



**USAID** | **EL SALVADOR**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# INCREASING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN EL SALVADOR

Latin American and Caribbean Education Profiles 1999–2005



## 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.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Education Team of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean expresses its gratitude to the dozens of officials at the USAID missions in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Peru who gave generously of their time in welcoming the editorial team to the host countries, squiring the team's writers and researchers throughout the missions, furnishing ample information and photographs, and reviewing the documents through successive iterations to ensure that the information herein would not only be factually accurate but also portray the true spirit of the featured missions.

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A kindergarten teacher practices interactive reading with students.

**COVER:** Children create stories together to improve reading and writing.

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

# EL SALVADOR AT A GLANCE



## GEOGRAPHY

**Total Population:** 6,587,541 (July 2004 estimate)  
**Land Area:** 21,040 sq. km (about the size of Massachusetts)  
**Capital:** San Salvador (metropolitan area population: 1.7 million)

## GOVERNMENT

**Government Type:** Republic  
**Current President:** Elias Antonio Saca, elected to five-year term in March 2004, assumed office June 2004

## ECONOMY

**Total Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** US\$15 billion (2003)  
**Per Capita Gross National Income:** US\$2,258  
**Population Living on Less Than \$2 a Day:** 48 percent (1999 estimate)  
**Human Development Index:** .720 (compared with .777 Latin America and Caribbean regional average—2002)  
**Overall Donor Assistance:** \$143 million (bilateral and multilateral donations—2003)

## HEALTH AND CULTURE

**Median Age:** 21.4 years  
**Life Expectancy at Birth:** 70.9 years  
**Annual Population Growth Rate:** 1.78 percent (2004 estimate)  
**Chronic Malnutrition:** 18.3 percent (urban 11.0 percent/rural 25.6 percent), National Family Health Survey 2002–2003  
**Languages:** Spanish, Náhaut (among some Amerindians)  
**Official Language:** Spanish  
**Ethnic Groups:** Mestizo 90 percent, white 9 percent, Amerindian 1 percent

## EDUCATION

**Compulsory Education:** Nine years (grades 1–9)  
**Literacy Rate (age 10 and over):** 80.3 percent (male: 82.8 percent/female: 77.7 percent—2003 estimate)  
**Primary Net Enrollment (grades 1–6):** 90 percent (2004)  
**Fifth-Grade Completion Rate:** 75 percent (2004)  
**Secondary Net Enrollment (grades 10–12):** 44.8 percent (2004)  
**Twelfth-Grade Completion Rate:** 27.1 percent (2004)  
**Tertiary Net Enrollment:** 16.6 percent (2001)  
**Public Expenditures on Education Sector:** 3 percent of GDP (2004)

## EL SALVADOR AT A GLANCE

**SALVADORAN PRESIDENT ELIAS ANTONIO SACA, ELECTED IN 2004, HAS IDENTIFIED EDUCATION AS A NATIONAL PRIORITY. THIS IS EVIDENT IN THE EDUCATION PLAN FOR 2021, WHICH BUILDS ON PROGRESS IN DECENTRALIZING ACTIVITIES AND IMPROVING EDUCATION QUALITY BEGUN UNDER THE 1995–2005 EDUCATION AGENDA.**

After 12 years of civil war, El Salvador has experienced significant progress toward extending education since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992. In 2003 the literacy rate for those ages 10 and over was 80 percent, and in 2004 the country experienced a net primary enrollment rate of 90 percent. Yet progress has been uneven. Rural children do not receive the same quality of basic education services that children in urban areas receive. While about 60 percent of Salvadoran children finish primary school overall, only 30 percent of the country's poorest children achieve that level.

Economic stress and high adult illiteracy threaten to perpetuate the cycle of low achievement and poverty. For Salvadorans to compete globally, access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities must be increased, particularly for rural populations. To this end, the government is decentralizing and has incorporated new testing and education standards. The current administration vows to concentrate on and improve both educational access and quality by 2021.

USAID/El Salvador, now in its third decade of working in El Salvador, is the largest bilateral donor supporting education in the country. The Mission has provided assistance to the government on various activities addressing educational access, decentralization, quality, and rehabilitation of schools needed as a result of natural disasters. In line with the Central America and Mexico Regional Strategy, the Mission has shifted its activities to improve the quality, efficiency, and equity of primary education. This includes training teachers, providing appropriate teaching materials, expanding educational opportunities for preschool-age children, developing school principal and teacher networks, and enhancing community participation in schooling. Other activities include establishing private sector alliances and improving research, management, decision-making, and policy-making.

Through 2009, USAID/El Salvador's Country Plan Strategic Objective 3, "Investing in People: Healthier, Better-Educated People," has two Intermediate Results targeted to intervene in the education sector:

- (1) Increased and improved social sector investments and transparency.
  - 1.1. Increased and more efficient expenditures by Ministries of Health and Education
  - 1.2. Increased and more effective decentralized investments in health and education
  - 1.3. Private sector alliances established
- (2) Increased and improved basic education opportunities.
  - 2.1. Improved access, quality, and efficiency of basic education
  - 2.2. Innovative approaches applied to increase and improve educational opportunities.

**USAID/EL SALVADOR HAS BUILT ON PREVIOUS STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY BY SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS THAT ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING AT ALL LEVELS OF EDUCATION.**

**“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/EL SALVADOR**

**“When the peace accords were signed in 1992, both access to and quality of basic education services in El Salvador had been greatly deteriorated, especially in rural areas. During the past decade, USAID El Salvador focused its support to the education sector by first improving access and then focusing on the quality of basic education, especially for children in poor rural areas. USAID’s program also improved the quality of early childhood and preschool education so that children would be better prepared for primary school. Improving the quality of primary education is key for El Salvador to become a more competitive country. Our goal is to contribute to ensuring that all children in El Salvador receive quality basic education and develop basic academic skills so that they can continue on to secondary education, enter into a more demanding labor market, and contribute to the economic growth of the country.”**

**—Mark Silverman**

# CONTENTS

<b>PART 1. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Education Conditions in El Salvador .....	1
USAID Regional Strategy .....	3
USAID/El Salvador: History and Strategies in Education .....	4
Overview .....	5
<b>PART 2. ACTIVITY PROFILES</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Major Efforts</b> .....	<b>8</b>
EDIFAM: Early Childhood Family Education Activity .....	8
SSR: Social Sector Reform .....	10
EXCELL: Excellence in Classroom Education at the Local Level (Social Sector Reform, Phase 2) .....	12
HCD: Human Capacity Development .....	14
ERP: Earthquake Recovery Program .....	16
<b>Small-scale Initiatives</b> .....	<b>18</b>
SAGE: Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education .....	18
ALCANCE: Alliance of Communities Supporting Children and Their Continuation in Education .....	20
Participatory Education Assessment and Research for Policy Dialogue .....	22
<b>Regional Projects</b> .....	<b>24</b>
CETT: Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training .....	24
CERCA: Civic Engagement in Education Reform in Central America .....	26
CASS: Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships .....	28
<b>PART 3. IMPACTS, LESSONS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS</b> .....	<b>31</b>
Impact of USAID Education Activities .....	31
Lessons Learned/Best Practices .....	33
Education Sector Prospects in El Salvador .....	37
Future Directions for USAID/El Salvador .....	38





# PART I

## BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

### EDUCATION CONDITIONS IN EL SALVADOR

Since the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords,<sup>1</sup> the government of El Salvador has made clear progress in extending education to the nation's poorest communities. President Elias Antonio Saca, who took office in June 2004, has also identified education as a key priority. Activities during his administration include the following:

- Design and implementation of a National Education Plan, “Plan 2021.”
- Development of alternative education programs, such as distance education and multi-grade classrooms, to expand coverage.
- Creation of an accreditation system to allow children to be reinserted into the formal education system.

- Development of school networks, or clusters, in rural areas to strengthen professional development opportunities and resource sharing for teachers.
- Application of national testing to ensure excellence in education.
- Emphasis on improving classroom practices through in-service teacher training.<sup>2</sup>
- Creation of a system of academic credits to formally recognize training for school principals and teachers.

This political commitment is essential to future advances in strengthening the education sector, particularly since the system still faces challenges related to insufficient coverage, poor quality, low student achievement, and urban–rural inequities.<sup>3</sup>

Net primary school enrollment has risen considerably—from 81 percent

<sup>1</sup> The governing National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebels signed peace accords requiring the demobilization of the FMLN and its incorporation into the political process, in return for democratic reforms by state institutions.

<sup>2</sup> In-service teacher training is training provided to teachers who are already “serving,” or practicing, in the classroom.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent overview in Spanish of educational progress in El Salvador; see the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas 2002 national “report card” at [www.preal.cl/prog\\_educativo/RCESalv.pdf](http://www.preal.cl/prog_educativo/RCESalv.pdf).



A 4-year-old child uses learning tools provided under EDIFAM.

of school-age children in 1992 to 90 percent in 2004. With high repetition and dropout rates, however, roughly 25 percent of students do not complete primary school, and basic competencies in math, writing, and reading comprehension are very poor. In 2004, net enrollment was much lower at the preschool (41 percent) and upper secondary (27 percent) levels.

As in other Central American countries, the rural poor have limited access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities—a serious impediment to educational advancement and employment. In 2004, one of ten rural children ages 7–12 did not attend school, and only about 1 of 3 of the poorest children completed primary school. Roughly 38 percent of the heads of rural families could not read or write—more than double the national illiteracy rate of 15.5 percent. In 2004, the proportion of adults (ages 25–59) with 13 or more years of schooling was 21.7 percent in urban areas,<sup>4</sup> compared with only 3.3 percent in rural areas. Unless educational levels increase substantially, the Salvadoran workforce will be unable to compete in the global economy.

Yet the Salvadoran government designates a relatively small share of its gross domestic product (GDP) for education investment—only 3 percent, in contrast to the Latin American average of 4 percent.<sup>5</sup> The level of public

spending per student is low (\$224), and existing scarce resources could be used more effectively.

Any discussion of the current education sector must be rooted in recent Salvadoran history.<sup>6</sup> After the 1992 Peace Accords, the Ministry of Education (MINED) identified the expansion of access to basic education and educational quality as a central policy objective. Notwithstanding this government commitment, the formal education system was incapable of incorporating nearly 1 million out-of-school youths and redressing years of past neglect. The MINED thus decided to pilot a new decentralized model of service provision—the *Educación con Participación de la Comunidad* (EDUCO) community-managed schools program—to delegate management of new rural preschools and primary schools to parents and community organizations. The Ministry declared 1995 as the “Year of Consultation on the Reform Process” to launch a national dialogue about education.

These efforts culminated in the 10-Year Education Reform Plan (1995–2005) that developed from four objectives: (1) increasing access to education and improving literacy, (2) improving the quality of education, (3) promoting the formation of values, and (4) enhancing institutional modernization. Despite the 10-Year Plan,

<sup>4</sup> Indicators are from the 2004 household survey.

<sup>5</sup> To meet the Millennium Development Goals, at least 5 percent of GDP must be invested in education by 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Much information in this section is drawn from “Reform of Basic Education in El Salvador.” World Bank. [www.worldbank.org/participation/web/webfiles/eseducation.htm](http://www.worldbank.org/participation/web/webfiles/eseducation.htm).

studies show that quality has not markedly improved since 1995, and equal opportunities for education continue to escape the grasp of poor, rural children. The majority of El Salvador's rural children do not attend secondary school.

Nonetheless, the past decade has provided a strong base from which to build for the future. MINED has continued to decentralize services, giving more authority to regional and local actors. New education standards and testing mechanisms have been developed, and programs to improve access and quality are in place. With the new administration's concentration on educational equity and quality, the work of the past 10 years should now begin to bear more fruit.

## 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 objectives: improved *access*, *equity*, *efficiency*, and *quality*. The LAC Regional Education Program, based in USAID/Washington, supports initiatives under the Summit of the Americas,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For background information on the Summit of the Americas, see [usinfo.state.gov/wh/americas/summit\\_of\\_americas.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/wh/americas/summit_of_americas.html) and [www.americasnet.net](http://www.americasnet.net).

<sup>8</sup> The Millennium Challenge Account is a Bush administration initiative to increase assistance to those developing countries whose governments rule justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom. For more on this initiative, see [www.mca.gov/](http://www.mca.gov/), [www.usaid.gov/mca/](http://www.usaid.gov/mca/), and [www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/developingnations/millennium.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/developingnations/millennium.html).

the promotion of education reform in the region, and three Intermediate Results: (1) improved environment for education reform, (2) improved skills of teachers and administrators, and (3) improved workforce skills.

The education programs in four countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua—operate under the framework of 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 quality-of-living issues such as health and education. All of these areas are closely aligned with Millennium Challenge Account<sup>8</sup> goals.

As a result, USAID education activities in Central America are centered on achieving the following:

- 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.
- Establishment of private sector alliances.
- Greater community involvement in education.
- Innovative approaches to increasing and improving educational opportunities.



**A girl talks with a parent about how to help children learn to read and write.**



**Children in a multi-grade class in a rural primary school learn about addition and subtraction through music.**

## **USAID/EL SALVADOR: HISTORY AND STRATEGIES IN EDUCATION**

The U.S. government has actively supported El Salvador's education sector since the early 1980s, and USAID is currently the largest bilateral education donor. Two USAID Country Strategies have guided activities in recent years. The first strategy, in place from 1997 to 2002, was extended to 2004 in response to the devastation from the 2001 earthquake. The follow-on national strategy, the current El Salvador Country Plan, covers the period through 2009.<sup>9</sup>

The previous strategy supported sustainable development and democracy in El Salvador, with education activities under the Strategic Objective (SO) "Expanded Access and Economic Opportunity for Rural Families in Poverty." To better educate rural residents, activities emphasized three areas: (1) improved quality of basic education for rural poor families, (2) increased community and nongovernmental participation in basic education reform, and (3) greater access to basic education and productive skills training to meet market needs.

During fiscal years 2004–2005, USAID transitioned from its ongoing programs to activities under the new Country Plan, which responds to the CAM Regional Strategy. The CAM Strategy

calls on USAID Missions to move from delivering services to supporting policy reform efforts and prioritizing investments that will have national- and regional-level impact.

Under the SO, "Investing in People: Healthier, Better-Educated People,"<sup>10</sup> education assistance in El Salvador concentrates on implementing policies and programs that result in improvements in primary school educational attainment. Activities are designed to contribute to increased and improved social sector investments and transparency, and to expanded basic education opportunities.

To help the Salvadoran government maximize their social sector investments, USAID supports government efforts to (1) leverage funds, form alliances, demonstrate the socioeconomic returns to increased social investments, and improve efficiency through better planning and management of budgeted resources; and (2) improve accountability and transparency of education services.

To improve the quality, efficiency, and equity of primary education, USAID supports the education sector in the following:

- Strengthening in-service teacher training in active teaching methods, curriculum planning, and evaluation of student performance.
- Modernizing school curricula and providing more appropriate

<sup>9</sup>The full Country Plan for El Salvador may be found at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PDACA298.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDACA298.pdf).

<sup>10</sup>The other SOs in El Salvador are "Economic Freedom" and "Ruling Justly."

classroom teaching materials for reading and writing.

- Improving skills of teachers and school principals and broadening teacher–principal professional development networks.
- Increasing parent and community participation in student learning.
- Improving the capacity of the MINED and education think tanks to use research and information for decision-making and policy refinement.
- Establishing alliances with the private sector and donors to leverage additional assistance.

The overall resources available for education have remained fairly constant since 1999, averaging between \$3.0–\$4.0 million annually.

## OVERVIEW

Part 2 of this report profiles 11 of USAID/EI Salvador’s past and current projects.

The *Early Childhood Family Education (EDIFAM)* project was designed to improve the care and education of Salvadoran children under 6 years of age, particularly those from poor and rural areas, by strengthening early childhood care and education. The *Social Sector Reform (SSR)* activity brought public and private stakeholders together to develop institutional capacity to formulate and implement policy. Training was targeted to MINED personnel and teacher training institutions. Phase 2 of

SSR, *Excellence in Classroom Education at the Local Level (EXCELL)*, also strengthens the capacity of the MINED, with special attention to building school principal and mid-level manager capacity, while expanding research for informed decision-making and policy dialogue. The *Human Capacity Development (HCD)* activity aimed to improve institutional performance that contributed to achieving the Mission’s objectives and its overall strategy across sectors, including education. The *Earthquake Recovery Program (ERP)* responded to two consecutive earthquakes in early 2001 by rebuilding schools and childcare centers, benefiting more than 21,000 students.

The *Strategies for Advancing Girls’ Education (SAGE)* project used a multi-sectoral strategy to improve girls’ participation in school and put enhancing girls’ education on the national agenda.

*Alliance of Communities Supporting Children and Their Continuation in Education (ALCANCE)* provided an opportunity for the private sector and Salvadoran immigrant communities in the United States to help keep poor, rural children in primary school.

*Participatory Education Assessment and Research for Policy Dialogue* supported an assessment of the education system, emphasizing primary education, to contribute to informing national policy dialogue, particularly concerning quality and equity.

With regard to regional projects, the *Center of Excellence for Teacher Training (CARD<sup>11</sup>-CETT)* offers training and follow-up support to teachers to

<sup>11</sup> Centro América y República Dominicana.





**USAID/El Salvador's Education Team supports the improvement of learning opportunities for primary-level students in rural areas.**

make them better instructors of reading and writing in grades 1–3. *Civic Engagement for Education Reform in Central America (CERCA)* fosters proactive community participation at the school level as a strategy to improve educational accountability and quality throughout Central America. The *Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS)* is designed to improve the human capacity and potential for sustainable development in the region by enabling poor and disadvantaged youth and adults to study in the United States.

Part 3 of this report spells out the impact of USAID education activities in El Salvador over a five-year period, such as the development of an early childhood and preschool curriculum,

training of teachers, and support to education reforms. It lists lessons learned from the various USAID/El Salvador activities, explaining, among many other things, that participatory project design and ongoing communications with all Ministry levels can greatly improve the impact of Mission investments, and that thorough and participatory needs assessments can positively affect the quality of a training design. The section concludes with an overview of what the Mission plans to achieve in El Salvador by 2009 by concentrating on both policy and institutional changes to improve system-wide education quality and student learning in rural schools.

A list of suggested reading about the projects featured herein appears at the end of this publication.

#### **MESSAGE FROM USAID/EL SALVADOR EDUCATION OFFICER**

**“El Salvador has made progress over the past 10 years in expanding access to education and modernizing the system. However, only about 75 percent of Salvadoran children finish primary school, and this is true for only 30 percent of the country’s poorest children. Roughly half of the country’s third graders cannot read and comprehend a four-sentence paragraph. The Salvadoran government continues to advance in improving the education system, and USAID/El Salvador is complementing this effort by supporting the improvement of learning opportunities of rural primary school children. The goal is that these children not only will complete primary school but also strengthen their reading, writing, and thinking skills and become motivated to continue learning. We are working toward this already by helping school principals and teachers improve teaching skills and by enriching family support to children’s learning. At a policy level, USAID seeks to support policy dialogue with stakeholder participation and to bring policy reforms to the classroom in order to improve schools—especially those that serve the poorest children.”**

**—Kristin Rosekrans**

# PART 2

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## ACTIVITY PROFILES

### MAJOR EFFORTS

EDIFAM: EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION ACTIVITY

SSR: SOCIAL SECTOR REFORM

EXCELL: EXCELLENCE IN CLASSROOM EDUCATION AT THE  
LOCAL LEVEL (SSR, PHASE 2)

HCD: HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

ERP: EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY PROGRAM

### SMALL-SCALE INITIATIVES

SAGE: STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING GIRLS' EDUCATION

ALCANCE: ALLIANCE OF COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING  
CHILDREN AND THEIR CONTINUATION IN  
EDUCATION

PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH  
FOR POLICY DIALOGUE

### REGIONAL PROJECTS

CETT: CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR TEACHER TRAINING

CERCA: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN  
CENTRAL AMERICA

CASS: COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION OF STATES FOR  
SCHOLARSHIPS



Early childhood campaign materials promote family support.

## MAJOR EFFORTS

# EDIFAM: EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION ACTIVITY

Implemented by: Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia (Salvadoran Institute for Integrated Development of Children and Youth, ISNA), Ministries of Education and Health, UNICEF, American Institutes for Research, Education Development Center, Save the Children, and Sesame Street Workshop

Dates: September 1998 to June 2005

Funding: \$8,487,000

## WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

Children who are neglected developmentally in the first years of life—as many rural, economically deprived children tend to be—bear the intellectual and emotional scars of that neglect throughout their lives. Education programs for Salvadoran children had been directed mainly at the formal school sector, and particularly at children age 7 and older. Few programs had concentrated on children ages 4–6, and even fewer on children age 3 and younger. Scarcely 20 percent of rural children under age 6 were receiving either formal or nonformal preschool education. Moreover, research showed a link between the lack of access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) and learning problems (including dropout and repetition) in the early grades of primary school.

## WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

USAID/EI Salvador chose to invest in early childhood and family education to help primarily poor, rural, and at-risk families more effectively promote

stimulating developmental experiences for infants and young children in their homes and communities. Considering ECCE programs as a key investment in human and economic development, USAID began supporting *el Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia* (the Salvadoran Institute for the Protection of Minors, ISNA) to ensure greater participation by local communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and municipal governments in early childhood development.

## WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE ACTIVITY?

The Early Childhood Family Education (EDIFAM) activity was designed to improve the care and education of Salvadoran children, particularly poor and rural children, from birth through age 6. The goal of this multifaceted activity was to implement a strategy targeting five distinct audiences: educators and caregivers, government institutions, children, the general public, and parent/community caregivers and untrained schoolteachers.



EDIFAM consisted of four integrated components to:

- Improve the technical skills of formal and nonformal caregivers and educators.
- Increase the cognitive, affective, physical, emotional, and psychomotor skills of at-risk children.
- Strengthen the ability of public and private sector institutions to provide better-quality early childhood care and education services.
- Increase the general awareness of the importance of childrearing skills.

Another component was subsequently added: to rebuild and rehabilitate child-care centers damaged by the 2001 earthquakes. (See description of the Earthquake Recovery Program later in this Section.)

## WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

EDIFAM provided training and technical assistance in the following areas:

- Early childhood family education outreach programs for teachers and mothers through the Ministry of Education (MINED) Preschool Education Program.
- ECCE methodologies and messages for mothers, caregivers, health care workers, local authorities, and NGOs.
- Application of newly designed curricula for formal and nonformal education for ages 0–6.
- Effective policy implementation, advocacy, and strategic planning for ISNA.
- Increased national awareness and understanding of ECCE through nationally transmitted media messages.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

EDIFAM trained 450 preschool and 50 pedagogical advisers in ECCE theory and classroom methodologies. As a result, 13,000 children benefited from improved preschool teaching practices. EDIFAM also trained 1,000 nonformal educators at ISNA and the Ministry of Health, benefiting 10,000 additional preschool-level children. Innovative teaching practices were demonstrated at an International Early Childhood and Preschool Conference, which was attended by 600 preschool teachers and 170 nonformal educators.

The activity also was responsible for materials development. Under EDIFAM, a new ECCE curriculum for formal preschools and nonformal childcare centers was completed, and a training manual for pedagogical advisers and teachers was prepared. EDIFAM also provided more than 16,000 culturally relevant books to 450 preschools, kindergartens, and daycare centers. A multimedia social mobilization campaign—featuring Lola and Elmo of *Sesame Street* in posters, short books, and televised announcements—addressed issues relating to literacy, science, and the importance of play. EDIFAM also coordinated the development of an improved parent education module, which was used by 1,000 teachers and educators in discussing better discipline practices with parents.

## MAJOR EFFORTS

# SSR: SOCIAL SECTOR REFORM

**Implemented by:** *Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo* (The Business Foundation for Educational Development, FEPADE)

**Dates:** September 1995 to February 2002

**Funding:** \$8,000,000



**Ministry of Education staff brainstorm strategies for improving policy implementation.**

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

El Salvador's civil war of 1980–1992 left the country's education system with tremendous deficiencies in both access and quality. Many communities and schools were abandoned, and education funding levels were minimal.

### WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

MINED and USAID jointly designed the Social Sector Reform (SSR) Program, an initiative that provided training, equipment, materials, and technical assistance to the government and to NGOs and other private sector institutions. The program, which was implemented by the *Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo* (The Business Foundation for Educational Development, FEPADE), centered on training key groups of teachers and administrators, who, in turn, trained other education sector leaders in support of education reform. The SSR program also helped assess the quality, coverage, and equity of education programs. It provided assistance to develop research capacity in local education organizations and MINED, thereby helping identify specific weaknesses in education quality. SSR also helped guide the development of national policy and promoted broad

education reforms and investments in national policy debates.

Additional support was provided during a follow-up phase (see description of SSR, Phase 2: EXCELL, which follows).

### WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

The objective of SSR was to provide technical assistance to the Government of El Salvador to develop and strengthen basic education for the duration of the 10-Year Education Reform Plan. SSR's primary goal was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in three components: (1) building national capacity to conduct educational research essential to the design and implementation of education reform, (2) training "change agents" from the public and private sectors in educational reform, and (3) promoting national policy dialogue in support of education reform.

### WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

SSR supported the development of a national education capacity study and a training program for education researchers: *Programa de Formación de Investigadores Educativos* (Program for Training Educational Researchers, PROFINE). This intervention included

the participation of diverse stakeholders from the private and public sectors, including NGOs, to reach consensus on actions to improve quality and equity in education. SSR supported educational conferences, research studies, technical documents, and magazines. The project also funded training and support to teacher training institutes and school advisory commit-

tees, and certificate/degree programs for MINED personnel. Through SSR, MINED assessed the quality, coverage, and equity of education programs, evaluated and guided the development of national policy, and promoted broad education reforms and investments in national policy debates.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

SSR was instrumental in establishing a national certificate program to guide change agents and school resource centers to support practitioners. National systems (including teacher certification and decentralization systems) were strengthened and a foundation for greater private sector participation was established. Under SSR, youth and parent participation in school advisory councils increased and youth leader modules were developed.

The project provided training to a network of 15 institutions (including FEPADE) in education research, produced an education research norms and procedures manual, and financed various research projects and studies (e.g., an analysis of early childhood education).

Citizen and community participation, and information sharing were improved as a result of project activities. SSR guided the development and definition of strategies, methodologies, and mechanisms, and organized various events to promote dialogue on specific education themes and topics. SSR also published and distributed a pedagogical magazine and the *Youth Identity* magazine series and produced a collection of publications on the history of education in El Salvador. Under the PROFINE component, FEPADE produced and distributed 12 national research publications and a series of educational materials to 35,000 people.

*To review the results achieved under the second phase of SSR, see the next section on EXCELL.*

## MAJOR EFFORTS



**Facilitator works with school principals in a reflection circle aimed at strengthening pedagogical leadership.**

# EXCELL: EXCELLENCE IN CLASSROOM EDUCATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL (SOCIAL SECTOR REFORM, PHASE 2)

Implemented<sup>12</sup> by: American Institutes for Research and Academy for Educational Development with Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation

Dates: July 2003 to June 2005

Funding: \$4,743,000

## WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

Over the last decade, MINED made progress in improving access to education, developing modern curricula, instituting new teaching strategies and testing systems, and decentralizing the national education system. This progress was boosted further through the SSR, a project that through institutional capacity building, research, and policy dialogue, generated a national certificate program, school resource centers, stronger institutions, more community participation and information sharing, and a foundation for greater private sector participation in education. As SSR drew to a close, strategies were needed to communicate and foster implementation of its new ideas at the school and classroom levels.

## WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

Based on international literature documenting the pivotal role principals play in school effectiveness, USAID's strategy was to bring about excellence in rural schools under a second phase of SSR: EXCELL.<sup>13</sup> The project emphasized improvements in language and math instruction, primarily by strengthening

<sup>12</sup> Under the USAID/Washington EQUIPI Project.

<sup>13</sup> EXCELL was a project agreement between USAID and the Salvadoran government to continue working on education quality.

the pedagogical leadership of school principals. The underlying assumption was that better-prepared principals would exercise improved instructional leadership vis-à-vis teachers, parents, and children—thus leading to better implementation of educational policies and improved classroom quality.

## WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

EXCELL was designed to do the following:

- Develop and improve MINED's ability to implement effective educational reforms and policy.
- Improve the effectiveness of school principals in managing schools and improving pedagogical practices.
- Enhance the MINED's capacity to conduct educational research and use it to inform policy decisions.

Following SSR's emphasis on policy reform, EXCELL aimed to bring the reforms to the classroom by addressing educational needs and priorities to improve student performance in at least 250 rural primary schools in six regions of the country that serve approximately 44,000 K–6 graders.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

The three EXCELL components corresponded with the key objectives outlined above. The first component was designed to support educational reform and student learning processes by strengthening mid-level management within MINED. Roughly 150 managers received training in planning and strategic management practices to implement and support education reform at the school level. Specifically, they learned to transfer MINED policies and strategies into useful guidelines for principals, provide more effective responses to schools' needs, and process and analyze data for research, monitoring, and evaluation.

The second component (and highest priority) strengthened principals' leadership skills and management competencies to ensure that administrative, organizational, and community activities improved

classroom learning conditions. The aim was to strengthen the capacity of principals to be pedagogical leaders and better support teachers in improving student learning. The professional development process consisted of three phases: (1) the *acquisition* of new knowledge through training sessions, (2) *reflection* on that new knowledge, through "reflection circles" with other principals, to identify ways to apply the theory to practice, and (3) the *application* of new practices through innovative projects in the classroom.

The third component sought to expand the knowledge base of MINED and the research community with regard to educational quality. Action research approaches involved stakeholders in critical and constructive reflection pertaining to educational reform. Policy and research forums were held to discuss pertinent topics, such as problems facing the education sector and effective strategies to improve quality.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

EXCELL's achievements in each of the components are described below.

### **Component 1: Strengthen Ministry of Education's Capacity to Improve Decentralized School Management, and Modify and Implement Education Reforms**

One hundred and sixty mid-level managers completed the professional development program and have started implementing changes in their work units to provide more effective responses to schools. A cadre of 15 managers developed a professional development plan to provide follow-up with these managers and newly recruited mid-level personnel. USAID also strengthened the capacity of MINED's National Directorate for Monitoring and Evaluation (DNME) to provide accurate, timely, and useful data based on improved analytical research. To further improve DNME's response capability, 1,500 copies of an interactive CD with educational data were produced and distributed to MINED staff.

### **Component 2: Improve Student Achievement in 250 Rural Schools Through Training and Technical Assistance to School Principals**

Two hundred and fifty principals completed the professional development program designed to improve their instructional leadership at the school level. As a result, most of these principals are implementing new pedagogical practices and inspiring innovative teaching methodologies in the classroom. Instructional practice guides for language and math were produced and distributed to 250 EXCELL schools, providing teachers with useful classroom material. Special education training modules for primary education teachers also were produced for EXCELL schools.

### **Component 3: Extend Educational Policy Research**

Three studies were completed: "Equity in Education Opportunity in El Salvador," which was disseminated through a public forum and shared directly with the Presidential Commission for Education; "Quantitative and Qualitative Characterization of Teachers," which was discussed with MINED and selected NGOs; and "Technical Assistance for the Design of Education Interventions under Strategic Objective (SO) 3/Intermediate Result 3.1," a document that guided USAID/El Salvador and the Ministry of Education in defining precise interventions for improving education investments.

## MAJOR EFFORTS

# HCD: HUMAN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Implemented by: Development Associates, Inc.

Dates: October 1998 to April 2005

Funding: \$4,251,355



Teachers work with preschoolers during the Ludotecas NAVES<sup>14</sup> diploma course.

## WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

One major constraint to achieving USAID's objectives in education was that institutions in El Salvador—public and private, local and national—needed to be more efficient and productive. Although several USAID activities provided technical and management training for leaders in their corresponding sectors, there was little coordination among the various players.

## WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

USAID sponsored the Human Capacity Development (HCD) activity as a mechanism for strengthening human resource capacity more consistently across sectoral programs. HCD aimed to improve institutional performance in support of achievement of the Mission's SOs, including education, and the overall country strategy. It also helped strengthen Salvadoran government and NGO commitment to actively participate in and contribute to the sustainability of development goals.

## WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

The purpose of HCD was to improve the efficiency and productivity of key

public and private institutions and of community organizations, particularly those contributing to sustained democracy and development, by offering short-term training opportunities for key personnel of those institutions. The activity was designed to improve the skills of the staff within the Ministry of Education, various other Ministries, counterpart organizations, and Mission contractors, thus leading to greater progress toward the Mission's strategic objectives.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

HCD provided planning, implementation, monitoring, and follow-on services to all USAID technical offices. Activities were designed to incorporate best training practices into all Mission training activities. To achieve this, HCD provided a variety of training-related services—workshops, conferences, seminars, technical assistance, on-the-job experience, training needs assessments, and advisory/coordination services—for Salvadoran government institutions and NGOs.

HCD training was implemented mostly through two indefinite quantity contracts<sup>15</sup> with USAID/Washington's Bureau for Economic Growth,

<sup>14</sup> Ludotecas NAVES are activity centers or spaces for boys and girls to learn, live, explore, and socialize.

<sup>15</sup> The first mechanism was Global Training for Development (from October 1998 to August 2002). The second was Strategic Technical Assistance for Results with Training (known as START, beginning in December 2002).



Agriculture, and Trade. Training, which related to economic growth and education, democracy and governance, health, and water and environment, was

provided through conferences, seminars, study tours, observational visits, workshops, and instructional sessions.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

The Ministries of Education, Economy, Finance, Labor, Public Health, Public Works, Governance, Agriculture, and Environment, and the General Directorate of Energy and Telecommunications, have all benefited from HCD training activities. Several NGOs, including *Fundación Salvadoreña de Salud y Desarrollo Social* (Salvadoran Foundation for Health and Social Development, FUSAL), *Fundación para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, FUSADES), and various microfinance institutions, have also benefited.

Training activities built skills in a variety of areas. For example, based on the results of a training needs assessment, HCD developed a workshop to strengthen MINED's capacity in curriculum development in support of the Strengthening Achievement in Basic Education (SABE) project.<sup>16</sup> The activity included updating curricula in seven basic subject areas, printing new textbooks, and training teachers across the country.

HCD guided and implemented the *Ludotecas NAVES* diploma course, a training intervention funded by EDIFAM (see profile earlier in this section). This course built technical capacity among library staff, university instructors, and members of educational organizations in the development, implementation, management, and evaluation of *ludotecas*, or toy-lending libraries, which encourage children to learn through educational play. The training also provided guidance in establishing a national plan to create *ludotecas* throughout El Salvador to reach the rural poor.

One of the largest series of training events featured 10 conferences for public school kindergarten teachers and other stakeholders, which together reached 5,365 participants in 1999. For example, the National Conference on the Education of Girls convened educators and community and business leaders to explore the links between the commitment to girls' education and El Salvador's economic development. Regional conferences for kindergarten and early childhood teachers were held in October 2000. More than 4,400 educators participated in the Third National Conference on Preschool and Early Childhood Education.

HCD supported community leaders and the Ministries of Education and Environment in developing and implementing strategies for disaster mitigation and prevention. These collaborative efforts resulted in the production and large-scale distribution (35,000 copies) of a disaster prevention manual for use in schools, and a series of community-centered disaster mitigation workshops for 550 participants throughout the country. Participants who were trained in those workshops then replicated the training nationally.

In support of USAID's EXCELL project, HCD provided a training session, "Teaching for Understanding," for 420 teacher trainers and teachers. To further strengthen educational quality, HCD designed and implemented three other interventions that capitalized on international expertise in related areas. MINED team members participated in a seminar at the Harvard School of Education, where participants and advisors designed Plan 2021, the new strategic plan. MINED staff also visited Honduras to learn more about this neighboring country's promising evaluation and quality measurement system. Third, in conjunction with the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, a US-based organization dedicated to improving the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, MINED adapted the module, "Teaching Children with Mild to Moderate Retardation," to El Salvador's context and needs. More than 100 teachers were trained, and 6,000 copies of the module were delivered to MINED for distribution to all schools in the country.

<sup>16</sup>The primary objective of the USAID-funded SABE project was to improve the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of primary education. SABE was implemented by the Academy for Educational Development from 1990 to 1998.

## MAJOR EFFORTS

# ERP: EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY PROGRAM

Implemented by: Fondo de Inversión Social para el Desarrollo Local (Social Investment Fund for Local Development, FISDL), Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, FUSADES), and Fundación de Apoyo a Municipios de El Salvador (Support Foundation for Municipalities in El Salvador, FUNDAMUNI)<sup>17</sup>

Dates: May 2001 to January 2005

Funding: \$10,000,000

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

A devastating earthquake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, ravaged El Salvador on January 13, 2001. A second earthquake, measuring 6.6, struck one month later. In the wake of these two disasters, there were more than 4,000 aftershocks. The human toll was devastating—1,159 dead and more than 8,100 wounded. In all, one-fourth of the country's population was affected. Together the earthquakes damaged 277,000 houses, more than 2,300 kilometers of roads, 2,647 public schools, and 40 percent of the childcare centers, with total economic damages estimated to exceed \$2 billion.

### WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

Under USAID's Earthquake Recovery Program (ERP), the U.S. government provided \$170 million in support of reconstruction activities.<sup>18</sup> The ERP concentrated on four principal areas, one of which restored basic

community infrastructure (including schools, houses, health facilities, and water systems) for the rural poor.<sup>19</sup> Every attempt was made to "build back better" to help ensure that USAID investments will withstand future earthquakes to the maximum extent possible. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided technical advice for the designs, construction, and final inspections of the buildings. Efforts were focused particularly on the rural poor and areas most severely affected by the earthquakes.

### WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

USAID's objective was to support MINED in its efforts to reconstruct and repair schools and other structures damaged by the earthquakes. Improving education in rural schools was also targeted through policy changes that enhanced service delivery, enabling more students to complete basic education on time and with adequate skills.



Students benefit from ERP at the new Cruzadilla School in Usulután.

<sup>17</sup> For the reconstruction program, USAID used different implementing mechanisms such as host country contracting and local and international NGOs.

<sup>18</sup> This included \$10.8 million of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) funding, a portion of which was dedicated to a food distribution program.

<sup>19</sup> The other three areas include reactivation of the economy in the affected rural areas, working with micro and small businesses and farmers; mitigation of the potential adverse effects of future natural disasters; and refurbishment of municipal government infrastructure such as municipal centers.



## WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

ERP education activities were designed to achieve two things: (1) reconstruct and re-equip 53 damaged or destroyed schools, and (2) reconstruct and repair at least 30 rural childcare centers. The schools that were repaired or rebuilt were designed to better withstand natural disasters and to be more accessible by children with disabilities. Disaster mitigation plans also were developed for 90 schools.

USAID completed some of the reconstruction in coordination with the Ministry of Education and *el Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia* (the

Salvadoran Institute for Integrated Development of Children and Youth, ISNA). Forty schools were reconstructed by the Social Investment Fund for Local Development (FISDL). The other schools and centers were reconstructed under the administration of *Asociaciones de Desarrollo Comunal* (Associations of Communal Development, ADESCOS), with technical assistance from local NGOs such as *Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, FUSADES), and the *Fundación de Apoyo a los Municipios de El Salvador* (Support Foundation for Municipalities in El Salvador, FUNDAMUNI).

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

As of June 2005, all 53 schools were completed, benefiting more than 20,000 students. The school centers are located in the departments of La Paz, San Vicente, La Libertad, Usulután, and Cuscatlán. In addition, 30 rural childcare centers were completed and equipped. These centers benefit more than 1,500 children under age 6 and their families.

A series of community-centered disaster mitigation workshops were held throughout the country. Under its ERP program, USAID worked to build capacity for preventive maintenance and disaster mitigation to prepare for future earthquakes or other natural disasters. The Mission supported the Ministries of Education and Environment, and community leaders, in developing and implementing strategies to meet this objective. This collaboration resulted in the production and large-scale distribution of a disaster prevention manual for use in schools. Ninety schools participated in the disaster prevention plan.

As part of the U.S. government's overall reconstruction support, USDA's year-long food distribution program provided food for 152,000 children and elderly citizens. The targeted primary school feeding program benefited 43,000 rural children.

## SMALL-SCALE INITIATIVES

# SAGE: STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING GIRLS' EDUCATION

Implemented in El Salvador by: Academy for Educational Development

Dates: September 2001 to July 2002

Funding: \$600,000<sup>20</sup>



**Girls' enrollment is improving in El Salvador's primary schools.**

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

El Salvador presented a familiar set of challenges in relationship to girls' education. At first glance, girls' primary school enrollment rates were nearly equal to those of boys. For example, according to the 1998 Household Survey, male school attendance was 34.2 percent, while female school attendance was 30.7 percent. Men averaged 5.1 years of schooling and women 4.8 years. But these statistics masked differences between the education provided in urban and rural areas, and gender gaps in school retention, achievement, and completion. It is also important to note that there are qualitative differences that are not reflected in statistics, such as the stereotyping of girls into traditional roles and girls' being responsible for cooking and cleaning in the schools.

### WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

USAID's response was to include El Salvador in the Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) project, an initiative designed to raise public awareness about girls' education and encourage the placement of girls' education on the national agenda of the targeted countries. Since girls'

school attendance depends on many factors—including community norms, school accommodations, and parents' expectations for their daughters—the project addressed all these factors in its multisectoral, top-down, and bottom-up strategy for increasing involvement in girls' education. SAGE activities were implemented in El Salvador and four other countries: Congo, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.

### WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

The SAGE project in El Salvador had four primary objectives: (1) strengthen public and private sector institutions to promote girls' education; (2) improve the knowledge base of girls' education in order to better implement related policies, strategies, and programs; (3) mobilize leadership to promote girls' education; and (4) broaden and support local community participation. In El Salvador, the most important objective was to highlight the importance of girls' education to socioeconomic development on the national agenda.

### WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

The SAGE approach was characterized by its emphasis on engaging traditional

<sup>20</sup> Funded by USAID/Washington's Office of Women in Development.

and nontraditional partners across sectors in support of girls' education. In El Salvador, the project worked to improve girls' educational achievement through a coordinated approach with a multisectoral alliance—including MINED and the National Secretariat of the Family—by doing the following:

- Organizing consciousness-raising and mobilization activities at the national level.
- Organizing roundtables for representatives of the media,

businesses, NGOs, and religious leaders and organizations.

- Working with MINED on improving girl-friendly aspects of materials, textbooks, teacher training, and classroom management.
- Promoting activities outside the formal educational sphere that reach communities and students where they live and where local leaders can mobilize action to support girls' education.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

SAGE facilitated four gender workshops to train 250 educational counselors. Gender-sensitive teacher manuals were developed with counselor participation. SAGE also implemented a gender-oriented workshop to teach 100 Juvenile Brigade volunteers to integrate girls' education issues into their community work.

For SAGE to successfully bring girls' education to the national agenda in El Salvador, three highly publicized roundtables were undertaken—one with the business and media sectors, the second with the religious community, and the third with NGOs and civil society organizations. Each roundtable was chaired by El Salvador's former First Lady, Lourdes Rodríguez de Flores, who also participated in many other project activities.

SAGE developed important partnerships with the business community. The first was with *Pollo Campero*, one of the country's largest restaurant chains, which produced 50,000 placemats with a positive message for girls' education. A fictional character was used to motivate girls to stay in school through the message: "You can also be a Camperonix girl—if you go to school, perform well in school, and are interested in your own and your country's development." A second business partnership was with *Arrocera San Francisco*, a Salvadoran rice distributor, which put the message "Support Girls' Education!" on 20,000 bags of rice and beans. The third partnership was with textbook publisher *Educational Services Editors*, which placed the motto "Girls' Education: A Door to Development" on the back cover of every book it published.

Several media partnerships were developed, including one with a radio broadcasting company that agreed to air 10 girls' education spots featuring local celebrities. *La Prensa Gráfica*, one of the two leading Salvadoran newspapers, donated space to publish SAGE messages nationwide in 15 issues of its insert devoted to children's issues. SAGE contributions normally took the form of photo essays on outstanding local girls/teenagers in academics, sports, arts, and technology. In honor of International Women's Day, SAGE published an article about the importance of girls' education for the country's development. The final issues were dedicated to a contest in which young children sent in drawings and older children sent in essays about girls' education.

## SMALL-SCALE INITIATIVES

# ALCANCE: ALLIANCE OF COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND THEIR CONTINUATION IN EDUCATION

Implemented by: Pan American Development Foundation, World Vision, and Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo (The Business Foundation for Educational Development, FEPADE).

Dates: June 2004 to June 2005

Funding: \$463,000

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

Access to primary education in El Salvador's rural areas had increased over the past decade, with about 80 percent of rural children attending school. However, about 15 percent of these children were overage, and many children frequently repeated grades and dropped out before graduating. The high costs involved in attending school (e.g., for supplies and uniforms) and the need to work and generate income were among the commonly cited reasons that children did not attend or dropped out of school.

Research and experience suggest that the level of education received by a population often transfers from one generation to the next: parental education is a strong indicator of the level and type of education that children will receive, particularly in poor communities. Therefore, it is critical for children from the poorest sectors to complete at least primary school so that future cycles of poverty can be broken.

A growing number of Salvadorans residing in the United States had shown tremendous solidarity with their home country, particularly during times of natural disaster and other moments of need. What they lacked, however, were

established institutional relationships and mechanisms for channeling financial contributions in a way that could have a strong and lasting impact on poor, rural populations.

### WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

USAID established a *transnational alliance*—an arrangement that allows direct programmatic/financial involvement of a constituency outside the target country in a program within that country—for Salvadorans in the United States to support program efforts in El Salvador. USAID's innovative *Alianza de Comunidades Apoyando la Niñez y Su Continuación en la Educación* (Alliance of Communities Supporting Children and Their Continuation in Education, ALCANCE) pilot was the largest transnational alliance funded by a Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Mission. ALCANCE linked a broad coalition of US-based public and private sector groups in a unified development effort to support the Salvadoran education sector, targeting the participation of 21 Salvadoran hometown associations (HTAs) in the United States.

### WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

ALCANCE addressed three broad objectives: (1) improving access to



Festivals generate teacher, parent, and community support for children's school attendance and learning.

primary education and retention of poor, rural Salvadoran schoolchildren; (2) leveraging and channeling support of the private sector and U.S.-based Salvadoran groups for educational programs in their communities of origin; and (3) developing a sustainable implementation model that could involve transnational support to improve overall educational attainment in El Salvador beyond the one-year pilot.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

ALCANCE sponsored the following activities:

- A needs assessment and viability study to identify the causes of children dropping out of school, the most effective ways to create a sustainable mechanism to channel remittances-for-scholarships, and the level of support that HTAs were willing to provide.
- Small scholarships—covering basic school supplies, uniforms, shoes, food, and transportation costs—to children in grades 1–3 in rural primary schools. Participating children also received savings accounts in which \$2 per month accumulated based on their attendance throughout the school year.
- Educational interventions, including needs-based school assistance packages concentrating on the neediest children in rural schools. ALCANCE linked these interventions to community remittance flows and Salvadoran HTA contributions.
- Support for rural schools to improve teachers' skills in language and math, and the overall classroom learning environment.
- Training and capacity-building sessions for HTAs to increase their organizational development and provide longer-term capacity to participate in and manage future development activities.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

ALCANCE tested two intervention models. Model A consisted of a “mini-scholarship” of school materials, teacher training, parent–student workshops, and some small infrastructure support. However, this was feasible only within World Vision’s operational areas, restricting potential HTA involvement (since HTAs tend to support specific communities). Model B established a \$25,000, one-to-one matching fund, wherein each dollar invested in the program by the HTA was matched with an ALCANCE dollar from the private sector (up to \$1,000 per school). The interventions varied among schools and were designed and implemented directly by HTAs in conjunction with their local counterparts, school directors, teachers, and parent–teacher associations. Employing these two models allowed ALCANCE to maximize HTA participation in the initiative, target the broadest range of schools, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the respective pilot approaches.

Through the combination of Models A and B, 21 Salvadoran migrant groups actively participated in ALCANCE, with a total of 150 training and outreach sessions provided to Salvadoran HTAs. More than 12,000 children received benefits, and 77 schools were involved in the program. A total of 1,429 children, 1,122 parents, and 98 teachers participated in workshops to improve skills and further children’s education. Nearly \$220,000 was leveraged in HTA counterpart funds, volunteer time, and in-kind donations. In addition, \$30,000 in corporate sponsorship was raised.

The program successfully targeted the most vulnerable children and reduced absenteeism and school desertion. Beneficiaries’ grades improved as a result of students demonstrating greater interest in learning. Teachers, parents, and the children themselves fostered good relationships and motivated one another to have more involvement in education.



## SMALL-SCALE INITIATIVES

# PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH FOR POLICY DIALOGUE

**Implemented by:** Academy for Educational Development

**Dates:** 2002–2005

**Funding:** \$185.00 (Decentralization and Rural Poverty Reduction)

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

El Salvador's 10-Year Education Reform Plan documented the government's commitment to improve education, a decision that typically begins with updating and/or modifying governing policies and procedures. Yet in El Salvador, as in many other countries, policy reform was often more a mandate from top-level decision-makers than the initiative of people responsible for implementing the policies.

To increase the likelihood for success, policy reform should be based on input not only from higher-level government officials, but also from those charged with ensuring sound policy formulation and effective implementation throughout the system. Groups include mid-level managers and administrators who directly oversee interventions; principals and teachers who deliver the services; students and parents who directly benefit from the services; the private sector, which has a need for qualified personnel; and society in general, which benefits from educated citizens. Participatory processes had been implemented on a small scale with promising results during the planning for the 10-Year Education Reform Plan. Expanded stakeholder participation and dialogue were

considered essential for promoting educational improvements nationwide.

### WHAT DID USAID DO TO RESPOND?

USAID supported an approach to policy reform beginning in 2002, when USAID/El Salvador, MINED, and various other key stakeholders collaborated on several participatory assessments that led to education policy change and the shaping of a new national education agenda. This process was designed based on the premises that education policy is more likely to be effective when research is a part of the policy analysis process and when stakeholders participate in policy decisions.

### WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROJECT?

The objective of the project was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of El Salvador's education system, emphasizing primary education (pre-school through ninth grade), in order to define policy priorities for USAID support to the education sector. Assessment findings were to contribute to the development of a 2005–2009 comprehensive strategy for USAID/El Salvador to support the Government of El Salvador's efforts in improving its education sector.



Participants share ideas on policy issues during dialogue session.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES WERE INVOLVED?

USAID/EI Salvador worked with MINED to design and implement a process for identifying the areas of the education system to support as part of the 2005–2009 strategy. The process involved several participatory assessment strategies that had proven successful in 1993: focus groups, roundtable discussions, joint research teams, and dialogue and communication with key stakeholders. The assessment team, consisting of international and local education experts, tapped teachers, administrators, principals, school and community members, and representatives from the government, NGOs, and think tanks to participate in the first round of assessment activities. Based on the findings from these activities, the research team produced an eight-chapter assessment that summarized issues related to preschool, basic education, inequalities in education, teacher education, decentralization, standards and testing, education finance, and donor coordination.

To obtain further input and buy-in, USAID then convened a three-day forum to discuss all the issues in the assessment report. Roundtable sessions were held to exchange knowledge and experience, with the objective of reaching consensus on priorities or goals, for each issue, and the most effective strategies for achieving those goals. Attending were 200 decision-makers and representatives from the various stakeholder groups that were previously contacted. Through extensive dialogue, the different groups were able to build on the findings of the assessment, enriching the analysis and providing viable interventions to improve policies and programs.

In addition to the roundtable sessions, a questionnaire was distributed to each participant to gather opinions about policy priorities. Participants rated interventions in terms of their probable effect on improving education quality (or, more specifically, student learning) and their viability for implementation.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

While it is not possible to attribute the government's new policy and program priorities to this process, it is quite likely that participation by the various stakeholders contributed both to informing the policy analysis and to generating stakeholder buy-in. At least two issues that were highlighted in the assessment and discussed in the education policy dialogue were included as priorities in the new education plan: expanding educational opportunities to the poorest sectors, and ensuring that all children in primary school learn how to read and write. In addition, this process generated increased awareness among the many participants and facilitated a dialogue in which people could exchange views. Finally, perhaps the most important outcomes of this activity were that the process contributed to a wider, more encompassing assessment of the entire sector—from early childhood to higher education—and that the effort was led by MINED, with substantive involvement from the major donors, the World Bank, and various local think tanks and NGOs. Because of these and other outcomes, this assessment was one of the major inputs to Plan 2021.

## REGIONAL PROJECTS

# CETT: CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Implemented in El Salvador by: **Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo (The Business Foundation for Educational Development, FEPADE)**

Dates: **October 2002 to September 2008<sup>21</sup>**

Funding: **\$8,497,683 (regionally)**



Children read books donated by Scholastic as part of the CETT program.

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS MUST BE ADDRESSED?

Educational achievement indicators for Latin America and the Caribbean compare poorly with many of the world's other regions. In some LAC countries, fewer than 60 percent of children who start school reach the fifth grade, and illiteracy remains high. These educational gaps limit the personal, economic, and civic potentials of children and the communities in which they live. On a regional level, the economic competitiveness of the LAC region is severely constrained.

### WHAT IS USAID DOING TO RESPOND?

In view of these regional challenges, President George W. Bush announced a White House initiative at the Summit of the Americas in 2001 to establish three regionally based teacher-training centers (in Central America and the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean, and the Andean region of South America). These training hubs, which are known as Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT), were established specifically to improve reading and writing instruction in the early primary grades. The Central

American and the Dominican Republic CETT (CARD-CETT) is implemented by a consortium of partners in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. An estimated 15,000 teachers and 500,000 students in 1,000 primary schools region-wide will benefit by 2006.

### WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

The objective of the CETT initiative is to reduce the high rates of illiteracy and school underachievement in the region by improving reading and writing instruction in grades 1–3. CETT activities are intended to improve the pedagogical skills of teachers and administrators in the region and to enrich early classroom instruction so that students gain competence in reading and writing. To address equity concerns, special emphasis is placed on disadvantaged communities and rural areas.

### WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE INVOLVED?

There are five major CETT program components: (1) teacher training, (2) the creation of teaching and learning materials, (3) the production of

<sup>21</sup> Anticipated completion date.



assessment and diagnostic tools, (4) applied research, and (5) information and communication technology. Partner institutions in each country (except Nicaragua) are responsible for implementing the training program and for developing a specific program component with materials, methodologies, and best practices shared across the consortium within the Central American context.

In El Salvador, the Business Foundation for Educational Development (FEPADE) is implementing the CETT training program, as well as leading the social marketing component for the Central American CETT to produce strategies to raise the profile of CETT in the region, and help leverage additional funding and resources.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

In collaboration with other CETT partners, FEPADE has compiled a database of private enterprises as a resource for future CETT activity support. A plan and a model of promotional social marketing materials for the region also has been produced.

FEPADE is currently collaborating with CETT implementing partner INMED<sup>22</sup> on the production of public service announcements promoting literacy that will air on CNN. These accomplishments benefit all five countries that have worked closely together to improve reading and writing instruction under the CETT program.

The CETT team in El Salvador contributed to the development and application of instructional materials, a published teacher-training model design, and the “Diagnostic and Evaluation Model” for target schools in the country. As a result of these and other combined efforts, CETT has reached 262 schools, training 410 first-grade teachers, 88 second-grade teachers, and 80 third-grade teachers in Chalatenango. Ongoing coaching is provided to participating teachers in their classrooms. In addition, training and follow-up have been provided to primary school principals and counselors.

CETT program evaluations have demonstrated that teachers are teaching and children are reading and writing in new and interactive ways that are conducive to improved learning.

<sup>22</sup> INMED Partnerships for Children is a nonprofit global development organization dedicated to inspiring communities and fostering their ability to develop healthy, educated children with increased opportunities for the future.

## REGIONAL PROJECTS

# CERCA: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN CENTRAL AMERICA

**Implemented by:** Academy for Educational Development

**Dates:** October 2002 to March 2006

**Funding:** \$2,700,000 (regionally)



**Analysis group consisting of students, parents, teachers, and the school principal present results of School Report Card to 400 community members in Tehuacán.**

### WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS MUST BE ADDRESSED?

Many countries in the region have committed to decentralizing their education systems, with the intention of strengthening local constituencies and improving educational quality. Although programs have succeeded in engaging parents, teachers, and communities in improving educational quality, little is known in the region about how specific decentralization policies encourage or hinder parent and community participation to enhance education quality at the school level. The success of these programs and their common features—such as encouraging initiative and ownership by parents, teachers, students, and community—have rarely been documented and systematized. As a result, these initiatives are seldom considered in national-level policy-making.

### WHAT IS USAID DOING TO RESPOND?

Since 2002, USAID has been supporting the Civic Engagement for Education Reform in Central America (CERCA) program to build sustained effective citizen engagement for improving school accountability and quality in five countries: the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Through empirically

grounded research, CERCA is creating knowledge, defining models, and mobilizing constituencies to strengthen systemic support for the engagement of local actors who have a direct stake in education: parents, teachers, students, and communities.

### WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

CERCA strives to strengthen the forces for educational reform. It does this by creating a shared knowledge and vision among public and private sector constituencies on the importance of and strategies for empowering parents and communities to hold schools and policy-makers accountable for educational quality. Further, CERCA aims to facilitate joint action among these constituencies to achieve changes in policies and practices that promote greater engagement on the part of parents, communities, and teachers to improve school quality. Through the creation of broad, well-informed, and well-defined constituencies in each of the five countries, CERCA hopes to ensure the sustainability of educational reform efforts over time.

### WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE INVOLVED?

CERCA involves the following activities:

- Synthesis and analysis of information for a series of case studies, two of which were done in El Salvador, which have generated empirical knowledge on effective local engagement that contributes to improving educational quality and on the systemic factors that promote or inhibit that engagement.
- Design and validation of a School Report Card (SRC) model tailored to the Central America context that lends itself to application on a national scale by Ministries of Education and other country groups. SRCs provide relevant information to local stakeholders—such as parents, students, teachers, and principals—so they can be aware of the status of their schools, make decisions accordingly, and collectively plan and implement actions to improve school quality.
- Mobilization of key individuals from the region through its Consultative Committee and regional workshops to learn from each other’s approaches. This builds a common knowledge of the types of community participation that improve education quality and identify ways to work together region-wide to reinforce local or national-level educational reform efforts. Moreover, the project has strengthened national reform movements by forming stakeholder groups in each of the five countries.
- Development of a strategy for encouraging teacher-initiated reforms to improve educational quality in the classroom. The strategy will provide guiding principles for policies that encourage teacher innovation and support teacher unions to exercise leadership in encouraging teacher initiatives leading to quality improvements.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

CERCA’s case study research, which included two case studies from El Salvador, contributed policy-relevant knowledge about the kinds of local participation that most help education quality and the factors that promote or impede the engagement of local constituencies.<sup>23</sup>

CERCA has been testing and validating the SRC model in 15 schools in El Salvador and in 21 schools in four neighboring countries. Motivated by the preliminary results in these schools, the MINED, with USAID support, is planning to implement the SRC model in 500 Salvadoran schools. The MINED will link the SRC methodology to its annual school improvement plans.

Meeting monthly and with a rotating leadership, the El Salvador stakeholder group includes representatives from the government, civil society, and the private sector. Although coming from diverse sectors with sometimes conflicting views, they have been working together and building on the body of knowledge CERCA has developed about citizen participation that improves education quality. The stakeholder group has planned and carried out activities ranging from broadcasting educational television programs (featuring topics related to parents’ and community support for improving schools) to collecting and disseminating examples of teacher innovation and making an inventory of municipal-level efforts to monitor and support education quality.

<sup>23</sup>The report synthesizing findings from 13 cases in the five countries, along with other CERCA products, is available in Spanish and English on [CERCANET.org](http://CERCANET.org).

## REGIONAL PROJECTS

# CASS: COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION OF STATES FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Implemented by: The Georgetown University Center for Intercultural Education and Development (CIED) in partnership with 18 currently participating U.S. academic institutions

Dates: May 2003 to April 2008

Funding: \$50,000,000 (regional funding)



CASS program participants celebrate the completion of technical training and short-term professional training.

## WHAT EDUCATION PROBLEMS MUST BE ADDRESSED?

In Central America and the Caribbean, most of the rural population lives in abject poverty. Too many promising youth and working adults lack the education and skills needed to compete effectively in today's competitive global economy. While there has been significant progress in increasing access of the poor to primary and secondary education, resources for post-secondary education are scarce, particularly for underserved and marginalized populations.

## WHAT IS USAID DOING TO RESPOND?

With USAID funding, the Georgetown University Center for Intercultural Education and Development (CIED) has administered international exchange programs for over 20 years. Under the current cooperative agreement signed in 2003, the Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS) program works to directly develop local human capacity and promote sustainable rural development in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean through a combination of two-year technical training for high school graduates and short-term professional training for rural professionals. CASS serves individuals who are socially or economically

disadvantaged, including ethnic minorities, rural women, and persons with disabilities, and provides them with technical skills that enable them to have productive and meaningful lives.

## WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PROGRAM?

The primary objective of the CASS program is to build human capacity for rural development through supporting the USAID/EI Salvador strategic objective of "expanding access and economic opportunities for rural poor families." To accomplish this objective, CASS works directly with the USAID Mission and a strong network of U.S. community colleges and universities to provide technical education, job training, and leadership skills to young adults and leaders from the region's poorest rural communities.

Beyond training individuals, the ultimate objective of CASS is to foster the development of people who will become agents of change—people committed to sharing their knowledge and skills and making a strong, positive social and economic impact within their communities. Each of the CASS participants returns home with new academic and technical skills that enable them to continue growing professionally, share the benefits of their training with others, and contribute positively to the development of their countries.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE INVOLVED?

The CASS program offers two types of training: short-term scholarships for rural professionals such as primary education teachers, micro-finance managers, and health workers; and two-year technical and leadership training scholarships for rural youth. Training takes place at partner community colleges and universities in the United States that have been prepared by CASS to meet the specific academic and personal needs of CASS students. Specific fields of study are determined by a comprehensive annual assessment of country development needs and employment trends.

In El Salvador, CASS short-term training scholarships have been awarded to practicing professionals from rural areas throughout the country. These scholarships, of six-months and one-year duration, focus on combating infectious diseases through strengthening rural health care systems, preventing HIV/AIDS transmission among highest-risk popula-

tions, strengthening rural agricultural cooperatives, developing capacity for anti-seismic rural construction, and strengthening rural primary education.

The CASS program in El Salvador also has awarded numerous two-year technical scholarships for rural, poor high-school graduates in key development fields such as quality control, industrial management, electronics technology, integrated natural resources technology, agribusiness for export, small- and medium-enterprise management and marketing, and water management and reclamation. During their studies in the United States, CASS students receive a broad technical education. In addition to technical classes, they receive intensive English instruction, intern with U.S. businesses, and perform many hours of volunteer work. CASS scholars participate in events that expose them to U.S. political, economic, and social systems, thus developing their leadership skills and commitment to democratic principles.

## WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED?

The CASS program has a proven success record. From 2003 to 2005, CASS awarded 54 two-year and 115 short-term professional training scholarships to rural leaders from El Salvador.

In the area of rural primary education, CASS has trained 44 primary education teachers from the poorest rural school districts of El Salvador, including teachers who worked in public schools, refugee camps, and community charter schools in conflict zones during the civil war. CASS teacher-training alumni are now strengthening local community schools, many holding posts as school directors or rural department educational resource specialists.

CASS technical-training alumni are now top-level managers in local industries, and many hold key positions in local community organizations and the NGO sector. Short-term professional program graduates are managing rural agricultural cooperatives, administering rural health care systems, and occupy key positions in the fight against HIV/AIDS transmission, particularly with at-risk populations.

The CASS program has been especially proactive in including women, rural, indigenous, and disabled people in its scholarship exchange program. In terms of employment, the truest measure of success for a training program, 92 percent of CASS alumni are employed in their home countries. More than 75 percent are working in a field directly related to their CASS training.



# PART 3

## IMPACTS, LESSONS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

### IMPACT OF USAID EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

USAID supported activities have contributed to significant progress in El Salvador's education sector from 2000 through 2005, particularly in the geographic areas where activities are centered. Overall, the number of children in schools affected by USAID-supported basic education programs (an Agency-wide performance indicator) was roughly 150,000 in 2003. Major achievements and results are as follows:

- By June 2005, an estimated 250,000 rural children under age 6 were receiving better early childhood care and education services, and the academic performance of 43,500 children in 250 rural schools had improved.
- More than 1,500 nonformal educators and preschool teachers have been trained in

improved education and child-care methodologies, resulting in nearly 25,000 children receiving better childcare.

- USAID assistance in improving early childhood education resulted in a new early childhood and kindergarten curriculum (formal and nonformal) for children ages 0–6, which will be used in public schools and child-care centers nationally in 2005.
- USAID support to the Ministry of Education (MINED) to conduct policy research and dialogue with a variety of education stakeholders about national education priorities contributed to shaping the new national education agenda.
- USAID made a significant contribution to the administration of public schools when its partner, the Business Foundation for Educational Development

Principals and teachers read theory and share experiences about improving learning opportunities in schools.





(FEPADE), recommended—and MINED implemented—a new policy requiring schools to go from a two-principal to a one-principal system. The new system streamlined decision-making and improved school management.

- The Social Sector Reform (SSR) program played an important role in strengthening training institutions that provide services to MINED, school advisory councils, and teacher-training and quality-control mechanisms. It also helped foster the use of new learning resources and innovations in schools.
- Over the course of the Human Capacity Development (HCD) activity, 522 training activities were implemented for nearly 25,000 participants across all Mission Strategic Objectives (SOs), representing diverse sectors. More than 90 percent of these activities took place in El Salvador, reflecting the priority given to in-country training.
- USAID has supported several participatory assessments and studies, including (1) an assessment of basic education with stakeholder feedback to define priorities for the education sector, and (2) a study on educational equity challenges that analyzed the distribution of resources to different socioeconomic groups. These processes have helped shape

education policy, as reflected in the government's current priority on improving basic reading, writing, and math skills and ensuring equitable education spending.

- The Civic Engagement for Education Reform in Central America's (CERCA's) program of coordinated research and strategic stakeholder involvement region-wide has created new knowledge about how local participation improves quality and what factors promote or impede such participation. The program also has demonstrated that School Report Cards can be used to constructively engage schools and communities in improving education quality. This has inspired national- and school-level stakeholders in five countries to commit to working together to create conditions for effective local participation that improve educational accountability and quality.
- Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) succeeded in putting education for girls on the national agenda. Through its partnerships with the media, including the leading newspaper and radio broadcasting company, SAGE brought the nation's attention to this topic and garnered considerable private sector support.



- Through the Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS), youth, women, the disabled, and practitioners from rural, indigenous areas are attending training programs and returning to El Salvador and other Latin American countries prepared to apply new knowledge and skills to improve education, advance the economy, and make their communities better places to live.

## LESSONS LEARNED/ BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Participatory project design can add great value.

Excellence in Classroom Education at the Local Level (EXCELL) promotional activities proved invaluable in obtaining stakeholder feedback on the project's design. Presenting EXCELL to staff at various levels of the Ministry improved its strategic and operational design and garnered goodwill for the project. While it is important to empower participants by involving them in the design, it is also important to respect existing levels of authority and communication channels. Open, regular communication, clear roles and responsibilities, and consensus building among all levels of authority minimize conflicts and misunderstandings.

### 2. Involving community stakeholders can also add great value. Involving community

members in critical and constructive reflection to identify problems both in their school and in the education sector can spur action at the local and national levels.

### 3. Management structures should be streamlined. The EXCELL management structure

was designed to maximize the opportunities for various partner organizations to contribute their institutional experience and expertise. However, this made project management cumbersome. Project design must ensure clear lines of management, responsibility, and resource allocation across the board for each of its tasks and activities, taking into consideration the individual practices and strengths of each institution.

### 4. Professional development "reflection circles" should be considered as one possible mechanism for strengthening principals' work, and thus the reading, writing, and thinking skills of rural students.

In EXCELL, reflection circles consisted of regular meetings of small groups of school principals, in which participants shared experiences and reflected on applying new knowledge and theory in their schools. These circles were considered key opportunities for interaction among principals. Despite occasional problems in convening these circles, results were positive. In some cases, the circles continued to operate after the project ended.



**USAID Mission Director, Mark Silverman (right), presents program highlights as El Salvador First Lady Ana Ligia de Saca, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Health Jose Guillermo Maza look on.**

**5.** Direct involvement of teachers and pedagogical advisers strengthens the quality of instructional programs at the school level. Another of the primary lessons from EXCELL is that training, as an institutional strengthening strategy, should proceed through a multilevel and coordinated approach. As an alternative to a cascade training model, in which information is passed through various levels before reaching the classroom teacher, this process integrates various levels (teachers, principals, supervisors, and advisers) in the same training exercises. This direct involvement helps ensure that all receive the same information and generates synergy and cooperation.

**6.** Appropriate timing for training is an important element of any successful professional development program. Again from EXCELL, experiences suggest that selecting an appropriate time for professional development should be considered by both MINED and USAID. Conducting training during the regular workday can interrupt work assignments and time in school. Training on weekends or school breaks takes away from a professional's personal time. Given the need for teacher professional development, future technical support to MINED should consider plans for distributing training time throughout the school year so that neither instructional nor personal time is severely compromised.

**7.** School-level technical assistance is an effective follow-up training mechanism. While effective, however, this component is challenging to implement. Providing technical assistance at each school is costly and difficult to sustain.

**8.** Conducting participatory assessments and research on education and using findings to generate informed public dialogue is a useful strategy for influencing education policy and programs. Different approaches can be used. Researchers can define problems and lead stakeholders in interpreting the results. Alternatively, policy-makers can define problems and work collaboratively with consultants and beneficiaries to brainstorm solutions. Timing and socio-political context should be considered in determining the most effective approach.

**9.** Strengthening local capacity to contribute to sustained impact of programs can be used as a strategy in different types of activities. In EXCELL, for example, local researchers in the governmental and nongovernmental sectors were trained to conduct qualitative research as part of the research process. It is important to reach an agreement with the governmental counterparts to allow their staff to dedicate sufficient time for these processes.

**10.** Development training should be designed to develop local capacity that will, in turn, help to ensure a lasting impact. HCD programs pioneered many concepts that USAID now invokes as best practices. Concepts such as comprehensive needs assessments and training for a critical mass of participants were recognized in the El Salvador training programs throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.

**11.** The success of training largely depends on the institutions' and participants' commitment to create change. Training design, participant selection, and follow-up support should be developed by training providers in coordination with participants, their immediate supervisors, and USAID. This integrated approach helps to ensure applicability at the institutional level. Actions to be undertaken by the participants as a result of their training program will be more successful if supported by their supervisors and the institution. All interested parties should participate in all phases of the process.

**12.** Support from prominent leaders helps promote a program's success. One of the important lessons from SAGE is that the involvement of prominent political leaders—in this case, the First Lady of El Salvador—brings immediate national attention to the project. The fact that Ana Ligia de Saca hosted each

of the roundtables, spoke at each session, and presented at the awards ceremony lent great credibility to the issue of girls' education.

**13.** Participant training programs should regularly be reviewed and modified or refined based on evaluation outcomes.

According to a 2002 program evaluation, CASS introduced several strategies for adapting to changing circumstances and incorporating lessons learned. Those strategies include (1) reducing the number of countries served to reflect evolving USAID priorities and economic conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean, (2) improving predeparture orientation and reentry workshops to address students' needs, (3) incorporating an internship requirement for all trainees, (4) adding new community colleges and fields of study, and (5) increasing the number of scholarships awarded to disadvantaged groups. Continued monitoring might provide insights that could lead to other important changes.

**14.** National populations outside of the home country can provide tangible support for local development efforts.

ALCANCE provided a systematic, coordinated way for those who have migrated and resettled in the United States to support development programs at home. Knowledgeable about context and needs, Salvadorans succeeding abroad can help improve education and other basic services for

**A first- and second-grade class writes experience-based stories.**



others in the home country. Immigrants from other countries might be willing and able to contribute to their home countries in similar ways.

**15.** Participation of the private sector in development initiatives can be important for leveraging both resources and political support. Private sector support contributed to the success of many of the projects (ALCANCE, SAGE, EXCELL, Early Childhood Family Education Activity, Centers of Excellence in Teacher Training). The donation of storybooks, materials, airtime for the campaigns, and cash extended the impact of the funded programs. Also, the involvement of the private sector helped forge new relationships and generate more private sector support for development.

**16.** Team building can be a key factor in building trust and empowerment for success in large, complex projects. At the beginning of EDIFAM, there was a lack of communication and coordination between public and private sector organizations working in the field of early childhood care and education (ECCE). The first phase of the project strongly emphasized team building and developing a shared vision, which built the foundation for a successful program. The resulting cohesion led to improvements in the quality and coverage of national ECCE services.

**17.** The use of an advisory committee has been a successful strategy for maintaining high-level political support and a feedback loop for project interventions. Under EXCELL, a committee of national education and development experts met regularly to discuss the theory and practical application of approaches implemented in the schools. Their feedback helped enrich the interventions and link them to the national education policy dialogue.

**18.** Establishing alliances among the national and local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), key community actors, media, and the private sector can be a successful strategy for developing awareness and placing traditionally neglected issues on the policy agenda. Under EDIFAM, two national ECCE campaigns were implemented, with the involvement of the office of the Salvadoran First Lady, NGOs, Sesame Street, UNICEF, the Ministries of Health and Education, and local actors. The development of the new preschool and kindergarten curriculum was also produced with the involvement of these and other stakeholders. The alliances established through these processes helped generate a political and social commitment to ECCE.

**19.** In strengthening local capacity, international specialists should work collaboratively with local professionals to introduce new practices. Throughout

the different projects, an ongoing issue was how to respect and strengthen national education plans and interventions and use local experts, and also benefit from outside expertise, ideas, and approaches that have proven successful in other contexts. Maintaining ongoing dialogue with national counterparts, reaching consensus on priorities and needed activities, and creating teams of international and local experts were key to achieving this balance. With this approach, new practices can be introduced and local capacity can be accessed and strengthened.

**20.** The role of the external researcher should be carefully determined based on timing and contextual factors.

An external researcher/technical consultant can serve as an important complement to local input and leadership in developing new education policy—whether it is to introduce new concepts or constructs, participate in shaping research designs, use specialized research methods to process information and interpret results, contribute to national capacity development, or exchange points of view based on experience. The role these researchers play should be carefully analyzed and defined at the outset with national counterparts.

**21.** Paradigms change slowly. To bring about change, it is often necessary to initiate a process in which people critically reflect on their existing assumptions. It

is helpful to have divergent perspectives represented in order to have healthy questioning of deeply held assumptions and to entertain different ideas. Within the political and social context, it is good to strive for this openness when possible (while also steering away from ideological discussions and instead focusing on common views). Sufficient time should be allowed for discussion, the organization of ideas, consensus building, and collective decision making.

## EDUCATION SECTOR PROSPECTS IN EL SALVADOR

When presidential candidate Antonio Saca won the national election in March 2004, he subsequently appointed a new Minister of Education who initiated Plan 2021, the long-term national education plan. The long-term plan was intended to allow sufficient time to achieve results, preserve momentum through changes in government, and set goals that coincide with the country's 200th year of independence. With the previous 10-Year Education Reform Plan ending in 2005, the new Minister brought a multitude of stakeholders together to set national goals beyond those of Education for All (EFA), the global vehicle by which education and literacy issues are being addressed.

As a next step toward the ambitious Plan 2021, MINED devised a five-year plan to follow through on the previous

Ministry's concern with educational quality and equity as a responsibility of all.<sup>24</sup> The 2004–2009 plan intends to bring change to all levels of education. For example, change will be achieved in the early grades through an integrated series of reading and writing learning models, including the teaching of English as a second language in public schools. Technology is also a fundamental pillar of the education process to prepare El Salvador to compete in the global economy.

A nationwide research effort was launched to encourage participation and ownership by all Salvadorans, including those living overseas. A report of the findings was submitted to a Presidential Commission, which used the information to design a 17-year plan for 2009–2021. Implementation and follow-up of the plan is being coordinated by MINED through a network of institutions consisting of NGOs, universities, businesses, and other stakeholders.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR USAID/EL SALVADOR<sup>25</sup>**

Education is one of the most important factors that will contribute to El Salvador's future economic success. With increased competitiveness and

globalization, El Salvador needs to strengthen its basic education system so that all children complete primary school with the basic competencies necessary to continue in school and/or to join the world of work. Children must also develop the social and civic competencies needed to live in a democratic society.

What are these basic competencies? During the participatory research and dialogue activities described earlier in this report (see Section II, Participatory Research and Informed Dialogue), stakeholders identified learning to read and write as one of the top priorities. Beyond basic literacy and numeracy, stakeholders identified improved academic competencies, higher-order thinking,<sup>26</sup> teamwork, and exposure to information technology. The government's strategic education plan, Plan 2021, reflects some of these priorities.

During 2004 and 2005, USAID/El Salvador, working closely with MINED, developed a five-year country plan and detailed education program that would directly support the implementation of Plan 2021. Under the Strategic Objective, "Investing in People: Healthier, Better-Educated People," USAID planned to provide technical assistance to strengthen MINED's management capabilities, preschool and pri-

<sup>24</sup> This effort concentrated on improving education policies and donor coordination with programs to raise the average educational level of the population and reduce gaps among regions and socioeconomic groups, and between public and private sector schools. Efforts continue to empower citizens to participate in modern society and incorporate parents and communities in the education process for girls and boys.

<sup>25</sup> Information concerning new programs in this section reflects the program status in August 2005.

<sup>26</sup> In Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of levels of questions for education settings, analysis (seeing patterns and organizing parts), synthesis (using old ideas to create new ones or to make generalizations), and evaluation (comparing and discriminating among ideas) are generally considered higher-order thinking skills.



mary education policies, teacher training, materials development, computer-based teaching technologies, and rural school networks. More specifically, USAID/EI Salvador's 2005–2009 education program plan was designed to accomplish four main objectives, as described below.

**(1) Improve education opportunities through teacher training in innovative approaches for reading and writing instruction, continuous assessment of learning, and the development of civic and social competencies.**

COMPRENDO, MINED's program to improve reading and writing instruction in primary schools, will be strengthened through various program interventions. Modules, which will be written and validated as part of the new in-service teacher-training system, will be designed to improve teachers' knowledge of language and the didactics of language and to better prepare teachers both to develop students' basic competencies and to monitor their progress. Other modules to be developed will prepare teachers to build children's civic and social competencies. All of the modules will form part of the accreditation system and thus serve as an incentive for teachers to continue to grow professionally. In addition, workbooks for children in grades 1–6 and informational materials for families will be developed. Some support materials already have been produced for use with the CETT and

EXCELL programs mentioned earlier in this profile. Parent materials will be developed as an expansion of the Escuela de Familia program, a component of USAID's Early Childhood and Family Education (EDIFAM) Activity.

In addition, because of the increasing global pressures for computer literacy and the need to find ways to update teachers' skills on a regular basis without taking them out of the classroom, USAID will explore new strategies for preparing teachers to obtain information using computers. Short tutorials with self-testing may be developed and introduced. Alliances with the private sector will be sought out to support this.

**(2) Improve the quality and efficiency of basic education through the strengthening of the capacity of rural schools to plan, coordinate, and evaluate their own progress.**

Schools will be provided resources to support professional development and student learning. "Learning corners" will be set up for students. Guides and didactic resources will be provided for teachers. Teachers and principals will receive assistance in planning, coordinating, and evaluating education programs at the school level. They also will be assisted in developing School Report Cards (SRCs) to guide the school community in assessing and monitoring their challenges and achievements, and in taking concrete actions to improve student learning.

**(3) Establish alliances with the private sector nationally and internationally that contribute to improving primary education quality, especially in reading and writing instruction.**

To complement USAID-funded interventions, USAID will work jointly with MINED to leverage greater levels of domestic and international private donations in education. The goal will be to identify possible collaborating partners, to include for-profit companies, NGOs, foundations, hometown associations, and private remittances. Alliances will be sought within and outside of El Salvador to obtain technology, libraries, textbooks, and materials for teachers and students.

**(4) Increase MINED's capacity to analyze and report on efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of education investments.**

Long- and/or short-term technical assistance will be provided to strengthen and institutionalize the financial analysis and planning capacity of MINED's planning unit. This assistance should strengthen the Ministry's capacity to plan and execute budgets, use existing resources, and thus effectively justify increased allotments in the national budget. USAID also plans to introduce new methodologies and tools to enhance capacities in economic and cost-benefit analysis and program evaluation, which will contribute to MINED's ability to make

more informed decisions on how to allocate scarce resources. For example, a "National Education Account" initiative will help MINED to identify and analyze different education sector sources of support and use the findings for improved decision-making in planning, budgeting, financial management, and policy development. Activities will be conducted within the broader framework of improving social sector investments, and thus will seek to strengthen coordination and collaboration between MINED and the Ministry of Health toward this common goal.

Program activities will be implemented under three separate cooperative agreements. One cooperative agreement is with Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo (FEPADE), the local implementer for the CETT program since 2002. Under this new agreement, the CETT program will be expanded and enriched in 500 rural primary schools. Another cooperative agreement was signed with EQUIP2.<sup>27</sup> This agreement, which will be implemented by the Academy for Education Development, will assist in improving education investment, working directly with MINED's planning unit, and also will help to develop and implement competency measures and SRCs in the same 500 rural primary schools. A third agreement, with the Global Development Alliance (GDA), is entitled, "Welcome to

<sup>27</sup> Educational Quality Improvement Program: Policy, Systems, and Management (2003–2008).

School Partnership: Building an Alliance to Improve the Effectiveness of Education in Rural El Salvador." This three-year program (October 2005 through September 2008) is intended to improve learning and reduce dropout and repetition in the early grades of primary school (kindergarten through third grade). Save the Children is the prime contractor for this agreement. Core partners, including Kraft Foods, Scholastic, and the San Mateo Foster City School District, will provide

financial support, books, in-kind donations of materials and services, and technical assistance.

Through this plan, USAID's education program will reach roughly one-fourth of the primary schools in seven of El Salvador's 14 departments, located in the poorest municipalities. A total of 500 schools, 3,000 teachers and principals, and 100,000 children are expected to benefit from the program.

# SUGGESTED READING

For more on EDIFAM (Early Childhood Family Education Activity), see the following reports/Web sites:

- Early Childhood Family Education Activity (EDIFAM)-El Salvador (International Education Systems). N.d. EDIFAM fact sheet. Available at [ies.edc.org/projects/elsalvador.htm](http://ies.edc.org/projects/elsalvador.htm).
- *EDIFAM: Early Education Through the Family-Final Report*. 2002. Available at [www.mccneb.edu/elsalvador/EDIFAM%20Final%20Rpt%20Barb.doc](http://www.mccneb.edu/elsalvador/EDIFAM%20Final%20Rpt%20Barb.doc).
- EDIFAM home page ([www.mccneb.edu/elsalvador](http://www.mccneb.edu/elsalvador)).
- EQUIPI/EDIFAM home page ([www.equip123.net/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=293&z=16](http://www.equip123.net/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=293&z=16)).
- [www.equip123.net/equip1/edifam/default.htm](http://www.equip123.net/equip1/edifam/default.htm).

For more on EXCELL (Excellence in Classroom Education at the Local Level), see the following reports/Web sites:

- *Equidad Calidad Educativa y Desarrollo en El Salvador (EQUIPI) Project*. Available at [www.equip123.net/equip1/excell/docs/Equidad.zip](http://www.equip123.net/equip1/excell/docs/Equidad.zip).
- *EXCELL*. 2003. Brochure in Spanish. Available at [www.equip123.net/equip1/excell/docs/exc\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.equip123.net/equip1/excell/docs/exc_brochure.pdf).
- EXCELL home page and newsletter. Available at [www.equip123.net/equip1/excell/default.htm](http://www.equip123.net/equip1/excell/default.htm).

For more on ALCANCE (Community Alliance in Support of Childhood and Its Continuation in Education), see the following reports/Web sites:

- *Increasing the Impact of Community Remittances on Education in El Salvador* (Pan American Development Foundation). 2005. Available at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PNADE002.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNADE002.pdf)
- *Program ALCANCE: A Study Analysis of the Diaspora Community's Interest* (Sarah Gammage and Corrie Drummond). 2004. Washington, D.C.: Pan American Development Foundation. Available at [www.panamericancommunities.org/\\_Rainbow/Images/UploadedImages/Viability%20Study%20nov%202004.doc](http://www.panamericancommunities.org/_Rainbow/Images/UploadedImages/Viability%20Study%20nov%202004.doc)

For a complete list of the training activities implemented under the Human Capacity Development activity, see the following report/Web site:

- *Final Report: Human Capacity Development/El Salvador, October 1998 through August 2002 and December 2002 through February 2004* (Development Associates, Inc.). 2002. Available at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PDABZ623.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDABZ623.pdf)

For more on the Earthquake Recovery Program, see the following report/Web site:

- "Earthquake Reconstruction: Overview of Damages" (USAID/El Salvador). N.d. Available at [www.usaid.gov/sv/er/index.htm](http://www.usaid.gov/sv/er/index.htm)

For more on Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education, see the following reports/Web sites:

- *Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE): SAGE Final Activities Report* (Academy for Educational Development). 2002. Available at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PDABX585.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDABX585.pdf)
- *Strategies That Succeed, Stories from the SAGE Project* (A series of 10 articles, Nos. 9 and 10 on El Salvador). 2002. Available at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PNACS003.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNACS003.pdf) and <http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/009%20SAGE%20Success%20El%20Salvador.pdf>

For more on the Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training, see the following reports/Web sites:

- *Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT): A Summit of the Americas Initiative Information Packet* (Creative Associates International, Inc.). 2003. Available at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PNACY696.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNACY696.pdf)
- FEPADE, or Business Foundation for Educational Development, home page ([www.fepade.org.sv](http://www.fepade.org.sv)).
- INMED home page ([www.inmed.org](http://www.inmed.org)).

For more on Civic Engagement for Education Reform in Central America, see the following Web site:

- Academy for Educational Development CERCA home page ([www.aed.org/Projects/cerca.cfm](http://www.aed.org/Projects/cerca.cfm)).

For more on the Cooperative Association of States for Scholarship (CASS), see the following reports/Web sites:

- *An Evaluation of the Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships Program (1994–2001)* (Aguirre International). 2002. Available at [www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PDABZ325.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDABZ325.pdf)
- Georgetown University CASS home page ([www.georgetown.edu/CIED/cass.html](http://www.georgetown.edu/CIED/cass.html)).

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