



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

June 2009—Focus on Youth

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

YOUTH IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

By Maxine Hillary, Washington, D.C.

The years between 15 and 24 can be tough sometimes. You're not a child anymore, but not yet experienced enough to take on all the responsibilities of being an adult. You are well aware of the world around you but it seems as if you can do little to make a difference in that world. Distractions and influences are everywhere from your friends to the music you listen to. Add that to the fact that you live in a developing country where the education system can't meet all the needs of young people, health-care is poor, unemployment is high, and drugs and crime abound. This is the reality for much of the youth in Latin America and the Caribbean

If you are a youth in the 21st Century you are part of a group that is increasingly gaining the attention of governments, the media, non-governmental organizations and of course, academics. The World Bank in its recent report titled, *Youth in Numbers*, calls young people "custodians of the world's social and economic well-being." It calls on governments and multi-lateral institutions in their efforts to include youth in public decision-making processes and in tailoring public policy, to better support youth and to understand the strengths and needs of the young people of the world.

USAID in its programs in the countries it serves has made great efforts to comprehend and respond to the issues faced by youth in the region. Programs that encourage youth to do well in school are helping youth in Jamaica use technology to tell their stories and find meaning in their studies. Guatemalan youth surrounded by gangs and guns are becoming involved in legal money-making activities that ensure them a promising future rather than a life of crime or worse.



Teens demonstrate their dance moves at the opening of the Mejicanos Youth Center in San Salvador. See story on page 2

In Mexico, USAID supports the Training, Internships, Exchanges and Scholarships program which establishes partnerships between U.S. and Mexican higher education institutions to address development problems, such as access to microfinance, watershed management, and border health. USAID also funds one and two-year technical training programs in the United States for disadvantaged rural, indigenous Mexican teachers and youth who then return to their communities to implement their newly acquired skills. And in Haiti, Club Cool has educated thousands of youth in avoidance practices for HIV in ways that are relevant to their age group and culture.

This month's issue of the *LAC Newsletter* outlines some of these programs and others that are also helping youth in the LAC region better themselves and their communities thus ensuring that the future of Latin America and the Caribbean is as bright as the young people it has produced.

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YOUTH CENTERS HELP CENTRAL AMERICAN KIDS AND YOUTHS

By Karen Azucena, San Salvador

On July 30, 2008, Father Antonio Rodríguez of the San Francisco Parish in Mejicanos, attended the funeral of a young man he knew well. He had been killed the night before in Mejicanos, an impoverished yet vibrant suburb of San Salvador. A victim of gang violence, the young man would not be able to attend the opening of the country's first outreach center led by his friend, Father Rodríguez.

"I am just coming back from the cemetery," said Father Rodríguez to a group of kids, youth volunteers from the community, journalists, and special guests who were waiting for him to officially inaugurate the Mejicanos Outreach Center. In spite of the tragedy the night before, the atmosphere at the Center turned festive as young people celebrated the chance for a different future.

Located in the heart of high-risk communities, USAID-sponsored outreach centers offer a safe environment for children, adolescents, and at-risk youth to gather, learn, and socialize. A network of community volunteers staff the centers, offering support on how to avoid gangs and drugs. Alternatives to violence are role played and discussed.

The USAID Sistema de la Integración Regional Youth Alliance, managed from USAID/El Salvador with a total investment of \$2.8 million, began in 2008 with the signing of a cooperative agreement between USAID and Creative Associates International, Inc. While incorporating lessons learned from other countries, the Youth Alliance offers a holistic approach for addressing the needs of youth, ages 10-25, who may be at a high risk of gang recruitment. By operating through a regional network, the centers have pooled funds to obtain additional resources, such as psychological services for youth. The outreach centers are composed of five program components:

1. Creative use of spare time. Recreational opportunities such as sport activities, art, and games are offered and taught to youth.

2. Job training. Training sessions are focused on helping youth find ways to contribute to the family budget while continuing their education and vocational skills.

3. School tutoring and bringing students to the expected academic level. Staff support and encourage youth to do their homework at the centers. Tutoring is offered to bring students up to their expected grade level, and proactive counseling is available for drop outs to help them return and complete their studies. The underlying focus throughout these efforts is to improve school performance, boost self-esteem, and stay in school.



Mejicanos youth perform at the opening of the Mejicanos Outreach Center in San Salvador.

4. Opportunities. The outreach centers offer opportunities for educational and vocational development for youth.

5. Volunteering. A network of volunteers from the community, including youth, support and work at the center. A commitment to volunteerism and recognition of its importance is fundamental to the program.

Several additional centers are planned for El Salvador, and will continue to be located in areas where vulnerable youth are at risk of being victims of violence, drugs or gang recruitment.

In Guatemala, nine outreach centers are operating. By the end of 2010, the country expects to have 27 centers throughout Guatemala's cities.

In Honduras, over 400 children and adolescents are using an outreach center launched in January 2009 in Rivera Hernández, one of the most violent neighborhoods of San Pedro Sula. In addition, the Youth Alliance has signed agreements with Rotary Clubs to open six outreach centers in Tegucigalpa. The first two will be established in the Villafranca and Buenas Nuevas communities, areas plagued by youth violence.

The overarching goal of the USAID-SICA Regional Youth Alliance and other programs remains noble: bring hope and a better future to thousands of vulnerable youth throughout the Central American region.

To read more about USAID youth centers in Latin America, cntrl/click on http://www.usaid.gov/stories/guatemala/fp_gtm_manfer.html

USAID FUNDS FIRST FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR FUTURE AFRO-COLOMBIAN LEADERS

By German Acevedo, Bogotá

In January 2009 U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield and Colombian Minister of Culture Paula Moreno greeted the first participants of a new Afro-Colombian Leadership and Scholarship Program. The program was developed by the Government of Colombia, through its Ministry of Education, in cooperation with USAID and Fulbright Colombia. The first five Fellows will travel to the United States in August to begin doctoral and master's programs in Environmental Science and Policy, Public Health, and Public Administration. This is the first and only fellowship program in Colombia that is tailored to respond to the challenges faced by emerging Afro-Colombian leaders wishing to actively engage in the policymaking process and make a difference in their communities.

The program covers tuition, leadership training, medical insurance, visa, travel, and living expenses. A total of 21 fellowships for graduate studies in the United States will be granted over a three year period for outstanding Afro-Colombians.

Assistance to Afro-Colombians is a high priority for USAID/Colombia. Since the inception of Plan Colombia in 2000, USAID/Colombia has worked with Afro-Colombian populations to improve their economic, political, and social development through alternative development, democratic governance, assistance to internally displaced persons and vulnerable groups, and demobilization and reintegration.

Despite significant advances in recent years, living conditions for Afro-Colombians remain challenging. Unemployment rates are higher than the general population. Education levels are lower, and access to health and education services is limited. Greater representation at the national level is seen as a way to increase influence and oversee public policies. A shortage of financial resources, insufficient English skills, and limited knowledge of admission requirements are impediments for Afro-Colombians in attending graduate school in Colombia and abroad. To address these issues, USAID Colombia's US\$500,000 financial support focuses on training to prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language and Graduate Record Examinations, required for fellows to apply to United States universities, as well as the leadership training--an essential part of the program.



Participants of the Afro-Colombian Leadership program pose with facilitators.

In January 2009, the Phelps Stokes Fund conducted the Leadership workshop for the program fellows.

Mark Taylor, a grantee from the Island of Providencia, who is going to study for his master's degree in Public Policy and Community Development, emphasized the importance of the training. "It was very helpful and interesting because people from different Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities from all over Colombia participated in the workshop."

Mark is already a leader in Providencia. He ran for Mayor in 2007 and is planning to run again in 2011, when he comes back from the United States. "My goal is to bring the government closer to people by giving them a voice and ability to be a part of the decision-making process. I hope to contribute to the process of making government decisions more transparent, and government officials more accessible to the community. I hope that my efforts will help the people of Providencia."

Nilsen Lasso, a biology professor from the Pacific University of Buenaventura, also has very high expectations of the program and a well thought-out strategy on how to help his community after he obtains his Ph.D. in plant biology. "There is a lot of work that I need to accomplish on many levels on the Pacific coast of Colombia. We have many problems. Afro-Colombians have no representation in the government, because they do not have appropriate education, and those who do are not taken into account because of their race. I want to lead them to better education, encourage them to seek opportunity, and change their attitudes. I would like to educate people on how to use wisely the natural resources of this unique region -- one of the most ecologically diverse areas in the world, how to respond to climate change and maintain ecological balance, and how to be the creators of their own destiny."

WHO ARE THE AFRO-COLOMBIANS?

Afro-Colombians comprise 20-25% of the national population, but are recognized at 10.6%. The population is about 11 million of the 42 million people in Colombia. It is the second largest population of African descent in Latin America. Brazil has the largest.

Approximately 72% of Afro-Colombians live in coastal areas of the Caribbean and Pacific regions. More recently, and due in part to the intensity of the armed conflict and the lack of economic opportunities in these regions, Afro-Colombians are migrating or are forcibly displaced to urban areas where 66% of Afro-Colombians now live. Afro-Colombians have the highest indices of poverty, violence, and social unrest in Colombia. Nearly 85% of Afro-Colombian families are poor, with the annual income at approximately US\$500, as opposed to US\$1,700 for non-Black Colombians. Afro-Colombians experience a 32% illiteracy rate, compared with 15% among non-Blacks. Only 38% of Afro-Colombian teenagers go to high school, compared to 66% of non-Black Colombian teenagers. Only 2% of all Afro-Colombians go on to higher education. To learn more ctrl/click on <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afro-Colombian>

DESAFÍO 100 – PEACE FOR GUATEMALA

By Wende Duflon, Guatemala City

Gang activity in Central America has become a form of sophisticated violence and a threat to the region's security. In Guatemala, it is recognized as the number one national problem.

The reasons for the expansion of gangs include large areas of marginal living where access to basic services is scarce; high unemployment rates, particularly among youth; insufficient access to education and ineffective justice systems. Criminals with easy access to weapons act with impunity. Family violence is rampant, particularly against women.

“Before I was part of the destruction of my country. Now I want to be part of the reconstruction of my country.” JotaJota, former gang member and now member of Desafío 100

Though the number of new recruits to gangs increases daily, many gang members are also leaving their gangs. These former gang members are finding refuge in churches—religion being one of the few reasons condoned by gangs for a person to leave their ranks. Former gang members are also finding support from non-

governmental organizations (NGOs).

In Guatemala, being an “Ex” who has stopped engaging in illegal activities for several years is still a dangerous and difficult proposition, largely because of the tattoos former gang members carry on their bodies and/or faces. The police are indiscriminate and they pick up tattooed young people without distinguishing between active and former gang members. Prospective employers associate tattoos directly with gang membership and refuse to talk to people who have them. Former gang members, male or female, have an uphill battle finding worthy and legitimate sources of income to support their reformed lifestyle.

Desafío 100 – ¡Paz para Guatemala! (Challenge 100-Peace for Guatemala!) Is a pilot initiative of the USAID Youth Alliance Program in conjunction with CACIF (Guatemalan Chambers of Agriculture, Commerce, Industry and Finance) that brings together 100 former gang members and up to 100 entrepreneurs that are opening entry-level jobs so these youth may begin to recover their lives and become productive, responsible citizens.

In 2006, more than 20 churches and NGOs that work with at-risk youth nominated 180 former gang members as candidates for the Desafío 100 initiative. Criteria for nominees included having been out of a gang for more than a year, having no pending criminal case to deal with, passing a psychological test and being over the legal working age of 18. The USAID program evaluated candidates through psychological, IQ and aptitude tests to ensure they were capable of handling a job

CACIF, through its various chambers, identified businesses that were interested in contributing to solve the youth violence and security-related problems in Guatemala.



Desafío100 participants run a car wash in downtown Guatemala City.

CACIF also named persons from each one of its chambers to form a committee that selected the businesses and placed appropriate candidates with respective companies and jobs.

This alliance is a historical effort because it is the first time that CACIF, private sector leaders and more affluent Guatemalans have tried a positive, creative and humanistic solution to a complex and controversial social problem.

At the inauguration of Desafío 100 in December 2006, 49 business leaders personally offered jobs to 53 young women and men, all former gang members from several different internationally known gangs. At the inauguration, a leading businessman of a chain of popular restaurants reflected, “I was deeply moved by this ceremony! I called my office because I want to accept two more youths—now we have four in total.”

Two months later, in February 2007, 34 youths had been placed in specific jobs. Six were filling positions in other businesses not part of the Desafío 100 alliance, and only 14 had started a job and left it. As a former gang member, alias ‘Panadero’ said, “I see now that everyone struggles, not just us. Everyone has to work hard and has disappointments. So, we have to all forge ahead together.”

The alliance partners expect that once the success of the program is solid, other businesses will join to provide opportunities to for-



Female membership in gangs is on the increase in Latin America. Girls joining gangs to find the support they don't have at home often find themselves further endangered and victimized by their fellow gang members.

EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAM GIVES HOPE AND SKILLS TO BRAZILIAN DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

By Rodrigo Dalcin, Brasília

Disadvantaged youth from Northeast Brazil face an array of challenges including poverty, limited education, lack of English-language capability, and weak life skills--all of which limit their ability to secure decent, formal employment. The youth unemployment rate in Brazil is even higher than the overall unemployment rate of the population and impedes economic growth for the entire country.

Many of the youth that once lived without any concrete professional perspectives are now being promoted to management positions in the sales sector. This reality has been made possible by Enter Jovem, a USAID-supported youth employability program in Salvador and Recife that, over the past five years, has benefited 7,000 disadvantaged youth aged 16-24. The program has provided professional and life skills training, English-language instruction, and job placement assistance.

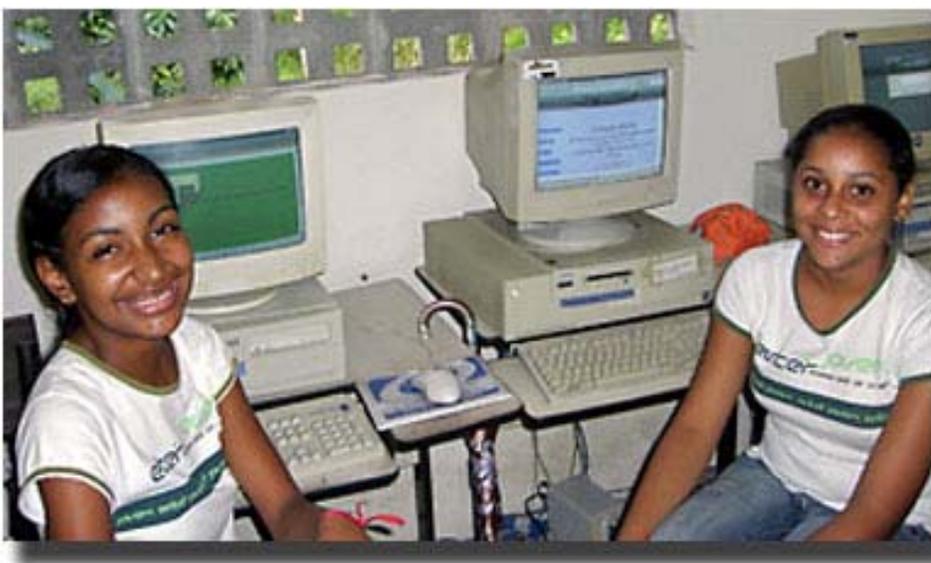
Enter Jovem student Gabriela Conceição was recently nominated 2008's best employee at the telemarketing company where she works. She expressed her satisfaction at reaching financial independence and being able to make plans for her future. Learning from Gabriela's example, Enter Jovem student Tamiles Santos who found her first job through the program, remarks, "Now I have personal goals in my life and no longer consider myself to be a marginalized individual."

Entrepreneurs hiring Enter Jovem graduates have praised the professional values of graduates. According to Sandro Coelho, a store owner from Bahia state, employees coming from the program usually start on their first job already demonstrating outstanding professional skills and a great sense of responsibility. "Youth from Enter Jovem seem to be especially conscious of their roles within the job market," he notes.

Implemented by USAID/Brazil partner American Institutes for Research, the program's results include a 40% placement of trained youth into formal employment opportunities in more than 500 private sector companies. Enter Jovem director Tanya Andrade holds that the program design and methodology is based on continuous dialogue with the private sector, aiming to identify job market needs.

In March 2008, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Enter Jovem and delivered a speech stressing the importance of USAID's youth employability program for establishing strong relations between Brazil and the United States. Since her visit, the Enter Jovem program has been aiming to reach other regions.

In February 2009, after U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Clifford Sobel's tour through nine Northeastern Brazil states, the youth employability program raised significant interest for expansion to three other states: Sergipe, Ceará and Piauí. The Ambassador's meetings with state governors, state government representatives, the private sector, and civil society communicated a significant desire to form partnerships that would enable Enter Jovem to expand its reach. Already, the private sector has provided important contributions from corporate social responsibility initiatives of U.S. companies including Motorola, IBM, and Microsoft, as well as Bahia State Electricity Utility Coelba. It is hoped that such alliances will multiply the funds already invested in Enter Jovem by USAID, which to date are equivalent to more than \$4 million.



Enter Jovem participants learn computer skills.

YOUTH IN BRAZIL	
Ages 15—24	
Number of youth	184,101,109
Literacy	95.8%
Secondary School Enrollment	72%
Tertiary School Enrollment	18.2%
Pregnancy rate per 1,000	
Ages 15—19	36
Ages 20—24	93
HIV Awareness	
Male	80%
Female	79%
Unemployment	17.9%
Homicide per 100,000	
Male	81.2
Female	6.5
Suicide per 100,000	
Male	8.0
Female	2.2

VEGYFRUT - A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR REALIZES HIS DREAM

By Jan Howard, Managua

Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas. Poverty affects 2.3 million people throughout the country. Most kids barely complete grade school and teen pregnancies account for one of every four births. Domestic violence, child and adolescent sexual exploitation, drug use and youth gangs are rampant. It's not hard to see how difficult it might be for a young person to plan for the future. But a USAID incentive has helped one young person beat the odds and benefit his community. In 2005, then 22-year-old, Carlos Fernando Solórzano had an idea for packaging cut fresh fruits and vegetables. When he won the first place in the USAID-funded *Idea su Empresa (Plan a Business)* contest, Solórzano used the \$10,000 prize to turn his idea into reality.

With guidance from USAID's "Launching New Ventures in Nicaragua" program, Solórzano developed a business plan and in December 2006 VegyFrut was born. The company now generates over \$1 million in sales to clients that include Esso On the Run Markets, McDonald's, TGI Fridays, and other large retailers and franchises in Nicaragua. USAID/Nicaragua formed a Global Development Alliance (public-private alliance) with the U.S.-based NGO TechnoServe, the Roberto Teran Foundation in Nicaragua, Agora Partnerships USA (a non-profit), Agora Venture Fund - Nicaragua I, and additional U.S. and Nicaraguan partners to help young entrepreneurs like Solórzano to establish or expand small businesses. The activity, entitled "Launching New Ventures in Nicaragua," created a new, Nicaraguan-based, non-profit entity called Agora Partnerships Nicaragua, which offers technical assistance to Nicaraguan entrepreneurs and provides them with the opportunity to access capital from the Agora Venture Fund. Estimated resources of the Alliance total \$4.2 million. USAID contributes \$1.7 million.

The Alliance provides education, financing, and ongoing support to competitive businesses committed to growing themselves and their communities. In 2008, 118 businesses received technical assistance from the program to develop business plans and improve management practices. Many of these businesses have increased production, entered new markets, and gained access to venture capital investment.

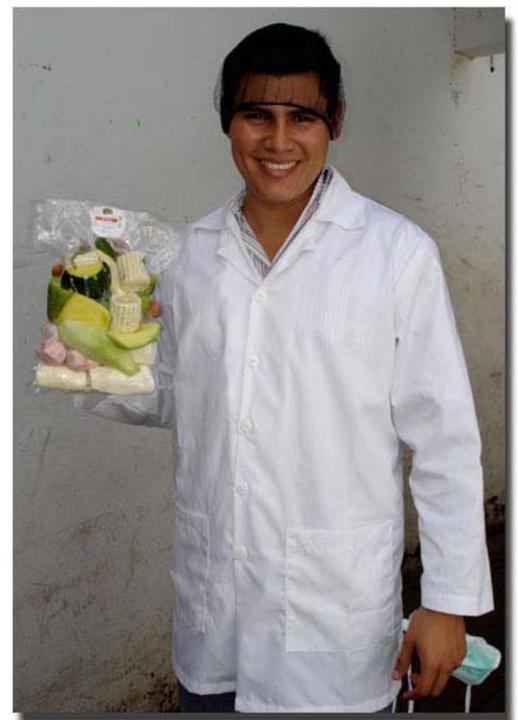
"The program helped us when VegyFrut was still just an idea on paper," says Solórzano. "They helped us to define our market, to figure out how the business would flow, and to assess what kind of capital was necessary to launch the business."

But Solórzano's mission encompasses more than just fruits and vegetables. VegyFrut provides 21 full-time jobs and a market for 50 farmers, many of them members of a women's agricultural cooperative, who supply the business. VegyFrut employees receive full benefits and training as do the company's suppliers. The company offers their suppliers new types of seeds and fertilizers and a steady demand for their products. The improved quality of life for employees and suppliers trickles back up to the entrepreneur. Solórzano comments,



Carlos Fernando Solórzano works with growers to develop quality products.

"I don't want to be able to buy myself a new car or house if I don't also see my workers improving their lives. But now I'm seeing that my workers are beginning to build their own houses or buy a little piece of land. They're sending their kids to school. The lives of the farmers are also improving. They are able to eat better and dress well. It fills us with pride. It's something we have done together."



One of Solórzano's employees shows off some of the packaged produce that he markets successfully in the region.

STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES TACKLE YOUTH CRIME IN THE CARIBBEAN

By Jim Goggin, Barbados

Blue skies, pristine beaches, a rolling ocean. Steel drums beat and the rum flows, but behind this tourist's vision of the Caribbean is a growing crime and violence problem backed by increasing use and trafficking of drugs. With a per capita murder rate of 30



USAID Barbados/Eastern Caribbean Mission Director James Goggin makes presentation of sports gear and computers at boys and girls homes in Eastern Caribbean.

per 100,000, it ranks the highest in the world. Its educational systems have significant weaknesses despite universal secondary education and the region has one of the world's lowest rates of availability and access to tertiary education. These factors make a focus on youth-related issues a prime concern for USAID/Barbados and Eastern Caribbean.

While USAID works to complete a new five-year strategy that places youth issues at its core, the agency is moving its youth agenda forward. Recently, USAID engaged with the Florida National Guard's State Partnership Program and the U.S. Southern Command to hold "Youth Services and Crime Prevention" workshops in two eastern Caribbean nations, St. Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda. The St. Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda Ministers of National Security and their respective Permanent Secretaries were directly involved in the planning of these workshops. Both played active roles during the day-long discussions which brought together experts from across a broad spectrum of local organizations dealing with youth to hear from Florida counterparts about juvenile crime and justice prevention and diversion programs being practiced in several Florida jurisdictions.

The Florida experts included the State Prosecutor from Jacksonville, a manager of the Jacksonville Police Athletic League, representatives from the Seminole County Sheriff's Department, and leadership from the Florida Youth Challenge Academy (FYCA). Sgt. Major, Ret. James Ransom is Deputy Director of FYCA. His observations led him to the conclusion that youths in the Caribbean are much like youths in the United States. "I could see the parallel. Kids are kids. I noticed that they still had the same issues, the same problems. The difference is the financial situations they come from." He notes that similar influences affect youth behavior. "The economy is not doing well and both parents have to work. The media, lyrics of songs, games, videos—kids try to interpret these things and emulate them. We saw the wannabe gang members on Caribbean TV, just like in the States."

One cornerstone of the workshops was the opportunity to adopt and apply "best practices" from the Florida experience. Says Ransom, "There were at least 50 people at our presentation. There is a strong desire for change. We were overwhelmed with the level of interest and the number of questions posed to us." Local authorities in St. Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda left the workshops with determination to tackle critical youth crime and violence issues. There has already been interesting follow-up between St. Lucia education and police officials on how to handle suspended students. USAID and the Embassy Bridgetown Military Liaison Office are planning a visit of key Caribbean officials to Florida to continue this uniquely valuable form of development assistance.

Coupled with the high-level, technical discussions between the Caribbean and Florida officials, the USAID-State Partnership Program team also visited several youth facilities in both St. Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda to assess local conditions, meet with the administrators of these boys and girls homes and training centers, and talk directly with the at-risk youth. Tapping into the U.S. Southern Command's Humanitarian Assistance Minimum Cost Grants, the team was able to distribute to each youth facility an array of much-needed goods, including school exercise books and teaching materials, sports equipment, and desktop and laptop computers. There was lavish local media coverage of each site visit and a handover ceremony, highlighting not only the partnership between the United States and these island nations, but also a vibrant operational partnership among civilian, military, federal, and state segments of our own government.

"If the pivotal social factor is violence – it will destroy not just our social fabric, but also our economic potential." -- Caribbean Regional political leader

HIGH SCHOOL USES TECHNOLOGY TO PROMOTE BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

By Ruth Chisholm, Kingston

Ascot Comprehensive High School in Greater Portmear, St. Catherine, Jamaica was becoming as challenging a place to teach and learn as many stateside urban high schools. School administrators, teachers, parents, and some students were concerned with rampant fighting, theft, extortion and truancy--offenses that would normally lead to suspension or expulsion. With youth accounting for nearly 30% of Jamaica's population, investments in youth that foster positive behavior change and encourage a culture of lawfulness are understandably high priorities in local and national initiatives that address crime and violence. In the case of Ascot, something had to be done. A program known as Students Expressing Truth (S.E.T.) was set in motion.

Originally designed to rehabilitate inmates in Jamaica's correctional facilities through education, life, and job skills training using technology-driven approaches, in its nine years of existence S.E.T has enjoyed a zero percent recidivism rate among former inmates enrolled in the program. Many of them have become positive role models in their communities.

A program designed to address the issues of prisoners might be seen as inappropriate for high school students, but S.E.T found relevance at Ascot. Calleen Dedrick, a counselor/facilitator at the S.E.T Foundation says "A school can be a microcosm of what happens in society." She explains that knowing that crime is driven by social problems, the S.E.T. team recognized that the issues in underserved communities contribute to the establishment of criminal networks. "Kids are recruited even before they get to high school, so S.E.T.'s knowledge of the prison system and how gang leaders or 'dons' command their 'soldiers' from behind bars makes it vital to expand the program into schools where the student population is mainly from volatile communities. Many students are at risk for gang recruitment."

S.E.T is working with nearly 30 of the most disruptive students at Ascot by using non-traditional methods to achieve behavior change. The students had low academic averages and were repeatedly referred for disciplinary action. Some were reported gang members. Others had frequent trouble with the police.

Andre Waugh, physical education teacher and a dean of discipline along with Principal Cedric Murray, sought to implement more preventative measures rather than just reacting to each disruption. According to Murray, "The old ways of discipline were not working." S.E.T provided an approach that would engage students, teachers and parents in getting to the root of the behavior problem.



S.E.T. Student Council Leaders

"They are drawn to the computers," Dedrick states, "and they all want to create something." The students ranging from 14 to 17 years of age are encouraged to tell their stories through digital storytelling, role-playing and video. These methods hold their attention and help them to work through their problems because they share their experiences with their peers. Together they identify better ways to resolve conflict. These stories are also an important part of a repository of information that a wide range of stakeholders can draw upon to formulate appropriate strategies and interventions.

The program is student-driven. Students become members of an executive body, similar to a student council, with some members holding certain leadership roles. This empowers them to participate in decision-making, while managing the responsibilities associated with leadership.

15-year-old Sadene, club secretary, was on the verge of being expelled. Her mother Diane McNeil says the program is the best thing that could have happened. "She was becoming very aggressive and I was getting calls from the guidance counselor saying they would have to put her out of school because of her behavior." McNeil can barely find the words to express her satisfaction, but she smiles profusely. "She loves the program, she's more disciplined and focuses more on her school work and we communicate better now," she adds.



Sadene McNeil shows her mother Diane some of the technology she's learning to use.

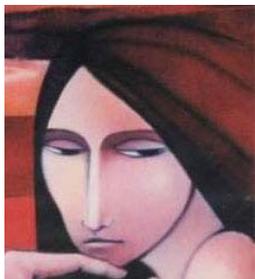
The Ministry of Education has also been trying to find ways to address the growing problem of violence in schools. Alphansus Davis, senior advisor in the Ministry of Education said the Ministry hopes that the S.E.T/Ascot approach can be extended to other schools. "We look forward to the results of this pilot so we can use the successes to guide us." Davis advised that among other activities, the Ministry had rolled out security and safety manuals to schools to help them to manage behavioral issues.

Sean Osner, deputy director of the USAID/Jamaica Office of Sustainable Development commended the school administration for believing something could be done. They saw the potential in these students and didn't give up on them despite complex circumstances ... Ascot is a good example that will serve the wider community." The S.E.T/Ascot sessions include audio and video production, strategic games to foster better decision making, voice and speech, and job readiness. The strategic games are done online through a partnership with Harvard Law School.



The Youth Centers give kids opportunities to learn new skills and pastimes.

**Coming in June:
Women in Latin America
and the
Caribbean**



Sketch by:
Sergio Gonzalez

**Population of Youth (Ages 15-24) in LAC
(2004, World Bank)**

Antigua and Barbuda	14.9%
Barbados	15.1%
Bolivia	21.2 %
Brazil	19.1%
Colombia	17.7%
Dominica	16.5%
Dominican Republic	19.1%
Ecuador	19.8%
El Salvador	20.2%
Grenada	24.5%
Guatemala	21.1%
Guyana	21.3%
Haiti	22.6%
Honduras	21.0%
Jamaica	18.7%
Mexico	19.2%
Nicaragua	21.8%
Panama	18.3%
Paraguay	18.5%
Peru	19.4%
Saint Kitts and Nevis	18.3%
Saint Lucia	20.3%
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	20.8%
Trinidad and Tobago	20.7%

To learn more about what USAID is doing to help youth in Latin America and the Caribbean, check out some of our stories at the following links:

- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/dominicanrepublic/ss_dr_teens.html
- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/bolivia/ss_bo_education.html
- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/brazil/ss_br_youthemployment.html
- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/brazil/ss_br_youthenergy.html
- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/colombia/ss_co_wounds.html
- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/colombia/fp_col_julio.html
- http://www.usaid.gov/stories/guatemala/cs_gt_youth1.html
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