

# BEST PRACTICES IN HIGH RISK POPULATION EMPLOYMENT INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

*Technical Report*

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## SOLUCIONES



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## *Technical Report*

SolucionES Project:

Cooperation Agreement No. AID-519-A12-00003

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Document prepared by Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo – FUNDE  
<http://www.funde.org>  
ISBN: 978-99961-49-40-5

Marzo 2016  
San Salvador, El Salvador C.A.

DISCLAIMER:

This document was made possible through the generous support of the people of the United States of America through the United States Agency for International Development. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research was funded by the United States Agency for International Development and supported by National Foundation for Development and ASU Foundation, through the Arizona State University Student Development Corps. We would also like to acknowledge support from Cher Stuewe-Portnoff, Tim Nelson and Lidia Nuno from Arizona State University; Robert Brunn (Chief of party Project SolucionES-FEPADE), Giuliano Perseu (Research Coordinator Project SolucionES-FEPADE); PhD. Roberto Rubio Fabián, Patricia Valdés and Juan Meléndez from the National Foundation for Development, for their helpful comments and suggestions throughout the project.

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## Executive Summary

In 2008-2009, more than 100,000 Salvadorans, nearly half of them between the ages of 16 and 24, were unemployed.<sup>1</sup> Education, jobs, and opportunities for productive self-employment are scarce in Salvadoran communities where economic conditions are poor. The relationship between youth unemployment and criminality has been well established, but it is especially complex in developing nations such as El Salvador. Marginalized youth are excluded from formal employment,<sup>2</sup> in part because they lack the requisite education, life skills, and training. Also, employers shun applicants from gang-dominated communities, even those without personal criminal histories. Thus, the cycle of poverty and violence, particularly gang violence, becomes self-perpetuating.

During his 2012 opening remarks to *Juventour*, an annual conference to promote youth, President Mauricio Funes stated, “The essence of the work we carry out through government is creating opportunities for Salvadoran youth.” The focus on youth is a primary concern for the recovery of El Salvador’s continuing state of social and economic distress. In response, policymakers began promoting employment-based programming developed for at-risk youth. This report explores seven projects that hoped to change the dynamics of youth poverty and violence in El Salvador, where the magnitude of the problem has moved the national and local governments, international and local nonprofit and charitable agencies, and private enterprise to take action.

Each of the seven programs claimed to have an interest in and impact on improving youth employability, although in varying ways. Five approached the challenge with combinations of job and/or entrepreneurial skills training, job development and placement services, continuing education, and other components intended to prepare youth to support themselves and their families. All directly or indirectly attempted to divert at-risk youth from crime and to enable their access to legitimate, gainful employment. All, to some extent, included complementary components that had wider-ranging impacts—for example, reinsertion into social institutions such as family, school, and community. The communities selected for attention by those

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<sup>1</sup> Nóchez, Mario Ernesto. (2013). “Evaluación Operativa del Programa Inserción Productiva”, FISDL-CSU.

<sup>2</sup> Victor E. Tokman, “The Informal Economy, Insecurity And Social Cohesion in Latin America,” *International Labour Review* 146, no. 1- 2 (2007): 81-107.

programs, mostly rural, some urban, were widely known for their poverty and violence, and for the absence of the kinds of recreational, educational, and employment opportunities that would allow youth to envision and work toward a meaningful, dignified future.

The seven programs examined shared some broad long-term goals and certain short and medium-term objectives, but their emphases differed in accord with the varying philosophies and priorities of each program's organizers and funding agencies. The authors made site visits, interviewed stakeholders, and reviewed reports (some of which had been prepared for funding agencies) and other public information; few primary sources of data were made available, even when requested. The information sources did not support objective comparisons or cost-benefit analyses, but it proved useful for understanding approximately what it might cost, for example, to prepare youth for finding employment in certain fields (e.g., see section 3), or to provide a temporary income supplement to the most vulnerable Salvadorans during an economic crisis, along with some skills and advising for pursuing future income generation (e.g., see section 4).

In some respects, Jóvenes Comprometidos was the program most directly and aggressively focused on ensuring youth access to employment. Staff forged working relationships with employers to provide trainees with work experience and then to match them with actual job openings. The cost of training individuals who found jobs upon graduation ranged from an average of \$320 per person (for catering) to \$630 per person (for accounting assistance); recalculated to include only individuals still employed three months after graduating, those average costs became \$517 and \$840 per person.<sup>3</sup>

PATI, on the other hand, was the government's emergency response to the economic crisis. PATI provided a monthly income supplement (\$100 for six months) in exchange for community service and attendance at workshops designed to build skills and confidence for a future job search. The program was meant to be a one-time effort, relieving the burden on El Salvador's most vulnerable individuals through the worst of the financial disaster. The average cost per person has been estimated at \$817—\$600 in direct payments and the rest for other programming.<sup>4</sup>

Like Jóvenes Comprometidos, Jóvenes Constructores placed significant emphasis on directly preparing youth for employment, although it attempted to serve a wider range of at-risk

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<sup>3</sup> See section 3, "Jóvenes Comprometidos," in this report.

<sup>4</sup> See section 4, "PATI," in this report.

youth. In a CRE Final Report, CRS to USAID (June 30, 2014, 42), the cost per youth, including technical assistance, averaged \$1,210;<sup>5</sup> this could be compared, perhaps, with the cost reported in that same document (p. 43) of simply feeding and housing an inmate in an over-crowded prison for a year, \$1,142—a situation which, it is hoped, would be prevented by assisting youth with programs such as the ones studied here. The above examples illustrate the range of services and some approximate unit costs of program delivery.

The last two projects studied for this report (Sustainable Cities and Young Entrepreneurs), both ongoing, differ from the others in that they are organized primarily by private businesses and associations, funded and executed through public-private partnerships. In addition, they do not focus on alleviating social ills, but on regional economic viability, with beneficial social outcomes becoming a potential side effect. The economic motives and constructs are complex. Still, proceeding in a way that encompasses marginalized local populations (including at-risk youth, although both projects emphasize that they do not characterize individuals as such nor do they target youth exclusively) and that attempts to include rather than displace them, these projects have something important in common with the others.

As with the other five programs, researchers again did not have access to primary source documents for those two endeavors, but for purposes of comparison, a FUNDE presentation of Project Sustainable Communities estimated that the average per-person cost of providing support for some 933 individuals to enhance their earning potential through education, training, advising, and other assistance, as needed, averaged \$1,211 (pp. 2, 12); that project is ongoing.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Project Young Entrepreneurs aims to develop self-employment opportunities for youth by encouraging them to finish their educations (averaging \$489 estimated annual cost/person), teaching life skills for reintegrating with their families and communities (averaging \$903 estimated annual cost/person), and helping them to establish successful entrepreneurship (averaging \$1,400 estimated annual cost/person).<sup>7</sup>

Across the seven programs studied, numbers are consistently identified as "estimated averages." Still, they tell us something about the investments needed to achieve the kinds of goals those respective programs are pursuing. Much more research is needed to determine the

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<sup>5</sup> See section 5, "Jóvenes Constructores," in this report.

<sup>6</sup> See section 8, "Project Sustainable Communities," in this report.

<sup>7</sup> See section 9, "Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities," in this report.

cost-effectiveness of the various approaches to mitigating the closely related problems of youth poverty and violence, and still more is needed to enable meaningful comparisons among them.

The programs all began with start-up funding of varying amounts, but long-term funding streams were harder to come by. Several projects ended because funding ran out. Those that lasted longer tended to rely on partner organizations, including businesses that benefitted from the training programs, local governments that provided resources for the programs in their municipalities, and volunteerism. Without a sustainable source of funding, the viability of projects can be short-lived.

One of the more important lessons drawn from this study: any program in need of stable funding from international, governmental, nonprofit and/or for-profit organizations would do well to have clear goals, a well-developed strategy drawn in part from the evidence-based successes of others, measurable outcomes measured and indicators that can be tracked, a sharp and sustained focus on those goals and measures, and an independent evaluation plan for assessing and reporting achievements (and failures, and responses to failure). Not surprisingly, programs in which private businesses and associations were active reported better employment and also better self-employment outcomes. All, formally or informally, sought in some ways to ease impoverishment and reduce violence. Programs that focused more aggressively on business alliances and participant employment did so at some cost to those who did not or could not meet employers' stringent requirements. Programs that focused more on quality of life, social/cultural issues, and life skills as a means of promoting the conditions for economic improvement or violence reduction (or both) seemed to make a difference, but forfeited the potential for crossing the sustainable "job" or "self-employment" finish line with the majority of their participants. Researchers may differ on relative importance and causal relationships of the elements of economic and social hardship that the programs were addressing, but there is little disagreement that those relationships mattered. It would be worth thinking about what kinds of organizational mergers or collaborations might be able to more efficiently and effectively set priorities and achieve the desired outcomes.

Other valuable lessons were learned from the programs' successes and shortcomings. Our interviewees urged future program planners and implementers to know the targeted communities and populations well, to engage them in planning from the beginning, and to involve all stakeholders in decision-making; to expect to invest (e.g., the cost to prepare a disadvantaged



youth for employment could range from about \$700 to more than \$2,200), but also to remain within their resources and capabilities; and to be realistic about security issues and knowledgeable about local gangs that might have impact on the program and enrollees. Working closely with potential employers turned out to be important, to assure that jobs would be available for successful program graduates; at least two programs found success selling businesses not on social "goods," but on productivity and the financial benefits of hiring screened and trained employees from a previously untapped labor pool. They also found it important to plan training based on real market needs, for both jobs and for entrepreneurship. Investing in high quality instructors, preferably native to the region, made a positive difference. Finally, most programs suffered for having not built in ways to measure and report outcomes by collecting and analyzing data that could guide early course-correction and provide the basis for reporting and funding requests.

Some lessons learned were unexpected. Youth employment programs such as these could have been narrowly focused on numbers and regimented in their approach, focused on the bottom line. Instead, the programs and their recruits were more values-driven (internally, even informally in some cases) than data-driven, and most programs were as least as developmental as they were disciplined in their approaches.<sup>8</sup> Jobs mattered, but apparently they mattered most in the context of family, community, and country.

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<sup>8</sup> Jóvenes Comprometidos was an exception, focusing more narrowly on employment. That was noted by some stakeholders as a lost opportunity.

## Section 1. Introduction

Unemployment is high in El Salvador, especially among youth. Between 2008 and 2009, more than 100,000 Salvadorans, nearly half of them between the ages of 16 and 24, were unemployed.<sup>9</sup> The nation's youth unemployment rate currently stands at about 10.4%, compared with 6.1% for the nation as whole. Almost 25% of youth 15 to 25 years old are not enrolled in school nor do they work.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, that youth with high school degrees or less who are employed and not in school typically earn very low wages. A 2013 report from the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that young adult Salvadorans earn on average between \$169 and \$353 a month.<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, chronic youth unemployment and inequality have been linked to high levels of delinquency and violence.<sup>12</sup> A number of explanations for the relationship between crime and unemployment have been proposed. Some have attributed the relationship to the strain that youth feel when they are unable to improve their standard of living. In these cases, crime and delinquency are the result of individuals trying to meet their economic needs.<sup>13</sup> Others have argued that crime is a rational consequence to unemployment. Youth, particularly unemployed youth, weigh the costs and benefits of criminality against licit behavior and determine the relative cost of each.<sup>14</sup> Still others have maintained that young adults who are out of school and out of work have greater opportunity to commit crime; in other words, those who are in school or who are employed have less time, or inclination, to engage in criminality.<sup>15</sup> A number of other

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<sup>9</sup> Nóchez, Mario Ernesto. (2013). "Evaluación Operativa del Programa Inserción Productiva", FISDL-CSU.

<sup>10</sup> DIGESTYC. (2013, May). Encuesta de Hogares y Propósitos Múltiples 2012. Ciudad Delgado, El Salvador: Gobierno de la República de El Salvador Ministerio de Economía, Dirección General de Estadística y Censos.

<sup>11</sup> ILO – International Labour Organization. (2013). Diagnóstico del Empleo Juvenil en El Salvador 2013. Retrieved from [http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/sida/WCMS\\_234016/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/sida/WCMS_234016/lang--en/index.htm). The minimum wage in El Salvador is \$220/month.

<sup>12</sup> Britt, C. L. (1994). Crime and Unemployment Among Youths in the United States, 1958- 1990. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 53(1), 99-109.

<sup>13</sup> Britt, C. L. (1994). Crime and Unemployment Among Youths in the United States, 1958- 1990. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 53(1), 99-109.

<sup>14</sup> Welsh, B. C., & Farrington, D. P. (2000). Monetary costs and benefits of crime prevention programs. *Crime. & Just.*, 27, 305.

<sup>15</sup> Robert D Crutchfield and Susan R. Pitchford. "Work and Crime: The Effects of Labor Stratification." *Social Forces* 76, no. 1 (1997): 93-118.

explanations have been posited, as well. Regardless of the root causes, the relationship between youth unemployment and criminality appears to be strong.<sup>16</sup>

This relationship is even more complex in developing nations such as El Salvador where the most marginalized are socially excluded from some forms of employment.<sup>17</sup> In large part, that is because the majority of them lack the requisite education, life skills, and training. Even if they were to be prepared for work, however, jobs and opportunities for productive self-employment are extremely scarce in those communities where economic conditions continue to be dismal. As a result, youth commonly drop out of school to work as temporary farm laborers or in the informal labor market (e.g., street vending) to supplement their families' low incomes.<sup>18</sup> For rural youth, such educational and economic disadvantages have been related to the increased probability of becoming involved in violence or gang activity.<sup>19</sup>

One of the more insurmountable barriers to youth unemployment, even for those few youths who do graduate from high school and attempt to obtain legitimate positions, is employer discrimination based on applicants' home communities. In other words, applicants are routinely rejected solely because of where they live. Gangs dominate in many rural areas, and employers refuse to hire residents from such communities for fear of gang infiltration or intimidation. Applicants for the most menial positions, regardless of their qualifications, are subjected to polygraph tests meant to reveal their home communities and whether they or family members, friends, or neighbors have any gang or criminal history. Few of the young applicants from those communities can claim not to have such associations, even when they have no personal criminal history. During the application process, they suffer the anxiety of having to choose between almost certainly being caught in a lie or exposing others, and the prospect of being rejected, in either case. Thus, the cycle of poverty and violence becomes self-perpetuating.

The greatest problem facing Salvadoran youth and young adults today may be the nation's gangs and the violence associated with them. In response, to reduce dependence on illicit activity to generate income, some policymakers have strongly emphasized and promoted

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<sup>16</sup> C. L. Britt, "Reconsidering the Unemployment and Crime Relationship: Variation by Age Group and Historical Period," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 13(4), (1997): 405-428.

<sup>17</sup> Victor E. Tokman, "The Informal Economy, Insecurity And Social Cohesion in Latin America," *International Labour Review* 146, no. 1- 2 (2007): 81-107.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank, "El Salvador Poverty Assessment." See section 6 for additional information.

<sup>19</sup> Idem.

employment-based programming. A modest amount of research has examined the impact of these programs on criminality. On the one hand, this body of research has shown that a number of employment-based strategies are ineffective in reducing criminality. For example, summer jobs programs, short-term nonresidential training programs, and job training as a diversion from court each have been found ineffective. On the other hand, other programs have been found to be promising or even effective. For at-risk youth, Job Corps training as well as training in using critical thinking skills have shown promise, as have prison-based vocational programs for adult inmates. For ex-offenders, job training has been found to be highly effective.<sup>20</sup>

Some academics have pointed out that much of our understanding of the impact of employment-based programming has been confined to developed nations. They argue that the impact of such programming could be much more pronounced in developing nations because skill levels are lower and there is much more opportunity for economic and social growth. Recently, a small number of experimental and quasi-experimental studies were conducted to examine the effect of employment-based programming on earnings, employment, and specifically employment in the formal sector. This small but important body of work suggests that some forms of employment programming not only have a significant impact on individual-level economic activity, but that the impact of the programming is much greater in developing than in developed nations. This has led to its proliferation in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay, among others.<sup>21</sup> These findings suggest that the impact of employment-based programming in developing nations might be much more pronounced than in developed nations with respect to crime and violence, as well.

The purpose of this report is to understand the processes of programs that facilitate the employment of high-risk populations in El Salvador. As such, this report is not an evaluation of employment-based programs in El Salvador as such. Rather it seeks to provide policymakers and SolucionES<sup>22</sup> with information about the organizational structures and operational strategies used

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<sup>20</sup> Sherman et al., *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*. (Washington DC: National Institute of Justice, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Orazio Attanasio, *Training Disadvantaged Youth in Latin American: Evidence from a Randomized Trial*, Center for the Evaluation of Development Policies (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> SolucionES is multifaceted violence prevention program, implemented by an alliance of Salvadoran non-profit organizations who have come together to prevent crime and violence: Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo (FUNDE), Fundación Salvadoreña para la Salud y el Desarrollo Humano (FUSAL), Fundación Crisálida (aka Glasswing), Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES), and Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo (FEPADE), with partial funding from USAID/El Salvador. Together,

by selected employment-based programs so that they can better understand their implementation and potential for effectiveness and sustainability and in consequence design and implement programs which help at-risk youth find employment. In doing so, we sought to examine seven characteristics of high-risk population employment intervention programs in El Salvador: objectives, coverage, impact, inter-institutional coordination, replicability and sustainability, and lessons learned. Below, we describe our research methodology, including our case study selection process, and present our findings from those seven case studies. The presentation of the findings is followed by our discussion of their policy implications and recommendations for future programming.

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those organizations bring their widely recognized expertise in education, health, community development, economic development, research, and youth leadership and their combined synergy and strengths to the task of preventing crime and violence in El Salvador. SolucionES uses a three-pronged strategy: (1) Strengthen municipal crime and violence prevention capabilities and actions, (2) increase private sector social investment, and (3) research, publish, and disseminate findings to inform decision-making. The current report is one of 10 planned policy-oriented studies. SolucionES will use the results of this study to enrich the design of its job preparedness and placement programs focused on at-risk youth.

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## Section 2. Methodology

We examined seven employment-based intervention programs for high-risk youth in El Salvador. Programs were eligible for inclusion in the study if they met all of the following five criteria. First, the programs had to be relevant to the present study; that is they had to have been focused on generating employment opportunities for youth at risk in El Salvador. Second, the programs that focused only on gang members were excluded, at SolucionES' request. Third, the programs had to have been operational within the previous five years. Fourth, the programs must have included *prevention of violence* as a goal or objective. Fifth, the program had to show promise for being successfully replicated in other communities or nations, and access would be needed to information that could demonstrate how to accomplish that.

We first conducted an inventory of employment-based violence-prevention programs for at-risk youth by reviewing three reports that contained a catalog of programs, projects, and initiatives that were closely related to the study objectives. These three reports included (1) *Service Directory for Young People*,<sup>1</sup> (2) *Final Report of a Study of Programs and/or Projects Implemented for Violence and Crime Prevention*,<sup>2</sup> and (3) *Social Corporate Responsibility in El Salvador: Practices and Strategies to Prevent Violence and Crime*.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 16 employment-based intervention programs that focused on at-risk youth were identified through these reports, nine of which were excluded because they had worked primarily with gangs and gang members. The seven remaining programs accepted our invitation to participate in the study. Those programs included (1) USAID Program Improving Access to Employment: Jóvenes Comprometidos; (2) Program of Temporary Support to Income (PATI); (3) Jóvenes Constructores; (4) Project Enabling Opportunities for Peace and Youth Employment

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<sup>1</sup> Fundaungo, Directorio de Servicios para Jóvenes, El Salvador 2010: [http://www.fundaungo.org.sv/dir\\_Jóvenes/pdf/directorio\\_Jóvenes.pdf](http://www.fundaungo.org.sv/dir_Jóvenes/pdf/directorio_Jóvenes.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> S.G. Méndez Tario, *Reporte Final de Investigación Sobre Programas y/o Proyectos Implementados para la Prevención de la Violencia y El Crimen*. (USAID, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> M. Beneke de Sanfeliú, D. Polanco, and M. Chávez, *Responsabilidad Social Empresarial en El Salvador: Prácticas y Estrategias Para Prevenir el Crimen y la Violencia* (El Salvador: Centro de Investigación y Estadísticas, FUSADES, 2014).

(Habilitando Oportunidades para la Paz y el Empleo Juvenil), or (HOPE); (5) Provenes II, (6) Project Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Employment Generation; and (7) Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a total of 78 key stakeholders during their normal working hours in November 2014. Each organization selected four types of program stakeholders to participate in the study: technical staff, promoters, beneficiaries, and personnel from that organization's partners. As shown in table 2.1 below, 8 to 12 stakeholders from each project participated in the study.

**Table 2.1. Number of study participants, by program.**

Level	Technical		Promoters		Beneficiaries		Partner Institutions		Total		
	Focus Group	Interview	Focus Group	Interview	Focus Group	Interview	Focus Group	Interview	Focus Group	Interview	
Experiences / Projects / Programs											
USAID Program Improving Access to Employment		2			9			1	9	3	12
Program of Temporary Support to Income (PATI)		2	1	1	4				5	3	8
Program "Jóvenes Constructores".		3		1	5	1			5	5	10
Project Enabling Opportunities for Peace and Youth Employment (HOPE)		2			10				10	2	12
Projóvenes II	1	3	2		7		1		11	3	14
Project Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and employment generation'		2	3		4	2		1	7	5	12
Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities.		2		1	7				7	3	10
Total	1	16	6	3	46	3	1	2	54	24	78

The data were collected systematically, but in a way that allowed flexibility for discovery. We made an effort to encourage the stakeholders to bring in additional outside information not called for by the interview schedule. The interviews and focus groups typically lasted one to two hours. We recorded the proceedings by taking written notes with pencil and paper and also by using a digital recorder. We read the consent form aloud to participants at the beginning of every interview and focus group. A translator was used whenever the interviewer did not speak Spanish. The interviews with the stakeholders were comprised of 17 questions (see table 2.2).



**Table 2.2. Stakeholder interview questions.**

	QUESTIONS
1	What are the project objectives? What type of violence is prevented by the project?
2	Is employment promotion a priority for the project? Why? How is it promoted?
3	What is the definition of employment, work and/or generation of employment opportunities that has been used in the project?
4	What is the project target population? Define its characteristics (profile) and quantity?
5	What is the definition of at-risk population used in the project? Has there been equal participation between men and women?
6	What impact has the project had? What are the tangible effects?
7	What would be the success factors of the project? What would be the major difficulties faced by the project?
8	Are there successful stories within the project? Identify and mention some?
9	How has it been the coordination with municipalities, organizations and/or institutions linked to the employment or self-employment topic?
10	How has citizen participation been within the project? Do participants come from other organizations or have they become part of them?
11	What opportunities and/or difficulties does the current legal and institutional framework of El Salvador imply for these kinds of projects?
12	What activities have been done or planned to guarantee the sustainability of the project results?
13	Has the project left installed capacity in municipalities or in other institutions in terms of infrastructure, human resource training, monitoring on young people who have been employed, equipment, etc.? Specify.
14	How will monitoring be given to productive or self-employment initiatives and young people who have been employed?
15	Is there a mechanism for internal and/or external communication in the project? Has there been or will there be any publications on success stories from young people who are employed or self-employed?
16	What actions taken by the project would you propose to be carried out by anyone who works with young people at risk?
17	What things would be done again and what would not be done in terms of the project?

We collected a combined total of 119 official documents that related to programs: 17 for Projóvenes II, 9 for USAID, 41 for Jóvenes Constructores, 29 for PATI, 4 for Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities, 13 for HOPE, and 19 for Sustainable Communities (see table 2.3). Those included final reports, progress reports, Standard Operating Procedures, annual reports, interoffice communications, promotional materials, statistics kept by the programs, and others. Because no central depository existed for those documents, they were collected as they presented themselves. The majority of them were received as a result of having let it be widely known that we were seeking any written material related to the history and development of the seven projects. Several documents were obtained through Internet searches or found at project-related websites.

The documents were intended to serve as both primary and secondary research materials. Official documents produced by the program to express organizational arrangements, including directives pertaining to employee and recipient conduct, and/or that could place the organization in an historical context, were considered primary sources. Annual reports, progress reports, and statistics kept by the program, for example, assisted in constructing the realities of the community's employment-related problems—or at least those realities as documented by the program—and illustrated their scope. Accordingly, these documents provided data that supplemented information obtained through the interviews and focus groups.

**Table 2.3. Numbers of source documents collected, by program.**

Experiences / Projects / Programs	Documents (#)
USAID Program Improving Access to Employment	9
Program of Temporary Support to Income (PATI)	29
Program "Jóvenes Constructores".	41
Project Enabling Opportunities for Peace and Youth Employment - HOPE	13
Projóvenes II	17
Project 'Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and employment generation'	19
Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities.	4
Total	119

Using the qualitative analytic strategies outlined by Schatzman and Strauss,<sup>4</sup> data analysis began early in the research process. From the inception of the study, data were continually reviewed and organized both chronologically and categorically. That analytic cycle allowed us to continue testing emerging ideas as well as to identify developing patterns, relationships, and processes. Additionally, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the data after the completion of the project. This process involves unitizing and categorizing information units.<sup>5</sup>

Two strategies were employed to ensure that the interpretation of the findings were accurate. First, the present study, when possible, attempted to triangulate multiple sources of data; that is, we used data from different sources to corroborate and clarify the research in question. Second, several experienced researchers were used as peer examiners, periodically examining work products to provide a check on researcher bias.

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Publishing, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> B. Glasser and A. Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

### **Section 3. USAID Improving Access to Employment (*Jóvenes Comprometidos*) Program: An Evaluation of a High-Risk Population Employment Intervention Project**

*Ryan Moskop and Lidia E. Nuño*

USAID's Improving Access to Employment Program *Jóvenes Comprometidos* served nearly 2,000 at-risk Salvadoran youths, training them for jobs and connecting them with employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Originally funded in September 2011, *Jóvenes Comprometidos* ran for two years, ending in September 2013 when the funding expired. We began our review of *Jóvenes Comprometidos* by reading the published literature. Next, we conducted in-person interviews with key stakeholders who had participated in the creation and implementation of the program, each ranging from one to one-and-a-half hours. We asked the interviewees about the availability of unpublished program literature; they provided us with flyers and brochures, and several directed our attention to social media outlets, such as the Facebook page and YouTube channel created by *Jóvenes Comprometidos* to publicize and endorse the program. That unpublished program literature and those media resources were also reviewed and considered in this evaluation. Finally, we invited ten program graduates, then employed in positions acquired through *Jóvenes Comprometidos*, to take part in a focus group in order to contribute their experiences and perspectives to the study. The focus group was conducted before normal business hours in a San Salvador restaurant.<sup>2</sup> Focus group members were both males and females, with work experience ranging from less than one month to 2 1/2 years.

#### **Program Description and Relevance**

*Jóvenes Comprometidos* was initiated to help solve employment problems in El Salvador.

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<sup>1</sup> The Improving Access to Employment Program was implemented in December 2009 with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), CARANA Corporation, and RTI International. The current report focuses on one component of that program, the *Jóvenes Comprometidos* project.

<sup>2</sup> The Pizza Hut restaurant at which we met had employed a number of the program graduates, who suggested this as a convenient and comfortable location for them to meet. Employees from Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Wendy's restaurants were present.

The majority of Salvadoran youth, particularly those living in low-income rural areas, were unable to find and obtain legitimate work, and those who turned to local gangs for income opportunities and companionship were placing themselves at risk for involvement in crime and violence. At the same time, Salvadoran employers were finding it difficult to find competent, reliable workers, and that was limiting their productivity and profitability. According to the program literature and our interviewees, the goal of Jóvenes Comprometidos was to prepare at-risk youth to fill those employers' unmet labor needs.

The program was designed for youth about 18 to 26 years old who were neither attending school nor employed, with three objectives in mind: (1) to train them in skills that labor markets needed, (2) to guarantee every participant an interview for a real job, and (3) to provide the opportunity for each program graduate to obtain at least minimum wage employment. In return, youth participants committed to obtaining the jobs found for them and to performing those jobs so well that employers would come back to the program with more jobs for its trainees.<sup>3</sup>

To achieve those objectives, program staff established relationships with potential employers, learning what characteristics and skills would be needed to motivate each one to hire the young applicants. During a focus group conducted by the staff, potential employers from various companies were encouraged to express their wants and needs. From their responses, staff developed profiles defining the ideal employee for each company. Those profiles were later used to identify youths who would be likely, given appropriate training, to fulfill the employers' respective needs.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, a set of three separate profiles was created for each employer. The first profile included non-negotiable or obligatory characteristics, such as age, level of education, and (for some companies) gender preferences; the second listed potentially negotiable or interchangeable characteristics and included phrases such as “being considered at high risk for violence”; the

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<sup>3</sup> USAID reports: *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Atención al Cliente en Restaurantes y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral* (September 2013); *El Modelo de Formación en Ventas del Programa Jóvenes Comprometidos y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral* (August 2013); *El Caso Piloto de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Asistentes Administrativos y Auxiliares Contables y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral* (September 2013); *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Cajeros en el Mercado Laboral* (October 2013); *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Asistentes de Gerencia en Restaurante y Supermercado y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral* (October 2013); and *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área del Profesional del Servicio de Hoteles (Servicio de Banquetes y Ama de Llaves)* (October 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Those "needs" included characteristics such as strong values, morals, and ethics; positive attitude; preferred age ranges; career-oriented mentality and desire to remain with one company; at least a high school education; and, in some instances, a basic knowledge of work in the private sector.

third specified competencies needed for specific jobs.<sup>5</sup> Having determined the potential employers' needs, specialized trainings were designed to address them, and at-risk youths were recruited who, given that training, would be relatively good matches. According to staff, recruiting was accomplished by publicizing the program in newspapers and on radio whenever companies were actively hiring, in keeping with the program's pledge to offer interviews and work opportunities only where there were actual openings.

To aid staff in making the best matches for various types of employment, new recruits submitted to a psychological evaluation. Based on their results, participants would be offered a place in one of the program's training workshops,<sup>6</sup> after which they would be offered one or more job interviews with specific employers. Depending on the outcome, they would either be hired or would continue the job search. A few months after participants had completed the program, whether or not they had obtained (or remained in) a job arranged by the program, staff would attempt to follow up, checking whether they were employed and, if not, offering additional assistance with locating possible openings.

The program initially intended to serve the population of at-risk youth described above. Within that population, interviewees reported, it sought youth who were willing to learn and who exhibited certain characteristics: a positive attitude toward and commitment to work, the capacity to maintain trusting relationships, and a desire for personal and professional growth. Staff members particularly wanted to help youth who had had demonstrably few opportunities for employment, especially those whose families lacked stable work histories. They worked to assure that opportunities were offered equally to males and females; men and women participated in similar trainings and, unless requested differently by the hiring company, they were offered the same types of job interviews. As a practical necessity, however, from the population of at-risk youths needing employment, potential recruits tended to be selected in large part by how well they matched the characteristics that potential employers had defined as desirable.

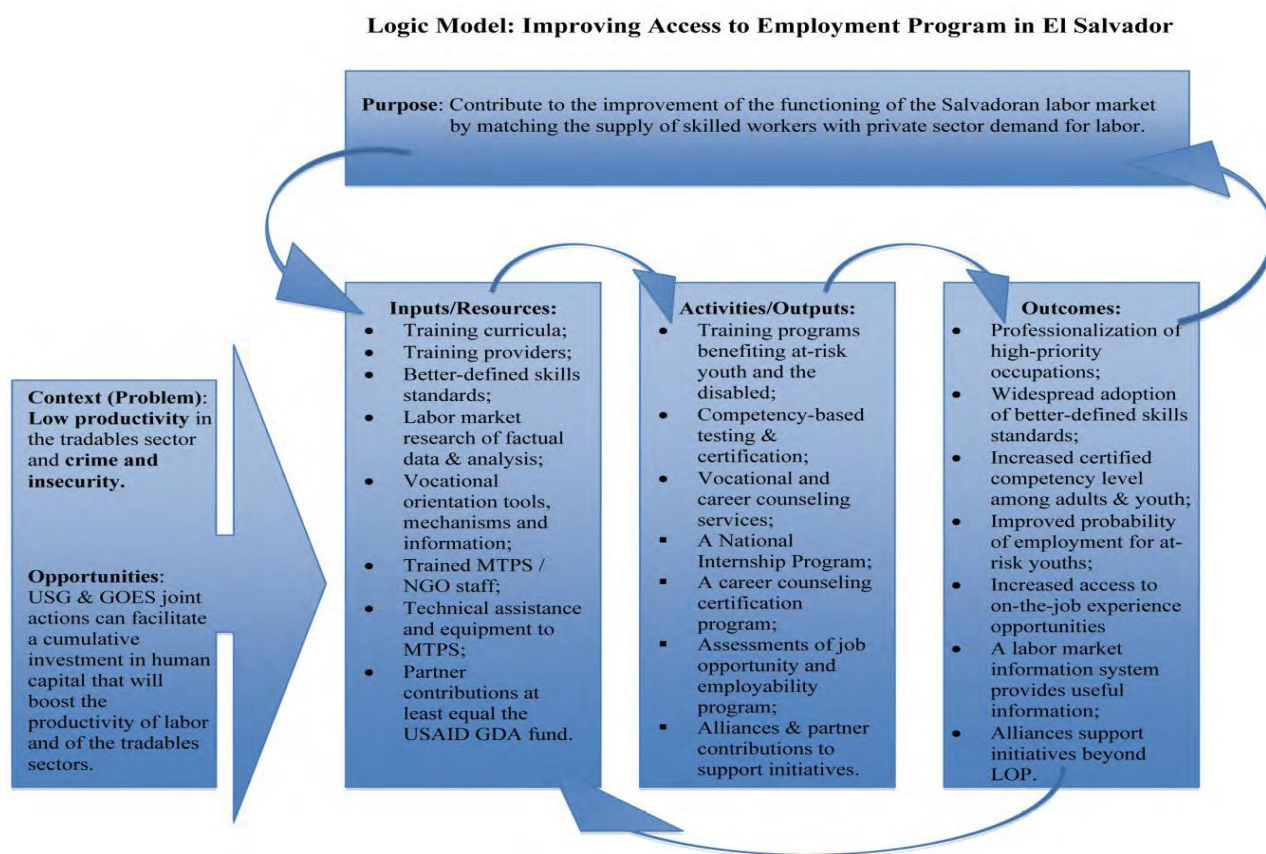
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<sup>5</sup> USAID reports (all); see bibliography for complete listing.

<sup>6</sup> Initially, the program offered three workshops: restaurant customer service, sales, and cashiering. Later, more than a dozen different trainings were offered. Each workshop took from one to three weeks to complete.

## Logic Model

The Jóvenes Comprometidos concept and program flow may be most clearly understood by viewing an annotated graphic representation from an official program evaluation report conducted for USAID. The goals, components, concepts, and sequencing of the program are illustrated in the logic model, below. The model developed by Cambronero, Midling, and Molina (2012) demonstrates the program's overall vision, key components, and anticipated outcomes.



## Program Effectiveness

Jóvenes Comprometidos aimed to help young Salvadorans who had gone unrecognized as a valuable labor resource to prepare for and find employment, simultaneously helping businesses to acquire competent, trustworthy, hardworking employees for positions that might otherwise go unfilled. Program stakeholders viewed this not only as a benefit to individuals and employers, but to the economy and the entire society. The concept and use of company-specific

employee profiles seemed to be a significant key to the program's effectiveness. The profile helped staff select those at-risk youths most likely to be hired for the chance to become competent at performing a legitimate job, and it reassured potential employers that the program's trainees would have the attributes they required. Without those profiles, the majority of those young men and women might well have been rejected as prospective employees. On the other hand, by focusing on the businesses' desired characteristics, the profiles promoted a selectivity that excluded any number of otherwise eligible at-risk youth from program participation.

Although the focus of the program was economic, for some, it soon became apparent that the outcomes could effectively include other significant societal improvements, such as reductions in crime and violence. Asked directly about the impact of employment upon rates of violence, one interviewee explained that youth often turned to crime and violence in San Salvador/El Salvador not only from economic need, but because they were looking for excitement; legitimate employment could redirect those succumbing to poverty-laced boredom toward more productive activities. Another added that the Improved Access to Employment Program and jobs in general gave participants "a different perspective . . . to work and [to have] a different vision and leave behind the violence in the country."

Although we could not confirm their perceptions with objective data, all whom we interviewed seemed confident that Jóvenes Comprometidos had been effective in supporting productivity and the Salvadoran economy. An interviewee explained that the program was not presented to potential employers as a social responsibility, but as a profitable business model. One person reported that the program had cut employers' training budgets by as much as 30%, lowering new employees' learning curves and reducing turnover. As companies experienced the quality of program applicants, they allocated more positions to them.

The interviewees did not seem prone to idealizing the program's effectiveness. One reported that in the first cohort, about half of the participants who obtained jobs failed to survive their probationary periods. Another reported that only one of 20 trainees in the program's first workshop had been hired. Confronting such dismal outcomes, however, the staff quickly regrouped to identify and address the program's shortcomings. Perhaps most importantly, Jóvenes Comprometidos modified its training program to make it more specific to employer needs, and therefore more effective and efficient. That renewed efficiency was then promoted to recruit additional companies to provide more positions for Jóvenes Comprometidos graduates,



thus allowing the program to grow. The evolution of program efficiency over time was reflected in statistics offered to us by the stakeholders; near the conclusion of the program, we were told, 70% to 100% of graduate group members were being placed in and maintaining jobs. The stakeholders with whom we talked considered the program a success because, according to one, the number of program participants who obtained employment (approximately 2,000) had exceeded their initial expectations.

Staff attended to smaller lessons learned from the first cohort, as well. Jóvenes Comprometidos began providing a travel stipend to assure that the unemployed youth could get to the INSAFORP training center, and when it seemed that some were being deterred by hunger, the program began serving a simple lunch that the youths sometimes described as their best meal of the day. Attention to such details helped to raise attendance and lower attrition rates.

Jóvenes Comprometidos may have set the standard for effectiveness in achieving employment for participants. From the beginning, the plan was to have a real job opening and the opportunity to interview for it for every program graduate. Some time afterward, staff would check on the status of those graduates. Reportedly, those follow-up interviews revealed that those who did not remain in positions arranged by Jóvenes Comprometidos often were able to find other jobs on their own. Outside companies were beginning to recognize the value of employing program-trained applicants. One stakeholder commented that in the limited job market, Jóvenes Comprometidos trainees stood out due as more employers realized that program participation was an asset on a resume—one that was backed up by the professionalism and technical skills demonstrated by program graduates.

### ***Community and Financial Support***

Communities contributed to the effectiveness of Jóvenes Comprometidos in part by posting program bulletins in local city halls and at college job fairs and by broadcasting program announcements during public radio programs. Several interviewees thought that the level of publicity was inadequate in the community, however, and that a greater number of at-risk youth would have been reached had the particulars about how and where to qualify and participate been better communicated. Some were of the opinion that wider awareness of the program's possibilities would have generated better community support.

Communities supported Jóvenes Comprometidos financially, albeit at varying levels,

throughout the life of the program, according to the interviewees. Reportedly, USAID had funded the start-up year with a grant, after which INSAFORP<sup>7</sup> and local businesses paid the majority of the program's expenses. Jóvenes Comprometidos always had intended to become self-sustaining after USAID funding was exhausted, they said, or at the least it would be transferred to the community and private sector businesses as a modified program that could be implemented independently. When in 2013 the USAID-funded program did come to an end, as promised, the implementation model and curriculum were given to several community, nongovernmental, and governmental organizations. That included INSAFORP, which created a Jóvenes Comprometidos training program that continued to use the model to good effect.

Throughout the interviews, participants explained that at the time, several NGOs were promoting other employment-based programs. Few of the interviewees had applied to those, and none had actually enrolled or participated in another employment-based program. When asked why not, their answers were uniform: Jóvenes Comprometidos had been the first to respond to their applications.

### ***Building on Best (and Avoiding Worst) Practices***

Jóvenes Comprometidos from inception had incorporated evidence-based "best practices," but had also been deliberate about recognizing practices that might inhibit effectiveness. According to a former staff member, program planners had conducted research to determine what had *and had not* worked well for other agencies when attempting to implement similar programs. After meeting with several of those agencies, the staff had brainstormed ways of building upon their successes, but also had considered how to avoid their problems. For example, most other job training programs were not yet placing trainees in actual open positions, nor were they maintaining contact with trainees after sending them out to interview for jobs; Jóvenes Comprometidos was able to address both shortcomings in its own planning.

### ***Program Impact***

Some 2,400 youths became involved with Jóvenes Comprometidos during the two-year span of the program. The attrition rate was around 20% to 25%: More than 1,800 youth reportedly completed the program, and nearly all of those were placed in jobs. Seventy percent

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<sup>7</sup> A publicly financed government agency that supports vocational training.

of those who participated in the program were reported to have obtained steady employment with either a program-affiliated employer or another employer found by the graduate (through a follow-up program referral or independently). For many, that had been their first real job.

### *Impact on Youth*

According to a 2013 USAID report reviewing the success of Jóvenes Comprometidos, “youth agree that without any previous work experience, it is difficult to obtain the competencies and specific ability required to work in the area.”<sup>8</sup> Participating in Jóvenes Comprometidos prepared youth for such work opportunities, and also for success beyond the job. Youth we interviewed from both groups—those who obtained a job and those who did not—agreed that that whether or not they had immediately found jobs, participating in the program had given them a sense of security and self-esteem, knowledge about the labor force, mentoring, and a vision for a career path.<sup>9</sup> The interviewees noted that Jóvenes Comprometidos had shown them how to be professional and responsible in the work place, and they were encouraged to treat their placements as a first step on a career path rather than as “just a job.” Repeatedly, former participants whom we interviewed emphasized the short- and long-term influence of the program on their careers. They suggested that without it, they might never have obtained legitimate employment. Furthermore, the members believed that they would continue to apply skills and philosophies learned for the foreseeable future in their professional and personal lives. One participant said that “the discipline that we have [learned] is not going to be just for a job; it’s going to be for life in general and for the future.” The program appeared to have been successful at not only increasing employment among at-risk youth, but at helping those youths become proactive, productive Salvadorans worthy of the investments being made in their futures.

As mentioned, the initial Jóvenes Comprometidos employment rate had been deeply disappointing, but the numbers rapidly improved as the program refined its recruiting methods and training curriculum. According to several staff, the improvement came about in large part after a renewed focus on recruiting youth who demonstrated sincere interest in obtaining employment and commitment to the idea of beginning a career, not just getting a job. Toward the end of the program, 15 to 18 of some 20 trainees from each class reportedly were being hired.

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<sup>8</sup> USAID, *Atención al Cliente*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Program graduates in the focus group supported those numbers, reporting that within their program groups, on average, about 20 of 25 participants were completing the program, and of those, about 18 were attaining and maintaining employment. Jóvenes Comprometidos placed many of those young men and women on a path leading out of the very lowest depths of disadvantage. Several reported progressing through internal promotions within their companies, while others reported finding opportunities for professional growth with other companies, using their Jóvenes Comprometidos experience to be promoted within and outside of those companies.

### *Impact on Employers*

If youth had benefited from taking part in Jóvenes Comprometidos, so had the participating companies. Stakeholders speaking on behalf of those businesses related that the program had streamlined the employee selection process and costs related to recruiting and training had been substantially reduced. They reported that the program had also resulted in lower turnover; youth from Jóvenes Comprometidos left their jobs less frequently than youth who had not participated in the program, and the graduates were proving to be dependable workers. Sixteen separate training workshops were preparing youth to work as cashiers and perishable food handlers (supermarkets), sales persons (retail stores and door-to-door), entry-level managers (fast-food chains and supermarkets), hotel workers (banquet managers, housekeeping), administrative and accounting assistants, microcredit analysts, customer service (restaurants and supermarkets), and mechanic's assistants and aircraft ramp personnel. Altogether, according to stakeholders, the companies were expressing great satisfaction with the quality of the employees produced by the training process.

### **Difficulties Associated with Implementation**

Staff members interviewed were asked to name their biggest challenges. The majority chose "time." First, all agreed that the two-year timeframe allowed for conducting the entire project was rather short. Given its successes, they believed, more time could have allowed them to reach more youth. Second, they thought that the one-to-three-week training period was too short. In some instances, training was needed outside the classroom; for example, physical training course was needed to fulfill requirements set by one hiring agency, but there was no time for it. Although staff members found the training period limiting, they were quick to note

that it was "adequate," due in large part to its tight focus and the quality of the instructors.

Based upon conversations with various persons within the program and involved peripherally, the profile, including specific competencies for specific jobs, set this program apart from its predecessors and competitors—but not without cost. The profile initially was used to describe the kinds of participants who could benefit from what the program had to offer and to match participants with willing employers. During the focus group, program participants emphasized the rigorous process involved in building profiles and the importance of this step to the participants in acquiring their positions. According to a former staff member, the profile was, however, vulnerable to use by the more savvy companies for funneling certain individuals toward their jobs. That could effectively limit who could be placed with them, even before the employer had considered all technically qualified applicants.

According to one interviewee, it was hard to overcome the obstacle created by the fact that certain characteristics could instantly disqualify a trainee: "[The companies] are very strict. Some companies do not hire you if you have a piercing in your ear or a tattoo."<sup>10</sup> The young job applicants could alter appearances to meet employer standards, but they could do little about the neighborhoods in which they lived. Fearing gang infiltration or harassment, employers often rejected applicants from areas known to be dominated by gangs, regardless of qualifications, and lie detector tests made it impossible to avoid revealing such information. Our interviewees acknowledged that employers could not be forced to hire applicants whom they found objectionable. However, one expressed confidence that as such programs establish credibility with participating companies, those companies will come to trust the programs to produce qualified graduates and will be less apt to disqualify applicants based on such stringent requirements. One stakeholder saw evidence of this as Jóvenes Comprometidos neared the end of its run: "At the end, [the companies] were more flexible if [potential employees] came from the program, because they knew that we were offering the best."

### **Replicability**

Jóvenes Comprometidos' infrastructure appeared capable of being both sustainable and replicated. Given the need, a similar environment, a funding source, and a detailed description of

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<sup>10</sup> One interviewee clarified that although a particular employer might disqualify a person based on factors such as appearance or the reputation of one's home community, those factors did not bar individuals from program participation.

the program, any organization with staff capable of implementing the program might do this. Reportedly, other organizations had already adapted portions of the USAID Improving Access to Employment program to their own needs.<sup>11</sup> Three factors were identified as deserving special attention in any effort to replicate the program model: the use of labor market/employer-driven profiles for recruiting, training, and placements; investment in an excellent curriculum and instructors; and the use of social media to tell the story.

### *Profiles*

Jóvenes Comprometidos was essentially based on the "head hunter" concept, in which individuals are identified and pursued to fill open positions based on a personal profile. The available literature and our interviews indicated that Jóvenes Comprometidos stressed profile creation as a program priority, crucial for the success of participants and the program as a whole. If testing and profile-building elements of programs modeled on Jóvenes Comprometidos are faithfully replicated, those programs could experience similar success.

### *Instruction and Instructors*

One focus group participant said that the instructors were "one of the best parts" of the entire program, and several others agreed, saying that the instructors and the content were their favorite part of the training. They described the instructors as "charismatic and eager." They described the positive attitude that instructors displayed every day as "contagious." It was evident that the quality and positivity of the instructors delivering the training were integral to the success of these particular participants, and possibly to the program as a whole.

According to one stakeholder, a large portion of the initial funding provided by USAID had been invested in the consultants who created the curriculum and in compensating the workshop instructors. To the best of their knowledge, stakeholders said, the instructors all were natives of El Salvador who knew not only the occupations they were teaching, but knew the environment, culture, and people, as well. Given the unanimity of the stakeholders on this point, any program interested in replicating the Jóvenes Comprometidos model should be mindful of

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<sup>11</sup> Interviewees referred to such adaptations, but did not discuss them in detail. We were informed that certain agencies were using the programming (e.g., INSAFORP, the aircraft industry, Don Bosco University, the tourism industry, the National Program of English for Work), but were offered no further information.

the importance of quality in its curriculum and instructors.

### *Social Media and Success Stories*

When asked about success stories from Jóvenes Comprometidos, stakeholders were quick to point interviewers towards social media sites like Facebook and YouTube. There, numerous success stories were available for the public to read. Jóvenes Comprometidos had created and maintained a website, a Facebook page, and a YouTube channel for disseminating program information. According to one interviewee, the Access to Employment Facebook page was considered successful when it quickly accumulated more than 60,000 “likes” from the Facebook community. Jóvenes Comprometidos became El Salvador’s most viewed NGO Facebook page. Focus group participants indicated that they would routinely monitor those Internet outlets as a real-time source of information about Jóvenes Comprometidos, informing their friends and family about published opportunities advertised by the program.

The stakeholders' praise for social media was not exclusive to Facebook. They were also quick to point out the quality of content on the Jóvenes Comprometidos YouTube channel. One participant told us that this channel would adequately present the accomplishments of the program and its many success stories to us. Given a second chance at running the program, one person added, they would place more emphasis upon using those individual success stories to better convey the program's benefits to the private sector, community, and NGOs.

We did hear one success story directly from the focus group. The individual in question had been working in an entry-level position at an airport before being hired for an administrative job with Jóvenes Comprometidos. When the program ended, this person used professional contacts acquired through working with the program and participating businesses to obtain her next job, this time with a local outlet for a major international retailer. With skills acquired in her program position and honed through its curriculum, s/he was able to climb the corporate ladder there, eventually becoming a human relations administrator, a very good job in the Salvadoran labor market. Jóvenes Comprometidos was not only effective at developing its at-risk youth participants, it also proved effective as an employer at preparing motivated personnel for higher level positions.

## **Sustainability**

The USAID Jóvenes Comprometidos program came to a close in 2013 after only two years, as planned, when funding ended. The concepts that guided the model program lived on in various other programs, however. Those programs have adopted the model or one quite similar to it, according to one stakeholder, and are experiencing success. An interviewee told us that the program "left us with a curriculum for [programs within] the aircraft industry, Don Bosco University, the tourism industry, and the National Program of English for Work." That assertion was supported by another person, who intended to move forward with creating and conducting similar programs for different populations of at-risk and gang-involved youth within El Salvador. With the Jóvenes Comprometidos model attracting interest from other agencies, its sustainability in some form seems assured.

### ***Cost Effectiveness***

Several USAID reports were reviewed to determine the costs associated with different trainings (see table 3.1, below).<sup>12</sup> For example, for training workshops for customer service positions, the average cost to train a group of 24 youths (including the selection process and training) was \$7,379. About 14 graduates were employed soon after completing the training, at an average cost of \$518 each. After three months, about 10 of them remained employed, raising the average cost per employed youth to \$740.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, for cashier workshops, the average cost to train a group of 17 youths was \$4,650. About 12 were employed upon completing training, at an average cost of \$380 each. After three months, about nine of them remained employed, at an average cost of \$528 each.<sup>14</sup>

The program offered trainings for accounting and administrative assistant positions. The costs for the two differed, with accounting training being slightly less cost-effective. For example, it cost about \$11,979 to train 41 youths for administrative assistant positions. About 24

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<sup>12</sup> The job training categories described here are a sample, representing only those for which cost data were available from secondary sources (USAID reports associated with job types). Mathematical inconsistencies are assumed to be attributable to differences in primary sources and/or methodologies used to calculate results.

<sup>13</sup> USAID. *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Atención al Cliente en Restaurantes y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral* (September 2013), 39.

<sup>14</sup> USAID. *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Cajeros en el Mercado Laboral* (Oct. 2013): 37, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pa00jhnw.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00jhnw.pdf), 37.



typically found positions upon completing training, of whom about 16 typically remained employed after three months, at an average cost of \$748 each.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the average cost to train 38 youths for accounting assistance was \$12,605. Upon completing training, about 20 youths obtained jobs (\$630 per employed youth), and about 15 maintained employment after three months, resulting in an average training cost of \$840 each.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 3.1: Average Costs of Preparing At-risk Youth for Employment, by Job Type**

Job Type	Class Size (av.)	Cost per Class* (av.)	Youths Employed (#) (av.)	Initial Cost per Employed Youth* (av.)	Youths Employed (#) 3 Mos. after Training (av.)	Cost per Youth Employed 3 Mos. after Training* (av.)
Cashier <sup>17</sup>	17	\$4,650	12	\$380	9	\$528
Other, Restaurant <sup>18</sup>	15	\$4,992	11	--	7	\$713
Customer Service, Restaurant <sup>19</sup>	24	\$7,379	14	\$518	10	\$740
Admin. Assistant <sup>20</sup>	41	\$11,979	24	--	16	\$748
Accounting Assistant <sup>21</sup>	38	\$12,605	20	\$630	15	\$840

\* U.S. dollars.

## Recommendations

Our interviewees, representative of various roles in Jóvenes Comprometidos, offered insights that they hoped might improve future efforts. The program's success was not without limitations. The amount of time allotted for developing and implementing the program, for example, was thought by many to have been too little; several expressed regret that so many

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<sup>15</sup> USAID, *El Caso Piloto de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Asistentes Administrativos y Auxiliares Contables y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral* (September 2013), 41.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> USAID, *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Cajeros en el Mercado Laboral*, October 2013, 39.

<sup>18</sup> USAID, *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Asistentes de Gerencia en Restaurante y Supermercado y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral*, October 2013, 37.

<sup>19</sup> USAID, *El Modelo de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Atención al Cliente en Restaurantes y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral*, September 2013, 39.

<sup>20</sup> USAID, *El Caso Piloto de Inserción Laboral en el Área de Asistentes Administrativos y Auxiliares Contables y su Impacto en el Mercado Laboral*, September 2013, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

communities and other potential beneficiaries had missed the opportunity to participate.

Our interviewees, both individuals and focus group members, unanimously believed that the program had been beneficial. Those who were participants had almost no criticisms of Jóvenes Comprometidos, and thought that the use of the profiles had been particularly beneficial for placing individuals in lasting, meaningful employment. They were genuinely appreciative of the opportunities that Jóvenes Comprometidos had afforded them. The following are some of the issues that the majority of stakeholders considered important for others to hear.

### ***Decision to "Start at the End"***

Interviewees unanimously agreed on the success of the program, but could not reach consensus on a reason for that success. According to one, the "decision to start at the end" during early program planning might have been what separated Jóvenes Comprometidos from less successful programs: identifying real jobs ("the end") and then tailoring recruitment and training specifically for them. Indeed, they noted, the profile concept had arisen from observing the failures of other employment-based programs that had rapidly saturated the labor force with low-skill workers for whom there was little demand.

### ***Maintaining Focus on Target Populations***

Published program literature emphasized that Jóvenes Comprometidos would find worthwhile jobs for at-risk youth who completed the program. Whether or not this was accomplished depends on one's definition of "at-risk." Prerequisites for participation, such as being at risk for involvement with violence and crime *and* having a high school diploma certainly would have excluded a substantial number of otherwise eligible youth. The stricter requirements originated with employers who had considerable influence over who was (and was not) admitted to the program. Future programs should explore ways around that problem; solutions may involve employer education and modifications to employer-driven recruit screenings, but they should also include pragmatic approaches to the goal—perhaps, for example, lengthening the training period and integrating it with a GED program.

Although the greater economic and social disadvantage tends to occur in rural areas, according to some interviewees, Jóvenes Comprometidos did not serve that population very well,

instead placing a larger number of urban trainees.<sup>22</sup> Some obvious reasons were proposed (e.g., transportation problems, childcare issues) for why that may have been the case, but one interviewee argued that rural youth were shunned because employers perceived them as more likely to have some gang affiliation, personally or through friends or family members. The individuals in question were not necessarily to blame for those perceptions, but they were "geographically challenged"—the greater *possibility* of gang association because of the regions in which they lived made employers wary. Youth from the poorer outlying areas were, arguably, in greater need of help than their urban counterparts. Nonetheless, particularly as a program that had only two years in which to model success, Jóvenes Comprometidos seemed better positioned to serve youth from urban areas with less alarming reputations for gang involvement.

### ***Agency Leadership in Selections for Job Placement***

One of the few criticisms raised by participants interviewed was that Carana should have participated earlier in the process of selecting individuals for job placement. Those who felt this had not been handled well were particularly concerned that more dedicated participants had lost opportunities due to less capable or reliable participants having been put forward as employees. Some thought that that outcome, as well as a certain amount of confusion during the placement process, could have been prevented, had Carana become involved earlier and emphasized the importance of job functions more strongly.<sup>23</sup> Related, another person suggested that when positions requiring similar profiles became available with more than one business, applicants (rather than the program or agency) ought to be able to pick their preferred location; s/he expressed gratitude for the program, but wanted planners to know that options, where possible, would have also been appreciated.

### ***Job Training Levels Offered***

We observed that Jóvenes Comprometidos had placed a large number of its Salvadoran youth workers in American fast-food franchise operations. There were undoubtedly strategic advantages to this, particularly as the program began. Still, those were relatively low-skill jobs,

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<sup>22</sup> We found no official data that either confirmed or contradicted the interviewees' report.

<sup>23</sup> Carana, on the other hand, believed that not only had it been intensely involved in the selection process from the beginning, but that its involvement accounted for the high numbers of participants who obtained employment (Robert Brunn, personal communication).

requiring only limited capabilities. As work-based programs mature, the labor markets served by those programs should also mature and diversify. One stakeholder informed us that such a transition had begun to manifest itself toward the end of the program. More businesses were noticing the successes of program-affiliated businesses and began inquiring how they might also hire graduates. With sixteen different job/sector types to train for, that growing selection of career entry choices promised to increase the number of at-risk individuals who could find in Jóvenes Comprometidos a path to a worthwhile future.

Cost effectiveness is a pivotal factor here, but once underway, programs should not overlook the potential value of training for increasingly specialized, high-value trades and skills, as well. For Jóvenes Comprometidos, funding was allocated to train individuals for general employment. At the right place and time, it could also be a good investment to allocate resources for training in more permanent, albeit still entry-level, professional and skill-based positions.

Program documents and stakeholders declared the importance of building upon an individual's existing skill set and characteristics. Yet the stakeholders we interviewed were drawn to the possibility that certifications and specialized skills, such as those in the information technology field, were so sought after that companies that avoided hiring, for example, individuals from certain regions would embrace those same individuals if they had those skills. Work-based programs might explore ways of offering eligible but hard-to-place youth with advanced training and employee development. Providing technological skillsets, meaningful certifications, and degrees in popular and up-and-coming labor markets, if adequately funded, could meet the needs of both employers and at-risk participants.

### ***Social and Cultural Development***

Stakeholders, including program participants, believed that the kinds of youth employment opportunities generated by Jóvenes Comprometidos would reduce the risk of becoming involved in crime and violence for Salvadoran youth. A program participant bluntly described the youths' perceived trade-off this way: Those who were gainfully employed by legitimate employers were less likely to "entertain" themselves with violence and crime as much as those who were unemployed; they were not as apt to be looking for ways simply to fill time. Some crime is committed out of economic need, but not all crime is. Based upon written and oral descriptions of Jóvenes Comprometidos, however, we found no direct efforts to change the

growing social norm of violence among Salvadoran youth, such as Project HOPE attempted to do with the culture of peace (see section 6). Life skills training that could offer alternatives to violence and intentionally reconstruct environments and attitudes to be conducive to peace and nonviolence could be integrated into future programs, leveraging the reductions in violence attributed to increasing at-risk youth employment opportunities.

### ***Follow-up after Program Completion***

Some interviewees encouraged the incorporation of a more rigorous follow-up process to track graduates' accomplishments. Learning whether or not graduates are successful would provide valuable data, and responding to the real-life obstacles encountered by graduates by improving program components should lead to higher participant success rates. Follow-up was not part of the initial plan for Jóvenes Comprometidos, but reportedly, shortly after it began, 30, 60, and 90-day contacts with active participants became a requirement. Other interviewees could not confirm that schedule, but they agreed that some follow-up had occurred. An interesting finding: As program graduates who had left their program-facilitated positions were contacted, a stakeholder related, "we discovered that they would get jobs with other companies on their own." The training acquired through the program was apparently proving useful for becoming employed beyond those companies directly participating in Jóvenes Comprometidos.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

For this report, we were dependent upon information published in program literature, interviews with stakeholders, a participant focus group, and other unofficial and sometimes conflicting sources. Although Jóvenes Comprometidos did collect the kinds of objective data useful for accurately reporting the number of recruits and of participants who graduated, were placed in jobs, remained in those jobs or found other jobs, or that would be needed to measure investments and outcomes, or to analyze the program's cost-effectiveness, it was not made available for this study.

Future programs of this type should be designed with an evaluation process, including data collection. Analysis and reporting of such data are valuable for managing the program, supporting requests for funding, informing the public, and researching and reporting on the most cost-effective ways of solving social and economic problems. The lack of such information also

affected our ability to report on the distribution of program funds. Interviewees offered some anecdotal information about spending, but could not offer reliable documented data.

### ***Best Practices***

Jóvenes Comprometidos, especially in its second year, embodied several "best practices" worthy of replication in future programs. Among them were the following:

- *Invest in training.* Settle for nothing less than quality, competency-based courses that are designed to prepared trainees for actual jobs, and use instructors who know the people, the environment, and the jobs and who are excellent motivators.
- *Form alliances with reliable businesses.* Know their needs ("the profile") and recruit and train for them. Job placements based on employer profiles position youth for success.
- *Aim to make a positive impact on every youth's life,* even for those who do not find immediate employment. Make opportunities to enhance their self-esteem, service focus, commitment to work and community, and verbal expressiveness.
- *Communicate who you are as a program, what you offer, and what is required to take part.* Use social media to inform the public and to tell your success stories. Be the first to respond to inquiries from potential recruits.
- *Lower attrition rates by removing common obstacles.* For example, this program provided transportation and a simple lunch, or stipends, when recruits could not manage such costs, but also could not afford to be late or absent or to come to class hungry.

### ***Areas for Improvement***

Finally, we observed three areas for potential improvement, the first two of which might strengthen advantageous community-program relations:

1. Incorporate conflict-resolution training for community initiatives.
2. Link job training with other community-level programs.
3. Lengthen the course of training, and integrate it with GED studies, when including youth with less than a high school degree.

## Conclusion

The aim of the USAID Access to Employment program Jóvenes Comprometidos was to address broad social issues confronted by at-risk youth in El Salvador, at the core of which was their inability to attain legitimate employment. Throughout two years of operation, the program served more than 1,800 youth participants. Many reported having acquired more than the much-needed jobs they were initially seeking; they had acquired work and social skills that would help them build a future. That success has been largely attributed to "the profile," a strategy for recruiting and selecting youth participants and companies who were well matched, and a major investment in a quality curriculum, effective instructors, and the use of social media to tell the story. One program participant reflected the experiences of many, telling us that "[I have] become a new person because of this process."

The program began with several flaws, despite the research and thought that had gone into planning; that in itself could be considered a "lesson learned." Staff tracked their progress and reacted quickly when early results were poor. The changes they made led to far better outcomes for the classes that followed.

Jóvenes Comprometidos' was among the most aggressive of the programs studied in considering its mission accomplished only when its participants obtained actual employment. It also worked more closely than most of those programs (excepting *Sustainable Communities* and *Young Entrepreneurs*) in forming partnerships with private businesses specifically for the purpose of actual job placement. The program's ranking among employment-based programs serving at-risk youth is not a question this study can answer. One could conclude from this study, however, that the program has much to offer as a model that has engaged both the public and private sector in a relatively effective effort to address serious social and economic problems in El Salvador.

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## Section 4. PATI: Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso

*Kara V. Hannula*

In 1998, El Salvador began experiencing a major economic crisis that led to drastically rising unemployment rates. Over a decade later, in 2009, new leadership assumed the government of El Salvador and made it a priority to reduce the impact of that crisis with an initiative called the Global Anti-Crisis Plan.<sup>1</sup> The initiative aimed to help individuals who lived in high poverty areas and who were in precarious economic positions. One program component of the plan, *El Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso*, or PATI, provided financial support and skills training for those most vulnerable members of the population.<sup>2</sup> In addition to working toward improving economic conditions in El Salvador, the new government leaders developed the Universal Social Protection System, an initiative to increase collaboration between various government agencies in an attempt to address social problems through nationwide cooperation.<sup>3</sup> PATI incorporated the goal of this initiative by encouraging participation in the program of local governments. A pilot phase of PATI was tested from 2009 to 2010, and then between 2010 and 2014, two additional phases were implemented.<sup>4</sup> Funding for PATI was scheduled to end in December 2014;<sup>5</sup> at the time of this study, no plans were in place for program continuation in 2015.

The information presented in this report was gathered by reviewing official program documents and previous program evaluations; interviewing program

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Ernesto Nóchez, *Informe Final: Evaluación de Procesos del Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso (PATI) en los Municipios Pilotos* (FISDL, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> FISDL, *Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso–PATI* (April 9, 2013): <http://www.fisd.l.gob.sv/temas-543/programas-sociales/pati#.VDI3Lul0wic>.

<sup>3</sup> FISDL-CSU, *Evaluación Operativa del Programa Inserción Productiva* (2013); Nóchez, *Informe Final*.

<sup>4</sup> FISDL, *Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso–PATI*.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *El Salvador-Income Support and Employability Project: Restructuring* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2013): <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/07/18082027/el-salvador-income-support-employability-project-restructuring>.

participants, administrators and fieldworkers; and observing operations at program sites.

## Program Description

### *Program Development*

PATI was the new government's response to the Salvadoran employment and income crisis. The program evolved in three phases.<sup>6</sup> In accord with national government initiatives in 2009, the pilot phase targeted rural areas. These were located in 11 municipalities across El Salvador, especially those severely impacted by Hurricane IDA.<sup>7</sup> In 2010, a national study identified the urban areas in El Salvador with the most extreme poverty levels, resulting in the 2010 Map of Urban Poverty. This map was used at the start of phase two to identify and target 412 urban areas (referred to as AUPs—Asentamiento Urbano Precari, or precarious urban settlements) within 25 municipalities all across El Salvador. In 2012, the third phase of PATI was launched, targeting AUPs in 10 municipalities.<sup>8</sup> In total, 36 municipalities were served by the program, and more than 500 staff members contributed to the execution of the program.

PATI, initially funded by loans from El Salvador's national government and the World Bank, cost between \$19 and \$60 million<sup>9</sup> per year to operate.<sup>10</sup> Once the municipalities that were to be involved in the program were identified, those municipalities contributed local government funds to support it. In an attempt to continue the program, donations and grants were obtained from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); that funding was pulled in December 2013<sup>11</sup> because, according to one stakeholder, some individuals who had received PATI payments were thought to

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<sup>6</sup> FISDL-CSU, *Estado del Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso–PATI: Situación Después de 3 Años de Implementación*, unpublished internal document (n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> Gloria Morán, “PATI se Extiende a Más Municipios,” *Diario Digital ContraPunto* (May 2, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> FISDL, *Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso–PATI*.

<sup>9</sup> All monetary amounts reported in this study are U.S. dollars (USD).

<sup>10</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), *Global Jobs Pact Country Scan: El Salvador* (Geneva, Switzerland: ILO, 2012): [http://www.ilo.org/jobspact/country/country-scans/WCMS\\_178011/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/jobspact/country/country-scans/WCMS_178011/lang--en/index.htm); Robert Palacios, “A Conversation with Héctor Silva Arguello,” *Inter-American Dialogue* (July 6, 2011): <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2697>.

<sup>11</sup> El Salvador Noticias.net, “USAID No Financiará Programa PATI en Seis Municipalidades de El Salvador” (September 6, 2013): <http://www.elsalvadornoticias.net/2013/09/06/usa-id-no-financiara-programa-pati-en-seis-municipalidades-de-el-salvador/>; and David Marroquín, “Gobierno Financiará Programa PATI,” *Elsalvador.com* (September 9, 2013): [http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota\\_completa.asp?idCat=47859&idArt=8162285](http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota_completa.asp?idCat=47859&idArt=8162285).

be gang members.<sup>12</sup> Afterward, through 2014, El Salvador's national and local governments continued to fund the program with money supplied by the World Bank.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Program Objectives***

PATI's primary objectives were to temporarily supplement the incomes of those experiencing extreme poverty and joblessness and to improve the employability of program participants. In addition, the program had two secondary objectives: to improve coordination between the national government and local governments, and to enhance the capacity of local governments to improve the condition of their communities.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Target Population***

PATI prioritized aiding female heads-of-household and youth.<sup>15</sup> Individuals from 16 to 24 years old (or 30 years old, depending on the phase) were preferred, but anyone who satisfied the general inclusion criteria was accepted when space permitted. To be eligible, an individual needed to be at least 16 years old, to have resided in the targeted AUP for at least six months prior to enrollment, and not be formally employed or in school; participants, past or present, of in other similar programs were ineligible. Despite the prioritization criteria, PATI was highly inclusive and accepted participants of any gender, age, physical ability, sexual identity, or history of delinquent activity.<sup>16</sup> No formal check was made for previous delinquencies, but if it was discovered that an applicant had previously violated the law or was a gang member, he or she still was not prohibited from participating.<sup>17</sup>

As of October 2014, PATI had served 65,825 Salvadorans; 68% of them were of the targeted gender (female) and 38% were within the targeted age range (16-30 years). Through discussions with program participants, it became clear that many of them once

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<sup>12</sup> The author was unable to confirm that as the reason that the funding was withdrawn.

<sup>13</sup> Marroquín, "Gobierno Financiará Programa PATI"; World Bank, *Restructuring*.

<sup>14</sup> FISDL, "Crecimiento Económico para el Siglo 21 (Creceer 21)," *Convenio de Donación de Alcance Limitado Proyecto Mitigación de los Efectos de la Crisis Financiera Global*, Actividad No. 519.0462 (2014); and Youth Employment Inventory, "Income Support and Employability Program (PATI)" (n.d.): <http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/inventory/view/663/>.

<sup>15</sup> FISDL, *Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso-PATI*.

<sup>16</sup> FISDL, "Crecimiento Económico para el Siglo 21."

<sup>17</sup> Cristian Meléndez, "750 Pandilleros Dentro del Programa PATI," *La Prensa Grafica* (July 22, 2013).

had been employed, but had either been laid off or their self-employment was no longer sustainable. The majority of participants interviewed had completed high school, and some had completed additional courses (e.g., cosmetology, secretarial skills).

### ***Program Structure***

PATI was a six-month program in which participants were given \$100 per month in exchange for attending vocational training courses and seminars and participating in community service projects.<sup>18</sup> In the original program design, participants were to spend six hours a day, four days a week, in community service.<sup>19</sup> The projects were intended to improve community conditions and to provide experiential skills training.

Participants were also expected to spend one six-hour day each week in technical skills training and education courses. PATI did not directly help participants find employment, but it offered skill development courses and workshops, and occasional career counseling, to help them find their own employment or start their own businesses. Upon completing the program, participants were informed of other sources of help with finding work and of other government aid programs that emphasized securing employment. For example, some participants were accepted into USAID's Improving Access to Employment Program (see section 3) after completing PATI.

Program implementation seemed to vary by location, with local community leaders working in concert with executing agencies to tailor PATI to their area's specific needs. In practice, it appeared that the schedule of four days per week on community service projects and one day per week on skills training was not consistently followed. Some participants reported spending their first four months participating only in community service projects. As a result, the technical skills training component was concentrated toward the end of the six-month program, sometimes resulting in 8 or 10-hour training days.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Citizen Participation***

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<sup>18</sup> FISDL, *Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso-PATI*.

<sup>19</sup> ILO, *Global Jobs Pact Country Scan*.

<sup>20</sup> Laura María Cerritos Valle and Claudia Beatriz Ramírez Flores, *Sistematización de Taller Evaluación 7o Convocatoria: Municipios Ida*, Fondo de Inversión Social para el Desarrollo Local; Presidencia Funes Buenos Cambios (2014).

Participants were recruited for PATI through local authorities, and recruitment methods varied according to municipality. In some, announcements about the program were made at local town meetings. In others, flyers were passed around or the program was advertised by word of mouth. On occasion, program employees directly visited homes in the targeted areas. Some municipalities publicized PATI on their websites.<sup>21</sup> After interested community members signed up, teams from PATI visited the potential participants to conduct surveys that were used to determine vulnerability/level-of-need scores. The survey included items such as how much access to basic services an individual had, whether the head of household had a partner present, and the number of children or elderly people residing in the household. Once vulnerability scores were determined, individuals were prioritized based on level of need, and those at the top of the list were offered positions in the program.

Typically, between 30 and 90 participants in each municipality would sign up. Multiple family members could enroll, as long as each met the inclusion criteria. Once they became active, participants were involved in most decision-making, helping to choose which courses would be offered, signing up for their preferred courses, and acting as project leaders. In general, individuals who started the program completed the program. Throughout all phases of the program, the retention rate remained consistently above 90%.<sup>22</sup> The small number of individuals who prematurely left the program did so for various reasons, including lack of desire to perform community service work, moving out of the high-risk area, or having found legitimate employment.

### *Coordination with Other Organizations*

Many different organizations, government offices, and programs worked together to develop and implement PATI. Those contributors included the Secretaria Tecnica de la Presidencia, FISDL, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Salvadoran Institute for Professional Training (INSAFORP, Instituto Salvadoreno de Formacion Profesional), the Local Economic Development Unit (ADEL), the National Council for

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<sup>21</sup> E.g., Alcaldía Municipal de San Martín, *Programa PATI* (n.d.): <http://www.sanmartin.gob.sv/index.php/pati.html>; and Alcaldía Puerto de la Libertad, El Salvador, “Proyecto PATI: Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso” (2015): <http://alcaldialalibertad.com/proyecto-pati-2/>.

<sup>22</sup> FISDL, “Crecimiento Económico para el Siglo 21.”

Micro and Small Enterprises (CONAMPYPE), and mayors from all the involved municipalities.<sup>23</sup> FISDL was primarily responsible for funding and overseeing the entire program, while INSAFORP and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare were responsible for managing and implementing the employment-related components.<sup>24</sup>

INSAFORP provided technical skills trainings for PATI. INSAFORP is an independent organization financed by the private sector through a 1% payroll tax;<sup>25</sup> it partners with social aid programs in El Salvador, as well as with PATI and Jóvenes Comprometidos (see section 3) to offer courses for various programs' participants.<sup>26</sup> Those courses are oriented toward teaching participants skills that will either enhance their employability or help them start their own businesses. INSAFORP worked with PATI staff and participants and local mayors to customize the courses being offered. Participants requested courses teaching skills they hoped to acquire, and mayors requested courses based on the economic needs of their communities. Efforts were made to link participants with UDEL and CONAMPYPE programs, which helped them start their own businesses. PATI was a complex program that effectively leveraged its resources by partnering with other established organizations.

### ***Within-program Coordination and Communication***

One FISDL employee noted that PATI lacked an explicit communication mechanism. The program relied on community liaisons to link the main FISDL office to various communities; liaisons were responsible for communicating between FISDL and local offices and also for helping the local offices to execute PATI initiatives. FISDL employees related that the different program offices sent reports to each other to provide progress updates. Although not explicitly cited by any program employees, the success of the program may in itself be considered some evidence of effective internal

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<sup>23</sup> FISDL-CSU, *Conclusiones del Taller de Evaluación de la 5ª Convocatoria Realizado con el Personal Operativo PATI*, unpublished internal document (2014).

<sup>24</sup> ILO, *Global Jobs Pact Country Scan*; and INSAFORP, “Programa Apoyo Temporal Ingreso” (n.d.): <http://www.insaforp.org.sv/index.php/84-articulos-de-interes/239-programa-apoyo-temporal-ingreso-pati>.

<sup>25</sup> World Bank, *Competitiveness Enhancement Technical Assistance Project*, Report No. T-6679-ES (El Salvador: Technical Annex, September 11, 1995): [Http://Www-Wds.Worldbank.Org/Servlet/Wdscontentserver/WDSP/IB/1995/09/11/000009265\\_3961008060532/Rendered/INDEX/Multi0page.Txt](Http://Www-Wds.Worldbank.Org/Servlet/Wdscontentserver/WDSP/IB/1995/09/11/000009265_3961008060532/Rendered/INDEX/Multi0page.Txt).

<sup>26</sup> INSAFORP, “Programa Apoyo Temporal Ingreso.”

communication practices.

PATI had developed several methods for communicating with communities about the program. For example, a project called Reporters Development trained program participants to distribute news and photos representing the program. FISDL's Department of Communications disseminated success stories; those were reported at community events and in media reports in many municipalities.<sup>27</sup> One final unique outlet for publicizing the program was the Patimánias, events at which program participants were recognized for their achievements. These ceremonies were effective at publicizing the achievements that were possible with participation in PATI.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Expected Outcomes***

PATI began with four anticipated outcomes: (1) increased financial stability for the most vulnerable members of the Salvadoran population, (2) enhanced employability for participants, (3) improved coordination between national and local governments, and (4) empowered and more effective local governments.<sup>29</sup> In addition, however, several other unexpected positive outcomes were observed during the first two phases; these outcomes later were integrated as formal program objectives or informal expectations for phase three. First, program staff reported that community service projects had improved the community environment structurally and interpersonally; improving community conditions became a formal program objective by phase three, with the expected outcomes being improved community environments, increased social interactions, increased trust among community members, increased feelings of security in the communities, and reduced violence. Second, although not related to an explicit program objective, program staff suggested that PATI had improved participants' self-efficacy, and they came to expect that participants would experience improved self-esteem and mood and to gain a sense of empowerment as a result of taking part in program activities

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<sup>27</sup> E.g., Alcaldía Municipal de San Salvador, "Capitalinos se Gradúan del Proyecto Huertos Comunitarios del Programa PATI" (May 7, 2014): <http://www.sansalvador.gob.sv/noticias-institucionales/news/noticias/capitalinos-se-graduan-del-proyecto-huertos-comunitarios-del-programa-pati.html>.

<sup>28</sup> FISDL-CSU, Estado del Programa.

<sup>29</sup> Youth Employment Inventory. "Income Support and Employability Program."

and trainings.<sup>30</sup> PATI's effectiveness in achieving those outcomes is discussed below.

### **Program Effectiveness**

Between 2008 and 2009, more than 100,000 Salvadorans, nearly half of them between the ages of 16 and 24, were unemployed.<sup>31</sup> PATI was initiated to address this economic crisis by aiding individuals who were experiencing the highest levels of poverty and unemployment. Initially, PATI served 1,346 participants, budgeting an average for each of \$600 in direct payments over six months and \$200 for training.<sup>32</sup> The program was funded in the amount of \$1,099,100<sup>33</sup> to cover their participation in 27 community projects and 70 training courses, at an average cost per person of \$816.57. In its final year of operation, 6,420 individuals were served at an average cost of \$770 each (a total of \$3,661,400 in TMC and an additional \$200/person for training).<sup>34</sup>

To determine whether PATI was effective, met its objectives, and produced the expected outcomes, information on program operation was gathered from two sources. First, I solicited the personal opinions of program stakeholders and participants ("interviewees") on the program's effectiveness. Next, I reviewed findings from three official evaluation reports: the first evaluated portions of the pilot phase, the second evaluated portions of phase two, the third evaluated the program's overall success. The reliance on both personal opinion and formal reports to evaluate program effectiveness contributes to the validity of any findings that consistently appear across those various sources. In addition, a logic model of the program is provided in appendix A, illustrating both the anticipated and observed goals and outcomes of the project.

### ***Stakeholder Opinions of Impact***

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<sup>30</sup> Ideally, participant insertion in the labor market would increase following participation in PATI, but PATI does not claim to directly help with the employment insertion process. Rather, PATI was formed with the intention of providing participants with skills *to begin a job search*. Thus, new employment levels should not be considered as a direct measure of program success.

<sup>31</sup> FISDL-CSU, Evaluación Operative.

<sup>32</sup> *Evaluación Inserción Productiva-PATI II*, 5. Although the effort is made to be consistent when reporting costs and benefits, numbers may differ somewhat throughout the study when they have been differently reported by various sources.

<sup>33</sup> Distributed as \$807,600 in Conditional Cash Transfers (TMC), \$67,500 for municipality administrative expenses, and \$224,000 for training expenses.

<sup>34</sup> *CRE Final Report CRS to USAID* (30 junio 2014), 3. Numbers may differ, depending on source.



From stakeholder and participant interviews, it appeared that the program had met some of its objectives and had produced not only the expected outcomes, but certain other unanticipated positive outcomes, as well. The four program participants interviewed acknowledged the importance of the income supplement component of the program, but they rarely mentioned it as a direct benefit; rather, they focused on the utility of the training programs and community service projects. Participants and other stakeholders were most focused on how the program had resulted in changes within communities and led to personal growth. In addition, stakeholders discussed how the program had improved government coordination and increased the capacity of local governments to aid community members.

*Community Impacts: Infrastructure, Social Cohesion, and Violence Reduction*

The community service projects were designed to improve community infrastructure and appearance, while providing community members with new skills. Participants and program staff described how the projects rebuilt and restored buildings, cleaned up neighborhoods, and contributed to community beautification through projects such as mural painting. Interviewees also described unanticipated benefits, such as altered perspectives regarding community cooperation and improved community relations. One fieldworker explained how working for the community gave participants a sense of ownership in the community; they began caring about their community in ways they previously had not. Another related that the major mechanism for change had been providing community members with a shared goal and sense of purpose. As a result of the program, communities had become more integrated. The program afforded participants the opportunity to develop bonds with their neighbors. Program participants emphasized how much they valued the many relationships that were developed through participation in the program. Overall, the community service component not only improved community conditions, but also gave rise to social cohesion.

Program employees observed that youths in the program had begun treating adults in the community with more respect after working with them and learning from them during community service projects. These new ways of interacting and the resulting social cohesion were thought to have affected delinquency and violence levels within the

communities. Although the program was not designed to reduce delinquency or violence, both staff overseeing the implementation and follow-up of the program and all program participants perceived changes in that area.<sup>35</sup> Community members who previously had remained largely isolated from one another, or had even engaged in hostilities, began developing new and kinder ways of interacting. One program participant believed that the violence reduction had not only occurred between community members, but that it had actually begun and was concentrated within families. Overall, the reduced violence seemed to stem from improvements in communication skills among family and community members.

Three other mechanisms may also have been responsible for some change in levels of violence. First, the participants believed that had many of the youth not been in the program, many of them could have become gang members. Second, one fieldworker suggested that providing productive activities for unemployed non-students, as they prepared for employment, had reduced delinquency. Finally, and possibly most importantly, the program was thought by some to have altered the values of the participants toward tolerance, acceptance, equality, and fairness. One fieldworker observed that prior to participating in the program, community members often would be hostile toward one another, especially when they did not understand each other's differences. Working together on community projects, those same individuals developed respect and empathy and learned to accept each other's differences. One fieldworker saw this change most clearly demonstrated in the quality of interactions between able-bodied persons and their handicapped peers.

One program employee reinforced that observation, explaining how the lack of experience in a school environment for many of the program's youth had left them initially intolerant of differences.<sup>36</sup> The liaison explained that having not been in school left some children lacking positive role models and the presence of a positive socializing institution in their lives. The situation was bound to leave many living in ignorance,

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<sup>35</sup> FISDL-CSU, *Conclusiones del Taller*.

<sup>36</sup> When questioned about the lack of time youth spent in a school environment, the community liaison explained that a large proportion of children were not attending school in El Salvador. Children who were enrolled in schools in neighborhoods largely controlled by gang members would stop attending due to the legitimate fear of experiencing violence while commuting.

lacking social values, and lacking hope for the future. This program could be a vehicle for bringing diverse youth into contact with one another and other community members and, in doing so, could help to fill the traditional role of the school in socializing and instilling positive values in them as members of the larger community.

### *Individual Change*

Interviewing stakeholders and program participants, it became clear that not only did some individuals benefit in the targeted area (gaining technical skills to improve employability), but they also experienced personal growth in terms of improved self-esteem and altered values.

*Technical skills and enhanced employability.* Engaging in classes offered by INSAFORP, PATI participants acquired skills intended either to improve their employability or to enable them to start independent businesses.<sup>37</sup> A sample of four participants (the number interviewed) can hardly be said to represent the experiences of 65,000 or so participants, but those four interviewees each expressed that they thought the technical training would directly helped them with the job insertion process. They also noted the usefulness of resume writing and interview skills workshops offered by the Ministry of Labor. The trainings were effective at providing participants with marketable skills, but perhaps more important, participants gained the confidence needed to navigate the labor market and offer their talents and abilities in job interviews. It should be noted, however, that at the time of our interviews, none of interviewees had finished the program nor had they yet attempted to find employment. Thus, their view that the program was effective for increasing their employability was based on expectation rather than experience.

PATI staff noted the absence of any comprehensive formal follow up of program participants, making it difficult to determine how many were successfully employed after completing the program. One program staff member noted that in a small follow-up project of 3,000 participants, over one third (n=1,250) had become self-employed, suggesting that a substantial number of participants did use skills developed during the program to start their own businesses.

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<sup>37</sup> FISDL-CSU, *Conclusiones del Taller*.

Community service projects also were effective vehicles for developing skills. For example, many participants worked on creating and maintaining small farms, learning how to prepare the land and take care of various crops. Farming skills are needed in El Salvador; the community liaison mentioned that some areas of El Salvador are experiencing food shortages, and providing program participants with farming knowledge could not only give individuals a means to generate income, but would help alleviate a larger social problem.

Although most interviewees were positive about the program's usefulness in teaching skills that would increase employability, one program employee believed the program suffered from a lack of direction and that some of the courses were not aligned with local economic needs or provided only a cursory overview of some skill sets, not enough to qualify participants for new jobs. The four participants interviewed, on the other hand, said that they were satisfied, although again I note that those respondents had not yet completed the PATI program.

*Personal growth.* The theme of increasing confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy was common throughout the interviews. The training courses, community service projects, and even the structure of the program itself worked together toward that end. The technical skills training component gave participants confidence in their ability to secure and retain the jobs they desired or to start their own businesses; they began pursuing employment options that they previously would not have considered. Thus, the skills training component acted as a catalyst for an effective job search or successful entrepreneurship by providing the necessary confidence to take action in those directions.

The community service component was thought to increase self-esteem by altering participants' positions within their communities. All participant interviewees remarked on having become or anticipating becoming role models. The youth in the program also seemed to experience personal growth through participation in arts and culture classes. Finally, PATI promoted active decision-making processes that appeared to be another means of empowering program participants. By contributing to decisions related to the courses that would be offered and serving as project leaders, participants found that they could take initiative and lead others. The practice of acting as a project leader was particularly beneficial for women who as a group generally had had little

leadership experience. This consistently observed outcome of personal growth in phases one and two resulted in slightly altered objectives and expected outcomes for phase three of PATI—that is, in phase three, enhancing self-esteem became a more formal program objective.

### *Government Coordination*

PATI staff members noted that the program had encouraged improvements in communication and coordination between the national and local governments and had helped to empower local governments to aid their own communities. Program operation became decentralized; local government began operating PATI without relying solely on national government funding. Additionally, members of local governments and communities had been given the power to determine which community interventions they needed most, and they could decide how to execute those. For example, throughout the progressive phases of PATI, FISDL improved its coordination with INSAFORP. INSAFORP also partnered with mayors to provide and update courses that were specifically designed to meet the unique needs of each municipality. The improved coordination between various government and non-government agencies increased their efficiency and should be considered an effective use of program resources.

### *Implementation Difficulties*

When asked about difficulties experienced in delivering the program, participants offered very little input. They did not identify any challenges and made only two recommendations for program improvement: to allow participants to take multiple training courses, and to provide more follow up with participants after the program ended. Program staff, on the other hand, did offer feedback about challenges they had faced involving the development of community projects—specifically, their uncertainties about the ideal target population, how to address the needs of the heterogeneous participants, and the effects of the difficult economic climate. They noted that the development of community projects had initially been challenging, and that even once initiated, the projects had not been tracked. Those challenges appeared to stem from difficulties with identifying appropriate projects and with coordinating among the

multiple agencies involved. As fieldworkers gained experience, they became more adept at coordinating, executing, and tracking community projects.

Depending on whom I was speaking with, the exclusion criteria were either too restrictive or not restrictive enough. Some program staff believed that including both youth and elderly participants in the program proved challenging. The youth seemed apathetic toward community service and were not consistently motivated to participate. Further, the extreme range of pre-existing skill levels among the heterogeneous participants created problems. For example, including some of the younger participants in certain training courses slowed the progress for the rest of the class, and certain community service projects were too physically demanding for some elderly participants.

Finally, the general economic climate of El Salvador created difficulties for the program. The exact social problems that PATI intended to address (high levels of poverty and economic insecurity) complicated the program's operations. For example, with some program participants not having bank accounts, finding ways to pay them initially presented a problem.<sup>38</sup> Also, the more basic technical skills training had been insufficient to equip some participants to begin successful job searches. Besides, PATI was not designed to help participants complete their high school educations, and many employers were requiring applicants to have at least a high school diploma.

### ***Formal Evidence of Impact***

Three formal evaluations of PATI were reviewed during this study, each of which summarized PATI's effectiveness during a different time frame. The evaluation of the pilot phase<sup>39</sup> had identified several weaknesses and suggested areas of improvement for the next phase. The evaluators of the pilot phase found that:

- Not all participants were interested in the courses offered;
- Some participants were too young to participate in the courses;
- Program staff needed a more effective method for diagnosing training needs;
- Training courses were not linked to the economic needs of the municipalities;
- Training courses were too short;

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<sup>38</sup> Palacios, "A Conversation."

<sup>39</sup> Nóchez, *Informe Final*.

- The program needed a better developed self-employment component; and
- Many participants lacked the appropriate background to secure jobs (e.g., high school graduate, prior experience, recommendations) and were unable to qualify for employment, regardless of having completed the skills training.

Evaluators of PATI's second phase administered surveys to a sample of program participants and a control group at three intervals: before starting the program, immediately after finishing the program, and 12 months after having finished the program.<sup>40</sup> Evaluators found that compared with the control group, participants felt more prepared to look for employment and establish a business at both points after finishing the program, although they were not employed at a higher rate at those intervals, nor were they earning higher average incomes, nor did the program appear to have had a significant long-lasting effect on their self-esteem.

The phase-two report suggested that PATI had met its main goal, reducing the level of extreme poverty of the most vulnerable. Also, consistent with the findings of the first report and the opinions of interviewees, the evaluation suggested that training should be more effectively tailored to the unique needs of program participants. Further, the evaluators recommended adding different kinds of training programs, such as a life skills or basic education modules to help improve employability, self-esteem, and mood.

A presentation on the final impact assessment of PATI indicated that from 2009 to 2014, the program had ultimately produced several notable successes.<sup>41</sup> PATI contributed to an increase in labor force participation among program participants, although that increase was observable only for young female participants with at least a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed agreed that the training was useful for developing business plans; however, nearly half indicated that the training needed improvement. Suggestions included offering longer and more in-depth trainings,

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<sup>40</sup> Carlos Guillermo Ramos, Juan Pablo Pérez Sáinz, Ligia Fuentes, and Ana Margarita Montoya, "Proyecto de Investigación: Evaluación del Programa Comunidades Solidarias Desde las Valoraciones de los Actores Claves," *Los Casos de Los Letona (San Martín), San Agustín y San Francisco Javier (Usulután)* (El Salvador: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú, "Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social; Investigación y Estadísticas," *Evaluación Programa "Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso" (PATI)* (2014).

providing access to more resources and materials for skill development and community service projects, and operating with more flexible hours.

In addition to its minor successes in the employment component, PATI effectively changed community dynamics. Specifically, civil participation (engagement in community organizations and occupation of community leadership roles) increased to a small degree after participating in PATI; participants involved in community organizations increased from 6.8% to 7.5%;<sup>42</sup> those holding leadership positions increased from 8.5% to 11.3%, and individuals participating in community projects more than doubled, increasing from 15.5% to 38.8%.

The final comprehensive evaluation report concluded that, overall, the program appeared to be meeting its main objectives.<sup>43</sup> The effect of the financial aid component of the program still was visible at one year past program completion—that is, the impact of the \$100 payments on reducing poverty levels was observed among program participants even 12 months after the payments had ceased. Also, the method of targeting participants was particularly successful; using the poverty map to geographically target the most vulnerable members of the El Salvador population was an effective tactic.

The evaluators concluded that the major program weaknesses were in the technical training component. The content did not adequately teach needed skills, the quality of the courses was not high (e.g., too little time was spent for training to produce any substantial knowledge), and some participants reported being unprepared to start a job search after training ended. This significance of this finding was that the program had left the majority of participants without the means to continue to sustain themselves, after their participation in the program ended. As an employment program, then, PATI missed an important opportunity to serve as a real bridge from impoverishment to gainful employment.

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<sup>42</sup> Although those percentages suggested a small change, the evaluators had not tested for statistical significance. It is unlikely that a 0.7% increase in participation indicated a statistically significant change—that is, it is possible that this observation was due to chance and not program effects.

<sup>43</sup> Beneke de Sanfeliú, *Informe Final*;" Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú, "Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social; Investigación y Estadísticas." *Evaluación de Impacto del Programa de Apoyo Temporal al Ingreso (PATI): Resumen Ejecutivo* (2014).



Contrary to reports from interviewees, the evaluators also found that participants were neither empowered in terms of increased self-esteem nor did they report elevated moods after completing the program. It was challenging for participants to be in a high-support situation for six months, financially and socially, and then abruptly to lose that support. Additionally, the report noted that a life skills component had been included in earlier versions of the program, although neither prior evaluations nor interviewed stakeholders had mentioned that. One final and surprising finding of this report, and one that contradicted the reports of interviewees, was that perceptions of safety among program participants had *decreased*. The evaluators were unsure of the cause of this change in perception, as they had anticipated that increased social cohesion would lead to reduced violence and a sense of security in the neighborhoods participating in PATI; this outcome suggests a direction for additional research. Overall, and consistent with prior evaluations, the program evaluators recommended more flexibility in terms of the courses offered, tailoring those courses to the specific needs of the participants, and placing more emphasis on providing more basic education.

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When assessing program effectiveness, conclusions differed in accord with the source and medium of the information collected. Active participants, staff members, and other stakeholders provided highly positive reports of the program's success when interviewed. The formal evaluations I reviewed were much more likely than interviewees to provide concrete evidence of claims. One possible reason for that discrepancy is that the interviewed participants had not yet completed the program: Their assessments were based on anticipated success in the job market once having completed training, while participants surveyed in the evaluation reports had completed PATI and had attempted to enter the job market.

As the final evaluation suggested, perceptions of the program's effectiveness may have been less positive among those who had moved on and were attempting to use their newly acquired skills to establish a steady income, while no longer receiving the supplemental income. The program's support ended abruptly, without a transition or follow up, and that may have altered how participants perceived its overall effectiveness. Despite those differences, however, PATI had met many of its more important objectives

and when it did not, it attempted to adapt its practices to try to meet them better.

It is important to consider the cost of meeting those objectives. Unfortunately, this researcher was unable to locate complete official records of PATI's budget and expenditures. Without that data, it was nearly impossible to determine the program's cost-effectiveness. As mentioned above, various sources offered estimates ranging between \$19 million and \$60 million per year,<sup>44</sup> aiding on average about 13,000 individuals per year, not all of whom completed the training, although they may have benefitted in other ways. Also mentioned above, PATI evaluations indicated that the average cost per participant (possibly only for those who completed training) was \$800 or less, depending on the year, including the stipend, community service projects, and training.<sup>45</sup>

### **Replication**

PATI was a complex and expensive nationwide program; it is unlikely that a community organization would be capable of securing the funds necessary to provide immediate financial support to a large portion of El Salvador's population or to serve the wide of range of individuals, geographically and in terms of diversity, that PATI did. Thus, any replication of the program is likely to be carried out, once again, by the national El Salvador Government.

As mentioned above, funding for the most recent phase of PATI expired in December 2014.<sup>46</sup> The national government may wish to repeat this program should another similar economic crisis be experienced in El Salvador. That is, PATI may be a useful social aid tool to employ if El Salvador once again finds itself in a situation in which large portions of the population are unemployed, living in poverty, and in need of immediate financial assistance. However, the national government would need to secure the funds necessary to provide the immediate cash hand-outs, and several adjustments to program operation would be needed to ensure optimal success.

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<sup>44</sup> ILO, *Global Jobs Pact Country Scan*; Palacios, "A Conversation with Héctor Silva Arguello." Palacios claimed that PATI cost \$40-\$60 million dollars per year, while the ISO website claimed that the budget for two years was \$37.7 million. The exact budget is unknown and likely differed from phase to phase as the source of funding changed.

<sup>45</sup> CRE Final Report, CRS to USAID, 3.

<sup>46</sup> World Bank, *Restructuring*.

## **Sustainability**

Two aspects of program sustainability may be examined: the ability to maintain the necessary resources for continued operation, and the ability to create long lasting change in participants and their communities. According to at least one stakeholder, sustainability in any form was not a program priority. Rather, the program set as its goal to aid a specific number of individuals; once that goal was met, it was expected that the program would be discontinued. Its purpose was to immediately alleviate the financial strain on the most vulnerable members of the population caused by national economic problems, while providing them with some skills that could be of help in gaining future employment.

### ***Operational Sustainability***

PATI was able to secure funds and human resources needed to operate for five years. The program ended in 2014 when the goal of aiding 72,571 members of the El Salvadoran population was nearly reached. Funding for the program to continue in 2015 was not secured, and the high cost of operating PATI certainly limited its sustainability. One stakeholder suggested that communities might develop methods for fully funding the program at the local level. At the time of this study, in fact, local offices were continuing to carry out some forms of the program, relying on their own funds supplemented by FISDL.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Outcome Sustainability***

PATI offered quick aid to the most at-risk individuals in El Salvador, but without effecting long-lasting change. PATI did incorporate employment components that could have effected long-lasting change (specifically, increasing students technical skills and knowledge), but the training fell short of adequately preparing individuals for obtaining real jobs. It appeared that in practice, PATI did not prioritize training programs and community service programs that matched real employment opportunities.

The only evaluation to capture long-term effects had surveyed participants one

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<sup>47</sup> Had they been able to operate without FISDL's help, they might have increased sustainability still further; local governments could then have executed their respective programs as local conditions warranted.

year after program completion.<sup>48</sup> That evaluation showed that at the one-year mark, participants who had received payments were in a better financial position than members of a control group; the proportion of their participants whose incomes continued to increase after the program is unknown. Thus, it is unclear for how long and how large an effect the financial and training components had on program participants.

Program staff members acknowledged the lack of activities or mechanisms to guarantee the sustainability of project results. After six months of program involvement, participants were released without further contact or support; community service projects ended, income support ceased, and job training ended without any certain job prospects. One program employee acknowledged the value of engaging in projects that community members potentially could continue after their official stay in the program. For example, starting farms was a valuable and potentially sustainable community service project; community members would benefit from such farms well past the termination of the program. Choosing community service projects that developed community infrastructure would be one method for enhancing the long-term impact of the program, but few of the program's community service projects (outside of the farming projects) did so. The liaison also noted that had the program focused on developing individuals who could become pillars and leaders in their communities, the efforts and goals of PATI could have continued to be carried out by those individuals.

Longer lasting impacts may have been experienced relative to the program's secondary objectives. All program staff members interviewed perceived that PATI had improved coordination between national and local governments and increased the capacity of local governments to address their communities' needs. PATI provided technical assistance and training to municipal officials and technicians, and project monitors and municipal coordinators gained experience in developing relationships with communities.<sup>49</sup> Thus, PATI successfully enhanced the ability of project and government employees to work with community members, skills that would certainly be useful beyond the life of PATI.

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<sup>48</sup> Beneke de Sanfeliú, *Informe Final*.

<sup>49</sup> Valle and Flores, *Municipios Ida*.

## Recommendations

### *Best Practices*

The interviewees brought attention to several practices that seemed significantly related to PATI's successes and that would be beneficial in any future implementation of PATI or another social aid program.

- *Locate and directly contact potential participants (the poverty map).* Rather than waiting for potential participants to seek help, the program used an instrument (the poverty map) to identify and approach those individuals;<sup>50</sup> in this way, the program ensured that it was effectively using its resources to help that portion of the Salvadoran population most in need of such help.
- *Maintain an adaptive and flexible operating plan and tailor services to communities' respective needs.* Local governments were consulted about the specific needs of each community, and when evidence indicated that a particular practice or workshop was not effective, program staff worked to alter that.
- *Empower participants with decision-making and leadership opportunities.* PATI was effective at empowering participants, engaging them in making program decisions and appointing them to leadership roles. For example, rotating participant leaders led community service projects in which they learned to manage infrastructure, resources, time, and people, and developed their skills, confidence, and sense of self-efficacy. As discussed previously, this appeared to be one of the key mechanisms explaining individual change within the program.

### *Areas for Improvement*

Should another phase of PATI be initiated, certain weaknesses of the program should be addressed:

- Training courses needed to last longer and to be matched with real jobs in

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<sup>50</sup> Beneke de Sanfeliú, *Informe Final*.

local labor markets.<sup>51</sup> In addition, community service projects could have been better planned for learning and practicing marketable skills and abilities.

- Basic education courses were needed by many of the participants, some of whom had never held a writing utensil before entering the program, including courses to increase literacy and to help participants develop alternative values (e.g., reinforcing tolerance and diversity understanding); also, sexual health and reproductive education courses would be useful.
- Serving the heterogeneous (in terms of age, skill level, and physical ability) group of at-risk individuals proved overwhelming.<sup>52</sup> It would have been useful to develop age, sex, and ability-specific courses and community service projects to more effectively meet the needs of all the individuals. Alternatively, the program could have restricted its inclusion criteria.
- Rather than abruptly ending six months of support, a future program might design a transitional exit for participants that could include follow up, linkages with other community resources and support, and limited assistance in troubleshooting commonly encountered problems. (Following up with those who have completed the program would also make it more possible to assess the program's effectiveness.)

### **Conclusion**

PATI was a government-sponsored program initiated to relieve the burden of poverty on the most vulnerable citizens of El Salvador during a severe national economic crisis. In exchange for participating in technical skills training (to improve employability) and community service projects full-time for six months, about 65,000 adults of all ages received \$100 a month. PATI was partially successful in meeting its objectives, producing not only some of the more important anticipated outcomes, but also some unplanned positive outcomes.

The primary goal, to provide financial aid to vulnerable Salvadorans, was met; as

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú, Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social. *Evaluación de Impacto del Programa PATI*. PowerPoint slides (July 23, 2013.)

of October 2014, of the anticipated 75,581 eligible individuals, more than 65,000 individuals received between \$100 and \$600 in monthly payments, depending on how long they stayed in the program. In an attempt to meet the second program objective, increasing participant employability, those who received the payments also attended skills training courses. Although most participants completed training courses, those courses did not consistently provide the skills that participants needed to find and secure jobs. Further, community service projects also failed to significantly enhance participants' marketable skills and abilities.

With respect to secondary objectives, although program staff whom I interviewed had observed and described such successes, formal program evaluations did not provide concrete evidence of local governments becoming more empowered to help local communities or of intergovernmental coordination and communications having improved. The program's most significant benefit of the program, its ability to improve community relations and instigate personal growth, was unrelated to the original objectives of the program.

As mentioned above, the program is thought to have assisted an average of about 13,000 individuals per year (65,825 individuals over five years), not all of whom completed the training. Some of the needed improvements related to better preparing participants for employment after the stipend ends would simply require using better judgment (or "lessons learned," e.g., matching training to real job opportunities) in executing existing program components, and therefore should not add to program costs. Other improvements, such as lengthening the time spent in skills workshops and following up to potentially assist participants who encounter employment roadblocks after completing the program would suggest the need for more investment. The cost estimates used here are wide ranging and based on inexact data, as noted above; before any judgments on cost-effectiveness are made, the actual program budget should be examined closely.

Ultimately, PATI as it existed from 2009 through 2014 could be best described as a community development program and secondarily a work force development program, with a financial support element. Project staff noted that the most impressive outcomes of the program related to an increase in the social cohesiveness of communities involved

and a resulting social climate of reduced conflict and increasing cooperation.

In sum, PATI was an expensive, but moderately effective program. If it were feasible to obtain the funding to support its continuation and enhancement, it would seem to be a worthwhile endeavor. With the several modifications suggested within this report, PATI could become highly successful, useful for aiding members of the El Salvador population living in extreme levels of poverty and unemployment. Perhaps the most critical of those modifications would be (1) to match skills training courses to local labor needs and to provide adequate skill development to prepare participants for job searches (e.g., see section 3, USAID Improved Access to Employment Program), (2) to develop program activities appropriate for the diverse range of participants, and (3) to incorporate follow up and transitional support for participants beyond their official stay in the program.



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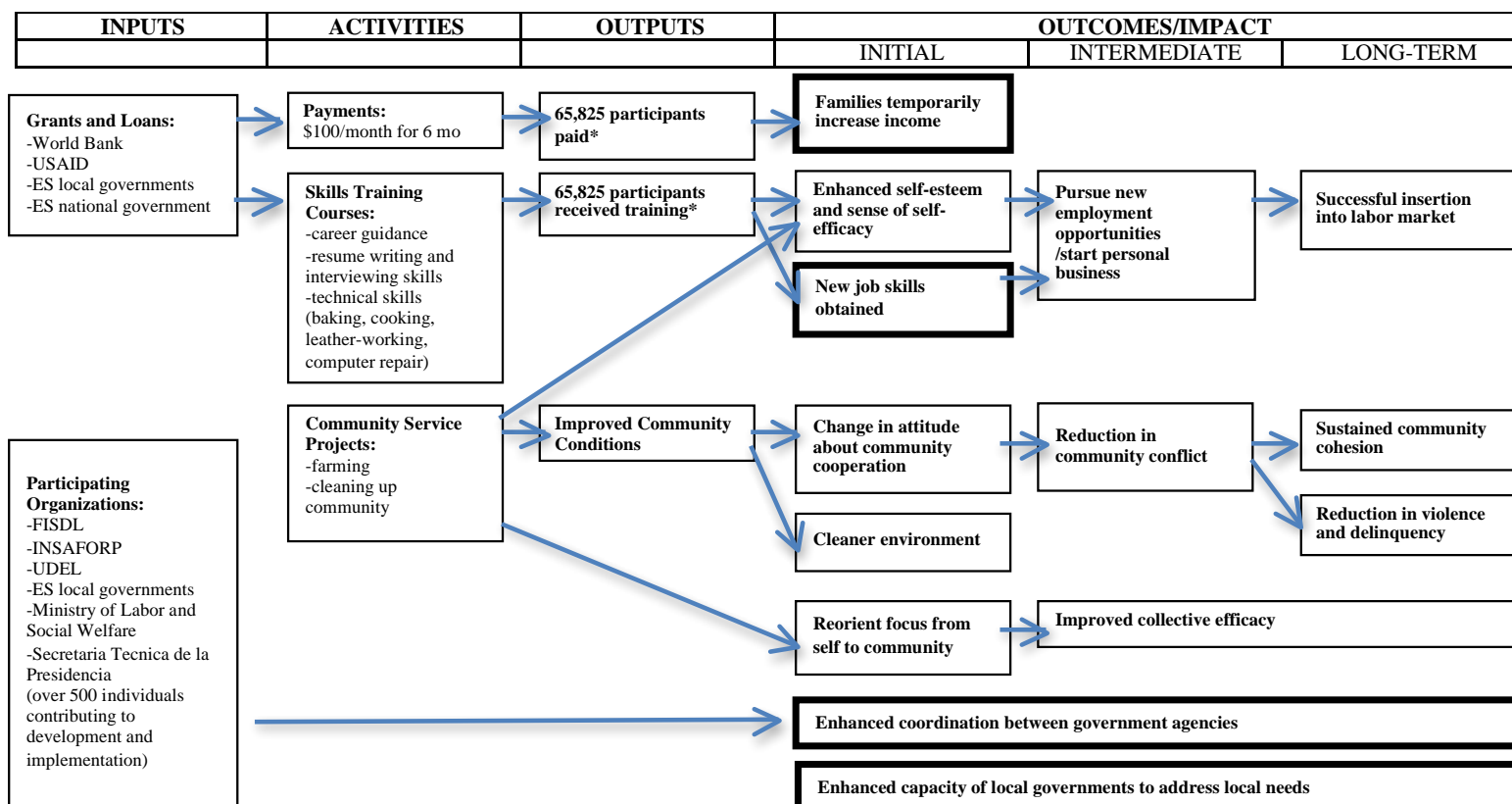
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**Appendix A: PATI Logic Model**

SITUATION - Problem: Employment crisis in El Salvador, high levels of extreme poverty.

Objectives:

1. Provide temporary income support to the most vulnerable members of El Salvador population
2. Increase employability
3. Improve community environment
4. Increase coordination between local and national governments and community



\*As of October 2014 - bold boxes indicate anticipated outcomes.

## Section 5. Jóvenes Constructores

*Courtney Riggs*

In 2010, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with several Salvadoran agencies implemented Jóvenes Constructores, one of a handful of programs initiated by the alliance to help youth complete their educations, develop adult life skills, and obtain employment.<sup>1</sup> Salvadoran youth who leave school before graduating or who face discrimination for living in troubled urban communities are generally excluded from consideration for traditional job openings, which are scarce in the current economy. Growing up in the country's violent social environment and lacking legitimate employment opportunities, too many of El Salvador's young citizens now want to leave the country.<sup>2</sup> Jóvenes Constructores, modeled on YouthBuilders, a U.S. program that teaches American youth marketable leadership and job skills,<sup>3</sup> was initially funded through March 2014 by USAID. Since then, Glasswing, a local partner agency, has continued to operate the program at one site with funding from a USAID-funded initiative, SolucionES. For the current study, it was reviewed CRS and Jóvenes Constructores documents and annual reports. It was also visited the program operated by Glasswing on site, and were interviewed program graduates, CRS staff, and Glasswing field workers.

### Program Description

Jóvenes Constructores set out to increase at-risk Salvadoran youths' social and economic opportunities by creating pathways to leadership, service, and employment opportunities. Program staff aim to prepare each participant for returning to school, for obtaining a job, and/or

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on CRS, see Catholic Relief Services (CRS), *2013 Annual Report: Give Us This Day* (2014): [annualreport.crs.org](http://annualreport.crs.org); also, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), *Mission of Catholic Relief Services: Mission Statement* (2015): <http://www.crs.org/about/mission-statement/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrade-Eekhoff for further discussion.

<sup>3</sup> CRS, *Give Us This Day*; YouthBuild International, *Building Communities. Building Lives*, "El Salvador/Guatemala/Nicaragua/ Honduras" (2011): <http://youthbuildinternational.org/el-salvador-guatemala-nicaragua-honduras>; YouthBuild International, *Building Communities. Building Lives*, "Our Work," online pamphlet (2011): <http://youthbuildinternational.org/our-work>; and YouthBuild International, *YouthBuild Bulletin* (International Issue, Autumn 2011): 2-3, 6, [https://youthbuild.org/sites/youthbuild.org/files/email\\_images/2011/11/953/YouthBuild\\_Bulletin\\_2011.pdf](https://youthbuild.org/sites/youthbuild.org/files/email_images/2011/11/953/YouthBuild_Bulletin_2011.pdf).

for starting his or her own business. For program purposes, "at-risk youth" refers to young males and females from troubled communities, aged 16 to 25 years,<sup>4</sup> who do not attend school and do not have a legitimate job.

The entire program takes five months (5 days a week, for a total of 400-800 hours) to complete. Each student is exposed to components that will help advance his or her education, life skills, community service experience, and vocational and entrepreneurial opportunities. A common theme across those components is leadership development: Students are taught and encouraged to exercise leadership skills as they lead discussions, participate in conflict resolution, carry out administrative responsibilities, and participate in a variety of other activities.<sup>5</sup>

Program participants under age 18 are strongly encouraged to complete high school, as most employers will not even consider applicants who have not yet graduated. Employment training and opportunities are the primary attraction for many applicants who have heard about Jóvenes Constructores from others in their communities. Traditional entry-level jobs tend to be low-skill minimum-wage positions, but many have opportunities for advancement. To maximize students' competitiveness in the real job market, Jóvenes Constructores monitors local employers' needs and creates skill-based training modules to match them. Frequently, however, not enough jobs are available or students may lack certain job qualifications (e.g., a high school diploma). In those instances, entrepreneurial occupations (self-employment) offer more realistic alternatives. The program's entrepreneurial component can teach students how to fill nearly any need the community will support—anything from computer maintenance and repair to cosmetology or baking—in addition to general entrepreneurial skills needed for success, such as how to speak with strangers, work on a team, deal with conflict, and make good decisions.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 5.1, below, illustrates the logic behind Jóvenes Constructores. The model shows how the system works: the reason for intervening, program "inputs," activities and participants ("outputs"), and expected short, medium, and long-term "outcomes." Below, each element is discussed in detail.

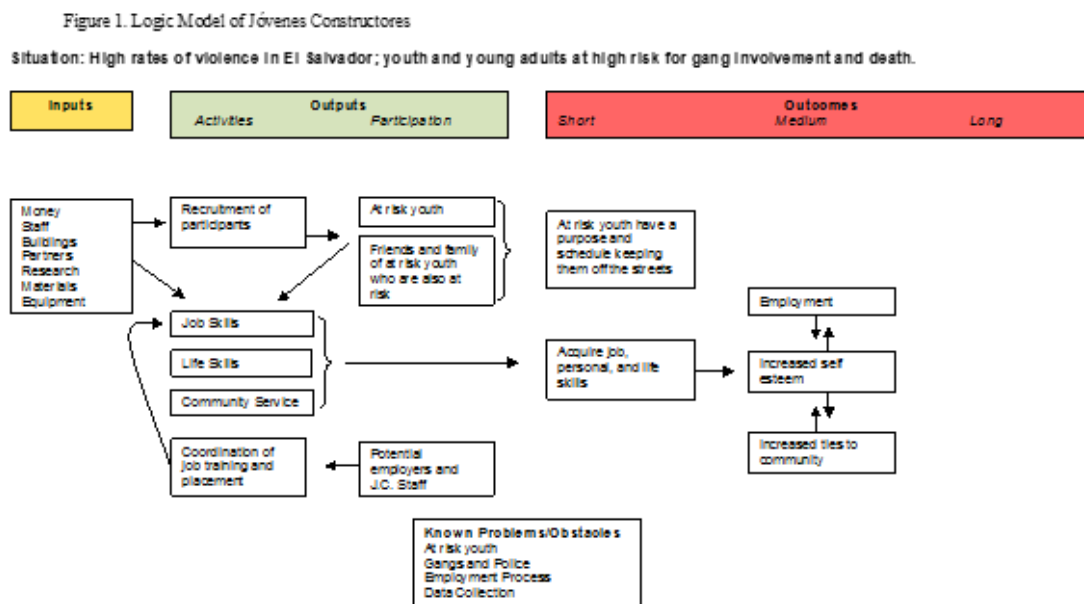
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<sup>4</sup> Typically, program participants are about 20-22 years old. Age exceptions may be made for individuals at the margins of eligibility who are considered to be at high risk of dying without intervention.

<sup>5</sup> YBI Design and Performance Standards, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, p. 28.

Figure 5.1: Logic Model - Jóvenes Constructores.



### ***Inputs: Investments in Jóvenes Constructores***

Jóvenes Constructores projects were established at eight separate sites, each one implemented by one or more partner agencies: Fe y Alegría, Fundación Quetzalcoalt, or Fundación para el Desarrollo Juvenil (FDJ). CRS piloted the Jóvenes Constructores model from 2009 to 2011 with Fundación Quetzalcoalt and FDJ (with funding from the Interamerican Development Bank, Nokia, First Green Foundation, and CRS). Starting in March 2011, CRS expanded Jóvenes Constructores with Fe y Alegría, with funding support from USAID. FDJ ended its involvement with Jóvenes Constructores in December 2010 and Fundación Quetzalcoalt did the same in about June 2013.<sup>7</sup> At the time of this study, one project remained in existence, operated by Glasswing, a local nonprofit agency, and funded by SolucionES/USAID.

### ***Outputs: Program Activities***

#### *Student Recruiting*

<sup>7</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, 5

Glasswing began by looking at promising local communities to serve as program sites. Communities undergo a two-to-six-month qualification period, during which its schools and patterns of violence, along with other factors, are examined. CRS coordinates with one or more local partners embedded in prospective communities who can support program success. Once a community and a local partner have been selected, evaluators begin the search for eligible, motivated applicants.

Jóvenes Constructores primarily serves at-risk Salvadoran youth from troubled urban communities. Males and females between the ages of 16 and 25 years old who have left school and are unemployed are eligible. (The majority of recruits are between ages 20 and 22 years of age.) However, eligibility alone does not assure acceptance. The program has structured its recruitment process to be certain that it invests in youth who are highly motivated to succeed in obtaining employment and to become leaders, especially those who have experienced severe difficulties or who have been rejected by other systems.<sup>8</sup>

Potential recruits often hear about Jóvenes Constructores from others in their communities who have already experienced the benefits of the program. The applicant screening process itself sparks interest, as word spreads about the program. According to program staff, applicant recruiting is an inexact science. Applicants who second guess the "correct" answers to recruiters' questions may be evasive about their actual reasons for wanting to participate, but those reasons almost always include a genuine desire to become employed. Although many enter the program unclear about the direction they want to pursue, once enrolled in the program, most seem to find their bearings.

Applicants who survive the initial screening move on to the second qualifying phase, a two-week motivational challenge. The components of that challenge vary, but it is intended to give the applicants a realistic experience of what program participation would be like and to give program staff an opportunity to further evaluate applicants' motivation and readiness. During this period, the applicants are expected to compose a resume and deliver it to a specific company; they also must successfully complete a community service project.

One of the bigger challenges for participants who have been leading relatively unstructured lives is simply arriving on time, every day—a non-negotiable requirement. The pre-

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<sup>8</sup> YBI Design and Performance Standards, p. 16.

enrollment selection process is meant to assure that enrolling in the program is the informed personal choice of each applicant and that he or she is fully committed to succeeding. This lengthy screening process has proven to be prudent, considering the program's high-risk applicant pool and the considerable investment made in each enrollee (400-800 hours of training over five months, six months of follow-up, and program support for each participant's employment insertion).

Each recruit's personal situation is unique, and staff can use their discretion to include as many as possible of those who are in serious need. Some similar programs report higher job placement rates, because they serve less troubled youth. Jóvenes Constructores participants have often travelled a rougher road to achieve their success. If the desired outcomes for such programs are community change and reduced violence, then working with higher-risk youth offers greater potential for achieving those goals. Without intervention, these are the youth most likely to engage in or be subjected to violence in the future.

### *Activities*

From day one, Jóvenes Constructores provides participants with a highly structured environment. Students engage in a variety of activities: (1) educational reinforcement, particularly for those who have not completed high school; (2) general job skills training, including teamwork, punctuality, and understanding rights and responsibilities; (3) vocational skills training, sometimes leading to certification; (4) entrepreneurship, emphasizing goal setting and financial planning (including savings and the use of internal lending groups); (5) life skills training (for guiding and supporting future plans); and (6) community service projects in which students apply newly acquired skills to volunteering in their communities. Students who have not completed high school are expected to continue their educations, and all are expected to obtain employment or to become successfully self-employed upon completing the program. Program staff members are committed to enabling each willing and able participant to meet those expectations.

During the interviews, staff members noted that Jóvenes Constructores' structured daily routines promoted the participants' success. Each morning, students came together in a circle, acknowledging one another's progress and accomplishments from the day before, airing problems, and reviewing the current day's schedule. Each day closed with a similar gathering.



Once a week, students came to class dressed in business attire appropriate for a job interview.<sup>9</sup> For most, showing up on time every day, Monday through Friday, required a kind of self-discipline that they had not exercised.

To foster group cohesion and to establish a common culture, Jóvenes Constructores has introduced an element unique among the employment programs reviewed for this report. Students are allowed to communicate at designated times using a set of special hand signals, gestures, and symbols. In respect for the program's inclusivity ethic, each group can add new signing vocabulary (gestures representing words and expressions) as long as all members are in agreement. Jóvenes Constructores' "group dialect" seems to make it easier for participants to transition into expressing positive emotions and attitudes, rather than the habitually hostile verbal and nonverbal exchanges they are accustomed to. This reinforces values and behaviors that can result in success, internalizing the purpose of rules in place of the power of authority and submission.<sup>10</sup>

Each student tracks his or her own progress. At the site I visited, students were photographed from time to time throughout the program, documenting how they were developing. (This does not occur at all program sites.) Students also drew pictures representing how they viewed themselves as they began, and again when they finished the program. One new recruit, before joining the program, reportedly had drawn a gun symbolizing the violence in his life; nearing graduation, he drew a tree in bloom representing his new potential. These kinds of activities and the program's consistent day-to-day routines together function as a form of cognitive behavioral therapy; this is intended to provide a secure framework within which students can more fully focus on developing their job skills.

*Enhancing Employability.* Each program participant learns a specific trade or occupation with ±200 hours of vocational training for a job likely to be needed in the community. In addition to acquiring trade skills, students receive about 80 hours of general job skills training, learning how to network to find jobs, how to prepare and dress appropriately for an interview, and even how to proceed when asked to take a polygraph test (required by most employers, regardless of the job). They practice writing resumes and learn to communicate effectively by email. The staff's general aim is to give the students every possible advantage for competing

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<sup>9</sup> The program financially supported participants who could not afford dress clothes so that all were capable of meeting that requirement.

<sup>10</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, p. 6

well in the job market.

In July 2012, the Salvadoran Institute for Professional Training (INSAFORP), a government-funded institution supported by a one percent payroll tax, assisted CRS in financing vocational training and course certification with Fe y Alegria.<sup>11</sup> CRS conducted periodic labor market studies to determine labor demands and then created training modules to match. For example, one CRS study indicated a need for motorcycle delivery drivers. Based on that finding, CRS developed a curriculum and worked with Fe y Alegria in alliance with the Salvadoran Automobile Club (ACES) to conduct driver training specifically for those jobs. At the time of this study, more than 400 businesses had employed Jóvenes Constructores youth, with many returning more than once to hire additional program trainees.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of that success, Jóvenes Constructores recognizes that the at-risk population remains at some disadvantage in the open job market, and that the number of job seekers will more often than not exceed the number of jobs to be filled. Therefore, it offers an entrepreneurship module, as well, in which trainees acquire skills needed for starting and managing a business of their own. Over the course of five-month program, students planning for entrepreneurship set aside start-up money with a self-managed savings system.

*Life skills training.* Jóvenes Constructores staff members recognize that job skills alone will not adequately prepare most at-risk youth for competing in the job market, much less for fully participating in family and community life. Life skills training is needed to provide a strong character foundation for everything else the program offers. This training is oriented toward enabling students to accomplish insertion into society—school, family and/or employment settings—and to gain confidence in a possible future in El Salvador, rather than looking toward immigration for personal and financial security. Life skills training and character development are taken so seriously that three mornings a week are devoted to it: building a positive identity, developing self-esteem and empathy, and coming to value forgiveness above revenge, among other things. Individual and group counseling are offered, as well. Staff members interview each

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<sup>11</sup> INSAFORP, *Catholic Relief Service e INSAFORP Entregan Reconocimientos*, online public bulletin, (2015b): <http://www.insaforp.org.sv/index.php/comunicacion-institucional/noticias-menu/314-catholic-relief-service-e-insaforp-entregan-reconocimientos>; and INSAFORP, *Catholic Relief Services e INSAFORP Firman Convenio de Cooperación*, online public bulletin (2015a): <http://www.insaforp.org.sv/index.php/comunicacion-institucional/noticias-menu/142-catholic-relief-services-e-insaforp-firman-convenio-de-cooperacion>.

<sup>12</sup> Catholic Relief Services, *Final Report*, 8.

student to determine his or her needs; not uncommonly, students come to the program with unresolved histories of physical, mental, and/or sexual abuse.

*Community service.* Importantly, the program includes a community service component. This has a dual purpose: the practice of skills learned in job training and the development of social and community-building skills. Each student spends at least 60 hours on community service projects such as building, remodeling, or cleaning parks, community centers, and classrooms. High school graduates may tutor others who need academic assistance. Such projects enable students to apply and hone their newly acquired skills and reinforce the system of values introduced through life and job skills acquisition.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Coordination of Job Training and Placement*

Students are initially most motivated to achieve in Jóvenes Constructores by the promise of gaining access to employment. That is a complicated promise for the program to keep; thus, each site has its own job coordinator who is responsible for staying current on the needs of local employers and coordinating or creating skill-building programs that prepare participants to be competitive for those jobs. Working on behalf of individual participants, the job coordinator mediates placements among program staff, students, and potential employers. A good job coordinator knows what kinds of openings are available or upcoming, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each job seeker, and strives to facilitate good matches. In addition to building working relationships with potential employers, the job coordinator maintains a professional relationship with the Ministry of Labor. Ties such as that have helped to open doors, leading to higher job placement rates.

Despite attempts in El Salvador at interagency coordination on the part of all of the various youth programs, the government, and other NGOs, it has not been unusual for Jóvenes Constructores to find that it has enrolled participants who have been associated previously with another program. Program coordinators are aware of this, but the extent to which it happens is unknown as there is no way to track students' movements. Most participants who have been trained in programs other than Jóvenes Constructores have been taught life skills, but often they have acquired little in the way of marketable job skills. At the time of this study, INSAFORP

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<sup>13</sup> YBI Design and Performance Standards, p. 21.

was attempting to certify program graduates' competencies; however, other programs have not been doing this. That deficit contributes to the difficulty of determining how many individuals participate in multiple programs.

### **Program Effectiveness**

The greatest problem facing Salvadoran youth and young adults today may be the nation's gangs and the violence associated with them. Reducing gang involvement and violence were not specific goals of Jóvenes Constructores, but those factors affected students' daily lives including, in areas controlled by gangs, their ability to obtain employment. Gangs and increasing local violence created serious challenges for program implementation.<sup>14</sup> Program staff learned that before becoming engaged with Jóvenes Constructores, many of the youths from high-risk communities had not expected to survive to adulthood. The majority of program graduates interviewed related that this had been the first time they had had a safe place in which to be open and authentic, where they could neither judge nor be judged—in short, where they could live in an environment conducive to learning and growing. The students' troubled backgrounds had virtually assured that they would not finish high school, would not acquire the most basic social and life skills needed to build a future, and most certainly would not find or maintain worthwhile employment. The rare few who might have acquired a job interview would almost certainly have been met ultimately with rejection, discriminated against for belonging to a troubled community where gangs were prevalent. Left to fend for themselves, their individual prospects would have remained poor, their collective hopelessness adding to the intractable poverty of their communities' prospects.

### ***Outcomes***

CRS and Jóvenes Constructores emphasize behavioral change and life skills development as fundamental to the mission of generating employment opportunities for at-risk youth. Students are prepared, one by one, to complete their schooling and to become employed either in a traditional job (preferably with benefits) or as an entrepreneur. Students are expected to respect the program's day-to-day structure and to become positive community leaders.

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<sup>14</sup> Andrade-Eekhoff, p. 11

Students begin that journey by embracing a shorter-term outcome: simply having a purpose and a place to be each day of the week with their peers, acquiring the intrinsically rewarding life and job skills imparted by Jóvenes Constructores staff. It stands to reason that the program schedule alone would give them less time, opportunity, and even inclination toward delinquent activities. Five months is not a long time to prepare for legitimate work, acquire greater self-confidence (self-esteem) and self-control, and to strengthen one's community ties, but experiencing real progress in any one of those areas will create momentum in the others.

As critical as the short and medium-term outcomes were (and are) for program participants individually and as a group, the long-term outcomes projected for Jóvenes Constructores reach even further. Jóvenes Constructores, or something very much like it, is still expected by its organizers to be a significant contributor to increasing economic opportunities and providing a renewed sense of belonging for its least advantaged young citizens.

In the United States, crime and disorder is commonly predicted using measures of socioeconomic status (employment being a major factor) and community ties. Assuming those predictors to be universal, Jóvenes Constructores aimed to address problems in both areas. The program's graduates have reported feeling more a part of their communities and safer in their neighborhoods. One Glasswing staff member commented that those changes alone support the program objective that calls for participants to envision their futures in El Salvador, as opposed to as immigrants.

In spite of numerous challenges inherent in reaching at-risk youth, 83% of Jóvenes Constructores students are reported to complete the program. Staff members follow graduates for six post-graduate months, tracking whether they are earning at least the minimum wage and, if needed, encouraging them to obtain traditional jobs with benefits. Those measures are tracked for each participant from enrollment through graduation and job insertion, using individual case files and verification documentation. According to an external evaluation conducted at the end of 2013, using a random selection of 500, 2010-2015 graduates, 59% of graduates had jobs, 47% with benefits.<sup>15</sup> Despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, compared with the overall population of Salvadoran workers, Jóvenes Constructores graduates were reported to have attained more

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<sup>15</sup> Beltran y Savenije; report in Spanish.

than twice the average rate of jobs with benefits.<sup>16</sup> Many who did not currently have jobs reported having returned to school to complete high school or college. Frequently, driven by financial considerations, graduates reported moving between formal employment, self-employment, and education as opportunities arose. Simply having the credentials, confidence, and ability to choose among those alternatives as their situations changed gave those participants an edge. In some respects, of course, program evaluation and effectiveness could have been improved. For example, not all graduates were tracked for the full six-month post-graduation period, and few were monitored for longer periods.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Implementation Rates***

Participants in Jóvenes Constructores projects that received USAID funding experienced success rates that exceeded the benchmarks established for the project, according to the CRS Final Report.<sup>18</sup> Six percent more participants enrolled in the workforce development program than were expected (3,157 vs. 2,970). Of those, 84% completed the program, only one percent shy of the goal (2,640 vs. 2,673). Employment numbers showed that 50% of graduates had obtained a job upon graduating or had gone on to find a better one, which was 6% more than expected (1,572 vs. 1,485).<sup>19</sup> Graduates achieving self-employment fell just two percent shy of the goal (584 vs. 594). The education component experienced similar success, as 501 participants returned to school after completing the program, 16% more than the goal of 431. Considering employment and education together, the total number of participants served exceeded the project goal by eight percent (2,073 vs. 1,916).<sup>20</sup>

Another site, operating for 2½ years and funded by CRS and the Open Society Foundation (OSF), documented outstanding results, as well. It exceeded its benchmark goal for

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Graduates frequently changed residences and phone numbers, making them difficult to reach. Many maintained contact with the program and some had a presence in social media such as Facebook. Through that channel, CRS was able to locate and arrange to meet with five graduates from varying communities and cohorts for this study.

<sup>18</sup> CRS commissioned a study to compare performance between Jóvenes Constructores and other similar programs. Unfortunately, other programs did not maintain data regarding insertion. The only possible comparisons were cost per participant and cost per training hour. These comparisons can also be used against prison housing and meal costs.

<sup>19</sup> Those employment numbers represented only those individuals who had completed a U.S. Government-funded workforce development program, such as Jóvenes Constructores (or Mi Nuevo Plan de Vida).

<sup>20</sup> CRS, Final Report, p. 9.

numbers served by 11% (155 vs. 140) and for graduates by five percent (132 vs. 126). Employment data showed that 29% had obtained jobs, seven percent more than expected (45 vs. 42), and 28% had become self-employed, 54% more than expected (43 vs. 28). Sixty-one participants (40%) had returned to school, more than doubling the goal of 28.<sup>21</sup> The similarity in results across sites is not particularly surprising given that the programs all used the same model and outcome goals; also, all of the programs were strongly community-based, rendering funding sources irrelevant to program success.

### *Cost Effectiveness*

According to the June 30, 2014 CRS Final Report, USAID invested a total of \$4.9 million in Jóvenes Constructores and one other youth employment program in El Salvador.<sup>22</sup> CRS matched USAID funds with another \$716,000. CRS functioned as the umbrella organization for the program, and CARITAS operated the two programs as an implementing partner, serving 4,187 youths; the average cost per participant was reported to be \$1,347.<sup>23</sup> The amount spent per youth receiving technical training was reported as \$1,210.<sup>24</sup> Meaningful cost comparisons are difficult to make, however, as each program claimed different training components, hours, numbers trained, and other outcome measures. Jóvenes Constructores specifically shows a range of cost per participant from \$782 to \$1,408 across program sites, with technical assistance amounting to \$426 per participant.<sup>25</sup>

### *Success Stories*

Jóvenes Constructores staff members insisted that students and graduates communicated most effectively about the program and its successes. Community members including families, neighbors, and teachers described the positive changes they had noticed in program participants. Other at-risk youth also noticed those changes, which motivated them to apply. Graduates from

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> That funding was shared with Mi Nuevo Plan de Vida operated by CARITAS.

<sup>23</sup> CRS, Final Report, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> One might compare the one-time cost of preparing a youth to support himself or herself and a family with the expense of housing and feeding one inmate in an over-crowded prison, estimated to cost an average of \$1,142 per year (CRS, Final Report, p. 43).

<sup>25</sup> Andrade-Eekhoff, p. 8.

various program sites set up Facebook pages showcasing their programs' successes.<sup>26</sup> CRS developed videos featuring graduates, such as one featuring a young woman who became a successful baker in her community.<sup>27</sup> These examples, and those shared below, are just a few of the success stories that were heard from CRS and program staff members, and the participants themselves.

- A young man who had become involved in a gang enrolled in the program. His family owned a home-based clothing store. In a Jóvenes Constructores workshop, he learned to stamp images onto fabric, enabling him to expand the family business. That success made it financially possible for him to go back to complete high school. He has since become a community leader, and plans to go on to college to study social services.
- A 21-year-old male was referred to Jóvenes Constructores while in juvenile detention and involved with gangs. Once accepted into the program, he was placed on parole. His first job was in a local store; a few months later, he moved on to work in a bakery. Now he is waiting to enter a Catholic seminary to prepare for becoming a priest.
- In order to protect herself from gang members' threats, a young woman had been forced to leave high school before graduating. Wanting to occupy her time productively, she applied to Jóvenes Constructores. Initially very quiet, she soon found a safe place to express herself in the program. She succeeded in starting her own business selling natural medicines; her earnings enabled her to return to finish high school. She said that she had little to spend on herself, but with the job and life skills she had learned, she took pride in having acquired ways of helping others.

Community service projects have proven a particularly rich context for student success. One group started a cyber café in a community. The program donated computers, and the students repaired them as needed. The cyber café gave neighborhood kids a place to do homework with free use of its computers. That student group also cleared the local beach of debris from abandoned turtle nests.

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<sup>26</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://youtu.be/BmpB-Fl-4hA>



Another student was given an opportunity to teach baking in a rural area for two weeks; he formed strong attachments with the local people there and found it hard to leave. Still another student was sent to a school to repair old computers; she learned to work as a member of a team and became comfortable asking peers for help. She developed self-discipline, as she had to be punctual to catch her daily bus, which left on time, with or without her. A different student described working with her group to build an entire playground from the ground up; she became attached to her co-workers and enjoyed the sense of satisfaction she experienced when the playground was completed.

Personal growth and hope for the future were recurring themes throughout these and other success stories. Nearly every participant described entering Jóvenes Constructores feeling insecure and lacking self-confidence, but then finding a "second family" there. The security provided by the stable routine, along with being consistently surrounded by positive people, allowed students to grow and mature. They reported gaining confidence in their own ability to navigate communities outside the program, no longer feeling judged or discriminated against.

Program staff members related having learned how much positive change depended upon the various program sites sharing a common culture and philosophy. Unusual as it may seem, the use of the group's hand gestures for communicating was often mentioned as uniquely important; all staff members and many graduates brought this to attention. Perhaps that is less surprising when we remember that "insider" slang and jargon arises from and bonds groups of young people, everywhere.

In addition to gathering anecdotal evidence during graduate and staff interviews of the program's success, CRS shared data that it collected on each student in order to measure progress at both individual and program levels. With that data, leaders could make strategic decisions, assess results, and review progress and program completion rates.<sup>28</sup> Periodic meetings with program staff across the various sites helped them to learn from their respective experiences, as well.

In addition, a 2011 International Youth Foundation evaluation and two other external evaluations contributed to what is known about the program. The 2011 International Youth Foundation evaluation focused on the first pilot cohorts in El Salvador and Nicaragua in 2009.

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<sup>28</sup> Andrade-Eekhoff, p. 6.

For the USAID expansion process, a midterm external evaluation was conducted by the Jesuit University, UCA. Dr. Antonieta Beltran and Dr. Wim Savenije conducted the second external evaluation, focusing on the ability of the program to foster youth resilience, as well as monitoring educational support and outcomes.

Together, the sum of these data sources indicates that Jóvenes Constructores has been successful in its program completion rates, graduate employment and self-employment rates, and student satisfaction. The external evaluations provided Jóvenes Constructores with objective analyses of the program's impact and challenges; which have been used to modify and further improve the model.<sup>29</sup>

### *Obstacles to Effectiveness*

During this study, It was able to observe and to hear about several problems that hindered the program's effectiveness. Those appeared to affect the program in three areas: (1) eligible individuals could not or did not always participate, (2) graduates could not or did not always obtain and maintain employment, and (3) program staff members and others could not or did not consistently collect and analyze the amount of quality data needed to effectively monitor, manage, and report program successes.

#### *Obstacles to program participation*

During their earliest stages of contact with Jóvenes Constructores, recruits' own reticence and mistrust sometimes became an obstacle to their full program participation. During the recruitment phase and initial program activities, according to staff, applicants and students often had difficulty being truthful; the more at risk they were, the less likely they were to be entirely forthcoming about themselves and their reasons for being interested in the program. Over the course of time, as trainees, most would gradually open up and become less fearful, more willing to reveal themselves. When they fully participated in this way, they began making real progress.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to participation (for both staff and trainees) was gang related. This was especially problematic at program sites in areas where more than one gang operated. Conflicts and violence would break out when program participants from

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

neighborhoods controlled by one gang tried to cross into neighborhoods controlled by rival gangs in order to attend program activities; the consequences could be severe, up to and including homicide. Such a situation forced Jóvenes Constructores to close part of its Mejicanos program when the gang in the program zone would not permit youth from rival territories to participate.<sup>30</sup> Staff found it safer to locate programs in areas occupied by only one gang. Unfortunately, not only gangs created such problems for Jóvenes Constructores; according to a CRS staff member, police and the military were also known to harass or threaten students and staff for their involvement with the program.

### *Obstacles to obtaining employment*

Students, particularly those deemed most at risk, continued to have hurdles to overcome in order to obtain and maintain employment, even after being trained. Employers remained reluctant to hire workers from certain neighborhoods, a problem that is encountered by nearly all employment programs. Business owners and managers fear being infiltrated and extorted by gangs from those areas, and have concerns about those applicants' limited access to public transportation and their ability to show up reliably during the required hours. As a result, even trainees of age and with work permits (required for those under age 18) face discrimination based on their home addresses. Some reported showing up for scheduled interviews, then being turned away by security guards.

Even for a minimum wage job, applicants who make it through their interviews are likely to be required to take a polygraph test administered by a security company (many of which are owned and managed by former military personnel). The security companies have little knowledge of human resources issues; candidates who do not pass the polygraph are simply rejected. Anyone with a criminal record or who has a family member involved with a gang can easily fail a polygraph test if they try to hide certain facts, but if truthful, that applicant is unlikely to be hired for fear that his or her affiliations might lead to interference with the owner's operation of the business.

With persistence, support, and troubleshooting from staff, many Jóvenes Constructores trainees do manage to find jobs. Those students' hurdles then become everyday challenges such

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<sup>30</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, p. 7

as finding reliable, affordable transportation and childcare. Those who rely on public transit may find that the hours they are scheduled to work do not always coincide with hours that busses are running. Private transportation for service sector jobs is provided by some businesses, but those systems often refuse to go into the neighborhoods where at-risk trainees live; this is especially true at night. Commonly, reliable childcare during job shifts is difficult to find.

Self-employment, other than the difficulty of finding startup capital, offers more flexibility, but entrepreneurship presents equally serious challenges.<sup>31</sup> Young entrepreneurs reported needing to keep a low profile to avoid potential extortion from gangs or even neighbors, and trouble from would-be competitors. A young student baker reported preparing her larger catering orders away from her usual location, to avoid drawing attention to herself. It takes determination and persistence to continue under such adverse circumstances.

#### *Obstacles to data collection and analysis*

Making a compelling evidence-based connection between providing at-risk youth with life and job skills training and achieving long-term crime reductions requires the collection and analysis of reliable data. Crime reduction was not a stated goal of Jóvenes Constructores, and such data were not systematically collected, but the program may have provided a few secondary crime prevention benefits, nonetheless.<sup>32</sup> Collection and analysis of reliable data is inhibited in El Salvador in several ways. First, the Salvadoran culture is not receptive to tracking information (even crime rates) about individuals by location, regardless of the purpose. Also, gangs posed a strong threat to the safety of those affiliated with Jóvenes Constructores, impeding the staff's and third parties' ability to ask for and document such data. It is difficult to obtain information relating to violence when community members fear being killed for talking to the wrong people about such matters. Conducting even simple interviews involved risk and required safety precautions. CRS could not use police escorts for site visits; to do so would have suggested to gang members that Jóvenes Constructores and the police were affiliated, a potential death sentence for program staff. Such barriers are not specific to Jóvenes Constructores and are not a

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<sup>31</sup> For more information about entrepreneurship within the Jóvenes Constructores program, see Wendy-Ann Rowe, Richard Jones, and Katherine Andrade, *Creating Change, Creating Opportunities: Promising Practices in Youth Enterprise Development for At-risk and Gang-involved Youth* (USA: Catholic Relief Services, 2011):

<sup>32</sup> Andrade-Eekhoff, p. 18

program weakness, but rather are a data collection weakness in El Salvador.

As previously mentioned, Jóvenes Constructores did collect some data about program participants, although none were collected beyond the six-month post-graduation period. The lack of systematic data collection for measuring long-term program impacts led to the external survey of 500 randomly chosen graduates, mentioned above.

One external evaluation concluded that Jóvenes Constructores was successful in instilling protective factors in at-risk students that may have helped to prevent them from becoming victims or perpetrators of violence; this was attributed to four key program elements: (1) changing students' routines, distancing them from risky behaviors and peers; (2) affiliating students with others working toward similar positive goals; (3) emphasizing the use of a moral and ethical compass to guide actions; and (4) teaching students how to navigate difficult relationships in family and community.<sup>33</sup> (The evaluation was not designed to extend its findings to crime and violence prevention or to community or municipal levels.)

To its credit, CRS has persisted in searching for solutions to programmatic problems and in preparing students to overcome employment-related obstacles. Acknowledging that certain gang-related problems are almost insurmountable, it ceased locating projects where rival gangs share a common border. Additionally, CRS seems cognizant that working relationships need to be maintained with law enforcement, and yet is still sensitive to the community's negative perception of any who might be police allies.

As for its more immediate objectives, Jóvenes Constructores appeared to be making a concerted effort to find employment for every graduate. Tailoring job training to market demands, it increased the chances that program participants would qualify for local jobs. The challenge is to continuously reinvest and retool for changes in a market that is ever evolving. This is a challenge for employment programs worldwide, not just for Jóvenes Constructores. Graduates hired into their first jobs, however, reached a significant life milestone that they may have missed without help. Given the option of acquiring entrepreneurship as well as conventional job skills, they were equipped to choose alternative ways to earn a living. Entrepreneurships that they trained for were within reach and appropriate, allowing income earned to be comparable to that of most jobs available.

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<sup>33</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, p. 7; findings from Beltran y Savenije in Spanish.

Graduates also made it clear during our discussions that the program's community service activities became more than a way to fulfill a 60-hour program requirement. Some found volunteer opportunities that allowed them to put newly acquired job and personal skills into practice, helping others. Many created lasting bonds with people whom they never would have encountered any other way. Further, they experienced the benefits of teamwork and shared responsibility. Perhaps most important for their growing self-esteem were those experiences of being useful and welcomed as persons who could and did improve the lives of others.

Upon completing the five-month Jóvenes Constructores program, students' accomplishments were formally acknowledged at a graduation ceremony. Graduates stated that they highly valued the ceremony, the first of its kind for most of them. For the next six months, program staff followed up with them to assure that they were either employed or in school. The first two or three months of their post-graduate transition were critical.<sup>34</sup> During that period, staff visited with employers, reviewed the books of the self-employed, and checked in with the schools of those who were completing their educations.

From our observations, reshaping the futures of program participants—supporting them in completing high school and preparing them for employment, as well as teaching other necessary life skills—better equipped them to deal productively with the complexities that came with living in at-risk communities. Throughout the program, youth seemed to be learning ways to cope maturely with adverse circumstances, strengthening their communication skills, and building self-confidence, all of which raised their chances of avoiding situations that could end in violence.<sup>35</sup>

Listening to program graduates, it is believed that completing the Jóvenes Constructores program had given them self-confidence. They had come to feel (and be) more secure, to be more comfortable interacting with others and with talking openly about themselves and their lives, not only within their somewhat sheltered group environment, but at and beyond home. People outside the program noticed that the group's shared language of hand gestures was used to communicate in a non-hostile manner. Personally, I observed and interacted with a group of polite individuals who were highly respectful to staff, one another, and to me. They appeared

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<sup>34</sup> Beltran y Savenije; in Spanish.

<sup>35</sup> Due to methodological issues in measuring rates of violence, discussed in greater detail below, it is not currently possible to provide definitive numbers regarding violence reduction rates within the program communities.

happy with where they were, and they spoke enthusiastically about the program and the benefits it brought them. Job skills and employment were deemed important, but they also spoke of having “changed,” of becoming better people in general. Jóvenes Constructores was targeting and serving those who were at high risk, and staff members appeared to be navigating the many challenges involved well enough to make a clear difference.

### **Replication**

The Jóvenes Constructores program is based on YouthBuild International. As part of the adaptation process in El Salvador, CRS (with YBI) created, tested, and validated program design and outcome standards for Jóvenes Constructores programs in El Salvador.<sup>36</sup> As a result, replication of projects using the YBI model, including Jóvenes Constructores, is best informed by its design and performance standards. The standards establish key components of the Jóvenes Constructores model, including how they should be implemented and the outcomes they should achieve. They provide direction and guidance for “best practices” for those programs wishing to replicate Jóvenes Constructores. At the same time, there are replication difficulties that warrant discussion.

Replication raises the question of whether, if successful, the model of Jóvenes Constructores could be successfully implemented in other communities deemed “at risk.” A partial answer can be found in CRS’s experience to date with initiating programs using the Jóvenes Constructores model at multiple sites. CRS managed the programs and tracked their participants, while partner organizations operated day-to-day program activities. Of eight programs initiated, one, operated by partner organization Glasswing, remained in operation at the time of this study. Closures of the other programs were attributed to various factors, two of which would need to be resolved for further replication to be feasible: (1) scaling the program to dimensions that can be funded locally and/or by partner organizations without degrading quality and effectiveness, and (2) ensuring the safety and security of participants and others associated with the program. CRS is currently working on scaling the model to make it affordable for local governments.

The second unresolved issue is that programs such as this, which serve youth already at

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<sup>36</sup> See YBI Design and Performance Standards for the YouthBuild Program for more information.

risk for crime and violence, are not themselves without risk to those involved. For all of their successes in helping willing recruits to make life-changing progress toward a more fruitful life, success can come at considerable cost. CRS attempted to replicate the Jóvenes Constructores model in one particular location where it admitted youth who were already in conflict with the law—young people who were farther along the path toward violent crime than those more typically accepted into the program. This site operated for approximately a year and a half before a situation arose that forced its suspension when a shooting injured a participant and staff member.<sup>37</sup> The program had recruited a total of 55 participants, a lower number than the usual goal of 80 participants. The low enrollment was generally perceived to reflect a lack of motivation on the part of potential recruits. In this case, the catchment area was dominated by gangs, each of which acted to prevent participants who lived in areas controlled by its rival gangs from participating. This program documented only half the completion rate of other sites, although those who did complete the program had insertion rates (into employment or education) similar to those of all youth in these programs.

The most common advice offered by staff to others who might want to replicate this program was to teach and nurture “soft skills” along with job training. They included in this creating a culture of resilience where participants feel safe. Jóvenes Constructores accomplishes this by establishing a structured environment within which participants can function—a routine that is followed every day and a common mode of communication that is shared and expanded by the participants as a group. Additionally, psychological counseling has proved useful. Lastly, an outlet for recreational activities is important, a place to engage in sports and arts that expand life and can help build confidence and a sense of community. CRS staff members believe that tracking participants beyond graduation has contributed to the program’s success, as well. Several CRS staff mentioned that this might be the key to sustaining the program, as it allows them to learn and respond to what is working, and what is not. Last, they recommend flexible admission criteria, as the most at-risk applicants need the most help, yet they may be excluded if acceptance criteria are overly rigid.

The Jóvenes Constructores model could be replicated at multiple sites, provided that the sites were carefully chosen and that there were implementing partners and funding available.

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<sup>37</sup> CRS, *Final Report*, 5, 8.



Successful replication demands a regard for safety. Although it is admirable to take on youth who are at higher risk than those typically involved in these types of programs, certain precautions would be necessary. Perhaps future sites should, for example, not be located in areas where more than one gang shares a border, in order to avoid potential territorial gang issues and corresponding violence. As a result of its accomplishments and potential for long-term “grassroots” change, CRS and others continue to try to overcome the funding and security-related obstacles to successful replication.

The cost per youth employed might also be a deterrent for development organizations (e.g., NGOs) without external funding. In 2014, only Glasswing, funded by SolucionES, was able to undertake replication, and then only because SolucionES had USAID funding. At the time of this study, CRS was developing an alliance with INSAFORP and the Interamerican Development Bank to bring the program model to scale. Based on recently (2015) signed agreements, CRS will provide funding to train INSAFORP and a network of INSAFORP implementers in the Jóvenes Constructores model. INSAFORP will fund all the direct implementation costs.

## **Sustainability**

### ***Funding***

For four years, CRS partner organizations with external funding implemented the Jóvenes Constructores model. At the time of this study, the partner at the one remaining site, Glasswing, projected that its SolucionES funding could be maintained for four to five more years, provided that the program continued to meet employment rates of at least 70%. CRS now receives funding from IADB/Multilateral Investment fund, as well as co-financing with INSAFORP. This enables CRS to train INSAFORP implementers in the Jóvenes Constructores model; INSAFORP will fund implementation of the program.

### ***Programmatic Sustainability***

After four years of implementing the Jóvenes Constructores model, CRS settled on a few areas of focus for continuing and stabilizing the program in the future. With respect to employment, CRS leadership wants to ensure that the entrepreneurship module remains a part of the program. They believe that giving participants the skills to start their own businesses is a

strong alternative for at-risk youth, as they face greater challenges than others in obtaining traditional employment. CRS would also like to implement career counseling so that participants can learn what types of jobs are available and which paths could lead to the job or career of their choice. Often, program participants are all on a single job path, competing with hundreds of others for limited positions, with no way of knowing what other options might be out there for them.

Education is another important aspect of potential future programming. Staff would like to help youth who have not yet finished middle school become part of the program, convinced that education is as important as a job. In fact, it may be the only path to getting a job, since many companies will only hire applicants who have a high school education. Many of the graduates I talked with had a strong desire to return to school, either to finish high school or to continue on to college.

Finally, CRS wants to strengthen its relationship with communities. Community service projects create ties with those communities and give greater visibility to the program and its successful participants. Building those community ties may be the most effective way to transform not only the communities' perception of the formerly "at-risk" youths, but also the youths' self-perceptions within that community where they previously were judged to be troublesome. Perhaps demonstrating to the community and government the kinds of change that such at-risk youth are capable of making when given the right opportunities would bolster the programs' ability to obtain much needed funding and other support.

### **Conclusion**

The Jóvenes Constructores program model was implemented by CRS and partner agencies to provide at-risk youth with job and life skills that would give them better access to lifelong opportunities. With the volume of at-risk youth in El Salvador, programs such as this are vital. Due to the large investments in this program, it will continue to be important to ensure that the program is effective. Based on information received from program graduates, partners, and CRS employees, it appears that they have been accomplishing the goal of providing at-risk youth with life and job skills needed for success. A high number of participants returned to school or attained employment upon completing the program, and they maintained that status over the six-month follow-up period. Having the ability to track participants and report success rates, even in

limited terms, appears to be one of the strengths of the program, as far as internal evaluation goes.

The program would be strengthened if it had the ability track community-level changes in relation to its activities. In the future, perhaps those implementing these programs could require participants and graduates to complete a questionnaire asking how they perceive their communities to have changed, if at all. A survey could be given to participants when they begin the program that asks questions regarding their community. The same survey could then be given a couple times during the program, as well as every three months for a year following graduation. With several participants at each location typically coming from the same community, enough data could be collected in this way to make the results statistically significant. This would allow researchers to determine what, if any, changes the community perceived the program having made and which communities were experiencing those changes. Additionally, assuming employment programs were located in several communities, those could be compared to assist in determining which programs were affecting the greatest change, and how.

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## Appendix A: Summary of key program components and participants

Program (USAID and OSF funding)	Key components	Total participants
Jóvenes Constructores	5 months training, follow up and insertion services (400 to 800 hours)	3157
JC, in conflict with the law	5 months training, follow up and insertion services (400 to 800 hours)	55
Jóvenes Constructores San Marcos Counterpart site <sup>2</sup>	5 months training, follow up and insertion services (800 hours)	155
Workforce orientation	2 weeks job orientation for high school students (Fe y Alegria)	1098

CRS, *Final Report*, p. 6

## Appendix B: Summary of Program sites, Implementing partner, and period

Implementing site location	Implementing partner	Period	Comment
<b>Jovenes Constructores sites:</b>			
Soyopango, San Salvador	Fe y Alegria, Soyapango	March 2010 to March 2014	
Mejicanos, San Salvador	Fe y Alegria, Zacamil	March 2010 to March 2014	Also implemented pilot with youth in conflict with the law from Jan 2012 to August 2013
Tierra Blanca, Jiquilisco, Usulután	Fundación Quetzalcoatl	March 2010 to Dec 2010	
Mejicanos, San Salvador	Fundación Quetzalcoatl	Jan 2011 to June 2013	Also implemented pilot with youth in conflict with the law from Jan 2012 to June 2013
San Marcos, San Salvador	Fundación Quetzalcoatl and CRS	August 2011 to March 2014	Counterpart funding from YBI and OSF
Cuscatancingo, San Salvador	Fundación para el Desarrollo Juvenil	March 2010 to Dec 2010	
Santa Ana, Santa Ana	Fe y Alegria Santa Ana	March 2010 to March 2014	
Jiquilisco, Usulután	Fe y Alegria, Usulután	March 2010 to Dec 2011	

CRS, *Final Report*, p. 5

## Appendix C: Key program indicators

	Total Participants			Percent of Those that Complete		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
<b>Participate</b>	2312	2030	4342			
<b>Complete/Graduate</b>	1952	1710	3662	84 %	84 %	84 %
<b>Productive insertion</b>	1090	900	1990	56 %	53 %	54 %
<b>Employment</b>	625	595	1220	32 %	35 %	33 %
<b>Self-employment</b>	465	305	770	24 %	18 %	21 %
<b>Return to school</b>	528	499	1027	27 %	29 %	28 %
<b>Total insertion</b>	1618	1399	3017	83 %	82 %	82 %

Source: Created by Juan Carlos Duran, CRS Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, based on data from On line data base

Andrade-Eekhoff, p. 3

## Section 6. Project HOPE: Having Opportunities for Peace and Employment

*Doug Mellom*

In 2008, the AGAPE Foundation of El Salvador established Project HOPE, an employment program aimed at helping rural Salvadoran youth realize their cultural, social, and economic rights, despite living in socially disadvantaged areas with high rates of violence.<sup>38</sup> According to a 2005 report from the World Bank:

Poverty [in El Salvador] continues to be disproportionately rural. About half of Salvadorans living in rural areas are poor, a quarter of which live in mere subsistence, while 28.5 percent of the urban population is poor and only 9 percent are extremely poor.<sup>39</sup>

Educational opportunities for youth living in rural areas of El Salvador, particularly in Ahuachapán, Sonsonate, Chalatenango, and Cabañas, are scarce compared with similar opportunities in more urban areas such as San Salvador.<sup>40</sup> Rural youth must travel considerable distances simply to take advantage of opportunities that are routinely accessible to most urban youth, hardly an affordable proposition for a young person living in relative poverty. Yet that lack of education severely inhibits their future opportunities for gainful employment; therefore, youth commonly drop out of school to work as temporary farm laborers or in the informal labor market (e.g., street vending) to supplement their families' low incomes.<sup>41</sup> For rural youth, those educational and economic disadvantages have been related to the increased probability of

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<sup>38</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE: Habilitando Oportunidades para la Paz y el Empleo Juvenil*, Asociación AGAPE de El Salvador (2014): [http://www.agape.com.sv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=105](http://www.agape.com.sv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=105); and Jacobs Foundation, "Having Opportunities for Peace and Employment," Jacobs Foundation (2012): <http://jacobsfoundation.org/project/project-hope-having-opportunities-for-peace-and-employment/>.

<sup>39</sup> World Bank, "El Salvador Poverty Assessment: Strengthening Social Policy," *Poverty Reduction and Economic Management and Human Development Sector Management Units: Latin America and the Caribbean Region*, Report No. 29594-SV (2005): 1-134, [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/01/11/000160016\\_20060111134320/Rendered/PDF/295940SV.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/01/11/000160016_20060111134320/Rendered/PDF/295940SV.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Compassion International, *El Salvador: Rural Region* (2014): <http://www.compassion.com/el-salvador/agriculture.htm>; and AGAPE, *Habilitando Oportunidades*.

<sup>41</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*; World Bank, "El Salvador Poverty Assessment."



becoming involved in violence or gang activity.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Project HOPE sought to bring its employment project to them.

Project HOPE was administered and championed in El Salvador primarily by the AGAPE Foundation of El Salvador,<sup>43</sup> a Catholic organization founded in 1978 by Franciscan priest Flaviano Mucci. It is comprised of several multidisciplinary social work programs that serve individuals living in extreme poverty, addressing basic needs and helping to solve social, spiritual, educational, and productive problems. Project HOPE was developed to create employment opportunities; AGAPE, the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation, the Jacobs Foundation, and the Fundación Salvador del Mundo (FUSALMO) funded the project.<sup>44</sup>

Over a 30-month period from 2004 to 2006, INSAFORP, the Pestalozzi Foundation, Swisscontac, and the AGAPE Foundation of El Salvador cooperatively executed the Project HOPE pilot project, serving at least 1,299 participants.<sup>45</sup> Following the pilot run, Project HOPE was fully launched in 2008 and continued into 2012.<sup>46</sup> Program records made available for this study indicated that between 9,200 and 10,000 youth had participated during that period.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, stakeholders who were interviewed during the study reported the numbers of those who participated and completed the program as "unknown," with estimates as low as 3,000. The interviewees reported that Project HOPE had ended in 2012 when funding ended; the exact date could not be confirmed.

To gather information for the current study, I reviewed official agency documents and related materials (e.g., newspaper and media articles, reports), conducted a focus group with

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<sup>42</sup> World Bank, "El Salvador Poverty Assessment."

<sup>43</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*.

<sup>44</sup> AGAPE, *Que es AGAPE?* Asociación AGAPE de El Salvador (2014): [http://agape.com.sv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=2](http://agape.com.sv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=2); R. M. Aguilar, "Presentan Culminación del Proyecto HOPE," *La Prensa Gráfica* 6 (March 21, 2013): 1-2, <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/presentan-culminacion--del-proyecto-hope>; Jacobs Foundation, "Having Opportunities;" and Fusalmo, *Misión, Visión y Valores*, Fundación Salvador del Mundo (2014): <http://www4.fusalmo.org/index.php/quienes/nosotros/mis-vis-val>. Fusalmo, in El Salvador, began in 2001 with the mission of sponsoring projects promoting holistic development (e.g., educational and work opportunities) for underprivileged and at-risk youth. The Jacobs Foundation sponsors evidence-based programs that support youth in becoming socially responsible, productive members of society. Pestalozzi Children's Foundation is a Swiss nonprofit organization that sponsors projects in developing countries that support the rights of children and youth to a quality education and promising future.

<sup>45</sup> [www.elsalvador.com](http://www.elsalvador.com), *Insaforp Firmó un Convenio de Cooperación* (June 20, 2007): [http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota\\_completa.asp?idArt=1567065&idCat=3791](http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota_completa.asp?idArt=1567065&idCat=3791).

<sup>46</sup> Jacobs Foundation, "Having Opportunities." The majority of the information in this segment, unless otherwise cited, was provided by Project HOPE and/or confirmed by stakeholders during individual and focus group interviews conducted in November 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Aguilar, "Presentan Culminación del Proyecto HOPE;" and Jacobs Foundation, "Having Opportunities."

former program participants, and interviewed former employees. Before leaving the U.S. for El Salvador, I attempted to locate all relevant reports, articles, and other documents with a Google search on "Project HOPE" and the names of the major affiliated stakeholder organizations. That search did not produce a significant amount of information. Upon arriving in El Salvador, I conducted a focus group with eight former participants from one program administered by Project Hope; that meeting was held at AGAPE headquarters in the Department of Sonsonate. I also conducted one interview with two former project employees and one interview with another former employee. The focus group and interviews all were recorded. A translator assisted with oral translation of the interviewees' remarks (I am proficient but not fluent in Spanish), and I recorded handwritten notes. Following the interviews, I requested official project documentation from the agencies; a limited amount was received.<sup>48</sup> Shortly after the interviews and the focus group were completed, handwritten notes were transcribed and audio recordings were reviewed to determine whether any relevant information was missing from my notes. I identified common themes across the remarks made during the focus group and individual interviews; these are discussed in later sections of this report.

### **Program Description**

The purpose of Project Hope was to provide employment training for marginalized, at-risk youth in several rural regions of El Salvador, particularly in Ahuachapán, Sonsonate, Chalatenango, and Cabañas,<sup>49</sup> in order to mitigate the lack of educational and employment opportunities available for youth in rural areas compared with those available in urban areas of the country. The lack of access to education and employment opportunities in rural areas was considered to be a significant contributing factor in those youth being at increased risk of engaging in violence.<sup>50</sup> Project HOPE reportedly meant to assist at-risk youth, "at-risk" meaning those who lacked opportunities for further education or jobs, and who were therefore considered the most likely to become engaged with gangs and violence. The project targeted youth who (1) were 16 to 19 years of age, (2) had at least a 6th grade education, (3) were not presently attending school, and (4) were either unemployed or underemployed; however, those criteria

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<sup>48</sup> I requested a copy of the earlier impact study related to outcome measures, but did not receive it.

<sup>49</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*.

<sup>50</sup> World Bank, "El Salvador Poverty Assessment."

could vary across the local projects.<sup>51</sup> Individuals with histories of criminal or violent behavior were not necessarily excluded, according to interviewees.

The project reportedly set out to recruit more women than men. Females were more likely than males to be victims of violence, and they typically were not being employed in traditionally male-dominated occupations, such as mechanics. Both official project records and interviewees indicated that males and females were about equally represented among the participants.<sup>52</sup>

Initially, individuals considered at-risk (particularly for violence) and who were economically and socially marginalized were identified and recruited into the program with the help of nonprofit and other organizations that served the targeted areas. Youths who were referred were evaluated using a diagnostic instrument that helped determine whether they were better suited for job placement or for self-employment. Both training modes included career counseling, vocational-technical training for a specific occupation, and "culture of peace" training. Youths bound for job placement gained experience working for a business during the training period, while those aiming for self-employment received added business training in entrepreneurial management. For both modes, the initial objective was for participants to develop the frame of mind and skills needed to obtain and maintain gainful employment. Reportedly, a secondary objective was for participants to transmit what they were learning (attitudes and knowledge) to other family and community members, ultimately resulting in a reduction in violence and a cultural transformation from violence toward peace throughout the entire community.<sup>53</sup>

According to various stakeholders, recruitment into the program was facilitated in several ways. The program was publicized on the AGAPE radio station and TV channel, and in flyers and brochures posted in the city halls of targeted regions. Project HOPE also relied on strategic alliances with local governmental and nonprofit service organizations in the targeted communities to identify qualified youth who might be good prospects.

The diagnostic instrument used to determine whether each participant would enter the job placement or self-employment path reportedly was re-administered throughout the participants'

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<sup>51</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

time in the program as a means of assessing whether the aptitude needed to progress was being maintained. In addition, a separate diagnostic instrument was used to identify whether individual participants possessed the qualifications that companies were looking for in potential employees (e.g., a high school diploma). Although the diagnostic instruments theoretically played a role in determining participants' preparation for work, stakeholders indicated that in practice the training path offered tended to depend more on the local community's needs, and that the decision often was made by the local partners. Certain communities had businesses or companies that wanted to hire youth; at those project sites, more participants would be assigned to the job placement path. Other communities could offer few or no job opportunities for youth, and so the self-employment/entrepreneurial modality would be offered. Official data were not available, but interviewees indicated that the majority of participants were, in fact, enrolled in self-employment or entrepreneurial training due to the overall shortage of formal employment opportunities in rural areas.<sup>54</sup>

Trainees in the job placement mode spent about 400 hours in training; entrepreneurial trainees spent about 300 hours in training. Vocational-technical skills training emphasized efficient and effective performance in specific jobs, an understanding of the theoretical basis of a particular occupation, the processes and procedures undertaken to perform that occupation's tasks (and alternatives for continuously enhancing performance), and general techniques for obtaining sustainable, quality employment throughout one's career.

In addition to occupation-specific training, both modalities included career counseling and culture of peace training.<sup>55</sup> The latter consisted of 40 hours of workshop training, emphasizing nonviolence, respect for human rights, cross-cultural understanding, inclusion, tolerance and solidarity with others, peaceful conflict resolution, the universal right to information and knowledge (e.g., freely making information available that is needed by others to make assertive decisions, establishing direct communication among partners), and respecting all forms of diversity; it also promoted critical self-reflection and analysis as a transformational tool.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the path taken, participants completed their training in about six months.

Project HOPE had established strategic alliances with numerous other local and regional

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> HOPE, Fundación Pestalozzi, Fusalmo, and AGAPE. *Malla Curricular: Proyecto Educativo HOPE* (n.d.), 1-16.

organizations; these included World Vision, MELIDAS, INSAFORP, Save the Children, ADESCOS, Swisscontact, International Plan, and the Ministry of Work/Labor. According to interviewees, the purpose of forming extensive alliances was twofold: first, the alliances facilitated effective use of the organizations' varied but limited resources to achieve the common goal of providing at-risk youth employment opportunities, and, second, alliances broadened the possibilities for recruitment. Although Project Hope used several techniques, recruiting through its local allies, who were aware of local conditions and needs, was its principle method.

Project HOPE also coordinated efforts with NGOs, municipal mayors, and the business sector to identify supply and demand for labor, to contribute to the training of young people, and to generate opportunities for employment and self-employment. Furthermore, the project coordinated with church, community, school, and cultural leaders to acquire the physical infrastructure for job training and to promote the development of the job programs. INSAFORP, a Salvadoran government agency that collects a 1% payroll tax to support vocation training, provided funding for job training for both intervention strategies, while Swisscontact funded teacher training and helped with the design of various components, specifically the vocational-technical and culture of peace trainings.<sup>57</sup>

A common concern of those who had worked for or participated in Project HOPE was the lack of financial and other resources needed to carry out even the most basic program activities. Forming mutually beneficial partnerships was a way to at least partially overcome that problem. One interviewee described an instance, for example, in which the MELIDAS organization was able to provide materials and equipment for training, yet lacked financial resources needed to execute it; Project HOPE could offer the financial resources, but lacked materials and equipment. Joining forces, they delivered the training.

Project HOPE's affiliation with various organizations already well known to community members enhanced its legitimacy. One interviewee cited Project HOPE's close relationship with the AGAPE Association, which had a very good reputation, as helpful in establishing its partnership with the Ministry of Labor. Overall, Project HOPE's extensive collaboration with other organizations was one of its better strategies for increasing its effectiveness.

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<sup>57</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*.

## Program Challenges

For a variety of reasons, Project HOPE seemed to struggle with both external and internal challenges to its plans for enhancing employment opportunities for youth. Some of those challenges, as well as some of the program's strengths, are discussed below.

### *External Challenges*

Research has indicated that individuals who lack sufficient education have severely limited employment prospects and that unemployed (therefore economically disadvantaged) individuals are at higher risk of becoming involved in violence or gang activity.<sup>58</sup> In El Salvador, Project HOPE aimed to help such high-risk individuals attain stable employment, either with an existing company or as skilled entrepreneurs. It seemed that participants on the job placement path were experiencing more success than those on the entrepreneurial path, yet fewer participants seemed to have access to job placement training—specifically, those with at least a high school diploma. This occurred because nearly all employers were insisting that their applicants, including those from Project HOPE, have that credential. When asked, interviewees acknowledged the obvious: that the most at-risk individuals (those at the greatest educational disadvantage) were generally excluded from the path that produced the most employment opportunities. Including non-graduates would not only be pointless for them, but it could alienate potential employers from the program. In other words, the practice of recruiting and placing high school graduates was somewhat of a mismatch with the program goal, to enhance employment prospects for the *most* at-risk youth. Staff appeared to feel conflicted about that reality, but they had little choice. (See also section 3.)

The shortage of jobs in the surrounding environment limited the project's potential for success. One interviewee reiterated that there simply were not enough quality job opportunities for youth living in the rural areas, noting that it was beyond the financial capability of the project to effectively address that problem. Although Project HOPE staff could have considered limiting the number of recruits to the number of available jobs, as some other programs had done (see, for example, section 3), there is no indication that Project HOPE staff had considered that strategy

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<sup>58</sup> World Bank, "El Salvador Poverty Assessment."

or, if they had, whether it would have been a practical approach given local circumstances. In sum, the intervention strategies used by Project HOPE might have complemented concurrent economic development in those regions, had such development been in place, but the project was not intended or equipped to compensate for the lack of such development.

### ***Operational Challenges***

According to the interviewees, apparently few program graduates had kept in contact with Project HOPE staff, although this seemed to vary among individuals. Project HOPE had not incorporated a formal follow-up process. Some interviewees expressed frustration with that, citing the various potential benefits of follow-up that were being forfeited, but formalizing such after-program responsibilities may not have been a high priority, given the program's limited resources.

The proper use of diagnostic instruments also posed an operational challenge. The tools seemed to offer a practical way for to allocate the limited funding that the project received from its sponsoring organizations.<sup>59</sup> That same tool, however, made it almost too easy to place students in accord with their profiles. Many marginalized youth who participated in the project, but did not meet stringent employer standards, reportedly were passed over. In addition, the attitudinal diagnostics were self-report measures; it did not appear that other sources were being used to check the validity of participants' responses.<sup>60</sup> Essentially, the diagnostic instruments suffered from limitations similar to those of other self-report methods (e.g., respondents' tendency to answer in socially acceptable ways, particularly if the truth might jeopardize their acceptance into the project.)<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*; Aguilar, "Presentan Culminación del Proyecto HOPE"; and Jacobs Foundation, "Having Opportunities."

<sup>60</sup> Fundación Pestalozzi, AGAPE, and Fusalmo, *Mi Registro de Avances, HOPE: Habilitando Oportunidades para la Paz y el Empleo Juvenil* (n.d.), 1-8.

<sup>61</sup> D. Champion, *Research Methods for Criminal Justice and Criminology* (Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005). The diagnostic instrument's validity could have been improved by collecting data on the same measures from other sources, such as interviews with local community residents and leaders about an individual, or obtaining official data on each individual from, for instance, prior criminal, employment, and/or educational records. However, such data collection may not have been feasible for an organization that was already functioning with quite limited financial resources.

### ***Organizational and Collaborative Challenges***

Project HOPE's strategy for success relied on the involvement of and collaboration with various partner organizations. Nonetheless, the project seemed to lack any specific long-term planning that considered those partnerships. The collaborative relationships were one of the program's strengths; they allowed the agencies to recruit more widely and to match resources to achieve mutual goals and objectives related to making employment opportunities accessible for at-risk youth. Yet those alliances added complexity to the program's operations. Each project launched was implemented somewhat differently, depending on which partner organizations were involved. Thus, a significant limitation of the intervention design was its lack of detailed planning that considered each of its site's unique set of projects and partners, along with inadequate attention to monitoring and coordination among the various partners. It seemed that the alliances were necessary in order for Project HOPE to deliver the program, but their benefits were offset to a certain extent by occasional costly complications, many of which could have been avoided with advance planning.

Project HOPE sought to partner with El Salvador's Ministry of Labor in order to facilitate relationships with companies that could become potential employers. That partnership benefitted the program in that the companies reached through that connection were credible. On the other hand, according to one interviewee, some companies were reluctant to become involved with Project HOPE *because* of its partnership with the Ministry, for fear of inviting that agency's closer scrutiny.

### ***Internal Challenges***

Project HOPE suffered internally from its lack of qualitative or quantitative standards and measures by which to assess effectiveness. No official evidence was found that the program's outcomes were being documented, monitored, measured, or assessed, or that someone was responsible for seeing that they were. Perhaps the aforementioned impact study will present such data. In addition, the program did not make use of an internal audit process to determine whether the components and activities of the intervention were being administered as planned; informal indications suggested that they often were not. Process evaluations might have determined early on whether this factor was inhibiting program effectiveness; such evaluations, had they been in



place, might have provided timely insight into problems that employees and students were experiencing, making it possible to adjust or adapt the program accordingly.<sup>62</sup>

### **Program Effectiveness**

Project HOPE did not systematically collect data needed for a quantitative assessment of its effectiveness in achieving the goals and objectives it had articulated. There were not consistent, reliable records of the numbers of youth who had participated in either modality or who had completed the program, or who succeeded afterward in attaining employment of any kind. There were no measures or data for evaluating the effects, if any, of the culture of peace component, or for determining whether reductions in violence may have occurred in the communities during the program's operation.

At the time of this study, Project HOPE's website posted the claim that in 2007, a total of 227 individuals, participating in 12 programs, had specialized in one of seven self-employment specialties;<sup>63</sup> the website did not indicate how many had completed the program or how many were subsequently employed, nor did it offer program data for other years. A 2012 article posted at [telemudo.com](http://telemudo.com) reported that 325 youth had participated in Project HOPE that year;<sup>64</sup> again, the article did not indicate whether any of them had been employed after completing the program. An interviewee related that 30% of the youth who completed the entrepreneurship modality had become self-employed or established their own businesses, reaching the initial goal. Another interviewee contradicted that, recalling that Project HOPE had claimed an employment rate between 30% and 32% for the two modalities combined over the five-year life of the project, the majority of those finding jobs; s/he added that the entrepreneurial modality had failed because the rural areas were unable economically even to support their self-employed neighbors. The data were no more reliable for the job placement modality. One interviewee asserted that 80% of youth who completed that training found jobs; again, that report could not be reconciled with a contradictory report that the five-year employment rate no more than 32% for the two modalities combined. In addition, of the eight participants I interviewed, just two were employed at the time we spoke. Someone mentioned that an impact study was nearing completion and a copy would

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<sup>62</sup> Champion, *Research Methods*.

<sup>63</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*.

<sup>64</sup> J. Ventura, "Fusilmo Puso en Alto la Cultura," *El mundo.com* (October 12, 2012).

be sent to me; despite my repeated requests, that report never arrived.

Drawing upon the few official documents and program materials that were available and stakeholder interviews, little quantitative evidence could be found to support a finding that Project HOPE had been effective in achieving its goals and objectives. Despite this, and the interviewees' reports of the programs shortcomings and challenges, the stakeholders also reported experiencing positive qualitative changes.

All of the interviewees, both participants and employees, were unanimous in holding Project HOPE trainers in high regard, particularly (but not only) those whom AGAPE had trained to teach the culture of peace curriculum. About the job skills instructors, one former participant said, "I felt so happy because they taught us a lot about sales . . . [and] helped me improve my resume to help in future job seeking."<sup>65</sup> Another described the approach the instructors used: "My teacher encouraged role playing to reduce fear involved with a new job . . . organizing files and self-techniques [customer needs, why customers buy products] were some of the most beneficial aspects of the program." For many, this was their first employment training and first experience in a formal place of work. The youth interviewed generally seemed quite thankful for the help and insights provided by their instructors, and they considered Project HOPE to have been relatively successful in transmitting skills and knowledge that would support them in finding and taking advantage of future employment opportunities.

The culture of peace training had an impact on nearly everyone who encountered it, through the program or through program participants. Interviewees described how the training had taught them to interact in peace and solidarity, to work effectively with each other, to be respectful, humble, and "go the extra mile," seeing one another as brothers and sisters. Former participants said that the training had influenced their understanding of how one should think and behave in a work environment. Nearly all viewed the ideology and practice as having potential for reducing the violence in their communities, with the emphasis on peaceful conflict resolution.

Project HOPE employees observed that the culture of peace training had had a profound impact beyond the youth participants, as parents taught their other children its principles and modified their behaviors at home to reflect culture of peace ideals. The employees also witnessed young participants increasingly resolving their differences without resorting to violence, and

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<sup>65</sup> Quotes were transcribed as accurately as possible during the focus group with assistance from a translator.

noted that the youth continued to talk about what they had learned in the program (particularly regarding culture of peace) after completing the project. One person related that the researcher conducting the impact study had commented that every youth s/he spoke with had mentioned the culture of peace training and passing it on to other family members.

Interviewees also cited the cultural festivals that they and other participants had organized in their communities as a beneficial Project HOPE activity. Family members and others who were interested could attend. The festivals, which promoted the culture of peace and nonviolence, were coordinated by youth who had been considered at-risk for violence in those communities. Possibly the very fact that they now were facilitating a cultural transition from violence to peace was influential.

Although much of what they said was positive and optimistic, none of the interviewees could produce evidence that Project HOPE had reduced violence in the rural communities that it served. Most seemed certain that having more youth employed would reduce violence, if only because of the significant amount of time that work occupied. Many also believed that internalizing and transmitting the culture of peace values and practices had great potential for reducing violence, as it offered alternative, far less painful and destructive ways of perceiving and responding to a difficult life. In summary, however, for purposes of this study, the lack of data meant that it could not be shown what impact, if any, the program had on reducing violence in those rural communities.

The interviews with those who participated in and worked for Project HOPE identified numerous difficulties faced by the project. The most common was the lack of resources sufficient to deliver the project's activities. In particular, providing sufficient infrastructure, including a place to train youth, was identified as a major difficulty. Several participants interviewed described fixing a stranger's roof in exchange for holding training sessions in his home when no other place was available. The youth (five in all) had listened to lectures on employment orientation and then received employment training for one month, from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m., for a total of 275 hours spent in that person's house. They did not have enough voltage to run their machines in this location, and felt ashamed for invading private space (e.g., asking for water or to use the bathroom). The entire project at that particular site was closed down after one month, due to the lack of funding to continue training. The difficulty in obtaining basic necessities such as infrastructure in order to effectively administer the program was a significant

factor in limiting program effectiveness.

Program participants identified the unpaid time that needed to be committed—eight to ten hours a day for training and work—as another obstacle. The major difficulty was transportation, particularly in rural areas. Participants often had to travel long distances over poor roads for training and to reach their assigned jobs. Many reported quitting the program because of insurmountable transportation problems. Project HOPE requested that companies and other organizations help with providing food and transportation (or some compensation for hours that trainees worked), but many of them were evidently unwilling or unable to do so.

Overall, insufficient financial resources were the cause of most of the complications that severely restricted the effectiveness of the project's activities and reduced the likelihood of accomplishing its goals. Still, the biggest hurdle the program was simply the lack of employment opportunities for the participants who had been trained and prepared by the program.

### **Replication**

Project HOPE (as it existed from 2008 to 2012) had not been replicated at the time of this study. Several issues would need to be addressed if it or a similar project were to be replicated successfully in the future. With that in mind, Project HOPE employees and participants whom we interviewed identified several program elements that they would like to see reinstated in some form:

- Far more employment opportunities would need to be developed, particularly in rural regions, for such a program to fulfill its purpose. New job creation was beyond the scope and the resources of Project Hope.
- Strategic alliances enabled program activities that otherwise would have been impossible. Because they were not planned for, however, those alliances also added complexity; future programs could strengthen the planning and processes needed for efficient and effective collaborations, up front.
- The culture of peace training was valued by virtually all of the interviewees. There were accounts of nonviolent "culture of peace" principles being transmitted from program participants to families and communities. The translation of those principles into attitudes and behaviors appropriate in the workplace made it relevant to Project HOPE's employment goals. As with

other elements, sufficient resources would need to be invested to fully exploit its potential.

The lack of sufficient resources was consistently identified as the greatest obstacle encountered by Project HOPE; while I could not assess the program's cost-effectiveness, the program's budget and expenses should be carefully analyzed before considering its replication. Also important, not having a plan and processes in place for internal and external program evaluation was a deficiency that should be corrected in any future program of its kind.

### **Sustainability**

Project HOPE ended in 2012, largely due to lack of funding. As mentioned above, I was unable to assess whether the funding was insufficient or cost-effectiveness could have been improved, or both. That question would need to be addressed in order to determine the program's capability to become a sustainable operation.

Also limiting sustainability was the lack of enough jobs for all of its graduates, together with the inability of local communities to financially support the program's self-employed entrepreneurs. Most interviewees thought that the lack of quality economic development in rural El Salvador was the most significant limiting factor for program sustainability; unfortunately, that was also the factor that the program had the least ability to control.

Despite the program's demise, Project HOPE's legacy was evident, which could be considered a kind of sustainability. Through its alliance with Project HOPE, INSAFORP extended its services into rural El Salvador; that work is ongoing. Furthermore, after expanding its curriculum to meet Project HOPE's training requirements, INSAFORP expanded its offerings beyond technical training to include self-employment/entrepreneurial training and human development modules (including the culture of peace). Operating in the rural regions once served by Project HOPE, INSAFORP has continued to support the job placement modality previously offered there by the program.

The culture of peace curriculum is mentioned most often as Project HOPE's greatest lasting contribution. Several other organizations later adopted that curriculum, incorporating it into their training and activities. Reportedly, INSAFORP and the AGAPE Association in particular have done so.

### *Cost Effectiveness*

No information pertaining to the budget of Project HOPE was available, nor were there reliable data related to the number of participants who successfully completed either training modality. Limited evidence suggested that the job placement modality may have been more effective than the self-employment modality at securing stable employment for at-risk youth, but no information was available on costs associated with either training modality. Hence, we could not assess the cost-effectiveness of preparing trainees for employment in either modality, nor of Project HOPE as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Project HOPE was created to provide employment training for at-risk and marginalized rural Salvadoran youth. The AGAPE Foundation of El Salvador executed the program with funding and operational assistance from numerous other organizations, such as the Jacobs Foundation, the Pestalozzi Foundation, INSAFORP, and Fusalmo. The project had two intervention strategies: a self-employment/entrepreneurial training modality and a job placement modality. Both included career-counseling, vocational-technical training in a specific occupation, and culture of peace training.<sup>66</sup> The self-employment/entrepreneurial intervention added a training component for business and entrepreneurial management, and the job placement intervention reportedly youth with work experience in an actual business or company (generally uncompensated) during the course of their training.

The immediate goal of Project HOPE was to instill in the youth a positive attitude and mindset that would assist them in becoming better employees, whatever occupation they chose after completing the project. The intermediate goal was for the youth to internalize the components of that training, allowing them to obtain and maintain quality employment and good working relationships with others, along with continually enhancing their job performance. The ultimate goal of the project was for the youth to transmit knowledge obtained in the program to others in their communities, establishing a culture of peace for the betterment of society, as well as attaining and maintaining quality<sup>67</sup> employment throughout their careers.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> AGAPE, *Proyecto HOPE*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Overall, it was quite difficult to assess the effectiveness of Project HOPE in attaining its goals due to the shortage of documentation, outcome measures, and data collection throughout the life of the program. Based on the limited information available, it appeared that the project was unsuccessful in leading to employment for the majority of the youth who participated. Based on anecdotal evidence, the job placement modality may have been somewhat more effective than the self-employment modality at providing youth with good employment opportunities, although it appeared that due to a lack of actual job openings, the majority of youth who participated in the program were channeled into the self-employment/entrepreneurial intervention. Lack of adequate funding to provide for basic necessities for operating the program (e.g., appropriate facilities for conducting training) and the lack of sufficient employment opportunities to accommodate the trainees in rural regions were the primary factors inhibiting the program's success. One of the more effective strategies for overcoming financial limits was its extensive collaboration with other organizations, combining resources to achieve mutual aims.

As mentioned several times above, Project HOPE's culture of peace training was possibly the most valued part of the entire program; project stakeholders consistently identified it as such. The cultural transformation it promoted might be an effective way to help change the cultural environment in ways that not only would improve the immediate quality of life for community residents, but that could attract the economic development and the new businesses needed in order for youths to gain access to much-needed jobs for supporting themselves and their families.

Based on the findings from this study, several policy recommendations are offered for consideration by future employment programs:

- Establish adequate qualitative and quantitative measures to assess and manage the effectiveness of the program. Identify outcomes to be monitored; determine who will monitor them and how they will be measured, documented, and assessed.
- Use process evaluations (internal audits) to determine whether the program is being implemented as designed, or if certain deviations from the central program design may be inhibiting effectiveness; also, whether partners' shares of limited funds are being appropriately used.
- Conduct in-depth long-term planning with partner organizations. Project HOPE's wide collaboration was both a strength and a weakness; it was also most certainly a necessity. Given that, advance collaborative planning would have clarified

- expectations and provided a framework for determining whether the alliance's mutual promises and obligations were being fulfilled. (On the other hand, note potential employer's sensitivities to prospective alliances; some were reassured while others were apprehensive when Project HOPE partnered with Labor Ministry.
- Align the number of job-bound trainees to the number of likely available job openings; be prepared to screen trainees for characteristics (e.g., a high school diploma) required by employees.
  - Follow up with participants after they have completed the program to help troubleshoot their employment obstacles until they have achieved some success; also, in order to learn what has and has not worked, for future program development.

This study was limited by the absence of sufficient documentation and data. The overall impression one is left with is that Project HOPE, despite having done some good in the communities it served, was unsuccessful at fulfilling most of its objectives related to providing sustainable employment opportunities to at-risk rural Salvadoran youth. The prospects for future successes for similar programs could be improved, given attention to the recommendations in this study.

In particular, future youth-oriented employment programs are encouraged to coordinate and cooperate with other agencies having similar or complementary goals; detailed long-term planning would be required in order to maintain the structure, focus, and integrity of the core program and to ensure that mutual promises and obligations are being kept. Someone needs to know at all times where funds are coming from and where and how they are being spent, no small task with a multiagency alliance. However, with the right management and coordination, the promise of joining forces and resources to achieve mutual ends is attractive.

Finally, without the kind of regional economic development that is beyond the scope of a cash-strapped youth employment program, a struggling endeavor such as Project HOPE simply exemplifies and magnifies the dilemma that brought it into being in the first place: Salvadoran youth in the poorest, mostly rural, regions of the country are at risk of involvement with gangs and violence in large part because they presently have few or no immediate, legitimate alternatives for a social and economic future.

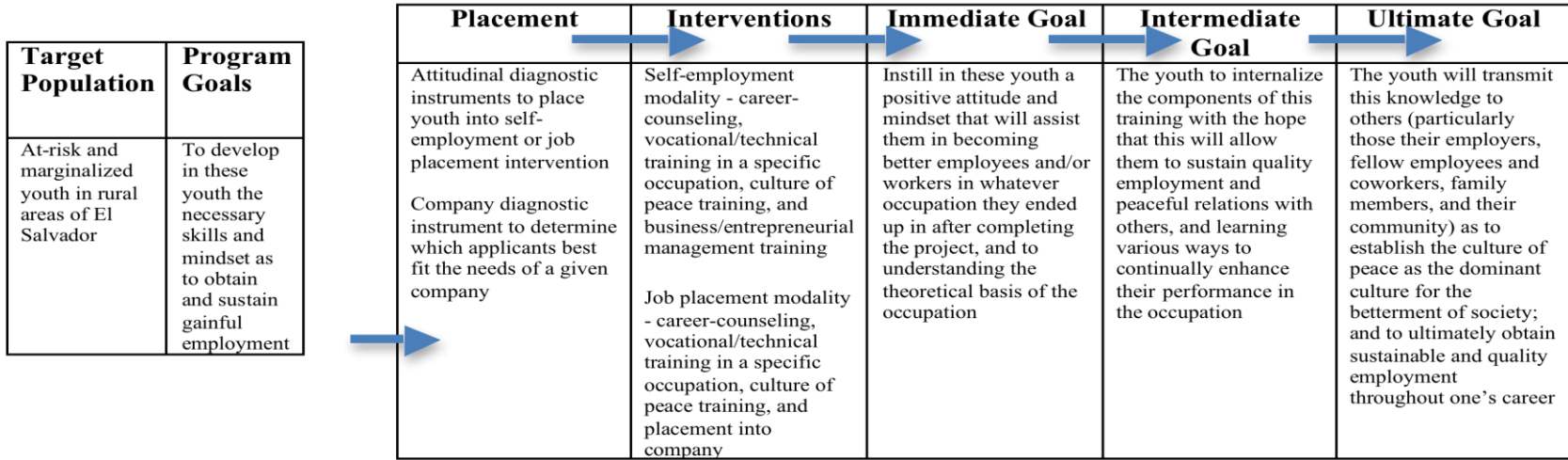


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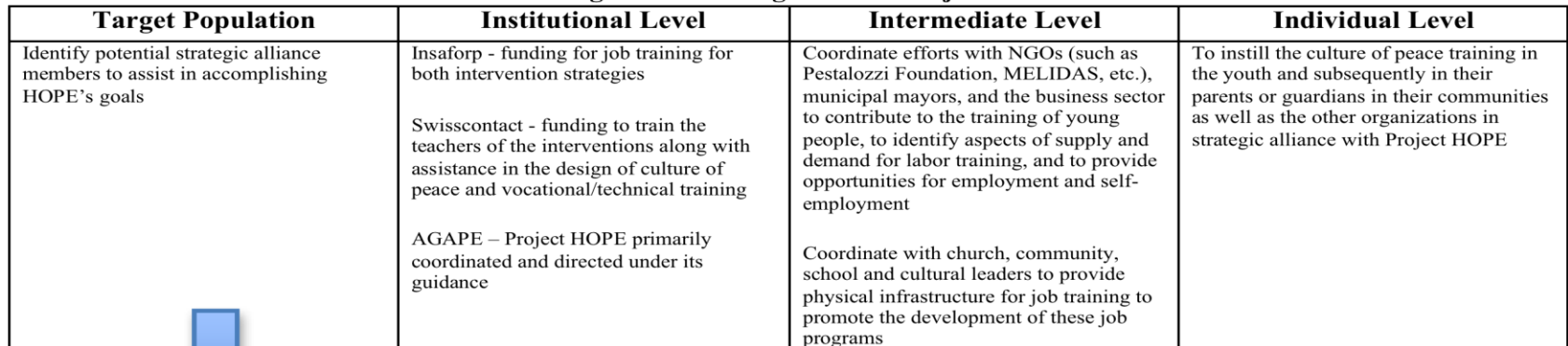
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### Appendix A. Logic Model - Project HOPE

#### Individual Level Logic Model Project HOPE



#### Strategic Alliance Logic Model Project HOPE



## **Section 7. Projóvenes II: Social Cohesion and Youth Participation as a Violence Prevention Model**

*Laurel Burgett*

The majority of programs studied for this report aim in various ways to directly improve opportunities for young El Salvadorans to obtain legitimate employment. In contrast, the Project of Social and Violence Prevention with Youth Participation, Projóvenes II, is a project that indirectly affects the employment prospects of its clients by targeting regions with high risk factors for juvenile delinquency and violence, and then mitigating those risk factors, particularly for those age 35 years and under. El Salvador's National Institute of Youth (INJUVE),<sup>1</sup> an organization responsible for the formulation, execution, management, and monitoring of projects aimed at assisting with the growth and development of Salvadoran youth and reducing violence among them, directs Projóvenes II.

According to INJUVE's *Conceptualization of a Social Model of Violence Prevention with Youth Participation*,<sup>2</sup> the El Salvador government's political agenda included the prevention of violence and addressed other topics relevant to youth within its National Policy on Justice. During his 2012 opening remarks to *Juventour*, an annual conference to promote youth, President Mauricio Funes stated, "The essence of the work we carry out through government is creating opportunities for Salvadoran youth." The focus on youth is a primary concern for the recovery of El Salvador's continuing state of social and economic distress. The effort to construct peaceful and inclusive communities is believed to be the foundation needed to provide for their material needs and the development of Salvadoran youth into productive members of society.

The *Project of Social and Violence Prevention with Youth Participation*, also known as

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<sup>1</sup> The organization was known as CONJUVE until 2012, when it was renamed INJUVE.

<sup>2</sup> W. Savenije and Maria Antonieta Beltran, *Conceptualization of a Social Model of Violence Prevention with Youth Participation* (San Salvador, El Salvador: Impresos Multiples S.A. de C.V., 2013).

Projóvenes II, is among several initiatives under INJUVE's direction. Projóvenes I, the first phase of the Projóvenes project, operated from 2003 to 2009, with funding from the European Union and the Republic of El Salvador. The European Union Head of Mission to El Salvador cited the results of Projóvenes I as promising and supported its continuation through a second phase, Projóvenes II, which is currently scheduled to end in 2015. The challenges encountered while implementing Projóvenes I resulted in 2012 in the establishment of the National Youth Institute (INJUVE) to lead the Projóvenes II project.

INJUVE's Prevention Model complements the framework of the General Youth Law and the National Youth Policy that guide state actions for the implementation of youth development public policy, plans, strategies, and programs.<sup>3</sup> The Prevention Model is organized around risk factors and dynamics of vulnerable communities that negatively affect youth at risk. The two most common social risk factors are unemployment and domestic violence. According to INJUVE, environmental factors that are detrimental to youth include dark areas, poor roads, lack of recreational space, dilapidated infrastructure, natural disasters, and the presence of bars. Activities developed to support the Projóvenes project's objectives are designed around each individual community's complex of interactive dynamics and symptoms. INJUVE relies on community management teams to plan activities that are relevant to their local environment needs. Their success depends heavily upon volunteers and participation. Such activities include workshops that enhance the physical environment, such as building and painting sports facilities. Other workshops might include arts and crafts, or training to improve opportunities for employment. INJUVE also supplies the guidance, resources, and transfer of knowledge needed to enable city leaders to assume responsibility for sustaining their communities.

Unfortunately, El Salvador has been well known as one of the most violent countries in the region in the aftermath of El Salvador's 12-year civil war. The prevalence of human rights violations and death squads operating with impunity is part of the institutional legacy that threatens Salvadorans today. The Peace Accords of 1992 marked the end of the war; however, violence and insecurity continue. Efforts to create a democratic institution have been unsuccessful, contributing further to the current high levels of violence. The war affected the country's governance systems, and El Salvador now suffers from political polarization, weak

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 60.

democratic institutions, and ineffective judicial systems. Meanwhile, the formation of street gangs has evolved as a consequence of social and economic destruction; those gangs have become the leading perpetrators of violence. Weak enforcement response on the part of judicial and law enforcement institutions has permitted the gangs to strengthen their authority among the population.<sup>4</sup>

According to the RESDAL Public Security Index, 45% of Salvadoran gang members are situated in San Salvador.<sup>5</sup> The presence of gangs is linked to issues of youth and public security. The Mara Salvatruche and Mara 18 factions, in particular, battle for control of Salvadoran neighborhoods and communities.<sup>6</sup> Typical crimes include extortion, muggings, highway assault, home invasion and auto theft. According to an April 25, 2014 travel advisory from the U.S. Department of State, Salvadoran police statistics at the time indicated a steady rise in homicide, as well, since August 2013. The National Civilian Police (PNC) cannot adequately address those crime issues with its limited training, resources, and overall response capabilities. The current conviction rate in El Salvador is 5%, demonstrating the lack of sufficient resources to investigate, prosecute, and deter violent crime.

The Projóvenes II project targets 14 municipalities, covering 78 communities in the Metropolitan San Salvador area. Much of the violence occurs in impoverished, densely populated cities. INJUVE's focus is on children and young people who live in those areas. Communities attempting to mitigate the conditions that support crime rely upon a prevention model used by cooperative partnerships among state government agencies, educational institutions, employers, the PNC, the Institute of Sports, and the Departments of Education and Transportation. INJUVE claims that the Projóvenes II project has enjoyed high levels of participation and continues to offer promise for violence intervention. The project has generated opportunities for labor training and employment mediation, and has contributed to much-needed personal, family, community, and municipal development to provide support and opportunities for youth at risk.

The current study focuses on phase two, Projóvenes II, as managed by INJUVE in San

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<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Brewer, Mark Jensen, Timothy Mayhle, Spring Miller, Maria Romero, and Molly Thomas-Jensen, *No Place to Hide: Gang, State, and Clandestine Violence in El Salvador*, manuscript (Harvard University, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> RESDAL, *Public Security Index Central America El Salvador* (last modified March 2013): <http://www.resdal.org/seguridad/assets/resdal-index-2013-el-salvador.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Brewer et al., *No Place to Hide*.

Salvador, El Salvador. To gather the information presented in this report, I reviewed program documents obtained from INJUVE staff, attended a presentation by INJUVE, and conducted group and individual interviews of stakeholders.

### **Program Description**

Projóvenes II is supported financially by the European Commission's Cooperation with El Salvador, which provided more than 14 million euros to the endeavor. An evaluation of that effort found that Projóvenes I had established an “insightful and valid alternative approach for youth delinquency through intervention that was later accompanied by a change in public policy.”<sup>7</sup> The updated focus for Projóvenes II youth included community action, citizen literature, local governments, regional government leadership, a more participatory violence model, restored spaces, and communal meeting places, as well as the external partners’ authority to supervise programs.

Projóvenes II serves at-risk individuals from birth to age 35, who live in 14 municipalities (counties) encompassing 78 at-risk communities in San Salvador. Criteria for qualifying communities as “at risk” were determined by government and local authorities; they routinely have high levels of violent incidents such as murder, aggravated assault, sexual assault, and robbery. The Prevention Model mentioned above concentrates on five core areas to guide community development that supports the project's objectives: sports and recreation, culture and arts, family and volunteerism, health and social environment, and education and labor formation (preparation for employment).

### ***INJUVE's Institutional Role***

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), among others, considers El Salvador one of the most violent countries in the world. Youth violence is recognized as one of the country's principal problems for deterioration of public security.<sup>8</sup> That issue has generated policies and laws that mandate National Youth Policy. INJUVE was established as the head of government programs that highlight specific social and economic rights for youth. Previous

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<sup>7</sup> ADE, "Evaluation of European Commission's Cooperation with El Salvador–Country-level Evaluation," Final Report (2010): <http://www.oecd.org/countries/elsalvador/46141753.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> RESDAL, *Public Security Index*.

repression policies were unsuccessful at resolving social violence issues, leading to the adoption of integration and prevention strategies focused on youth. The new policy shift moves toward consolidating policies that address the juvenile condition, replicating positive outcomes at a national level, as well as within the 14 municipalities and 78 communities involved in the Projóvenes II project.<sup>9</sup>

INJUVE's theoretical approach, adopted by the Social Model of Violence Prevention, is clarified as crime prevention, a way to protect public safety.<sup>10</sup> Crime theory has consistently identified as causal factors such conditions as lack of education, unemployment, poverty, social structure, peer pressure, and opportunity. The focus on youth at risk is a reasonable strategy; this promises to be a productive population within which to apply prevention and intervention strategies, which have potential for improving the social and economic environment in El Salvador. Projóvenes' Prevention Model is a comprehensive proposal for solving Salvadoran cultural problems and improving the lives of youth at risk, and El Salvador's youth are in a unique position to intervene in the local dynamics of their communities to help establish social cohesion and strengthen their sense of community, thereby reducing the propensity for violence.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Local Communities - Conditions and Requirements***

According to an INJUVE concept, "the social model of violence prevention is based on the notion that violence has social roots and they manifest largely in poor and excluded urban environments."<sup>12</sup> The municipalities targeted by Projóvenes II are poor and lacking in social services such as education, health, and social security. High levels of violence are concentrated in high-poverty areas; the relationship is believed to be a condition of social fragmentation and lack of collaboration among its members. The risk factors of unemployment and domestic violence provide an environment of continuing social and economic dysfunction. The lack of strong family bonds, due in part to single parent homes and absent working parents, provides opportunities for youth to form gangs to share a social identity, interacting with each other through criminal behavior. Gang members establish territorial control in their neighborhoods

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<sup>9</sup>ADE, "Evaluation."

<sup>10</sup> Savenije and Beltran, *Conceptualization of a Social Model*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

using extortion, violence and threats.

Projóvenes II seeks to promote social cohesion and to mitigate risk factors for juvenile delinquency in local communities. Social cohesion develops when residents are engaging with one another for the betterment of their community and are included as members of the wider society. Because of local participants' connection to the community, their roles within the Projóvenes process are valuable in generating social cohesion. The municipal mayors have pledged their support and promote the activities organized in their communities. Their commitment includes methods for local prevention and intervention techniques and a supportive infrastructure.

INJUVE recognizes that municipal governments are the institutions that best understand local needs and expectations, and that have the authority to allow security-related measures needed to implement programs. The Prevention Model requires the involvement and institutional strengthening of the 14 municipal governments as needed to meet the results described by the European Union. An INJUVE employee described the institution's responsibility as to teach communities how to succeed, then to let the community make decisions and take action.

Projóvenes II uses the Prevention Model to guide communities toward social cohesion by implementing specific activities designed by those municipalities. During an interview, INJUVE managing staff members presented a PowerPoint summary of the project's goals, efforts, and initiatives that they deemed successful. During the presentation, they related that they monitored activities through reports that had been filed by target communities and accepted by the Mayors' Council. The Mayors' Council is comprised of the mayors of all 14 municipalities (counties) involved in Projóvenes II. Those reports document numbers of participants and types and locations of workshops. The INJUVE employees described the oversight and training process, emphasizing that the goal is to transfer knowledge to communities while leaving them responsible for the implementation of violence-prevention initiatives. When asked how they measured outcomes, the employees stated that it was difficult to quantify social cohesion, and they relied on the perceptions of each community's members to gauge success. They compiled data from communities on activities for each community, number of workshops, number of participants, completion rates, and community feedback. One staff member reported, for example, a better than 90% completion rate for workshops.

Workshops varied as to scope and timeframe. INJUVE staff gave examples of art and



culture workshops such as painting, acting, and singing. Some of those workshops were classified as entrepreneurial opportunities for self-employment, since the San Salvador culture has a market for street vendors and performers. Youth are particularly interested in performance art, such as posing as human statues; street performers receive payment from their audiences. Other workshops covered topics such as education, entrepreneurship, scholarship programs, and family strengthening. Most of these were viewed, directly or indirectly, as expanding options for employment and education, and producing the social cohesion missing from the lives of at-risk youth.

The INJUVE employees said that each community decides its own initiatives; as mentioned above, they consider the communities to be the best informed about local priorities. Equally important, this helps to establish responsibility and investment in community growth by the community participants and volunteers. The staff explained that the authority for spending funds is determined by the mayor representing each municipal government. INJUVE collects and creates a summary report of the data based on information from the community and provides it to the Mayoral Council.<sup>13</sup>

Communities are expected to lead and implement local initiatives and crime prevention strategies. Volunteers exchange their time and effort for an enhanced community and valuable training and experience in community service and work that may be applicable to future job opportunities. Focus group members were unanimous in reporting volunteer experiences resulting in growth and development that they perceived as a step toward uplifting community spirit. As an example, they identified workshops during which they had built a basketball court and soccer field as having been significant for their youth, giving them a place to play safely; being involved in sports occupied their time constructively and provided an alternative to gangs for youth from different communities to interact. An INJUVE team leader facilitates such workshops, providing materials and recruiting community volunteers.

The staff and volunteers who further training and education are a promising catalyst for engaging community action and the concept of social cohesion discussed in the interviews. Those individuals have a greater understanding of the issues that are unique to their communities and presumably are better equipped to develop strategies that provide hope and opportunities for

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<sup>13</sup> A request for documents was submitted, but those had not been received by the completion of this study.

their youth. The number of program participants is an important outcome for assessment. Therefore, marketing the program to increase awareness, support and participation is important.

Unemployment due to lack of job opportunities is identified as a major risk factor for vulnerable youth. The Projóvenes project creates unique training opportunities for its staff and volunteers, while encouraging social activity. Community technicians, volunteers and youth facilitators belong to the community they serve. They are in a position to identify factors and situations that put youth at risk and to conduct outreach efforts to intervene and encourage participation. The technicians receive training to organize activities in the Prevention Model: sports, health and environment, arts and culture, and family. Their knowledge of the community includes knowing the people with influence, such as church leaders or gang members. They are trained to promote and organize social activities seeking the support of other residents. They are selected to receive training through scholarships provided by INJUVE in specific areas such as painting, martial arts, or organized sports, then put this into practice in their communities.

Youth facilitators are chosen from volunteers who have demonstrated cooperation with the Prevention Model and have experience in community work. They are recognized as social entrepreneurs and receive theoretical training for violence prevention and in areas such as holistic health, work orientation, life skills, sexual and reproductive health and drug use and prevention. Within their model, INJUVE provides technical support and training to guide the communities' efforts through territorial coordinators, community technicians and youth facilitator scholarships. The process is designed to train and transfer responsibility for social prevention and violence to the municipality, local organizations and volunteers.<sup>14</sup>

One of the more insurmountable issues facing youth at risk is the social and employer prejudice that attaches to those from certain communities that are known to be dominated by gangs (see also sections 3 and 6). During interviews with INJUVE employees and participants, those stakeholders expressed the belief that such discrimination was widespread. Rightly or wrongly, employers may fear infiltration and intimidation from gangs when hiring employees from those areas. Program initiatives that mention gangs or violence in their descriptions may even serve to reinforce the perception of violence associated with participating communities, an unintended consequence of violence prevention programs that might be counterproductive to

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<sup>14</sup> Savenije and Beltran, *Conceptualization of a Social Model*, 12.

their objectives.

### **Effectiveness**

According to the Delegation of the European Union in El Salvador, the general objective of Projóvenes II is to promote social cohesion and mitigate risk factors for violence and juvenile delinquency in El Salvador. The intention is to strengthen the capacities for rehabilitation and prevention of violence in 14 municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador. The project is a multi-institutional effort to consolidate the processes initiated by Projóvenes I (2003-2009). The following, quoted directly from Union Europa website,<sup>15</sup> are the four results sought as Projóvenes II launched:

- Strengthening public institutions with jurisdiction in violence prevention and rehabilitation of persons in conflict with the law. This is to be achieved through promotion of conditions for interagency coordination, improved quality of services, support for municipal councils for violence prevention, monitoring of agreements, and technical assistance to support the inclusion of the needs of youth at all levels of the political agenda.
- Supporting the integration of risk groups in the life of the community. The intent is to improve conditions for different risk groups, to provide resources and opportunities for them to actively participate in the prevention of violence and crime in their communities and municipalities.
- Provide economic opportunities for youth and their families. The project will create opportunities for job training and intermediation for employment, and will provide technical support for establishing companies that can especially help at-risk youth, the family, community and municipal development.
- Recovery of physical/environmental conditions of the communities. This involves the development of activities that attempt to change habits and cultural patterns that hinder healthy physical environments, as well as the construction, maintenance and preparation of public areas to transform them into areas for civic coexistence.

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<sup>15</sup> Projóvenes II. *Social Violence Prevention with Youth Involvement in El Salvador*. (n.d.): [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/el\\_salvador/eu\\_el\\_salvador/tech\\_financial\\_cooperation/social\\_cohesion/projovenes/index\\_es.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/el_salvador/eu_el_salvador/tech_financial_cooperation/social_cohesion/projovenes/index_es.htm).

Projóvenes II uses the prevention model to guide participating communities toward the goal of social cohesion, helping them to implement activities that they have chosen, using community volunteers. INJUVE has a staff of 148 employees, 50 of whom work as coordinators within the communities. The program provides (and teaches community members) project coordination and technical and troubleshooting skills. The efforts of the INJUVE staff and community volunteers are augmented where needed by some 100 additional volunteers from the National Youth Volunteer Network. The objective is to offer training, support, and experience, gradually transferring those skills and the responsibility for prioritizing, carrying out, and maintaining the projects to the communities. Examples of workshops selected by the communities included arts and cultural activities, some of which were considered to have entrepreneurial value in areas where street performance was a way to make a modest living.

Spending authority is given to the council of 14 mayors who represent the municipalities within which the program operates. INJUVE monitors progress in each municipality by reviewing and compiling self-report data on numbers of workshops, number of participants, completion rates (which one staff member reported as typically being 90%), and community member feedback. Interviewees acknowledged that it is hard to measure social cohesion. These data are reported back to the Mayors' Council.

### ***European Commission's Final Evaluation Report (Projóvenes I & II)***

In the Final Evaluation Report prepared by the European Commission on the cooperative agreement with El Salvador (2010), evaluators found that Projóvenes stakeholders considered its projects relevant to the problems they were intended to address. The Commission's approval of the violence reduction policies and strategies in particular made those elements important to carry forward into the second phase. The report established that Projóvenes I was an interesting case of an intervention that initially contrasted with the repressive government policy toward juvenile delinquency then in effect. Projóvenes' strategy was based on prevention, rehabilitation, and integration. Repressive policies had been openly criticized by the United Nations and ultimately were deemed in El Salvador to be anti-constitutional. In 2005, the Salvadoran government proposed to emphasize prevention and an integrated approach to intervention strategies. Some attributed that public policy change to success of prevention-based Projóvenes

I.<sup>16</sup> Overall, based on the achievements of Projóvenes I, the program proved to be an effective model for violence prevention.<sup>17</sup> Since that time, the program appears to be continuing to improve and evolve in accord with individual community issues, establishing initiatives that reduce risk factors for youth by promoting social bonds, family, self-esteem, and education. The objective of social cohesion is in line with many existing crime theories that focus on juvenile crime prevention while improving opportunities for employment and social equality. The Projóvenes model has evolved since its implementation in 2002, and all sources examined for this study indicates that it will continue to be effective in the current environment as a violence-reduction strategy. Its impacts on employability and job placement, however, are indirect and less clear.

### *Projóvenes II Site Visit*

An assessment of a target Projóvenes II community was conducted through a site visit and group interview (focus group) in an impoverished San Salvador community. The location had a high number of gang members and a reputation for violence. The community had been involved with INJUVE for two years, engaging in several workshops. During my visit, a workshop to provide space to play sports was in progress. Volunteers were building a soccer field that would be used by more than 200 youth making up 40 teams, and a large number of youths already were eager to play on the teams. INJUVE had hired a contractor to assist with the project and community volunteers were supplementing paid construction workers.

Overall, interviewees at the site were highly supportive of INJUVE and the motivation for their involvement in the community. Among the interviewees were youth participants who had won scholarships to attend college and to receive labor training. The scholarship winners would have had no other means of continuing their educations, and were clearly appreciative of the program's generosity and of the personal growth and learning achieved. They embodied the community's newly found social cohesion, expressing the desire to give back to their community by teaching and mentoring others; one had earned a college degree, yet wanted to remain in the community and teach. Another was able to obtain employment because of the labor training received and currently remained in the community, supporting a spouse and child. The money

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<sup>16</sup> ADE, *Final Report*, 67.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

provided by the grant scholarships was significantly greater than any funding that either could have earned on his or her own, the average income for the area being approximately \$35 a week.

The interviewees reported that the social cohesion-violence prevention objectives of Projóvenes II were met through education, sports and recreation, and community celebrations that promoted social bonds. The activity deterred violence by providing entertainment, motivation through competition, and a place to play sports. The communal center provided a gathering area for neighbors to meet to celebrate birthdays, holidays, and sports games.

### ***Projóvenes' Impact on Violence Reduction***

Local workshops and celebratory gatherings fostered an atmosphere of community and safety, but they were subject to the violence inflicted by gangs. Gang members are often considered an authoritarian presence, and the neighborhood negotiates with them to allow activities to take place. This has been a challenge for coordinators, who sometimes have to stop working due to gang intimidation, but the situation has improved somewhat through communication and negotiations with gang members. Interviewees who had children were particularly appreciative of the value of having non-gang alternatives for their children safe and positive environments for them to play.

Projóvenes tackles the problem of juvenile delinquency and violence. The foundation for its prevention model has its roots in social theory; the belief is that prevention and intervention practices within the community will develop social cohesion and the communal support needed to reduce and eradicate violence. The European Commission viewed the prevention model as a pioneering approach for juvenile delinquency strategies that was resulting in a decrease in juvenile delinquency in intervention areas.

The European Commission did establish that there had been a reduction of violence and juvenile delinquency in one program during the timeframe for Projóvenes I, stating:

Projóvenes I proposed an integrated approach based on prevention and improvement of opportunities for young people. It covered 13 municipalities (1,537,171 inhabitants) and 57 communities (179,949 inhabitants or 38,225 families). There were 70,915 young people aged between 10 and 25 as direct beneficiaries according to the project's final report (compared with 50,000 envisaged in the financing agreement). Its action is being pursued by the follow-

up program, Projóvenes II.<sup>18</sup>

The project's final technical report provided a summary of achievements from 2003 to 2006: that is, a 25.2% reduction in the number of cases opened at Juvenile Courts, a 23.7% reduction in the number of detentions of minors carried out by the National Police, and a 70% reduction in child abuse and family violence reports.<sup>19</sup>

The authority of gangs within communities is a safety and security issue that continues to challenge Projóvenes II. Gangs have confronted volunteers and staff. In one incident, gang members suspected program coordinators of being informants simply because of their contact with government officials. INJUVE staff saw such challenges as a need to establish better communication between government authorities, police, and the community to promote trust. A local media news outlet also reported that between September 2010 and February 2011, 14 Projóvenes II volunteers had been killed by gang members who were working in their territories.<sup>20</sup> Critics suggested that a weakness of the program was the lack of security to protect volunteers as they worked in the target communities, and that data were insufficient to determine whether Projóvenes was effectively influencing crime.

### ***Projóvenes' Impact on Youth Access to Employment***

Asked how the program might improve, interviewees requested more training and support aimed at generating income and employment opportunities. They believed that the community was working together to improve their environment—they had learned how to fix the physical environment and to be self-sustaining in that area—they now saw the need for outreach to improve employment opportunities with local companies. They recognized that positions for their children to attend schools were scarce, and that companies would not hire the youths because they lacked education and experience, and the few available jobs were highly competitive. They were certain that if they could get help training their youth, the employment potential would increase. The two priorities for this community were typical: Their children

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> ADE, *Final Report*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> David Marroquin, "14 Teenagers Murdered during Projóvenes II Program," *Fusades* (August 23, 2013): [http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota\\_completa.asp?idCat=6342&idArt=6121553](http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota_completa.asp?idCat=6342&idArt=6121553).

needed community activities to constructively occupy their time, and they needed help breaking through the barriers to employment, including those barriers associated with the stigma of living in at-risk gang-connected communities.

Interviewees described their community as violent, poor, and overrun by gangs, yet they were mistrustful of the local police. They knew that their youth were discriminated against simply because they lived in that area. An emotional discussion took place about how this discrimination affected the ability to be hired, regardless of having completed training workshops and having other qualifications that suited them for employment. They blamed the negative reputation of all residents on local authorities, including police. One remarked that it was “a crime to be young” in their community, describing incidents of police abuse toward youth from the community who were not involved in criminal activity. The sensitivity to issues of prejudice, distrust, suspicion, and lack of communication with police authorities found in INJUVE documents were confirmed by this discussion, and there was little doubt that qualified or not, youth from this community would have trouble finding jobs without assistance in overcoming cultural barriers, as well.

### **Replication**

According to INJUVE, the Projóvenes project has become an international model for at-risk youth development projects. The European Union, a major funding source for Projóvenes, is an international foundation geared toward volunteerism and projects that expand youth opportunities, such that a network for sharing youth projects and model programs is readily accessible. The long-term implementation of Projóvenes provides a vast array of experience and social diversity to draw upon and learn from. As a government institution, INJUVE has an abundance of resource materials that can be analyzed for replication purposes. The broad context of social cohesion through youth participation is a theory for crime intervention in which the most successful outcome is believed to be prevention. It may be difficult to effectively monitor socially applied initiatives, but promoting values, self-esteem, education, inclusion, and social bonds for youth is a globally accepted ideology.

The Projóvenes model in its first phase began in 2003 and lasted for more than six years. Projóvenes II began in 2009, incorporating lessons learned from Projóvenes I, and is currently scheduled to end in 2015. According to INJUVE, Projóvenes II increased program support to



serve more than 100,000 youth in the target region and increased its maximum participation age from age 25 to age 35 years. Development of employment opportunities became a greater focus, addressing an issue that is likely to become an increasingly relevant in El Salvador for some time to come; communities considering replicating the Projóvenes model locally might give special attention to prioritizing employment support.

Projóvenes II might be one of the better options for replication in locales with gang problems; the program model is based on long-term strategies that aim to reduce violence predominantly linked to gangs. Increasingly, Projóvenes is contributing to a youth and community environment that could be expected to mitigate that problem. The founding of INJUVE was a management evolution that supported continued progress toward that Projóvenes goal. Recent INJUVE leadership has had the benefit of lessons learned from both Projóvenes models, enabling them to continue improving. Evidence of Projóvenes' success may not yet be available in the form of official data, but it is captured to a certain degree through community reports of initiatives, numbers and activities of participants, and the collective experiences of the individuals involved.

The interviewees we spoke with during our site visit acknowledged that funding for the project in their community, and in any community in which it might be replicated, would be an ongoing issue for Projóvenes II and INJUVE. They provided examples of in-kind resources they had been given, such as paint, sports equipment, and the community center. They requested continued funding because they believed the program was offering positive solutions to improve opportunities and quality of life for their youth. They have increased the activity of their community members as volunteers and youth participants. That activity has generated community involvement, pride, and hope for their local environment.

Communities are likely to be attracted to the Projóvenes II model because of INJUVE recognition that local residents can best prioritize and manage local needs. To be effective when transplanted, a program must be newly sensitive and relevant to improving the social and economic environments *specific to those areas*. Projóvenes' Prevention Model has that kind of flexibility.

As mentioned above, Projóvenes is tied to public security associated with youth vulnerable to violence and gangs. Universally, gangs are engaged in criminal activity and recruiting members from at-risk environments. The street gang phenomenon in El Salvador has

succeeded somewhat in inhibiting youth participation in Projóvenes II in the 14 municipalities it serves. Gang dominance has been undeterred by ineffectual policing strategies, and it continues to be a public security concern. To protect youth participants, volunteers, and staff who work predominantly in high-violence areas occupied by gangs, far better law enforcement strategies are needed, but those strategies require careful consideration due to the complex relationships between gangs, communities, and police. In areas contemplating replication of Projóvenes, such strategies will require partnerships among the relevant actors within each community.

INJUVE has gained some experience and insight into developing responses to gang violence perpetrated against youth participants in Projóvenes projects. INJUVE has tried negotiating directly with gang members to reduce the number of such incidents—a dangerous strategy to rely upon, perhaps, but it has been proven to work when initiated by other community members. This illustrates the kinds of dangers that the Prevention Model is aimed at reducing. Currently, police simply are neither trusted nor capable of offering a solution.

Social and economic factors associated with other communities are likely to be different than those found in San Salvador. Wherever the Projóvenes prevention model might be under consideration for replication, it would be necessary to examine closely the social conditions that undermine youth opportunities in order to develop effective goals, strategies, and outcome measures. Social inequality in El Salvador is an obstacle for employment and education opportunities. INJUVE has the benefit of funding sources to support both Projóvenes projects, but it was still essential to competently communicate project details, monitor initiatives, and capture data to illustrate progress in order to obtain continued funding. The Projóvenes II budget was more than 14 million euros (USD\$16.4 million), provided by the European Commission and the Republic of El Salvador. To replicate this project would require similar funding, government support, and the ability to monitor and report program outcomes accurately and effectively.

No independent final evaluation of the project has been conducted to date, and little objective information is available for verifying those data or attributing outcomes directly to Projóvenes. The question posed for the examination of the program's local impact was whether it had potential for replication and expansion. The final official program evaluation concluded that although that potential had not yet been realized, Projóvenes' influence on changing the direction

of public policy to fight violence was highly significant.<sup>21</sup>

Vocational training, access to employment, and support of self-employment were identified as areas in need of improvement as Projóvenes II was unveiled. At the time of this study, very little objective information was available on other monitoring and evaluations of the Projóvenes II programs; however, our analysis of the documents, interviews, and research available suggested that it is an effective model for violence prevention and intervention strategies. The depth of violence in El Salvador is well established and acknowledged by the nation's government. In addition, the government focus on youth at risk through lawful mandates and the creation of institutions like INJUVE to plan and implement youth strategies is indicative of the government's priorities, and the support of government-external organization partnerships is a critical for long-term sustainability. The available data suggested a reduction in violence due to Projóvenes initiatives. There is potential to replicate those outcomes at a national level. The measure of success is difficult to quantify, but the interviews conducted suggested a common theme of positive outcomes and synergy that is necessary to create social cohesion as an element for recovering social and economic opportunities for the youth in El Salvador.

### **Sustainability**

Stabilization requires continued funding, engaged external partners, and volunteers. The damage caused by violence and gangs in the community is significant and not easily repaired. INJUVE staff provided recommendations to improve strategies through "lessons learned." They talked about wanting to include youth in communities that were not at risk as well as those with risk. They believed that advancement of youth opportunities would be furthered by the inclusion of all youth to improve relationships and to extend the program's impact. They believed that INJUVE's position as an advocate for youth should be separated from outside political influence. As the voice of youth, INJUVE would work to improve their status, to better understand youth issues, and to create proactive solutions on their behalf. An example of the type of issue they wanted to address is the prevalent mistrust between youth and the police. INJUVE could credibly defend the identity and adverse stereotypes of young people. The marked presence of gangs is another dominant issue that inhibits their access to areas to complete their work. INJUVE can act as a negotiator to communicate with the gangs. Finally, they realized, the eradication of gangs

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

from the community would be a holistic solution that could significantly improve the liberties of the youth. An integrated approach would be needed. INJUVE would like to invest and generate opportunities to confront this issue. The interviewees acknowledged that a complete solution is not likely to be achieved in the next five years, but the problem should be openly discussed among citizens, church, and government institutions with the objective of deflecting the gangs' authority and penetration in communities.

Projóvenes is an evolving long-term initiative. The sustainability of this ambitious project would require an ongoing constant stream of resources, including funding, government support, and staffing. The priority given to Projóvenes through National Youth Laws and the National Institute of Youth (INJUVE) suggests stability. The ultimate goal for Projóvenes is to promote social cohesion and mitigate risk factors for violence and juvenile delinquency in El Salvador. The second phase of the Projóvenes project offers us some insight into the requirements for sustainability. Projóvenes I funding was more than 11 million euro (\$12.8 million) over a period of six years. Projóvenes II funding is over 14 million euro (\$16.4 million), also for a period of six years, due to end in 2015. The success of Projóvenes is evidenced by increased participation in community activity. Projóvenes II continued the emphasis on increasing local volunteer participation. More resources would be needed to keep up with the momentum of growth expected if the project were to continue.

INJUVE staff had been told that they would receive funding to continue Projóvenes for a third phase after its 2015 conclusion, but they did not know the funding source. They do believe that their model is highly regarded by the European Union and their own government. The support of external partners and the government is critical for long-term financial and policy continuity. If the continuation of the program becomes a reality, the Projóvenes II staff expects to continue to offer improvements and updated initiatives to remain relevant to the current social and economic environment.

### **Conclusion**

The level of violence in El Salvador is a cultural reality attributed to the aftermath of its 12-year-long civil war. The environment of El Salvador continues to be affected both socially and economically. Although the Republic of El Salvador, in cooperation with the European Union, has implemented strategies to improve conditions, much more work is still to be done.

The Salvadoran government has focused on increasing opportunities for youth as an effective means to create positive change. Communities have made progress through the Projóvenes Project, implemented as a result of the National Youth Policy and managed by the National Youth Institute known as INJUVE. Projóvenes emphasizes a social model of violence prevention with youth participation. The aim of the model, according to INJUVE, is to promote social cohesion and mitigate risk factors of violence and juvenile delinquency in El Salvador.<sup>22</sup> At the time of this study, Projóvenes, which began in 2003, has continued through two project phases over the past 12 years. Long-term vision, focus and reliable funding are required to accomplish the outcomes established by the European Union and Republic of El Salvador.

The project continues to work toward improving social cohesion as a means of deterring violence among youth. Feedback from those directly involved is a significant source of information about whether that outcome is being achieved through the project's initiatives. A more comprehensive method for monitoring and evaluating program results, however, will be needed to more effectively measure and communicate those outcomes. Such evaluation data would be useful for monitoring, analyzing, and improving the program for future applications, as well as for justifying continued investment of resources.<sup>23</sup>

The best currently available source of information for evaluating this program resided within the communities' own assessments of improvements in their residents' quality of life. There was some criticism that external partners should become more visible in the discussion and solutions for their specific localities. The Projóvenes project relies on the transfer of knowledge to members of at-risk communities, who then come together in applying that knowledge, a process that should help establish local social cohesion. Overall, however, the interviews conducted for this evaluation clearly supported the communities' need for intervention programs designed for their youth at all ages. One remaining unsolved problem is the impact of the prevalence of gangs in the participating communities; this will continue to be a challenge for violence prevention, public security, and participation in community activities where gangs are located. Many interviewees believed that security strategies should be adopted so that residents will continue to volunteer to work on initiatives that contribute to social

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<sup>22</sup> Savenije and Beltran, *Conceptualization of a Social Model*.

<sup>23</sup> According to the CRE *Final Report*, CRS to USAID (June 30, 2014, 43), average annual cost per participant for programming was \$2,353.

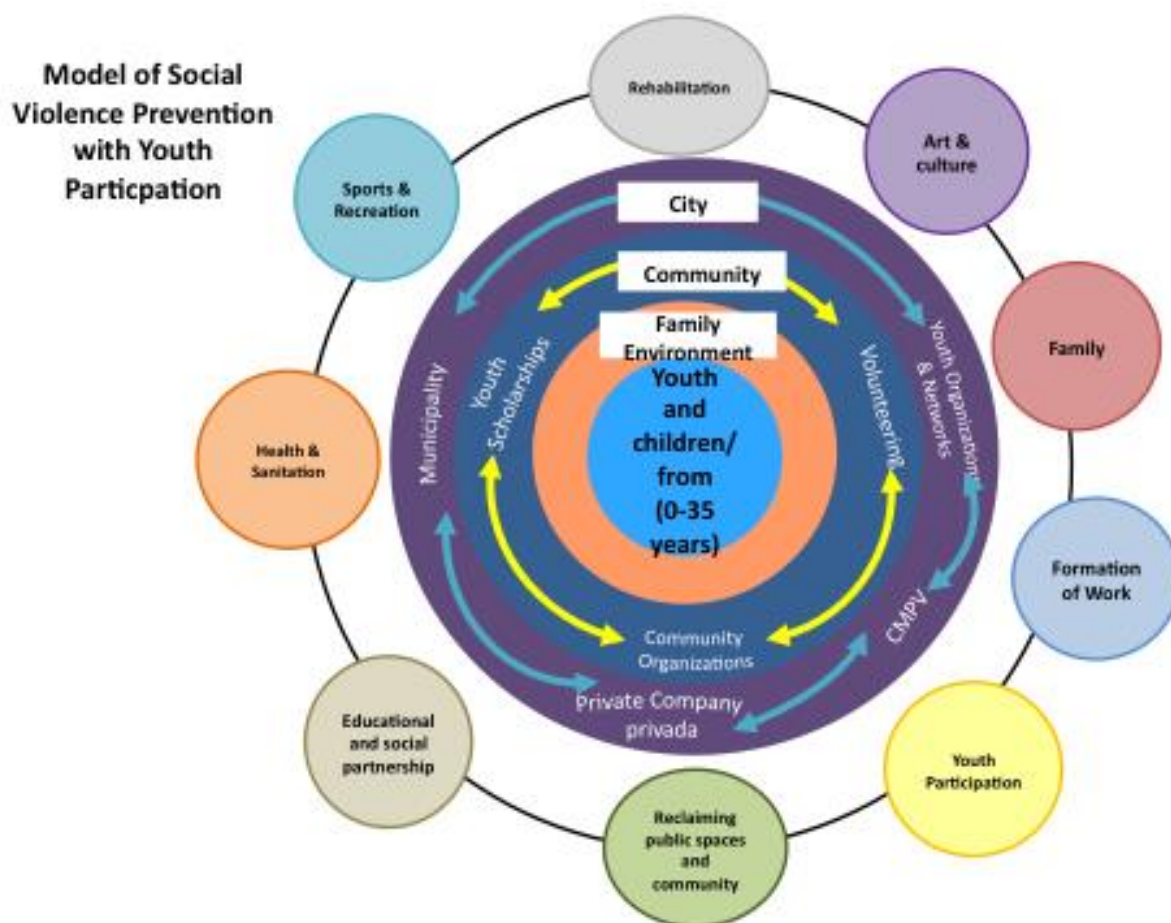
cohesion. Additionally, the stigma of gang-related violence associated with specific areas is a barrier for employment and a source of social prejudice among those outside these communities. INJUVE recognizes that it should take the lead in strengthening external partnerships and speaking on behalf of youth rights to improve communication in order to make progress towards resolving such problems; the conversation needs to include employers, law enforcement and community members.

Projóvenes II has considered itself to be in the business of fostering an environment and social context that ultimately will support more employment opportunities for youth, rather than being a direct employment services program. The stakeholders we interviewed were in agreement, however, that their youth of a certain age needed more opportunities to generate income now. Projóvenes II has responded by offering workshops to help improve education self-employment and job placement, to the extent possible. The stigma of violence and the reputation associated with impoverished and gang-ridden communities has been difficult for those youth who live in those communities to overcome. A greater effort to advocate for those who have demonstrated high values and skills with employers is a step forward in this process. INJUVE staff also recommended that the organization separate itself from political interests so that it could have a stronger voice with which to represent youth rights. It is this developing commitment to working more directly to resolve problems that inhibit the employment of even trained and well-qualified youth from troubled communities is what earns Projóvenes II a place among the employment programs studied for this report.

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*Appendix A. Model of Social Violence Prevention with Youth Participation*





## **Section 8. Project Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Employment Generation**

*Rafael Artiga Gudiel*

*The Sustainable Communities Project: Entrepreneurship and Employment Generation* began as the initiative of a single leader from the business sector.<sup>1</sup> The 2010 completion of the construction of the Torre Futura located in Colonia Escalon offered business opportunities and challenges that stimulated his thinking and eventually led to the initiation of this project. He was convinced that the completion of the Torre Futura would boost economic activities in the area and that those opportunities could be identified and addressed. He was also aware of the significant challenges related to the territorial-commercial system, traffic, the area's appearance, and the need to ensure a safe environment.

Security issues in particular would be complicated. According to the security office of the City Hall of San Salvador in December 2012, the security levels of eight of the area's communities—Cristo Redentor, San Diego, la Pedrera, Nueva Esperanza, Nuñez Arrue, Las Lajas Oriente, Corazon de Maria, and El Prado—were classified by the Civil National Police (CNP) as "red code, highly dangerous" due to the presence of the gangs MS and 18, which resulted in increased murder statistics, the sale and consumption of drugs, and gang controlled housing. Two communities, Cecilio del Valle and El Carmen, were classified as "yellow code;" gangs in those locations had been dismantled by the army, but the sector still experienced high rates of extortion and the sale and consumption of drugs. Seven other communities at that time did not present major problems<sup>2</sup> and were classified as "green code:" San Valle de Oro 1 and 2, 12 de Octubre, Rosalinda, Lajas Poniente, San Pablo, and La Paz.

Another difficult situation would also require alternative solutions: the Centro Escolar

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<sup>1</sup> This individual served as Chairman of the Board, AGRISAL Group; Chairman of the Board, Fundación Empresarial para la Accion Social (FUNDEMAS); and Secretary of the Board, Fundación La Escalon.

<sup>2</sup> AGRISAL Group, Descriptive Document of the Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Job Creation.

Concha viuda de Escalon was losing students before they graduated. Nearly 400 students had dropped out over three years, lowering the school's enrollment from 1,700 to 1,300 students. Without prospects of completing high school, students from seven other area schools also were giving up their formal education. Lack of education would affect their chances for employment, potentially making them vulnerable to becoming gang members.<sup>3</sup>

An inclusive project design was needed, one that would become an agent of change for the communities in which it was implemented and that would take into account the ideas and abilities of the group of entrepreneurs, national and international institutions of education, and residents of Colonia Escalon (who later formed the Asociación La Escalon) who would influence the general development of the area's communities.<sup>4</sup> That would assure the relevance of the project, as it responded to the concrete and specific needs of various segments of the population that occupied their distinct geographical areas.

Three agencies became involved in giving life to the Sustainable Communities Project, AGRISAL, the Asociación La Escalon, and FUNDEMAS, each fulfilling a specific and complementary role. Their contributions in terms of experience and knowledge were critical to the success of the project design, its fluid and inclusive implementation, and its generation of results and impacts. To that end, one stakeholder explained, there were no written agreements between the agencies; everything was accomplished by discussion and oral agreement, which was highly effective. With other strategic partners, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), written agreements were signed.<sup>5</sup>

The AGRISAL Group is one of El Salvador's business conglomerates. It began operations in 1953 and now manages several major industry projects, shopping centers, and automotive and corporate centers, with operations in Central America and (more recently) South America. Its flagship project is the World Trade Center San Salvador, the most important corporate complex in the country. AGRISAL has been the main developer of design and project positioning, and the one that managed the first project funds and invited companies located in the area of Colonia Escalon to be part of the Asociación La Escalon, in order to generate a more favorable environment for the project's development.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with stakeholder.

<sup>4</sup> AGRISAL Group, *Descriptive Document of the Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Job Creation*.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with stakeholder.

FUNDEMAS is a nonprofit organization that was born on May 25, 2000 from a group of businessmen who saw the need to establish an organization dedicated to promoting the adoption of values, policies, and practices of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Salvadoran business sector, to achieve business competitiveness and sustainable economic and social development in El Salvador.<sup>6</sup> FUNDEMAS already had a suitable methodology for the development of the project, so it became a strategic ally and was primarily responsible for the execution of project activities for five years.

Asociación La Escalon is a group of residents, businesses, educational institutions, trade associations, cooperatives and professionals, incorporated on March 30, 2011 with financial support from USAID and management support from other companies of the AGRISAL Group, allowing the association to expand and consequently to invest in the area. The association places a strong emphasis on ensuring sustainable development in and surrounding the area of Colonia Escalon. Its objective is to make the area into a neat, attractive, safe, inclusive place, capable of representing a new model of urban quality of life, all of which is in complete harmony with the objectives of Project Sustainable Communities.<sup>7</sup>

The association's creation coincided with the start of Project Sustainable Communities, and one of its primary purposes has been to follow up that project. The project is embedded in the association's strategic plan, which is oriented towards four actionable measures: (1) improve social inclusion in area communities, (2) improve area safety, (3) improve traffic flow in the area, (4) and renew the urban image of the area to attract and maintain activity. Asociación La Escalon reportedly has a membership of 23 large companies. Initially, it also received support from organizations such as the nearby Fundación Meza Ayau. Further financial resources were received from USAID and the Fund for Educational Development Initiatives of El Salvador (FIDES), administered by FUNDEMAS.

FUNDEMAS is an organization that has developed methods for enabling development project participants, both owners and workers, to acquire practical tools and entrepreneurial skills to improve income. The organization began with challenges to economic development, originally identified in 2010, and the strategic vision to generate entrepreneurship through empowerment for work, to create new self-employment opportunities, and to strengthen existing micro-

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.fundemas.org/quienes-somos/que-es-fundemas>.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.laescalon.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=8&Itemid=111](http://www.laescalon.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=8&Itemid=111).

businesses. The project was born not as an approach to violence prevention, but with a focus on job creation; therefore, according to a stakeholder, the initial support of USAID was for economic growth and not for violence prevention, public safety, or promotion of peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. To achieve its institutional objectives, since the year 2000, FUNDEMAS has been presenting EMPRETEC workshops. According to a project stakeholder, EMPRETECH, a pioneering program of the United Nations, was established as an international franchise and now has a presence in more than 30 countries. It was created with the aim of helping small and medium-sized entrepreneurships to put ideas into action, as well as to develop and strengthen their businesses.<sup>8</sup>

Project Sustainable Communities initially was focused on developing area entrepreneurships and businesses, according to one stakeholder. That project element was organized by FUNDEMAS. One could say that the project was built upon the accumulated experience of FUNDEMAS, which develops entrepreneurial behaviors, using EMPRETEC workshops, in order to create new employment, to create new jobs in existing companies, and to teach skills necessary for new and existing ventures that have the requisite potential and characteristics to thrive.

To fine-tune the project's goals and objectives, a number of relevant tools were used—market research, supply and demand, census of communities, and a poverty map—to provide a baseline and analysis of those inputs for a market study. Market research was conducted to get a realistic understanding of the conditions in the communities near Colonia Escalon. At least two additional efforts were made to increase what was known of the area: a door-to-door community and business census (that is, where entrance was permitted), and research by Glasswing to inventory the existing infrastructure (e.g., recreation centers). In La Colonia Escalon, 865 companies were surveyed. Most were service companies; some did not practice CSR.<sup>9</sup> All of those inputs helped to inform project organizers about the health, education, risk mitigation, security, and recreation situations of the communities, which facilitated decision-making in the design of the project. AGRISAL and FUNDEMAS jointly defined objectives, activities, indicators, and the intervention area, which was delimited by the criteria of business partners and

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<sup>8</sup> EMPRETEC workshops are also known as *Development of Entrepreneurial Behaviors*.

<sup>9</sup> Herrarte Marketing, *Marketing Research, in the Frame of the Project Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Job Creation* (December 2011).

then retaken from the development strategy of Colonia Escalon as part of the Asociación La Escalon.

Once the general area of intervention was defined, two specific criteria for selecting communities for project participation could be decided: *proximity to businesses* and *vulnerability*. Work began in nine communities, but over time, fourteen were served. Eight schools were thought to have potential for working with the project, although initially that work was concentrated in the Centro Escolar Concha viuda de Escalon, the only school in the area offering classes up to high school level.

The initial target group included young women aged 16 and older. The upper end of the age range was left open so that initially the project could not only focus on youth, but could extend its reach to the adult population, with the intention of having training examples to show to others. Thus, calls went out in general for anyone who wanted to participate. Throughout, project implementation evolved in accord with demand; today, the target population is youngsters. One stakeholder reported that statistics showed that most of those involved, or who are beneficiaries, are young, and that has encouraged still more young people to become involved. The population served includes gang members, as the project does not discriminate against anyone.

Given that some gangs are predominant in the area, the project was forced to move from general calls for participation across the entire area to sectorial calls, in order not to expose participants to unnecessary risks. Reportedly, the schism of the gang "18" has caused that duplication of resources; now two courses have to be given for any training, one for each sector, rather than one, to maintain order and safety.

The strategy for entering into the communities involved some trial-and-error efforts before the best way was found. For example, the work began with the Municipality of San Salvador (MSS), but that was quickly put aside for political reasons; the bias that could be generated usually associated the AGRISAL Group and FUNDEMAS with right-wing sectors, according to one stakeholder. However, the MSS has always been a strategic partner; the classifications of violence used by the project were developed by that agency. Likewise, the project tried to work with or enter communities through the Community Development Associations (CDA) or boards of directors. Finally, access to communities was accomplished through churches and even with the support of several political parties.

A stakeholder told us that participation and full availability of the business sector has

made all the difference, since from the beginning of the project, a business representative had been meeting once a month with the association (initially, once a week), permitting timely redirection of the course of the project, if necessary. Besides, that stakeholder explained, that business is focused on the market, which has helped to have a well-defined job horizon.

### **The Project**

The *Sustainable Communities Project: Entrepreneurship and Employment Generation* began in January 2011 with a deadline of five years (giving it one more year of operation at the time of this study). It has an overall budget of \$1.13 million.<sup>10</sup> FUNDEMAS administers the project with financial support from USAID (\$500,000), the AGRISAL Group (\$125,000), Fundación Rafael Meza Ayau (\$125,000), FIDES (\$250,000), and the contributions of FUNDEMAS itself (\$130,000).<sup>11</sup>

Project Sustainable Communities supports people living in communities located near Colonia Escalon with technical assistance related to issues that have been identified and prioritized through studies conducted in the area (e.g., projects, costing, sales, English topics, and computer and life skills) in order to facilitate the process of obtaining a job, creating a micro-business, or strengthening an existing business. All of this has occurred in three phases, seeking to improve quality of life in the area as well as to decrease the number of youngsters who engage in violence. The project's purposes are to:

- Contribute to employment generation, allowing participants to improve income and living conditions for this vulnerable sector;
- Contribute to preventing the population from engaging in violence-generating activities;
- Implement a methodology that articulates actual demand with supply;
- Strengthen people in their entrepreneurial behaviors; and
- Generate employment opportunities, creating and strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of micro and small businesses (MSB), with a focus on the value chain.

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<sup>10</sup> All monetary amounts are U.S. dollars, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>11</sup> Since this study ended, three new donors, Cooperation GIZ, Cooperation of Canada, and the Fundación Gloria de Kriete, have made further contributions.

Project Sustainable Communities aims to contribute to employment generation in an environment of gender equality by promoting employability and creating and improving the competitiveness of micro and small businesses in support of the population of 14 communities in the area of La Escalon: Comunidad Asociación Francisco Nuñez Arrue, Comunidad La Pedrera, Comunidad Las Lajas Oriente, Comunidad Las Lajas Poniente, Comunidad Nueva Esperanza, Comunidad Rosalinda, Comunidad Valle de Oro I, Comunidad Valle de Oro II, Comunidad San Diego, Comunidad 12 de Octubre, Comunidad El Prado, Comunidad San Pablo, Comunidad Cristo Redentor, and Comunidad Cristo Paz. The target population located in those 14 communities has the following characteristics:<sup>12</sup>

- *Education:* 40% of the population attended school until 9th grade and 60% have a high school education; they attended area schools.
- *Income level:* The average household income is less than \$200 a month; households average four or five individuals with one person employed, typically in the informal sector.
- *Work experience:* 28% of people seeking employment have formal experience; 72% have no work experience.
- *Employment:* Only 37% of the population has formal employment; 18% have informal jobs (below legal minimum wage, no benefits), and 37% are unemployed; 8% own a small business.
- *Health:* Access to preventive primary health is quite limited; most go to the Health Unit Gerardo Barrios or Clinicas Parroquiales for healthcare services.
- *Risk mitigation:* In terms of vulnerability, 60% of the population of five of the six communities lives on the banks of streams and in overcrowded areas in conditions of risk.

Also in these communities, youth gangs have created an informal power structure. Members must authorize the entry of technical equipment and any outside persons who may have set up schedules to enter those communities.

The project has three work areas:

- *Enabling and employment:* Youth are prepared to enter working life, receiving

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<sup>12</sup> AGRISAL Group, *Descriptive Document of the Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Job Creation*.

technical training and learning, among other things, how to prepare a resume, behave in an interview, dress professionally, and speak while at work.

- *Starting new businesses:* Youth are coached while developing business ideas; they are trained in business skills such as costing, marketing, sales, helping in branding creation, and more.
- *Strengthening existing micro or small businesses:* Expertise is made available through consultancies and professional advisory services to help the micro or small business grow (and become another source of employment); to help increase sales, they are also linked commercially with other companies.

FUNDEMAS is responsible for project execution with a small technical team consisting of seven members:

- A coordinator, responsible for managing and administering the project team, seeking project support from companies, and tracking participants in their communities.
- Two employability technicians, a psychologist who is responsible for teaching life skills and a human resources administrator of companies.
- An entrepreneurship technician, responsible for the creation and monitoring of enterprises, associative groups, and the development of EMPRETEC, as well as for commercially linking companies through partnerships; s/he is also involved with monitoring results in the communities.
- A technician for strengthening companies, responsible for monitoring and developing businesses and associations.
- A Management Information System technician, responsible for data entry to track the progress and results of project beneficiaries; also, for supporting calls community members for participation in project activities.
- An office staff person, responsible for office organization and cleaning, and supporting call issues.

Local staff are hired to help ensure smooth work flow. Members of local churches who are paid by the project accompany those making home visits and calls. Staff members organize job fairs in order to collect resumes and conduct other activities to promote the courses being taught. The Asociación La Escalon is responsible for tracking and monitoring all activities



performed by FUNDEMAS.

### **Methodological Process**

The methodologies adopted by the project were consistently fitted to the needs of the population. Those needs were taken into account if, for example, someone had learning or behavioral difficulties or other special needs. Alliances and relevant funding were sought accordingly. Staff also took into account the community profile when defining workshop content and training approaches. In the entrepreneurship workshops, young people and adults were mixed together, as adults can travel elsewhere to market their products if an opposing gang dominates in their community of origin. Unlike in many areas, polygraphs are not used to screen applicants; only psychometric tests and interviews are conducted. (Some companies outside the Colonia Escalon require the use of the polygraph; we cannot control that.)

Initial studies showed that of those who were age qualified, 50% were unemployed but wanted jobs; 20% did not wish to be employed; and the remaining 30% were already employed. In this regard, during the first two years, an effort was made to reach that half of the population that was involuntarily unemployed. The next objective was to promote employment among those who did not want jobs, mostly youth, using methods such as instilling the values of education, life planning, and so forth.

A baseline is set whenever the project begins in each community by collecting basic information about each person and storing it in a database (Management Information System); this functions as the information database for employment.

Also, the courses given prepare individuals to work as customer service staff, receptionists, secretaries, salespersons, office keepers, cooks, various service workers, operatives, maintenance staff, and in other positions that are in demand by the 865 companies located in La Colonia Escalon.

The methodological intervention process used in the field consists of the following four steps:

- Call on community members, accompanied by community leaders, to encourage participation in the project in any of the three modalities.
- Invite potential participants to an EMPRETEC workshop where employee or entrepreneurial preferences or vocations are discovered, applicants are prepared,

and support is offered that matches applicants' strengths.

- Depending on the area of participation, provide training for employment, or provide support in workshops for creating a micro or small business, or provide support for strengthening an existing micro or small business.
- Monitor participants regularly to check progress; collect feedback from companies that have employed individuals from the communities.

Strategically, these steps are organized into three phases of intervention:

- Phase I
  - House-to-house visits or calls
  - Life skills and EMPRETEC
  - Psychometric tests
  - Resume creation
- Phase II
  - Courses on how to obtain a job
  - Courses for entrepreneurship
  - Training, technical assistance, and mentoring
- Phase III
  - Job placement
  - Bonding and financing
  - Constitution and insertion of micro and small business
- Projection for possible next project phase:
  - Strengthening the entrepreneurship (25, five at a time)
  - Monitoring the other ventures
  - Cluster service for La Colonia Escalon and/or networks
  - CSR practice with area's small hotels and restaurants

In practice, an ongoing effort remains oriented to strengthening companies created during the execution of the project, as well as to the creation of new ventures or companies, taking into account the inclusion of high-risk groups from communities. The project tries to secure financing through loans for beneficiaries through a Guarantee Fund and partnerships with financial institutions, and trade linkages for goods and services among participating companies, with other external companies, and with potential markets.

### Effectiveness

The development of the project has generated results that allow one to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of its formulation, implementation, and outcomes. Data are updated monthly. The project has set different indicators to measure different types of outcomes. Impact indicators measure participant income, employment, and security; performance indicators measure numbers of jobs created, business ideas generated, new businesses established, micro- and small business strengthened, and individuals trained.

The goal for employment generation was 450 jobs; for newly created companies. it was 75 companies.<sup>13</sup> Since the beginning, the project has had an impact on more than 1,000 people, men and women, young and old. It has trained 920 individuals for work with technical and entrepreneurship courses (230% compliance rate), built or strengthened 202 area entrepreneurs and businesses (269% compliance rate), and generated 502 new jobs, 232 as positions obtained through partnerships with companies and 270 as self-employment positions generated in 228 new enterprises (a 112% compliance rate).<sup>14</sup>

According to one stakeholder, member companies of the Fundación La Escalon generated some of those jobs, but companies or enterprises outside of the Colonia Escalon created at least 30% of them. Another route used to place staff in jobs is outsourcing, using Al Empleo, the digital employment agency (database) generated by the project. At least 12 companies provide continuous employment by soliciting personnel for the project; also, several companies outside Colonia Escalon request people trained by the project because of its reputation for quality and commitment.

Project effectiveness is also demonstrated by the strengthening of 13 micro and small businesses, the creation of Al Empleo, and the consolidation of 25 permanent partner entities, including businesses, churches, municipalities, schools, and others who facilitate the implementation of activities and expand their own scope.

Other important project achievements include the following: (1) the successful integration of technical equipment in intervention communities, (2) no defections in the bakery

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<sup>13</sup> Consolidated project results from 2011 to November 2014.

<sup>14</sup> "FUNDEMÁS Lanza Agencia Digital de Empleo 'Al Empleo,'" *El Diario de Hoy*, Monday (December 8, 2014): [http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota\\_completa.asp?idCat=47861&idArt=9303655](http://www.elsalvador.com/mwedh/nota/nota_completa.asp?idCat=47861&idArt=9303655).

workshops, (3) access to credit for community residents, (4) consolidation of small companies (e.g., bakeries, restaurants, candy stores, craft outlets, recycling), (5) at least 25 companies of 202 enterprises with potential to grow, a potential second phase goal working with five companies at a time, (6) formation of associations, (7) 228 enterprises that created 1.8 jobs each, and (8) a more inclusive community, with improvements in quality of life for all area residents.

When evaluating the project, I also assessed other scenarios that could have occurred, as well as the ones that did. For example, one stakeholder reported that FUNDEMAS had been asked whether it would have been better to initiate the project with activities meant to promote peaceful coexistence rather than taking a formative approach that focused on entrepreneurship. The response was that it had been much more effective to begin by bringing forward training and technical assistance related to entrepreneurship, until the project was inserted in the areas where communities most needed violence prevention.

Another stakeholder reported that the demand for resources and services from the general population would always exceed what the project could deliver, such as investment in community spaces and basic construction work. In order to be effective and to generate solutions, project staff negotiated new resources, starting with an effort to profile each community. In that way, financial support and donations were capitalized from at least 25 businesses (e.g., Dermalogica, Arqco Outsourcing, TIGO, Crowne Plaza<sup>15</sup>, Hotel Mediterraneo, Gourmet Express, Pizza Hut, MD, Cid Gallup); from churches, schools and ADESCOS; and from nonprofits (e.g., GIZ, Fundación Gloria Kriete, Canada Fund, Exporsal). With funding from the Fundación Gloria Kriete, for example, a vocational technical center is being established within the Centro Escolar Concha viuda de Escalon, and another will be located outside a school in a different area, where youth can attend once they reach 9th grade, without the risk of being harmed by members of territorial gangs. In total, there are four vocational-technical centers.

In order to meet its objectives and as a feature of its effectiveness, project organizers have spared no effort, relying on external resources and technical tools such as consulting and advice from professionals, so that beneficiaries are placed in good jobs, and micro and small businesses grow or partner with other companies to increase employment opportunities in the communities. In addition, they are linked commercially with other companies to increase their sales. Thus, the

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2013/12/03/graduacion-del-centro-escolar-concha-viuda-de-escalon>.

AGRISAL Group uses its trade and business links with Exporsal (a Salvadoran company founded in 1974 to export handmade goods) <sup>16</sup> to promote and market product ventures abroad.

**Table 8.1. Project interventions (2011-2014).**

INTERVENTION 2011-2014 (3 YEARS 10 MONTHS) <sup>17</sup>		
Nº	Activity developed	Amount
1	Technicians and for work courses	36
2	Entrepreneurship courses	43
3	Number of hours taught in courses for beneficiaries	4,054
4	Average hours in technical assistance to beneficiaries	7,360

The document describing *Project Sustainable Communities: Entrepreneurship and Employment Generation* identifies the following as being among the direct benefits for the communities in the project area:

- *Attitudinal changes*: Residents feel safer, more prepared, have new knowledge, know how to approach companies and how to behave with entrepreneurs.
- *Improved self-esteem*: In conjunction with new techniques learned, better income for their families; jobs, technical support for creating small businesses, and advice for strengthening their micro and small businesses; improved quality of life in the communities; tools for self-sustainability.
- *Generation of income* for owners of micro and small businesses.
- *Increased trade options* for residents and their competitors, a generator for more jobs for neighbors in the area.
- *Generation of commercial networks* between companies in the same area; among all companies, not exclusively among large ones.
- *Improved quality of life* for residents, as well as economic and growth opportunities.
- Prevention of youth engagement in criminal acts, even in families of gang members (although legal system has freed several gang members who continue to commit

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.exporsal.com/us.php?lng=0&s=1>.

<sup>17</sup> Consolidated project results, 2011 to date (Nov. 2014).

- crimes in the area); decrease in the number of youngsters joining gangs.
- Reduced idle time; people now spend that time in jobs and workshops, enabling young people to stop dwelling on negative situations.

Direct benefits identified for area businesses include:

- Commercial growth through the strengthening of micro and small business.
- Increased trade options, due to the number of new businesses created, allowing purchase of products and services in the area.
- Trained applicants for positions, with the working tools necessary to meet their needs; reliable, prepared, punctual employees, due to their living in the immediate vicinity.
- Reduction in transportation costs incurred for employees; employees live nearby.

Difficulties overcome:

- The entry of technical equipment to communities seeking support from ADESCOS, community leaders, schools, health promoters and churches; one of the conditions for entry to the communities is to be accompanied by a community leader.
- Inability to mix benefited individuals from communities in conflict during project activities; disputes between communities, including deaths, have resulted from these conflicts. The project has had to duplicate opportunities and/or activities in various areas to overcome this difficulty.
- Companies that marginalize and deny employment to people in the area, only because they live in these communities and so are feared and considered dangerous. Some companies have opened their doors; others have employment policies that prevent hiring residents from "code red" communities.
- Companies that will not hire area residents because of the social stigma (see also sections 3 and 6 of this report). Some companies now rely on applicant selection and preparation by FUNDEMAS. Currently the project has earned the confidence of 12 companies who support it as much as possible.
- Most individuals, even after training, do not pass company screening procedures, such as interviews and polygraphs (see also section 4), not necessarily because they have committed a felony, but they come from areas classified as unsuitable for

recruitment, or because during the evaluation process they become nervous about questions like "are you related to persons related to or members of gangs?"

Inevitably, they have neighbors and relatives who are involved in gangs; they cannot be isolated from that in their environments. That, combined with recruitment policies, often shuts out technically qualified candidates.

- Some start-up businesses did not thrive because of a lack of market connections or unattractive, poor quality products for which there was a low or no demand. Business associations and attractive, quality products are needed for a business to survive.

### **Replication**

The intervention strategy has evolved according to the emerging needs and realities of the targeted communities, an ongoing evolution made possible in part because of effective, consistent coordination between AGRISAL, the Asociación La Escalon, and FUNDEMAS. The project began working with nine communities, and is now reaching fourteen more. The gang "18" operates in the original participating communities; Mara Salvatruche accounts for the gang presence in five of the new ones.

Although it has not yet been replicated, the project model thus far has generated a wealth of "lessons learned" about what should and should not be done. One stakeholder reported that the project could be improved by focusing on employment activities that will enable young people to find jobs, and to take further actions to promote social cohesion. The project team identified additional actions that could improve project outcomes:

- Communicate better about the project from the beginning, not to gain leadership, but to encourage more companies to join the cause; also, gain the trust of the communities from the beginning by letting them know that the work being done is for their benefit.
- Seek to better understand the communities affected by the intervention; in each area, every community has its own distinct characteristics, needs, and lifestyles. All of this information is important to know before starting, through studies that measure the demand for services, to give more meaning and sustainability to the project, and so the intervention strategy is prepared and staff are trained to offer the valuable proposition to surrounding businesses.

- Research and know the target prior the intervention, and identify the needs to be emphasized, because sometimes those needs considered by the implementing team to be important are not the ones considered important to the beneficiaries.
- Do not try to change the ideas and projects that communities already have; instead, try to improve the existing ones, and by this people will empower their businesses.
- Do not underestimate programs aimed at attitudinal improvement of people, since in most cases it was found that they are their own obstacles; those who are marginalized feel less valued because of the differences found in living between large buildings. If support is shown and they are given a sense of equality, people will gain confidence.
- Accompany the workshops and training on technical issues with the full support of psychologists and training in life skills, allowing participants to acquire new tools for dealing more easily with problems encountered along the road and to build self-esteem.
- Seek allies within communities to gain the openness and trust of their people and to strengthen partnerships with the business sector, from the beginning of the project. Look for support from companies that will benefit from having access to trained personnel and from communities that will benefit from income generation.

Something that was done in this project, and a recommendation to companies wishing to work with similar issues, is to "seek support from those who know," as the successful results that have been obtained so far have been due to the expertise and methodology brought to the effort by FUNDEMAS. AGRISAL sought support in this regard from an organization that had expertise in project implementation. For now, AGRISAL, the Asociación La Escalon, and FUNDEMAS understand clearly the need to continue this valuable effort. There is already talk of possible actions to be taken, such as strengthening the 25 leading enterprises, five at a time, through image consulting, marketing, and purchasing equipment, tools and/or machinery needed; the funds have been made available for this from Canada Cooperation. There are similar plans for the remaining enterprises, going forward progressively in blocks of 25.

It is anticipated that the project will develop a model for public-private partnerships for the creation of companies dedicated to produce recycled products and employment generation so that this practice of CSR can be replicated at national and regional levels through entities and



businesses that promote CSR.

Another new element to include in the project is the involvement of small hotels and restaurants in the area, with financing from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), focused on improving the performance of micro and small businesses through CSR. This action is designed from the perspective of the sustainability of the project actions.

At the community level, in a possible second phase of the project, organizers have considered investing in basic construction in communities such as risk mitigation works, some houses, drains, and so forth, for which it is expected to have strategic partners who can contribute the necessary funding and experience.

### **Sustainability**

The involvement of the business sector in Project Sustainable Communities has been its key to success until now, and that will ensure that the project and its outcomes continue. FUNDEMAS has an agreement with the La Asociación La Escalon that resulted in 23 local companies having a major role in project implementation. That partnership now is part of the Monitoring Committee of the *Project of Sustainable Communities-Entrepreneurship and Employment Generation*.

Steps are currently being taken to further assure the project's sustainability and replicability. As mentioned above, the co-financiers of the work accomplished thus far have been AGRISAL, la Fundación Meza Ayau FUNDEMAS, and USAID. They have joined with other supporters, forming strategic partnerships with the private sector to strengthen trade links, among other things. Private companies have participated through the commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) that supports different elements of the project. Direct and permanent connections have been formed with companies from AGRISAL Group, Crowne Plaza, CONAMYPE, Dermalogica, Sirama, Carana, among others. There are also agreements with the private sector to promote employability. Companies such as Pizza Hut, MD, Arqco Outsourcing, Cid Gallup, Crowne Plaza, Gourmet Express, to name a few, have entered into agreements to recruit individuals who have participated in the project.

Three major actions are currently underway, the results of which are expected to generate further stability:

- Strengthening the 25 companies with image consulting, marketing, and the purchase

- of equipment, tools, and/or necessary machinery. The funding source has already been found for this action.
- Clustering services for Colonia Escalon and/or networks. Area residents will be offered a series of multiple services, already ordered, and commercial networks are being generated between companies in the same area. The commercial networks are being generated among all companies, not only among large enterprises.
  - Bringing small hotels and restaurants to the area. An initiative funded by the IDB focused on improving the performance of micro and small businesses through CSR. Small hotels and restaurants are good additions, from the perspective of CSR, to the other small businesses that have been created in the community and that will hire area residents. Again, the funding source has been found for this action.

Since the beginning of the project, actions have been taken to assure the sustainability of the enterprises and small businesses that it has fostered. These include:

- Follow up of beneficiaries through the Management Information System, designed to measure impacts in terms of income, education, and improved quality of life, and to document investment per person. Staying in contact with project beneficiaries to see whether they are ready to advance to the next stage of specialization makes them feel valued, and strengthens their commitment to themselves, their families, the project, and to the community and society in general.
- Continuously searching for market-to-market products, improving their quality and presentation through image consulting and marketing promotion.
- Transferring needed equipment, tools and/or machinery, expecting gradually to reach all enterprises that require it.
- Generating job offers, which will be promoted through the Fundación La Escalon and other project partners, such as corporations and other institutions in the sector.
- Clustering services to Colonia Escalon (several trades), which are also promoted through the Fundación La Escalon.
- Generating networks for technical assistance and ongoing training according to specific needs.
- Specific actions to raise visibility:

- Bimonthly newspaper
- Application of Fundación La Escalon for smartphones
- The FUNDEMAS website
- Development of the Week for CSR
- Annual event or nationally on CSR
- Reports in various media

The plan is to systematize and document the entire project, providing a summary of the FUNDEMAS and Fundación La Escalon intervention strategy. This document will include a model for public-private entrepreneurship and job creation, enabling this CSR approach to be replicated at national and regional levels by organizations and companies that promote CSR.<sup>18</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Sustainable Communities Project has the distinction of being an initiative arising from the business sector. Traditionally, such programs are formulated, developed, and implemented by the government sector, through international cooperation, or as religious charitable initiatives. This program instead exemplifies how private enterprise views such problems, understanding and assuming that comprehensive economic and social development can be transformed into direct and sustained benefits for everyone.

Business sector participation in Sustainable Communities brought a different vision and philosophy to this project, as well as strategic perspective, the ability to manage all types of resources, business connections and strategic alliances, and the ability to understand and adapt to the environment. For those reasons, those who have been involved with the project or who know it firsthand share the view that key to this project's success has been the active participation of the business sector.

The founding organizations are responsible for the design, implementation, and monitoring of Project Sustainable Communities. The AGRISAL group, la Fundación La Escalon, and FUNDEMAS coordinate closely, but without written agreements; instead, they communicate

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<sup>18</sup> The estimated total cost of the program was to be \$1.13 million for 933 participants. If accurate, this would result in an average program cost per participant of about \$1,211 and an average cost per person employed or self-employed of \$2,251. See *Presentación Proyecto Comunidades Sostenibles-FUNDE*, 2, 12. (These figures are estimates based on results to date; the project is still in operation.)

by word of mouth to manage the endeavor. The lack of written contracts and agreements permits optimal flexibility for changing course and making strategic decisions quickly, as needed. The fact that everything is done consensually enables all of those involved to know how the project is developing, leaving little or no room for surprises or the emergence of difficult situations to handle.

Strategic alliances with other companies, institutions, and donors have been the chief means of achieving and even surpassing the project's goals and objectives. During the project's execution, international and nonprofit donors such as USAID, GIZ, Fundación Gloria Kriete, and Canada Fund have contributed. A group of businesses were also willing to cooperate in various ways, among them companies from AGRISAL Group, the Hotel Crowne Plaza, Hotel Mediterraneo, Dermalogica, Gourmet Express, Pizza Hut, MD, and Cid Gallup, and others. So did institutions or organizations such as CONAMYPE Sirama, Carana, churches, schools, ADESCOS, and more. A concrete example of the possibilities opened up by such strategic alliances is the linkage of AGRISAL with Exporsal to promote and market products overseas, ventures created and consolidated by this project. Likewise, companies outside The Colonia Escalon (the intervention area) are requesting employees trained by the project due to their reputation for quality and commitment.

Project staff track and monitor program activities and participants. The status of the project's entrepreneurs and employees is monitored monthly to track their progress and to provide assistance, if needed, to optimize their development and the project's results. This information is entered and updated in an Excel spreadsheet.

Cross-monitoring also occurs, through a management information system that is updated every three to six months. The software system was designed specifically for this project to measure its impacts in terms of income, education, costs, quality-of-life improvements for beneficiaries, and other indicators. This is a second database, which incorporates data from the Excel spreadsheet. This system makes it possible to visualize the investment per person and to compare that with other variables in order to perform a cost-benefit analysis, which helps to identify "best practices" in terms of job stability, consolidation of enterprises, and profitability, among other things. The scope of data it provides is extensive, although it only became operational in 2013, two years after the start of the project.

In addition to customized software for information management, other ad hoc tools have

been acquired according to the project's needs. For example, specialists are hired to provide technical advice or mentoring, workshop facilitation, product and image consulting, and other necessary professional services. Personnel residing in the intervention area are hired, assuring the best possible access to the communities and improving the overall impact and scope of project calls. Such specialization ensures that the personnel hired are trained using the best possible methods for their functions.

Project Sustainable Communities believes that micro and small businesses created by the project can grow and become another source of employment for communities; they can also partner or form business connections with other companies to increase sales. The project has not been hesitant to rely on external technical staff for professional consulting and advisory services, nor to purchase tools, machinery, or equipment (for 10 of the 25 companies) when necessary. The project uses best practices that already exist and have proven effective, such as methodologies for developing entrepreneurial behaviors (e.g., EMPRETEC), and existing infrastructure and managerial resources that are made available by project allies (e.g., multipurpose rooms, trained staff, additional funding).

In sum, Project Sustainable Resources focuses on the promotion of entrepreneurship and job creation. The prevention of violence emerged as a necessity in order to work in area communities and therefore has been an added value generated. Invitations to participate in project activities are issued from the perspective of employment generation, not for the prevention of violence or for peaceful coexistence, but in the end, they are having an impact on those, as well. This avoids the stigma or stereotypes involved when addressing issues of violence or crime directly, and facilitates everyone's involvement, including that of young people who are already involved in gangs.

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## Section 9. Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities

*Rafael Artiga Gudiel*

The main objective of *Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities* is defined as follows: "To design and implement a proposal for the prevention of violence and the insertion of young people and their families who live in high-risk regions into the nation's socioeconomic life."<sup>19</sup> According to the project coordinator, "The objective is not only to promote employment among young people to prevent violence, it is to establish a permanent implementation model."<sup>20</sup> The purpose of that model, according to technical staff with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), is to instill within those young people personal and work skills that will enable them to have productive lives and to generate income for themselves and their families in a dignified manner. Achieving that goal would also align with El Salvador's national, regional, and local political interests, as it would contribute to the reduction of homicides and risk factors that generate violence at the local level. Project Young Entrepreneurs began in Sonsonate in January 2013 and ended in September 2014. At the time of this study, the project was phasing out.<sup>21</sup>

### Program Description

Project Young Entrepreneurs defined as its client population 100 youngsters who resided in the municipality of Sonsonate, in the community of Sensunapán, who were neither in school nor employed (similar to targeted populations in other programs, e.g., see also sections 3 and 6.)<sup>22</sup> The Sensunapán community was selected because it met the following criteria:

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP), "Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities," project document (2012).

<sup>20</sup> Stakeholder interview (November 22, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> This is relevant data; at the end of the intervention, it allows verification of the mechanisms and sustainability agreements with the Municipality, aspects that will be reviewed later in this study.

<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of this study, we considered only program activities undertaken with youngsters not involved in gangs. According one stakeholder, however, the project included another 135 youngsters who were gang members (Barrios 18 and MS-13) "since a good percentage of them are part of the young population that does not study or work, and that is involved in violence in the country. However, it is a typical population in urgent need of intervention to prevent violence."

- High indexes of social exclusion and violence
- Large number of youth at high risk of violence and social exclusion, without access to education or employment
- Citizen security programs<sup>23</sup>

A group of youngsters exposed to gang members' activities had approached the community's board of directors in need of such assistance. It is important to note that the project worked with young people who at one time or another had been connected with gangs in the municipalities of Sonsonate and Sensunapán, but who were inactive when they enrolled in the program. Nonetheless, the fluidity of individuals' gang membership status means that any given moment, youngsters in the program might be a mix of gang members and non-gang members.<sup>24</sup>

The focus group members and interviewees described five program priorities:

- *Social insertion*, providing specialized, personalized attention to youngsters and their families to help them strengthen their life skills and to confront issues such as work, leadership and teamwork, dialogue and negotiation with others, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and sexuality and HIV. A service project was conducted by which those who had participated in damaging the social bonds of the community participated in restoring them.
- *Educational insertion and retention*, using flexible education models to encourage school attendance including tutoring, financial assistance and scholarships, accelerated programs, and other options.
- *Labor insertion by employment*, identifying potential areas for professional development that related to the community's labor demands, and offering technical preparation, scholarships for the first job experience, and support during the search for employment.
- *Labor insertion by entrepreneurship*, guiding the development of an entrepreneurial endeavor, with support from a team specializing in establishing entrepreneurships and an experienced entrepreneur who is sensitive to the challenges and knowledgeable about practical strategies for successful self-employment.
- *Model construction*, structuring a project model for inserting at-risk young people

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<sup>23</sup> For more than a decade, supported by UNDP, the municipality of Sonsonate has promoted citizen safety projects in communities in Sensunapán.

<sup>24</sup> UNDP, "Young Entrepreneurs," 2.



into the social, educational, and employment systems of El Salvador, ensuring that the model was systematic (i.e., could be replicated) and that it incorporated measures and processes for evaluation.

Project Young Entrepreneurs had a clear mission to develop, document, and demonstrate a model for systematically helping young people at risk for violence and social exclusion to gain access to the social, educational, and employment institutions of the country—a model that could also inform public politics. Although listed as the final priority in the project's official documents, UNDP technicians and the youngsters in the focus groups understood model construction to be a clear priority.<sup>25</sup>

With all of those priorities in mind, Project Young Entrepreneurs initially was considered for communities within the municipalities of San Salvador and Santa Tecla. It ultimately was established in Sonsonate, in close collaboration with the municipal government, in the community of Sensunapán, a subdivision of San Antonio. A previous citizen security group had identified youth employment as a security issue and had made specific recommendations that gave project organizers a place to start. In order to maximize their results, project organizers decided to take advantage of the mutual employability and entrepreneurial interests and diverse resources and methods of the various institutions, civil society, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations across the country. Among them were the program for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of El Salvador (CCIES), Development of Suppliers program; the Labor Ministry-City Hall, Employment Program; Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Young Builder program; and the Municipal Offices, employability. Project partners were selected according to their specialty areas:

- UNDP coordinated the project, with financial support from the World Bank.
- CRS developed social and community reinsertion methods, including the use of psychosocial and life skills elements similar to those in its Young Builders program.
- The municipality of Sonsonate established the Municipal Coordination Committee to support the project's insertion activities and student retention.

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<sup>25</sup> The project included an evaluation component with the goal of building a program delivery model. During implementation, various activities were conducted to compile information with the purpose of “systemizing the experience,” according to the members of the focus group held in the community of Sensunapán de Sonsonate (November 15, 2014).

- CCIES developed the strategy for labor insertion (the employment-related program elements) through its Development of Suppliers program.

UNDP was in charge of convening regularly scheduled meetings of the partners to oversee and monitor progress towards the development of activities. The meetings also facilitated the exchange of information and coordinated planning. To maintain organizational coherence, UNDP appointed four working groups:

- The Advisory Council, composed of representatives from local and central government institutions, worked toward strategic and political alignment and guided political strategies.
- The Technical Committee, with representatives from each of the partners, ensured compliance with agreements made with the Advisory Council.
- The Coordination Committee, consisting of representatives from local institutions, was responsible for developing the work plan, establishing alliances for its implementation, and monitoring its progress.
- Implementation Team members represented the city halls, the various partners, and UNPD, and were responsible for ensuring that planned activities were carried out.

UNDP gave technical and financial support to the project through combined programs, the Reduction of Violence and Construction of Social Capital (RVCSC) and the program for Local Governability, Rule of Law, Justice and Public Safety. Funding for the entire project amounted to \$235,000<sup>26</sup>; of that, only 15% was destined to finance activities that directly benefited at-risk youngsters in Sonsonate.<sup>27</sup>

The project ultimately was justified by a significant reduction in the number of homicides documented for 2012. From March through September of that year, 552 fewer homicides were reported than during the same period in the previous year, representing a 56.8% reduction. That reduction was associated with the dialogue and truce that occurred between members of the Pandilla 18 and Mara Salvatruche gangs, a process that was initiated in March under the

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<sup>26</sup> All amounts in this report are U.S. dollars, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>27</sup> This information was not reflected in a way that immediately benefited the youngsters, according to comments from the focus group. Many of them saw opportunities limited by the intermediation of the municipality and its bureaucratic processes. Some of them got better jobs on their own and others continued waiting for help from the project and the municipality and the support of the promised job. Focus group with benefited youngsters in the Community of Lotificacion San Antonio, Sensunapán, Sonsonate (November 15, 2014).

leadership of the Catholic Church and civil society, with support from the government of El Salvador. The reduction in homicides provided an opening to promote integral strategies for security and development focusing on the territories and population groups that were suffering conditions that left them highly vulnerable.

In this context, the President of El Salvador requested international cooperation in reorienting existing or identifying new resources to help sustain those homicide reductions observed during 2012, highlighting the need to take action locally in the municipalities and to promote reinsertion of young people living under high-risk conditions into the socioeconomic life of the country. That solicitation is framed in the proposed Pact for the Employment and Security.<sup>28</sup>

The development and expansion of projects directed towards reducing violence by generating employment were becoming increasingly justifiable. For this reason, UNDP considered it appropriate to demonstrate a model project comprised of cooperative strategies developed by expert organizations, setting out the components needed to achieve the socioeconomic reinsertion of young people residing in at-risk communities.

Project Young Entrepreneurs defined one of its main objectives as the design, implementation, evaluation, and systemization of a proposal for the socioeconomic reinsertion of youngsters and families who live under conditions that placed them at risk of crime and violence. As of the close of this study, the project had completed a preliminary version of the evaluation of its results and processes conducted by Don Bosco University; however, the project had not been concluded and for that reason, the systematization experience had not yet been completed.

Results for the other components were reported, as follows:

- At-risk young people had developed skills for building positive relationships with their families and communities, for being productive, and for having a lawful and dignified life.
- At-risk young people and family members of school age had been reinserted into formal schools or a flexible education modality.
- At-risk young people and family members had been reinserted into the labor force through jobs.

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<sup>28</sup> This pact was announced by President Funes as part of the support for the gang truce process, which was developed in collaboration with Minister Munguia Payes.

- At-risk young people and family members had been reinserted into the job market by self-employment (entrepreneurship).

The activities of the project were developed for each component in accord with the specific results expected of it. That is, the young person who would benefit from the project in the area of employment would participate in the activities designed to achieve reinsertion into the labor force through jobs. The main activities developed to achieve that outcome were the following:

- *Workshops to prepare the participant for the job search*: learning how to prepare a resume, how to interview, how to keep a job, appropriate work behavior, and worker's rights.
- *Workshops of vocational formation* to develop competencies and capabilities sufficient to become inserted in the labor market, in accord with the job opportunities in the local municipality.
- Support for youngsters during the process of searching for employment and labor reinsertion, according to their job skills and labor demands.

Those activities were given a budget of \$44,334 intended to benefit 70 young people, of whom 25 developed their first labor experience (i.e., an average investment of \$1,773 per first-time employed youth), backed up by ten national companies with a local presence or local businesses that supported programs of socioeconomic reinsertion.

The project started from the finding that young people at risk lacked the necessary skills to obtain a job, and it focused its attention on actions that would prepare and train them to be capable of entering the labor market. Other than being a positive experience for the majority of the participants, the project did not generate the external conditions to ensure labor insertion, because "the work done with the companies that could offer employment opportunities to the young people was not effective enough," according to one young person in the focus group.<sup>29</sup>

From the beginning, the project was designed to focus on entrepreneurship, as indicated by its name. By the design of the model and the selection of the program to support it (PDP), the project focused its efforts on the self-employment scheme, leaving the search for employment as a second choice in which little effort and few resources were invested; that assessment was

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<sup>29</sup> That person completed all of the steps in the employment insertion process, yet could not get a job; the project should have a firm agreement with companies that such participants can be guaranteed employment.

confirmed by project documents, the comments of the project beneficiaries, and the evaluation of the experience.<sup>30</sup>

In the strategy developed for that intervention, the role of the municipality was important, as were local efforts to generate employment. The labor fair and the municipality's office of employment support were ineffective, in part because their selection criteria and priorities often did not coincide with the personal options of the benefited youngsters. Some other critical aspects, such as the availability of funds and the time needed for bureaucratic processes, can have a counterproductive impact on the implementation of programmed activities; those are important to take into account when working in a participative way with the local government.

### **Effectiveness**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the project, we collected two types of information: a subjective type, taking into account opinions from benefited youngsters, and an objective type, based on the conclusions of the UNDP Evaluation of Results and Processes (preliminary results). During the focus group, the youngsters were asked to identify the positive aspects of the project. They offered comments such as the following:<sup>31</sup>

- A good idea to help young people that need job opportunities.
- Learned many things that we need to find a job.
- Meeting other youngsters from the community with similar interests or in the same situation related to job searching.
- A very emotional experience in which we obtained a lot of knowledge that allowed us to clarify our goals.

The majority of the comments that were offered by the youngsters concerning the positive aspects of the project referred to opportunities that were generated and what was learned. All expressed thankfulness for having been given the opportunity and recognized its benefits; however, when asked about aspects of the project that could be improved, we obtained responses that would greatly benefit future project planning:<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> One conclusion from the project evaluation was stated this way: "The project should add a management component for employment positions, such that the participant youngsters would have the option to pursue either an entrepreneurship or a labor experience that will allow them to increase their employability." Results of the process and evaluation report, preliminary version (September 2014).

<sup>31</sup> The young people in that focus group were from Lotificación San Antonio, Sensunapán.

<sup>32</sup> Positive opinions from the youngsters about the project tended to be too general, but references to needed improvements and

- Long and tedious training.
- More constant communication is required and dosage of the content of the training.
- The help from the Labor Ministry did not work well; many young people were not placed, a few found work on their own without the help of the employment office.
- In the entrepreneurship cases, it took too long between training and the handling of work equipment. This caused the abandonment of the project by some youngsters.
- To be trained to search for a job is not enough; the project should negotiate the hiring of the youngsters, since in many cases the businesses hired by recommendations and not for competencies.

When asked if the project and job opportunities had demonstrated any contribution toward violence prevention in the community, the youngsters replied as follows:<sup>33</sup>

- In the community, there is a gang control, and when encountering unknown people they ask for the Legal Country Identification known as DUI (Document of Unique Identification). However, in this case, gangs did not oppose [the project] and allowed us [the benefited youngsters] to take part in the activities without opposition.
- Without these opportunities to learn and work, we will be more exposed to violence and delinquency. So this project helps to prevent that from happening.
- Having a decent way of earning income, a job, it's the most important way to prevent young people from thinking of searching for illegal ways to make money.

Regarding assessment of the project, the following are some important findings related to the employment strategy:<sup>34</sup>

- The youngsters participating in the project were less susceptible to quitting their studies or work while being active in the project. However, more than a third (36%) of the participants were not studying or working 15 months after the project started.
- Sixty-four percent of the youngsters in the intervention group said that they obtained

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changes tended to be quite specific.

<sup>33</sup> These responses were documented in the evaluation.

<sup>34</sup> The evaluation established an intervention group and a comparison group, statistically exploring aspects such as study and work for the youngsters. The results are preliminary; the evaluation of this document is under revision by the UNDP.

- their actual job, thanks to the project.
- The employment rate of the youngsters in the intervention group (37.5%) was higher than that of the comparison group (28.6%).
  - To maintain a job is the harder option to access and keep. Also, only a minority (9%) simultaneously pursued educational and work insertion activities successfully during the project.
  - A high percentage of young people in the intervention group (50%) said that they were certain to be attending university studies in the future, compared with those in the comparison group (37.5%).

The annual average costs associated with preparing youth for future employment varied with the options that were most appropriate for them: Supporting the return of a youth to school, including retention, averaged \$489; preparing a youth to become reinserted into family and society averaged \$903; preparing a youth to gain access to a job averaged \$328; and preparing a youth for self-employment through establishing a successful entrepreneurship averaged \$1,400.<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, the evaluation showed that the youngsters in the intervention group considered that the project had helped them in an indirect manner to find a job or an occupation by developing their capabilities for becoming employed. One group of youngsters from the intervention group, with the help of the project, also achieved the start-up of entrepreneurial or self-employment activities, particularly in the area of sales; however, this happened in a smaller number of cases.<sup>36</sup>

The main recommendation of the project evaluation regarding the employment strategy is to increase the ways in which job placements can be achieved, to assure that participating youngsters have the opportunity to obtain a work experience that will increase their chances of finding a job. At the same time, it is fundamental to ensure follow up with these youth, since the timely response to challenges they encounter along the road can be as important as the planned actions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> UNDP, Evaluation of Results and Processes

<sup>36</sup> UNDP, Evaluation of Results and Processes, 32.

<sup>37</sup> UNDP, Evaluation of Results and Processes, 33.

## Replication

With the purpose of contributing to the replicability of the model, as requested by UNDP, the evaluation showed some interesting aspects that need to be considered as "lesson learned":<sup>38</sup>

- In relation to the implementation of the program, it is imperative that teamwork building includes members from all of the different parties involved.
- Simultaneously pursuing academic and labor insertion is probably an exhausting effort that ends in the abandonment of one of the activities or, worse, of both. Hence the project should place more emphasis on the preference and profile of each of the participating youngsters in the program. (Also see this finding in section 3 of this report).
- The efficiency and related cost-benefit ratio of the project must be improved before moving into replication and dissemination; the vast majority of young people want to work—basically, to find a job that provides the stability and security that comes from regularly producing income.
- Reformulate the role of the municipalities to improve territorialization and to focus collective efforts and local resources that can be made available for use for project activities.
- Working with members of the community and families of the youngsters can maximize and amplify the results obtained, since these groups are part of the primary network of social support to young people who are capable of extending and receiving direct benefits from experimental changes in their lives.

All of these recommendations were verified as being necessary and accepted by the focus group of youngsters participating in the employment strategy of the project. According to the Technical Project Manager, the following also should be listed among factors necessary for future replication: the identification and training of local supporters who work consistently in the community and the direct attention, day by day, of each of the project's different operating parties to the youngsters in their communities.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> UNDP is negotiating new funds with World Bank and other sources to replicate the model in the municipalities of Zacatecoluca (Depto. La Paz) and Ciudad Delgado (Depto. San Salvador), beginning in January 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with project stakeholder (November 10, 2014).



## **Sustainability**

Project Young Entrepreneurs has been carried out with expectation of becoming replicable and sustainable. For that to be achieved, local partners must be strong, technically competent, and politically aware. Also, the model must be systematized and stable. UNDP continues to work on that second quality, but with respect to the first, there are still challenges to overcome to attain sustainability.

In the words of an unemployed young girl who was trained by the project, "The UNDP should supervise the purchases by the City Hall with respect to equipment and processes, since it took so long to do it and to be delivered to the youngsters."<sup>40</sup> The UNDP, in its role as coordinator, and the partners should minimize the administrative processes so they do not have a negative effect on project results, especially when the main effort is to effectively achieve an opportunity for the youngsters to be inserted into the labor market, overcoming threats to their safety in their communities and without having to face bureaucratic obstacles.

It is necessary that City Halls invest in technical personnel who will consistently follow up the diverse actions and actors of the program. The transition of local governments and ideological agendas of the political parties in power are important themes that have to be planned for and given attention, since on many occasions the support and/or continuation of the initiative will depend on that. Other critical aspects, such as the availability of funds and the pace of the bureaucratic processes, can have a counterproductive impact on the implementation of programmed activities; that is important to take into account if we want to work in a participatory manner with local governments.

## **Conclusion**

Project Young Entrepreneurs' design coordinates a series of actors to achieve the objective of caring for the participating youngsters in the best way possible. The theoretical model of the cooperation scheme to implement its actions is solid, although testimonies from the young participants show that in practice, performance on the implementation measures of the model could be improved. One key aspect for the model's operation is the role assigned to municipalities. Even though the participants identified some deficiencies in the implementation

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<sup>40</sup> Declarations of project participants during focus group (November 15, 2014).

of the actions carried out by the municipalities, that they are in fact the public institutions that can best offer support to the participants in these kinds of projects.

The trainings provided to the youngsters in order to help them improve their capabilities for entrepreneurship and employment were effective, helping to develop in them a more aggressive attitude in searching for job opportunities, and strengthening their knowledge of the labor market. This will probably become more important over the rest of their lives than the fact of having obtained a job.

Finally, the project proposed as its main objective the development of a model for social, educational, and labor insertion for youngsters at risk—a model that would be systematized and evaluated, both of which were accomplished in its last stage. During this investigation, the time came when we no longer had access to the results, but we do know that the UNDP, as the organization responsible for the project, will be in charge of publishing the model, improving it, and allocating the funds to replicate it in other municipalities.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations reflect those set out in the project evaluation conducted by Don Bosco University. That evaluation points out key aspects of the project that must be modified in the future for it to reach its goals and to have a more positive impact on the youngsters. First, in the model, the participation of the central government institutions was weak. Coordination between the municipalities and the Ministry of Labor had been proposed to improve jobs offers at the local level, but in practice that did not work as expected. Thus, it is necessary for the project to strengthen the participation of central government institutions to lend greater capability and the necessary resources to effectively support the municipality and other partners involved in the project.

There is need for direct management between the project, companies, and institutions that offer job posts to young people, so that once they have finished their training, the opportunities become effective and they can gain access to the job posts for which they have been trained. The several successes in managing job placements for the youngsters taking part in the project, although not many, could be consolidated as job management procedures, improving their possibility of being instituted.

In most cases, the youngsters participating in the project come from high-risk

communities in which gang presence is a constant threat. The municipality in collaboration with the UNDP and the rest of the partners should implement security measures to ensure that young people participating in the project do not suffer any kind of difficulties or retaliations from gangs solely because of their or as a result of the visible benefits they are able to achieve (i.e., access to legitimate jobs.)

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## **Section 10. Conclusions**

Many researchers and practitioners have made convincing cases for the relationship between chronic unemployment and societal violence. The dynamics of that relationship have been widely discussed; several of those studies and discussions, particularly as they pertain to youth, are cited in the studies above. The purpose of this report has been to explore what is being done to change those dynamics in El Salvador, in locations where the magnitude of the youth unemployment problem has moved the national and local governments, international and local nonprofit and charitable agencies, and private enterprise to respond. The authors have studied seven programs that have attempted to improve the prospects of the current generation of young Salvadoran workers so that they can support themselves and their families without resorting to crime or leaving their homeland. They have described those programs' organizational structures and their operational goals and strategies. Having reviewed program records and reports and listened to the observations and insights of numerous interview and focus group respondents, the authors have collected data and perspectives on the effectiveness, replicability, and sustainability of those programs. They have also documented those stakeholders' critiques of and aspirations for their programs, along with their advice to others who might consider pursuing similar ventures.<sup>1</sup>

### **Youth Employment as a Goal**

Each of the programs examined claimed to have an interest in and impact on improving youth employability, although in varying ways and at varying levels. Five of the seven programs approached employability issues directly, with differing combinations of job and/or entrepreneurial skills training, job development and placement services, continuing education, and other program components intended first and foremost to prepare youth to support

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<sup>1</sup> Formal evaluation of measurable outcomes and cost-effectiveness comparisons were beyond the scope of this report. Such evaluations are resource and data intensive; the sources needed for such analyses were not consistently available at the time of this study. Future research along those lines could be of considerable value.

themselves and their families through the dignity of legitimate work. For example, *Jóvenes Comprometidos*, one of USAID's *Improving Access to Employment* programs, matched businesses who were suffering from a shortage of trained, reliable workers with recruits from its classes of formerly under-educated, unskilled young workers from severely disadvantaged communities, now trained and prepared to work. *Jóvenes Constructores*, a program modeled on its U.S. counterpart and adapted for El Salvador by Catholic Relief Services (aided by local partners), sought to divert at-risk rural youth from gang involvement by engaging them in nearly full-time training and job-seeking activities, preparing them for traditional work or entrepreneurial ventures. Project HOPE, sponsored by AGAPE and other partner foundations, recruited promising young men and women from poor rural areas, then trained them for jobs; because the number of accessible jobs was always smaller than the number of those who were eligible to be trained, those recruits were also prepared for entrepreneurship (self-employment).

Project Sustainable Communities matched youth and women from nearby communities with the companies that conceived, designed, financed, and executed that project. Those companies were prepared to place program participants in jobs in their own and partnering companies, or to help them develop their own small businesses. Young Entrepreneurs served at-risk youth and their families, engaging them in activities that included sports and recreation, academic support, and vocational and business training to assure that those youth were prepared for and had access to the social, educational, and work-related aspects of community life.

For most of the programs, at-risk youth employment was an activity related in some way to another overarching purpose. In 2008-2009, for instance, government-sponsored PATI (Programma de Apoyo al Ingreso) was created primarily to offer limited financial relief to the most vulnerable poor during a difficult economic period in the country's recent history, providing direct payments to individuals in exchange for their participation in community service and basic job training workshops; PATI did not engage in job placement per se, but offered career counseling (e.g., resume writing, interviewing) and job and entrepreneurial skills courses—in other words, PATI equipped its enrollees with the basic tools needed for making job searches on their own.

Each of those programs was directly or indirectly engaged in diverting at-risk youth from poverty and crime, enabling their access to legitimate, gainful employment. All, to some extent, included complementary components that had wider-ranging impacts—for example, reinsertion

into social institutions such as family, school, community—or even into their home country, as the programs sought to prove that Salvadoran youths’ futures could be found in El Salvador, without their having to migrate to other countries such as the United States.

To varying degrees, the stakeholders who were interviewed emphasized (sometimes passionately) the growth in personal and interpersonal attributes that enriched individuals and communities that participated in the programs. They spoke of gaining self-confidence, respect for diversity, and pride in making a difference, all of which contributed to social cohesion, community efficacy, and the beginnings of a cultural shift toward attitudes of peace in place of revenge. *Projóvenes II*, an INJUVE-managed program formally known as the Project of Social and Violence Prevention with Youth Participation, placed a high value on such outcomes. It prepared youth for legitimate employment by first addressing societal/cultural, personal, and interpersonal obstacles, often specific to local communities. Although during this study, that program’s job and educational assistance components were less developed than some, more recently, Projóvenes has begun to make an effort to incorporate and strengthen employment-based components.

### **Clientele**

At-risk youth made up the targeted client population for all of the programs studied. Most defined “youth” as those in their mid-teens to mid-twenties, although variations occurred; Projóvenes, for example, served “youth” into their mid-thirties and even beyond. The programs all made exceptions; they all cited reasons for not excluding anyone in need who met the general criteria, were close in age, and badly needed employment. On the other hand, for the most part, the programs recognized their limits. Few had resources to accommodate mentally deficient youth or those whose criminal records made them security risks. Across the board, “at-risk” meant that an individual was not in school, did not have a job or prospects of finding legitimate employment, and was vulnerable to becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence without intervention. In some, but not all cases, at-risk might mean that the individual was already known to law enforcement; in at least one program, the inability or failure to determine where to draw that line for the safety of other participants and staff became a serious, program-ending security issue.

Sometimes, recruits who were otherwise qualified and needful were left out of a program

because they were unlikely to help meet its particular goals. Jóvenes Comprometidos, for example, had promised to place all graduates, and therefore could take in only at-risk youth who could fit within potential employers' "profiles" of requirements. If tattoos or those with community connections to gangs, for example, were going to be absolutely unacceptable to employers regardless of the applicants' other qualifications, then tattooed youth or those from communities known to have widespread gang activity were unlikely to be recruited. This distressed program staff, but they had to balance such discriminatory practices against the need to successfully place as many as possible of the graduates in whom they were investing.

Employer discrimination, even when associated with legitimate concerns, challenged all of the programs that made an attempt to match participants with real jobs. After having gone through training for a job, Sustainable Communities and other programs' participants found the experience of being interviewed and forced to take polygraph tests anxiety provoking and objectionable. Because they had come from areas considered dangerous, most were asked questions such as "are you related to gang members?" Truthful answers could disqualify them, at best, or expose relatives or neighbors, at worst; rejection would be the outcome, either way. All of those factors that made them need the program's help in the first place would come together to set them up again for failure.

Above all, because the programs were locally sited, "at risk" youth were considered those unemployed and unemployable youth who were heavily concentrated in El Salvador's most "at risk" communities, mostly rural, but some urban. At-risk communities were widely known for their poverty and violence, and for the absence of recreational, educational, and especially legitimate employment opportunities that would allow youth to envision and build towards real futures. Some of these communities were within the metropolitan area around San Salvador; Projóvenes II and the private-enterprise administered programs served in these areas, for example. More often, at-risk communities were rural, far from legitimate jobs and dominated by one or more warring, uncontrolled gangs. Employers routinely discriminated against job applicants from those communities, not only because the applicants were almost certainly ill prepared, but because they could not transport them home at the end of the evening shift, or out of the fear of inviting infiltration or extortion by gang members who might be relations or acquaintances of those applicants. The programs, in their varied ways, had not only to help such youth transform themselves into competitive job applicants, but they had to find, persuade, and

prepare the employers who would hire them.

### **Primary Program Outcomes**

The programs that set standards by which to measure success reported meeting or exceeding them, for the most part. A considerable amount of that success was reported anecdotally. Some of those perceptions of accomplishment and value tended to be strongest during or immediately after the program, and then faded after reentering the world without the day-to-day intense support of their former staff and peers. Participants who were prepared to search for jobs, but not helped to actually find and obtain them, were most prone to experiencing this. In all cases, however, there was enough lasting pride of accomplishment and visible evidence of success to infer that, measured or not, some good was accomplished.

PATI was one of those programs that could provide researchers with numbers. As of October 2014, of the 75,581 individuals expected to receive \$600<sup>2</sup> each in government payments, nearly 66,000 had been paid; 68% of them were of the targeted gender (female heads of households) and 38% were in the targeted age range (16-30 years old). To receive the full \$600, recipients had to remain in the program for six months, working on community service projects and learning job search skills. Retention rates were reported to be above 90%; dropouts included individuals who had lost interest, moved away, or found employment. When asked, the recipients expressed gratitude for the added income, but they talked more about personal growth, new relationships and community improvements that had improved their lives and given them the vision and confidence to find work.

The Projóvenes programs (I and II) had the most diffuse goals, and thus the most varied and location-specific outcomes. Projóvenes seemed to view its long-range purpose as fostering local conditions under which youth would eventually have access to good employment, rather than facilitating immediate job prospects. The program's stated purpose was to promote social cohesion and to mitigate factors of violence and juvenile delinquency. Our clearest indicator of success, within the limited time and resources available for the study, was the European Commission's assessment that the program was an effective model for violence prevention. Stakeholders in general attributed improvements in local quality of life to the program. Projóvenes is increasing its programming for youth employment, but we had no means of

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<sup>2</sup> Monetary amounts in this section are U.S. dollars, unless otherwise indicated.



assessing its impact at the time of this study.

Project HOPE set out to provide job and entrepreneurial training to marginalized youth, and to intervene to aid job placement. Here, the shortage of clear goals, measurable outcomes, and data made it impossible to evaluate whether or not any program goals were met. In addition, the program was a complex assortment of partners, each of which operated a unique version of the model, making it still more complicated to recognize and track progress toward overarching goals and outcomes. Some evidence suggested that various HOPE programs may have deviated significantly from the model's established protocols. Overall, while the program undoubtedly did some good, convincing evidence that it fulfilled its purpose was not found.

Jóvenes Constructores aimed, among other things, to reduce violence and criminal activity in the communities; with its highly structured and disciplined schedule of activities, the program was successful in keeping its trainees off the streets and productively engaged. As with many of the other programs, little or no objective quality data was available for analysis of the program's economic outcomes. Participants reported other highly valued benefits, regardless of its employment outcomes; they talked about gaining the motivation and means to continue high school or college educations, a sense of security, confidence and self-esteem, a vision of a viable career path, and a general knowledge of employment practices.

The purpose of Jóvenes Comprometidos was to facilitate employment for thousands of youth in El Salvador, and over the two years of its existence, it did that for almost 2,000 youth. This program demonstrated the ability to learn from early mistakes and to make adjustments in order to raise its success rate. According to stakeholders, in the first group only one of 20 graduates found a job. Program staff responded quickly by redesigning the trainings to be more relevant to actual jobs available, and the rate of graduate hires rose to somewhere "between 70% and 100%." Stakeholders considered their measure of success to be that the number of youth eventually employed exceeded the number they had expected. Some evidence suggested that perhaps as many as half of the newly employed youth did not stay in their jobs for long, but there were also reports that those youth, armed with their new confidence and skills, went on to find other employment unaided.

The conclusions drawn from the available program reports and stakeholder interviews are tenuous, at best. It appears that many were served, and of those, through a mix of new confidence and skills, many were able to find jobs or to start self-employment enterprises,

whether or not program-aided. Others returned to school. Still others fluctuated between jobs and school, as opportunities and finances allowed. The promise of such programs is deserving of a more disciplined effort to set sound, measurable goals and to collect the data needed to evaluate progress, given the need for such data from governmental agencies and other funding sources that would like to support cost-effective, evidence-based efforts.

### **Secondary Program Outcomes**

Four of the five programs studied indicated that employing at-risk youth was either their goal or their strategy for reaching another goal (e.g., reducing violence). The fifth, PATI, was created to provide temporary financial relief to those hardest hit during the 2008-2009 economic downturn, although it also equipped recipients somewhat for job seeking. Several other outcomes were sought and/or attained by the programs, among them increased business productivity (providing trained, prepared workers from a previously untapped labor pool); social cohesion (bringing together at-risk youth of varying backgrounds, community members, and volunteers to work towards common goals); improved intergovernmental coordination and empowerment of local governments (consulting them about local needs and practices, encouraging financial participation); improved community self-efficacy (involving local volunteers in activities and decision-making); reinsertion of youth into social structures such as family, school, and community; and hope for youths seeking a future at home rather than migrating to the U.S. and other countries. For the participants themselves, the most-often discussed and most highly valued outcomes tended to be personal and interpersonal gains – the development of confidence, trust, appreciation for diversity, resilience, and having alternatives to violence for handling anger and frustration, among others.

### **Intergovernmental Coordination**

One of the least talked about, but more interesting observations was that government entities at various levels found in these programs the need and the means for communicating and collaborating in ways that had not been tried before. Although stakeholders had relatively little to say about this, some evidence was found that the experience gained by some agencies and organizations can be expected to continue to benefit Salvadorans for years to come.

### **Replicability**

In the strictest sense, most of the programs were replicated as their projects were sited in more than one community; thus, their successes and failures could be taken as an indication of their replicability elsewhere. The Improving Access to Employment program, Jóvenes Comprometidos, ended in 2013; however, the model was provided to others, including INSAFORP, which has adopted many of its elements. In spite of that program's short life, its stakeholders judged the model's replicability as good because (1) its practices were simple and were modeled on those of successful evidence-based programs, (2) employers had helped to inform those practices, and (3) its curriculum was consistent and clear.

Jóvenes Constructores represents a different replication experience. The first program established was replicated at least seven times in other communities; however, at the time of this study, only one program was still in operation. One had been closed down when security precautions proved inadequate to keep staff and participants from being harmed; the reasons for the other closures were not entirely clear, but lack of stable funding was inferred. Several obstacles were encountered when trying to involve municipalities in the program; the sponsor is now attempting solve those problems by scaling the program to dimensions that could be more readily funded by local partners and managed by municipalities, while not degrading program effectiveness; it is also, of course, exploring ways of improving safety and security.

Not all of the programs were intended to be models for replication. PATI, for example, was a relatively quick and direct governmental response to a particular critical situation. The outcome could certainly be studied in more depth for lessons learned, but it was unique in its purpose, time, and place. The replicability of the other programs varies, depending in large part upon the amount and quality of documentation and advising that could be accessed. Without cost-effectiveness data and analyses, however, the advisability of replication in other locations or for other situations cannot be adequately assessed.

### **Cost Effectiveness**

The current studies were not designed to draw conclusions about cost effectiveness. The seven programs examined shared some broad long-term goals and certain short and medium-term objectives, but their emphases differed in accord with the varying philosophies and

priorities of each program's organizers and funding agencies. In addition, the programs faced different challenges, in part depending on territorial resources and conditions. Cost-effectiveness may be affected by the sufficiency or insufficiency of financial resources available to carry out programs, and this also differed among the programs studied. Finally, to study cost-effectiveness, researchers would have needed access to primary data sources—that is, official budgets, funding documents, information about planned and actual expenditures, and others. Very few of those kinds of data were offered, even when requested.

Rather, the authors were provided with secondary resources, such as reports prepared for funding agencies and program-generated public announcements. The information found in those sources proved useful for understanding approximately what it might cost, for example, to prepare youth for finding employment in certain fields (e.g., see section 3), or to provide a temporary income supplement to the most vulnerable Salvadorans during an economic crisis, along with some skills and advising for pursuing future income generation (e.g., see section 4).

In some respects, Jóvenes Comprometidos was the program most directly and aggressively focused on ensuring youth access to employment. Staff forged working relationships with employers to provide trainees with work experience and then matched trained graduates with actual job openings. Depending on job type, the cost of training the individuals who obtained jobs upon graduation ranged from an average of \$320 per person (for catering) to \$630 per person (for accounting assistance); when recalculated to include only those individuals still employed three months after graduating, those average costs became \$517 to \$840 per person.<sup>3</sup>

PATI, on the other hand, was an emergency response to the economic crisis that provided individuals with a monthly income supplement (\$100 for six months) in exchange for community service and attendance at workshops designed to build skills and confidence for a future job search. The program was meant to be a one-time effort, relieving the burden on El Salvador's most vulnerable individuals through the worst of the financial disaster. The average cost per person has been estimated at \$817, \$600 in direct payments and the rest for other programming.<sup>4</sup>

Like Jóvenes Comprometidos, Jóvenes Constructores placed significant emphasis on

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<sup>3</sup> See section 3, "Jóvenes Comprometidos," in this report.

<sup>4</sup> See section 4, "PATI," in this report.

directly preparing youth for employment, although it attempted to serve a wider range of at-risk youth. In a CRE Final Report, CRS to USAID (June 30, 2014, 42), the cost per youth, including technical assistance, averaged \$1,210;<sup>5</sup> this could be compared, perhaps, with the cost reported in that same document (p. 43) of simply feeding and housing an inmate in an over-crowded prison for a year, \$1,142—a situation which, it is hoped, would be prevented by assisting youth with programs such as the ones studied here. The above examples illustrate the range of services and some approximate unit costs of program delivery.

The last two programs studied for this report differ from the others in that they are organized primarily by private businesses and associations, funded and executed through public-private partnerships. In addition, they do not focus on alleviating social ills, but on regional economic viability, with beneficial social outcomes becoming a potential side effect. The economic motives and constructs are complex. Still, proceeding in a way that encompasses marginalized local populations (including at-risk youth, although both projects emphasize that they do not characterize individuals as such nor do they target youth exclusively) and that attempts to include rather than displace them, these projects have something important in common with the others.

As with the other five programs, researchers again did not have access to primary source documents, but for purposes of comparison, a FUNDE presentation of Project Sustainable Communities estimated that the average per-person cost of providing support for some 933 individuals to enhance their earning potential through education, training, advising, and other assistance, as needed, averaged \$1,211 (pp. 2, 12); that project is ongoing.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Project Young Entrepreneurs aims to develop self-employment opportunities for youth by encouraging them to finish their educations (estimated at \$489 average annual cost/person), teaching life skills for reintegrating with their families and communities (estimated at \$903 average annual cost/person), and helping them to establish successful entrepreneurships (estimated at \$1,400 average annual cost/person).<sup>7</sup>

Across all of the programs mentioned above, the numbers provided are consistently identified as "estimated averages." Still, they tell us something about the investments needed to

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<sup>5</sup> See section 5, "Jóvenes Constructores," in this report.

<sup>6</sup> See section 8, "Project Sustainable Communities," in this report.

<sup>7</sup> See section 9, "Project Young Entrepreneurs in Safe Cities," in this report.

achieve the kinds of goals those respective programs are pursuing. Much more research is needed to determine the cost-effectiveness of the various approaches to mitigating the closely related problems of youth poverty and violence, and still more is needed to enable meaningful comparisons among them.

### **Sustainability**

Objective assessments of the programs' potential for sustainability proved elusive. The programs all had start-up funding of varying amounts, but longer-term funding streams were harder to come by. Some relied on partner organizations, including businesses that were benefitting from the training programs; others looked toward local governments to provide resources for the programs at their sites. Projóvenes was unique as the only program studied that had been underwritten for a long-range, multi-dimensional plan; after the first six years, deemed successful by its sponsors, it was funded for another six years. Projóvenes intentionally cultivates and relies heavily on local governmental and citizen participation; given the length of time that it could be present while transferring skills and responsibility to local entities—a condition for lasting change—that program may have the best long-term prospects for sustainability of the nonprofit and government-sponsored programs studied.

Jóvenes Constructores was more typical. The program was funded for start-up in part by Catholic Relief Services, but it relied on implementing agencies at its various sites to carry some of the financial burden of operations, as well. That apparently was not enough; of eight programs that were initiated, most closed within a couple of years or less. The one program that remained in operation at the time of this study also relied on its implementing agency; Glasswing/SolucionES projects that its funds are adequate to operate for another four to five years, as long as its trainees' employment rates remain high. Catholic Relief Services had also attempted unsuccessfully to solicit financial investments from municipalities. In addition, CRS has applied for program funding from a national bank; that outcome was still uncertain at the time of this report.

Sustainability was not a goal for every program. At the other end of the spectrum, PATI, for example, was created to provide short-term economic relief for a specific number of disadvantaged individuals through a period of national hardship. Participants were compensated for community service projects and for attending job-search training workshops. After two years,

with its program goals met, PATI closed.

### **Lessons Learned**

Perhaps the most important lesson drawn from this study, although only time will tell whether or not it was a lesson “learned,” is that any program in need of stable funding from international, governmental, nonprofit and/or for-profit organizations would do well to have clear goals, a well-developed strategy drawn at least in part from the evidence-based successes of others, outcomes that can be measured and indicators that can be tracked, a sharp and sustained focus on those goals and measures, and an independent evaluation plan for assessing and reporting its achievements (and failures, and responses to failure). Anecdotal information and stakeholder perceptions are of great value, but they don't measure everything that is important. The lack of such program planning and inconsistent (or inaccessible) data impeded the researchers' ability to make valuable comparisons between various strategies and outcomes, including the relative cost-effectiveness of the respective programs.

One of the more important questions that went unanswered by all of the programs is "What happens to those youth who invest time, effort, and hope in the program's activities, but still do not achieve sustainable employment?" Those programs that did claim to follow up with participants had little or no focused purpose or strategy for that follow up; few documented the results of follow up contacts, and many did not have the resources to even attempt them. Therefore, we could find no answer to that question. At every level—individual participants, program staff, communities and local governments, national government, investors—the stakes are high, and this is information that should be sought, documented, analyzed, reported, and acted upon.

Not surprisingly, programs in which private businesses and associations were active reported better employment, and possibly even self-employment, outcomes for their participants. All of the programs, formally or informally, sought in some ways to ease impoverishment and reduce violence. Those programs that focused most aggressively on business alliances and participant employment did so at some cost to those who did not or could not meet those employers' stringent requirements, and may have done less to reduce violence. Programs that focused more on quality of life, social/cultural issues, and life skills as a means of promoting the conditions for economic improvement or violence reduction (or both) seemed to make a

difference, but forfeited the potential for more quickly crossing the sustainable "job" or "self-employment" finish line with the majority of their participants. Researchers and practitioners differ on the ranking in importance and the causal relationships of the various elements of the economic and social hardships that the programs studied here chose to address, but there is little disagreement that those relationships matter. It would be worth thinking about what kinds of organizational mergers or collaborations might be able to more efficiently and effectively set priorities and cover that ground more comprehensively.

Apart from those above, many other valuable lessons were learned from the programs' successes and shortcomings. Some are recorded here as the best of the advice offered by the stakeholders:<sup>8</sup>

- In choosing a client population and communities to serve, stay within your resources and abilities to serve well and safely. Be realistic about security issues when qualifying applicants and when siting programs; be knowledgeable about local gangs, their conflicts, and their potential impact on the program and enrollees.
- Expect to invest; the cost to prepare a disadvantaged youth for employment can range from about \$700 to more than \$2,200.
- Know the community and the population well, and involve them in planning from the beginning, in as many ways as possible.
- When asked, most applicants said they had chosen to enroll in the first program (of several they had inquired about) to contact them. PATI went one step better: it used a data-driven "poverty map" to locate individuals in need, rather than waiting for them to ask for help.
- Involve stakeholders in decision-making—local governments and agencies, potential employees, enrollees, community members and volunteers, and others; this builds social cohesion and community efficacy, leading to greater independence, and helps to assure that the outcomes pursued are desired by and feasible for those most affected.
- When building relationships with employers, do not appeal to their social consciences; rather, be prepared to talk about the productivity and financial benefits

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<sup>8</sup> Since the same advice was heard repeatedly from several different sources, we have not attempted to identify all of the contributors; they know who they are, and we thank them.



- of hiring screened and trained employees from a previously untapped labor pool.
- Remain current on the skills that the job market wants, and remain flexible enough to adapt training courses accordingly. Train not only in job-specific technical skills, but also for developing job search strategies, interviewing techniques, responding to difficult questions, and behavioral protocols on the job.
  - “One size fits all” trainings, while initially economical, are relatively ineffectual in the long run compared with age and ability-appropriate trainings focused on hard skills and tailored to the immediate economic needs of local employers.
  - Align the number of trainees at a given time to the number of likely vacancies; otherwise many graduates will be spending considerable time trying to find a job or may simply give up.
  - Because jobs are never as plentiful as applicants, train for starting and managing one’s own enterprise, as well. Include entrepreneurial management practices and hard skills, such as computer repair, baking, contract building, and others, matched with local needs.
  - Invest in highly qualified instructors for the best results; when available, give preference to regional native instructors and staff; they will possess invaluable knowledge, insights, and connections that outsiders cannot match.
  - Build ways of getting early feedback into the plan in order to make timely course corrections and enhance the chances of success.
  - Follow up graduates for a reasonable period to help troubleshoot obstacles and celebrate successes; also, to measure and document the project's longer-term impacts.
  - Do not overlook the business community as an ally, for reasons that may have little to do with their social consciences (although some will care about that); most business people are likely to see mutual interests and opportunities in places that may not be as apparent to those in nonprofit sectors.
  - The proposition suggested by *Sustainable Communities* is an interesting one: that defining programs and their goals and participants using the language of disadvantage may serve to stigmatize and perpetuate those disadvantages, and that it may be possible to rehabilitate *places* toward health and functionality, with the intention of including and enabling their existing populations rather than displacing or segregating

them. That program is still a work in progress, but it is an effort worth watching.

Some of the lessons learned were unexpected. One in particular kept coming up in the conversations researchers had with stakeholders across all of the programs studied. We might imagine that youth employment programs such as these would be narrowly focused on numbers and regimented in their approach, focused on the bottom line. Instead, the programs and their recruits were far more values driven (internally, even informally in some cases) than data driven, and most programs were as least as developmental as they were disciplined in their approaches.<sup>9</sup> *Projóvenes II* stakeholders were outspoken about the need and means for increasing social cohesion in the communities it served, and its staff went to great lengths to develop community-based volunteer investment and participation towards that end. The HOPE program held fast to the “culture of peace” context within which its employment activities took place, to inspire and instill attitudes in its trainees and their families and communities that could overcome intolerance and violence. Even stakeholders across roles in the more pragmatic and tightly structured *Jóvenes Constructores* program were adamant that its life skills and community services components, two strongly human-value-laden program elements, were indispensable if the direct employment and entrepreneurship efforts were to succeed over the long term. When asked about outcomes, stakeholders expressed sincere gratitude for the opportunities afforded them, but then passed quickly over dollars earned and jobs obtained to talk about matters of personal and community growth and aspirations for the future of El Salvador. Jobs matter, but apparently they matter most in the context of family, community, and country.

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<sup>9</sup> Jóvenes Comprometidos was an exception, focusing more narrowly on employment. That was noted by some stakeholders as a lost opportunity.

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