

Community Transformation in Brisas del Valle

Country: Honduras



Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Duration: 1995 to 2010

Beneficiaries: 14,000 people living in four neighbourhoods

Partners: Government of Honduras Ministry of Education, Secretary of Health, FUNDANASE, Red Cross, CESAMO San Miguel, Fundacion Amiga de los Ninos, FUNED, Pastoral Network of Churches and others

Total project funding: US\$4,745,731

Funding source: Sponsorship and private donations

Area Development Program (ADP) goal: To harness and build the community's knowledge and resources to help overcome poverty and improve the well-being of children and families through long-term, child-focused development programs

What we are trying to accomplish:

- Support communities to develop programs in economic development, education, housing and primary health using an integrated, multi-sectoral approach
- Empower low-income families, health and education professionals and parents to support child well-being
- Partner with community-based organizations, churches, government and local business in working alongside the poor to ensure sustainable development

Project Overview

The capital city of Tegucigalpa has been a favoured destination for the rural poor of Honduras. Families have streamed to the city with hopes of finding work and the prospect of a better life. In the early 1980s, many of these migrants created shantytowns in the northwest part of the city. Families fashioned homes of cardboard and tin that provided scant shelter from the rain. These unplanned neighborhoods did not have the benefit of basic city services such as clean water, electricity or sanitation facilities.

In these primitive conditions, very few migrants realized their dream of a better life. Adults and children frequently fell ill with parasites, diarrhea, respiratory

illness and other communicable diseases. Frequent illness and a lack of nutritious food left many children suffering from malnutrition.

Equipped with little education and very basic job skills, fewer than half of the residents were able to find employment. Those who did often worked at low-paying service jobs such as janitors, night watchmen, domestic help and fruit vendors on the street. School drop-out rates were high and many children were forced to repeat grades. Alcoholism, family breakup and youth gang violence became common features of life in the shantytown where 70 per cent of households were woman-headed.

Partners in community development

World Vision began a partnership with the people living in four neighbourhoods in northwest Tegucigalpa in 1995. This partnership, which we call the Brisas del Valle Area Development Program (ADP), aims to harness and build the community's knowledge and resources to help overcome poverty and improve the well-being of children and families.

World Vision ADPs around the world are long-term, child-focused development programs that are funded primarily through child sponsorship and supplemented by other private and public funding. We work with the



Brisas ADP's award-winning peer tutoring program successfully reduced student failure and drop-out rates.

community, the church, government and other NGOs to facilitate a range of interventions tailored to the context, which may include programs in education, health, economic development, microfinance, agriculture, water and sanitation.

In Brisas del Valle, World Vision is using this proven framework to work with local residents to implement and sustain solutions that address the root causes of poverty. World Vision has involved the Brisas community members in all phases of the ADP, beginning with an initial assessment, designing the program and continuing through three cycles of evaluation and redesign.

In 1995, just 47 per cent of the households in Brisas del Valle had an active income earner and only 63 per cent of these reported income in the previous month. Only 42 per cent of high-school aged young people were enrolled in school. Adolescents without job skills or opportunity for employment often drifted into violent gang lifestyles. Many of these children had struggled at school their entire lives. Access to medical care was limited to a health centre in a neighbouring community with only one doctor for 12,000 people, and awareness of nutrition and hygiene was very low.

One of the most pressing problems in the community was poor housing.

More than half the families in Brisas del Valle lived in homes with dirt floors and leaky roofs. As a result of poor sanitary conditions, 46 per cent of children suffered from acute respiratory disease and frequently missed school due to recurring illness. Community leadership was weak, disorganized and rife with political antagonism.

Assess needs and design integrated response

All of World Vision's development work flows from an overall plan developed in discussion with the community itself.

ADP planning helps to maximize the community's resources to address these



Ritza Altamirano credits her college success to her sponsor's encouragement.

needs by combining initiatives in many sectors into one integrated approach.

Based on the results of an assessment, the community identified economic development, education, housing and primary health as priority sectors for the work in Brisas del Valle ADP. In its first three years, the ADP accomplished the following:

- **Economic development:** In response to the community's needs, the ADP began supporting local entrepreneurs with training and small loans to increase household income through microenterprise development. After just five years, the number of families earning less than the minimum wage had dropped to 30 per cent.
- **Education:** Our initial efforts in Brisas del Valle focused on sensitizing parents to the importance of education, beginning with pre-school stimulation. This included establishing pre-school education centres where children could

gain basic skills needed to succeed in primary school and acquire the skills needed for a more productive future.

- **Primary health care:** To bridge the gap in accessing health care, World Vision helped train and mobilize a network of volunteers to support mothers in caring for their children.
- **Housing:** To help improve health conditions in homes throughout the community, World Vision implemented a program that provided 1,500 families with tile roofs and concrete flooring. Another 120 vulnerable families received new homes.

Ritza Altamirano, a sponsored child in the community, is one of four sisters whose impoverished family benefited from a new home. As a young girl, Ritza, now 20, thought she would never be allowed to finish school or live in a proper house made of cement and bricks.

"My sisters and I helped to fetch material and bricks. It was a difficult task. It was something unexpected and a powerful change in our lives," Ritza said.

Education has proven to be another powerful change. Her sponsor always encouraged her to study, and now, she has completed her second year of college.

Evaluate and refine community development

Community transformation requires more than implementing a series of successful projects. A coordinated and strategic development plan needs to be reviewed by the community and adjusted as progress is made and new opportunities discovered. In Brisas del Valle, the first review and adjustment was carried out at the end of the program's third year.

The evaluation provided encouraging evidence of the impact that the ADP was having in the community. For example, the number of profitable microenterprises had grown from eight

to 25. Awareness of the importance of education grew and almost half of pre-school children in the community were involved in the education program. Immunization coverage for children under age five rose from 73 to 95 per cent, and mothers practising exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months increased from 12 to 50 per cent.

The results of the evaluation helped to confirm the community's priorities and identify ways to extend the impact of the partnership. A number of new initiatives were included in the ADP plan in multiple sectors.

Community ownership key to sustainability

A critical goal during each evaluation cycle is to assess the capacity of the community to sustain the gains made by the ADP. In Brisas del Valle, community confidence in leadership was very low due to a history of inaction and infighting. Building the quality of community leadership became an essential component of ADP activity.

As a result, the community organized youth clubs to create a supportive environment where young people could grow in character and in their ability to become the capable leaders needed in the future. World Vision also began to work with churches to develop programs for adults that helped them develop better literacy skills and gain the character qualities that leaders need to build the trust of others in their homes and in the community. Many of these men and women were able to hone their leadership skills through volunteer service in the various ADP programs.

Rosa Bessy Franco is one of the volunteers who provides leadership in the community. A 46-year-old mother of three, Bessy attended training sessions on leadership, development promotion and a wide variety of community health

issues. Today, she provides leadership in the Health Centre pharmacy, distributing medicines and keeping medical records of the patients who visit the clinic.

“It never crossed my mind that I would work in health, but the task done by World Vision burst into me the [desire] to help my fellowmen and now I feel more proud of myself than ever before,” she says.

Bessy has seen great change in the community. At the clinic, she sees how parents are now more attentive to the health needs of their children. Her own commitment continues to grow and she contributes to the community as a member of the ADP board and as a sponsorship volunteer.

Volunteers play important roles in sponsorship monitoring

One of the ways in which sponsorship contributes to community development is in the use of local volunteers who visit sponsored children and their families, monitor their well-being and report any concerns to ADP staff. Volunteers are trained to undertake these monitoring visits which often include delivering mail from the child’s sponsor. Children are delighted to receive this correspondence and when sponsors encourage them in their pursuit of education and other goals, the relationship can empower them and broaden their outlook to include knowledge of a world outside their own community.

Sponsorship in a community encourages participation and volunteers motivate children and their families to become involved in ADP programs such as health workshops or training on income generation.

As we prepare to close this ADP, we are leaving a group of dedicated, trained community volunteers who will continue to advocate for the children and their well-being.

Strategic partnerships are a critical success factor

Although community ownership is key, World Vision also recognizes the importance of partnering with churches, community organizations, government, other NGOs and private enterprises to ensure that initiatives are sustainable. To help reduce failure and drop-out rates in local schools, the community partnered with the Ministry of Education and the private institution, FUNDANASE, to implement a peer tutoring program. The program has been so successful in reducing the rates of children dropping out and repeating grades that the district school board won a national prize and World Vision has expanded the program to all its ADPs in Honduras.

Another good practice has been to establish partnerships with universities and technical schools where graduate students in medicine, psychology and social work have gained valuable professional experience volunteering in the community and have benefited community members.

Challenges encountered

As a Christian organization, World Vision partners with churches and this ADP was no exception. In the early days, there were 38 church and faith-based organizations working in the area. However, there was little collaboration among them and in the worst cases, some had no intention of working together. Since the church will be present in the community long after World Vision leaves, it was important to harness their positive impact. We began to train religious leaders as Sunday school teachers, which served as a point of entry. Today, a network of pastors representing 32 different groups are working together to address issues in health, education, child participation and HIV and AIDS.

Another challenge was to strike the right balance between time spent on administrative processes of the ADP and community development activities. It is also important to clearly define to the community how child sponsorship actually works and the roles of community members when World Vision first comes into a community, so as not to create false expectations.

Although there is much to celebrate in the community, results could have been strengthened by focusing on fewer areas and integrating the interventions of various sectors such as health, education and economic development.

Prepared for transition

In our ADP model, World Vision’s partnership with a community lasts between 10 and 15 years. During that time, we actively build the capacity of the people themselves to continue community development at the end of the program. In Brisas del Valle ADP, that process will be completed in fall 2010.

Rosa Bessy Franco volunteers at the local health centre.





Since the beginning of the project, community members have been involved in the decisions that affect them. More than 200 people have been trained in leadership skills and have proven their ability to advocate for the community. They have organized themselves into four governing groups and created their own legally registered association called Asociacion APRENDE. With shared responsibility, they have helped formulate development plans, designed and executed pilot projects, and learned to prioritize needs and identify vulnerable families.

Today, Brisas del Valle's leaders are better positioned to respond to their community's needs. They are eager to find their own solutions to whatever challenges they may face and enjoy the dignity of self-reliance.

The people of Brisas del Valle continue to face economic and social challenges. However, the community has hope because they have already worked together to overcome many obstacles and can look to the future with confidence.

Results to date:

1. Communities were assisted to conduct an initial assessment of their specific needs and resources, design programs and continue implementation through three cycles of evaluation and redesign.
2. Local entrepreneurs were trained, small loans increased, and access to organized co-operatives facilitated to bring products to market, improving household income.
3. A technical school was built where 1,000 youth learned welding skills that prepared them for jobs in the auto repair industry. An adult distance education program was organized to provide vocational training.
4. A pre-school education program was developed, four learning centres established and teachers trained in early childhood development.
5. The ADP successfully piloted a peer tutoring program that has significantly improved education in the area, making this district the best in the country in terms of highest approval rates and lowest indices of drop-out and grade repetitions. This successful model has been replicated in all the World Vision ADPs in Honduras.
6. A network of volunteers was trained and mobilized to support mothers in providing improved health care for their children.
7. A nearby medical centre and dental clinic were rehabilitated to improve access to medical care. A new medical centre was built in the community and four counselling centres opened to provide support for abused children and adults.
8. Youth volunteers were mobilized to spearhead an HIV awareness campaign, promoting prevention education and care for people living with HIV and AIDS.
9. One hundred and twenty new homes were constructed and 1,500 received new tile roofs. Community members negotiated a connection to the municipal water supply that delivers clean water to a large number of homes. Sanitation was improved by supporting construction of new latrines.

What we learned from this project:

- In addition to technical skills in health, education and income generation, community leaders must also have comprehensive training to build their capacities in a range of sectors, including planning, management of their own resources and fundraising.
- Since total reliance on outside funds is not sustainable over the long term, community leaders' mandate must include seeking funding for development initiatives at the local and national levels to supplement sponsorship funds.
- When working in urban areas, it is necessary to prioritize and focus on more stable communities where it is possible to measure and analyze the impact of the program.