



## **Obra Learning and Launch Event**

*April 12-14, 2010  
Kingston, Jamaica*

Hosted by the International Youth Foundation (IYF)  
and The Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ)

In partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

### **Purpose of the event**

This three-day event will serve to both launch the *Obra* Program and kick-off partnership-building activities in the three sub-regions – Central America, South America and the Caribbean. During the first two days of the learning event, Youth of the Americas partners from each of the sub-regions will join USAID, IYF and other key stakeholders to:

- review the socio-economic context and challenges which face youth in the Latin America and Caribbean region
- analyze the most salient issues and opportunities for youth
- develop a common understanding of key elements of the *Obra* program as well as a shared vision
- explore the theme of multi-sectoral partnerships and strategies for success
- learn about positive youth messaging and reaching vulnerable youth
- prepare initial action plans for the three sub-regional partnerships

The launch of the *Obra* Program will take place on the third day of the event, and participants will be joined by high-level government officials from Jamaica, the U.S. and other countries in the region, as well as representatives from civil society, government and the business sector.

## Overview

Over 100 million people in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region are under 30 years of age – the largest cohort of youth in the region’s history – and represent particular opportunities and challenges for growth and social change. Young people make up significant proportions of the population in most countries, further challenging governments to meet key needs such as education and job skills training. The potential for economic and social growth is tremendous if these needs are fulfilled, while the risk of conflict, unrest and other social ills increases as needs go unmet.

Already issues such as youth violence, poor education, lack of employment skills and other hurdles are plaguing millions of young people across the region. Unemployment in the LAC region rose by a quarter between 1995 and 2005, and has risen again during the economic crisis of 2008-09. On average, young people are at least twice as likely to be unemployed as adults; a statistic which masks the problem of low wage informal work performed by poor youth in the region. These youth often receive poor quality and incomplete education, having left school for economic or other reasons. “Out of school, out of work” youth face an uncertain future with few options. The sense of frustration is widespread, due to a lack of access to real opportunities and alternatives to improve their lives.

Finally, in many parts of the LAC region, youth face additional challenges of growing up in violent neighborhoods and being pressured into making poor choices about which paths to choose. Gang activities in Central America, Brazil and other parts of the region are increasing, fueled by drug trafficking, extortion and other illicit but lucrative activities. Having felt marginalized most of their lives, at risk youth face considerable challenges in making the right decisions.

In the face of these challenges, many initiatives are underway across the region to support and serve youth who seek to improve their lives. These initiatives have a common purpose: to provide youth – especially those who are vulnerable or at risk, estimated by the World Bank to be up to half the population in the LAC region – with viable options. These include opportunities to gain market-relevant skills, complete basic education, learn crucial lifeskills, and help understand the modern economy, the marketplace and how to succeed. While many initiatives are being implemented, they often lack the linkages, synergies, scale and coordination among actors to have sustained impact. Public-private partnerships have often proven to be a critical link in ensuring quality service delivery and sustainability of programs for youth development in both education and employment.

In response to this situation, U.S. president Barack Obama called for renewed and strengthened partnerships in the region to promote greater opportunities among the region’s youth at the 2009 Summit of the Americas. Subsequently, the International Youth Foundation and USAID, in coordination with the U.S. State Department, developed “*Obra*”, which aims to form private and public partnerships that will raise awareness of youth at risk issues and strengthen youth services to improve education, employment prospects and lifeskills for young people throughout the region.

At the Kingston learning workshop and launch, experts, practitioners, and other key stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors will come together to frame the key issues facing youth and establish the building blocks of partnerships which will address them. These multi-sectoral alliances will serve to raise awareness about critical challenges facing youth and society at large, identify “what is working” and exchange best practices, as well as influence programs and policies which serve youth. Relationships, interests and resources will be leveraged to ensure that youth are provided the education and skills to take advantage of opportunities. In this way youth can fulfill their dreams of become healthy, engaged and productive citizens, with positive impacts on families and communities in the region.

#### *About Youth: Work*

Youth: Work is a Global Development Alliance Leader with Associates assistance mechanism that USAID and other U.S. government agencies can utilize to access the youth employability programs, services and expertise of the International Youth Foundation. Under this mechanism, USAID and other entities can choose to expand or replicate successful IYF programs as well as to design collaboratively new programs tailored to local realities and priorities. The goal of Youth: Work is to improve livelihood opportunities for disadvantaged young people around the world by supporting: improved access to high-quality, integrated training to increase youth employability; greater youth employability and entrepreneurship support services and networks; and an improved enabling environment for youth employability. Youth: Work also promotes cross-project learning and networking events; targeted training and capacity building; rigorous monitoring and evaluation; support for partnership and leverage development; and other special initiatives.



#### *About Obra*

A two-year initiative, *Obra* was awarded under the Youth:Work global program with USAID. It builds on IYF’s foundational programs such as *entra21* and the Education & Employment Alliance to ensure youth at risk have improved access to services and programs needed to prepare them for citizenship, work and life. In addition to creating multi-sector alliances to support those goals, *Obra* will develop mechanisms for identifying and sharing best practices so that successful experiences may influence the design of programs and policies; and apply these practices in specific education and employability projects which directly benefit Latin American and Caribbean youth. Expected outcomes include: multi-sectoral partnerships mobilized to

support youth at risk; youth at risk more prepared and productively engaged; and youth at risk programs and policies better informed



*About IYF*

The International Youth Foundation invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil-society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts for change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities. To learn more visit [www.iyfnet.org](http://www.iyfnet.org).

