



voices

THE VOICES
OF COED



Roberto Tun credits CoEd and its partners for giving him the skills he needed to get hired as a bank teller. Patzún, Guatemala, February 2010.

Roberto Xinico Tun: Banking on a brighter future

Roberto Carlos Xinico Tun, age 23, contemplates an alternate reality: What if Cooperative for Education (CoEd) and its partners hadn't brought computers and textbooks to his school? Where—and who—would he be now?

"Some of my friends who didn't have access to CoEd programs are farmers, and others went to the U.S. to see how life is there," Roberto explains. "Now they work in the fields or as gardeners. That could have been me."

Instead, Roberto is a bank teller and a rising star in the indigenous K'aqchiquel town of Patzún, in Guatemala's remote Western Highlands. He has worked at Banrural—a large, national chain—for more than two years. He credits CoEd programs for helping him get his job.

"I want to become the manager, not just of this branch, but of the entire region. I know this is something I can accomplish," he states confidently.

Roberto got married two years ago. His wife recently gave birth to their first child, a baby boy. Roberto says it seems like yesterday he was a boy himself, attending middle school and living under his parents' roof. That's when he first learned about CoEd. The textbook and computer programs helped Roberto to excel in school and to develop the technical skills so attractive to prospective employers, like Banrural.

Thinking back to 2002 when CoEd set up a computer lab at his school, Roberto tells of the community's reaction to the event.

"Most people had never seen a computer before," Roberto recalls. "The parents came to our school and asked, 'What's that?' They thought the monitors were televisions. Even some of my classmates thought that."

Roberto realized he could use these new tools to get ahead.

"When the CoEd lab came to town my life changed," he says. "I knew I was going to be someone important."

Roberto speaks enthusiastically, but humbly, about the future. His optimism is tempered by an awareness of the dire poverty that plagues so many in his community—including his parents. Illiterate, subsistence farmers, they live like most indigenous Guatemalans: barely scraping by, from day to day.

"My life is totally different from my parents'," he observes. "I see the people from the town working hard every day under the hot sun and the rain. It is such suffering not to earn enough to support your family. You receive a paycheck every three or four months. When you finally get the money, it is to pay off debts. There is nothing else left."

Roberto perks up again as he returns to the subject of his job. He also talks about how he intends to expose his son to the world outside of their rural village. He is not afraid to make plans.

"I have a steady income and I know I will be able to support my family," Roberto says. "It isn't like that with my parents and so many others in my town."

A devoted son, Roberto helps out his mother and father. They are proud people though, so they often reject his assistance. Their limited circumstances will always serve as a painful reminder to Roberto that without a high-quality education, he would have shared their fate.