



USAID
DEL PUEBLO DE LOS ESTADOS
UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA

EMPLEANDO
FUTUROS

USAID BENEFICIARY TURNED COVID-19 RESPONSE HERO

Each year, Honduras loses thousands of acres of forest and hundreds of thousands of trees to its more than 720 annual forest fires. In response, the government has hired more firefighters, like Melissa Raquel Trejo, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Empleando Futuros (Employing Futures) project beneficiary. Prior to the pandemic, Melissa focused mostly on fighting fires, responding to floods, providing first aid and rescuing animals. As the impacts of the pandemic have grown, she now dedicates more time to the country's COVID-19 response.

When she was 18 years old, Melissa started her career as a volunteer firefighter; after three years, she became a leader in her group. After completing her training with Empleando Futuros in October 2019, where she learned life skills, basic labor competencies, job entry skills and other valuable lessons, she applied for and obtained a paid position with a firefighters' unit.

"Amongst the many tools that Empleando Futuros gave me, I can say that the one I've used the most is teamwork. I've learned to understand my colleagues in the squad, to solve problems through communication and furthermore to share my opinions with the team."

The first woman entered the Honduran fire department profession in 1972. She later became a captain. Nearly 50 years later, Melissa estimates that today only 20 percent of Hondurans firefighters are women, but her dream is to follow in the footsteps of her predecessor. *"The stigma against women always exists within the fire department. But the best I can do is to demonstrate the potential that one has as a woman. That is why I always say to other women that: we have to keep going forward; don't let what others say defeat you; if you cannot do something keep trying until you can; and do not allow first experiences to stop you."*



Melissa Raquel Trejo

Because of the current COVID-19 emergency, Melissa has gained experiences she never imagined. She has provided first aid to people infected with the virus, loaded critically ill patients into ambulances and transported them to hospitals, and even transported the bodies of those who have died as a result of COVID-19. Almost 40 percent of the country's firefighters have become infected by COVID-19, which has resulted in Melissa needing to work more shifts and longer hours. Throughout this experience, she balances protecting herself by following the biosafety protocols with also helping others.

USAID honors the work and example of Honduran youth like Melissa Raquel Trejo, a woman who adapts to adversity, continues to develop her skills, grows her potential and serves her country.