



Our faith calls us to empower vulnerable young people like Selena to build better jobs and futures.

Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

Empowering Youth: *Fostering Workforce Development In El Salvador, Ghana And Senegal*

The right to work is fundamental for all people. Yet young generations are growing up without jobs to turn to, or the skills to forge their own path. It is time we did better for future leaders today—**because we can and because we should.**

Going Far

Driven by our agency-wide strategy, Vision 2030, CRS is positioned to not just reach more young people, but to permanently change the systems that serve them. Through **Go FAR: The Campaign for Catholic Relief Services**, we will fundamentally transform the landscape for young people around the world by working at scale to **achieve widespread, systemic change.**

The Need

Youth populations are growing exponentially in vulnerable communities worldwide—from Central America to West Africa. Young people want to work, but often their skills do not meet the needs of changing and competitive labor markets. And available training opportunities are not falling flat. Now, COVID-19 is exacerbating these challenges as the pandemic continues to further eliminate jobs, disrupt education and limit opportunities.

In many developing nations, the problem is so severe that federal governments are directing millions of dollars from their extremely tight budgets toward technical and vocational training for young people. In Senegal, for example, the government hopes to enroll 30% of young people, ages 15-29, in workforce programs by 2030. Sadly, most workforce training programs are failing.

**“Young people today are experiencing difficult times.
But we have a lot to give.”**

—Selena

Frequently, these programs use outdated equipment and methodologies. They are disconnected from local markets and invested in training for jobs that are unavailable or irrelevant. Many offer job placement services or technical training, but few support both. Rarely do they focus on soft skills—like communication and problem solving—which employers need but don't know how to teach. Overall, training and support services are fragmented and the most marginalized young people fall through the cracks.

The Opportunity

Although many efforts have failed, CRS has a proven model for youth development. Our comprehensive framework includes the elements researchers agree are critical: life and technical skills, mentoring, and job placement. A four-year, independent study tracking the long-term impacts of our youth programs in El Salvador and Honduras showed that



Nidelson is one of many young people empowered through CRS' youth development programs. Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

employment increased from 10% to 60%, incomes rose above the local average, and 90% of young people reported the program helped them improve relationships at home, work and school.

CRS knows how to empower young people. But we also know that large-scale change cannot happen without cross-sector coordination. That's why we will no longer focus solely on individual programs or models, but rather on leveraging our expertise and networks. Through Vision 2030, we are convening young people with governments, businesses and service providers to reimagine, together, their employment and entrepreneurship systems.

Building on our field-tested youth programs, CRS will join with youth, and public and private organizations to build or improve their abilities to equip young people for success. While our reach will extend globally, our pilot programs will begin in El Salvador, Ghana and Senegal, where we will support partners such as Ghana's Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and the National Institute for Professional Training in El Salvador. United, we will help these programs align efforts with local markets, adopt safety standards, and provide young people 21st century skills.

The Impact

Over the next 10 years, CRS will reach 5 million young people by transforming government and private sector youth workforce systems. In three years, our pilot efforts in El Salvador, Ghana and Senegal will:

- **Foster collaboration between governments, businesses and service organizations** to strengthen workforce development systems for young people.
- **Improve the practices** of vocational education centers by helping them to adopt state-of-the-art methodologies and focus on market-driven skills and job placement.
- **Train 70,000 young people** and place 65% in jobs or back in school.
- **Design and foster alternative impact investing or "pay for success models"** in which governments, banks or others pay programs costs and bonuses when targets are met.

Building A Better Tomorrow

Across El Salvador, young people like Selena Escalante and Nidelson Murga are working hard to buck the stigmas they face and build better futures. For Nidelson, like many, he was struggling to find work near his home. A 21-year-old father of two, his family was counting on him and their relationship became strained. His mom felt he was not acting responsibly, but his grandmother—always his biggest supporter—learned about CRS' YouthBuild program and helped Nidelson enroll.

Thanks to the training he received, Nidelson developed work and social skills and found a job at a restaurant. He and his family also received psychosocial support through CRS to overcome their differences. Nidelson, who didn't have his father's support as a child, is more motivated than ever to build a better life for his family. "Today I understand the need my children have for me," he says.

Like Nidelson, Selena grew from CRS training too. Now a local leader, she teaches farmers about environmentally friendly agricultural techniques. "When my peers and I started the program, we just wanted to work, to earn money. But now it is not only that. Now we dream big. We seek to do good for the whole country and the world if possible," Selena says. "Young people today are experiencing difficult times. But we have a lot to give. We just need someone to give us a hand and help us grow."

The Legacy

Support services for young men and women are failing, but CRS has a solution. By putting our faith into action, we will ensure young people acquire the holistic, market-driven support they need to thrive.

Learn More

about our vision for youth:
crs.org/go-far-bayron

