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MIDEH PROJECT HONDURAS

QUARTERLY REPORT
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I. Acronyms

AIR	American Institutes for Research
AMHON	Honduran National Association of Municipalities
AOTR	Agreement Officer's Technical Representative
CETT	Centers for Excellence for Training Teachers
COMDE	Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo Educativo (Municipal Committee for Educational Development)
COP	Chief of Party
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCNB	Diseño Curricular Nacional Básico (National Curriculum)
DIGECE	Dirección General de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación
EFA	Education for All
EFA-FTI	Education for All-Fast Track Initiative
EQUIP	Educational Quality Improvement Program
FEREMA	Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu
GOH	Government of Honduras
IDP	American Institutes for Research's International Development Program
INICE	Instituto de Investigación y Capacitación Educativa
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIDEH	Mejorando el Impacto al Desempeño Estudiantil de Honduras (Honduras Improving Student Achievement Project)
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SE	Secretaría de Educación
SBE	Standards-Based Education
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
TCPP	Teacher-Citizen Participation Project - EducAcción
TH	Transformemos Honduras
UMCE	Unidad de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación
UNAH	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras
UPN/UPNFM	La Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

II. Executive Summary

This report describes the main achievements for the Honduras Improving Student Performance Project (known by its Spanish acronym, MIDEH) implemented by the American Institutes for Research from October through December 2011. It serves to update USAID/Honduras on project accomplishments and inform of any outstanding issues during this period.

The major accomplishments of MIDEH during October through December 2011 were:

- Implementation of a pilot administration of internal end-of-grade tests prepared the way for the Ministry of Education to effectively plan the financial, personnel and technical resources needed to carry out 2012 standardized end-of-grade tests
- Advances were made in developing partnerships with the National Autonomous University, Transformemos Honduras, and UPNFM which will facilitate an acceleration in project implementation in the next quarter
- MIDEH offices were opened and staffed for a quick start-up; basic operating plans were submitted to USAID including the 2012 annual work plan endorsed by the Ministry of Education, branding and marking strategy and performance monitoring plan.
- Cumulative accrued expenses through December 31, 2011 totaled \$307,099, or 2.7% of the approved life of project \$11,192,521 budget and 15% of the funds obligated to date.

III. Program Context and Objective

National Context: Issues of security, violence, corruption, and socio-economic conflicts continued to dominate the Honduran national context in the last quarter of 2011.

The announcement by the US Government that the Peace Corps would withdraw from Honduras due to the high risks for volunteers, combined with the release of the 2011 UNODC homicide report placing Honduras as one of the most dangerous countries in the world, was a blow to the image of Honduras globally. Corruption in the national police force and revelations of police linkages to narco-trafficking, kidnappings and assassinations shook the faith of the citizenry in this institution. Notorious cases of corruption in government autonomous entities, public utilities, among tax authorities, and government ministries, including education, made headlines daily in the media.

In the political arena, the National Congress pushed through a huge agenda of legislative activity before the holiday recess but did not conclude work on the Fundamental Law for Education. Looking towards the primary elections in 2012 and national elections in 2013, partisan activities had already heated up by the end of the calendar year and diverted attention from getting basic government tasks done. Dismal performance on key democracy indicators left Honduras out of the running for a new MCA compact in 2011.

With revenues coming up short for the last quarter 2011, the government had difficulty in paying salaries and providing full services especially in the health sector but also in meeting the payroll

for public school system teachers. Heavy rains in October and November damaged major highways and other infrastructure as well as agricultural production thus causing economic hardship for the poor in rural areas. In general, economic performance in 2011 was not sufficient to recover from the past years' deficits. Honduras is among the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Project Context: The education sector ended the school year in the same state of upheaval that it lived throughout 2011. Teacher unions were doing battle over the government's intervention of the teachers' retirement institute resulting from the discovery of enormous mismanagement and misuse of funds. Teacher protests were organized to demand the payment of salaries for thousands of teachers before the end of the school year. Teacher unions attempted to block passage of a new general education law that would replace the 1966 education sector framework legislation. The Fundamental Law for Education was expected to be passed before the Congressional recess in December but was delayed until January 2012. The new law requires 200 days of classes, higher academic credentials for teachers as of 2018, and social audits of education activities to ensure greater transparency. Of special interest to MIDEH, the law commits Honduras to establish a comprehensive national education evaluation system through future legislation, but the timeframe for separate legislation is not defined. The Fundamental Law for Education, and the earlier Law for Strengthening Public Education and Community Participation (April 2011), define points of reference for the MIDEH project.

Traditionally all government ministers resign at the end of the calendar year to allow the president to name new collaborators. Speculation on a change in the Ministry of Education was strong during the quarter, with a supposed successor already identified in the media. Ministry counterparts were unwilling early in the quarter to make commitments to some project activities while they were uncertain about their own job tenure.

Education Ministry access to donor resources through the Common Fund was still suspended while the Superior Accountability Tribune reviewed the Plan EFA accounting dating back five years. Without access to these donor funds, the Ministry of Education had no resources for 2011 standardized testing or printing of educational materials. At the same time, since the MIDEH project award timing came late in the Honduran school year, the project was not able to plan and implement external end-of-grade tests. AIR's project proposal which included 2011 end-of-grade external tests assumed a direct transition from EQUIP1-MIDEH/AIR to the MIDEH 2011-2016 project, which did not happen. However, with minimum costs and a rapid start-up, the new MIDEH project was able to pilot school-administered 2011 end-of-grade tests in seven municipalities.

The Ministry failed to clean up the teachers' payrolls by the November 2011 deadline set by the President which indicates the lack of control over the largest budget item for the Ministry – salaries. The solution was to transfer control for teacher payrolls to the Ministry of Finance. The Education Minister publicly admitted that there were at least 3,000 teachers who could not be found in classrooms or schools but were collecting a salary.

Statistics on student promotion and retention at the end of the 2011 school year were disappointing. The Ministry reported that 154,000 students in all levels failed to pass their grade and nearly 69,000 deserted. The end of year 2011 registration stood at 2,185,777 students from pre-basic through secondary schools. In public statements, the Minister of Education suggested that citizen insecurity was a major factor which obliged many students to abandon their studies.

Objective: All project activities from this quarter contributed to helping Honduras to consolidate and sustain education reforms based on national standards with the objective of improving the quality of education in Honduras and achieving EFA goals. The MIDEH project activities are aligned with the USAID Development Objective for Education.

IV. Intermediate Program Results and Activities

This section of the quarterly report serves to inform USAID/Honduras of the program advances achieved from October through December 2011, and to report on specific activities. The results are presented by Program Result and Activity, according to the Work Plan covering the first six months of the project implementation as approved in Annex D to the Cooperative Agreement.

Program Result 1: Technical Capacity to Reach EFA Goals under SE Leadership Strengthened

Activity 1.1 DCNB, Aligned Educational Materials, and School Administered Tests

The majority of MIDEH's technical resources this quarter were focused on the design of tests and procedures for a pilot of internal school-administered summative tests in seven municipalities in late October/early November 2011 during the last two weeks of the Honduran school year. The pilot was enthusiastically received by the local government authorities, COMDEs, SE district supervisors, school directors and teachers. Some 23,300 students in grades 1-6 were tested at a low direct cost of less than HNL 12 per student, or about US 0.63. The direct costs of reproducing the tests, distribution, test administration, test collection and results tabulation, were financed by the municipalities themselves. The participating municipalities were: Puerto Cortés (Cortés), San José de Colinas (Santa Bárbara), San Francisco de Becerra (Olancho), Potrerillos and Jacaleapa (El Paraíso), and San Marcos de Colon and Duyure (Choluteca).

To prepare the end-of-grade internal tests, MIDEH evaluation staff reviewed the existing items bank inherited from EQUIP1-MIDEH-AIR project and selected items to construct internal tests that would be approximately comparable to the 2010 external assessments. Though in this pilot MIDEH did not have time to develop perfect instruments in psychometric terms with the rigor demanded for external assessments, the tests were technically acceptable for the use of the classroom teacher. The purpose was to provide a tool for teachers to measure student performance against the content standards for a particular grade and subject matter. The assessment results were not to be used to compare one school or one municipality against another, or to evaluate teacher performance, rather they serve to guide the classroom teacher in devising new strategies for improved instruction and identifying subject content standards that need reinforcement.

Various administration procedures were used in applying the tests. They included classroom teacher administration and scoring, rotation of teachers to administer and score in other classrooms in the same school, rotation to other schools, and centralized scoring by third parties. A review of the performance of the schools in the pilot against the 2010 results for the same department revealed that the level of reliability of results varied markedly from school to school with a significant number that were not in line with prior external test results.

The importance of the pilot was to demonstrate that technically acceptable assessments could be done as school-administered census tests for a low costs with local government participation. The challenge is how to increase the level of security to make the school-administered census test proposed for 2012 reliable enough to serve communities' needs for monitoring education quality and performance as required by the Law for Strengthening Public Education and Community Participation (April 2011).

Activity 1.2 System-Wide External Summative Tests

As a result of the pilot test of internal summative tests, the Ministry of Education moved closer to a decision to expand the pilot to system-wide census tests in 2012 to substitute for the previous sample-based external end-of-grade evaluations. Census tests would provide the performance data and information needed by COMDEs and local groups to demand transparency and accountability from the public school system.

Thus the Ministry of Education indicated its desire that MIDEH proceed to develop end-of-grade assessments for Math and Spanish for first through ninth grades. By December 31, 2011 MIDEH staff had produced test blue prints in two formats for each subject and each grade and reviewed the inventory of test items in the data bank to calculate how many new items would have to be produced to complete the test design. The blueprints would be reviewed with DIGECE early in the next quarter and training was scheduled for an item writing workshop at the end of January 2012.

Program Result 2: Institutionalizing Educational Quality Inputs

Activity 2.1 Transferring Technical Capacity to National Institutions

MIDEH met with various Ministry of Education, UPN and UNAH authorities throughout the quarter to define areas of collaboration and capacity building on the assumption that they remain the leading candidates for the transfer of technical capacity to national institutions. Although the draft legislation for the new framework law for the education sector at one point specifically said that an independent evaluation institute would be established, in the final version of the law presented for congressional approval the article was revised to call more broadly for the establishment of a national evaluation system. The Fundamental Law for education was passed in January 2012 with the article stating that future legislation would establish the national education evaluation system.

With no target date for the separate law to institutionalize education evaluation, MIDEH cannot postpone capacity-building activities aimed at transfer of its technical functions to national institutions. In mid-October 2011, MIDEH's technical staff, international consultant Dr. James Cobbe and AIR's Drs. Zarko Vukmirovic and Howard Williams met with local institutions and informants to begin a detailed analysis of the technical capacities and recurring costs involved in curriculum standards and assessment-related activities supported by the previous EQUIP1-MIDEH/AIR project and those planned for MIDEH 2011-2016.

The idea was that given the flux in education legislation and institutional structures at the end of 2011, MIDEH should break the set of activities and responsibilities envisaged in support of standards-based education into identifiable activities, responsibilities and functions that make up its entirety. MIDEH could then start transferring capacity and responsibility for some of the activities to those institutional homes that appear to have a high probability of getting them in

the end, but not look for institutional homes for those pieces which would naturally go to the independent institute when it is operational. For example, by determining the implications of assessment results for teacher training, and translating that into changes in pre-service and in-service teacher training, MIDEH could then decide whether to target UPN or INICE to provide the teacher training, or look for capacity among education sector NGOs. Further analysis of the technical demands and costs for a sustainable evaluation system will help refine the targets for training and capacity-building workshops.

Activity 2.2 Financial Sustainability

Costing the main elements of the education evaluation system is a first step towards a sustainability strategy. The cost analysis began with Dr. Cobbe's recommendations and will continue into the next two quarters. For the specific activity of 2012 end-of-grade census test, MIDEH prepared a detailed cost estimate for the Vice Minister of Education in mid-December as the Ministry was preparing the 2012 POA for the donors' consideration.

The October 2011 school-administered end of grade test pilot showed that local governments are willing to underwrite the costs of assessments to monitor the quality of education in their municipalities. This bodes well for increased sustainability of an assessment system that may not have to rely totally on central government financing.

Program Result 3: Strengthening Civil Society Participation in Supporting Education.

MIDEH delayed the start of major activities under this Result to the next quarter since the project staff was employed in the time-sensitive activities under Result 1 which could only be implemented at the end of the school year. That said, MIDEH did begin the basic groundwork to open discussions with civil society groups and NGOs who have a stake in the education sector. For example, MIDEH approached World Vision and Transformemos Honduras (TH) whose networks with communities and civil society organizations are extensive. Both have been receptive to initial conversations with MIDEH.

Immediate collaboration with Transformemos Honduras on education sector reforms holds great promise. Transformemos Honduras is gradually assuming a greater responsibility in social auditing at a national level, in different sectors, including education. MIDEH and TH have discussed the feasibility of a simple scheme to monitor the 200 days of classes on a periodic basis using parents to call in reports by cellular phone. MIDEH has also proposed a role for TH in organizing events for the socialization of assessment results, and monitoring the extent to which the test results and recommendations are used by teachers, school directors, parents, and authorities at all levels of government.

MIDEH will focus more on Result 3 engagement with civil society and design of a mechanism to fund small activities at the local level in the next quarter. The original work plan contained in Annex D to the Cooperative Agreement was developed before the implementing regulations for the Law to Strengthen Public Education and Community Participation had been published by the GOH. That work plan proposed that MIDEH would issue sub-grants to support NGOs monitoring of the quality of education and advocating for transparency and accountability in education services. With the publication of the implementing regulations for the Law to Strengthen Public Education, COMDEs emerge as a potential leading local instance for monitoring the quality of education in each municipality. MIDEH will revise its plan for sub-grants to extend support to COMDEs especially in the target municipalities where EducAcción is working.

V. Monitoring and Evaluation

MIDEH submitted its proposed performance monitoring plan to USAID in mid-December 2011. The AOTR has given informal feedback on the indicator selection which merits more discussion and technical input from both USAID and MIDEH experts. The draft PMP contains 16 indicators of which five are apt for quarterly reporting; the others are annual or biennial indicators that will be measured through surveys, research studies, annual government national accounts, student census data and periodic standardized tests. As soon as USAID and MIDEH agree on the final PMP, MIDEH will begin quarterly reporting on the appropriate indicators.

VI. Outstanding Issues, Constraints, Delays and Actions Taken

Project start up inevitably takes a huge effort in the first weeks of implementation. MIDEH was able to staff its field office and begin operations within 30 days of the award. During this quarter, MIDEH submitted its 2012 Annual Work Plan, a Branding and Marking Strategy and Performance Monitoring Plan to USAID for approval. The project start-up coincided with the close of the 2011 school year which required an adjustment to program activities which depend on the academic cycle.

As described in the national context and project context sections at the beginning of this report, the education sector was practically in shambles in October 2011. Government education stakeholders were tied up with the legislative push to approve the Fundamental Law for Education and to resolve the crisis in the teachers' retirement institute, IMPREMA. MIDEH had difficulties engaging the attention of the Ministry of Education authorities on anything other than the pilot on school-administered summative tests. This situation has been resolved now in the new quarter which should allow the project to accelerate implementation especially in the areas of capacity-building and teacher training. Similar to the situation with the Ministry of Education, dialogue with universities and civil society organizations was limited during the extended Honduran holidays when NGOs and universities close down their operations. This has also been resolved with a robust start in January 2012 with exploration of areas of cooperation with UNAH, UPN, AMHON, Transformemos Honduras, World Vision, and other USAID projects involved in decentralization.

VII. Financial Summary

Quarter October through December 2011

Pipeline at the beginning of quarter	1,975,546
New funds Obligation	0
Expenses during the reporting period	282,645
Pipeline at the end of the quarter	1,692,901
Estimated expense burn rate for next quarter	468,000
Estimated quarters of pipeline	3*

*The estimated remaining quarters of pipeline is not a straight-lined ratio of unexpended obligations at the end of this quarter divided by the estimated burn rate for the next quarter. MIDEH expenditures will accelerate during the Honduran school year with the full implementation of capacity-building and community and civil society participation activities.

VIII. Lessons Learned

The Ministry of Education is committed to carrying out the school- administered census tests designed along the lines of the 2011 pilot of internal end-of-grade tests in seven municipalities. Besides demonstrating the need for greater test administration and scoring security, MIDEH takes the lesson learned that municipal and community-level stakeholders must be informed about the nature and purpose of these educational assessments and how to interpret and use the information to plan actions in support of quality improvements in the classroom. There is no power in having access to assessment data if the communities do not know how to leverage that knowledge to demand transparency, accountability, and efficiency from the public school system.

IX. Coordination with Other Actors

Coordination with other education stakeholders during the quarter is described throughout this report. Given the relationship and intersect of program objectives with EducAcción, MIDEH's most frequent coordination efforts are with AIR's companion project and with our main counterpart, the Ministry of Education. In December 2011, MIDEH participated in the first meeting of USAID projects on the cross-cutting topic of decentralization and will continue coordination with those projects. During the period of debate on the new Fundamental Law for Education, MIDEH maintained constant communication with several congressional staffers in order to keep abreast of developments in education legislation which would impact the project.

X. Gender Considerations

MIDEH proposed several possible complementary studies of gender impact as part of its PMP. We await USAID's observations on the proposed PMP indicators and the qualitative measure of gender impact.

XI. Summary of Key Conclusions

It is too early in project implementation to draw key conclusions; however, in section VIII above we have reported lessons learned from project activities in this first quarter of full implementation.