



SDC IED

Inclusive Economic Development Expert Team

COVID-19 Special Series

Good Practices Learnt by SDC Projects in Responding to COVID-19

Series Case No 4

SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLENDED LEARNING COURSES TO ENABLE YOUNG HONDURANS TO CONTINUE WITH THEIR TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

COUNTRY	HONDURAS
PROJECT	ProJoven, 7F-08129
PERIOD	2018-2021
THEME	VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



Background

[Vocational Training for Young People at Risk of Exclusion \(ProJoven\)](#) is a project mandated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Swisscontact. The main objective of the project is to improve the efficiency of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system and ensure the integration of vulnerable youth. In the current phase (2018-2021), the project is training **7500 youth at risk** and aims at bringing **80% of them to employment**. In Honduras, young people are most affected by un- and underemployment, and are often confronted with gang violence and organised crime. The project focuses on their labour market integration and works with public and private institutions to offer demand-driven training programmes. Hereby, ProJoven cooperates with the National Institute for Vocational Training (INFOP) and different private sector representatives (e.g. National Chambers of Tourism, Construction, and Commerce).

Impact of COVID-19

Schools and TVET institutions are closed in Honduras since mid-March 2020. The population is allowed to leave the house every 15 days to perform necessary activities, for example to buy groceries or withdraw money. The Government of Honduras started to gradually open up the economy again.

At the time of writing, end of July, Honduras stands in phase 1 of opening the economy allowing the physical presence of 20% of employees in the companies. For the rest of the population the measures of leaving the house only every two weeks will most probably last until November 2020. For the education sector this regulation means that educational institutions need to continue their services through virtual tools. However, there is no clear strategy of the government yet to support the provision of online learning for schools and training providers.

Project's response

ProJoven started three major initiatives to respond to the Covid-19 challenges:

1. Virtual Training

Despite this interruption of training delivery, ProJoven tried to identify different solutions to continue their 14 TVET short courses in different professions. By now ProJoven has trained 519 young people through virtual trainings. They opted for a **blended learning approach**, with 80% of the training taking place virtually and 20% in the training venues. The project staff agreed with the training providers that youth can use the equipment in the workshops on the day they are allowed to move freely. The project team developed the virtual part of the training together with the training providers after an evaluation of different tools and online platforms, taking into account different criteria (e.g. access for youth, user-friendliness for the teachers and students). The project introduced digital tools to support the continuation of the TVET courses in different sectors. The first tools used were WhatsApp groups and google classroom. In a next step, the project introduced [a platform](#) to **offer virtual trainings**. The process also included capacity development of trainers, who had to resort to E-Learning from one day to the next. Digital teaching requires different skills than traditional teaching; therefore, the teachers and trainers were supported by introducing new tools, offering a mix of methods (e.g. videos, games), and ensuring participatory teaching processes



Illustration 1: Extract from a virtual gastronomy course

online. In total, ProJoven has trained 20 instructors from vocational training centres, 250 instructors from the National Institute of Vocational Training (INFOP) and 70 teachers from the formal education system. Further, five private training centres were supported to implement protection measures for students who use the training facilities every two weeks on their free day of moving, supervised by their trainers (e.g. sanitisation measures, physical distancing).

2. Innovative Initiatives

Together with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tegucigalpa (CCIT), ProJoven agreed to equip their fabrication laboratory (Fab Lab), where students start **producing personal protection equipment (PPE) to prevent the spread of Covid-19 through the use of 3D printers.** The Fab Lab was created as an initiative of the CCIT, with initial support from the United Nations Development Programme and CCIT's own resources to promote entrepreneurship and innovation through the use of new technologies. The Fab Lab aims at supporting people, who



Illustration 2: A student producing PPEs

developed a prototype or a design plan for different products allowing them to use modern tools and receive training for the realisation of their products. This initiative reached around 1500 beneficiaries including students from different institutions through support in digital manufacturing, 3D design, 3D printing, entrepreneurship support through mentoring or conferences for promoting women in technology. Through additional equipment supported by ProJoven, youth started producing Covid-19 related products. They are for instance trained to use these new machines to produce hygiene masks. These are distributed among healthcare personnel in poor communities or in big cities with high numbers of cases in order to ensure their protection against Covid-19, as well as among training centres' personnel.

Although this initiative does not contribute directly to employment promotion, it develops technological



Illustration 3: PPEs produced by students

capacities and innovation of the youth, which helps them to start their own business or find employment. The CCIT has planned a training module together with different companies, who will hire students about to graduate. They will be able to work within companies and receive a salary. In terms of entrepreneurship, the CCIT supports youth to develop their business idea and provide them with a basic entrepreneurship kit. One of the challenges of this Fab Lab is the high cost of equipment. The CCIT therefore plans to

build a business case to cover the costs through companies that will be charged for the use of the Fab Lab or for specialised training.

3. Psychosocial support

Another initiative of ProJoven is the introduction of a 24/7 **hotline for psychosocial support** for youth. Together with volunteer psychologists from the National of Honduras (UNAH), the project addresses the concerns of youth and listens to them. Considering this social and personal dimension is crucial, because Honduran youth suffer from a high stress level and fear. Until now 143 people have been advised through this hotline on different issues, such as anxiety, depression, arguments between couples, grief or suicidal thoughts. These negative effects are largely associated with not only physical confinement, but also social confinement, which is especially critical for youth. Each person has different family dynamics affecting psychosocial wellbeing and skills to cope with different emotions and stress. The psychologists can support youth to plan short, medium- and long-term goals, define a vision and maintain aspirations, which helps youth to look more optimistic in the future. This ability also has an impact on education and skills development, since youth need motivation and a vision to learn. Even if training providers do not count psychosocial support to their core business, their programmes need to include this aspect since stress and trauma affects the ability to learn and work. Through these measures vocational skills programmes will be more effective, drop-out rates can be reduced and chances to find and retain employment increased.

Outlook

According to the project team, these challenges linked to Covid-19 are used as a window of opportunity to introduce new tools, such as E-Learning. The project decided to digitize all curricula and teaching and learning material and, for some topics, ProJoven will also consider a virtual approach beyond the Covid-19 crisis. For TVET, the practical part and use of the equipment is very important. In some courses, for example in cooking courses, it is easier to add the practical part because students can watch a video and then try to cook a new recipe in their kitchen at home. For a car mechanic, however, the equipment is needed to practice. For this type of courses, it is foreseen to mainly digitize the theoretical content.

An important priority for the project team is to ensure that vulnerable youth has access to digital courses. The first experience of offering digital training has shown that the main problem for the youth was not internet connectivity, nor access to smartphones, it was the access to money to pay for internet data plans for their smartphones that proved to be an issue. The project decided to cover these costs during the Covid-19 situation. The project team will closely monitor the progress of the students and only distribute vouchers for the internet data plans if the participant concludes learning sessions. This disbursement of credit is done on a weekly basis and is temporary; usually, Swisscontact would not cover this kind of costs. However, under this situation of emergency, students sometimes do not even have enough money to cover their basic needs. To build a sustainable business model, ProJoven is currently in a process of negotiation with the National Commission of Telecommunications (CONATEL) to finance these internet data plans.

ProJoven tries to establish alliances with other actors, such as the Chambers or Universities in order to come up with innovative solutions thought outside the box. The project works closely together with the private sector and government to push digitalisation forward in the TVET sector.