



**International Youth Foundation**  
**Dialogue: Youth Employability and Violence Prevention**  
**December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011**  
**Hotel Marriot Courtyard, San Salvador, El Salvador**

*Summary*

The International Youth Foundation – in collaboration with FEDISAL, Asociación Ágape and Quetzalcoatl – held a half day dialogue on December 8, 2011 attended by 28 leaders from the private, public and civil society sectors. The objectives were to share lessons learned in advocacy and job placement to prepare disadvantaged youth for the labor market and the potential of developing public private alliances, and to explore the relevance of these practices and processes in the Salvadorian context. To stimulate dialogue among participants, IYF shared brief presentations on its experiences with *Obra* and *entra21* followed by small group discussions and a plenary session to share insights across the various groups.

The current context of El Salvador is characterized by a number of challenges and opportunities which affect young people and their development as productive actors in society. First, violence is highly prevalent in the country and deeply impacts youth, communities and the economy. Secondly, Salvadorian youth are ill-prepared for the workplace, even those who are fortunate enough to finish high school. And many do not: 25% of young people are neither in school nor gainfully employed, and two out of every three drop out of school by 9<sup>th</sup> grade. These youth may remain unemployed and under-employed for extended periods of time, becoming less likely to find decent work as time goes on. Biases against hiring youth at risk contribute to the problem as do their lack of market relevant skills. Without concerted efforts to change opinions, build skills and create opportunities, options for these young people will remain limited.



Participants discussed in small groups the relevance of IYF's lessons from the entra21 program to the Salvadoran context, noting that two of entra21's 54 grants were awarded to Salvadoran organizations, Agape and Quetzalcoatl. Some participants questioned how viable it would be in a Salvadoran context for youth without a secondary education to compete for jobs in Salvador's growth sectors—e.g., telemarketing, transportation. The overall consensus however was that entra21's methods and results could be easily replicated in El Salvador as a strategy to provide youth with viable options and thus prevent their involvement in violent groups. Mauricio Figueroa, Executive Director of Quetzalcoatl remarked that in order for programs like entra21 to be relevant and effective for youth involved in gangs, we need to allow a period of transition from gang involvement to community involvement and give them time to engage through community service, and to rebuild family and community relationships.

Coordination among institutions and programs, and between sectors, is generally weak in El Salvador – especially with regard to youth support – although there are a few signs of improvement. To date, most collaboration is in response to specific funding opportunities rather than to a strategic vision of how, by working together, sectoral and institutional leaders can promote lasting change. Because of this, alliances often fall short of achieving their full potential for deep and sustained change. There are a number of contextual factors which participants at the event noted which may partially explain. First, while numerous networks and vehicles for exchange exist around youth in El Salvador, there are few which specifically involve the private sector as integral partners. Second, the current context between business and the government is dominated by an issue of public budgetary shortfall and disagreement as to how funds would be raised to fill that gap. Encouragingly, both the government and businesses recognize that collaborative action for youth development cannot wait until these and other issues are resolved.

The new Ley de Juventud is one promising example of an opportunity for the government and the other sectors to collaborate, as the new law lays out a framework for more government support and entry points to work with public offices on youth issues. Another positive trend is the involvement of mayors in different regions of the country in addressing the needs of youth at risk. The level of investment by various foundations and NGOs linked to the Salvadoran private sector in education for youth at risk is another positive element. Bilateral and multilateral institutions, international and national NGOs and a multitude of businesses have shown a willingness to invest time, resources, human capital, knowledge and lessons learned to create those educational and employment opportunities essential for youth development.

Building strong and sustainable alliances is key to addressing the challenges listed above as well as taking advantage of the opportunities noted. Solid partnership can be a prime vehicle for delivering critical services to youth such as second-chance education and employability programming. Event participants learned about IYF's Obra Program of building Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular in mobilizing actors, incentivizing innovation and advocating on behalf of youth. Private sector collaboration is essential in alliances that promote education and employment in particular, and IYF noted that engaging businesses requires a specific approach with a clear cost-benefit proposition (in terms of time, human resources and financial resources versus the benefits provided to youth, the business, etc.). With businesses teaming up with government agencies and civil society organizations, much can be accomplished in providing youth skills, internship

opportunities and decent jobs, in addition to changing attitudes and public priorities which affect youth development in the long run.

In conclusion, this half-day dialogue provided an opportunity for key international and national youth development stakeholders in El Salvador to reflect on how they are working together and determine what is essential to strengthen violence prevention and youth employability programming. It is hoped that this event served its purpose in advancing the conversation and encouraging continued exploration of collaborative solutions with and for youth.

### *Minutes*

#### **Welcome and Introduction**

- **Peter Shiras**, Executive Vice-President, International Youth Foundation
- **Héctor Quiteño**, Executive Director, FEDISAL
- **Dinora Arias**, Executive Director, Education, Asociación Ágape
- **Thomas McAndrews**, Deputy Director, Economic Growth Office, USAID-El Salvador

This is the sixth dialogue that *Obra* has sponsored and it offers an important opportunity for sharing experiences, identifying promising practices and learning. It also is an indication of the interest that IYF has in bringing together representatives from the private, government, and NGO sectors and donor institutions for a collaborative dialogue. We believe firmly that all four parties should be involved in discussions as each sector has an important stake and perspective in addressing the issue of youth and the affects of violence. IYF also believes in the power of networks to bring about change. In that sense, this meeting brings together both the *Obra* and the *entra21* networks for a learning exchange.

IYF, FEDISAL and many of the institutions present at the meeting have been focusing for years on providing youth at risk training and support to strengthen youths' employability and ability to find employment and/or self-employment opportunities. This is especially true in conflictive environments such as El Salvador's, where the bias against youth at risk can be strong, and building direct linkages with the private sector can be challenging. We can learn from what is working via our professional networks and communities. Through the *Obra* and *entra21* programs IYF has provided a number of forums like this one today, so we can learn from each other's successes and challenges.

Asociación Agape began working with IYF and the *entra21* program 10 years ago, targeting 500 youth who had limited or no opportunity to continue their studies, some education but limited competencies to compete in the job market, and also those who had finished high school but hadn't found a job. The project had strong technical and life skills components, along with training in how to look for work, as well as a several-week internship. As a result of the support to youth, by the end of the project, 56% were either placed in permanent jobs or had started their own business such as computer repair or telephone services provider. In summary, Asociación Agape learned by its experience with *entra21* that a deep analysis of the market along with relevant training and support can result in decent jobs for youth who otherwise would not have access to such opportunities.

USAID is thoroughly vested in issues facing youth, education, employment and alliance-building; and in a landscape that has evolved significantly in recent years. The trend toward private sector investment is remarkable: in the last thirty years Official Development Assistance to the developing world

dropped from 70% to below 15% of overall resource flows. In El Salvador, USAID has invested in programs with significant private sector investment: improving education quality and school infrastructure in at risk areas; providing skills to youth at risk (e.g., the program Supérate); supporting young women in integrated development projects; and improving local security through projects with vulnerable communities. USAID will continue to innovate and invest through coalitions and in partnership with organizations from key sectors, especially ensuring business expertise is and resources are mobilized.

### **Youth employability: best practices from the entra21 program in Latin America and the Caribbean**

*Susan Pezzullo, Program Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, International Youth Foundation and Mauricio Figueroa, Executive Director, Fundación Quetzalcoatl*

IYF works with organizations such as Agape and Quetzalcoatl throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to train and place youth at risk in decent jobs. Through the entra21 program, IYF has provided skills-building opportunities to over 112,000 youth in more than 20 countries throughout the region. The program has developed and refined a methodology of technical, life skills training and job-seeking support as well as internship placement and job placement services. With a focus on quality and partnership, IYF works closely with local NGOs, government agencies, municipalities, businesses, academic institutions and other stakeholders in all phases of design, development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Click [here](#) to access IYF's power point presentation.

### **The power of partnerships in responding to complex challenges: the experience of the IYF's Obra program in Guatemala, Perú and Jamaica**

*Scott LeFevre, Program Director of the Obra Program, International Youth Foundation*

Public Private Partnerships are the basis for IYF interventions in all types of programming: education, leadership and especially employability. The power of partnerships cannot be overstated, and the potential is enormous. Alliance-building is the vehicle for effectively engaging a wide range of stakeholders who have the leadership, capacity and particular expertise to provide youth the training and support services they need to succeed in education, work and life. Alliances can also influence and change attitudes and behaviors towards youth by effectively targeting their efforts, and also have the potential to influence policies.

Click [here](#) to access IYF's power point presentation.

### **Closing session: entra21 and Obra in the Salvadoran context**

1. **Jose Luis Anaya**, Management and Job Placement Director, Ministry of Labor
2. **Héctor Quiteño**, Executive Director, FEDISAL
3. **Elena de Alfaro**, President, FUNDEMAS
4. **Peter Shiras**, Executive Vice-President, International Youth Foundation

The Ministry of Labor has made significant progress in developing a new vision of collaboration. Through partnerships with international cooperation and Salvadorian institutions, government

programs can succeed in meeting their goals in assisting youth by taking advantage of job opportunities. There are two primary obstacles to such collaboration, however, one being bureaucratic – it takes too much time for new programs to be approved and for partnerships to receive support to move forward, making it difficult to take advantage of an opportunity and move quickly. Secondly, there are multiple processes and programs under way and no means in place to coordinate and articulate a common approach. On the other hand, there are encouraging developments, such as a Ley de Juventud, which has been recently approved by Congress, giving legal basis to work in new ways to support youth. This will be an important instrument moving forward and exploring possibilities.

From FEDISAL's point of view there are three elements which stand out from the dialogue during the day. The first is relating with the private sector and gathering market intelligence. It is urgent that we provide technical assistance to our training institutes so they know how to relate to businesses. Secondly, in order to overcome the current challenges in El Salvador we need to develop a set of positive incentives for employers to offer internships. And third we need to strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation to help decision making around what works, and where to invest future dollars. As a final thought, sustainability needs to be considered carefully as we collaborate: it requires training and capacity-building within institutions and among specific personnel; it needs to be measured and evaluated; and initiatives need to be scaled up in a way that is cost effective.

For businesses, there are a number of reasons to be involved with youth development; the primary one is simply prevention of youth violence. Security is a concern, one that is on the minds of virtually everyone in the business sector. It is critical that the private sector be engaged in youth development, for the sake of the country's socio-economic development, including creating a conducive business environment. And we need to start with the basics: getting to know one another and understanding each other's interventions, without which we risk duplicating efforts. Additionally there is much work to be done in terms of developing the legal framework for internships, and how to work with youth-focused organizations in placing youth. The private sector can come on board and accept all types of youth, no matter where they come from, if the conditions are clear and an understanding is established. Businesses must also be open to recognizing internships as valid work experience when considering young applicants.