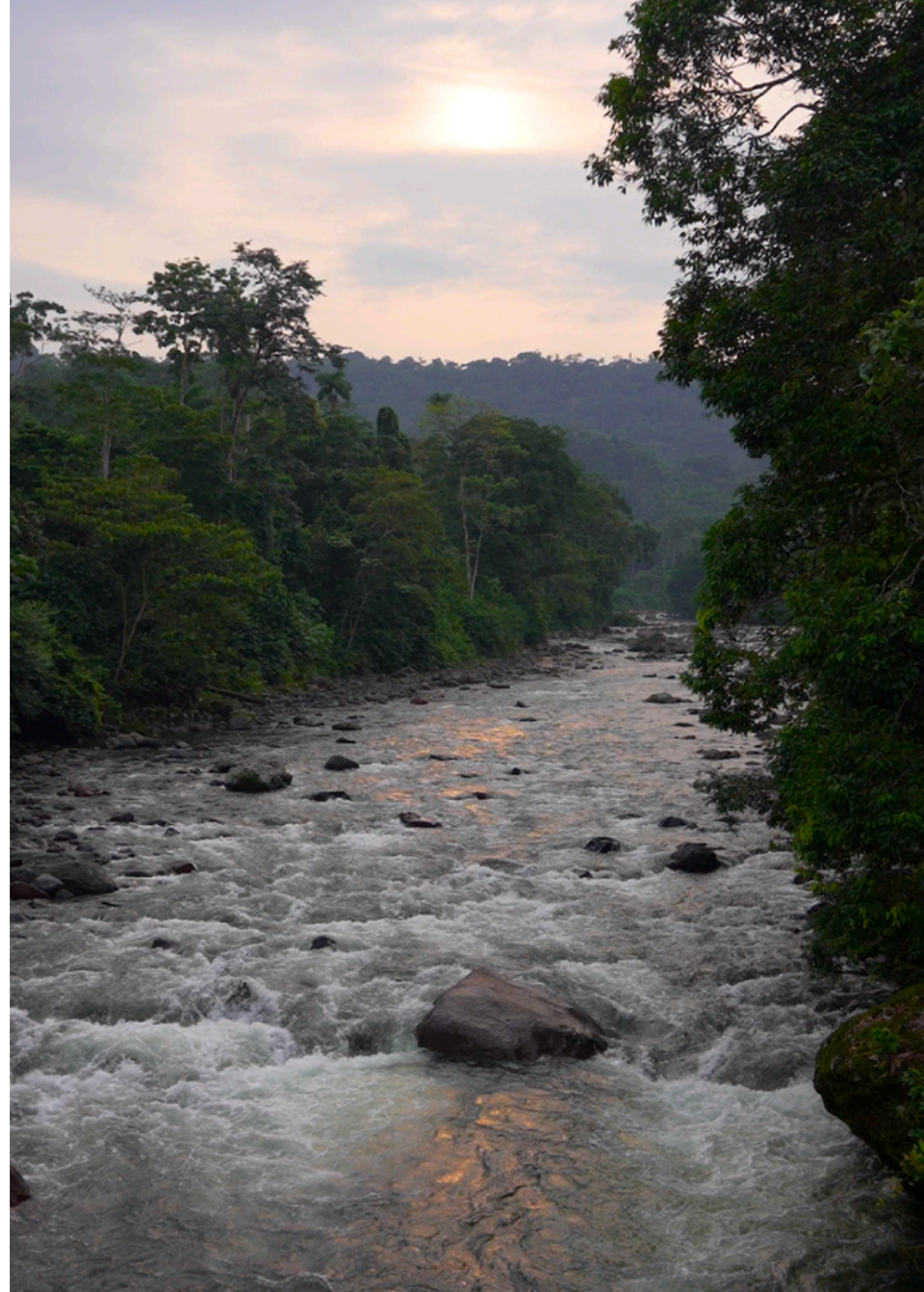
We specifically look for leaders who:

- Lead organizations that have struggled to access opportunities, connections, and funding due to systemic barriers.
- Have strong community ties and enjoy working with others.
- Are interested in determining project priorities through a collective and participatory community process.

If this sounds like you or someone you know, contact tessa@thechaincollaborative.org to connect.

Spread the Word

You can follow TCC on Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn to keep up with our work and share it with others.



Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to our generous 2023 supporters, who have each contributed to the activation of community-led change and have put change-making power into the hands of local leaders.





THE CHAIN
collaborative

Thank You