



DRIVING YOUTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Honduras Workforce Development project called *Empleando Futuros* partnered with nationwide Honduran retail giant, DIUNSA (*Distribuciones Universales S.A. de C.V.*) to support at-risk youth with market-driven training and opportunities for employment. This innovative partnership leveraged DIUNSA’s financial and human resources to launch the Training for Employment Alliance that operated for three years (2018-2021). The Alliance addressed a range of challenges, including:

- Overcoming the stigma of hiring youth from high violence and high irregular migration areas.
- Upskilling qualified candidates that lacked practical, on-the-job experience.
- Balancing youths’ needs for income generation with dedicating time to develop life and employability skills.

This learning brief explores the benefits and success factors of the private sector alliance with DIUNSA for future workforce development programming.

THE APPROACH

Empleando Futuros began its collaboration with DIUNSA in 2018 through a private sector engagement strategy that prioritized flexible localized partnering approaches for its youth-focused labor bridging program. The partnership was founded on DIUNSA’s commitment to providing employment training and job opportunities for at-risk youth coupled with the project’s tested training and labor bridging tools—life skills and basic labor competencies; labor orientation; basic customer service; sales training.

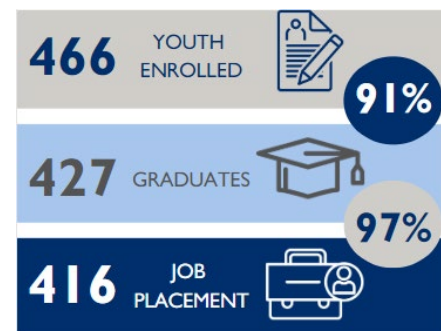
The Alliance took a co-design approach, adapting the *Empleando Futuros*’ training package with technical inputs from DIUNSA. *Empleando Futuros* and DIUNSA team members worked side by side in curricula adaptation; candidate recruitment; the delivery of company-specific technical training; youth job placement; and the supervision and mentorship of youth post training.

In response to COVID-19, *Empleando Futuros* and DIUNSA made several adaptations to the Alliance model to adjust to the new economic and health restrictions. Trainings were offered virtually to accommodate COVID protocols and a digital skill building module was added to respond to DIUNSA’s on-line sales needs. All 427 graduates received 512-hours of training (virtual and in-person) as well as on-the-job practicums in DIUNSA nationwide stores.

PROGRAM RESULTS AND BENEFITS

A strong predictor of high graduation and job placement rates proved to be the promise of candidacy for a DIUNSA job upon satisfactory completion of training with ninety-one percent of enrolled youth graduating and ninety-seven percent of graduates achieving a full time or part-time job within one week of graduating. This locally led initiative was considered a tremendous success by DIUNSA, addressing its skilled labor needs while bringing greater diversity to its workforce. Training and employment results beyond that of the project-specific achievements were accomplished over

Figure 1. Training for Employment Alliance Results



the course of the partnership. DIUNSA also claimed tangible benefits to its management and recruitment practices that positively impacted its profitability and enhanced organizational culture. Benefits include:

- **STRONG PERFORMANCE AND LOW TURNOVER:** A roster of well-trained candidates with highly relevant technical skills as well as soft skills—such as new skills in positive decision-making—that has resulted in strong staff performance and low turnover.
- **REDUCED RECRUITMENT COSTS:** Reduced recruitment costs for the identification, selection, and training of at-risk youth due to established relationships between the project and youth.
- **OUTREACH AND REPUTATION:** The Alliance reinforced DIUNSA’s commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal and internationally recognized business practices.
- **POSITIVE BEHAVIOR CHANGE:** The Alliance resulted in DIUNSA’s staff reduced stigma around hiring at-risk youth, which aligns with its corporate values of inclusion and diversity.

CONCLUSION

Locally led and private sector driven partnerships work well and can quickly pivot to changing market/economic conditions. The trust-based relationship with DIUNSA required continuous and transparent feedback on what program components were working and where improvements were needed throughout the design and implementation of the Alliance. DIUNSA affirmed that the model can be replicated and expanded under similar conditions through a donor/private-sector partnership and considers the following elements as key to the Alliance’s success:

- A partnership agreement founded on a **mutually beneficial value proposition** that allowed DIUNSA and the project to optimize their own resources and talents throughout implementation.
- **Executive level commitment** and continual support of the partnership’s objectives across all levels of the company resulted in acceptance of non-traditional candidates. Clear and transparent communication from executive management was carried out across all operational-level staff to ensure a **respectful and uniform approach to the initiative’s implementation**.
- **Flexibility** coupled with **deep technical knowledge and relevant workforce development expertise** from project staff allowed **market-driven adaptations to meet DIUNSA and youth participant needs**.
- An integrated training approach that heavily **focused on soft skill development**.
- **Embedded project staff in DIUNSA facilities** allowed for feedback loops and real-time adaptations based on changing market conditions.
- A dedication to **high quality standards** and **commitment to results** across all partnership interventions resulted in well-prepared and highly qualified candidates and a positive impact on DIUNSA’s bottom line.

Figure 2. Training for Employment Alliance Keys to Success

