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EDUCO: A Community-Managed Education Program in Rural Areas of El Salvador

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACE	Asociación Comunal para la Educación (Community Association for Education)
AECO	Asociación Educativa Comunitaria (Community Educational Association)
ARENA	Partido Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance Party)
EDUCO	Programa Educación con Participación de la Comunidad (Community-Managed Education Program)
FMLN	Partido Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front Party)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MINED	Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education)
PROHECO	Programa Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria (Community Education Honduran Program)
PRONADE	Programa Nacional de Autogestión para el Desarrollo Educativo (National Self- Management Program for Educational Development)
UNICEF	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The smallest country in Central America, El Salvador has the region's second-largest population (6.3 million). Between 1980 and 1992 a 12-year civil war tore the country apart. Peace agreements were reached in 1992 with United Nations mediation and a commitment to help the nation mend its devastated social fabric. Since then, the history of the country has been one of transition from war to peace.

El Salvador's EDUCO Program—Education with Community Participation—actually began during the final period of civil war to serve the poorest and most isolated rural communities. It made families and parents the driving force for educational leadership, providing preschool and basic education in rural areas through joint efforts by the state and local communities. The EDUCO experience has rapidly expanded educational coverage for poor rural children without compromising quality. EDUCO schools now account for about 40 percent of the overall rural enrollment in public preschool and basic education.

Background

During the 1980s, Salvadoran society experienced a deep-rooted crisis due to the effects of the war. The armed conflict generated lack of security, political violence, and deep ideological polarization. The country paid a high cost for war—more than 80,000 dead, severe damage to infrastructure, and heavy migration of the population within the country and abroad. Between 1978 and 1988, the average income decreased 37 percent in real terms—for the poorest 20 percent of the population the decline was 67 percent.

In education, the 1980s were a lost decade. Illiteracy rates reached 29 percent for the population 16 years of age and older, one of the highest rates in Latin America. Just 70 percent of children aged 7 to 15 were enrolled in basic education (grades 1–9), and only 18 percent of young people aged 16 to 18 were in secondary education (grades 10–12). The figures were even worse in the poorest sectors. One out of two seven-year-olds in the poorest 20 percent of the population was enrolled in school, while nine out of 10 children in the wealthiest 10 percent were in school by that age.

It is important to stress that even before the signing of the peace accords, the government of El Salvador recognized the importance of expanding access to basic education (with special emphasis on rural areas), of promoting decentralization of educational services, and of overcoming the inefficiency of the public sector in education. With growing social consensus and economic recovery in the 1990s, public investment in education grew consistently, and a series of innovative initiatives led to a nationwide educational reform process

Implementation of EDUCO

EDUCO, one of the first of the reform initiatives, was established in 1991 when the Ministry of Education decided to implement a pilot program to channel education funds through parents'

organizations, focusing on the poorest rural communities. The program is based on the creation, legalization, and provision of support to parents' organizations at the community level (Asociaciones Comunales para la Educación—ACE), which support the development of new education services in their communities. These organizations were acknowledged by the ministry to have the authority to receive and use public funds from the central education budget to hire teachers and cover the basic operational costs of educational services.

From its initial design, EDUCO has had three goals:

- To expand education services for preschool and basic education in the rural and poorest communities of the country
- To promote community participation in the provision of education services
- To establish a curricular link between preschool and the first grades of basic education.

The pilot program created 263 new classrooms to enroll 8,416 children in grade 1 of basic education. The success of the 1991 experience led the Ministry of Education to institutionalize the program, which gradually became the model for expanding educational access in rural areas. In 2003, enrollment was greater than 362,000 students; more than 2000 ACEs were managing a similar number of rural schools; and more than 7,000 teachers had been hired. The ACEs administered about \$50 million dollars allocated to them in the national budget (approximately 12 percent of the education budget).

Currently, the enrollment in EDUCO schools is about 40 percent of the overall rural enrollment for public preschool and basic education. This represents an installed capacity in the poorest rural areas where, at the beginning of the 1990s, education services were simply not available. It also has built up the social capital of communities. There is evidence that the services provided by the EDUCO program are more efficient than those of the traditional one, and that the quality of education is greater when community participation is effective.

Building capacity

The strategy of the EDUCO program is to set up community organizations for education (Asociaciones Comunales para la Educación—ACEs) whose members use funds from the Ministry of Education to hire teachers and meet other educational expenses. The process of creating an ACE takes no more than three months. At first, EDUCO took advantage of existing local infrastructure (schools, community buildings, or property belonging to community members); in other cases it built new classrooms with community participation.

The ministry ensures that financial resources are available to communities and provides support in the organization, legalization, and training of the community associations. It also helps to select and train teachers and provides teaching materials. For their part, the ACEs are responsible for administering their funds, hiring teachers, and managing the educational services in their communities.

Thus several key processes—hiring, purchasing, acquisition of professional services and materials, and payment for basic services—are now the responsibility of community

organizations. For schools within the EDUCO program, the ministry's role has become one of ensuring financial resources, providing technical assistance and support, and supervising the use of the resources through selective audits.

Achieving sustainability

EDUCO gradually decreased its initial financial reliance on a World Bank loan, and by 1996 the program was fully funded by El Salvador's national budget. In 2001, the government transferred to the ACEs a total of \$45 million, which represented 2 percent of its total budget and 10.5 percent of the budget of the Ministry of Education. The ministry reports that "ACE members dedicate annually 1,044 hours to various tasks: management training (200 hours), bank account management (16 hours), payment of teacher salaries and social security (96 hours), purchase of school consumable materials (72 hours), advisory consultations with school supervisors and district and regional coordinators (120 hours), community and ACE meeting and assemblies (180 hours), school visits and supervision (360 hours)."

A scalable solution

EDUCO met its original objectives—and did so much faster than previous programs. Meanwhile, it promoted innovation within the education system, with positive effects on quality. The impact of the EDUCO program is seen in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

Its improvements in efficiency include:

- Greater agility in creating services
- The benefits of decentralized, community-level decision making
- Improvement in teachers' attendance rates, leading to an increase in learning time for students
- The tendency to promote at least similar, and sometimes better, academic achievement than in the traditional public schools.

Its effectiveness as an engine of social change is also significant, particularly in terms of meeting the needs of rural children, especially the poorest, and building a mechanism to promote community participation for greater educational quality.

EDUCO enjoyed some important support. Among the driving factors of the program are the leadership and commitment of both the government authorities and the communities; the capacity of institutions to introduce innovative approaches (in the legal, administrative and curricular areas); and the technical and financial support related to loan-funded activities by the World Bank. EDUCO also had the flexibility to make adjustments while implementing the program.

Based on the experience of El Salvador, the governments of Guatemala and Honduras decided to promote similar programs: the Programa Nacional de Auto-Gestión para el Desarrollo Educativo (PRONADE) in Guatemala in 1995, and the Programa Hondureño de Participación

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Comunitaria (PROHECO) in Honduras in 1999. In 2003, the total number of children enrolled in the three programs was more than 800,000. Approximately 8,000 schools were participating. Community associations with 50,000 parent members had hired more than 22,000 teachers.

EDUCO and similar initiatives have the potential to enhance the capacity of the region's governments to satisfy the education needs of rural areas, help reduce poverty and existing inequities, and support broad economic and social development.

Implementation Process

El Salvador is the smallest country of the Central American region (21,000 km²) with the second largest population (6.3 million). Between 1980 and 2003 the history of the country has been clearly marked by a transitional process from war to peace. After a 12-year civil war and a torn country with its social fabric devastated, Peace Agreements were reached in 1992 with the United Nations mediation and commitment to help the nation.

During the 1980s, the Salvadoran society experienced a deep-rooted crisis due to the effects of the war. The armed conflict generated lack of security, political violence, and deep ideological polarization. It also paid a high cost for it with over eighty thousand dead, severe damage to the country's infrastructure, and a great migration of the population within and outside the country. Between 1978 and 1988, the average income decreased 37 percent in real terms, and for the poorest 20 percent of the population this translated to a decrease of 67 percent in the same period (Reimers, 1995).

With regard to education, the 1980s were a lost decade. Illiteracy rates reached 29 percent for the population 16 years of age and older; this only surpassed Guatemala, Honduras and Haiti in the Latin American region. During this period, only 70 percent of children ages 7 to 15 were enrolled in basic education (grades 1-9), and only 18 percent of the youth ages 16 to 18 were in secondary education (grades 10-12). These figures were even worse in the poorest sectors; for example, while only one out of two seven-year-olds in the poorest 20 percent of the population was enrolled in school, nine out of 10 children in the wealthiest 10 percent were in school by that age (Reimers, 1995).

In the early 1990s, as a result of the Peace Accords, a framework was established for dialogue and social participation, policies of macroeconomic stabilization were adopted, and social policies to benefit the poor were implemented. As a consequence, economic growth was reactivated (linked to increased investment of Salvadoran private investors and the sustained contributions of Salvadorans residing in the United States who sent money to their families in El Salvador), poverty reduction took place progressively, coverage for basic services improved, and migration of the population diminished (UNDP, 2001). Despite these efforts, which have been undermined by the impact of natural disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the two consecutive earthquakes in January and February of 2001, there still exist important social challenges. Amidst the challenges of a developing medium-income country, El Salvador needs to keep reducing poverty and overcome still severe levels of inequity (Table 1)¹.

¹ "2.7 million poor live without medical insurance; single women head one third of all households; and 256,000 children, age 8-17, work, while 14 percent of youth, 14-17 years old, are inactive (neither work nor attend school). About 20,000 people live with HIV-AIDS, and the adult prevalence rate for infection is 0.6 percent" (Reyes, 2002, p. 3).

Table 1. Decrease of Poverty in El Salvador's Households, 1991-2002 (percent)

Poverty	1991/92	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Total	59.7	48.3	44.8	41.3	38.8	38.8	36.8
Extreme	27.7	19.6	18.8	16.7	16.0	16.1	15.8
Relative	31.0	28.7	26.0	24.6	22.8	22.7	21.0
Urban	53.7	39.0	37.8	32.8	29.8	31.3	29.5
Extreme	23.2	12.5	13.7	10.3	nd	nd	nd
Relative	30.5	26.5	24.2	22.5	nd	nd	nd
Rural	66.1	62.1	56.2	55.4	53.7	51.6	49.2
Extreme	33.6	30.0	27.2	27.4	nd	nd	nd
Relative	32.5	32.1	29.0	28.0	nd	nd	nd

Source: PNUD (2001). *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano: El Salvador*. San Salvador: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo. Data from 2000, 2001 and 2002 were taken from: Ministry of Economy, MINEC. Social Indicators: www.minec.gob.sv (Date of access: July 15, 2003).

It is important to stress that even before the signing of the Peace Accords, the Government of El Salvador² had identified within the education sector the importance of expanding access in basic education, with special emphasis in the rural areas, of promoting decentralization of the educational services, and of undertaking the challenges to overcome the inefficiency of the public sector (MINED, 1994). In a context of an increasing social consensus and economic recovery, during the 90's, public investment in education grew consistently³ and there were innovative initiatives lead to nation-wide Educational Reform Process (MINED, 1995): "the recent educational reform of El Salvador reflects one of the most authentic and sustainable initiatives... in addition to its commitment for a better education system for the children of El Salvador, this process offers a unique opportunity for other countries to learn. Its central strategy, for instance, has been worldwide acknowledged and has inspired its neighboring countries. It is about going back to communities and families as essential resources for education and re-evaluating de role of State in education" (Alvarez and Dos Santos, 1999, p. 9).

One of the initiatives that gave birth to the education reform process in El Salvador is the Community-Managed Education Program (*Educación con Participación de la Comunidad*, EDUCO), which begun to develop in 1991 (MINED, 1997).

Within its policy to expand education services, especially in the rural areas, the Ministry of Education (MINED) carried out several field studies in 1990. One of the main findings was that during the armed conflict of the 1980s, many rural communities out of their own initiative organized themselves to provide their children with basic education services. On the basis of

² Since 1989, the ARENA Party (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista) has been in charge of three administrations: 1989-1994; 1994-1999 and 1999-2004. After being an armed group, the FMLN became a political party in 1992. Its presence has grown in local governments and the National Congress (Asamblea Legislativa).

³ Public investment in education as a percentage of the GDP grew from 1.5 percent in 1992 to 3.0 percent in 2000

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research, several recommendations were made: (a) to promote linkages between the school and the community; (b) to train teachers in order for them to focus on pedagogical relationships instead of depending on the existence of a school building; (c) to eliminate requirements of uniform and any financial contribution from the family; and (d) to promote nourishment school programs and to provide basic educational materials.

Thus, in 1991 MINED's authorities decided to implement a pilot program based on a very central strategy: that of establishing the transfer of funds to parents' organizations. These entities were duly acknowledged by MINED to have the authority to receive and use the funds transferred in order to hire teachers and cover the basic operational costs of educational services. Under a model that focused on the poorest rural communities, 263 new classrooms were created to enroll 8,416 children in grade 1 of basic education.

Based on the success of the 1991 experience, MINED decided to institutionalize the program, for which it had the financial and technical support of the World Bank. MINED was the entity responsible for ensuring that financial resources were available to the communities, and it provided support in the organization, legalization and training of the Community Associations for Education (Asociaciones Comunales para la Educación, ACE). MINED also provided assistance in the selection and training of teachers, and in the provision of teaching materials. On the other hand, the ACE's were responsible for administering their funds, as well as hiring teachers and to overseeing the overall management of educational services in their communities.

Despite the enthusiasm of the authorities of MINED and the communities participating in this effort, the teachers union and opposition groups to the government expressed disagreement with the program and argued that such program was endangering job stability of teachers. Nonetheless, this did not affect EDUCO's progress as it did not have any immediate impact on the traditional school system and it allowed the hiring of teachers to provide new services to distant rural areas. Insofar as successful relationships between EDUCO teachers and their communities developed, the issue of job stability lost relevance. Besides, the dialogue and negotiation experience that took place within the broad educational reform process led to a more constructive relationship between the government and the teachers unions. Finally, as the ACE's themselves discovered the value of the program and its benefits brought to their communities, they became the main vehicle to counter the opposition of those who did not trust the program.

From its initial design, EDUCO was aimed at achieving three objectives in the education sector: (a) to expand education services for pre-school and basic education in the rural and poorest communities of the country, (b) to promote community participation in the provision of education services, and (c) to establish a curricular link between pre-school and the first grades of basic education.

The end of the armed conflict in 1992 marked a pivotal point for the expansion of the program, which became the model for expanding educational access in rural areas. Although the initial objective of the program was to provide educational services up to third grade in basic education, the great demand for the services led to the decision of increasing the education level of the program through 6th grade in 1994 and up 9th grade 1997. By 2001 the program was already

being administered by 1,970 ACE's and achieved the enrollment of more than 322 thousand children in pre-school and basic education, representing 50 percent of public school enrollment in the rural areas at the pre-school level and 37 percent of public school enrollment in the rural areas for grades one through nine at the basic education level (See Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Expansion of EDUCO, 1991-2001.

Año	Absolute				Cumulative			
	Classroom	ACE ¹	Teacher	Student ²	Classroom	ACE ¹	Teacher	Student ²
1991	263	263	263	8,416	263	263	263	8,416
1992	746	582	746	23,872	1,009	845	1,009	32,288
1993	302	26	302	9,664	1,311	871	1,311	41,952
1994	1,005	463	1,005	32,160	2,316	1,334	2,316	74,112
1995	1,238	7	603	39,616	3,554	1,341	2,919	113,728
1996	1,725	359	965	55,200	5,279	1,700	3,884	168,928
1997	783	5	312	25,056	6,062	1,705	4,196	193,984
1998	386	-65	173	12,352	6,448	1,640	4,369	206,336
1999	967	82	334	30,944	7,415	1,722	4,703	237,280
2000	856	89	636	27,392	8,271	1,811	5,339	264,672
2001	1,805	159	1,174	57,760	10,076	1,970	6,513	322,432

1. From 1995, MINED began creating one ACE per community; before an ACE each education level (preschool and basic). Thus, in some years the number of ACE may be negative.

2. There is an approximately average of 32 students per classroom.

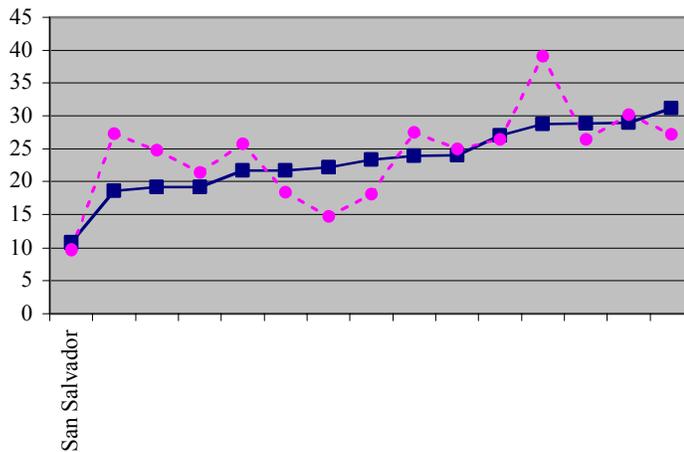
Source: MINED. 2001. EDUCO. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación. See also: Reyes (2002).

During its first years of implementation, EDUCO begun to decrease its financial resources from a World Bank loan, and in 1996 the program was fully funded by the national budget of El Salvador. In 2001, the government of El Salvador transferred to the ACE's a total of 45 million dollars, which represented 2.03 percent of its total budget, and 10.5 percent of MINED's total budget (Reyes, 2002). From an institutional perspective, the EDUCO schools progressively became a modality of public education in the country.

EDUCO promoted the organizational growth of the communities around the school system. Parents realized that it was possible for them to participate in such an important project, as is the education of their children. The communities were empowered, and their roles and responsibilities, in the majority of the cases, surpassed the requirements to administer funds, to pay teacher benefits and salaries as well as to support the operation of educational services. More importantly, they became the leading force of community development, and their success encouraged them to improve their own level of education through adult education programs. Therefore, beyond their legal responsibilities initially entrusted to them, the communities have contributed with their social capital to the development of education in the rural areas of El Salvador (Lindo, 2002).

The program not only met its original objectives, it also did so in an unprecedented short period of time. Furthermore, it allowed for an innovative experience to be developed within the education system, which eventually had positive effects in terms of quality. Overall, EDUCO has been successful at concentrating its efforts with the poorest sectors. For instance, if one is to take into account the current geographical distribution of children enrolled in EDUCO schools in relation to the public school enrollment, EDUCO's enrollment tends to be greater in the departments of the country with the highest levels of poverty (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. EDUCO Enrollment as a Percentage of Public Enrollment by Departments Ordered by the Level of Poverty



1. The higher the Poverty Index, the higher the level of poverty of the Department (Scale: 0-100).
2. A department is the first level of political division of the country.

Source: For EDUCO Enrollment: MINED. 2002 Annual Educational Database. For the Poverty Index: PNUD. 2001. *Informe sobre desarrollo humano: El Salvador 2001*. San Salvador: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, PNUD.

Impact Analysis

The impact of the EDUCO program can be analyzed in terms of its efficiency and its effectiveness. Both concepts are intricately linked to the aspiration of a society wishing to ensure adequate educational opportunities for the children of families who live in rural areas. In the case of El Salvador, as in many developing countries, such areas are characterized for not having access to services and present the highest levels of poverty. The criticism to the provision of education services by the public sector, in relation to its attention to rural areas, include aspects such as the centralization and bureaucratic approaches in the delivery of services, lack or very low quality of them, and the difficulties to enroll and keep the children in school at the ages there are supposed to attend. These aspects have been questioned about public education in general, but

it has been consistent in the case of El Salvador, that the children of the poorest families face greater disadvantages.⁴ (See ALFA, 2002; PREAL, 2001).

With regard to the efficiency of EDUCO, five aspects will be considered: (a) greater agility in the creation of services, (b) a decrease in the bureaucratic role of MINED's central offices (c) improvement of teachers attendance to school leading to an increase of learning time for the children, and (d) the tendency to promote similar academic achievement, and in some cases even greater, in relation to the traditional public schools.

First, *EDUCO has allowed greater agility in the creation of education services*. One of the main challenges faced by public authorities of the education sector of El Salvador during the 1990s was, on the one hand, the need to expand education services for pre-school and basic education in the rural areas, and on the other hand, the lack of efficiency of the traditional strategy to open more public schools in the country. The existing mechanism used then to create new schools included, at least, finding and securing land (which was to be donated as the public sector did not allow for purchasing of land), to build a school (following the conventional design with at least three classrooms), appoint teachers in a centralized manner (directly by MINED), and finally enroll the children. To have a new school in any community, this process could last between three and four years.

The strategy of the EDUCO program was geared to organize, legalize and train a community on how to carry out a bank wire transfer in order to have the resources to hire its teachers. This process has taken in all cases no more than three months. In its initial setup, the program has taken advantage of the local infrastructure already in existence (schools, community houses, or properties belonging to a member of the community) and in other cases it has provided support in building new classrooms with community participation. Under the traditional system it would have been impossible to expand enrollment in the agile manner in which it was accomplished in the decade of the 1990s. (See Table 2).

Secondly, *the EDUCO program has decreased the bureaucratic role of MINED's central offices*. These have shifted their role in order to become more normative, ensure financial resources, provide technical assistance and support, and supervise the use of the resources through selective audits. With the EDUCO Program, several responsibilities processes were transferred to the community level in order for them to do the hiring, purchases, acquisition of professional services and materials as well as the payment of basic services. All this was possible because EDUCO set up a model to transfer the financial resources of the State to the community level.

Although arguments can be made for centralized procurement or payments as positive for a scale economy, the operational performance of the communities avoid incurring storage, distribution and personnel costs, and above all, increase the probability for education inputs to

⁴ Factors relating to the disadvantages of different social groups in other contexts include: gender, race, culture, and religion. In El Salvador, gender issues are relevant more in terms of the content of technical and higher education than in terms of general educational opportunities. The other factors are not relevant to the case of El Salvador.

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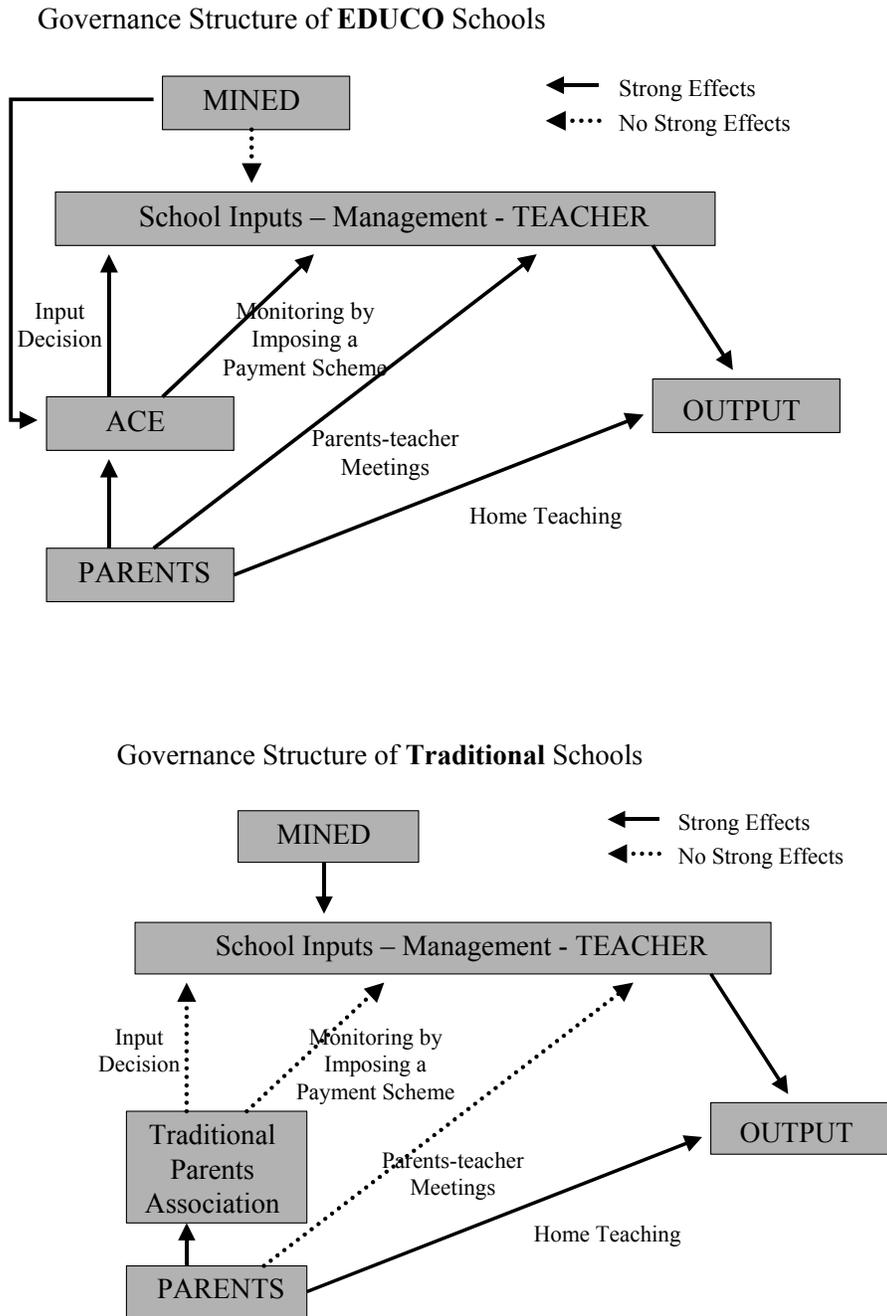
reach the schools in an appropriate and timely manner. One of the most important aspects of this modality is the effect that it has on direct supervision of the communities and their commitment with the education process. When comparing the EDUCO model with the traditional, Sawada (2000) concludes that, in the first case, the communities have greater influence in the decision making process for education input, management of the schools and teachers, which allows the selection of what is the most relevant information at the local level, thus adding a greater effort and commitment of the education agents to achieve greater levels of effectiveness in the provision of education services (See Figure 2).

Thirdly, *EDUCO has contributed in decreasing the absenteeism of teachers and, hence, it has increased the probability of learning time for children.* Historically, one of the problems particular to the rural areas has been the fact that teachers attended school an average of no more than three days per week. In the case of EDUCO, attributed specially to the supervision by the ACE's, teacher attendance increased to five days per week, which has practically eliminated absenteeism. Parents have been very effective in making a linkage between the concepts of teacher hiring and performance: to be in the school and focus on the tasks of teaching and learning.

On its end, MINED has provided support and training to teachers while supplying them with dynamic didactic materials, all of which has contributed to increase their levels of motivation. As teacher's attendance becomes constant, the interest of parents to send their children to school also increases. Empirical data of the EDUCO program indicates "in decentralized setting, parents are more motivated to send children to school and better able to monitor teachers. Parents' education, especially mothers' education, has a positive impact on student attendance. Moreover, teachers tend to miss fewer days when monitored by parent associations. This, in turn, implies that students miss fewer days" (Jimenez y Sawada, 1998, p. 440.).

Fourthly, *the accelerated expansion of EDUCO has not affected the academic achievement of students.* On the contrary, when participation is more effective, the academic results of the children are notably superior. In its original design, EDUCO was focused more on coverage than on educational quality. However, as it has been discussed previously, there are positive effects on the quality as the provision of education inputs improves in relationship with greater community participation. This leads to the logical question of whether children in the EDUCO schools have better levels of achievement than children in the traditional schools. The first analysis carried out indicated disadvantages for the EDUCO children, which was statistically proven to be related to their background and conditions of living in high levels of poverty (Jiménez y Sawada, 1998).

Figure 2. The Augmented Production Function Model with Endogenous Teacher Effort



Source: Sawada, Y. 2000. Community Participation, Teacher Effort, and Educational Outcome: The Case of El Salvador's EDUCO Program. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

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Following the first analysis, Lindo (2000) reviewed the empirical data available, establishing distinctively the EDUCO schools by the level of participation of the parents. The findings revealed that in the cases with greater participation: “the average visit of parents to the classrooms was eight times greater, and the results of language testing were 30 percent higher than those of the traditional schools even though the population attended by the EDUCO program had greater socio-economic disadvantages. The test results for mathematics were also better but the difference between those results was not statistically significant” (Lindo, 2000, p.378).

Thus, there exist evidences that the EDUCO model has allowed better used of resources and has generated benefits, which were not present in the traditional public schools and much less in the rural areas.

EDUCO’s impact can also be assessed from the standpoint of its effectiveness to attend the needs of rural children. With regard to the program itself, two central aspects can be considered: (a) it has had a positive impact as it opened education opportunities for the poorest children, and (b) it has served as a mechanism to promote community participation for greater quality.

Education opportunities were opened for the poorest children, as explained earlier, EDUCO’s cumulative offer tends to be greater in the poorest areas of the country (see Figure 1). In general terms, findings show that in the rural areas the net schooling rate in grades one through six increased from 76 to 82 percent between 1992 and 2000 respectively. For the same periods of time and the same grades, the rate had a small increase from 88 to 89 percent in the urban areas. Thus, although inequity still remains, the gap between the urban and rural areas decreased from twelve to seven percent points in the above-mentioned period (MINED, 2002). These changes can be associated to the increasing presence of EDUCO in the rural areas. In 2002, the percentage of children attending EDUCO schools in relation to the total number of children in rural areas attending public schools was 37 percent. By education level, these percentages were 50 for pre-school and 35 for basic education (40 for grades 1-3; 25 for grades 4-6 and 22 for grades 7-9) (See Table 3).

In addition, EDUCO has diminished late entrance to 1st grade in rural areas. In 1998, “88 percent of 7 year-old children in EDUCO communities started Grade 1 (at their expected age) and all others started by age 8. In contrast, only 75 percent of children at the same age started Grade 1 in traditional rural schools. In 1993, late entrance rates (children beginning at 9 or above) was almost 30 percent in rural areas; by 1998, it was 14 percent (surpassing original government goals of reducing late entrance to 15.3 percent by 1999)” (Reyes, 2002, p. 9).

Finally, as mentioned before, EDUCO has increased the levels of attendance in children living in rural areas, and they do not seem to have disadvantage in terms of academic achievement. These are also indicators of the program’s effectiveness. It can positively be said that EDUCO opens education services with agility, increases the possibilities for children living in rural areas to study timely according to their age, and it allows them to obtain academic achievements and at times superior to those of children attending the traditional public schools.

Table 3. EDUCO Enrollment as a Percentage of Public Enrollment in Rural Areas by Level of Education (2002)

Department	Pre-school	Basic Education				Total
		Grades 1-3	Grades 4-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 1-9	
Morazán	68.6	57.6	56.8	47.6	56.1	58.1
Sonsonate	55.7	45.7	41.1	28.9	41.8	43.8
Usulután	60.1	45.6	40.2	21.8	40.3	43.5
Chalatenango	52.3	45.2	42.4	29.5	41.7	43.4
San Vicente	54.0	45.6	39.7	26.8	40.6	42.8
Cuscatlán	55.4	41.3	40.8	36.7	40.4	42.7
Ahuachapán	63.7	44.1	39.0	23.6	39.5	42.6
La Libertad	54.3	45.6	38.3	22.4	38.9	41.0
Cabañas	54.1	40.2	37.9	29.4	38.5	40.3
La Unión	46.0	39.8	36.7	21.9	36.2	37.6
NATIONAL	49.9	39.7	34.7	21.9	35.1	37.2
San Miguel	40.4	34.6	30.6	18.0	30.5	31.8
La Paz	41.2	30.0	27.0	19.3	27.2	29.2
San Salvador	35.4	29.8	23.2	13.3	23.9	25.4
Santa Ana	38.3	26.7	21.8	14.2	23.1	25.1

Source: MINED. 2002 Annual Educational Database.

A second aspect that must be considered in the program in terms of effectiveness is its ability to promote community participation and the impact resulting from it on educational and social development at the local level. First, it is important to mention the time dedicated by the members of the ACE's to administer their respective school. According to MINED (2001b), "the ACE members dedicate annually 1044 hours to play various tasks: management training (200 hours), bank account management (16 hours), payment of teacher salaries and Social Security (96 hours), purchase of school consumable materials (72 hours), advisory consultations with school supervisors and district and regional Coordinators (120 hours), community and ACE meeting and assemblies (180 hours), school visits and supervision (360 hours). This indicates the importance of nonmonetary contributions of communities to the provision educational services.

Furthermore, the program has allowed the communities to have and offer a value added in the various aspects of local development: (a) transparent management of financial resources at the community level, (b) attendance of teacher and students (as argued above), (c) supportive relations between teachers and parents, (d) parental presence in the classroom, (e) support in the preparation of educational materials, (f) time after school and homework support for children, (g) community activities to support improvements in the school environment, (i) increased motivation of members of the community to benefit from literacy programs, parent school sessions and other adult education activities, (j) development of alliances with NGO's and

municipalities, and (k) collaboration to existing development programs in other sectors like health, water supply, and so on (to see Reyes, 2002 and Lindo, 2001).

Driving Factors

Among the driving factors of the program are: the leadership and commitment of both the government authorities and the communities, the capacity to introduce innovative approaches at the institutional levels (in the legal, administrative and curricular areas), the flexibility to make adjustments faced while implementing the program, and the technical and financial support of international agencies, particularly the loan-funded activities of the World Bank.

Commitment and Political Economy for Change

In the decade of the 1980s the then ruling Social Democratic Government focused its efforts on the dynamics of war. Although there were some attempts to resolve the armed conflict, these were not effective insofar as each of the sides considered it could win over the other. Some analysts considered the country to be in some sort of a catastrophic equilibrium. In 1989, presidential elections took place and the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) party was overwhelmingly chosen to lead the country. ARENA leadership was linked to the private sector and to groups of the right, who had been vehemently opposed to the military struggle of the Farabundo Martí Liberation Movement (FMLN).

As a result of its initial diagnosis, the new government's leadership realized there were needed undivided efforts to reactivate the economy and to invest in social sectors, with special emphasis on the poorest. In the case of the education sector, the main conclusion reached was the importance of expanding the education services to the rural areas for pre-school and basic education levels. Within that context authorities discovered that, due to the lack of education services, many rural communities had taken the initiative of teaching the children with the support of people within the community who had some level of schooling.

In contrast, MINED was a bureaucratic, politicized and inefficient organization, which did not appear to be the best foundation to face the challenges of providing education for the more than 500 thousand children ages 7 to 15 who were not enrolled in school. In addition, there was scarcity of financial resources, which required that new sources of funding be acquired and that the existing ones be used in a more efficient manner. Finally, there was a clear acknowledgement of the lack of incentives to motivate teachers to work in isolated rural or distant areas, which consequently had weakened educational services in those areas.

The vision of the education authorities at that time, coupled to the active involvement of the communities, gave way for EDUCO, which started before the war ended. Specifically, the genuine interest of MINED and the communities in the program, the adoption of a design that involved the communities and their capacity and expectations at the local level. All these key factors coupled to financial and technical support of the United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF), the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) gave way to the creation of EDUCO.

At the national level, the Salvadoran government acknowledged that economic and social development was not viable in an armed conflict environment. On the other hand, the FMLN decided, after the negative results of its general armed attacks in 1989, to find a negotiated solution to the war. With the mediation and support of the United Nations, this resulted in the 1992 Peace Accords, which promoted a process of social consensus that favored the institutionalization of EDUCO as well as the broad education reform process.

Throughout the years, the innovative experience was institutionalized and its leadership was consolidated within the structures of the MINED. First, the Minister had the ability and commitment to lead ample consensus within the education sector⁵. Second, the technical team in charge of EDUCO was identified itself with the teachers, parents and children involved in the program. Complementary, dialogue and agreements occurred between MINED and the teachers unions as well as opposition leaders. This contributed to overcome the fears and negative perceptions about the program (See Córdova, 1999).

Institutional Innovation

From an institutional standpoint, EDUCO arose from the receptive openness to new paradigms within the framework of educational policies to expand the coverage. Simply, the vision and the design of the program was based on a scheme developed “outside the traditional box”; that is to say, beyond conventional strategies and mechanisms. After all, the program found a mechanism to take advantage of the existing laws in order to give a legal framework for the official appointment of the ACE’s (through a legal entity status issued by MINED). This included the signing of contracts between MINED and the ACE as well as the transfer of funds and other competencies to ACE’s such as the power to hire (and fire) teachers and to administer educational services in their communities.

The strategy was rapidly institutionalized in order to include activities aimed at (i) promoting, organizing, legalizing, training and monitoring the ACE’s; (ii) training and providing technical support to teachers, and (iii) developing a transfer-of-funds system with its own financial auditing mechanisms.

As a historical background, during the first years of the program some debates took place within country (including positions of local public authorities and international organizations) about the option to decentralize at the municipal level. The final decision was to decentralize the competencies all the way to the school level -taking into account the institutional weaknesses of the municipalities and the risk of having them politicized-. It was believed that parents were the first and most interested in ensuring the education of their children.

⁵ EDUCO was born and developed under the sustained leadership of Minister Cecilia Gallardo de Cano, who held the post for nine consecutive years (1990-1998)

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Although MINED developed a financial administration program to ensure that legal requirements were being met for the use of public funds, the implementation of the transfer of funds took place by opening regular bank accounts for each ACE in the financial system. The account is managed by the Treasurer of the ACE and the expenses incurred are periodically reported and audited. The mechanism to transfer funds was very innovative at that moment: the State deposits funds into the account registered by the ACE's (a legally constituted private entity) in a private bank of the financial system.

Lastly, it is important to mention the effect that EDUCO's innovation had in the general institutionality of MINED and its positive push in the Education Reform. With the support of the funds provided by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), MINED developed an institutional modernization that included: (i) reviewing the legal framework, (ii) reducing its administrative staff; (iii) transforming the three regional offices (little Ministries) into 14 Departmental Offices with operational responsibilities, and (iv) creating School Administration Boards (CDE) in all the public schools of the country. The latter effort was legally backed by the Teachers' Law of 1997. In summary, EDUCO was not only innovational within its structures, but it also served as a catalyst to bring about new innovations for the institutional development of MINED (MINED, 1999).

Learning and Experimentation

One of the EDUCO's slogans has been: "EDUCO: an experience that learns and teaches". The initial phase of the program was intense in its need to master the criteria and mechanism to ensure the well functioning of the program. Not everything was designed from its beginning, thus, over the years changes were made in accordance with the dynamics of the program. Box 1 reflects a summary of various problems faced by the program during its implementation and how these were faced. It also reflects information about doubts and/or expectations with regard to the experience and how these were overcome.

As indicated before, the EDUCO experience promoted the idea of creating entities for school administration in the traditional public schools of El Salvador. As a result, in 1996 a law was approved for the creation of School Boards Councils (Consejos Directivos Escolares - CDE) in all public schools. The CDE's structure includes a president, a secretary, and a treasurer. The CDE's are integrated by the school director as its president, two teachers, one of them is the secretary, three parents, of which one is the treasurer, and two students. Since 1997 CDE's manage financial resources transferred from the central level. These resources are used to purchase educational materials, equipment, maintenance and teacher training.

Box 1. EDUCO: A Learning Experience

Pilot Stage	
<i>Problems</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
Lack of technical, legal and administrative tools to implement a pilot to decentralize the provision of services at the community level.	MINED organized technical teams from all the levels of the institution to jointly develop the legal framework; the administrative, training and follow-up systems; and an updated curriculum
Inexperience in de-concentration and decentralization processes.	Involvement of the three regional offices in the implementation. Two schools per region, at the very beginning.
Illiterate parents selected to administer ACE's funds.	Parents received training on how to sign documents, and their finger prints where allowed to be used in legal documents.
Institutionalization	
<i>Problems</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
Insufficient financial resources to fund the program.	Loan negotiation with the World Bank to finance the program, including the hiring of teachers under the agreement on incremental inclusion of the costs within the national budget.
Design of the program incomplete at the time of expansion, especially with regard to social benefits for teachers.	New processes were defined to provide social benefits for pregnancy, sickness and life insurance, among others.
Bank accounts were opened under the ACE's Board, and new Boards were elected every year.	The accounts were opened under the name of the community and an assigned bank number regardless of the ACE's Board changes every year.
Transfer of funds took place at the end of each month.	Transfer of funds were changed to take place at the beginning of each month and teachers were paid at the end of the month, just as the rest of teachers in the public sector.
The legal base of the program allowed only for the creation of sections from pre-school to third grade in basic education.	The ACEs' Guidelines were changed and now sections can be created from pre-school through 9th grade.
The Administrative and Financial Manual did not cover all the aspects to ensure the practicality and agility of the process.	A new Manual was elaborated to contemplate all the relevant aspects of the funds transferred to the ACE's from basic and complementary sources.
State's slow level to absorb classrooms operating by the support of external funds	During the 1994-95 period, the Government absorbed 100 percent of the operation of EDUCO classrooms
Breaking Paradigms within the EDUCO Program	
<i>Expectation</i>	<i>Experience</i>
Parents may not be capable of administering funds with transparency.	Parents have demonstrated great responsibility in administering the resources transferred.
The Program would not survive the change in Governments and would lose its credibility.	The Program is in its 12th year and has reached high credibility both in the country and internationally.
Teachers would not accept to be hired by parents.	Teachers accepted their hiring to be done by parents and have established a respectful and cooperative relationship with the communities.
EDUCO would be reduced only to parents' participation in the ACE's.	Parents' leadership promotes mechanisms with other entities to ensure support to education and social development at the local level.

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EDUCO could be considered as a mere strategy for the expansion of education services.	EDUCO is a strategy for expansion of education services in the rural areas with community participation.
When international funding would end, the program would close down.	EDUCO is financed 100 percent by the Government of El Salvador

With regard to its pedagogical strategy, EDUCO incorporated relevant innovations: aulas alternativas (multi-grade classrooms) and accelerated education for grades two to six. In the case of multi-grade classrooms, the program allowed flexibility to make changes in the highest grade offered in the community, taking into account the demand for it. This was an alternative that gave way to simultaneous attention to small groups of children in different grade levels, contributing to increase the enrollment rates and retention while making it a more efficient way to use the teachers' availability. The accelerated education program has been recently incorporated into EDUCO and its focus is to provide the services to overage children (with two or more years over the official age for schooling). This modality allows students to complete sooner their basic education. Both programs include the design of a specialized curriculum, instructional materials, training strategies for teachers as well as evaluation practices in the classroom.

Lastly, EDUCO has been a learning source for other countries worldwide. The program has been presented in numerous ministerial meetings, and has received many study tours of technical teams from other countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Chile, Nicaragua, Panamá, Dominican Republic, México, Brasil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Ghana, Mauritius Islands, Madagascar, Chad, Morocco, Senegal and Mauritania (MINED, 1999).

Based on the experience of El Salvador, public authorities of the governments of Guatemala and Honduras decided to promote similar programs in their respective countries: the Programa Nacional de Auto-Gestión para el Desarrollo Educativo (PRONADE) in Guatemala in 1995, and the Programa Hondureño de Participación Comunitaria (PROHECO) in Honduras in 1999 (See Box 2). These programs are also based on community participation and are focused on pre-school through basic education levels in their respective rural areas. In 2003, the total number of children enrolled in the three programs was over 800 thousand, and had approximately eight thousand schools, as well as over 22 thousand teachers hired by the communities and over 50 thousand parents participating in the associations. Taking into account the life of these programs, all three have an accumulated experience that amounts to 27 years (See Table 4).

As an interesting example, the case of PROHECO in Honduras will be described in more detail. Located in Central America, Honduras has a territory of 112.4 thousand square kilometers and 6 million inhabitants, out of which 53 percent live in rural areas. It is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and its economy was devastated in 1998 by the Hurricane Mitch, one of the major natural disasters in its history. The current Government is committed to improve access and quality of education as a tool to keep reducing the levels of poverty.

Box 2. EDUCO: A teaching experience in Central America

GUATEMALA: Community Managed National Program for Educational Development (Programa Nacional de Autogestión para el Desarrollo Educativo - PRONADE).

It is based on a strategy to offer education to poor students in rural and distant areas who would not otherwise attend primary school. It began as a model for community auto-management initiatives in 1995, seeking to increase coverage and improve the quality of education services, mainly in the first three years of primary education, strengthening decentralized initiatives and the participation of parents. PRONADE, alike EDUCO in El Salvador, provides financial resources to legally organized communities; these in turn administer the education services in a decentralized manner, thus strengthening community generated initiatives. Its operations are carried out through the community-based management committees (COEDUCA) and the education services institutions (Instituciones de Servicio Educativo- ISE). The schools covered by PRONADE are located in the most rural and poorest areas of the country, where 80 percent of the beneficiaries are in predominantly indigenous communities. Currently the program provides services for over 384,071 students in 4,137 schools nationwide.

HONDURAS. Honduran Community Education Program (Programa Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria - PROHECO)

The Honduran Community Education Program (PROHECO), was born in 1999 as a strategy of the Government of Honduras to provide education services in the rural and distant areas in the poorest areas of the country through the direct participation of parents in the administration of education services. Alike EDUCO and PRONADE, PROHECO is implemented by the Parents' Associations, in this case called AECO's, and which receive financial resources for payment of teachers and educational materials for its operation. The program is supported by a team of in-the field promoters and departmental supervisors who are responsible for the promotion, organization, legalization and training of the AECO's, as well as the supervision to ensure optimal operation of them. Currently, PROHECO provides services to 63,390 students of pre-school and basic education in 1,693 schools throughout the country.

Source: PRONADE: PREAL. 2000. *Tomorrow is to Late. A Report of the Central American Commission.* Washington D.C.: Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL); PROHECO: Elaborated by the authors. August, 2003.

Table 4. Community-Managed School in Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (2003)

	EDUCO (El Salvador)	PRONADE (Guatemala)	PROHECO (Honduras)	TOTAL
Start of the program	1991	1995	1999	
Schools	2,047	4,137	1,843	8,027
Enrolment in preschool and basic education (rural areas)	362,880	384,071	69,000	815,951
Teachers	7,174	12,573	2,811	22,558
Members of Community Associations	22,500	20,685	8,877	52,062
Classrooms	11,340	12,573	1,843	25,756
Years of experience	13	9	5	27

Source: Elaborated by the authors. Based on information from PRONADE, EDUCO and PROHECO Programs. August, 2003

The Community Education Honduran Program (Programa Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria - PROHECO) started in 1999. It was the result of a decision made by the President

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of Honduras, and it had the technical assistance and financial contribution from the World Bank. Since the beginning, the program has highly emphasized the management and participation of local communities, access to preschool and primary education in rural areas, and improvement of quality and efficiency of education.

In 2003 the 52,062 parents, organized as Community Educational Associations (Asociaciones Educativas Comunitarias – AECO), chose and hired 2,811 teachers to provide education to 69,000 children in 1,843 rural communities throughout the country with the support of 230 promoters. Among the direct impacts of the program are: (i) rural communities that never had a school before have it now; (ii) teacher use good educational materials and infrastructure; (iii) assistance of both teachers and students has improved; (iv) greater accountability of teachers; (v) parents support teachers, (vi) more efficiency and participation in the management of education; (vii) greater equity as poor children enroll in school (Reyes & Meza, 2001).

Box 3. Perceptions of PROHECO’s participants (2001)

Parents	“Before PROHECO, we just did not have a school where to send our children” “With PROHECO, teachers work all expected time from Monday to Saturday”
Teachers	“Despite of their difficult conditions, children have an intense desire to learn”
Community Promoters	“PROHECO is reaching the most disadvantaged communities” “We work hard, but we feel happy when we realize that the program is good for the community and the country”

Source: Reyes, J. & Meza, D. 2001. Una estrategia de eficiencia y participación comunitaria en el área rural de Honduras. Honduras: World Bank y Ministerio de Educación.

Learning outcomes of PROHECO’s students as measured by standardized tests are similar to those of other rural schools. However, it should be noticed that PROHECO’s students come from the most disadvantaged socio-economic and geographical areas in Honduras. Despite some success of PROHECO in terms of access, there still remains a challenge in terms of school completion: only 70 percent of children that enter first grade complete the 6th grade. In addition, 7 percent of children aged 7 to 11 years old are not in school; this group of children becomes a future target for the PROHECO (The University of Columbia’s Team, 2002).

External Catalysts

Various external catalysts of the program can be identified: (a) the declarations issued in international conferences, (b) the initial role of UNICEF and (c) the consistent role and support of The World Bank. The purpose of offering education services to the poorest and to promote community participation were coherent with the statements proposed in the Education for All Declaration (Jomtien, 1990) and the International Convention for Children Rights (1990). El Salvador is a signatory of both declarations, and that allowed for the country to have international support for the interventions carried out at the national level. Secondly, it is important to mention the important role UNICEF played by funding the first education diagnosis, which greatly contributed to identify basic issues and elements later included in the design of the program.

Finally, it is important to mention the active participation of The World Bank. On the one hand, the Bank has provided financial resources for education with the purpose of funding not only EDUCO but also the overall education reform process of El Salvador. “From 1991 to 2005, total Bank commitments for education in El Salvador will have been US\$271 million⁶, according to current schedule. While the Bank’s credits have been in the form of ‘projects’, the intention has been to help finance El Salvador’s long-term, integrated program of education reform” (Dos Santos, 2000). Additional to the funding provided, the leadership and technical assistance of the Bank’s team have been a key factor in this process. Through its technical team the Bank has also been part of EDUCO’s growth and development. In 1997 the Bank’s project team won the World Bank’s Achievement Award for Excellence from an enormous number of worthy projects. The Award was well received by the local and community authorities in El Salvador. The following year, with the presence of the President of the World Bank, the President of El Salvador, and the participation of more than 1000 ACE members, a celebration took place to acknowledge the work accomplished by the program.

Lessons Learned

Various lessons can be learned from the EDUCO experience in El Salvador. The following have been selected based on the analysis done for this work, and among the most relevant to the agenda of poverty reduction:

- *Innovative Strategies to develop education options for the poorest.* The main challenge of society is not to explain why the poor are at a disadvantage in terms of education, but rather on how to achieve that they overcome their poverty conditions. In the case of El Salvador, it was obvious that many children were out of the school system at the end of the 12-year civil war. This was especially true for the rural areas. Could this need be met? Was there a way to tackle this problem in an immediate manner? Was there a way to address the coverage problems encountered at the end of the 1980s? The EDUCO experience demonstrated that it could be done in an agile and pertinent manner without affecting the quality of the services. The first required breaking the myth that the only option was that of traditional schooling in order to find a more flexible educational space with teachers, children and communities as the center of the program. The second was a result of the significant involvement of the education community through the ACE’s. The participation of communities made it possible for educational services to take place where it was needed and with the characteristics and expected objectives of the program – something that had not had any precedent in the history of education in El Salvador. The third (to achieve better quality in relation to other schools) was not an explicit goal of the program. Many believed that the services provided by EDUCO would be of lower quality, but implementation and results proved the contrary. From the

⁶ It is important to notice that this amount was related to the whole process of reform. An estimation of the allocation to the EDUCO program coming from loans could be approximately 12 percent. In fact, the Bank has provided financial and technical assistance for the whole education system in areas such as curriculum, educational materials, teacher training, evaluation system, school transfers, and institutional modernization.

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beginning of the education reform process of El Salvador, a latent concern was to overcome low quality predominant in the entire education system. The evidence generated by the standardized tests for achievement in mathematics and language demonstrated that the EDUCO children are not at a disadvantage in relation to the children in traditional schools, and that when community participation is effective, learning levels are even greater.

- *Sustainability of local development education programs.* Perhaps it would have been difficult to begin a program without certain key support aspects, as is the financial resources to hire teachers. This was a sine-qua-non requisite at a time when financial resources were scarce and the country was experiencing a fiscal crisis after the war. The loan and technical assistance provided by the World Bank in a timely manner contributed to overcome this obstacle and gave way for the program to reach its maturity. However, can local and national capacity be created? EDUCO has proven that it is possible. MINED successfully institutionalized the program by including the total financial cost of EDUCO in its 1997 budgetary proposal to the National Assembly for approval (*financial sustainability*). This was coupled by the vision and leadership of the education authorities at that time. Complementary to these efforts, the presence of organized communities has become a key factor for the sustainability of the program. Insofar as the parents' organizations are part of education services that enjoy credibility, they become the most interested in ensuring that the services remain over time (*social sustainability*).
- *The Value Added of the Communities.* At the beginning of the program, many who opposed to it mistakenly believed that its objective was to delegate to families a responsibility corresponding to the State and that such approach would increase the volume of private contributions to education in detriment of the legal responsibility of the State. MINED never considered as an option to delegate the financial responsibility of the program to the poor communities. Furthermore, it adopted a normative role to establish guidelines and regulations and provided support to the communities (including teachers and parents). The available data and the testimonies of the participants themselves indicate that community participation added an important social capital which in turn benefited the development of the program: timetables for the administrative work and the pedagogical processes, the close monitoring of teachers, project development with local authorities to endorse education and the leadership to carry out joint social development projects. An example of this is reflected by the evidence that EDUCO communities recovered more rapidly from the destruction caused by the 2001 earthquakes. Thus, the community has added value, many times intangible, but certainly real to local education development.
- *Renewing Teachers' Commitment.* The culture of ensuring job stability for teachers regardless of their performance has become a negative factor for the development of education systems. In fact, at the start of the program, teachers unions attempted to halt the development of the program. Fortunately, the program has had no setback to this day. The EDUCO teachers, on the other hand, have developed a commitment that had been lost in rural schools. Constructive and positive relationships have been established between the teachers

and the parents, so long as the center of such relationship is based on ensuring better education for children.

- *The increasing demand for education.* In its first year the program offered services for first grade only. The following year, services were opened in pre-school and subsequently completion of services took place through third grade in basic education. Studies carried out in the mid 1990s indicated that creating higher grades in EDUCO schools was likely to have a positive impact in school retention. Thus, services were opened in grades fourth through sixth at the basic level. In its original design, the program did not contemplate growing beyond sixth grade. However, the high demand generated by the communities required an assessment to explore de possibilities of expansion, which were later implemented for grades 7 through 9, and recently even at the secondary level. EDUCO has created an infrastructure for the public sector in the poorest areas where there was no provision of education services before. EDUCO's focus on the poorest areas of the country constitute a valuable opportunity for the nation to further advance in overcoming still remaining socio-economic inequities.

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