



**CO-EDUCAR PROJECT:**  
Contributing to innovate and improve the education offer in secondary education in Honduras



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**Spotlight on a successful example of institutionalisation: from a small-scale project to a legally referenced model, currently being scaled up at national level**



Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and one of the most unequal in the world. It ranks 137<sup>th</sup> (out of 191) in the 2021 Human Development Index (HDI). The country faces major risks and challenges in a context of extreme fragility, political and social conflicts exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of climate change and migratory movements. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of cyclones Eta and Iota led to the sharpest fall in GDP in the last 20 years. The proportion of the population living in poverty reached 72% in urban areas and 76% in rural areas in 2021, while levels of extreme poverty increased to 44% and 66% respectively.

Honduras also faces challenges in education and employment. In 2021, 12% of people aged 15 and over could not read or write, particularly in rural areas (19% compared to 7% in urban areas). Educational coverage reaches 77% for basic education I (6-11 years), 42% for basic education II (12-14 years) and 28% for secondary education (15-17 years). In addition, the proportion of young people without education or employment reaches 27%, with a significant gap between men (12%) and women (41%) (WB, 2019).

In rural areas, parents who decide to send their children to school enrol them in secondary schools where the study time is shorter, but where the demand and skills acquired are not attractive and do not meet local market demand, thus generating few opportunities. On the other hand, young people who do have the opportunity to go to university do not acquire the necessary academic knowledge to pass the entrance exams. For these reasons, some parents decide to withdraw their children from school so that they can instead help them in productive activities, where they believe they will learn more and be able to provide for their families. In addition, the private sector is increasingly demanding that young and educated people possess specific skills and aptitudes (soft skills, effective communication, customer service, among others) that are not yet systematically trained.

In addition, although international migration is common in the country, it has increased because of poverty and violence. Since 1990, the number of Honduran migrants living outside the country has risen from 156,000 to 985,000, or around 10% of the population. Honduras is also one of the countries most dependent on remittances, which are the country's main source of foreign currency, accounting for 27% of its GDP (WB, 2022) and benefiting almost half of Honduran households. Furthermore, although Honduras contributes little to global emissions (0.06%), it is one of the countries most vulnerable to and affected by extreme weather events, such as floods, hurricanes and droughts, the frequency and severity of which are likely to increase as a result of climate change. Long periods of drought in the Dry Corridor, an area that Honduras shares with Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, and increasingly





Helvetas decided to invest in a secondary education project, which started 16 years ago.

### History of the CO-EDUCAR Project

HELVETAS began working with its implementing partner, the Red de Institutos Técnicos Comunitarios (Red ITC) in 2008 with the aim of improving rural secondary education in Honduras. During this period, HELVETAS and the Red ITC developed a project to promote quality education through the EDUCAR (Education for Rural Economic Development) model, which was implemented between 2008 and 2018 and funded by SDC. The first phase focused on formal education with the creation of two Professional Technical Baccalaureates (BTP) in Agricultural Development and Agroforestry Management, which in 2022 became the BTP in Agroforestry Innovation and Development (BTPIDA) and the BTP in Agricultural Development (BTPDA).

In 2013-2014, thanks to the advocacy work carried out in previous years, a tripartite agreement was signed between the Red ITC, the Secretariat for Education (SEDUC) and HELVETAS, institutionalising the EDUCAR model by approving the curriculum design and study plans and programmes of the two BTPs. This document also provided for the allocation, for an indefinite period, of an annual state budget assigned to the Red ITC for the implementation of the model.

The results of phase I identified limited coverage of the education system for young people who do not have access to education and/or employment. The second phase, called "EDUCAR Plus" (2014-2018), therefore incorporated non-formal education, offering young people in rural areas who are neither studying nor working (NINI) the opportunity to acquire new skills, facilitating access to vocational training and job placement opportunities and encouraging an entrepreneurial culture.

At the end of Phase II in 2018, the Red ITC, in collaboration with HELVETAS, SEDUC and the National Institute for Vocational Training (INFOP), and with funding from the European Union (through the EUROSAN-West programme), developed an additional curriculum on food and nutrition security as well as resilience in the two BTPs. In addition, in the context of the pandemic, the Red ITC, with funding from SDC, support from HELVETAS and backing from SEDUC, implemented two projects aimed at ensuring the continuity of vocational education during the closure of education centres and when they reopened. This has led to the development of a hybrid education model, adapting the methodologies of the EDUCAR model in the teaching and learning process to a digital environment, supported by digital platforms, resources and equipment, Internet access and pedagogical reinforcement for teachers and adapted to the rural context.

intense rainfall have had devastating effects in recent years. These phenomena, combined with environmental degradation, coastal erosion and salinisation, are having an impact on the livelihoods and health of rural populations, causing water stress that manifests itself in low yields and crop losses, compromising food production and increasing levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly in rural communities. To address some of these challenges and provide relevant employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people aged 14 to 30 living in rural areas of the country, with a focus on young people with high migration potential and returnees,



The Red ITC has also been able, in recent years, to raise and manage funds from a wide range of international donors (Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Lutheran World Relief (LWR), UNESCO, USAID, GIZ, etc.) and government to complement elements of the model such as: life skills, employability skills, entrepreneurship, self-savings and loan groups, internships, scholarships for students and graduates, mental health support as well as various interventions to support young people in situations of exclusion and vulnerability. As of June 2024, 27 institutes (out of 28) in the centre-west region of Honduras are members of the Red ITC and are implementing the EDUCAR model in 7 departments (Comayagua, La Paz, Intibucá, Lempira, Santa Bárbara, Copán and Ocotepeque with a total of 6,898 students enrolled (3,264 boys and 3,634 girls), including 1,102 BTPIDA students (622 boys and 480 girls) and 129 BTPDA students (111 boys and 18 girls). In addition, 300 young NINI took part in and completed the short courses offered by the project in 2022 and 2023 (60% women). Furthermore, with the scaling up of the CO-EDUCAR model in 7 institutes in the departments of Valle, Choluteca and Francisco Morazán, 463 students have been enrolled in the two BTPs, of which 333 are boys and 130 girls.

### Innovation and future prospects

In view of the positive results, the recognition and support of SEDUC, but also the challenges associated with the proportion of young people who have migrated or are neither working nor studying despite the project's support (around 1/3), a new project financed by Helvetas' own funds started at the end of 2023. This 2-year project aims to i) consolidate the achievements of the Red ITC in the centre-west of the country by strengthening the educational offer provided by the institutes, ii) replicate the model by establishing a new network in the south of the country, in the departments of Valle, Choluteca, El Paraíso and Francisco Morazán, and iii) to ensure the sustainability of the EDUCAR model through the complementary and synergistic articulation and action of the State, the private sector and development organisations, the institutionalisation of the model and its scaling up at national and regional level, promoting systemic changes in the education system.

The project focuses not only on developing young people's technical and non-technical skills (demand side) by improving the offer of formal and non-formal education, but also on strengthening links with the private sector to foster employment and self-employment opportunities (supply side).

Its added value also lies in the innovative elements of the model linked to migration, climate change and digitalisation, in response to the current political, economic, social and environmental context and the specific needs of the populations concerned. Voluntary and forced migration and the desertion of young people in rural areas are major problems in Honduras. The project addresses these issues by tackling the main drivers of migration in these rural areas (economic and environmental factors) that push young people to leave their communities and migrate to the cities or abroad in search of work. It offers a viable and sustainable alternative to young people, giving them the means and opportunities to develop new skills, apply their knowledge locally and generate income through employment or self-employment opportunities, thereby contributing to the economic and sustainable development of their communities, while also providing them with a wealth of knowledge and skills should they decide to migrate anyway.



In addition, the content of the modules forming part of the BTP programmes has also been enriched with innovative elements on green economy and circular economy. The implementation of the hybrid education system has also led to a change in the way teachers plan their lessons, moving from content-based planning to competence-based planning. For young people, this has enabled them to optimise the learning process, be more flexible and acquire additional knowledge contextualised to the subjects. Through the involvement of the private sector, the project also aims to contribute to the advancement of agribusiness, the

consolidation of value chains and the growth of agricultural exports, thereby increasing the country's income without compromising sustainability, promoting innovation and stimulating the green economy.

### Systemic approach - A path to ownership and sustainability

One of the main objectives of this new project is to strengthen good governance and further institutionalise the model, to ensure better coordination and ownership of the project. In addition to the Ministry of Education, other institutions have validated the relevance of the EDUCAR rural education model, including the UNESCO, the Central American Integration System (SICA), LWR and CRS. Recognition of the model by SEDUC, which has funded it on a permanent basis, took a major step forward last March, when a new law (Agreement No. 1020-SE-2023) was published in the country's official gazette, formalising the creation of a national network of agricultural schools, which will comprise five regional networks (including those in the center-west and south mentioned above) following the EDUCAR model. The article of law also refers to the cooperation agreement between the Red ITC and SEDUC concerning the management of the organisation, monitoring and operational processes of this national network. The legal basis for replicating the model in other regions therefore already exists, making it much easier to scale up.

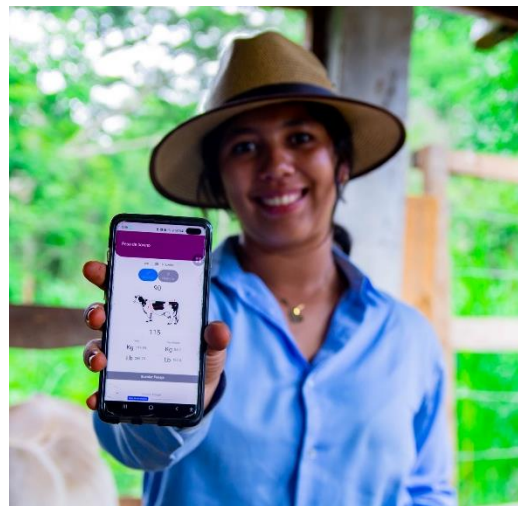
The current replication process is planned to be gradual, given the importance of consolidating what has been achieved while replicating the model in parallel in other regions, where contextual differences require particular attention and adaptation of the intervention. Since the beginning of 2024, the model has therefore been implemented in the southern region as well, in a number of technical institutes, in view of the vulnerabilities and needs of the area's inhabitants. The plan is to gradually extend this model to the whole country, creating not two but five networks, as indicated in the gazette, each responsible for its own institutes and exchanging experiences, best practices and lessons learned with various stakeholders. Contacts have already been established with the 108 technical institutes offering these BTPs to publicise the model and are continuing. CO-EDUCAR will also serve as a reference model for other BTPs at secondary level.

The project is currently seeking additional funding to 1) implement the model in other institutes in the south (so far 7 out of 19); 2) enable the development/reinforcement of complementary initiatives aimed at strengthening the offer, supporting students, producers or communities in various areas; 3) enable the model to be extended to other regions of the country, with the creation of new networks; 4) expand the number of work placements for NINIs and graduates from the institutes and 5) expand employment opportunities for young graduates by strengthening relations with private companies and providing service contracts for young people after employment.

There are also plans to extend the model at regional level (particularly in Central America), with the support of international stakeholders such as UNESCO, SICA and the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN). El Salvador has already expressed interest in the model, and discussions and visits are planned.



The current project is thus an excellent example of a small innovative and comprehensive initiative providing solutions to a number of challenges in various fields (secondary education for young people in rural areas, migration, climate change and digitisation), which produced results on a large scale and is now institutionally anchored, ensuring ownership and sustainability, thanks to joint management and collaboration between the local partner, the Red ITC and the Ministry of Education.



**For more information:**

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