



## South America Public Event and Learning Conference

### *Executive Summary*

As part of its ongoing efforts to increase education and employment opportunities for at risk-youth across the region, the *Obra* Program held a Public Event and Learning Conference in Lima, Peru from November 17-19, 2010. The three-day meeting was sponsored and organized by the International Youth Foundation (IYF), the Center for Information and Education for the Prevention of Drug Abuse (CEDRO) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). On November 17<sup>th</sup> over 100 organizations from more than a dozen countries – including 32 partner organizations and more than 30 youth leaders – joined senior officials from Peru and the United States, to highlight challenges facing young people, celebrate progress made to date in forming three *Obra* partnerships, and collectively recommit to the goal of creating real and tangible opportunities for youth at risk.

On November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, over 90 representatives – *Obra* partners, youth leaders, civic and business leaders, USAID officials, CEDRO and IYF leadership and staff, and special guests – met for the purpose of analyzing youth at risk dynamics in the LAC region. Together, they drew lessons from successful programs in replicating best practices, scaling up and advocating for improved public programs and policies; explored alliance-building and learnings from multi-sectoral partnerships which have had impact; increased participant understanding of *best and promising practices*; and worked to strengthen the *Obra* partnerships.

*Obra* is a U.S. Government initiative developed in response to President Obama's call at the 2009 Summit of the Americas, with the goal of creating and strengthening multisectoral alliances to expand job training and other opportunities for vulnerable youth. This was the third *Obra* regional conference, following similar events in Jamaica in April 2010, and Guatemala in July 2010.

All three *Obra* events have been key in building and strengthening *Obra* partnerships in the Caribbean, Central America and South America as they address significant issues facing young people across the region. The more than 50 partners now currently working within the three *Obra* alliances have developed joint initiatives to impact key areas such as low priority of youth in national policies, as well as innovative projects to directly train at-risk youth in marketable job and entrepreneurial skills. Civil society partners who have traditionally addressed the needs of youth are learning how to work more effectively with private and public sector actors. Business sector partners are also deepening their engagement in youth training and development, and broadening the exchange of lessons learned as a result of *Obra* activities. In addition, public sector agencies are



reaching out institutionally to increase the impact of their wide ranging programs and services. Through *Obra* events and follow up encounters, this dialogue has been strengthened, local resources have been identified and mobilized, and youth are being engaged, highlighted (via videos) and trained in new and exciting ways.

## **Expanding the Conversation: Building on Lessons Learned**

This Report is designed to keep policy makers, NGOs, government officials, business leaders, and young people themselves informed about *Obra*'s ongoing activities and achievements. We have thus sought to capture both the words and the spirit of the panel discussions, debates, and learnings gained during the event's proceedings. It is our hope that this report, as well as similar proceedings reports from the Jamaica and Guatemala events, will contribute to the growing body of knowledge about the challenges facing young people across the Latin American and Caribbean region, and help deepen our impact as we work together, in partnership, to address those needs.

Sharing learnings and best practices is a key component of the *Obra* program. Along those lines, it should be noted that *Obra* is identifying and documenting "best and promising practices" which have had an impact on youth, building on the Inter-American Development Bank's competition in 2009 which focused on eight areas of youth development, as highlighted in the conference. *Obra*'s continuing efforts have resulted in the documentation of more than a dozen practices to date, which will be posted on the *Obra* site by January 2011.

## **Highlights of Proceedings**

### ***Public Event***

Opening remarks by **Peru First Lady Pilar Nores** and **Vice Minister of Education Raul Diaz** underscored the need to continue striving towards a more collaborative approach to youth development among all sectors: civil society, business, government, academia, media as well as youth themselves. Currently the world is faced with the largest cohort of youth in history, and the growing demographic "youth bulge" presents both challenges and opportunities for economic development and positive social change. In order to seize this opportunity, it is imperative to build on high-impact initiatives in education, employment, entrepreneurship, leadership development, and skills-building in a comprehensive manner, through institutional alliances. "*Obra* is a program that goes beyond traditional assistance, and strengthens those alliances which will provide long-term, sustainable support," noted **Bruce Williamson, US Deputy Chief of Mission to Peru**.

A lively panel discussion addressed the role of each sector in relation to youth development. Panelists debated how to work more effectively together to provide increased opportunities for young people at risk. It was agreed that all sectors must focus on education, as it is the basis for competitiveness, good governance, responsible citizenship and societal prosperity. Each sector should understand its distinct role, e.g. government (serving its citizens' needs); civil society (innovation, complementary roles to the state); and international assistance (promotion, facilitation). Success comes with having common objectives, establishing a fluid dialogue and creating positive working synergies. Youth have a critical role to play by listening to experience, using their abundant creativity and energy, and sharing their contagious hope for a better future.



## *Learning Conference*

Renowned Peruvian economist and **President of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy, Hernando de Soto**, set the stage by highlighting key fundamentals for society as it provides youth with the foundation for a positive future. “Resources are not lacking; rather we need laws and structures – organizational, judicial, and educational – which make investments in youth more effective.” A panel of inspiring young women leaders also contributed to the understanding of youth dynamics, noting that an intergenerational, gender-sensitive perspective is critical. They highlighted challenges as they become professionals and leaders, while facing traditional female stereotypes and gender role expectations. Subsequent panels and group work explored alliance-building, identification of best practices, achieving scale as well as advocacy.

Alliance building starts with a common vision among institutions as well as a strong commitment by partners to achieve a set of specific objectives. With clear aims, processes and methods for resolving differences, partnerships can move forward with a common voice. These principles were identified by IYF in its presentation on alliance-building experiences around the world, as well as by a local partnership formed by EnseñaPeru, the Government of Arequipa, Interbank and the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia.

Participants heard from four successful “scale” and advocacy experiences – the Centro de Servicios Para la Capacitacion Laboral y el Desarrollo (CAPLAB)/Peru, *Reto Rural*/Ecuador, *Escuelas Abiertas*/Guatemala and IYF’s LAC-wide *entra21* Program – and took note of the synthesized lessons these experiences generated. These include: considering scale from the start of pilot initiatives to ensure that only strategies which hold wider potential are pursued; mapping of actors and ensuring political buy-in; and promoting technical co-development and co-responsibility. Visibility, participant testimonials, the presence of authorities, clear dialogue, mutual learning, all create an atmosphere of legitimacy and a sense of pressure to move forward in doing things differently and more effectively on a wider and larger scale.

Finally, with so many young people leaving school and entering the job market in the coming years, it is critical – now more than ever – to work more effectively together to educate and train youth. The potential for growth and the risks of missing this key opportunity are significant; the stakes are enormous. However, with a keener understanding of “what works,” increased and more effective collaboration among sectors, as well as clear strategies for training and educating youth and achieving scale, realizing the potential for young people is clearly within reach. *Obra* partners look forward to contributing significantly to this effort.