

## Livelihoods Case Study

# SUSTAINABLE VALUE CHAINS: OJON OIL IN HONDURAS

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**COUNTRY:** Honduras

**THEMES:** Sustainable value chains

## BACKGROUND

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MOPAWI are working with almost 2,000 Ojon oil (also known locally as Batana oil) producers in La Mosquita, NE part of Honduras. The indigenous communities live in coastal villages suspended on stilts which are only accessible by boat. Communities traditionally rely on income from fishing, production of coconuts and other food stuffs to feed their families including rice, beans, plantains, chickens, cassava etc. Communities harvest the Ojon fruits from the natural forests and the fruits are then processed within the communities to produce the oil. Over the last 10 years MOPAWI has developed a relationship with the Ojon Corporation, an international organisation, which has allowed the community members to export their Ojon oil to international markets for cosmetics and hair products. Ojon oil production is now a very important economic activity for approximately 2,000 producers in La Mosquita.

## SUCSESSES

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MOPAWI is working and investing in remote communities in La Mosquita (approx. 100,000 people in La Mosquita). The Ojon producers are the poorest communities in the region and MOPAWI has been an example to other NGOs of their time and investment in these areas.

The Ojon project has brought substantial economic development and empowerment to the communities. Enabling them to take a local product to export in international markets is a considerable achievement.

There is also excellent integration of economic activities with nutrition and WASH activities. The rainwater harvesting initiatives are hugely appreciated by community members enabling them to have year round access to fresh water. The infrastructure has also been accompanied by training to enable the community to manage the structures themselves. The farms are still in their infancy but already shows signs of excellent management and development. The farmers have demonstrated that they can be successful and the challenge is for MOPAWI to encourage further replication and to encourage more community members to integrate the produce into their diets. The training the farmers have received has meant the farms are being laid out in a way that encourages sustainable land management.

Ojon Corporation have shown good social responsibility for the development of the communities where they are sourcing the Ojon oil from in the form of funding schools, water and sanitation, agriculture etc. This is an example which can be used in the engagement of other businesses into sustainable developing and ethical sourcing. MOPAWI are also being funded to oversee the Ojon oil export and the community development initiatives.

MOPAWI are passionate about the sustainable management of the forest and mangrove ecosystems and their resources. This includes achieving FSC certification for the Ojon producers and agroforestry pilots to sustainably integrate food production into the forest ecosystem and promote reforestation.

Since MOPAWI began they have also been engaged in advocacy initiatives empowering local people to advocate for their rights and exerting influence through other networks. They have seen considerable successes in advocating for the rights of indigenous people to their land, a campaign which has spanned almost 30 years and is finally coming to fruition in La Mosquitia and has had knock-on effects in other parts of the country. There have also been other advocacy initiatives around the prevention of the hydroelectric dam on the Katupo river and MOPAWI consider advocacy and training local communities to be organised and to advocate as a complementary part of their overall work programme.

## CHALLENGES

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MOPAWI are already trying to transfer ownership and responsibility of the Ojon project to the communities themselves through training clusters to manage the process and setting up bank accounts for the groups themselves. However there is probably more that could be done to empower the community to have a direct relationship with the Ojon Corporation which does not rely on the intervention of MOPAWI. However this will take some time to establish due to the challenges of language and needing a presence/bank account in Tegucigalpa.

At present Ojon Corporation are the sole buyers of Ojon oil meaning the communities are vulnerable to the demands of a single buyer. The communities are also not producing the Ojon oil at their maximum capacity and therefore if another buyer could be found for the oil they would benefit hugely. However I am not sure how feasible this is.

The pilot of the agricultural farms is currently proving a success in the communities where it is being initiated but if the objective of improved nutrition is to be realised then agricultural farms need to be accompanied by nutrition trainings and cooking demonstrations. If the success of the farms spreads there may also be a need for further training on sustainable land management as per MOPAWI's other programmes, to ensure the land is managed adequately.