



USAID | **HONDURAS**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

IMPROVING THE QUALITY, EFFICIENCY, AND EQUITY OF BASIC EDUCATION IN HONDURAS

Latin American and Caribbean Education Profiles 1999–2004



PROFILES OF USAID EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS: INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This publication is one in a series profiling the recent work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the education sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). It is intended for all who are interested in learning more about USAID, international development, and education activities in the LAC region. While USAID currently has offices or development activities in 17 countries throughout the region, its education development efforts are concentrated in eight: the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Peru.

The purpose of the series is to provide information on how the U.S. government is responding to diverse education needs in these countries through a variety of initiatives—ranging from innovative projects that increase educational access for underserved populations to efforts to foster policy dialogue and better decision-making in the sector. Bringing these initiatives to life typically requires coordination with and participation from a variety of international, national, and local partners.

The publications highlight USAID efforts in these countries during a five year period, 1999–2004. Each profile treats one country and includes a succinct analysis of key problems that limit access to quality education there, defining those challenges within historical, political, and social contexts. The publication outlines USAID's strategies for targeting its education investments, describes specific projects for addressing key issues, and shares lessons learned/best practices to improve future programming.

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Preschool Honduran girl drawing in a USAID-funded workbook.

COVER: Honduran preschool children using colors to identify the different parts of the rooster.

All images courtesy of U.S. Agency for International Development.

HONDURAS AT A GLANCE



GEOGRAPHY

Population: 6.8 million (July 2004 estimate)

Land Area: 112,090 sq. km (about the size of Louisiana)

Capital: Tegucigalpa (population 1.15 million in metropolitan area)

GOVERNMENT

Government Type: Democratic constitutional republic

Current President: Ricardo Maduro, elected to a four-year term in November 2001, inaugurated January 2002

ECONOMY

Total Gross Domestic Product: US\$6.9 billion (2003 estimate)

Per Capita Gross National Income: US\$947 (2003 estimate)

Population Living on Less Than US\$2 a Day: 44.4 percent (1990-2002 estimate average)

Human Development Index: .672 (compared with .777 LAC regional average—2002)

Overall Donor Assistance: \$386 million (\$201 million in donations and \$185 million in loans—2003 estimate)

HEALTH AND CULTURE

Median Age: 19 years

Life Expectancy at Birth: 66.2 years

Annual Population Growth Rate: 2.24 percent (2004 estimate)

Chronic Malnutrition: 33 percent of children under 5 years

Languages: Spanish, Garifuna, and several Amerindian dialects

Official Language: Spanish

Ethnic Groups: Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European) 90 percent, Amerindian 7 percent, black 2 percent, white 1 percent

EDUCATION

Compulsory Education: Grades 1-9, in theory (but not in reality, as some sixth graders lack access to seventh through ninth grades)

Literacy Rate: 81.5 percent (male, 81.8 percent; female, 81.3 percent) of those age 15 and older (2004 estimate)

Primary (Grades 1-6) Completion Rate: 77.8 percent (2003 estimate)

Secondary Completion Rate: 23.4 percent (2003 estimate)

Primary Net Enrollment: 89.3 percent (2004 estimate)

Middle School (grades 7-9) Net Enrollment: 38.2 percent (2004 estimate)

Secondary (grades 10-12) Net Enrollment: 21.3 percent (2004 estimate)

Tertiary Net Enrollment: 15.9 percent (2001 estimate)

Public Expenditures on Education Sector: 7.3 percent of GDP (2003 estimate)

HONDURAS AT A GLANCE

A GENERATION AGO, FEWER THAN HALF OF ALL HONDURAN CHILDREN WERE GRADUATING FROM SIXTH GRADE. THANKS IN PART TO USAID ACTIVITIES IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, FOUR OF FIVE CHILDREN NOW DO.

As a framework for action and policy, the Ministry of Education developed an Education Development Plan to modernize the education system's structure, improve quality of education, promote community participation and efficiency in higher education, and support the nonformal education sector. Although gains have been made over the years, the Honduran education system still encounters shortcomings, such as lack of equitable access to education opportunities, poor quality of instruction, high repetition and dropout rates, and inadequate teacher training. When considering all primary school dropouts and repeaters, the cost of systemic inefficiency to the Honduran government is more than \$22 million annually.

Activities over the past five years have been guided by two USAID Country Strategies—the first from 1998 through 2003, and the latter from 2003 through 2009. In 2000 the education portfolio was revised to respond to the needs created by Hurricane Mitch. New objectives expanded alternative basic education programs, encouraged policy change and programs to improve quality of education and reduction of repetition, and also expanded vocational education. USAID's education strategy in Honduras contributes to a better educated Honduran workforce by expanding access to quality basic education at the preschool, middle school, and secondary levels and by working with the government to develop quality education standards, testing, and evaluation.

USAID/Honduras' 2003-2009 Country Strategy:

- 1) Emphasizes increased and improved social sector investments and transparency.**
- 2) Stresses increased and improved educational opportunities for youth.**

USAID/HONDURAS HAS MOVED ITS PRIMARY EMPHASIS FROM EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY TO BROADER SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORM.

“The quality and relevance of primary and secondary schooling in LAC countries continue to cause concern, as the majority of students attend weak and underfunded schools and fail to acquire basic skills in mathematics, language, and science. Fewer than 30 percent of students in the region complete secondary school, and many of those who do finish lack the skills to compete in the workplace—let alone in an increasingly competitive global economy. USAID programs are improving educational systems by developing innovative pilots and more effective service delivery models, many of which are being expanded by host governments and multilateral development banks.”

**—Senate Testimony of Adolfo Franco,
USAID Assistant Administrator for
the LAC Bureau, March 2004**

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF USAID/HONDURAS

“Since 1961, USAID has intensely supported Honduran education. USAID/Honduras acknowledges the intricate bond between education and economic growth and has been exceptionally proactive in ensuring that our mission portfolio has a strong education component. Beginning with our assistance in the early 1960s (when we built schools that provided Honduran children and youth, particularly in the rural areas, with the opportunity for education) to the 1970s (when through a regional project we printed textbooks and began our emphasis on quality and efficiency that persists today) to the 1980s (when we first became involved in vocational education) to our current programs (which attend to preschool, alternative basic education, and assessment), the Agency has been at the cutting edge of supplying access to quality education to children, youth, and adults. Through our education programs, we will continue our commitment to lay the foundation for a future of better opportunities for all Hondurans.”

—Paul Tuebner

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PART I

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

EDUCATION CONDITIONS IN HONDURAS

Over the past two and a half decades, Honduras has made steady progress in the education sector.¹ Preschool gross enrollment rates more than tripled, from 17.1 percent in 1990 to 52.8 percent in 2003. Though fewer than half of students completed primary school (sixth grade) in 1980, the level in 2003 was 78 percent. National illiteracy rates also improved—dropping from 27.3 percent in 1990 to 18.5 percent in 2004—though considerable urban–rural disparities persist.

Notwithstanding these gains, perennial shortcomings of the Honduran education system include 1) deficiencies in the preparation of the emerging workforce to compete in the regional and global economies, 2) a lack of equitable

access to education opportunities, 3) poor quality of instruction, 4) high student dropout and repetition rates, 5) inadequate teacher training and outdated curricula, 6) low student achievement, and 7) systemic management weaknesses. A lack of sustained educational and political leadership has frustrated attempts to address these deficiencies. Obstacles to education reform have also arisen from various factors, such as a lack of resources, constraints external to the education sector (e.g., Hurricane Mitch, high poverty levels), and deficiencies in the preparation, supervision, and pedagogical support for teachers.

Repetition rates in the primary education system have historically been high, with more than 17 percent of first graders in 2003 having to repeat the grade. Coupled with a first grade dropout rate of about 4 percent, more than 20 percent of students do not

¹ For an excellent overview (in Spanish) of educational progress in Honduras, see the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas 2002 national "report card" at www.preal.cl/docs-resumen/RCHonduras.pdf. For annual performance on the goals and indicators for the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative, contact anedh@anedh.hn.



Student in PREPI (Proyecto de Educación Prebásica Interactiva) interactive radio preschool program.

complete the first grade in one year. When considering all primary school dropouts and repeaters (144,560 students in primary schools), the cost of this systemic inefficiency to the government of Honduras is enormous—over \$22 million annually.

While gross enrollment for seventh grade is 75 percent, high dropout rates result in 65 percent of youth not completing the ninth grade of their basic education. Urban areas initially enroll more than 90 percent of eligible middle school students—in contrast to a complete lack of access in many rural municipalities, and masking the fact that many adolescents drop out of school to enter the workforce. Even fewer youth complete secondary school, including only a minuscule percentage of youth from rural areas and low-income families.

As the number of school-age children has grown—nearly half of the Honduran population now is between ages 5 and 24—the demand for teachers has increased. However, there remains little motivation for teachers to become actively engaged in the educational system. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training are in need of reform, and relations between the Honduran Ministry of Education (MOE) and teachers' unions have been strained over the past several years—resulting in numerous strikes and lost school days for children and older youth.

It is also problematic that roughly 20 percent of the population over 10 never completed the third grade of primary school. As a consequence of the low level of schooling of the labor force and a pervasive shortage of trained professionals, productivity rates for many Honduran economic sectors are among the lowest in Latin America. The inferior educational level of the workforce clearly hinders Honduras' ability to compete in the global economy and to engage in trade and attract foreign investment.

In 2003 the government of Honduras invested 7.3 percent of its gross domestic product in education. Although this is nearly double the Latin American average of 4 percent, more than 95 percent of that education budget covers salaries. Thus the level of discretionary spending is severely constrained.

USAID REGIONAL STRATEGY

In response to dramatically reduced region-wide funding levels—from \$190 million in 1990 to \$52.7 million in 2004—USAID education programming in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has shifted from large national programs to smaller, targeted geographic areas and an emphasis on policy dialogue. Bilateral mission education activities are based on four overarching regional objectives: *improved access, equity, efficiency, and quality*. The LAC Regional Education Program, based in

USAID/Washington, supports initiatives under the Summit of the Americas,² the promotion of education reform in the region, and the Intermediate Results of 1) improved environment for education reform, 2) improved skills of teachers and administrators, and 3) improved relevance and skills of workforce.

The four education programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua now operate under the Central America and Mexico (CAM) Regional Strategy. The CAM strategy directs bilateral and regional USAID investment toward three performance arenas—*just and democratic governance, economic freedom, and investment in people*—closely aligned with Millennium Challenge Account³ goals. As a result, USAID education activities in Central America are now centered on achieving:

- Improved access, quality, and efficiency of basic education.
- Increased and more effective decentralized investments in education.
- Increased and more efficient expenditures by ministries of education.
- The establishment of private sector alliances.
- Greater community involvement in education.
- Innovative approaches to increasing and improving educational opportunities.

USAID/HONDURAS: HISTORY AND STRATEGIES IN EDUCATION

USAID/Honduras has been active in the education sector since the U.S. government established a presence in the country in 1961. In the education sector, the United States, Canada, Sweden, and Japan are currently among the largest bilateral donors. Activities over the past five years have been guided by two USAID Country Strategies—the first from Fiscal Year (FY) 1998 through FY2003, and the latest from FY2003 through FY2008.

The goal of the previous strategy was “a more democratic and prosperous Honduras.” Education activities were initially implemented under the Strategic Objective “expanded and equitable access to productive resources and markets.” The assumption was that for the productivity of the poor to increase, it is necessary to increase their human capital. The strategy thus concentrated on both improving the knowledge base and productivity of the labor force through alternative basic education delivery systems, strengthening vocational training schools, and encouraging policy reforms.



School children and their teacher dancing to a CD that describes the parts of the body and various emotions.

² For background information on the Summit of the Americas, see usinfo.state.gov/wh/americas/summit_of_americas.html and www.americasnet.net.

³ The Millennium Challenge Account is a Bush administration initiative to increase assistance to those developing countries whose governments rule justly, encourage economic freedom, and invest in their people. For more on this initiative, see www.mca.gov, www.usaid.gov/mca, and www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/developingnations/millennium.html.

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