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Bridge Reduces School's Absenteeism by 80%

Background

Agalteca is a community of around 2,000 people, an hour and a half away from Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. It is located between two small rivers, which swell over their banks, during the height of rainy season in Honduras in September and October each year. Most of the people in Agalteca make their livelihood from cultivating corn and beans, which they sell in the Tegucigalpa markets, and from their work in a nearby iron mine.

Overview

The community of Agalteca is located between two rivers, the Agaltequita and the Juan Ladron. During the rainy season, in September and October, the community becomes isolated for four to five days due to river floods that block access to town. Residents were unable to travel to nearby Tegucigalpa to sell their goods. There were also several health risks since residents could not take the sick to the hospital, or bury the dead in the local cemetery across the river. Among the most affected with the flooding were the children from the Carmen Carias Elementary School. Almost 80% of them missed school because they feared being swept away by the river's raging current.

Before

During the months of October and September it was common for the Agalteca community to be isolated. Farmers could not deliver their corn, beans, sugar cane, and other agricultural products to the city markets, and therefore suffered losses. Additionally, the sick or badly injured could not be taken to the hospital. Several times even the dead had to wait to be buried until the waters receded, as the local cemetery is located across the river. The children living in the San Geronimo neighborhood across the river would miss classes for several weeks because the river was too dangerous to cross. Teachers often watched as parents, on their way to school with their children, nodded disappointedly and turned back home when they faced the river's raging waters.

After

With USAID funding and with the cooperation of the Government of Honduras, the community built the Agalteca Bridge. Since then, students have had unlimited access to the school all year round. Ilsa Amador, the schools' current principal, explains that "School assistance is back to normal during the months of September and October. We no longer lose 80% of our student body". According to Celina Lopez, the school's former principal "We no longer worry about the river's height, since now we can use the bridge. We can access the community permanently throughout the year." Residents consider the bridge to be the town's lifeline as it has given Agalteca's residents the opportunity to live a normal life during the tenacious rainy season.

The community contributed to the bridge construction by donating local materials such as gravel and sand, and by actually working on the bridge construction. Residents are proud of the bridge's quality. The community now proudly identifies with the bridge, claiming that the bridge is theirs because it was through their hard work that bridge became a reality. Residents have also established a

Management Board which is in charge of the bridge's maintenance and upkeep, thus ensuring its sustainability. People in Agalteca declared that they will continue to work together to bring economic and social development to their community.



Juan Ladron River in Agalteca, Honduras



Children from the Carmen Carias Elementary School crossing the Agalteca Bridge built with USAID funding.