MUJERPROSPERA (WOMENPROSPER CHALLENGE)

A Regional Challenge to Advance Gender Equality in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

Women and girls, in all their diversity, often face extreme violence, limited economic opportunities, and harmful social norms that adversely affect their security and livelihoods. Research shows that when women have agency, safety, access to power, resources, and stable long-term income, they are well-positioned to be change agents in their home countries. On January 3, 2022, as part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s efforts to address the root causes of irregular migration, the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Hub launched the MujerProspera (WomanProsper) Challenge, a regional challenge to advance gender equality in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Through this challenge, USAID sought innovative and impactful partners to:

- **Advance Women’s Economic Security** by improving working conditions and labor protections, recruitment, retention, promotion, and the advancement of women in dignified, stable work that results in increased access, productivity, and a fair and stable income in the workforce.
- **Address Harmful Gender Norms and Enable Safe Work Environments** by promoting positive gender norms, egalitarian attitudes and behaviors, a holistic safe working environment, and safe transportation to and from work, supportive of women’s economic security and agency.

After reviewing nearly 400 applications, USAID selected nine winners to receive funding awards and technical assistance as part of a $5 million portfolio. The winning organizations bring innovative and
impactful solutions to promote women’s decision-making, safety, and access to power, resources, fair and stable long-term income, and labor protections in the workplace. Seven of the nine winners are local partners, three are regional efforts, and all have leveraged private sector support to advance women’s economic security and address harmful gender norms, enabling safe work environments. Throughout the implementation period, the partners have formed a strong cohort and participated in diverse technical assistance and acceleration activities, resulting in a sustained peer learning network.

**PROJECT UPDATES**

In Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, **ZAMORANO UNIVERSITY** has worked with over 2,500 women (including business leaders, entrepreneurs, farmers, extension workers, and academics) to create the Women in Agriculture Network. Members have participated in leadership courses, in-person and virtual networking events, webinars, and innovative gender-based farmer field schools. The network has also worked with 13 agro-industry companies to design and implement institutional measures to advance gender equality and inclusion, benefitting over 5,200 workers.

In a regional effort covering all three of the challenge’s countries of intervention, the **BUSINESS FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL ACTION (FUNDEMAS)**, in association with its sister organizations CentraRSE in Guatemala and Fundahrze in Honduras), has worked with 92 member companies to launch and institutionalize Equality Tables that meet regularly and provide support to 24 business partners to implement elements of their gender equality plans. In El Salvador, FUNDEMAS has directly supported 281 women to strengthen their agency and entrepreneurial skills, supporting 254 small- and mid-sized businesses with 14 alliances with companies and organizations that support the economic empowerment of women.

In Guatemala and Honduras, the **COOPERATIVE FOR ASSISTANCE AND RELIEF EVERYWHERE (CARE)**, along with financial partner Cargill, has supported 501 women food producers in peri-urban and urban areas of Cortes and Comayagua in Honduras and Chimaltenango and Quetzaltenango in Guatemala. The partners helped the women to increase their economic security through skill development, market linkages, and business networks in fish, meat, poultry, dairy, and vegetable production. CARE also piloted an innovative “positive masculinities” approach, working with 130 male family and community members to garner support for the women entrepreneurs to thrive.
In Guatemala, the **TIKONEL ASSOCIATION OF PRODUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICES** helped a group of 150 indigenous K’iche women from twelve remote Totonicapan communities to form the Cooperative COPRODA RL, which oversees the production, quality control, and sales of the Qot’z (mushroom in K’iche) brand. Twenty-five of the women received specialized training to run the community oyster mushroom seed lab, the first of its kind in Guatemala.

In Guatemala, the **JUSTICE EDUCATION SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**, along with the Survivors Foundation, developed an evidence-based approach to economic development for 350 women survivors of gender-based violence in Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Retalhuleu, and Guatemala City. Their approach combines psychosocial support, technical skill development, and access to public legal education and information, and has been individualized for groups of Indigenous women, transgender women, and women with disabilities. In addition, given the importance of men serving as allies in reshaping gender dynamics and reducing violence within households, the project has worked with male community members and partners.

In Guatemala, **NEW SUN ROAD** has provided access to solar energy, internet, and training in digital, financial, management, and leadership skills to disenfranchised, off-grid rural communities through Digital Community Centers (DCCs), which are powered by Stellar Integrated System technology. The main objective of the project is to promote economic opportunities for Indigenous women in ten communities in northern Huehuetenango and to provide technical assistance to women in ten communities in Alta Verapaz. Through the formation of Women Leaders Committees, which enable the women to manage the DCCs, the newly empowered women leaders are running their own profit-making ventures while participating actively in decision-making at the local level. Additionally, the project has helped close the digital divide by providing internet access and digital training to more than 300 women who then facilitate the delivery of thousands of digital services to the community.
In El Salvador, the women-led ASSOCIATION MANY MORE (MUCHAS MÁS) has strengthened the knowledge and capacity of 147 young women between the ages of 12 and 25 in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) through: 1) Tech + Rights Bootcamps, which are immersive bootcamps that have equipped 147 young women with essential technology and coding skills and enabled the majority of graduates to secure well-paying fellowships and jobs; 2) STEM mobile education in underserved rural and urban areas, which provides access to STEM education for women who might not have had it otherwise; 3) Feminist Empowerment Schools, which collaborate with current university students and have fostered a new generation of empowered women who know and defend their rights; and 4) The STEM Mentors Network, which provides sustainability and continued support. In addition, the Pan American Development Foundation, a partner organization on the project, provided training to 603 professional women and men to help them build safe spaces free of violence and discrimination toward women and to strengthen their gender and equality policies and practices.

In Honduras, COHONDUCAFÉ FOUNDATION has worked with 29 women coffee producers in the department of Santa Bárbara to establish a new coffee brand, Eco-Café 1605. The project strengthened the women’s knowledge in specialized areas such as coffee processing, entrepreneurship, administration, marketing, and associative work to provide increased incomes for the women partners and their families. The Women, Coffee, and Prosperity Project has worked closely with women in personal, entrepreneurial, and business development, empowering them and providing them with new opportunities.

In Honduras, the GRAMEEN FOUNDATION, along with partner ODEF Financiera, has supported 200 food insecure women and their partners in Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities to shift gender norms and power dynamics through a proven approach of engaging spouses and partners to champion women’s business models, growth, and resilience. The women have participated in Grameen’s “Resilient Living, Resilient Business” trainings, with 50 women selected to participate in a series of intra-family dialogues with their partners. The effort has enhanced women’s access to credit and financial services and promoted more equitable sharing of household responsibilities.

To find out more about the challenge winners, visit the MujerProspera Challenge webpage or contact MujerProspera Challenge Director Lainie Reisman at lreisman_ct@resonanceglobal.com.