



Building a Prosperous Future, One Kilometer at a Time

Elsa Bolaños has worked as a civil engineer for 47 years at private sector construction companies and El Salvador's Ministry of Public Works, where she became the ministry's first woman division chief.

Elsa lives in the Northern Zone, which historically has been isolated from the rest of El Salvador. This isolation has impeded the area's development, contributing to widespread poverty that affects more than half of the region's families.

As part of the five-year, \$461 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact with El Salvador, more than 220 kilometers of road have been constructed and rehabilitated—equivalent to the distance between Washington and Philadelphia—to allow easier transportation for cargo and improved mobilization of people in the Northern Zone. The MCC compact is expected to create opportunities for more than 706,335 people.

Because of MCC's investments, the Northern Zone now has the building blocks in place for a more prosperous future: electrification, roads, bridges, water, sanitation, and a trained workforce. The region is open for business and investments.

Elsa's story

When she learned the compact included investments to build a highway to span the width of the Northern Zone and to connect the region to Guatemala and Honduras, Elsa was ecstatic about what it meant for her family's future. She put her decades of experience in civil engineering to work on Section



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2B1, a six-kilometer stretch of new road in difficult mountainous terrain.

Elsa was joined on the roads project by one of her four children, Elizabeth, an architect with a master's degree in environmental studies who assesses the environmental impact of roads. Elizabeth worked on the Nuevo Edén de San Juan bridge, one of the three main bridges constructed with MCC funding to ensure connectivity throughout the area.

Crossing gender barriers

In her current role, Elsa has provided opportunities to women in environmental assessment, quality control and social management. The construction company for which she works has filled 40 percent of its professional positions with women.

“This job was previously reserved for men only,” she said. “It has only been a few decades since women started entering this industry, and our achievements are becoming better known every day. Working in the road construction industry makes me feel accomplished. I don't think that I'm better than a man but I feel that I am his equal.”

Elsa and her daughter Elizabeth are proud to be members of the team who implemented the compact—and who helped build the foundation for a more prosperous future in the Northern Zone.



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