



UN MUNDO, TRANSFORMING LIVES

By Denis Espinal, Executive Director

UN MUNDO IN TIMES OF THE PANDEMIC

March 13, 2020 arrived, and the world changed. That was the day when, in Honduras, the first case of Coronavirus came to light, and anxiety and fear began to overshadow the joy on our faces. The Great Wall of China ceased to be an attraction, the night fell on Las Vegas in silence, the Eiffel Tower no longer seemed so high, Old Trafford ceased to be the theater of dreams, the Holy Land no longer seemed so, the archipelagos of Singapore became ghosts, moonlit nights became nightmares, and the streets became cemeteries after the national curfew. Kisses became forbidden, hugs a temptation, and closeness became distance.

In Honduras, as of January 5, 2021, there were 123,369 cases and 3,180 deaths from COVID-19. The Department of Atlántida, where the communities in which we work are located, has the fourth-highest level of infected people in the country.

Due to the situation with the pandemic, our beneficiaries of the programs have felt helpless, with doubts and uncertainty, without food. With schools closed and unable to offer classes to children, the Ministry of Education implemented the task submission system by WhatsApp. However, due to the geographic location of our partner communities and the lack of access to resources and technology, this has not been functional.

This is how the need arose to reinvent a community-based methodology that considered all security protocols to avoid the contagion and spread of the virus. We had to analyze the contexts of our communities, many of which do not have access to roads, electricity, or telephones — the latter making the strategy of reaching our participants through technology impossible.

With these concerns in mind, we created a new “Together from Home” methodology to keep our beneficiaries connected with our programming while also keeping them safe. In addition to being able to complement the school curriculum, our Mentors have been in charge of sharing the progress of each beneficiary with the teacher, so that s/he can obtain a final grade based on the progress obtained in our program. We developed educational materials with playful activities for children and families, including stories with themes related to our current reality. These stories feature a community character called “Ema” who narrates the communities’ experiences in these pandemic times.

Every village now has a “community mailbox,” which is a kind of post office where we deliver guides and storybooks that explain the details of the activities people must carry out during the week. Each guide is marked with a participant’s name and thus can be picked up from the mailbox individually, without causing a crowd of people. Once a participant has finished the work, she returns her packet to the same place, so that the local Mentor (Un Mundo employee) can collect and analyze participants’ progress along with our program coordinator — to be able to suggest new ideas and enrich the activities week after week. It is worth mentioning that one of our main objectives is to use and promote reading as a mechanism to engage and connect with our participants, in order to promote different skills and areas of knowledge in our children and young people (leadership, self-esteem, school curriculum development, disability awareness, and others).

The “Together from Home” methodology has been very well received by children and young people, as well as by parents and community leaders. In addition, this approach fosters strong connections between children and their parents as they work on activities together, helping the children to feel more supported during these difficult times.





Moreover, this approach that we have used in our organization has been replicated by other organizations in other countries, which are part of the Global Foundation for Children network, Strachan Foundation, and LitWorld — our grantors and partners who asked permission of Un Mundo to share our model. This high praise shows us how effective our strategy is for continuing to carry out programming in communities that technology cannot reach. Likewise, LitWorld recognized us as a Model Partner, and Strachan Foundation named us as one of the 8 most successful organizations in Central America.

FACING THE FUTURE

Un Mundo has acquired our experience in promoting literacy thanks to an alliance with two pioneering organizations, LitWorld and the Strachan Foundation, and we have been able to create a strong synergy of work with educational centers in the sector, leading to our being recognized by regional educational authorities at the Department of Education. The partnerships and collaboration between Un Mundo's Mentors and local school teachers has helped change a predominantly linear mode of education to a more vertical or participatory one.

Because the future is uncertain and we do not know how the situation with the pandemic will be in 2021, Un Mundo has outlined various possible scenarios, with a different strategy for each one. In doing so, we hope to ensure that our beneficiaries are always receiving our training and methodological guides, and that they can carry out the activities of our programs, whatever the reality may be.

Our institutional success built over the years is due to the fact that we have forged strong relationships with all the people in the communities where we work, and we have constructed a network of more than 100 community-based volunteers, many of whom lead aspects of Un Mundo's programming. Having a trained local person who is well established in and strongly committed to each community allows us to have a timely, effective, and efficient approach. These strengths will help us in any scenario that the future of the pandemic brings.

Einstein said: "We can't expect things to change if we keep acting the same. Crisis is the greatest blessing for people and nations because crisis brings progress. Creativity arises from anguish as day arises from dark night. It is in crisis that inventiveness, discoveries, and great strategies arise. Those who overcome the crisis overcome themselves without being 'overcome.'"

Un Mundo has been resilient, capable of overcoming an adverse situation, and we have learned and grown institutionally as a result of this experience. We are sure that we are ready to face possible challenges. In order to do so more safely, though, we need the support and collaboration of individuals, partners, and foundations. Together, we can row in the same direction, thinking about the positive impact that we are having with more than 3,000 program participants directly, and almost 6,000 community members more broadly.



Un Mundo mentor, depositing methodological guides in a community mailbox.





Members of a family working from home, with the guidance of an Un Mundo Mentor.

Girls in the educational program working from home, with the support of an Un Mundo Mentor.



Adolescent girls working on gender issues and political advocacy with the facilitation of an Un Mundo Mentor.

