



Paintbrush to Prosperity

Artisan Training Ramps Up in El Salvador's Northern Zone through MCC grant

In La Palma, a city in El Salvador's Northern Zone, artisans are painting a pathway from poverty to prosperity. By preserving and effectively marketing their artistic traditions, artisan shops and cooperatives are making the city a go-to destination for traditional Salvadoran art in a region otherwise known as one of the country's poorest. These shops and cooperatives are now preparing for further growth by participating in a unique artisan training pilot program made possible through El Salvador's \$461 million compact through the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), designed to reduce poverty through economic growth.

FOMILENIO, the Salvadoran organization implementing the compact, signed an agreement with Aid to Artisans (ATA) in August 2008 that will train approximately 850 artisans and directly benefit 340 artisan shops, cooperatives, or associations in the Northern Zone. The training will equip them with the technical know-how to expand product designs, grow sales, develop new markets, and increase incomes. As a testament to the effectiveness of coordinating with other donors to maximize impact, the FOMILENIO-ATA pilot program builds on USAID's successful work with artists in this previously war-ravaged area.

La Semilla de Dios, an artisan cooperative with 35 members, is among those to benefit from the MCC-funded training. Its president, Gregorio Diaz, explains how the anticipated training is "practical learning," creating a closer



La Palma's artisan craft provides a pathway out of poverty for residents of the Northern Zone. El Salvador's MCC compact focuses on alleviating poverty in this region, where more than half of the population lives below the poverty line.

link between what the artists will design and what consumers will purchase. The cooperative's members utilize their skills to manage various stages of the production cycle:

- ★ carpentry to fashion wooden designs,
- ★ drawing techniques to illustrate each piece,
- ★ painting and varnishing to complete every design,
- ★ and packaging and distribution to get finished artisan products to local and international markets.

Women play a principal role in the artisan sector as painters, either working from their homes or at shared workshops, many of which allow mothers to organize childcare. This benefit reduces the costs and strains on the family, while bolstering business productivity.

The training, already underway, will help artisans develop new product designs and strategies for marketing them. It includes instructing master artisans in best practices for working in wood, textiles, ceramics, and other innovative and environmentally-friendly materials like papier-mâché, natural fibers, and coffee beans.



Aminta Mancía talks about the benefits of the MCC-funded training for the artisan shop she founded, El Madero de Jesús.



Women artisans play a tremendous role in the Northern Zone's productive economy. Yolanda Mansilla spends her workday painting traditional wooden crosses at La Semilla de Dios cooperative.

These master artisans will then train other local artists to apply these practices to their specializations in carpentry, drawing, painting, and finishing.

Aminta Mancía, originally trained by internationally-recognized Salvadoran artist Fernando Llort and founder of El Madero de Jesús, a retail shop of artisan products that is participating in the training, summarizes the positive ripple effect of the pilot program best. "It will benefit me and give more work to more people."

Equipped with jobs, the artisans of La Palma not only will preserve their authentic art but also will generate income to pull themselves out of poverty and toward a more prosperous future.

For more information regarding the U.S. Government's \$461 million anti-poverty MCC compact with El Salvador, visit www.mcc.gov.