

Changing Lives in Copán, Honduras



What is the IPA?

We are a large collaborative group of Rotary clubs in the Pacific northwest who made a long-term commitment to helping the Mayan people of the Copán Ruinas region of western Honduras.

Founded in 2014, our projects cover most areas of international aid, including education, health, food and agriculture, water and sanitation, construction, economic development and disaster relief.

Why is the IPA necessary?

Honduras is the poorest mainland nation in Central America. Most of the indigenous Mayan people of Copán live in mountain villages under conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation. They survive on \$1 to \$2 per day per capita, much of it earned during the coffee harvest. In spite of this hardship, they have the potential to achieve a better life with our support.

Why did you choose Copán Ruinas?

We went through a formal process to search Mexico, Central America and Columbia for the best place to work. A dozen selection criteria led us to three finalists: small towns in Mexico, Honduras and Panama. Copán Ruinas emerged as the final winner.

What is your strategy for providing effective aid?

The aid business has gone through a revolution over the past 20 years or so, with big changes in what are regarded as best practices. We have taken great care to organize and manage our operations so as to achieve the best possible results per dollar invested. This is a complex subject, but here are a few examples of how we work differently from many other organizations:

Focus. In the three municipalities where we work, there are 230 Mayan villages needing help. We support just 38 of them. This allows us to have a significant impact and avoid being spread too thin on the ground.

Flexibility. As a Rotary organization, we are well equipped to address almost any community need. Many other organizations have only one area of focus, such as education or water.

Long-term commitments. Our support for each village has no end date. This allows us to develop relationships, build mutual trust, address the many needs of the villages, and

monitor the sustainability of our projects. Others will implement a single project, then leave.

Community-centered decision making. Instead of telling communities what we will do for them, they decide which projects are most important and we focus on those. Communities participate in all phases of their projects, from planning through completion.

Community contributions. Most of our projects are designed so that communities have to contribute in kind. For example, they donate the labor for construction projects such as school classrooms or water systems.

Job creation. When opportunities arise, we structure projects to generate jobs in the region. We manufacture school furniture to our own specifications in Copán Ruinas, instead of buying it from one of the big cities.

Zero overhead. We depend heavily on dedicated volunteers who pay their own expenses. We do not pay rent for an office.



Umbrellas donated to middle school students in the village of Mirasol La Esperanza, who walk a long way in all weathers to get to school.

How do you manage projects?

Our partner in Honduras is the Rotary Club of Copán Ruinas. They manage the funds we send to Copán, and supervise many of our projects. We are also supported by two full-time contractors in Copán. They focus on construction and development projects.

IPA representatives visit Copán at least four times per year, in order to visit every school, build relationships, plan new projects, monitor progress and evaluate results.

How do you evaluate results?

We visit every project after its completion to ensure that it was implemented correctly and is functioning well.

We collect school enrollment and attendance data every year, and this will be used to measure changes in attendance, grades, drop-out rates and completed years of education.

Our economic development program includes formal processes for Measurement and Evaluation (M&E). We conducted in-depth baseline surveys in the participating villages, and repeat these on every anniversary.

What are some of your accomplishments?

We currently fund the education of 2,700 students from pre-school to university. We have opened 15 new middle schools in Mayan villages.

We have built or repaired many classrooms, and we ensure that every school has working toilets and a water supply.

We have supported emergency and medical services such as the Fire Department, the Red Cross and public health centers. We provide health insurance to all of our students.

We launched an economic development program in 11 villages, and early results are very encouraging.

We have built and repaired village water systems, and have plans to fund several more.



Rotarians building a footbridge in the village of Nuevo San Isidro, so that students don't have to wade through a waist-deep river to get to school during the rainy season.

What is the scale of your operations?

Our annual budget varies between \$300,000 and \$400,000, depending on the number of matching grants received. A dollar goes about five times further in Honduras, so our budget has the impact of up to \$2 million in the U.S.

At any time we have at least 30 active projects. We are busy almost every day of the year.

What are your main sources of funding?

Our principal sources are:

- Annual pledges from member clubs
- Matching grants from The Rotary Foundation
- Sponsors of primary schools and secondary students
- Donations from organizations and individuals



Men from the village of El Zapote working on their new water system.

What percentage of donations actually benefits the recipients?

100% of donated funds pay for direct project expenses. All overhead and administrative activities are performed by volunteers who cover their own expenses.

How can I support the IPA?

There are many ways for you – or the organization you represent – to support our work. You can make an unrestricted donation or help fund a specific project. For example:

- Sponsor a village in our Adopt-a-School or Adopt-a-Village program.
- Fund a scholarship for one or more students attending secondary school in our Adopt-a-Dream program.
- Make a donation to our Student Health Fund, which pays for health care for our students. We focus on health issues that affect the quality of life or the ability to learn in school.
- Support a specific project that interests you.

If you represent a Rotary club, we encourage your club to become a full Member of the IPA. This only requires a pledge to contribute \$2,000 or more per year.

Become a Friend of the IPA

Any **individual** who donates \$1,000 or more to the IPA in any year is invited to become a Friend. The same applies to any **organization** that donates \$2,000 or more. Friends have many of the same benefits as full Members of the IPA. Please refer to our pamphlet *Friends of the IPA* for details.

How do I get started?

Please contact us so that we can answer your questions and discuss the best way to work together. As a first step, please contact Peter Martin at pgm@seanet.com.