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MIDEH PROJECT

HONDURAS

**QUARTERLY REPORT
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List of Acronyms

AIR	American Institutes for Research
AMHON	Honduran National Association of Municipalities
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
ASONOG	Association of NGOs
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 Basic 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
GSC	Grupo de Sociedad Civil
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

I. Executive Summary

This report describes the main achievements for the Honduras Improving Student Performance Project (known in Spanish as Mejorando el Impacto al Desempeño Estudiantil de Honduras, or MIDEH) implemented by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) from January through March 2012. It serves to update USAID/Honduras on project accomplishments and inform of any outstanding issues during this period.

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 Honduras Development Objective for Education and Goal 1 of the Agency's global education strategy published in February 2011.

The major accomplishments of MIDEH from January to March 2012 were:

- Accelerated pace of training and capacity-building, including training and orientation of 240 MOE district directors in the DCNB school package and use of test results;
- Intensive development of end-of-grade tests for census application in 2012 with SE/DIGECE participation;
- Rapid progress in engaging with civil society organizations to collaborate with the MIDEH Project including Transformemos Honduras, Grupo Sociedad Civil, ASONOG, and AMHON; and
- Cumulative accrued expenses through March 31, 2012 totaled \$612,747 or about one third of the funds obligated to date.

II. Program Context and Objective

National Context

Public Security. Citizen and community security remains the headline issue for Honduras. During this quarter pressure from many sectors to purge National Police continued with the Rector of the National Autonomous University leading the campaign after her son was assassinated by the police. In response, the Honduran Congress approved the creation of a temporary independent entity to design, plan and certify a process of comprehensive reform of public security in Honduras. This Commission for Public Security Reform comprises three Honduran members and two foreign members. At the end of March, the integration of the two foreign members of the Commission was pending.

The issue of public security again jumped to international attention when a fire in the Comayagua prison took the lives of more than 360 persons. Shortly thereafter, another violent incident in a San Pedro Sula prison demonstrated that gang rivalry determines who controls the prisons. With the virtual collapse of the penal system in Honduras and pressure from many sectors to reform the penal system, the National Congress approved a new law in April to remove the administration of prisons from the National Police and to entrust prison management to an independent national penal institute.

Political Year. Primary elections are being held in 2012 with the participation of three new parties – the Partido Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE) postulating the wife of ex-President Manuel Zelaya; the Anticorruption Party (PAC); and the Honduras Patriotic Alliance Party. These new parties added to the five previously established political parties, offering a wider range of democratic expression to Hondurans at the local and national levels. The traditional dominant Liberal and National parties have been strengthened with the formation of various internal movements. Those parties, along with the newly established LIBRE party, will hold primaries in November 2012 to select candidates for the presidency, congress, and municipal offices. As a result, political propaganda and campaign activities are already taking up space in the national agenda and may displace or limit key policy actions needed to ensure the implementation of reforms to the education system.

Project Context

Opposition to the reforms to the Teacher Retirement Institute Law. At the end of 2011, the Honduran National Congress approved changes to the Teacher Retirement Institute Law which aimed to improve the financial situation of the virtually bankrupt Institute. The reforms included increasing the teacher retirement age and reducing the percentage of salary that would be paid out in retirement pensions. Teacher unions and teachers countered with law suits arguing the unconstitutionality of the reforms. This challenge to the new law, combined with a lack of payments to some 3,000 teachers, have brought threats of teacher strikes and lost class days, similar to what has occurred in the past three school years.

Approval of the Fundamental Law for Education. After nearly 25 years of public debate and dozens of proposals to change the 1966 basic law for the education sector, the National Congress passed a comprehensive law with far-reaching changes affecting public education. The Fundamental Law for Education took force in February 2012. Articles 64 and 65 of the law call for the creation of a national system for evaluation, certification and accreditation of the quality of education, and for the establishment of an institutional framework for the operation of the system.

A huge task ahead is the drafting of numerous implementing regulations, manuals and complementary legislation for the Fundamental Law for Education. The National Congress' technical staff has requested assistance from the MIDEH Project to complete work on the draft law that would establish an independent institute to lead the national education evaluation systems. If the institute is created this year, the MIDEH Project will be able to target its capacity building activities to one entity.

The 2011 Law of Strengthening Public Education and Community Participation supports the Fundamental Law for Education. During this reporting period, a National Commission on Education Quality was established in compliance with the Strengthening Public Education law. The Commission, led by Congresswoman Gladys A. Lopez, comprises the Director of the DIGECE, a representative of the Ministry of Interior and Population, an official of AMHON, and representatives of education sector NGOs and Parents Associations. The MIDEH Project has engaged with various commission members and organizations as part of its work with civil society.

New Minister of Education faces corrupt legacy. At the end of February 2012, a new Minister of Education, Dr. Marlon Escoto, was named. The new minister distinguished himself as the Rector of the National Agricultural University. His nomination generated criticism from some

sectors because he had joined forces with the followers of ex-President Zelaya in opposition to the “golpe de estado” of 2009. The MIDEH Project’s main counterpart in the ministry, Vice Minister Elia del Cid, remains in her post and offers some assurance of continuity with the Ministry of Education (MOE).

The civil society watchdog organization Transformemos Honduras (TH) published its report on corrupt practices in assigning teaching positions, sparking widespread reporting in the press of the cited abuses. As a result, the Minister Escoto fired several high level officials at the central and departmental levels, opening the way for teachers, parents, mayors, and other stakeholders to document additional instances of alleged corruption in the assignment of teachers. As of the end of the reporting period, corrupt practices had been alleged in the departments of Intibucá, La Paz, Santa Bárbara, and Francisco Morazán, with the identification of National Congress members involved in corruption. The minister has asserted that control of public education, previously taken by the National Congress, should be returned to the Executive branch in an effort to root out corruption and remedy deficiencies in the public school system.

In another highly sensitive area, the new minister maintains weekly dialogues with the teachers unions in order to address problems related to teacher salary payments and the unions’ opposition to the recent new legislation. It is too early to know whether the critical MOE/teacher union relationship will improve under the new leadership.

Educational Materials. Teachers have not received textbooks, curriculum standards, pacing guides, or diagnostic and formative tests. Without these educational materials, expectations are limited for significant improvement in student learning outcomes and progress towards the goals established in the EFA/FTI plan. With other donor funds, the MOE undertook the bidding process for the printing of Mathematics and Spanish textbooks but the delivery of the texts to the classrooms will not be made until August or September, too late to impact this school year results.

The MOE lacks budget resources to print other educational materials aligned to the DCNB, most notably the formative tests which research shows contribute measurably to improved student performance through monthly checks on the progress of students in the core subjects of mathematics and Spanish. Moreover, the MOE secured financing to implement end-of- grade standardized tests; thus the central government now looks to municipal governments to take up part of the responsibility for census-based standardized testing. In the past, the donor-pooled Common Fund had served as a source of counterpart funding for test administration but the MOE failed to include testing in its Annual Operating Plan for 2012.

The shortage or absence of educational materials could be a limiting factor for the ability of the MIDEH Project’s training activities to spread efficient practices in the classroom. The prospects for participation by local governments in financing end-of-grade tests are reasonably good and thus could mitigate the issue of funding.

Project Objective. In this national and sector context the MIDEH Project seeks to improve student learning outcomes through the consolidation of the DCNB materials developed in a previous project and assurance that the materials will be used effectively in the classroom. In addition, the MIDEH Project aims to strengthen a national educational evaluation system through the design of end-of-grade tests ideally to be administered on a census basis. In the absence of a permanent independent institute for educational evaluation, the Project provides

capacity-building to DIGECE and seeks to form alliances with universities and other organizations to promote additional local capacity in educational assessment and measurement.

A major objective of the MIDEH Project is to strengthen the use of the school package of materials and to ensure access and use of educational assessment data and information at the local level. Thus, the MIDEH Project seeks to engage civil society to take a lead role in strategic planning, implementation of improvements, and monitoring the quality of education services in their communities.

III. Intermediate Program Results and Activities

This section of the quarterly report serves to inform USAID/Honduras of the program advances achieved from January through March 2012, 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 (September 2011-February 2012) as approved in Annex D to the Cooperative Agreement, and the 2012 annual work plan first presented to USAID on November 15, 2011 and revised on February 29, 2012. The 2012 annual work plan was provisionally approved by the AOR on April 23, 2012 pending a few minor adjustments.

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

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

With a remarkable turnout of 240 district directors, the MIDEH Project trained these important players in the use of the material aligned with the DCNB and assessment results. The purpose was to equip the district directors to replicate the training in their districts. In the same workshop, the MIDEH Project socialized the 2010 evaluation results in order to stimulate the district directors to design strategies to improve education services based on the analysis of the results for their areas. The district directors also were oriented to the planned census-based tests for 2012 are their role in ensuring a secure and reliable administration of tests.

Forty-four members of the teaching staffs of normal schools, where future teachers of Honduras are formed, were trained in the effective use of the DCNB page of school materials and the importance of education assessments for making decisions about quality improvements. The teaching staff is expected to replicate the training in the normal schools.

The MIDEH Project trained the technical staff of the partner organizations of our companion project, EducAcción, in similar themes of the use of DCNB materials in the classroom and civil society access to assessment information for purposes of advocating for quality improvements and accountability in the management of public education services.

An important workshop was carried out with the mayors of municipalities in the departments of Atlántida, Colón, Islas de la Bahía y Gracias a Dios in March 2012. Besides presenting the results of the 2010 evaluation, the Project staff conveyed the need for the local governments to support the end-of-grade tests as a tool to pinpoint where improvements are needed in the schools in their communities. The mayors made a commitment to include in their agendas other issues such as the supply of educational materials in the schools.

Activity 1.2 System-Wide External Summative Tests

The MIDEH Project is assisting the MOE to develop and administer census tests which would provide the performance data and information needed by COMDEs and local groups to demand transparency and accountability from the public school system. Census tests represent an innovation for the Honduran education system.

The end purpose of the census tests is that the departmental and district directors, town mayors, teachers, and parents will have a valid and reliable tool to measure student performance in 2012 and can compare those results to the 2010 outcomes. The challenge of census tests is how to ensure a secure test administration so results will be reliable.

During the reporting period, MIDEH Project staff worked with DIGECE technical staff to complete the test blueprints in Spanish and Mathematics for first through ninth grades. The blueprints were aligned with the content standards for each area and grade. Some 46 teachers were trained in production of test items for this year's tests but also to train a cadre of Honduran teachers who could continue to feed the items bank for future tests. During the training more than 650 test items in Mathematics and 600 items in Spanish were developed for the validation pilot to be carried out in May 2012. In addition, MIDEH Project staff reviewed more than 1500 items in the bank against TRI parameters.

With these items, the MIDEH Project began the development of 54 test forms which were completed early in the next reporting period ready for diagramming and editing before reproduction in May.

Program Result 2: Institutionalizing Educational Quality Inputs

Activity 2.1 Transferring Technical Capacity to National Institutions

Throughout the quarter, the MIDEH Project stepped up its consultations with various MOE and university authorities to define areas of collaboration and capacity building on the assumption that these will be the sources of technical capacity to transfer to the planned national evaluation institute. The Fundamental Law for Education was passed in January 2012 with an article mandating complementary legislation to establish a national education evaluation system with an independent institute as the operating arm.

The technical team of the National Congress asked the MIDEH Project for assistance in developing the draft legislation for the evaluation system and institute. In preparation for the legislative task, the National Congress invited sector stakeholders to a day-long symposium on strategies to improve the quality of education in which distinguished experts presented international experiences. The MIDEH Project and AIR sponsored the participation of Dr. J. Enrique Froemel, a Chilean expert on education evaluation systems. The symposium covered topics on the formation of teachers and information technology and communications in the education sector.

Given the shift in the political agenda of the Congress to campaign season, the timeline for passage of the complementary legislation for the independent evaluation institute is uncertain. Thus, the MIDEH Project engaged with the MOE's training department, INICE, in joint work sessions to first orient the INICE staff to the DCNB materials and use of assessment results, and then analyze what changes in teacher training should be made based on assessment results. And, in recognition of the roles of UPN and UNAH in teacher formation, the MIDEH Project carried out similar work sessions with the universities to define strategies for joint

collaboration. The fruits of the efforts were first seen in a train-the-trainers for normal school leaders in March 2012 with more train-the-trainer workshops planned with UPN and INICE in the next quarter.

While it is productive to target Honduran institutions for capacity-building, all investments in forming a cadre of Honduran professionals in the area of education assessment and measurement will serve the country's needs since the same professionals tend to rotate among a small number of institutions: the MOE (especially DIGECE), other government ministries UPN, UNAH, and international donor programs. Thus, a person trained by the MIDEH Project as an employee of one of these groups is likely in the future to accept employment with one or more of the other groups.

Activity 2.2 Financial and Technical Sustainability

Costing the main elements of the education evaluation system is a first step towards a sustainability strategy. The system-wide cost analysis began with Dr. James Cobbe's consultancy last quarter will continue with his return next quarter. During this reporting period, MIDEH prepared two revised detailed cost estimates for the Vice Minister of Education for options in administering end-of-grade census tests or sample-based tests.

MIDEH Project first direct engagement in March with the mayors of the northeastern region of the country confirmed that local governments are likely to be willing to underwrite the costs of assessments to monitor the quality of education in their municipalities. If that is the case, then reliance on the central government will not be critical for the sustainability of an assessment system thus the MIDEH Project is dedicating efforts to form alliances with AMHON and municipal governments and the same time we are working with DIGECE.

MIDEH developed standardized tests will not be the only elements of a national evaluation system. The administration of international tests such as TIMMS, PIRLS and others can contribute valuable data and information to be used to improve the quality of education. In addition, the five-year calendar of national testing approved by the MOE in May 2011 included alternating MOE/MIDEH end-of-grade tests with end-of-cycle tests administered by UPN/UMCE.

UPN/UMCE administered 2011 end of cycle (Grades 3, 6 and 9) to a sample of 37,000 students in March 2012. Though technical issues limit the reliability of test results for official reporting purposes, the head of UPN/UMCE reported that the tests results trends indicate a slow improvement over student academic performance in previous years thus counteracting some Honduran analysts who alleged stagnation in student performance levels despite previous USAID investments in standards-based reforms.

The Vice Minister of Education estimates that up to \$200,000 provided by the European Union for the UPN/UMCE end-of-cycle tests but not expended may be reprogrammed for 2012 end-of-grade tests. The MOE also stated that funding for end-of-grade tests and printing of educational materials will be included in a supplementary proposal to the Common Fund donors.

Program Result 3: Strengthening Civil Society Participation in Supporting Education

MIDEH Project activities to engage civil society took on life in the last month of the quarter once the Civil Society Coordinator position was filled. Activities under this Result are closely related to training described under Result 1.

In the training of the district directors who concurrently serve as leaders of the COMDEs, the MIDEH Project gained valuable information on the structure and functioning of the COMDEs. About half of the municipalities have organized COMDEs and of these about two thirds have developed their education evaluation plans but few are fully implementing the plans. Nearly half of the COMDEs have socialized education programs and projects at the municipal level and about 40% gather education statistics. Only a quarter of the COMDEs promote teacher training. District directors reported strategic alliances with community organizations and NGOs. The MIDEH Project will use this information about COMDEs and their role in the communities to shape the design and implementation of the subgrants component of the Project.

MIDEH Project was invited to present at AMHON's Regional Forum for Mayors in the Atlantic coast region of Honduras in March 2012. Some 28 municipal mayors from Atlántida, Colon, Islas de la Bahía y Gracias a Dios were introduced to the MIDEH-developed education materials and the national report on education assessment results for 2010. The mayors were convinced of the necessity of generating reliable data on student performance in their municipalities.

At the end of March 2012, MIDEH Project co-sponsored a meeting with more than 80 participants of the Civil Society Group to promote the establishment of a culture of education evaluation based on standards. The participants represented a range of organizations which can offer new avenues of cross-sector engagement for the MIDEH Project. By working through local organizations, the MIDEH Project can more effectively disseminate information and spur dialogue on themes of education reforms and improvement in the quality of education in Honduras.

During the reporting period, the MIDEH Project began discussions with several local NGOs, associations and foundations that offer good prospects for future collaboration and possible participation in the competitive subgrants programs. This effort was intended to encourage and maintain civil society interest in the themes of education reforms by promoting continual dialogue, orientation, information feeds, and concrete actions at the local level.

IV. Monitoring and Evaluation

MIDEH submitted its revised performance monitoring plan to USAID on February 29 and received the feedback from the AOR and USAID Mission monitoring specialist on March 29 confirming the indicator selection and general agreement with the PMP with certain clarifications and additions. The main topic of discussion was how the MIDEH Project could report on those indicators that require annual standardized testing if the Ministry of Education did not administer census tests or tests in a representative sample of schools at the national level for grades 1-6. A second topic of discussion was the use of gender-sensitive indicators, with a focus on an indicator measuring parents' participation in monitoring school and their children's academic performance.

Subsequent to the reporting period, the MIDEH Project submitted its final revised PMP and PIRS to USAID on April 30 with a proposed proxy measure in years when end-of-grade tests are not administered. The assessment tool for the indicator on parents' participation was improved to better capture gender differences in female and male participation.

The MIDEH Project presents its first quarter 2012 calendar year results for three indicators on persons trained which can be measured quarterly. Data on other indicators will be collected and reported annually.

Indicator 9 Number of administrators and officials successfully trained with USG support (F Standard Indicator)

CY 2012 Target	275
1Q Total Actual	<u>254</u>
1Q Female	124
1Q Male	130

Indicator 10 Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants who successfully complete in-service training or received intensive coaching or mentoring with USG support (F Standard Indicator)

CY 2012 Target	650
1Q Total Actual	<u>84</u>
1Q Female	50
1Q Male	34

Indicator 11 Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants who successfully complete pre-service training or received intensive coaching or mentoring with USG support (F Standard Indicator)

CY 2012 Target	400
1Q Total Actual	<u>0</u>
1Q Female	0
1Q Male	0

It should be noted that this quarter the Project trained 44 teachers from normal schools to be trainers in the school package of materials and use of assessment data. These new trainers will begin training of normal school students (pre-service teachers) in the next quarter.

V. Outstanding Issues, Constraints, Delays and Actions Taken

The MIDEH Project completed its staffing this quarter with the hiring of the deputy director, an M&E specialist, and coordinators for training and civil society participation. With the professional staff on board, activities in all areas accelerated. During the reporting period, the MIDEH Project also made decisions on the design of the subgrants component to allow an agile and simple competitive process that would encourage participation by local Honduran NGOs. Upon approval by USAID of the MIDEH Subgrants Management Manual, the project is poised to issue an APS with concurrence by the AOR.

During the period the MIDEH Project revised its 2012 Annual Work Plan, Branding and Marking Strategy and Performance Monitoring Plan based on feedback from the AOR and other USAID staff.

As described in the national context and project context sections at the beginning of this report, the education sector continues to present serious challenges for smooth development and implementation of project activities. The passage of the Fundamental Law for Education in January 2012 was step forward though the tasks ahead of drafting implementing regulations could delay the course of implementation especially in the key area of education evaluation. To get a jump start on the new law required to establish a national evaluation system, the MIDEH Project is working with the technical team of the National Congress to revive a prior draft from 2011 and to move it rapidly to the legislative docket.

The MIDEH Project staff has been searching departmental and district offices of the SE looking for DCNB materials that have not been distributed to schools in order to have sets of school materials for training. The search yielded sufficient materials for training of trainers but not enough for the participants in training soon to be carried out by the new trainers with MIDEH Project supervision. The Vice Minister has promised to order an inventory of all DCNB materials in the departments and districts. The most important items needed are the formative tests which some municipalities have committed to reproduce for their schools. As in the case of funding for end-of-grade tests, the outlook for central ministry funding for formative tests and other materials is not promising while local governments are more willing to take responsibility.

VI. Financial Summary

January through March 2012

Pipeline at the beginning of quarter	1,692,901
New funds Obligation	0
Expenses during the reporting period	330,104
Pipeline at the end of the quarter	1,362,797
Estimated expense burn rate for next quarter	500,000
Estimated quarters of pipeline	2*

*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 next two quarters with the full implementation of the subgrants component and training in preparation for the end-of-grade tests.

VII. Lessons Learned

The Ministry of Education is committed to carrying out the school- administered census tests for Grades 1 to 9 with the expectation of donor and local government support. If funds are limited, the MOE is considering options to administer sample-based tests valid only at the national level or to only test in certain grades to reduce the costs. It has been difficult to convince the MOE that the donors will not come to its rescue with financing, and that the MIDEH Project in particular will not directly administer tests as was done in the past.

From the very beginning of preparing the test forms for validation in a pilot, the MIDEH Project has taken a firm stance that the 2012 tests in all aspects are the responsibility of the GOH

although the Project does provide technical assistance and accompanies the MOE in this work. Using this tactic to pressure the MOE, the ministry responded by assigning staff to work directly with MIDEH in developing test blueprints, and in carrying out the logistics of the test validation pilot. This is a small advance in changing the attitude of the MOE. To further underscore the need to integrate MIDEH Project functions into the MOE, we have asked the Vice Minister for official confirmation that physical space will be made available to house the MIDEH Project even earlier than had been planned in the AIR proposal.

MIDEH Project first full activities to engage civil society and local governments in March 2012 were overwhelming successful because the call to participate was made not by a “foreign” project rather by our cooperating partners AMHON and the Grupo de Sociedad Civil. The MIDEH Project will continue to cede the lead to local partners given the effectiveness of this approach.

VIII. 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. During the reporting period, the MIDEH Project engaged with a number of potential partners ranging from universities, NGOs, to other GOH entities such as the National Institute for Youth. The MIDEH Project technical staff has also begun information exchanges with the German and Canadian development program staff. The MIDEH Project has excellent communication with the National Congress technical team for the education sector.

IX. Gender Considerations

MIDEH proposed several possible complementary studies of gender impact as part of its PMP. For the revised indicator to measure parent participation in monitoring their students’ and school performance, we have specific questions in the survey tool to identify difference in female and male participation patterns. If significant differences are evident in the baseline measurement for the indicator, the MIDEH Project will modify project activities to address those differences.

X. Summary of Key Conclusions

It is too early in project implementation to draw key conclusions. However, lessons learned from project activities in this quarter are presented in Section VIII above.