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## NOTE FROM THE FIELD

# Using Peer Learning to Develop 100% Market-Driven Program Design

**The USAID-funded Practitioner Learning Program (PLP) in Youth and Workforce Development highlights innovative approaches to market-driven employment and entrepreneurship.**



Photo courtesy of the SEEP Network

Rocio Peralta (age 16), presenting the organic cheese she is learning to make at Fundacion Paraguaya's Agricultural School during one of her professional rotations.

*To address these challenges [facing youth], practitioners must be able to design and measure each element of their youth development program in a manner that both responds to market needs and opportunities and develops the full range of skills needed by youth.*

The world youth<sup>1</sup> population is growing rapidly, with many youth facing serious obstacles: according to statistics from the International Labor Organization, only 30 percent are living in countries where there are decent jobs for them. The majority of these young people are highly motivated but poorly prepared to identify, seize, and generate employment opportunities for themselves.

On one hand, the current and upcoming surge in the number of youth presents a tremendous opportunity. The majority of youth are intelligent, ambitious, curious, motivated, and passionate young citizens who want to gain technical, financial, and life skills. The quality and kinds of education and training opportunities they receive set the stage for many of their economic prospects and success as adults, and in turn, for their children. On the other hand, youth whose energies are not channeled productively represent a tremendous waste of human potential and can result in youth-driven drags on country development, such as crime, violence, poor health, extremism, and social and political instability<sup>2</sup>. To address these challenges, practitioners must be able to design and measure each element of their development program in a manner that both responds to market needs and opportunities and develops the full range of skills needed by youth.

The USAID-funded Practitioner Learning Programs (PLP), a SEEP Network initiative carried out through the AED FIELD mechanism, supports practitioners in these endeavors. Working together to develop learning questions that consider each phase of the project design cycle, PLP practitioner organizations test and improve program design and implementation. They can then create learning products to share with the broader practitioner community their experiences and research findings in the areas of youth program assessment and design, strategic alliances, monitoring and evaluation, sustainability and

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scale-up, and incentives for program leaders.

The PLP “Youth and Workforce Development: Using 100% Market - Driven Program Design to Achieve 100% Employment” launched in Asunción, Paraguay, January 14-17, 2008. The PLP engages microenterprise practitioners to incorporate these learning questions into their projects while participating in a collaborative learning process. The following PLP learning questions were developed through a participatory mapping and grouping exercise of the six PLP partner organizations.

The first question focuses on program design and on the assessment phase. One possible learning output can be an inventory or review of various assessment tools available to youth program designers, and determining which is most applicable in different environments.

The second question focuses on selecting program partners and forming strategic alliances; the third focuses on sustainability and scale-up. The specific areas for study under this question include building the capacity and sustainability of local partners, engaging with the local private sector, keeping program content relevant and effective when growing to scale, and various models for scaling up.

A final learning question concentrates on monitoring and evaluation. Planned learning products include a set of common indicators for youth economic programming, as well as lessons learned and key success factors for

strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system.

This particular PLP is a peer learning, action research project that supports the identification and implementation of strategies to promote demand-driven workforce development projects that prepare youth for quality employment or self-employment, and to develop metrics to assess the effectiveness of these strategies. The desired impact is that PLP participants, individually and as a group, will achieve greater success in using market-driven strategies to help increasing numbers of young people - ideally 100% of youth clients – to gain quality employment or be successful microentrepreneurs.

At the opening workshop for this PLP, the organizations developed the learning questions mentioned above. For the remainder of the one-year program, participants will continue to collaborate, capture group learning and establish group-sourced knowledge on best practices through virtual communications, exchange visits, and collaborative action research. By utilizing these knowledge-sharing techniques, organizations are increasing the reach and impact of their programs.

The following six organizations are participating in this PLP:

- [Education Development Center](#) (EDC) and its Haitian Out-of-School Youth Livelihoods Initiative (IDEJEN) reach youth through vocational training, job development, and small business development.

- [Fundación Paraguaya](#), located outside of Asunción, Paraguay, runs a financially self-sufficient Agricultural School. The school provides children of low-income farmers with the education and skills they need to become economically successful rural entrepreneurs and employees.

- [International Rescue Committee](#) (IRC)'s Legacy Initiative works in four West African countries, including Liberia. The program reaches marginalized and at-risk youth; it supports demand-driven vocational and skills training, and creates linkages to the private sector and local businesses.

- [Mercy Corps](#) focuses globally on issues of monitoring and evaluation in youth programming, as well as subsidiary MFIs who are exploring how to make their youth-focused products more market-driven.

- [Partners of the Americas' A Ganar/Vencer](#) program is active in Ecuador, Uruguay, and Brazil, and reaches at-risk youth through a soccer-based curriculum that teaches life skills, such as leadership and teamwork, that translate to the workplace. A Ganar/Vencer also offers linkages to local private-sector businesses for employment or education continuation opportunities.

- [Save the Children's Rural Youth Livelihoods](#) (RYL) is a program in Upper Egypt that focuses on supporting young people through savings clubs, financial education, and training in making informed choices about market activities and work opportunities.

To stay informed on youth and enterprise issues, join the Children, Youth and Economic Strengthening (CYES) listserv by emailing [Jennine Carmichael](#). Developed in partnership between The SEEP Network and the AED Supporting Transformation by Reducing Insecurity and Vulnerability with Economic Strengthening, the CYES listserv provides regular updates and access to the latest research and programming in this area.

<sup>1</sup> 'Youth' is defined by the United Nations General Assembly as those people who are between the ages of 15 and 24 years, inclusive.

<sup>2</sup> USAID. 2007. "Youth Livelihoods Brief." Washington, DC: USAID.

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