

Evaluation Summary: Primero Aprendo Program in Central America and Dominican Republic

Project and Evaluation Facts

Region/Country: Latin America & Caribbean/
Dominican Republic

Grantee: CARE, USA

Project Duration: August 16, 2004 –
March 31, 2009

Fiscal Year and Funding Level:

FY 2004 USD 5,730,000

Grantee Matching Funds USD 809,030

Type of Evaluation: Mid Term

Date of Evaluation: January 2007

Mode of Evaluation: Independent

Evaluation Management: Macro International

Evaluator(s): Mauricio Garcia-Moreno (team
leader), Jeffrey Tines

Background and Context

Summary of Project Objectives and Focus

Primero Aprendo was a four and half-year project that aimed to enhance access to education for working children in Central America and the Dominican Republic. The project operated in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, and was focused on children engaged in or at risk of engaging in exploitative labor in the agricultural sector.

The project was guided by the following Immediate Objectives:

- General awareness is raised among key regional, national, and local actors regarding the relationship between poverty, education, and child labor;
- Best practices are effectively pilot tested and demonstrated in selected locations of participating “demonstration” countries – namely, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala;
- Conditions are created for stimulating sustained dialogue and knowledge sharing among project countries; and
- An appropriate policy options agenda is developed and promoted among select key institutional actors in each of the participating countries as well as regionally.

The project was designed to work closely with government actors, NGO’s, community-based organizations, and key implementing partners including Catholic Relief Services (CRS), DevTech Systems, and Ministries of Labor, Education and Family throughout the region.

Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation examined project performance to date in relation to stated objectives. Specifically, the evaluation reviewed and assessed activities with respect to their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Further, the evaluation was designed to be a learning process that could serve to provide guidance as to revisions in strategy for the balance of the cooperative agreement to ensure project objectives are realized.

Methodology of Evaluation

The evaluation was based on a desk review of relevant documentation, followed by a field mission to Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua conducted by the evaluation team from the 17th of September 2006 to the 13th of October 2006. The field work consisted of interviews, focus groups, and other information collection techniques with stakeholders including government representatives, NGO’s at the national, provincial, and district level, children, parents of beneficiaries, teachers, project staff, and USDOL representatives. The evaluation was affected in accordance with the terms of reference (TOR), as prepared by Macro International with input from USDOL and other key stakeholders.

Evaluation’s Main Findings & Conclusions

Performance Summary

At mid term, the project has successfully provided educational services to 2,080 children engaged in child labor, resulting in reduced absenteeism, increased enrollment, and a reduction in number of hours worked. Further, the project has served to elevate community-level awareness as to the relationship between child labor, education, and poverty.

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Nonetheless, as a consequence of insufficient regional coordination as well as a lack of national capacity, the project has not been able to affect national-level awareness, and, in turn, the evaluators contend that the project will not be able to achieve its third objective “to create the conditions for sustained dialogue and knowledge sharing among project countries.”

Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Lessons Learned

- Enrollment and retention can be increased through consideration of the following factors:
 - accessibility to educational services,
 - availability of funds to cover enrollment costs,
 - attitude and commitment of teachers toward the education of children;
- Organizations and professional experts in social marketing have greater capacity to create and implement strategies to change cultural patterns and to modify public policies related to the issue of poverty;
- In order to effectively influence public policy in countries with weak institutional social sectors, strategies should be placed in the logical framework of the project and should commence immediately;
- In order to implement a complex project in which multiple organizations are engaged and multiple countries are targeted, the operational structure should be predicated upon desired outcomes; and
- Redesign of the project’s logical framework, if needed, should be conducted early in the life of the project.

Key Recommendations

- Provide additional training and follow up for teachers and other personnel responsible for implementation of the educational initiatives;

- Utilize the Open Class and School Report project interventions to increase awareness efforts with parents;
- Consider combining select complementary practices in the same school during the period for replication of validated practices;
- Conduct additional analysis of educational practices to identify common elements that serve to facilitate or impede their success;
- Employ one of the applied research methods to obtain more accurate data regarding the effect of the project;
- Augment situational analysis conducted by PREAL with other documents that analyze other policies, programs, and projects conducted in Latin America in order to integrate knowledge and promote debate;
- Develop a partnership with UNICEF and ILO-IPEC to affect regional and national policy agendas;
- Restructure project objectives – place objective 3 within objective 4;
- Find support from experts in regard to team building to moderate communication challenges between the project director and team;
- Develop a work plan that includes mechanisms to allow the education specialist to support national and local teams;
- Conduct an analysis of the capacity of national coordinators to develop and promote policy agendas;
- Clarify the role of the national coordinators in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic;
- Identify and analyze favorable instances of inter-institutional work and work to replicate strategies, as needed; and
- Review USDOL definitions of exploitative work, beneficiaries, prevention, and withdrawal.