Central America Flyer

CIPE Overview

Populations in Central America are growing more quickly than the Latin America regional average. However, this trend isn’t translating into enough economic development and job creation. Corruption and the lack of sustained public policies by governments contributed to an overall lack of economic opportunities, in particular for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. For example, the Northern Triangle faces widespread corruption and citizen disengagement and a lack of economic opportunities is forcing people to leave. CIPE is addressing the economic and governance challenges in the region through bold, community-led, and creative projects that engage and connect women entrepreneurs, youth, the indigenous business sector and political institutions to help build a culture of democracy and economic opportunities. These initiatives are tackling some of the root causes of migration by helping support entrepreneurs in their communities and empower local civil society and the private sector to drive much needed reforms.

Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment

Women across Central America face many barriers to their economic participation and inclusion. CIPE is implementing cutting-edge women’s economic empowerment programs to change that. CIPE is working closely with women’s business associations in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to support the establishment of a Central America Women’s Business Network (CAWBN). Through the Network, local organizations are creating a community of business associations to raise the voice of women in the private sector to a regional scale, improve the environment for women’s economic inclusion, and generate access to new markets for its members.

In Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, CIPE is establishing a Women’s Business Resource Center (WBRC) to provide a safe, physical space where women can grow their businesses and develop their business skills without harassment. CIPE is also supporting a local women’s business network to encourage greater participation in leadership among women in the private sector.

“Not only am I expanding my business, I’m happy to employ more people in my community and spread the wealth. And the program gave me the confidence to think that I could do more. And I have!”

FLORITA, MEMBER OF CAWBN
Encouraging Youth Entrepreneurship

The lack of economic opportunities for young people in Central America forces them to seek opportunities abroad. For Central Americans to be successful at home, they must develop the necessary skills in an environment that fosters their talents.

CIPE designed the Xelajú Naranja program with the National Network of Managers’ Groups (RNGG) to support youth entrepreneurs in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Since 2016 the program has developed and supported entrepreneurial talent among youth in the creative economy, also referred to as the “orange economy.” Xelajú Naranja has engaged an estimated 5,900 young adults so far by providing skills to youth entrepreneurs and connecting them to experts. CIPE also supports the Xelajú Naranja Consortium, a group of entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, and local authorities interested in fostering the creative economy ecosystem in their community. CIPE is expanding its reach, supporting creative economy entrepreneurs in two new communities in Guatemala and one in El Salvador. The Xelajú Naranja model provides youth with the tools to discover their full potential as entrepreneurs and engaged citizens.

I came up with the idea of creating an art school and a colleague and I started with a small school. The program has given us several tools that are necessary to know the path that one has to follow to go from being an entrepreneur to a businesswoman.

GRADUATE OF XELAJÚ NARANJA

Strengthening Democracy and Transparency

CIPE and its local partner, the National Economic Research Center (CIEN) help strengthen Guatemala’s governmental institutions through concrete reform agendas and technical assistance to government ministries in policy implementation and monitoring. Under the ‘Alliance for an Efficient Congress Initiative,’ CIEN leads civil society groups in watchdog efforts of the Guatemalan Congress, to improve the legislature’s ability to promote economic recovery and anti-corruption efforts. The Alliance’s work made lawmakers more responsive and gave citizens more information about their government.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CIPE and its partner supported the Government’s pandemic response, and spurred digitalization efforts to increase transparency and efficiency. Its reports gave media and the public up-to-date information on the government’s spending. In addition, a technical review of the government’s main cash transfer vehicle for pandemic response resulted in key recommendations and assistance to ministries to improve future programs. CIPE’s program also provided guidance to the Presidential Commission for Open and Electronic Government on a National Plan for Digital Government, as part of a digitalization strategy for restarting the country’s economy post-COVID-19. CIPE is empowering legislators, ministry officials, private sector leaders, members of the media, and civil society to promote transparency and increase accountability of government activity.

We consider that our role is not only to point out flaws in Congress but also to work together with representatives as a civil society actor to create an efficient congress.

MARÍA DEL CARMEN ACEÑA, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ALLIANCE FOR AN EFFICIENT CONGRESS