



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM LOCALLY DRIVEN CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

USAID's [Cooperative Development Program](#) (CDP) strengthens cooperatives and credit unions around the world through a locally led approach. Throughout Central and South America, CDP implementing partner [Equal Exchange](#) works with agricultural cooperatives to improve their productivity, quality, governance, gender and youth inclusion, and capitalization.

Equal Exchange has always worked to strengthen the capacity of their local cooperative partners, but they decided to partner with USAID to institutionalize these efforts. Therefore when Equal Exchange applied for funding under the CDP Annual Program Statement, they engaged their local cooperative partners early on in the process of drafting their application and designing their project. Once Equal Exchange was selected to move forward to the co-creation phase, the CDP team facilitated a two-hour, virtual co-creation workshop where Equal Exchange, leaders of the local cooperatives, and USAID Washington and Mission staff came together to openly discuss and refine the proposed capacity development activities.

During this co-creation process, Equal Exchange adopted a posture of listening to the cooperatives rather than prescribing the types of capacity development that they would provide. Ultimately, the cooperatives chose to focus on environmental conservation, gender, and youth because those were priorities identified by the cooperative members. Regarding environmental conservation, through Equal Exchange's efforts to improve the productivity of coffee cooperatives in Mexico, many Indigenous Communities that make up the cooperatives' membership stressed the importance of mitigating the effects of climate change on their farms. During the co-design of activities, the cooperatives decided that technical assistance should specifically focus on strengthening agroforestry systems, reducing emissions through climate resilient practices, and improving education and awareness of environmental issues, while also ensuring that coffee production continues to be a profitable livelihood.

When local stakeholders occupy a central role in capacity development decision-making, they often generate the kinds of sustainable capacity that can improve partner performance and development outcomes over time. In the case of Equal Exchange's partnerships in Mexico, multiple cooperatives institutionalized their own approaches to environmental conservation, gender integration, and youth entrepreneurship based on the capacity development work supported by Equal Exchange. Now that these approaches have been fully adopted and funded by the cooperatives themselves, they will continue to benefit the cooperative members while advancing USAID's objectives of improving sustainable economic development.



EQUAL EXCHANGE
Young members of an Indigenous-owned cooperative in Mexico on their model farm where they implement climate smart agricultural practices.



EQUAL EXCHANGE
An example of a climate resilient coffee nursery at one of the local cooperatives in Mexico.