



Community Development Program

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The Community Development Program (CDP) of EARTH University is a learning scenario that promotes knowledge exchange between students and community members to strengthen student community engagement and to improve the quality of life in rural communities surrounding the University.

Through various community courses, and with the support of the CDP team, EARTH students are immersed in hands-on, collaborative learning to address social and agricultural challenges.

Structure and Operation of the Program

Each week, within the framework of different academic program courses, more than 100 students visit various communities where they work alongside hosts to improve production processes, support and introduce environmental initiatives, and enhance social and business operations. Projects include strengthening sustainable agricultural practices, creating organizational structures, and implementing business solutions.

Together with the specialized CDP team and EARTH faculty, students are responsible for identifying, diagnosing, and designing innovative and sustainable solutions for the communities. The CDP aligns with the focus of each of the four academic years as follows:



First and Second Year

During their first two years at EARTH, students work with the Community Development Program during the **Work Experience** course, which features over 15 learning scenarios ranging from agricultural and livestock production to food processing and community development. In the Community Scenario, students work hand in hand for a trimester with hosts under the leadership of fourth-year students. This allows the students to develop awareness of the living conditions in these communities and gain a deep understanding of their environment in order to generate real solutions to everyday challenges.

Third Year

In the third year, students take the Experience 300 course, which is divided into two areas:

- **Agro-Entrepreneurial Experience:** Focused on working with agricultural companies on activities such as planting, fertilization, and product processing.
- **Community Experience:** Students collaborate with social institutions on community development projects.

During the first two trimesters of the academic year, students rotate between these two focuses. This rotation allows them to obtain a comprehensive view of the realities of the agro-industrial and community sectors. This course prepares them in an integral way for the third trimester challenge: traveling around the world to complete their Internship in an agricultural organization.

Fourth Year

Fourth-year students play a crucial role in project leadership and activity supervision in rural communities. In the **Professional Experience** course, they apply all they have learned in the first three years of their academic journey, not only from a technical point of view but also using management, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills. They lead Work Experience projects, supervising and managing the activities of first and second-year students. Their role is key in implementing innovative and sustainable solutions in the communities in which various projects are executed.

Collaboration with Hosts

The CDP team is responsible for program logistics and for establishing partnerships with government organizations, private companies, and community leaders. Many of these entities either become hosts or connect the Program with farmers, entrepreneurs, organizations, and cooperatives carefully selected to ensure students can positively impact daily operations. Each year, around 80 hosts participate in projects ranging from agricultural production and rural tourism to food value addition.

The CDP operates by identifying common objectives between EARTH and regional guilds, seeking points of agreement to add more capacities and work in priority development areas. These collaborations are the result of periodic diagnostics identifying the immediate needs of the communities surrounding EARTH University's Guácimo Campus. The Program has prioritized the following work areas based on these needs.

Key Focus Areas

The Community Development Program is structured into three fundamental areas:

01

Sustainable Production

Promotes training in best agricultural, environmental, and productive practices. Both students and hosts learn about the proper management of natural resources and productive inputs. This area is essential to fostering a sustainable local economy that adapts to, respects, and protects the environment, opting for sustainable agricultural processes that lead to optimal levels of carbon neutrality.

02

Social-Organizational

Focuses on building networks through strategic alliances that allow sharing knowledge related to community development. This strengthens community organizational management and encourages citizen participation for transformation of the community. It also aims to empower youth and promote gender equity within communities, creating a more inclusive and participatory environment.

03

Entrepreneurial and Value Addition

Promotes entrepreneurial skills in producers, helping them make informed financial decisions based on reliable economic structures, including accounting records, cost structures, profit margins, and breakeven points. The focus is on developing sustainable and socially responsible micro-enterprises that contribute to the local economy in the long term.

Impact of the Community Development Program



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In my third year, I had the opportunity to go to communities near Campus to learn and share the knowledge I had acquired at EARTH. During the first trimester, we worked at a school where we were able to interact with the students, which helped me further develop my social skills to become a better professional in the future. Later, I worked with a citrus producer and participated in several activities to ensure the proper growth and development of the crops. We performed pruning, fertilization, training, and all the necessary practices to ensure optimal production. Working in the community was a wonderful experience because, with what we had learned in class, we could see how farmers in the field deal with such challenges. It was also a great opportunity to learn how to interact with communities, as we need to use the resources available in the community to provide solutions to any problems they may have. You cannot offer them a solution that they cannot implement. So, it is a significant learning experience, and I am very grateful.

Florence Ongaya
Class of 2025, Kenya

In 2022, a group of students worked on building a greenhouse alongside farmer Hilda Molina and her family, to diversify their crops, improve their agricultural practices, and strengthen their approach to new markets.

With the greenhouse, this family, which used to focus solely on the most common crops in the area, such as cassava, sweet potato, and other tubers, has been able to learn and diversify their knowledge and production in horticulture, growing crops like celery, sweet peppers, and cilantro. Today, Hilda and her husband, Víctor, enjoy improved food security and are offering new crops in their local market in Costa Rica.

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For me, it has been a wonderful experience because I have learned so much from the students. They have taught me many things: how to make the most of the resources we have here, how to make substrates, and things like that. It has been productive for us. It has been wonderful.

Hilda Molina
Producer

