

GOING FOR SCALE ACROSS LATIN AMERICA

How Two IYF Initiatives Are Impacting the Region's Youth Agenda

By SHEILA KINKADE

AS ESCALATING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT MAKES HEADLINES around the globe, governments are struggling with how to address an issue that's grown increasingly volatile. With dour economic forecasts promising little in the way of short-term relief, two IYF programs operating across Latin America and the Caribbean offer hard-won lessons and practical strategies for tackling the youth unemployment crisis over the long-term.

Over 100 million young people in the region are neither working, nor in school. The “*ni ni* (neither nor) generation,” as these youth are commonly referred to, poses a long-term challenge, with their chances of becoming productive members of society diminishing with every year they remain out-of-school, unemployed, and unengaged.

How do nations begin to tackle a complex issue that reaches across diverse sectors of society, including local and national governments, civil society organizations, businesses, training centers, and educational institutions, to name only a few? Two IYF programs—*entra21* and *Obra*—have pursued separate, yet complementary, strategies to address youth employment needs, and ensure that young people have a voice at the table. While their approaches differ, both share a common emphasis on alliance building. The good news? Results from these programs are shedding useful light on a positive path forward.

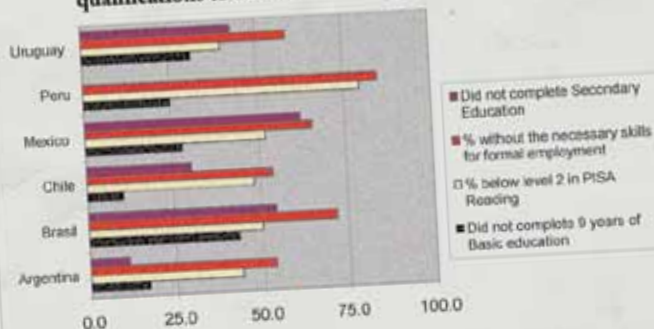
entra21: Influencing Systems

For decades, traditional approaches to addressing complex development challenges emphasized top-down strategies. National governments, through their policies and programs, sought to ameliorate pressing social problems, frequently with the help of international aid. This model often met with criticism over the impracticality of ‘one size fits all’ solutions, and issues related to efficiency and transparency. In response, bottom-up models, developed by nongovernmental organizations, emerged that sought to actively engage affected populations. These, too, were often criticized for their limited reach and uncertain future.

While both approaches are capable of producing impressive results, their limitations have fueled research and debate into how to ‘scale up’ effective practices to address the magnitude of today’s social challenges. It is within this context that *entra21*,

LAC youth are ill equipped for formal jobs

Percentage of LAC youth without the necessary qualifications to obtain formal employment



Source: IDB, "Quality of Life: Beyond the Facts" (2008), page 131

a joint initiative of IYF and the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) of the Inter-American Development Bank, has evolved over the past decade. *Entra21* provides disadvantaged youth, ages 16 to 29, with employment training and job placement services. After a successful first phase (2001-2007), the program was extended through 2011 with the goal of scaling up those best practices it had developed.

Over the past decade, *entra21* has reached 80,000 youth in 22 countries, enabling over half to find decent work, with 25% returning to school. How did it achieve such results? The answer lies, in part, in the MIF's long-term commitment and the program's emphasis on alliance-building, evaluating and refining its approaches, and scaling up through government partnerships.

Going to Scale in Chile and Argentina

A potent example of *entra21*'s efforts to achieve scale can be found in Argentina, where local governments—with the program's support—have opened 100 employment offices throughout the country to assist youth in pursuing jobs. Funding for the initiative came largely from the Ministry of Labor, the World Bank, and MIF. The program's local implementing partner, Fundación SES, strengthened the capacity of these facilities, which traditionally served adults, to provide youth-friendly employment services. Now, youth can talk to professionals specially trained to assist them in finding jobs, pursuing entrepreneurship opportunities, and accessing health services and volunteer activities. The initiative also offered youth two-month training workshops, which included life and IT skills instruction, and exposure to diverse career and continuing education options.

Similarly, in Chile, *entra21* introduced innovations at the local level that are now being considered for adaptation nationally. During Phase I, the program tested a model to address youth unemployment by incorporating vocational and job placement services. In Phase II, that model is being scaled up through a presidential mandate to improve young people's employability, with funding provided by the national government, the MIF, and Nokia. Activities are being carried out by Fundación Chile in collaboration with the National Training and Employment Service (SENSE), with special emphasis on using of technology to make services more easily accessible to youth.

Through the *Te Orienta* website [right], youth in Chile access tools and information for conducting a successful job search.

Now, young job seekers can access a virtual career counseling center, *Te Orienta* (www.teorienta.cl), in English "Orient Yourself," to obtain information about diverse occupations and determine whether they have the skills needed. The website features information on training/educational opportunities, and how to prepare a CV, look for work, conduct a successful job interview, and draft a business plan. In-person support is available through a *Te Orienta* center in Santiago.

Another technological innovation is the development of "virtual portfolios" that young job seekers can create to provide potential employers with an attractive online résumé documenting their educational and employment history, key skills, training courses completed, and references.

Also critical is building the capacity of local training organizations and youth workers to adequately support job seekers. Toward that end, *entra21* has developed an assessment tool to help training institutions determine young people's individual strengths and needs. More than 300 youth workers have also received instruction in how to provide 'youth friendly' job placement assistance. To date, more than 7,600 youth have benefitted from the program in Chile, with roughly half having secured jobs.

One company that has benefited from better trained workers is Telepizza, which operates branches throughout the country. The company has provided 100 *entra21* youth with internship opportunities, 35 of whom are now employed full-time performing duties related to logistics, transportation, production, and storage. "The program helped us take our service to a higher level by providing us with qualified employees," says Human Resource Manager Patricio Puga. "The youth take their work seriously. They have a plan and are pursuing a career path."

Chile's Ministry of Labor has also benefited from streamlining and improving its training and job placement services for youth. "*Entra21* has presented us with new challenges and opportunities—facilitating public-private partnerships and allowing us to adopt new methodologies and good practices," says Eduardo Cuevas, SENSE's Head of Training. "Exchanging ideas with other countries, including Peru, reaffirmed that we are not alone and are on the right track."



Obra: Making Youth a Policy Priority

Raising awareness of key issues facing young people—and amplifying youth voices in public policy debates—are key aims of *Obra*, a two-year initiative of IYF and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). *Obra* was launched in response to U.S. President Obama's 2009 Summit of the Americas call for partnerships that promote greater opportunities among the region's youth. Its mission: to ensure that youth at risk in Latin America and the Caribbean have improved access to the programs and services needed to prepare them for citizenship, work, and life. As is the case with *entra21*, alliance building lies at the core of *Obra*'s efforts to improve the prospects of the region's youth, with three regional partnerships established in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.

In Peru, *Obra* partners are working with government leaders to improve coordination among youth-serving ministries, including the Education, Health, and Labor Ministries. The partnership, led by *El Centro de Información y Educación para la Prevención del Abuso de Drogas* (CEDRO), a national NGO, is collaborating with the National Secretariat for Youth to support the mapping of existing youth-related public services and increase communication among government agencies, with the aim of improving the quality and reach of youth services.

Obra is also working with the press—and utilizing diverse media—to spotlight youth issues and inform debate. In advance of the 2011 elections in Peru, CEDRO joined with *Transparencia*, an affiliate of Transparency International, to assess candidates' views on youth issues. Videos were created of all 11 presidential contenders and their plans for supporting youth. The video content was made public via the internet, effectively inviting discussion around government decisions, priority setting, budgeting, and youth.

Central to *Obra*'s efforts is shifting how policy-makers and society at-large perceive youth: from a tendency to view youth as 'problems to be solved' to a focus on youth as assets. In Guatemala, *Obra* partners are working to create a National Agenda for Youth designed to change the perception, and self-image, of at-risk youth. Partners are using their collective political capital with ministry and business leaders to push for reforms—and have already influenced Guatemala's President to declare that his government will be taking steps to increase the sustainability of successful youth programs. The strength of this effort is in the deep consultation process partners have had with over 1,000 youth through 100 workshops in 50 municipalities. Youth can and do speak with a singular voice on issues such as the need for relevant education programs, quality job training, and the creation of safe spaces.




President of the Inter-American Development Bank Luis Alberto Moreno [center] visits *entra21* project and talks to youth participants about the benefits of the job and entrepreneurship training program.

Sustaining What Works

In the final analysis, *entra21* and *Obra* underscore the importance of comprehensive, far-sighted, multi-sector approaches to youth unemployment. Such approaches emphasize what we have learned in recent years about how to engage, train, and prepare youth for the world of work, and how alliance-building can create an environment where youth can best take advantage of skill building, internships, and employment opportunities. The risks of not investing or investing poorly—in terms of rising youth alienation, poverty, crime, and gang violence—make well-designed programs far more cost-effective for societies, which benefit from an emerging generation of youth who are productive and engaged citizens.

With soaring youth unemployment threatening to reverse recent economic gains in Latin America, IYF seeks to build on the achievements of *entra21* and *Obra* through the creation of a new alliance that spans the Americas, with even greater cross-sector collaboration and the commitment of diverse institutions throughout the region. This new partnership would invest in cost-effective workforce training programs, while documenting and disseminating proven best practices in youth employment and job creation. Special attention would be placed on creating new jobs for youth through the support of young entrepreneurs and small businesses with the potential to grow and create employment.

The keys to success will be the full engagement of the private sector, strong government commitment to demand-driven workforce training, and the capacity of NGOs and training institutions to incorporate lessons learned to reach greater scale and sustainability.

To learn more about *entra21* and *Obra*, please visit: www.iyfnet.org. 

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