



I. Background

A two day forum by the International Youth Foundation was held in Bogota, Colombia November 19th and 20th 2009 with support by the World Bank, USAID and the InterAmerican Development Bank. The event was supported by local partners: Fundacion Universitaria Panamericana (FUP), Corporacion Colombia Digital (CCD), The Caja de Compensación Familiar de Antioquia (Comfenalco) and the Mayor’s Office of Medellín. Over 110 participants were in attendance, from over 15 countries, representing government, private sector and local and international NGOs from across the Latin America and Caribbean region and beyond; in addition to several multilateral organizations.

The event’s purpose was to enable participants to share experiences and learning about:

- State-of-the-art practices in youth employment training;
- Strategies to facilitate entry into the job market for youth at higher risk;
- Effective approaches to stimulate youth entrepreneurship;
- The role of impact evaluation; and
- Scaling up effective youth employability programs through public-private partnerships and engagement of the private sector

Compared with similar summits, forums and meetings held in the last decade on the issue of youth employability, in the view of many participants, this meeting was particularly useful in that it: (i) demonstrated specific strategies that are being used to reach disadvantaged and vulnerable youth. (ii) Presented real impact evaluation exercises that covered appropriate tools, lessons and challenges. (iii) Showed the importance "thinking big", and taking programs that have shown positive results and applying the model at larger scale. (iv) Recognized, based on the practices analyzed, the keys to successful ventures developed with and for young people.



USAID Mission Director for Colombia Ken Yamashita offering opening remarks, following a welcome by IYF President and CEO Bill Reese (to the right), and remarks by MIF/IDB Deputy Manager for Strategy Fernando Jimenez-Ontiveros and World Bank Country Manager for Colombia Edouardo Somensatto.

II. Differentiating youth populations

The youth population (people between the ages of 12 and 29, with some different age ranges in certain countries) was not viewed as homogenous, but rather it was considered from diverse perspectives. These

“Unemployment disproportionately affects youth in our region, with economic as well as social implications. Working together systematically we can transcend individual initiatives via the alliances we form – public, private and civil society – to provide quality support to youth, and scale up to have real impact.”

Fernando Jimenez-Ontiveros, MIF/IDB

viewpoints are important because the definition of the target population influences the design of policies and programs, as well as how they are implemented and evaluated. The heterogeneity arises from characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, education, social, economic and cultural rights, or based on the subjects’ particular life situations or issues that affect them, such as: violence, handicapped, unemployment, disease, unwanted pregnancies, drug addiction, associations with armed groups and

criminal gangs, and displacement. Under this perspective, young people in general are considered to be a vulnerable, at-risk, or excluded and marginalized group. Therefore, it is more precise to refer to “youth groups” rather than simply “youth”.



Discussion on the state of the art on youth employment training in the LAC region: (left to right) Jürgen Weller (ECLAC, Chile), Natalia Ariza (National Department of Planning, Colombia), Fernando Pachón (Nokia, Guatemala); Peter Shiras (IYF, USA)

Also, this age group was discussed in terms of its potential and ability, and as a solution and an opportunity. As key actors in the development of their countries, young people are considered to have comparative advantages (creativity, flexibility, openness to learning, willingness to break with norms, and involvement in environmental issues) as compared with adults when it comes to their contributions to development.

Some participants suggested that beyond seeing youth as an opportunity, young people must be viewed as people with rights, a perspective which requires us to call on States to fulfill constitutional and legal guarantees that facilitate the employability of this group, i.e., their human development through training and the creation of social, cultural and economic capital that enable youth to fully exercise their citizenship.

Furthermore, the event emphasized the need to view the youth population from the life-cycle perspective; thinking about the young person during other stages of life, beginning with good health care and education during early childhood years to allow for proper development later on but also considering the adult and elderly life stages. This perspective makes it possible to formulate policies look comprehensively at the population.

III.Contextual elements that influence youth employability

Unemployment continues to affect two to three times more youth than adults in the region, well-paid jobs are still beyond the grasp of poor young people, and incomes remain below the expectations of youth and their families. And while education levels are increasing, challenges persist in terms of coverage, quality and segmentation of access. Besides these topics, analysis of the context focused on the youth bulge and the global economic crisis.

The **youth bulge** refers to the fact that countries in Latin America and the Caribbean will have, until approximately 2020, the largest cohort of young people. For example, in Peru, the population between 0 and 29 years of age represents 62% of the total population. This demographic trend can be viewed as an opportunity or a threat for the region, depending on the investments made in human development and income generation for the population between the ages of 15 and 24.

The **global economic crisis** was analyzed first from the perspective of its effects: decline in jobs, delay in youth employment, rise in informal and low quality jobs, and the possible effects this will have on the stability of democracies in the region. From other perspectives, the economic crisis is seen as opportunity for change, diversification of how organizations and companies interrelate, and making necessary changes in order to strengthen our economic system.

IV.Lessons

To reverse unemployment, simultaneous, comprehensive actions and combined short, medium and long-term measures are needed. A comprehensive action is one that works simultaneously on macroeconomic variables by: supporting the creation and strengthening of businesses; providing training required by the job market through professional training programs and linkages with the education system; and, enabling employment mobility through job placement and vocational guidance services.



Brainstorming in small groups.

Good employment policy begins with excellent education policy. Employability initially requires incentives for young people to stay in the education system. This requires investment in quality education (infrastructure, teachers and relevant curricula), creativity in remedial studies programs, schedules that permit students to combine work and study, and coverage of specific needs to keep students in school, for example for female heads of households.

Technical, technological and vocational training requires regulated diversification, flexibility and specialized services to retain students in the programs. Diversified and flexible programs operate as multi-service toolboxes and are combined with targeted interventions tailored to specific youth circumstances. The following services have proven effective in promoting student retention: subsidizing transportation costs, food, and materials; use of information and communication technologies in self-guided learning processes; and psychosocial support, counseling and support networks.

The most relevant job training integrates technical and human development dimensions with young people's life plans. Integral training that has demonstrated the best results is one that, based on a competency model, allows for the increase of knowledge and development of skills, attitudes and values. The competency-based model has demonstrated its contribution to improving the quality of education in countries implementing it.

Job training and placement demand high quality standards at all levels. If quality of technical education is poor and the efforts to manage job placement are not strengthened, young people will not see their income levels increase through employment as expected. Technical training that makes a difference is that which: develops and assesses skills in the workplace, is relevant to market needs, uses instructors with private sector experience, and emphasizes practical application. For its part, effective job placement services are those which: intelligently develop strategies to develop relationships with employers; establish real bridges between youth and employers through published market research, information systems, internships, certification of work practice/internships; and give personalized attention to employers and help them define what they need, e.g., via a survey or site visit. Effective job placement requires both youth employment counseling as well as support for the development of basic job search skills (interview, preparing a *Curriculum Vitae*).

Entrepreneurship and small business offer other alternatives for youth employability. It is useful to distinguish between “entrepreneurs by necessity” and “entrepreneurs by vocation”, because they have different economic profiles and different training and support needs. It is also necessary to determine which young people are inclined to be entrepreneurs - a minority of the population according to estimates - and the capacities of these young people for entrepreneurship. In general, it is recommended that entrepreneurship education be promoted in all employability programs, as this teaches youth to seize opportunities, to develop creativity, innovate, take calculated risks and put ideas into practice. And in programs specifically aimed entrepreneurship, it is critical to: promote partnerships with an emphasis on public-private-civil society linkages; encourage flexibility rather than formalization of processes, and learn to identify both opportunities and good ideas; and, support the conversion of “entrepreneurs by necessity” into “entrepreneurs by vocation” in order to grow their businesses, generate profits and create jobs.

With regard to employability programs, there is a higher level of trust between government, business and civil society organizations when partnership is approached from a win-win perspective, when there is clarity of roles and responsibilities, and when partnerships are developed within a shared framework. Unlike in years past, there are now a greater number of programs that have been undertaken in partnership with the private sector. The efforts of the private sector and civil society organizations are not intended to replace the tasks incumbent upon the State, but rather to complement and strengthen them.

Though there are still challenges, the private sector is increasingly assuming a shared responsibility for training and it has been changing its approach from one of a donor to one of socially responsible business. The challenge now is the inclusion, as partners, of universities, grassroots organizations, and young people and their organizations.

The experiences presented revealed the existence of public-private-civil alliances at various levels: global, national, local. From these it was learned that such alliances work when they have the following characteristics: (i) Strong partners with the capacity to implement and that are committed. (ii) Win-win perspective and clarity regarding the added value that comes with cooperation. For example: for governments, the added value in working with civil society comes from the quality of civil society interventions, the fact that it is another path to access the private sector, the integral vision and mystique of such partnerships, and greater community ownership. For its part, the added values for civil society in working with governments are the possibility of contributing to the formulation of public policies that enable greater coverage and impact, and the opportunity to learn about and better understand the logic of the public sector. For businesses, in addition to increasing productivity, which is one of their central objectives, the commitment to training enables them to complement their economic goals with social ones. The international agencies supporting the alliances are also relevant due to the credibility and technical assistance they provide. (iii) Emphasize common goals of welfare and productivity. In employability, partnerships can be developed around: keeping students in school, providing vocational training, managing job placement services, and scaling programs.

Lessons learned about which public policies and programs work and which ones do not.

The meeting considered various strategies for managing the monitoring and evaluation of policies and documentation of experiences and research, all of which are aimed at improving the quality and relevance of interventions and informing those responsible for public policy how to invest resources. Emphasis was placed on impact evaluation as a necessary tool to generate evidence about what is effective and what is not, and, therefore, to guide actions on allocation of resources, avoiding adverse effects as may be the case. Impact evaluations contribute to the sustainability of programs and their appropriation by stakeholders and builds credibility in investments that are made.



Break-out session on building public-private partnerships.

What to evaluate? Various categories and evaluation indicators were proposed, such as retention in training programs, job placement, income, re-integration in the education system, rate of return, cost vs. impact, employment agencies, training institutions, conditions for job placement. What type of evaluations? Evaluations with metrics involving control groups generate greater credibility that the effects are attributable to the programs being evaluated. However, these present technical challenges when there are no baselines, identification of a comparative group, and tracking program graduates. They also may present ethical dilemmas due to the fact that potential beneficiaries cannot access services provided by the programs because they are members of a "control group". In impact evaluations, it is advisable to integrate diverse perspectives and approaches, techniques and disciplines, and to involve beneficiaries wherever possible.

Scale strategies that have been tested and evaluated, making the leap from micro to macro. Scaling is not just a matter of coverage, broader dissemination, or doing more of the same. Bringing something to scale has to do with: the development of public policy, qualifying programs, including management of job placement services, more effective responses to structural issues, professionalization of the sector, and capacity building. Factors that affect the scaling of programs are: (i) the existence of a tested and evaluated program that is able to inform public policy through credible data and specific information on costs and benefits. (ii) Governments that value partnership and attach importance to education and job placement and are willing to invest resources in them; the existence of strong training institutions that work together in a

network, and companies that assume shared responsibility for training. (iii) Willingness to act in an area of relative uncertainty while defining limits, identify what can and what cannot be controlled by the program, negotiation and agreement among diverse interests, visions of success and benefits. (iv) Clarify who does what, learn to operate in the midst of changes of government and/or changing government priorities, become conscious of asymmetries, and go from operational management to strategic management. (v) Undertake comprehensive approaches to employment, taking into account possible trajectories of youth from being unemployed to job placement or entrepreneurship.

V. Challenges for turning youth employability into opportunity

Achieving a balance between quality and coverage. It has become clear that governments are most interested in coverage, while civil society organizations are most interested in quality, and businesses in having people with the required skills.



Break-out session on engaging the private sector.

Dual client model of training. It is said that labor market demands are oriented towards technical and technological areas, while in Latin America and the Caribbean young people's expectations are focused on the professional areas. This tension makes it necessary to increase opportunities for dialogue

between training institutions and the private sector for the definition of curricula. Youth should be involved in this dialogue.

Complexities of the transition from school and work. It is necessary to respond to the tension between the tendency to keep youth in the education system and young people's desire to enter the job market to generate income. When does the education cycle end? When should the job search begin? Furthermore, at times businesses comment that the young people they hire do not have the required qualifications, although at other times youth are overqualified for the work they perform. The job placement process is not linear or straightforward, there are ever increasing complexities. To address these complexities it is necessary to: conduct research, take a differential approach when dealing with youth attending school and those that are not in school, apply and develop tools (not final solutions) that address aspects that hinder the transition from school to work. Some of these tools are: programs to reduce child labor, improve educational environments to make them more relevant, coordinate with state programs aimed at improving conditions in the communities, provide career guidance to young people, redefine curricula, among others.

Focus on the most disadvantaged youth groups. This implies adaptation, knowledge of specific cultures, knowledge of the contexts in which young people work, and the identification of specific needs and barriers and the corresponding ways of addressing them. For rural youth, the main challenges are increasing options available to young people to decrease the need to migrate and improving the quality of training and integration with agricultural and land policies, taking into account family and community linkages. With regard to young women living in poverty, the main challenge is empowerment by means of resources that help them stay in school and improve their self esteem, training commensurate with their expectations, and internship opportunities. For young people affected by violence, due to their involvement in gangs or illegal groups, the main challenges are providing training for a law-abiding lifestyle through psychosocial development and promoting contributions by youth to their community, and establishing policies against the stigmatization and discrimination of this population. With respect to youth with disabilities, the central challenge is their inclusion based on the virtue of their potential to contribute. This will be achieved by means of their incorporation in the mainstream education system and by changing the approach from rehabilitation to promotion, by training professionals in how to work for inclusion this group, by generating infrastructure that facilitates their mobility, and by raising awareness among decision makers and other

sectors of society about the cost of not including them as well as the benefits and potential that comes with their inclusion. Also, it is important to consider other disadvantaged and discriminated groups of young people, such as those of Afro-descendants, indigenous and others, that require help accessing the education system and labor market.

“Youth need our collective support and ideas to help them take advantage of the opportunities ahead of them. The Bogota forum was a key moment for colleagues and friends across the region to learn from one other, and IYF was delighted to host and support this event.”

Bill Reese, IYF

Formulation of public policies that institutionalize programs that work. With regard to this, it is necessary to consider the diversity and specificity of the laws of each country and the levels of decentralization. Local and national employment policies are needed, and they must be linked to policies on health, education, poverty reduction, and the eradication of child labor. Develop a differentiated approach to employment policies, which have traditionally focused on

adults. Ensure the participation of youth in designing and monitoring policies. Countries should develop and implement policies that promote youth employability as a topic on the public agenda and demand compliance with existing laws (working conditions) and evaluation of policies and programs already in place.

Shape environments to create favorable conditions. Shape legal, economic, and cultural environments and areas of social relations to make them more favorable to youth, employers and training organizations. Work to make positive changes in young people's immediate surroundings, such as family, community, and peer relationships. And, influence legal and economic environments to help businesses to compete in new ways (network, technology, development of suppliers).

Institutional strengthening. Help create institutions that establish values, respect the law and generate contexts in which young people can make contributions. Expand institutions' capacity to provide education and training, and regulate private training. Creation of specialize municipal-level institutions specialized in job placement. Increase government capacity for short-term responses and to consolidate institutional development of job placement services.