

## FUNDASAL WORKS TO HELP BUILDING PRODUCTIVE AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN EL SALVADOR

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The FUNDASAL Foundation of El Salvador has been awarded the [2025 World Habitat Awards for its project Capacity-building for productive and resilient rural communities](#) in El Salvador. Founded in 1968, FUNDASAL is a non-governmental and non-profit organization which collaborates with rural and urban communities to improve the places where they live, and to increase their skills and capabilities, paying special attention to women and young people.

This award-winning rural development project implemented by FUNDASAL has improved living conditions and access to food for the 50,484 people who live in the three rural municipalities where it was carried out.

The project has considered [comprehensive habitat improvement interventions](#) in 12 rural communities from three municipalities in El Salvador and two rural housing cooperatives. All of them share an environmental approach based on protection of ecosystems, agroecology, and adaptation to the effects of the climate emergency. The frequency with which communities in El Salvador face droughts, tropical storms and flooding increases the levels of precariousness and limits communities' responsiveness and recovery capacity, worsening their vulnerability.

To break this vicious circle, the project aimed at improving conditions of the most vulnerable residents through a safe and secure home, a healthy and productive environment, and an organised and resilient community. FUNDASAL's working approach with communities is based on participatory assessments and planning, capacity-building, demonstrative construction works, mutual aid, and the strengthening of community organisations.

The interventions allowed for the construction or improvement of 640 earth houses for 2708 people, seven community centres, 367 dry toilets, 273 ecological kitchens, 59 rainwater harvesting systems, 227 poultry farmyards and 115 organic vegetable gardens. During the process, 447 women and men were trained in construction work, and 833 young people developed skills in a range of different topics.

These projects, in comparison with previous interventions from FUNDASAL, are innovating with nature-based solutions and livelihood improvements for rural homes. FUNDASAL promotes the construction and improvement of earth houses through the traditional techniques of adobe, quinchá and bahareque Cerén, but reinforced with technology tested in laboratories, instead of purely industrialised materials.





Agroecology and a circular economic approach are reflected by:

- Agroecological vegetable gardens (112 individual gardens with an average area of 45 m<sup>2</sup> and three collective gardens in schools) supplying healthy food to families and the creation of seed banks for barter and sale in San Pablo and Alegría.
- Basic seeds kit consisting of up to 20 species of green vegetables, aromatic plants and fruits. FUNDASAL also delivers popular booklets that guide families on how to set up and manage a vegetable garden, identify plants for organic supply, and recognise flowers for organic pest control.
- Low-cost technology such as longitudinal greenhouses with plastic tarpaulin covers firmly tied up to protect vegetable gardens from strong winds (called 'macro tunnels').
- Rainwater harvesting systems (tank and cistern) to use in vegetable gardens and domestic chores, and biodigesters to filter grey water.
- Segregated dry toilets that produce compost from the dry matter and fertiliser from the urine. These 'composting latrines' are small buildings made of quinchá that improve the safety and privacy of women and girls.
- Ecological kitchens made by women, consisting of a 9 m<sup>2</sup> room with bahareque walls and a combustion chamber made of brick plastered with earth on top of a concrete base. A chimney completely evacuates the smoke that often causes chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The earth walls keep the heat in, thus reducing the consumption of wood.
- Reforestation of hillsides with endemic species to prevent soil erosion and protect villages from strong winds. In Alegría and San Pablo Tacachico communities have used bamboo, stone, reeds and vegetation as live barriers against natural phenomena such as extreme rain.
- In La Palma, the community looks after a large native forest area as an ecotourism area to preserve it and raise awareness amongst visitors. The project's master plan has allocated future building away from protected areas for water infiltration and to reduce the risk of disasters.

The resources for the project come through funding by international cooperation agencies and foundations from France (Agence Française de Développement-Fondation Abbé Pierre), Germany (Embassy, Misereor), Spain (NGO Manos Unidas), Sweden (We Effect) and Chile (SELAVIP). FUNDASAL also received funds from El Salvador's private sector and Local governments (Municipalities provide support with machinery, workforce and permits for construction). Mutual aid equates to an average of 24 hours of labour per family per week until the work is completed. Communities provide local materials for construction, make the adobe bricks, prepare wood sticks and build the houses, kitchens and latrines. This is essential as not only does it reduce costs, but it also creates training for collective work involved in future projects. The financial savings from using local natural materials and mutual support are, on average, 55% compared to social housing with industrial materials

FUNDASAL projects develop knowledge, individual skills, practices and community management organizations. This guarantees the long-term continuity of the methodologies and improves construction safety. In these municipalities, 447 women and men developed construction or home improvement skills, and 833 young people were trained in different subjects, from agroecology and the improvement of public spaces with recycled materials, to women and children's rights.

The project has reached an important social impact, encouraging the creation of 18 Community Development Associations in the different communities where it works and the creation of 41 themed committees with five to ten members, for managing construction works (Construction,





Employment, Purchases) or permanent committees (Women, Young People, Education, Health, Housing, Water, Financial Initiatives, Disaster Risk Management).

The project has also reached an important environmental impact. Construction materials are mainly local (soil, clay, lime, straw, wood, bamboo, stones). Foundations and floors are made of concrete to guarantee structural safety. Roofs in new homes have a bamboo or wooden structure and a micro-concrete roofing tile cover. The use of local materials reduces pollution and gas emissions for raw material extraction, production and transportation to the construction site.

Through training in agroecology, young people and adults incorporate new knowledge and 'unlearn' practices linked to traditional agriculture based on pesticides and chemical fertilisers. Thanks to new skills development, FUNDASAL has noticed a change in the practices of farmers that grow basic grains or fruits, reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and increasing the use of local compost. By raising environmental awareness among people and community members in general, they have improved their drinking water supply and distribution systems. They also learned to monitor water quality to prevent diseases. Community reforestation and protection of springs contribute to water quality and availability. Environmental measures through nature-based solutions and community empowerment help to protect biodiversity and increase resilience against the effects of climate change.

The nature-based solutions used by FUNDASAL are highly replicable. In coordination with the country's three main universities, FUNDASAL has collected evidence on the resistance of earth construction systems, using scientific laboratories. This resulted in acceptance of the reinforced adobe system into the Ministry of Housing's building regulations, allowing its legal use in the country. Until 2024, FUNDASAL participated in the UN Environment's regional project [City Adapt](#), applying nature-based solutions in El Salvador and monitoring their progress. This transfers approaches to water harvesting, agroecological vegetable gardens and composting latrines to other vulnerable settlements in the country. FUNDASAL has strong links with universities and other Latin American NGOs, and, through the Habitat International Coalition América Latina (HIC-AL), to the Central American Self-managed Coordinator for Solidarity Housing (COCEAVIS) and earth construction networks (Red ProTerra, Red MesoAmeri-Kaab), amongst others. These spaces allow for exchange between NGOs and experts on earth construction such as CRAterre. In each intervention, FUNDASAL collaborates with local Community Development Associations which are part of wider national organisations (such as Housing and Habitat National Platform). This amplifies its vision and attracts other organisations and communities that complement the work.

[FUNDASAL has already reached the final stage of the Habitat Awards competition four times \(finalist in 2017, 2014, 1997, Gold winner 2004\).](#)

The project presented in 2025, however, explains the methodology adopted by FUNDASAL to address the long-term sustainability of communities and their resilience to climate change, jointly encompassing aspects of housing improvement with other socioeconomic and environmental improvements.

## To know more

[2025 News World Award Habitat Winners](#)

[2025 World Award Habitat Winners](#)



[FUNDASAL Project in world-habitat.org](http://world-habitat.org)

[FUNDASAL Project \*Capacity-building for productive and resilient rural communities, El Salvador\*](#)

[News in FUNDASAL website](#)

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