



Community-Led Development

Incubator Report

2024





The Chain Collaborative

About

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 communities beyond improved coffee production, and intentionally resources local leaders to develop culturally-specific solutions that create social, economic, and environmental impact.

About our CLD Incubator

Through our 18-month Community-Led Development Incubator program, we build relationships with emerging organizations in coffee-growing regions of Latin America and East & Central Africa, providing access to often first-time funding for their community-driven initiatives. Participants complete three program phases over the course of 18 months, which allow 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.



CLD Incubator since it started

18

Incubator participants

28

Incubator applications received

11

Countries represented in the Incubator

270k

USD invested in community-led projects

6

Projects focused on improved infrastructure

11

Projects leading to increases in income

4

Projects leading to improved access to education

13

Projects leading to increases in participation from women and youth

8

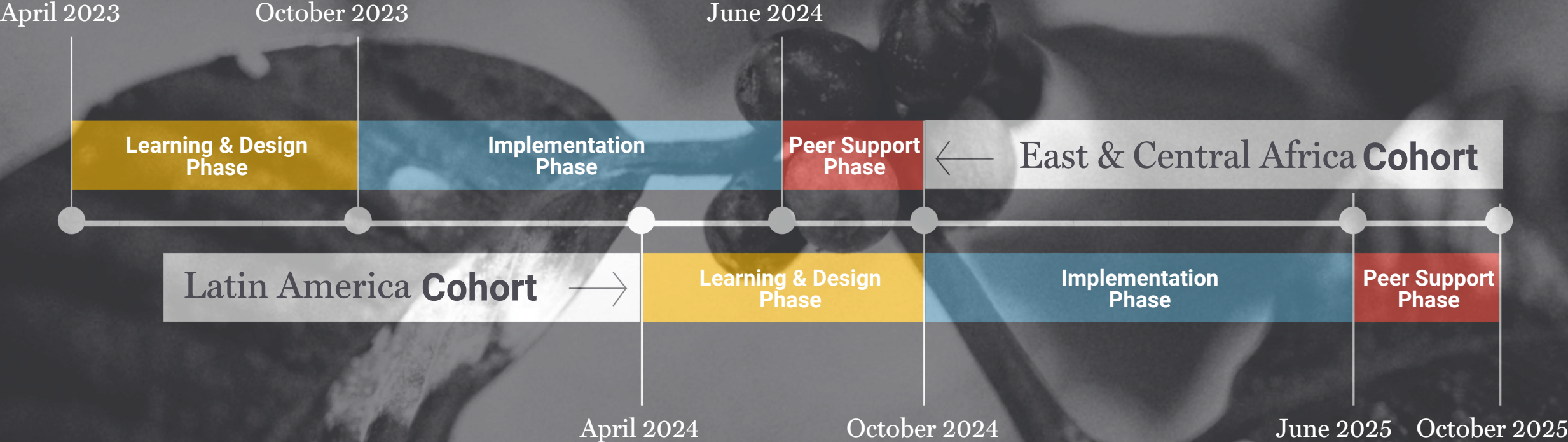
Projects leading to increases in food security/sovereignty

7

Projects leading to increases in climate resilience

CLD Incubator

Current Timeline





2024 - 2025 Latin America Cohort

In April 2024, we welcomed eight coffee-growing communities from Ecuador, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Honduras, and Guatemala into our 2024-2025 Latin America Incubator. During the six-month Learning & Design Phase—the first of three program phases—each organization designed projects based on their community's priorities. Throughout this initial stage, local leaders engaged in several key activities: they conducted strategic visioning sessions with their communities to build consensus on organizational priorities and project plans, developed comprehensive project budgets, and designed monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track impact. All participating communities have now completed this first phase and have received funding, and have officially entered the nine-month Implementation Phase—the second of three program phases.

Meet the cohort →

Casa del Puma

Napo, Ecuador

Casa del Puma is a farmers association located in the community of Mushullacta, Napo Province, Ecuador. Comprising 12 families, its members grow organic coffee, bananas, and other crops, ensuring both income and food security. To address challenges such as environmental degradation, out-migration, and low incomes, the association has developed a comprehensive action plan, which includes forest restoration activities and an experiential learning school for children. Through the latter, students not only learn about traditional school subjects, but also about coffee production and forest protection through a hands-on approach.

As part of the Incubator, Casa del Puma is now implementing a multifaceted project that aims to provide additional income to community members and support food security. The main element of the project is a chicken-rearing initiative that includes providing each family with 100 chicks, training on poultry husbandry, and the materials and space needed for organic fertilizer production from chicken manure. The association will also supply a variety of coffee and vegetable seeds to all families, along with technical advice for proper seed management and care. Finally, Casa del Puma plans to purchase a coffee roasting machine and a heat-sealing machine to send coffee samples to potential buyers.

“In the past, the trees in the area were cut down; now we are working to restore and create edible forests and to work the land like our ancestors did. We want to leave a good legacy for the next generation, both in terms of coffee production and culture.”

– José Narváez





“We support organic farming and provide employment opportunities in agriculture for young people as a way to avoid migration. The youths who stay and make a living in the community become an example for others, who might choose to stay as well.”

– Eduardo Cáceres



Combrifol

Marcala, Honduras

Cooperativa Mixta Brisas de la Frontera Limitada (COMBRIFOL) is a coffee cooperative located in Marcala, Honduras, a rural area near the border with El Salvador. One of the biggest challenges they are facing is rising production and export costs, which is limiting the incomes and livelihoods of their members. To address this challenge, for their Incubator project, COMBRIFOL decided to focus on building capacity to produce their own organic fertilizer. By sourcing the raw materials to produce their own fertilizer and selling it to their members at a reduced cost, COMBRIFOL plans to reduce production expenses for their farmers, and increase their own revenue as an organization. Additionally, as the cooperative aims to see better coffee quality and yields as a result of improved fertilizer application, the project will further contribute to income increases from enhanced coffee production. Finally, a key objective of COMBRIFOL is to increase the involvement of women and youth in their cooperative. In designing their organic fertilizer project, Combrifol chose to train youth in the production of the fertilizer in order to equip them with the skills they would need to become employed to create this fertilizer in an ongoing fashion.

Comité de Jóvenes

Zamora, Ecuador

Located in a remote section of the Zamora Chinchipe province of Ecuador, Comité de Jóvenes (Youth Committee) was established in 2015 by the youngest members of a larger coffee association called Asociación Agropecuaria Artesanal de Productores Orgánicos Cuencas del Río Mayo (ACRIM). They formed as a means to offer additional services to young people and encourage local youth to engage in coffee production.

Through the CLD Incubator program, Comité de Jóvenes is planting 15 hectares of specialty coffee varieties, including Typica Mejorada and Bourbon Sidra, to enhance coffee quality and competitiveness. To achieve this, members will engage in trainings on topics such as soil analysis, seed selection, nursery management, and other considerations for future scalability. These efforts are designed to deepen members' knowledge of coffee production and improve their decision-making about plant care, laying the groundwork for the adoption of innovative agricultural practices and increased production capacity. Recognizing the importance of diversifying the roles and expertise of their members in the coffee industry, Comité de Jóvenes is also prioritizing providing training opportunities on barista skills and cupping. They hope to not only have more control over their own coffee production in the future, but also generate additional employment opportunities within the community.


“Our goal is to support young people – the sons and daughters of our members – by encouraging their involvement in coffee production. We aim to help them establish a livelihood through coffee farming, offering them a sustainable alternative for generating income.”

– Willan Abad



Damas de San Ignacio

Jaén, Perú



“We came together as a women’s group within the larger cooperative to encourage the participation of women in the social, business, and productive management of the organization, working as a team to improve the lives of our families. In 2016 we started marketing our own coffee brand, ‘Las Damas de San Ignacio.’”

– Olinda Jaramillo

Damas de San Ignacio is the women’s committee within the Cooperativa Agraria Frontera San Ignacio, located in San Ignacio, Cajamarca, Peru. Established in 2012, the committee consists of 119 women and focuses on supporting women in the social, business, and production aspects of organic coffee farming. Since 2016, Damas de San Ignacio has been exporting their own coffee brand to Europe and the United States, showcasing the quality of their work on the international stage.

As part of the CLD Incubator, Damas de San Ignacio is launching a cuy (guinea pig) husbandry initiative, providing all cooperative members a sustainable source of meat and manure. The manure will be used as organic fertilizer for coffee crops, improving soil fertility, promoting sustainable, organic farming practices, and reducing input costs for farmers. The project includes building a new facility for rearing over 100 female cuy, various males, and their offspring. A series of workshops will provide cooperative members with hands-on training in cuy care, while on-site technical and veterinary support will ensure project success.



Fondo Páez

Cauca, Colombia

Fondo Paez is a Fairtrade-certified farmer association from Cauca, Colombia growing organic coffee since the late 1990s. In order to mitigate the impact of climate change and the migration this causes, the organization has initiated a transformative agroecological project that reinforces sustainable coffee production for its 523 indigenous Páez member families.

The organization has decided to leverage Incubator funds to contribute as needed to a larger experimental farms initiative that is ongoing at their cooperative. To date, they have designated two experimental farms to serve as training hubs for producers, where they can learn about sustainable coffee cultivation, livestock farming, sustainable tourism, and biodiversity promotion, among other things. Using the experimental farms as a living classroom, Fondo Paez is training members in both traditional farming and modern soil management techniques in order to enhance organic production, reduce chemical use, and improve sustainable practice overall. The cooperative is also establishing two apiculture stations on the experimental farms to pilot honey production as a food sovereignty and alternative income solution for member farmers.

Simultaneously, Fondo Paez is leveraging the experimental farms to establish tried-and-true infrastructure. In particular, they are establishing a nursery to grow coffee and non-coffee seedlings, which will be distributed to members.

"Young people in our region are increasingly turning to illegal crops or seeking more lucrative opportunities outside the agricultural sector. As an organization, our goal is to provide employment opportunities for youth in our community. We have recently established 31 new plots for organic production."

– Ivan Guegia





"Our goal as an organization is to ensure that each family lives with dignity and that our youth become integrated into the coffee sector, helping sustain the industry we have fought for all these years."

– Estefani Zapata



Núcleo Baní

Peravia, Dominican Republic

Núcleo Bani, founded after Cyclone David's devastating impact in 1979, unites 340 coffee producers in the Peravia province, Dominican Republic with a shared commitment to resilience, innovation, and community sustainability. Originally established to help farmers restore their coffee crops, Núcleo Bani now leads initiatives that holistically strengthen coffee communities through diverse, impactful projects.

In an effort to build sustainable livelihoods, Núcleo Bani has developed a project as part of the CLD Incubator for the improvement and diversification of 25 coffee farms.

First, they will introduce fruit tree seedlings to member farms, including lemons, oranges, coconuts, and mangoes. This will not only enhance economic resilience but also create a food network that sustains families.


Second, they will provide quality-focused training to empower farmers to increase the market value of their coffee. Third, they will purchase 13 de-pulping machines to improve processing capabilities and final product quality at some farms; through equitable selection, the association is planning to prioritize the families that are most in need. The beneficiaries of the de-pulping machines include 3 women and 7 youth.

Tinamit Tolimán

Sololá, Guatemala

Tinamit Tolimán is an association based in San Lucas Tolimán, Guatemala, primarily focused on coffee production and commercialization. The organization plays a crucial role in the local economy, where approximately 90% of families depend on coffee farming. Since its establishment, the association has been committed to sustainable development and the well-being of its members, promoting innovative and responsible practices throughout the coffee value chain to improve living conditions in the community.

As part of the CLD Incubator, the association has launched a pisciculture project designed to improve the livelihoods of its members. The initiative focuses on constructing tanks to raise tilapia and other fish, helping to enhance food security while generating additional income for the community. It also includes building a warehouse and office space to store materials for the fish and house the fish themselves once they've matured and are ready for sale. Beyond boosting food production, Tinamit Tolimán aims to create new job opportunities through this project, especially for young people and women, who have historically faced limited employment options outside of coffee production.



"We will succeed as a community by continuing to work together, upholding the founding principles of our cooperative and ensuring sustainable wellbeing for all."

- Vivian Cuc





Yuyarina Pacha

Orellana, Ecuador

Yuyarina Pacha is a community library in the Ecuadorian Amazon that serves children in the rural communities of Huaticocha and Santa Lucia. Huaticocha is home to their physical library space, while the team travels to Santa Lucia to offer activities for children. In both communities, Yuyarina Pacha's primary objective is to cultivate a love for reading and learning among local children. As intra-familial physical and psychological violence are prevalent, the library also intends to provide children with a safe, welcoming space where they can play, learn, feel supported, and simply be kids. Currently, the library hosts activities twice a week in both Huaticocha and Santa Lucia, including independent reading sessions, games, and workshops covering various topics.

“There is a lot of violence within the families in the communities we serve. It is difficult, but we are working to build trust with the children and make them feel safe and supported.”

- Yomaira Guaman

The leaders of Yuyarina Pacha now aspire to strengthen the library's educational offerings, and establish additional alliances with local and regional organizations. This includes developing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the impact of the offered activities; attending events focused on cultural projects; leveraging social media to raise awareness about the library and its offerings, and develop a business strategy that allows for a more structured approach to their operations. They have also been working to build a new library space.



Learning & Design Phase

Latin America in numbers

8

coffee groups from
six countries

12

hours of
capacity-building and
co-learning as a
cohort

41

strategic documents
produced and refined

100%

of Incubator
participants reporting
development of new
leadership skills

8 of 8

Incubator participants
reporting development
of new partnerships

8 of 8

Incubator participants
reporting satisfaction,
effectiveness, and
usefulness of Incubator
program

54

hours of one-to-one
support and
feedback

3462

people to be
impacted by resulting
projects (indirect
beneficiaries)

100%

of Incubator
participants
reporting pride in
their work

100%

of Incubator
participants reporting
confidence (in selves,
community, or
organization)

8 of 8

Incubator participants
reporting feelings of
independence and/or
freedom (to discover, to
act, to innovate)



Latin America 2024-2025

First year

Learnings & Takeaways →

Increased participation of women and youth

During interviews, most participating leaders reported increased participation of women and youth in their organizational activities. They attributed this growth primarily to their organization's involvement in the Incubator, specifically noting how their work during the Learning & Design Phase allowed for dynamic leadership and strong community involvement and commitment. The visible dedication of organizational leaders encouraged broader community member participation, particularly among women and youth, who also began stepping into leadership roles. One women-led group emphasized that their project served as concrete evidence of what women can achieve when given trust and resources. Their success not only boosted their self-confidence but also motivated other women to participate in activities, both related to their specific project and across the broader organization.

Flexibility of funding and project selection

Participating local leaders in the Incubator consistently emphasized the value of having autonomy over both project selection and fund allocation. Multiple Incubator participants noted that this flexibility allowed them to design projects that truly aligned with their organization's mission and local context, and their social, cultural, and environmental needs. One leader shared how his organization had previously declined funding opportunities that conflicted with their organic farming practices. Another described a previous experience where a different donor unilaterally modified their budget and project activities without community consultation. They highlighted how TCC's approach, by contrast, enabled them to design projects that genuinely addressed local needs with a full understanding of the community's context.





Strengthened community and local networks

A key finding from the interviews with participants was how the Incubator's suggested community consultation process strengthened their relationships. The Learning & Design Phase encourages leaders to collaborate with community members in project design, which not only ensures community-led approaches, but also enhances community cohesion. Leaders reported that in addition to strengthening community ties, their Incubator participation attracted interest from neighbors and local institutions, leading to expanded networks, increased collaboration, and new alliances that further strengthened their communities. For instance, one participating cooperative is in the process of signing an MoU with their town council to expand their Incubator project. Additionally, two producer associations have initiated discussions with new coffee buyers, with one association already having exported 250 bags of coffee.

Peer-to-peer learning opportunities

Local leaders consistently highlighted how the Incubator provided them with opportunities to learn from peers and connect with fellow coffee farmers in their region. One leader specifically noted that TCC's model inspired curiosity about projects being implemented in other communities; this leader suggested the creation of a platform where participating groups could independently share information and photos while exploring others' projects to facilitate co-learning and knowledge exchange. The TCC team is currently exploring ways to strengthen connections along these lines as part of the Alumni Network, and plans to focus in 2025 on how we can foment networking opportunities between current and former Incubator participants.



East & Central Africa 2023-2024

The East & Central Africa cohort completed all three phases of the 2023-2024 CLD Incubator program in November and has now joined the Alumni Network, a remote community through which past Incubator participants can continue fostering long-term relationships with TCC, other Incubator alumni, and additional sustainability and justice-minded professionals in the coffee sector. Together, alumni have the opportunity to further their community initiatives, expand their networks, continue learning, and work in tandem to co-create more opportunities and alliances. To assess the impact of the CLD Incubator and gain insights from participants, the TCC team conducted individual interviews with local leaders at the end of the program. Here are some of the key learnings and takeaways from this first East & Central Africa cohort.

Learnings & Takeaways →

From personal growth to community impact

All interviewed participants in TCC's first East & Central Africa CLD Incubator cohort reported that participating in the program had strengthened their leadership skills in multiple ways. First, the new hands-on experiences they gained while working with their communities boosted their confidence and deepened their pride in their work. This growth inspired them to envision new ways to support their communities through additional projects. Second, they noted that the cohort structure of the program proved particularly valuable. One interviewee explained how engaging with leaders from diverse cultural backgrounds during cohort calls fostered greater awareness of the challenges that other organizations are experiencing. Moreover, the Incubator's flexible funding model empowered leaders with a stronger sense of ownership, ultimately deepening their commitment to successful project completion and expanding their community impact.





Greater visibility and broader reach

Local leader participants shared that one key outcome of implementing their Incubator projects was increased visibility for their organizations. Whether they were building infrastructure or organizing community events focused on mental health, their efforts attracted interest from neighboring communities and potential partners for future initiatives. This visibility also created new opportunities for leaders to collaborate with their own communities in diverse ways. Together, they were able to explore new possibilities with community members and think strategically about the future. According to interviewed local leaders, the Incubator also fostered connections among participants themselves. One participant shared that she began to consider collaborating with another participant on future initiatives, as their organizational missions aligned and could complement each other.

In-person meetings and longer reporting periods

Among the suggestions made by local leaders during our interviews, two stood out as particularly significant. The first, echoed by several interviewees and consistently raised over the two years of the Incubator, was the desire for in-person cohort meetings to foster collaboration and enhance peer-to-peer learning opportunities—a possibility we are now actively exploring. The second suggestion came from a leader who advocated for extending the implementation and reporting period, noting that while they completed most planned activities in their agriculture-related project, measuring impact within the current timeframe proved challenging. While final reports must be submitted at the end of the 18-month program, local leaders are only requested to report on their achievements to date and are encouraged to continue sharing project updates through the Alumni Network. Nevertheless, we will explore opportunities for developing more specific timelines for some participants on an as-needed basis.



East & Central Africa 2023-2024

Project highlights



Girl Power Foundation Uganda

Kanungu, Uganda

Through their 2023-2024 Incubator project, Girl Power Foundation Uganda (GPFU) sought to engage over 500 community members in order to promote gender equity and raise awareness about mental health. To meet their goals, GPFU launched sports competitions to promote mental and physical wellness, and led music, dance, and drama performances to highlight important community issues as related to gender and mental health. GPFU's leader, Winnie Ainembaabazi, shared that the planned activities exceeded her expectations, with outstanding turnout and participation. Across all events, GPFU brought together:

- Over **2,000** participants from **six** villages
- **397** participants for the music, dance, and drama events
- **92** participants for football and netball games
- **720** people attended community dialogues in **six** villages
- **700** event spectators

Additional Achievements and Impact:

Increased Awareness: GPFU noted that community-wide understanding and discourse on domestic violence and mental health issues improved significantly.

Stigma Reduction: Participants noted that artistic expression and engagement with sports contributed to a reduced stigma associated with talk about mental health challenges.

New Help-Seeking Behaviors: GPFU noted that their initiative motivated many individuals to seek help and support for mental health concerns.

Promotion of Holistic Wellbeing: GPFU indicated that the integration of physical activity with mental health and gender equity awareness fostered a sense of holistic well-being among participants.



Abateraninkunga ba Sholi

Muhanga, Rwanda

As part of the 2023-2024 Incubator, Sholi designed a project to support young single mothers within their community and reintegrate them into the local economy. The project had two main components. First, they provided 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 members' income until they could see the profits from the new coffee production, Sholi fostered alternative income options through skill development in artisan crafting and goat farming, two areas the women identified as being viable and interesting to them.


- **72** single mothers between the ages of 19 and 30 years—from the villages of Nyarubuye, Karehe, Kibumba, Rubimba, and Gitwondwe—received training on organic coffee agricultural practices
- **5,000** coffee trees and **2,000** shade trees established on the shared land provided to the women
- **100%** of women beneficiaries reported a knowledge increase as related to coffee production
- **70** female participants attended training on handicrafts and goat rearing
- **80** goats provided to the women participants (there are now 146 goats)
- **100%** of interviewed participants reported a knowledge increase as related to goat farming and handicraft production
- **100%** of interviewed participants shared that handicraft activities made them feel less stressed
- **370** people indirectly benefiting from the two projects






Looking ahead

What's Next →



Latin America cohort moves onto the **Implementation Phase**

Now that all project documents have been submitted by current participants, the 2024-2025 Latin America Incubator cohort has officially entered the nine-month Implementation Phase. TCC has released funds to all participating organizations, and communities will be executing their planned project activities until the middle of 2025. During this period, participants will continue to meet with TCC and their cohort peers every two months. These conversations are a chance for participants to share challenges and lessons learned, and provide updates on progress towards their objectives. TCC will also schedule monthly individual calls with each organization to address any additional needs for support. Finally, we will also offer participants the chance to attend lectures and discussions on topics identified by them as relevant. Previous cohorts have requested sessions about coffee processing, leveraging social media for their businesses, and market access for producer organizations and cooperatives.



Onboarding a new **East & Central Africa cohort**

Our CLD Incubator will welcome its fourth cohort this April, the 2025-2026 East & Central Africa cohort. In recent months, we have been actively networking with coffee partners to identify potential participants, and we have already engaged with several promising local leaders. While some of the potential participants were direct contacts of our funding partners, others learned about TCC's Incubator program through past participants and social media. Following the application deadline on February 7th, our team will conduct interviews to select the final participants by mid-March. We anticipate bringing four to six local leaders into what will be our second East & Central Africa Incubator cohort.



The Alumni Network **welcomes a new leader**

As the 2023-2024 East & Central Africa cohort transitions from the CLD Incubator program into the Alumni Network, we're thrilled to announce Winnie Ainembaabazi as the new regional Alumni Network leader. As founder of Girl Power Foundation Uganda (GPFU) and an inspiring participant in the Incubator sessions, Winnie brings a natural talent for building community and fostering connections. Her two-year term will overlap with current Alumni Network leader Itzel Mendoza, who pioneered the role last year representing the 2022-2023 Latin America cohort. During their shared tenure, Winnie and Itzel will collaborate to design activities and coordinate Alumni Network community convening calls, ensuring that the participant-led network evolves to best serve its members' needs and interests.



Thank you!

Acknowledgements →

Supporting partners

Learn how you can support our work:

thechaincollaborative.org

