Y Care International and the Young Men’s Christian Association of Nicaragua have been supporting young farmers in rural Nicaragua to create strong resilient livelihoods since 2012. We have worked with young people to increase sustainable farming techniques, improve access to assets and help respond to the growing challenge of climate change.

Feeding the next generation: Increasing the economic resilience of young farmers in Nicaragua
The results

The Context
Having a sustainable livelihood can be challenging for young people in rural Nicaragua. Many work on their family’s small plot of land with limited options to expand or sell their products. Migration has pulled many young people away from farming to industrial areas or to other countries and some of them are often forced to take seasonal work at coffee farms to support their families.

Developing Leaders
76 per cent of the young people we worked with are responsible for supporting their families, yet few have the skills or assets to get the most out of the smallholdings. To empower young people as economic catalysts in their communities, we trained 186 young people in new farming techniques and 80 women in agro-processing and market gardening. These techniques further cascaded down to 744 more young people through peer education led by the young people we trained.

These young people established themselves as role models for new modernised farming approaches also addressing some of the challenges of climate change. By 2016, 76 per cent of young people felt they could influence decisions locally and 73 per cent felt they were treated as equals by elder community members.

Increasing economic security
We supported 1,068 young men and women to gain new technical skills so that they could increase their productivity, move beyond subsistence farming and access local markets. To increase access to enterprise and household income, we trained 349 young people in business development and linked them to a business advisor.

In 2012, only 12 families were running an enterprise. By the end of the project, 134 young people (92 females) were running their own enterprise selling their crops, and processed products. On average, household income has increased by 23 per cent, allowing families to invest more resources in health, education and food.

Increasing access to water
In 2012, only 2 farms had a functioning irrigation system. We supported 120 farms to build irrigation systems which have provided much needed water for their crops. We also constructed or rehabilitated 41 water points which are benefitting 1,334 people. This has increased young people’s access to clean water by 43 per cent. 10 local water management committees were created and trained to look after the new water points.

With greater access to water, we trained young people to deliver messages on hygiene skills. By 2016, 99 per cent of people had improved at least one hygiene practice, such as washing their hands with soap. 185 families benefited from water filters which improved the quality of the water for household consumption.

The final project evaluation noted a 12 per cent reduction in gastro-intestinal illness in the communities.

Becoming more resilient
Nicaragua has been badly affected by the El Nino effect with insufficient rainfall in 11 of the last 15 years. To address challenges linked to climate change and natural hazards, we trained 273 young people in risk management and climate change adaption which led to an 81 per cent rise in knowledge. We further supported 74 young people to participate in their local disaster risk reduction committees and contribute to the development and implementation of 11 risk reduction plans.

As a result of the technical training, 95 per cent of young farmers are now using sustainable farming techniques on their land and there has been a 38 per cent reduction in chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

We reforested 1,756 square metres of land and supported 571 families to access seed banks which have been critical in protecting and replacing crops lost during droughts. In 2012, only 10 families benefitted from seed banks.

Improving Nutrition
In 2012, most families were eating just two meals a day consisting of beans and corn. Young farmers are now sowing 5 to 6 new crops, including pumpkins, tomatoes, peppers, cucumber and coffee etc., which they are integrating into their diet and improving their nutrition.

By 2016, food security had improved by 46 per cent with families eating three meals a day. 40 per cent of people had added vegetables to their meals and 96 per cent recognise that crop diversification had a positive impact upon their own, and their families’ nutrition.
What next?

Climate change is a major risk facing rural Nicaraguans. We will continue to invest in skills, techniques and assets that will help young people to adapt to climate change and increase their resilience.

We understand that developing a small business can be challenging and there are many hurdles to overcome. We are therefore committed to providing training on business development and management to young people to increase knowledge. We also want to link young people to coaches who can provide technical support and to mentors to provide encouragement and advice.

We will also support young people to work together to form cooperative businesses. Thereby increasing young people’s support networks and reducing some of the risks that a young person faces when going into business by themselves.

We know that young people can find it challenging to access suitable micro-finance services and savings groups. It will be important for us to develop and strengthen links with such organisations and help them adapt their services to meet the specific needs of young people.

We want all young people to be networked and well supported. This is particularly vital for the success of a business. We will continue to build young people’s networks and give them the skills to identify new linkages and opportunities.
Stories of change

“Before the project, I had no idea how I could help my husband. This project helped me transform our land and set up a pig rearing business. Now I’m working with my husband to build and maintain a stable income. We are using this income to send our children to school.”

Grace, 24, Boaco

“I want to teach people about conserving our land and understanding the difference between destroying and constructing our future. It is important that we understand the possible future challenges as often we do not value what we have.”

Eddy, 29, Santa Lucia

“Young people have learned so much about how to address climate change, they have become role models in the community, and this community is a role model for other villages now.”

Local leader of La Pitahaya

“Before the project we didn’t take advantage of our land as we thought it was too small, but we’ve learned that we can grow a lot here. With the products that we make from our crops, we can teach our children and they can teach theirs. We really are feeding the next generation.”

Fredda, 24, Boaco

Project dashboard: Feeding the next generation: Increasing the economic resilience of young farmers in Nicaragua

Goal
Strengthening and increasing the sustainability of the livelihoods of 980 young people and their families in rural regions of Nicaragua.

Implementing partners:
Young Men’s Christian Association of Nicaragua

Funders:
Big Lottery Fund
Equitable Charitable Trust
Open Gate Trust
Evan Cornish

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£550,637

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To read the full evaluation report visit:
www.ycareinternational.org/publications

Y Care International creates opportunities for vulnerable young people across the globe to change their lives for the better. Inspired by and faithful to our Christian values, we work with people of all faiths and none to build a more just world, free from poverty.