

MCC Provides New Opportunities for Thousands of Students in El Salvador

Jonathan Eliel Hernandez wakes up every weekday morning at 5:30 am to get ready for a long school day. As in many parts of rural El Salvador, public buses pass infrequently and at irregular hours. Although classes begin at 7:10 am, the earliest bus that Jonathan can catch is at 7:30. To make matters even more difficult, Jonathan has to walk 45 minutes to the nearest main road to catch his bus, with no guarantee that it will arrive on time. Since he often arrives late to class, his teacher uses breaks between classes to help him and other students from distant villages catch up on the lessons they miss.

Despite this difficult schedule, Jonathan considers himself lucky. He is part of the second round of students participating in a scholarship program established by FOMILENIO (the entity implementing the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact with El Salvador) and the Ministry of Education (MINED) to increase secondary technical education enrollment, retention and graduation rates.

This and other investments in human development are critical components of FOMILENIO's strategy to reduce poverty through economic growth in El Salvador's Northern Zone. FOMILENIO and MINED are providing scholarships to over 1,300 students in the Northern Zone, providing them with financial resources that open the door to continued secondary education. The program is also creating critical new educational opportunities for women and girls, and encouraging them to consider careers that are traditionally perceived to be reserved for men. Approximately 50 percent of scholarship recipients are girls, while 63 percent of non-formal skills training course participants are female.

Due to rising costs in transportation and food, many poor Salvadoran families struggle to pay for their children's secondary education. While primary school enrollment and completion rates have increased dramatically in recent years, low enrollment and completion rates at the secondary level persist, especially in rural areas where there are not enough schools and dropout rates are high. For students who want to learn, the initiative is often left entirely to them and their families. The MCC-funded scholarship program works effectively to support student initiative and assist families that are making education a priority.



Jonathan Eliel Hernandez is one of the 4,377 students in the Northern Zone receiving scholarships to attend technical and vocational high schools and community colleges.

The \$30 million Education and Training Activity seeks to increase human and physical capital of residents of the Northern Zone to maximize employment and business opportunities.

- ★ There are 14,067 students participating in MCC-supported education activities in El Salvador. By the end of the compact's five-year term, it is expected that 26,927 students will have benefitted.
- ★ 450 teachers and school administrators have been trained.
- ★ 21 technical secondary schools have been renovated and equipped with education-enhancing facilities like modern computer labs, libraries and additional classrooms. A new community college facility is under construction.
- ★ To date, there have been 112 non-formal vocational training classes in 21 municipalities, with 1,475 women and 954 men participating. Trainings focus on skills like entrepreneurship, hospitality and tourism, civil engineering, aquaculture, computer technology, culinary arts, carpentry, and electrical systems, among others.



Northern Zone students pose with their program completion certificates.

Market-led curricula

Recognizing the need for innovation in vocational secondary education, FOMILENIO and MINED have developed new programs of study, or “career paths,” that are designed to prepare students with jobs in areas of increasing demand. In his first year of study in fair-trade business practices, Jonathan is one of the pioneering students in these new career paths. When asked why he chose his specialty, Jonathan explained that he has helped on the family farm since he was a child and he plans to use the knowledge that he will gain from this program to help his family and other families in his community improve their farming practices.

Residents of the Northern Zone are also benefitting from other compact projects:

- ★ The \$460.9 million MCC Compact with El Salvador is reducing poverty by providing education, electricity, safe drinking water, better roads, and more economic opportunities to thousands of Salvadorans.
- ★ 1,415 km of electrical lines are being installed and over 24,000 people are projected to be connected to the electricity network for the first time by the end of the MCC Compact.
- ★ 950 out of 1,950 solar panels have been installed in the Northern Zone, providing electricity for thousands of people.
- ★ 195.6 kilometers of roads and bridges are being constructed that will connect the Northern Zone with the rest of country and the region, reducing travel costs and time and encouraging business activity in the region.