

Developing Relationships

USAID SCHOLARSHIPS STRENGTHEN RURAL MEXICO **BY MARÍA CRISTINA PRADO**

On a recent visit to Mexico, President Bush met with several students who, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, had studied in the United States and returned to Mexico to improve their communities.

The youth and teachers with whom the President met had participated in the Training, Internships, Exchanges and Schol-

arships Program. TIES was created in 2001 as part of an initiative with Mexico to strengthen the bilateral relationship through increased competitiveness and promoting better living standards for Mexicans. The program supports scholarships for disadvantaged youth and teachers, and university partnerships that include faculty exchanges, development of new or improved curricula and joint research on innovative technologies for rural communities.

A Collaboration

TIES reflects a collaboration between the U.S. government and higher education institutions from both countries. The U.S. government has contributed \$35 million to TIES, and other collaborating partners, including participating universities and their public and private allies, have contributed an additional \$15 million. Over its six years, through 60 university partnerships and more than 975 long-term scholarships, TIES



Teacher Juan Salvador Díaz, a scholarship recipient, works with students.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (LEFT) MARÍA CRISTINA PRADO; (OPPOSITE PAGE) CUIBERTO GARCÍA



Scholarship recipients Francisco Flores, left, and Evelia Hernández.

has enhanced Mexican higher education.

The TIES partnerships focus on increased productivity, water resource management, access to rural finance, improved rule of law for indigenous people and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. The wide range of partners includes businesses, nongovernmental organizations, government agencies and rural communities.

TIES has many success stories, including:

- San Diego State University and the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in the city of Mexicali, Mexico, developed a joint master's degree program on transborder public administration and governance for the U.S.-Mexico border region, improving cross-border cooperation.
- The University of Texas at San Antonio, Universidad Veracruzana in the State of Veracruz and the Mexican Association of Small Business Development Centers are jointly helping small businesses grow by promoting job creation and will help more than 750,000 U.S. and Mexican small businesses capitalize on trade opportunities.

- Lamar University and Instituto Tecnológico de Saltillo developed a new technology to remove arsenic from water, resulting in a patent that is being commercialized by their private sector partners in Mexico and Central America.

Scholarships for Opportunity

Scholarships for youth and teachers address the lack of opportunity to pursue higher education in some of the poorest regions of Mexico. Talented students receive two-year scholarships to study at U.S. community colleges to improve their technical skills so they can better address development in their communities. The program also provides one-year scholarships to rural Mexican teachers to strengthen rural primary education for indigenous children, often in multi-grade, bilingual classrooms.

Scholarship recipients return to their communities to apply their technical skills and implement community service projects.

"This scholarship allowed me to continue my studies, an opportunity I did not have in

my rural community, and to grow professionally and personally, and visualize myself as an agent of change for our families and communities," said Francisco Flores, of Mexico's San Luis Potosí state, who studied computer information technology at Kentucky State University.

Flores said the experience "completely changed my outlook and helped me become a community leader." Formerly a city treasurer, he now teaches at a university and directs a distance-learning institution.

TIES shows how the United States and Mexico can work together through the personal experiences of students and teachers, who strengthen their nations' personal and institutional ties and promote better understanding.

As President Bush said during his Mexico visit: "One of the best things America can do is help people realize their dreams. The best way to realize dreams is through education." ■

The author is USAID Mexico's public affairs specialist.