

MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE ENTRA 21 PROGRAM

(ATN/MH-7513-RG)

This document was prepared by the GAMA team: José Pedro Alberti and Javier Lasida (coordinators), Mónica Oliber, Roberto Garcés, Kenia Leitaó, Aury Huezo, Guillermo Milán and Carolina Rodríguez.

CONTENTS

I.	SUMMARY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
A.	Introduction	3
B.	Conclusions on program implementation and recommendations	3
	1. Program level	Error! Bookmark not defined.
	2. Project level	Error! Bookmark not defined.
	3. Donor level	Error! Bookmark not defined.
C.	Lessons learned	6
	1. To improve the design of the Entra 21 program and of new projects	6
	2. To implement the Entra 21 program and new projects	7
	3. To evaluate the Entra 21 program and new projects	8

INITIALS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AHUB	Associação Hope Unlimited do Brasil
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
CINTERFOR	Inter-American Research and Documentation Centre on Vocational Training
MIF	Multilateral Investment Fund
IYF	International Youth Foundation
EA	Executing Agency
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PADF	Pan American Development Foundation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EVALUATION OF ENTRA 21 PROGRAM

(ATN/MH-7513-RG)

I. SUMMARY

A. Precedents

- 1.1 The main objective of the Entra 21 program is to improve the employability of low-income youths through projects that provide them with training in information technologies and support their entry into the workplace. These projects also provide lessons on best practices. The program sets out to deal with the growing problem of youth unemployment and exclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region whose educational systems are not adequately prepared for the working world and whose companies must adapt quickly to the demands of the information and communications technologies used in the global economy.
- 1.2 The program also involved testing a new mechanism for allocating MIF resources. Unlike more standard MIF programs, co-financed and implemented by an executing agency (EA) and supervised by the Bank's country offices, the Entra 21 program is based on a model in which the executing agency also acts as a financial partner and middleman in the identification and approval of smaller projects in the region, while also passing on the responsibility for supervising and evaluating approved projects. This new mechanism responded to the fact that the country offices recognize they are not prepared to supervise MIF's numerous and diverse projects.
- 1.3 The Entra 21 program includes \$10 million provided by MIF and \$10 million *to be co-financed* by the executing agency and partner, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) in Baltimore, USA. The program has two components: (i) a donations fund to support up to 40 projects that establish alliances between NGOs and/or providers of training in information technology, and companies, to train youths in information technologies and place them in jobs where these technologies are used, and (ii) learning, documentation of lessons learned, and diffusion and promotion of the resulting best practices.
- 1.4 The purpose of this mid-term evaluation is to determine the degree to which the goals defined in the logical framework of Entra 21 are being met, at three levels: (a) areas related to program management; (b) areas related to the projects approved in each country; and (c) areas related to program donors. As a result of this analysis, there will be recommendations and conclusions to help improve the program and its impact on the target group. To this end, interviews were held at the headquarters of the MIF and of the International Youth Fund (IYF), as well as with other program donors such as USAID and Lucent, and missions were sent to a sample of ten projects in execution.

B. Conclusions on program implementation and recommendations

- 1.5 At the time of the evaluation, the program had 15 projects in execution, of which 10 were evaluated on-site for this report. The projects analyzed and the management of the program in general seem adequate; with the significant limitation that the IYF has not

provided the promised co-financing. Other more specific observations will be made in following sections.

- 1.6 The program has successfully supported the design and selection of 15 projects that are giving courses related to ICTs, apprenticeships, and work placement for low-income youths. At the same time, the executed projects are being monitored and lessons are being learned.
- 1.7 The Foundation has collected 54 percent of the committed funds and a little more than 40 percent of those destined to finance the projects. This is a meager result from the perspective of achieving the established goal of 40 projects in execution.
- 1.8 The IYF says it is overcoming the internal difficulties it has faced to increase the collection of funds and that it will also be in a better situation to face external restrictions. In the opinion of the evaluators, there is no guarantee that the committed resources will be obtained.

1. Program level

- 1.9 The program has successfully promoted and supported the design and execution of projects appropriate both to the characteristics of low-income youths who have no opportunity to continue training or to find employment, and to the demands of companies for human resources with ICT capabilities.
- 1.10 The program also involves experimenting with an MIF management model. There is wide agreement that this has proven to be interesting in a number of ways. It has been observed that this model facilitates specialization and coherency in the implementation of a number of similar interventions, as well as comparison, learning, and “horizontal” exchange among the projects in each country. Consideration was also given to the opportunities it offers for supporting actions on a smaller scale, although for some regions, such the Caribbean, it will have to be better adjusted to the capacity requirements of local organizations. The cost efficiency of this model seems adequate, although there is still scarce information available to evaluate this.
- 1.11 The problems encountered by the IYF to meet its co-financing commitments must be differentiated both from the evaluation of the model itself, and, in particular, from the Foundation’s capacities as a partner. The IYF strengthened the program with its experience, organizational networks, people, information, and technical capacity. This may be as important as or more important than its financial contributions. Finally, none of the difficulties encountered in Entra 21 disqualify the model per se; rather, they provide lessons for future modifications.

a) Recommendations at the program level

- 1.12 An option being analyzed by both institutions was to increase MIF’s provisions for immediate projects. This would be compensated by a larger provision by the IYF for projects approved later. This would make it possible to increase the number of projects and targeted youths, but the risk is run that the future compensation will not be made. If this option is taken, it would seem appropriate to request that the IYF detail its strategies and potential donors to make it viable.

- 1.13 Based on proposals now being studied by both institutions, it would seem appropriate to consider the possibility of extending some of the projects in execution. To select the projects to be extended and to design the extensions, we suggest including the proposals on the basis of their innovative components (1.20) and their strategies for sustainability (1.17).
- 1.14 To receive approval for projects in countries or regions like the Caribbean, which do not have the institutional capacity to execute projects with the minimum required funds (both for the project and for the local counterpart), we recommend considering reducing these requirements.

2. Project level

- 1.15 The 10 projects evaluated on-site are being adequately executed, although the one in Bolivia is significantly behind schedule (as the result of external problems). The courses have the necessary resources (teachers, infrastructure, and equipment), and include practical training and also training in the necessary mindset and behavior for working, labor practices in companies, and support for graduates during their job searches and work placement. The youths are appropriately focused and drop-out rates are low or very low. The youths interviewed say they are satisfied with the experience and with what the courses have provided. The NGOs responsible for the projects are establishing links with companies for the placement of graduates. It is worth mentioning that these general observations are true for the vast majority of the courses observed, but that certain exceptions were also observed, as well as certain problems that affect several projects, making the following recommendations necessary.

a) Recommendations

- 1.16 To increase confidence in the selection of low-income youths, we suggest mandatory indicators to complement their declaration of their family income.
- 1.17 To anticipate and overcome the occasional problems detected in some courses, we recommend improving and intensifying project supervision by increasing the number of field visits. Especially in cases where problems are detected, visits should be made more frequently.
- 1.18 In most projects, weaknesses were detected in the quality of technical-occupational programs. We therefore recommend improving these by using a skills-based approach and incorporating some skills-based training tools¹. It would be possible and useful for the projects to make use of skills-based concepts and techniques to identify companies' work placement requirements, to translate these into training programs, and to manage and evaluate the training both in the training institution, and during the work apprenticeship.
- 1.19 Most of the projects showed gaps in their strategies for sustainability. We therefore recommend that projects now in execution, their eventual extensions, and any new

¹ This comment refers to a skills-based focus and tools, not to certifying or establishing a set of skills. There are already adequate tools for identifying skills and designing skills-based programs for short courses like Entra 21. We refer in particular to the DACUM and AMOD methods. See: Mertens, Leonard. "DACUM y sus variantes SCID y AMOD". 1999, Mexico.

projects should be strengthened and prioritized, especially in terms of how they interface with the development and reform of public policies, especially policies aimed at low-income youths.

3. Donor level

- 1.20 The participation of various donors—two of the major ones, MIF and USAID, being public agencies—required great effort to harmonize requirements. In addition to their contributions, USAID and some of the donor agencies also provided contacts and support from national organizations directly linked to their headquarters.

a) Recommendations

- 1.21 We recommend intensifying efforts, especially with individual donors and with companies and foundations with specific interests, as well as extending the program schedule.

C. Lessons learned

1. To improve the design of the Entra 21 program and of new projects

- 1.22 In the new projects being prepared and in the eventual extensions of those now in execution, we recommend promoting the development of innovations in ICT training through the development of products, methods, and materials (see 3.06 of the Donors Memorandum), and not exclusively by implementing courses.
- 1.23 IYF's non-financial contribution suggests that co-financing, though a requirement, is not the only condition, nor perhaps even the most important one for the executor of a regional project. Others to consider are the executor's technical capacity, its legitimacy, its precedents, the networks it runs and participates in, and its management capacity at the regional level. If there were to be several organizations with the capacity and interest to be the counterpart, a selection mechanism could be devised based on some kind of competitive proposals system.

2. To design of new MIF programs

- 1.24 Given the execution to date, it seems appropriate to continue, beyond this program, applying and improving this management model. No reasons have been found to suggest that the model necessarily has to be applied in other cases with the same high percentages of co-financing. Rather, the model has shown benefits that make it useful within the MIF's usual percentages.
- 1.25 Co-financing is a requirement, but it is not the only condition, nor perhaps even the most important one for the executor of a regional project. Others to consider are the executor's technical capacity, its legitimacy, its precedents, the networks it runs and participates in, and its management capacity at the regional level. If there were to be several organizations with the capacity and interest to be the counterpart, a selection mechanism could be devised based on some kind of competitive proposals system.

- 1.26 To improve the application of the model, at the most operational level we recommend that in future programs a stage be included, before implementation begins, to prepare and specify better (than in this case) the procedures and criteria to be used to: select proposals, taking care that including a regional actor involved in a specific issue does not diminish the quality of the competition among projects; establish a standardized and unified information system²; and supervise actions on-site.

3. To implement the Entra 21 program and new projects

a) Critical factors in the training strategy

- 1.27 The projects confirmed that the program was well defined in the sense that the training effectively met the human resources requirements of companies, and understanding of ICT was enhanced. They confirmed a training approach aimed at the demand side (youths and entrepreneurs) that has been tried and tested in the region (including rigorous evaluations), although the generalized practice is focused on supply.
- 1.28 Three key factors for success were identified in the training strategy: (a) the **comprehensiveness of the intervention**, including, in addition to occupational/technical aspects, a mindset and basic skills (for example, communicating well and working in teams); (b) the inclusion of **labor practices** that tend to be considered part of training; and (c) a willingness to give courses in any area of the broad field that uses ICTs, requiring only that they **meet market requirements** and include a final component that **supports the work placement** (mainly salaried) of graduates. Relations were established with companies by offering services (attracting, selecting, and training new human resources) through the participants and graduates of the courses.

b) Best practices identified

- 1.29 The Brazilian projects advanced toward **articulation with formal education**, due to the requirement that participants either be receiving secondary education, or else have graduated from it, as a precondition for registration. A noteworthy local experience was the AHUB project, in which this requirement was complemented with psycho-pedagogical aid coordinated with teachers at the educational centers, who assisted the youths in the project.
- 1.30 At least two of the projects show **rigorous performance standards**, which gives them great demonstrational value. COSPAE (Panama) tries to place youths in English-language call centers, and Quipus (Bolivia) helps them obtain Cisco certification. At another level, several projects made it possible for new actors, not often present in the training of youths, such as **the family** and **the community**, to take part in the actions. Another group of projects provided **economic support** to youths, making them a relevant resource for preventing exclusion, the best projects being those that do not homogenize benefits, but rather adapt them to the differing needs of youths.

² This does not mean that each project is limited to gathering the same information. Rather, there is a common, mandatory core to be gathered in a decentralized way. Practically simultaneously, this feeds a local database and also a central one.

4. To evaluate the Entra 21 program and new programs

- 1.31 Evaluation must include an analysis of the large amount of systematized information generated by the monitoring and evaluation system. It must deal with the difficulties of previous actions and how to establish the system for each project.
- 1.32 Given the experience of Entra 21, for new programs we recommend the installation and comprehensive operationalization (including computer software) at all levels (from headquarters to each of the local offices) of the monitoring and evaluation systems before beginning major work with the beneficiaries, in order to guarantee that the tools can be used from the first day of execution of each intervention.