Summary

UCIRI is a small group of coffee producers composed of several communities of the Sierra Juárez., and is currently composed of 64 communities, numbering approximately 3545 active partners. Among the Union's activities are the sowing of corn, beans, some chili, vegetables, and fruit trees such as oranges, sweet lemon, bananas, avocados, black sapota, mammey, mango and others used for local consumption. For commercial purposes, however, mainly coffee is grown. In fact, the price of coffee was the principal need addressed by this case. Other main needs addressed include eliminating the exploitation of middle-men for access to credit (at local and international banks); improvement of housing; improvement of health care; improvement of dirt roads and bus lines for transportation, communications (radio system and video programmes); distribution of basic food (community stores, 46 at the moment); adding value to coffee (roasted/ground and instant coffee, export and local marketing); credit union for the farmers/families; diversifying food production (above all vegetables); schooling and training of own technicians; and farmer assistance in production and local organization.

Objectives

Since its inception, the organization's aim has been to address all pertinent social and cultural problems such as: housing, roads, transport, commercialisation, diversification of production, better income, health care and education. Bit by bit the organization was able to tackle these problems. The main goal of the organization is that of promoting solidarity and sustainability rooted in culture. This is expressed in its products, according to ancestral wisdom and new techniques (organic) in order to preserve soil, water, forests and culture.

Most Significant Contributions

UCIRI was founded in 1983 and has over the years developed a strong community-based organization. Organic farming has created a more autonomous development and an integral process (improvement of housing, transport, communication, education, and own bank, among others) of progress, controlled by the farmers. Other significant contributions to sustainable agriculture and land use management are:

- Rotation and water management are priorities in organic farming and have been adapted in UCIRI.
- Using shade-tree coffee growing and aquaculture in ponds and river-arms.
Most Outstanding Results Achieved

Some of the most outstanding results achieved through the efforts of this case study include:

• Internationally accredited organic farming (IMO control, Suisa and CERTINEX national);
• Organic democratic organization with elements of Indian Government system. This system promotes transparancy of the use of financial means and infrastructure;
• By means of a social organization, the creation of political lobbying for autonomous Indian rights (the nine municipalities nominate again their own authorities according 'uso y costumbre'),
• Preserving languages and cultures in a dynamic process.