



Community-Led Development Incubator Report

20
25

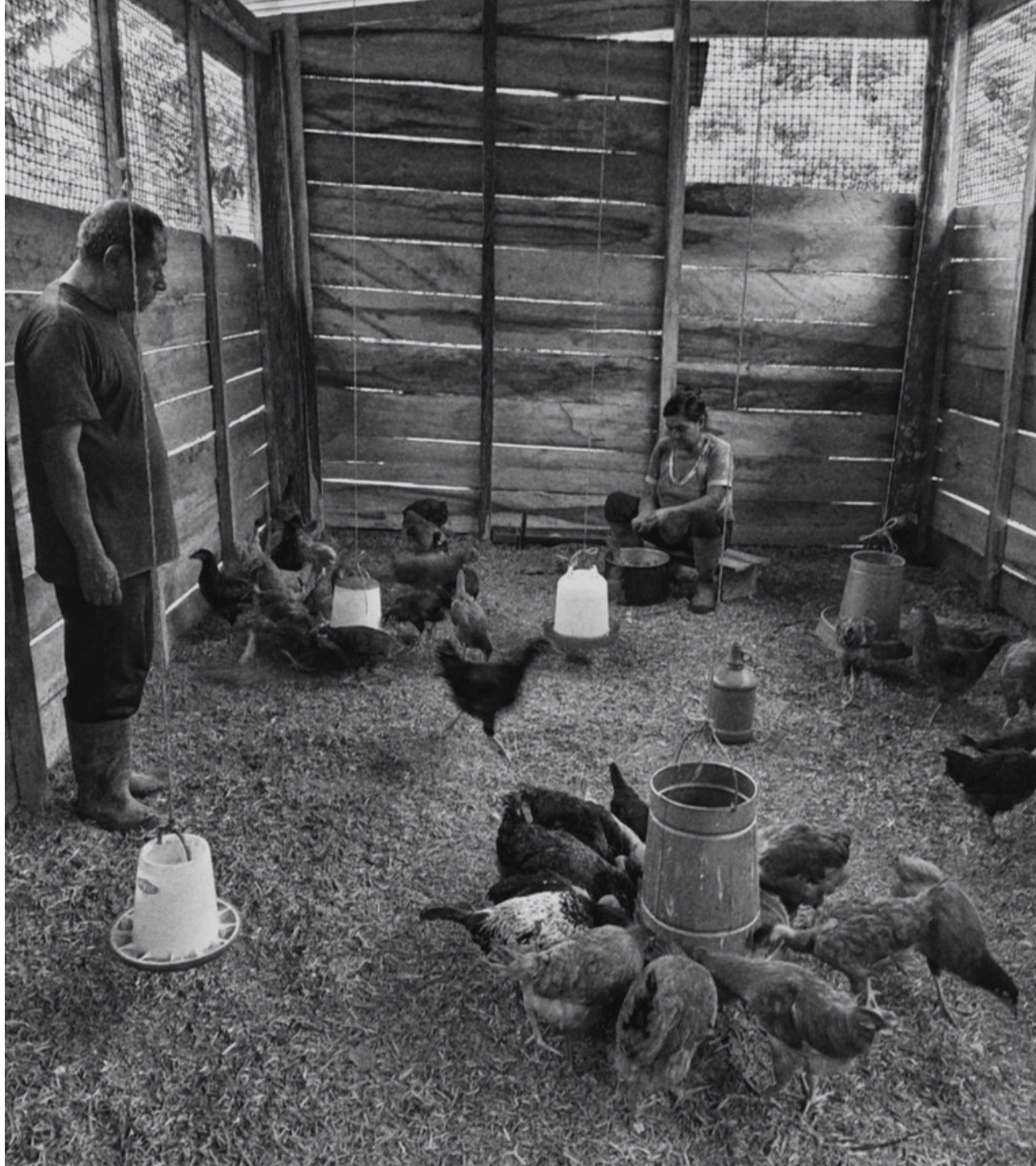


About The Chain Collaborative

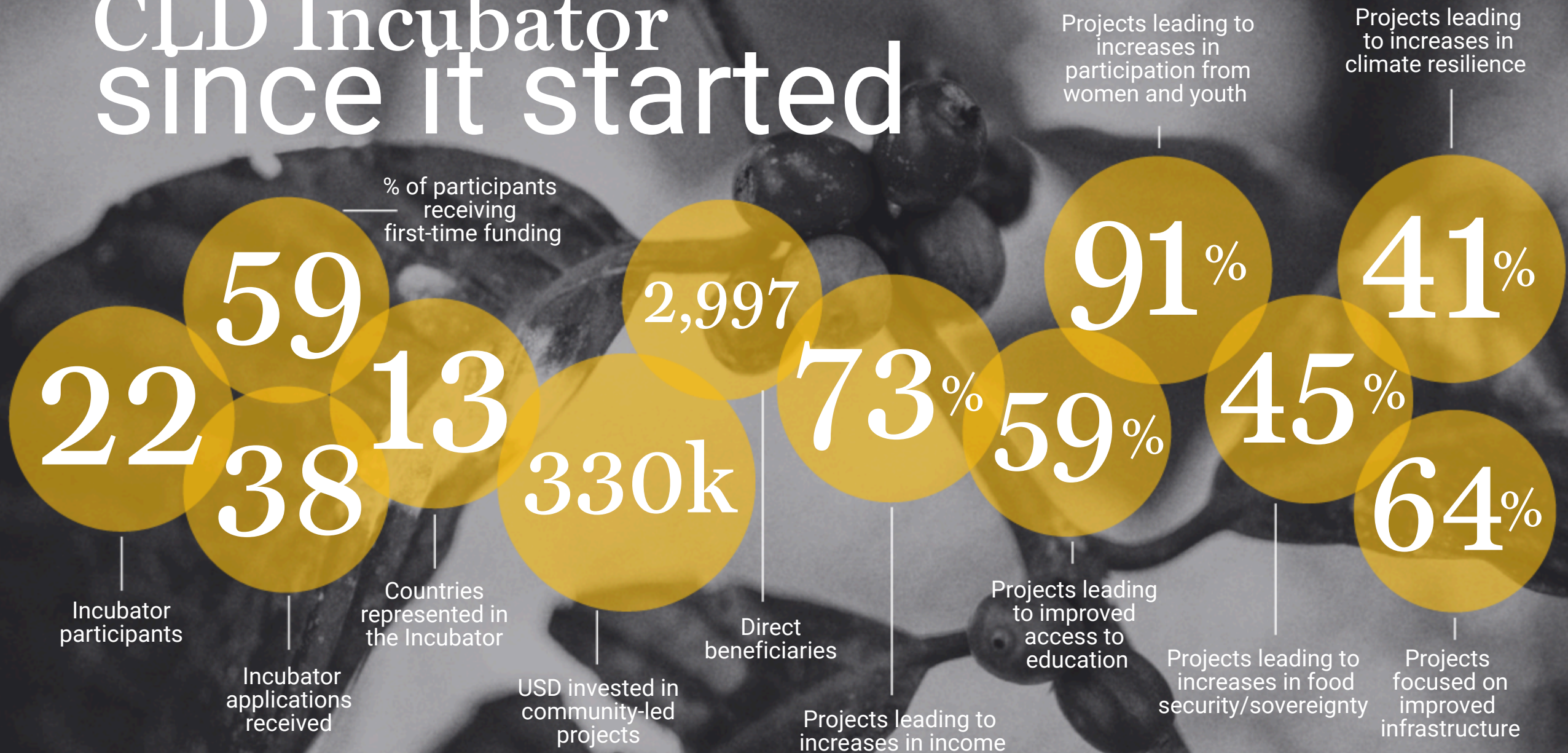
The Chain Collaborative (TCC) is a US-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to co-create opportunities and strengthen capacities for community-led change in the coffee sector. By investing in local leaders of community-based organizations from coffee-growing regions in Latin America and East & Central Africa, we ensure that meaningful change originates from beneficiary communities themselves. Our model recognizes that a thriving coffee sector depends on more than just improved farming practices; it begins with thriving coffee communities, whereby community members are able to advocate for their rights, and design and implement their own culturally-specific solutions that reflect their true priorities, long-term visions, and deep expertise.

About our CLD Incubator

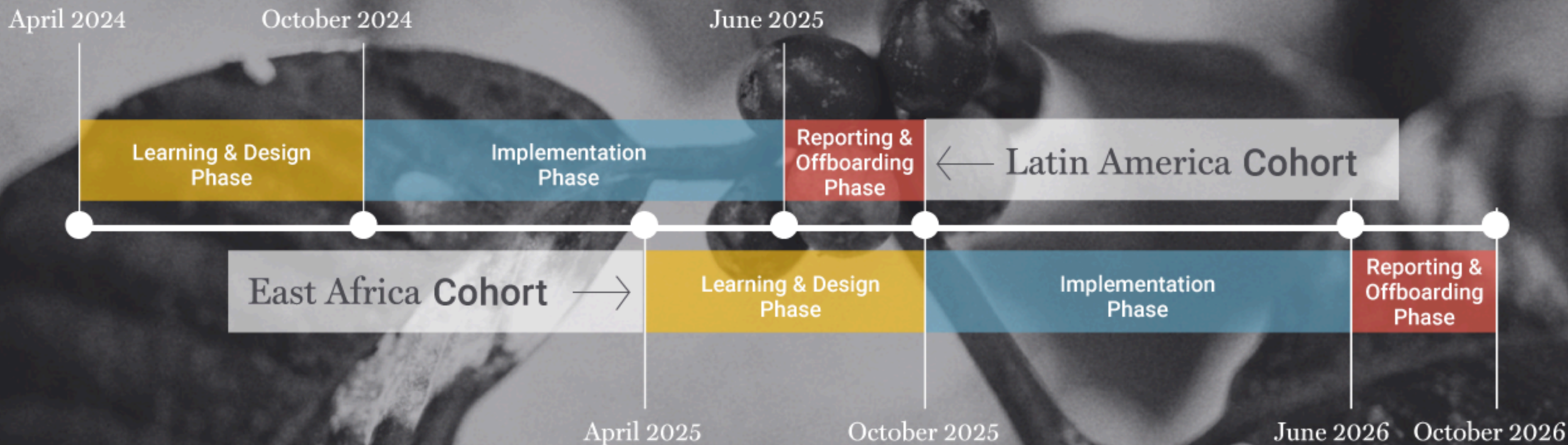
Through our Community-Led Development (CLD) Incubator program, TCC builds relationships with both long-standing and emerging organizations in coffee-growing regions of Latin America and East & Central Africa, providing access to often first-time funding for their community-driven initiatives. Participant organizations 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. At the close of the program, participants are able to join an ongoing TCC-led Alumni Network of change-makers in the coffee sector. This work allows global communities to combat intergenerational poverty and marginalization in the coffee sector on their own terms, according to their own visions for change.

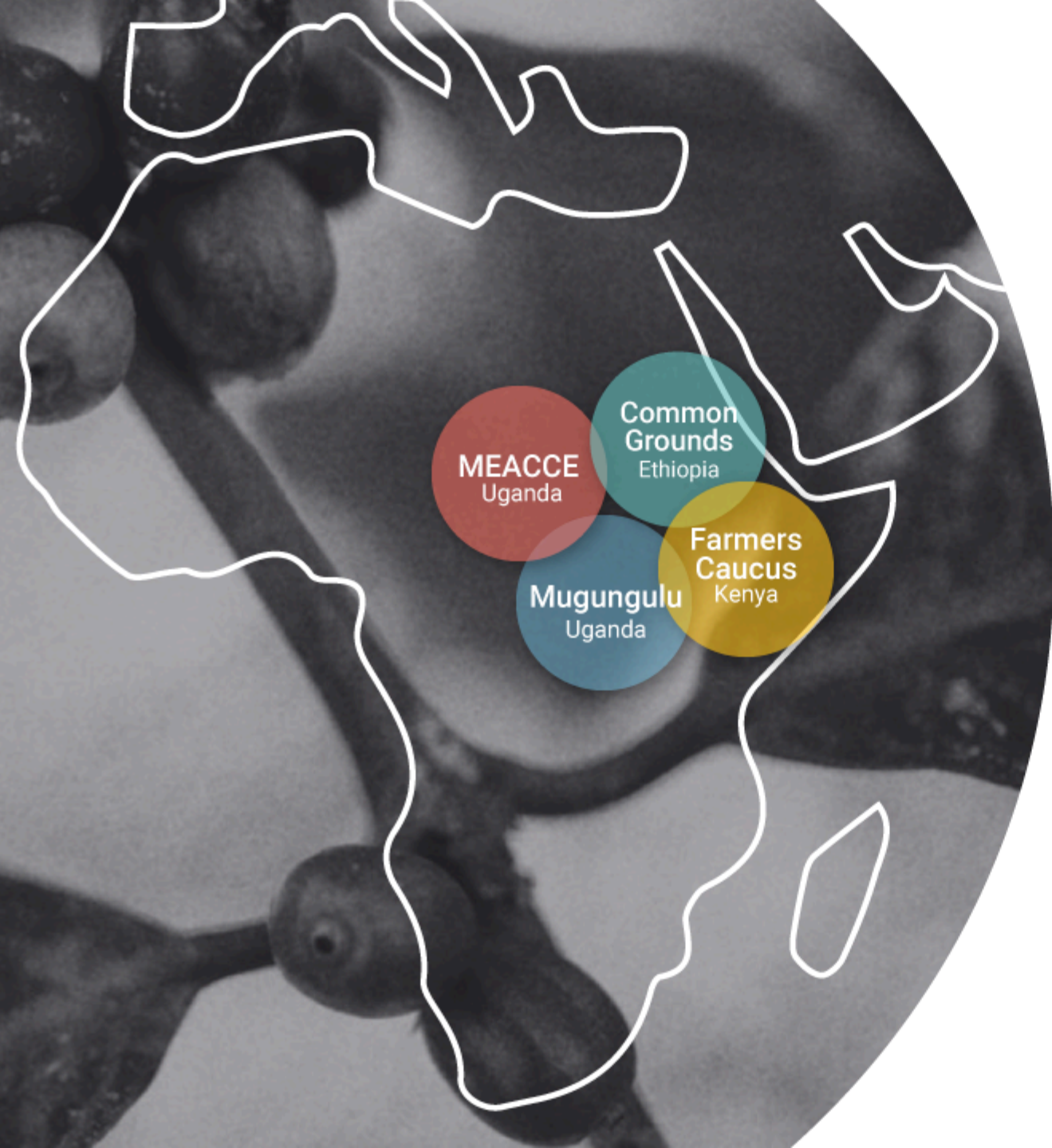


CLD Incubator since it started



2025 Timeline





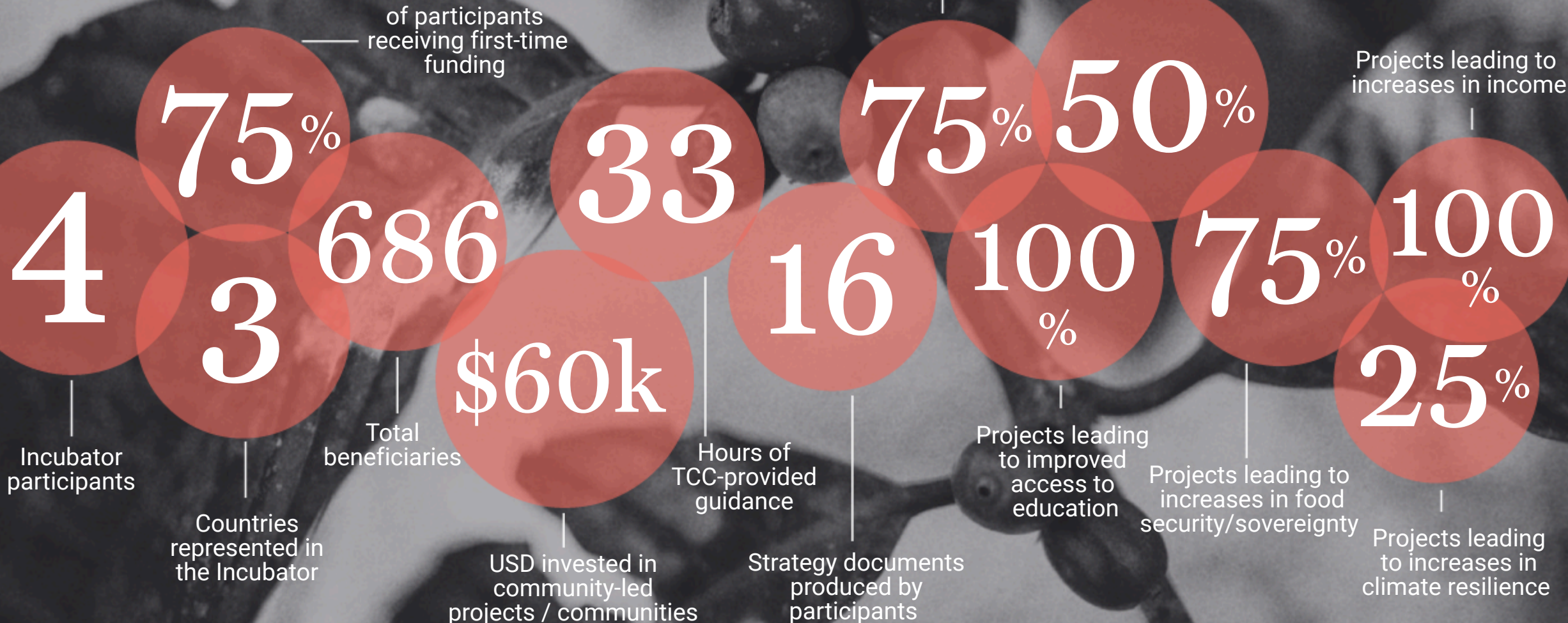
2025 - 2026 East Africa Cohort

In April 2025, we welcomed four community-based organizations into the 2025-2026 East Africa CLD Incubator cohort; the organizations hail from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. During the Incubator's six-month Learning & Design Phase—the first of three program phases—each participating organization engaged in several key activities with their community members. Specifically, they conducted strategic visioning sessions to build consensus on local priorities and project plans; developed comprehensive project budgets and timelines; and designed monitoring and evaluation tools to track impact. As of the end of 2025, all participating organizations have moved into the CLD Incubator's second phase—the Implementation Phase—and have received funding to begin carrying out their community-led projects.

Meet the cohort →

Participation in numbers

2025-2026 East Africa Cohort




Mugungulu

Uganda

Located in Mubende, Uganda, Mugungulu Farmers Group (MFG) was founded in 2015 by Gloria Kisakye in response to financial insecurity during the coffee off-season. To create steady income streams throughout the year, she launched a turkey rearing initiative alongside her other agricultural activities. As she learned about the endeavor through trial and error, she began to train fellow farmers, and MFG was born. It now has 19 active member families, and aims to improve the livelihoods of these families through income diversification.

As part of the CLD Incubator, MFG is launching two projects. The first, a chicken hatchery project, focused on the construction of a poultry house and the purchase of Kuroiler chickens. The group aims to distribute chicks to the community and train members on animal care; eventually, group members will generate additional income through the sale of eggs and poultry. Meanwhile, the group's second initiative is focused on the construction of additional drying beds and a storage facility for their coffee, with some funds set aside for the purchase of green coffee and red cherries, as well as new equipment. By purchasing coffee from the community and improving post-harvest care, MFG hopes to increase income from coffee.



“I dream of a thriving Mugungulu, where people don’t feel the need to move to the capital city. Instead, they have access to local economic opportunities, strong infrastructure, and quality education for their children. The ultimate goal is for families to thrive in place, rather than being forced to migrate for a better life.”

Susanna Namuli on dreams for her Mugungulu community



Common Grounds

Ethiopia

“The number of women in the supply chain decreases as more profit is added. Finding the right market and developing marketing strategies on our own has not been sustainable for women in coffee in Ethiopia. We want to offer consistent support to our community with a physical space where they can share ideas, learn, and gain certifications.”

Beamlak Bekele on why their project matters

Common Grounds, founded in 2025, is a dedicated group of women who work in the Ethiopian coffee value chain. Led by previous TCC Sustainability Fellow Beamlak Melesse Bekele, Ethiopia Women in Coffee (EWiC) co-founder Aynaddis Seyoum, and coffee professional Tsega Bekele, Common Grounds aims to improve access to knowledge, resources, and business skills-related training for Ethiopian female coffee stakeholders through mentorship and physical meeting spaces.


As part of the CLD Incubator, Common Grounds plans to build out an existing space in Addis Ababa where community members can gather, learn, and share resources to remain competitive. The hub will include an SCA-certified classroom where they will host the Green, Sensory, and Barista Skills modules of the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) Coffee Skills Program. Over the course of the Incubator's Implementation Phase, Common Grounds also plans to host a marketing course and an international cupping, equipping their community with tools to improve and promote their coffees to broader audiences.

Farmers Caucus

Kenya

Led by farmers Stephen Nendala, Catherine Olaka, and Habil Olaka, the Farmers Caucus is a group of 15 estate farmers in the Trans-Nzoia County of western Kenya. Their goal is to work together to create opportunities for their farms and communities, share lessons learned, and inspire each other toward improvement. At present, they are focused on building a shared methodology to support coffee worker families to create consistent, year-round income to meet essential needs, especially school fees.

Through the CLD Incubator, Farmers Caucus is strengthening livelihoods by helping worker families to develop diversified, alternative income streams that can complement their coffee income. The Farmers Caucus model combines practical inputs—such as seedlings, livestock, beehives, and other essential materials—with hands-on training tailored to each family's specific needs. Additionally, for families who hope to increase their income by growing crops, but lack the resources to lease land, Farmers Caucus will provide financial assistance for land acquisition. Together, these efforts are meant to expand economic opportunities in the region in a way that is sustainable and responsive to the priorities established by the worker community.

A black and white photograph of a woman with glasses, wearing a patterned top, writing on a whiteboard. The whiteboard has the text 'YDH', '21st June - 2025', 'STAFF - MEETING', and '① What does Success look like?'. A large yellow circle is overlaid on the image, containing a quote and a caption.

“It has helped be closer to the farmers....This led to learning their aspirations and frustrations while also showing them that they can achieve what they dream....There is more connection, respect, and a personal relationship. When I talk to peers/coffee farmers, they are impressed at the sense of community.”

Stephen Nendala on the impact of the Incubator program to date



MEACCE

Uganda

“I have gained confidence in TCC and our work because of the cohort meetings and as we start implementing the project. We are doing it together, with the community, and we typically have discussions before we do anything....I am proud of what we are doing because the community members love the project and some members have regained hope in the organization because of it.”

Tom Mogamu on engaging
his community

Mt. Elgon Agroforestry Communities Cooperative Enterprise Ltd. (MEACCE) is a farmer-owned coffee cooperative made up of over 3,800 members, organized into 13 primary groups across six districts in the Mt. Elgon region of Uganda. Formed in 2017 by Fairtrade farmers working to revive a former cooperative that had lapsed, MEACCE has since grown into a strong organization producing and marketing Fairtrade and organic Arabica coffee, as well as conventional Robusta coffee. As part of the CLD Incubator, MEACCE worked with their community to design a project that utilizes livestock to improve livelihoods through enhanced food security, soil fertility, and income. Each benefiting family will receive a cow, and learn about animal care, milk production, and use of manure. They will then apply the manure from the livestock to enhance the fertility of the soil on their coffee farms, ensuring improved organic certification compliance. Meanwhile, milk from the cows will aid with household food security, and may also provide supplemental income should families wish to sell milk to neighbors.



2025 - 2026 East Africa Cohort

Every year, TCC adjusts the CLD Incubator program to better meet the needs of participants. These improvements are guided by feedback gathered through individual interviews conducted at the end of the program's first phase—the six-month Learning & Design Phase—and at the end of the program overall. To date, participant insights have led TCC to provide simplified versions of certain project design and development tools, and to dedicate additional time to discussing complex elements of project planning, such as indicator design. The following section highlights some of the most relevant findings from the individual interviews conducted with participants of the 2025-2026 East Africa CLD Incubator cohort after their completion of the Learning & Design Phase.

Learnings & Takeaways —→



Higher levels of trust within the community

Incubator participants consistently noted that the strategic visioning exercises and project-related conversations they led in their communities as part of the CLD Incubator strengthened locally-based trust—both between organizational leaders and community members, and among community members themselves. The collaborative approach to project design emphasized by TCC also fostered a deeper sense of ownership, as community members began to take collective responsibility for activities and outcomes planning. Leaders from one participating organization also noticed a shift in community mindset. As a result of several conversations about project sustainability, community members approached project design with a more business-oriented perspective, and saw the Incubator project as an opportunity to build long-term economic growth.



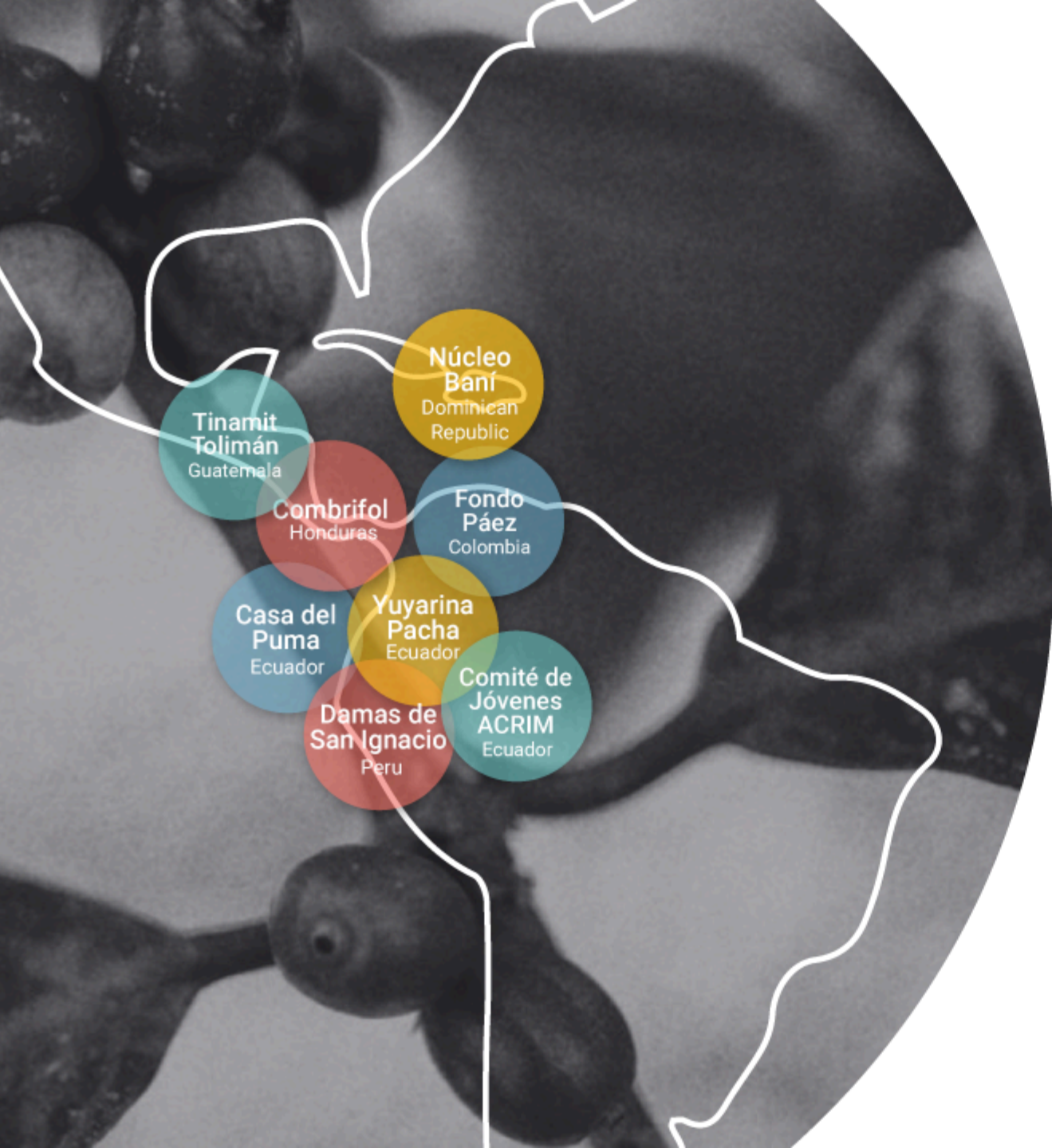
Building new skills and capabilities

Several participants noted that many of the tools, concepts, and ways of working introduced to them through the CLD Incubator were entirely new to them and their communities. While this occasionally presented challenges, particularly when developing project indicators or refining project budgets, it ultimately contributed to meaningful skill development. Incubator participants also emphasized that navigating these unfamiliar processes strengthened their business and leadership capacities. New skills ranged from using videoconferencing technology for the first time, to facilitating structured community consultation sessions, to opening bank accounts, all of which they viewed as instrumental for more effective project management going forward.



Tailored projects that address community priorities

Incubator participants expressed their appreciation for being able to design projects rooted in priorities identified by their own communities, rather than by external donors with limited understanding of local needs. This community-led approach was highlighted as highly relevant not only during post-Learning & Design Phase interviews, but also throughout the Learning & Design Phase itself. One participant, for example, stated that the CLD Incubator made community engagement more effective, as it provided participants with clear guidelines and tools to support collective decision-making; it also helped them to ensure that resources were used strategically and with a long-term community vision in mind. Similarly, one participant noted that working on deeply personal projects can make it tempting to rely on instinct or emotion. However, the Incubator provided a structured framework for community project design, allowing for the prioritization of everyone's vision, not just the assumed vision of leadership.



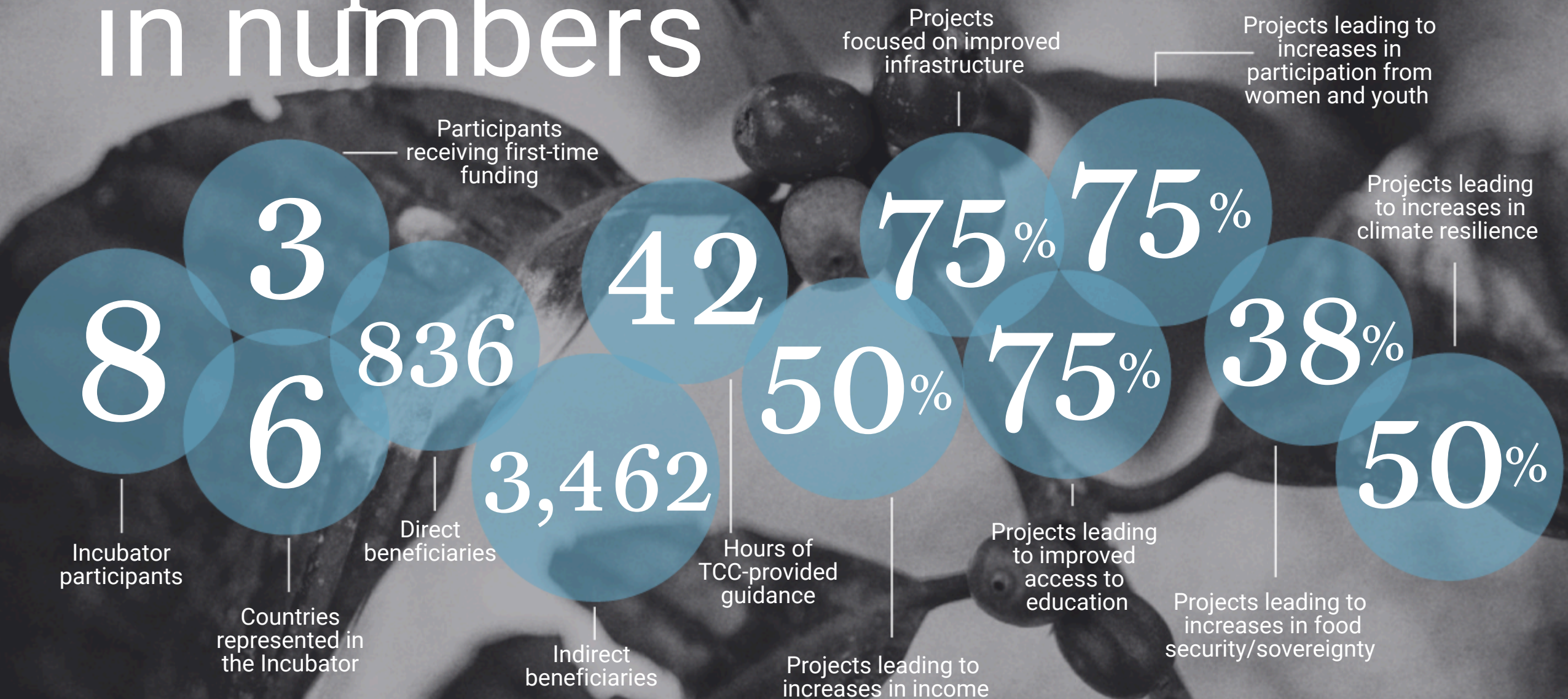
2024-2025 Latin America Cohort

TCC's second Latin America cohort onboarded into the CLD Incubator program in April 2024. This cohort brought together eight community-based organizations from six countries. After completing the six-month Learning & Design Phase in October 2024, each group began to carry out their projects within their communities. Throughout the nine-month Implementation Phase, they monitored project progress, and later, during the three-month Reporting & Offboarding Phase, measured their project's impact. As participants in this cohort represented a wide range of organizational types—from informal community-based farmer groups to registered coffee cooperatives—the impact they shared via their final project reports at the close of the program in Q4 2025 was diverse.

Project Highlights →

Participation in numbers

2024-2025 Latin America Cohort



Project Highlight

Damas de San Ignacio

Peru

Damas de San Ignacio is the women's committee of the Cooperativa Agraria Frontera San Ignacio in Cajamarca, Peru. Founded in 2012, the committee currently comprises 119 members and supports women in the social, business, and productive aspects of organic coffee farming. Since 2016, it has exported its own coffee brand to Europe and the United States.

Through the CLD Incubator, Damas de San Ignacio developed a *cuy* (guinea pig) husbandry project to provide members with a sustainable source of meat and manure. Over the course of the Incubator's Implementation Phase, Damas de San Ignacio built a *cuy* enclosure, purchased feeders, and secured veterinary care as well as technical assistance. They also received hands-on training in *cuy* maintenance. At present, the group is providing *cuy* manure as fertilizer for the larger cooperative's demonstration farm, but increased production will allow for fertilizer distribution/sale to members. As Damas de San Ignacio moves forward to sell both *cuy* as well as *cuy* manure, they will ultimately benefit more than 2,000 people through improved food security and affordable inputs.



Indicators of Success

- **Number of *cuy* raised in the project's facilities to date:** 653 total, including 390 females, 147 males, and 116 kits
- **Number of *cuy* distributed among cooperative members to date:** 65
- **Total amount of organic fertilizer produced to date:** 10,750 kilos
- **Participant satisfaction rates from the training on *cuy* husbandry:** 100%

Project Highlight

Núcleo Baní

Dominican Republic

Núcleo Baní, founded after Cyclone David in 1979, unites 340 coffee producers in Peravia, Dominican Republic, around a shared commitment to resilience, innovation, and community sustainability. Originally created to help farmers restore their coffee crops, the association now leads initiatives that strengthen coffee communities through diversified, long-term projects.

As part of the CLD Incubator, Núcleo Baní developed a project to improve and diversify 25 coffee farms through seedling provision, targeted training, and the distribution of coffee pulping machines. During the Incubator's Implementation Phase, benefitting farms received fruit tree seedlings to enhance food security and economic resilience through crop diversification. A comprehensive training program followed, focusing on coffee quality, environmental stewardship, and gender and youth inclusion, among other relevant topics. The association also purchased 13 de-pulping machines for the families most in need, and established an internal composting system for their members. They now have plans to offer low-cost fertilizer to nearby communities.



Indicators of Success

- **Number of coffee farmers (and their families) benefiting from the Incubator initiative:** 25 farmers, including 9 female farmers and 16 male farmers
- **Number of fruit tree seedlings distributed and planted:** 1,655
 - Cacao: 560
 - Lemon: 454
 - Avocado: 641
- **Number of farmers trained, disaggregated by topic and gender:**
 - **Traceability:** 6 women, 9 men
 - **Good agricultural practices (GAP):** 7 women, 14 men
 - **Gender and youth inclusion:** 15 women, 2 men
 - **Circular economy and household finance:** 11 women, 2 men
 - **Organic fertilizer production and composting:** 3 women, 18 men
- **Number of de-pulping machines purchased and distributed:** 13
- **Number of coffee farmers (and their families) benefiting from the de-pulping machines:** 5 women, 8 men
- **Number of composting facilities built:** 3

Project Highlight

Fondo Páez

Colombia

Fondo Paez is an indigenous farmer association from Cauca, Colombia that has been growing organic coffee for approximately three decades. To mitigate the impacts of climate change and the out-migration that it drives, the organization has launched a comprehensive agroecological program to strengthen sustainable coffee production for its member families, while focusing on youth inclusion.

Using Incubator funds, Fondo Paez contributed to a broader experimental farms initiative within their cooperative—which is part of their larger agroecological program. Two experimental farms now function as training hubs where producers can learn about sustainable coffee cultivation, livestock farming, organic fertilizer production, biodiversity conservation, and more. During the course of the Incubator's Implementation Phase, Fondo Paez piloted honey production on the experimental farms as a strategy for food sovereignty and alternative income, as well as small-scale pig and hen farming for improved fertilizer production. For the latter, they tested several enclosure designs, and now plan to share lessons learned with member farmers who may wish to adopt livestock farming as a diversification approach. Among other activities, Fondo Paez also distributed 150,000 coffee seedlings from their experimental farm nurseries to 118 member farmers, and provided training in sustainable agricultural practices.



Indicators of Success

- **Number of experimental farms benefitting from Incubator funds:** 2
- **Number of apiary stations established as part of the honey pilot:** 5
- **Amount of honey produced during the pilot to date:** 8 liters (2.1 gallons)
- **Number of animals part of the small-scale livestock farming pilot:** 6 pigs and 230 hens (30 of which were contributed by members)
- **Amount of manure produced as a result of the livestock pilot to date:** 5 tons
- **Number of seedlings established in experimental farm nurseries and later distributed:** 127 lbs of seedlings / 150,000 plants
- **Number of farmers receiving seedlings:** 118
- **Number of producers trained on sustainable practices, and/or provided demonstrations on improved farm management:** 177 farmers, including 86 women, 91 men, and 12 youth



2024 - 2025 Latin America Cohort

An integral part of TCC's monitoring and evaluation framework for the CLD Incubator is understanding the program's impact on participants, their organizations, and their communities. TCC conducts individual interviews with participating organizations as they are offboarded from the program in order to understand its qualitative impact and areas for improvement. The following reflections are drawn from post-Incubator conversations with participants of the 2024-2025 Latin America cohort.

Learnings & Takeaways →



Strengthening youth and women participation

Across all communities, Incubator participants reported stronger engagement of both youth and women in project activities and in coffee production more broadly. Several participants noted that their projects helped make agriculture a more viable and appealing option for young people, contributing to reduced out-migration. As one example, one participating organization noted that their Incubator project encouraged youth in their community to view coffee production as an alternative to cultivating illegal crops. Other participants highlighted the importance of including women in projects, not only as passive beneficiaries but as active decision-makers; by ensuring their inclusion in all aspects of project design, many Incubator participants saw increased confidence on the part of women leaders, and increased interest in supply chain participation. In addition, when youth or women served as project leaders, they described gaining more respect within their communities and becoming more recognized as partners in development, rather than mere recipients of support.



Expanding networks and strategic partnerships

Many participants noted that their Incubator projects led to increased network-building opportunities. Several organizations reported forming new alliances with local, regional, national, and even international institutions as a result of their project-based work. These institutions recognized each participant's growing capacity and, in several cases, took steps to formalize partnerships to help expand their access to resources, technical support, and market connections. Incubator participants noted that, in particular, successfully implementing their projects helped to demonstrate their organizational strength, reinforcing trust and establishing them as credible partners for future collaboration.



Tailored projects that address community priorities

Incubator participants highlighted that TCC's emphasis on community-led project design contributed to effective project implementation and meaningful outcomes. Participants highlighted that the flexible funding model allowed them to ensure that their projects responded directly to local priorities, while also strengthening community leadership and improving livelihoods. Several organizations contrasted this experience with past engagements with other partners, who often required them to adapt to externally-defined agendas, limiting community-wide impact and long-term sustainability. Participants also emphasized the sense of security created by TCC's consistent guidance and hands-on support throughout the process. Our accompaniment, particularly when compared to other organizations that focused primarily on compliance-related requirements, provided the structure and assistance needed to ensure successful meaningful project delivery and evaluation.



Looking Ahead →



2024-2025 Latin America cohort entered the Alumni Network

At the end of 2025, all participating organizations from the 2024-2025 Latin America cohort entered the TCC Alumni Network, a remote community where past CLD Incubator participants can continue cultivating relationships with TCC, fellow Incubator alumni, and other sustainability and justice-minded professionals in the coffee sector. Through this network, members can further their community-led initiatives, expand their connections, continue learning, and co-create new opportunities and alliances. Overall, the Alumni Network serves as a platform for collective growth, and ensures that the knowledge, tools, and relationships gained during the Incubator can continue to grow. With the addition of this cohort, the Alumni Network now includes 18 community-based organizations from 11 countries in Latin America and East & Central Africa.



2025-2026 East Africa cohort moves onto the Implementation Phase

At the end of 2025, all participating organizations in the 2025-2026 East Africa cohort entered the Incubator's Implementation Phase. Over the course of the next several months, each organization will carry out the project they designed in collaboration with their community members, and will continue to meet with TCC and their cohort peers to discuss project progress, challenges, and lessons learned. By the end of 2026, each participating organization will advance into the Incubator's final phase, the Reporting & Offboarding Phase, during which time they will complete their projects, apply their self-designed monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and report on their impact.



Onboarding the 2026-2027 Latin America cohort

We are excited to welcome our third Latin America cohort of the CLD Incubator program in April 2026. Interest in the upcoming cycle has been strong, thanks to recommendations from several industry partners as well as former Incubator participants, who have each helped to connect us with community-based organizations that are aligned with the program's goals and values. To date, we have already begun initial conversations with potential groups, gaining an early understanding of their priorities, challenges, and visions for community-led development. Following the formal application deadline on February 1st, we will conduct interviews with all interested applicants, with final participant selection being made by mid-March. We expect to onboard up to six community-based organizations to what will be our fifth CLD Incubator cohort overall.



Thank you!

Supporting Partners —→

Foundation and Corporate Supporters



Coffee Industry Supporters

