



MIDEH 2011-2016 Project Quarterly Progress Report

September 1, 2011 – September 30, 2011



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Mejorando el Impacto al Desempeño Estudiantil de Honduras (MIDEH)
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I. Project Summary

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has been awarded a Cooperative Agreement from USAID/Honduras to implement the *Mejorando el Impacto al Desempeño Estudiantil de Honduras* (MIDEH) Project, a 5-year project with an estimated budget of \$11,192,521 in federal funds. AIR's MIDEH team will support the Government of Honduras (GOH) in consolidating and sustaining a national standards-based educational reform program to monitor and improve the quality of education in line with Education for All (EFA) goals. MIDEH will operate with a field office in Tegucigalpa supported by international short term technical assistance. The program will implement activities in pursuit of three results, complemented by a research program.

The implementation of the DCNB (*Diseño del Currículo Nacional Básico*) standards, corresponding instructional materials, and the assessment system needed to reliably measure and improve student achievement (Result 1) is designed to ensure that quality professional standards that are comprehensive and cost effective are available and can be meaningfully used in a resource-scarce environment such as Honduras.

Building the necessary technical, organizational, and financial capacities to design and maintain a national system for monitoring and improving the quality of education (Result 2) will be facilitated and supported at appropriate institutions to ensure that the system will continue to operate beyond the life of the MIDEH Project. Honduran leadership and responsibility for the technical and financial aspects of the functions performed by MIDEH will be phased in gradually during the project implementation period.

Civil society engagement (Result 3) to promote implementation and utilization of DCNB standards and assessment results at local level is a new focus for MIDEH. Increased stakeholder involvement at the local level will increase accountability in the education system.

By building on the successful EQUIP1-MIDEH/AIR project, MIDEH will reinforce the cornerstones of an effective and sustainable national standards-based educational system: utilization of the DCNB, with valid and reliable assessment components, institutional capacity for maintaining and supporting it, and the active participation of civil society and other local stakeholders to create a demand-driven system of educational services and improvement.

II. Management Activities Implemented in Project Start-Up

During the month of September, MIDEH/AIR made good progress toward establishing its field office in Tegucigalpa and positioning itself to launch program activities in the month of October 2011.

The project began operating in temporary offices within two weeks of the start date of the award (September 1, 2011). A permanent location was identified; negotiations are underway on the rental contract and include modifications to the space to accommodate a team of 14 staff members.

The AIR home office approved the re-hire of several members of the MIDEH technical staff without competition since they have unique qualifications and experience not found elsewhere in Honduras. The MIDEH team includes five staff members who were trained and mentored by AIR's expert psychometricians during the 2005-2011 period. No university or institution in Honduras offers

educational opportunities in the technically demanding field of psychometrics, so it would be impossible to recruit new staff with the knowledge and history of practice in the areas of the project focus.

MIDEH/AIR published a recruitment announcement for the Deputy Chief of Party (D-COP) position on the websites of the *Red Sostenible* and the *Bolsa de Empleos* at the end of September 2011. In addition, MIDEH/AIR distributed the position description widely to USAID, the Ministry of Education, UPN and the UNAH, international and local NGOs, MERECE members and other donor representatives. MIDEH/AIR and the home office are reviewing the D-COP candidates.

The Finance and Grants Manager identified as key personnel in the AIR proposal gave notice to his employer and joined the COP at the end of September 2011, working on start-up activities. MIDEH/AIR also published administrative staff and an accountant vacancy announcement on the *Red Sostenible* and *Bolsa de Empleos* websites at the end of September 2011. The selection of administrative and accounting staff is in process.

AIR home office staff members have been designated to provide program direction and oversight as well as financial and administrative support to the MIDEH program.

The project accounting system was established and the project began to operate with modest funds through AIR's accounts in the local Banco de Honduras. Internal operating procedures were adapted from the previous project and tailored to the new award.

AIR has the advantage of having previously obtained legal recognition in Honduras as a non-profit and already having a Tax Registration Number (RTN). Thus the team can move ahead in October to process a request for exoneration of taxes, which can be a lengthy process. Until the exoneration is obtained, the project staff will have to wait to make any large purchases of equipment or furniture which would be taxable.

The MIDEH COP met with the USAID AOTR for the project to discuss the details of the first six month work plan. On September 12, 2011, the COP and Finance and Grants Manager participated in a Post Award Orientation given by USAID under the direction of the Regional A&A Officer. With the advances made in staffing and establishing operating systems, the project is poised to begin priority program activities in the month of October 2011.

III. Planned Activities Next Quarter

Activities will continue in the management area, working towards getting the field office fully staffed and operating in a permanent location. Program activities will begin in the month of October.

A. Management activities include:

1. Negotiation and signing of a rental contract for office space in Torre Alpha, Lomas de Guijarro
2. Selection and contracting of administrative staff, an accountant, three more technical positions, and the D-COP by November 30, 2011
3. Processing a request channeled through USAID to the DEI for exoneration of sales taxes

4. Preparation of the project Branding and Marking Plan, final Performance Monitoring Plan, and a Grants Manual for submission to USAID. Adjustments in some deadlines will be requested from USAID.
5. Preparation of the CY 2012 Work Plan for submission on November 15, 2011
6. MIDEH and AIR discussions with collaborating organizations to agree on areas of mutual interest and definition of working relationships

B. Program technical activities include:

1. Result 1 – DCNB, aligned educational materials, school-administered tests

- Complete the construction of census tests for grades 1-6 in Spanish and Math for application in a pilot program
- Join DIGECE to prepare local COMDEs, municipal leaders, SE district staff, school directors, and teachers to participate in a pilot of school-administered end of grade tests in selected municipalities from October 31 to November 2, 2011. Proposed locations are Puerto Cortes, Duyure, Jacaleapa, San Francisco de Becerra, Las Colinas in Santa Bárbara and San Marcos de Colón
- Assist teachers, school directors, district supervisors and DIGECE staff to score and report on school-administered tests
- Develop a parallel small pilot of computer-administered end of grade internal tests in four or five schools with computer labs, likely in Francisco Morazán
- Follow-up on curricular validation studies carried out in the last six months of EQUIP1-MIDEH to determine whether additional effort is needed for stakeholder reports
- Coordinate with the USAID-funded EducAcción Project, also implemented by AIR, to orient and train NGO staff on the DCNB school package of materials
- Complete orientation workshops for SE central, departmental and district level staff on the DCNB school package of materials
- Review and revise diagnostic and formative tests for grades 1-6 in Spanish and Math as first priority, and grades 7-11 as second priority

2. Result 2 – Foundation for Institutional Capacity Building and Sustainability

- With the help of an expert consultant, analyze best direction to take in designing a detailed work plan of financial sustainability activities under MIDEH
- With AIR's senior psychometricians, develop a preliminary outline for technical capacity building activities to begin in the first quarter of calendar year 2012
- Respond to SE requests for technical support in technology adaptation and cost-saving methods

3. Result 3 – Civil Society Participation

- Hold joint planning and coordination meeting with EducAcción to define areas of collaboration and synergies
- Review the scope and approach to the competitive grants program and small activities support in order to develop a practical grants manual tailored to MIDEH goals

- Meet with Transformemos Honduras and FEREMA to define areas of collaboration and forward planning

4. *Research Studies*—No major activities are proposed until the first quarter of CY 2012