



USAID | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

AT RISK YOUTH INITIATIVE

Annual Report

FY 2020 – October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020

Submission Date: October 31, 2020

Cooperative Agreement Number: AID-517-A-12-00002

Activity Start Date and End Date: July 05, 2012 to September 30, 2021

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This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development in the Dominican Republic (USAID/DR).

I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

Activity Name:	AT RISK YOUTH INITIATIVE
Activity Start Date and End Date:	July 05, 2012 to September 30, 2021
Name of Prime Implementing Partner:	ENTRENA S.R.L.
Cooperative Agreement Number:	AID-517-A-12-00002
Name of Subcontractors/Sub-awardees:	Fundación Pediátrica por un Mañana, Inc. (FPUM) Dream Project Children International Fundación Sur Futuro, Inc. Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE) Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral (IDDI) Plan International
Major Counterpart Organizations:	N/A
Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries):	Neighborhoods in the Distrito Nacional; Western Santo Domingo; Santiago; North coast including Sosúa, and Cabarete; and San Francisco de Macorís.
Reporting Period:	October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020

I.1 Program Description/Introduction

The goal of the Dominican Republic At Risk Youth Initiative (ARYI) is to create a sustainable, multidisciplinary safety net for at-risk youth (ARY), implemented to prevent crime. The technical approach develops a sustainable framework as a quality product that can positively continue to transform the lives of ARY in the Dominican Republic, standing by itself financially and technically, continuing its implementation after USAID support is phased out. Multi-disciplinary means that services are integrated and that one isolated intervention rarely will be effective by itself. Crime is prevented because conditions of risk are significantly ameliorated when youth have viable and accessible alternatives to improve their educational, employability, health, and legal status.

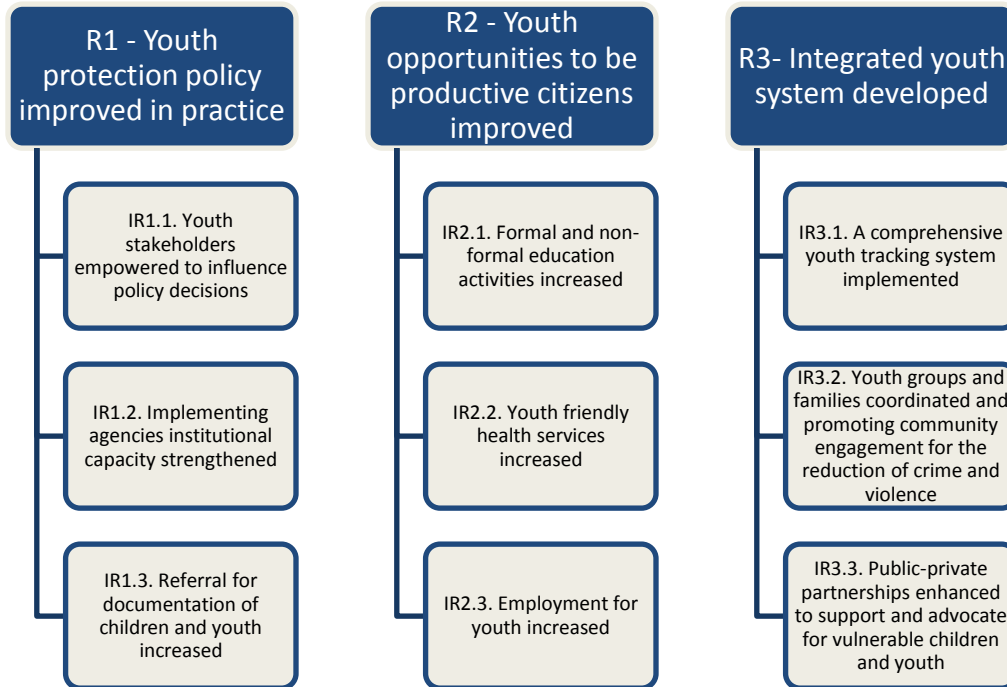
The initiative supports the best evidence-based practices, and produces a state-of-the-art information system that tracks participants/services. It also acts as a clearinghouse for all stakeholders, and develops networks to foster empowerment and to discuss and review policy. The target population is at-risk youth ages 11- 24. Until 2019, the geographic focus was the Duarte corridor between Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata, Azua, Las Terrenas in Samaná, and locations on the Haitian border.

In January 2019, an extension of the initiative was signed, covering the period from February 2019 to September 2020. During this phase, the ARYI was to be deployed with the collaboration of six sub-awardees: Fundación Pediátrica por un Mañana (FPUM), IDDI, Sur Futuro, Children International, Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE) and Dream Project. The geographical focus was narrowed down to achieve greater convergence with other USAID efforts, concentrating on the following areas: Distrito Nacional, Santo Domingo Oeste , Santiago, San Francisco de Macorís and Puerto Plata.

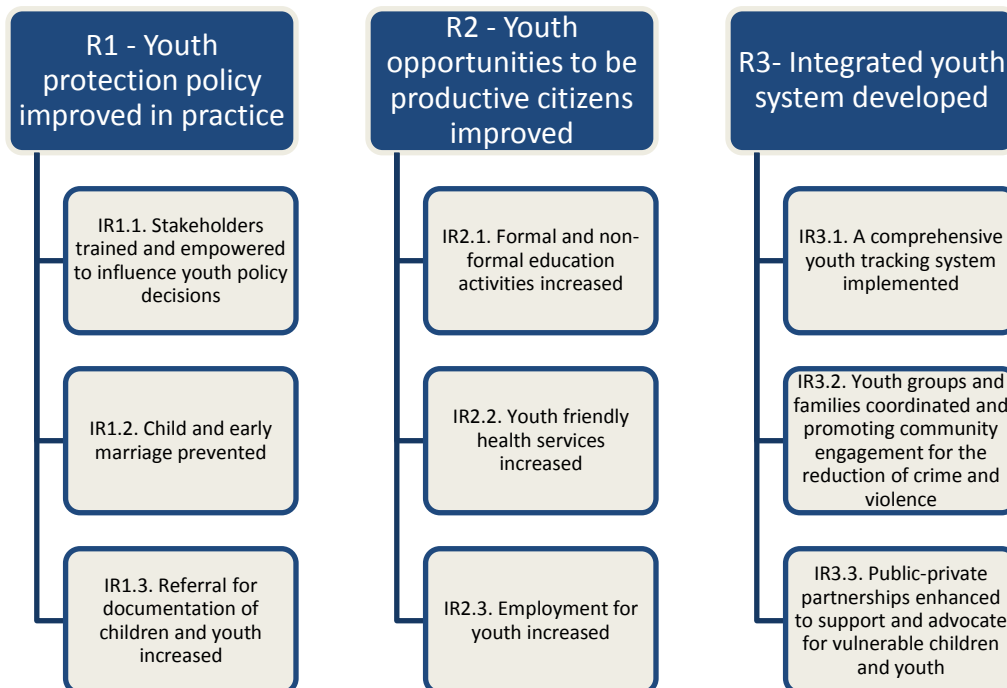
On June 19, 2020 a new extension was signed covering the period from July 5, 2020 to September 30, 2021. This will include the collaboration of the following six sub-awardees: IDDI, Sur Futuro, Children International, Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE), Dream Project and Plan International. During this extension the ARYI will downsize the current scope of activities and concentrate on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) prevention. Though a partnership with Plan International, a non-profit organization with expertise on the matter, the initiative will include CEFM prevention across all activities.

For the first period of FY20, Results Framework A (on the following page) was the guiding scheme for ARYI operations. However, the signature of the new extension and revision of the initiative's focus implied changes in terms of intermediate results which are visualized in Results Framework B (on the following page). Under IR1.2, this includes the new intermediate result "Child and early marriage prevented", while former IR1.2 was merged with IR1.1 into one intermediate result.

Results framework A: USAID/DR At-Risk Youth Initiative Results Framework February 2019 – September 2020



**Results framework B: USAID/DR At-Risk Youth Initiative Results Framework
August 2020 – September 2021**



2. ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

2.1 Progress Narrative

This section is a narrative of achievements by indicator results and targets from October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020. The first part of the section describes standard indicators defined by USAID/CBSI, while the second part describes custom indicators tailored to the needs of the project, proposed by ENTRENA and approved by USAID.

Standard Indicators

ES 1-3 CBSI 3.1-3 Number of learners in primary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance – Goal 2020: 1,967 participants, ages 11-14

The activity that supports this indicator is the Espacios para Crecer (EpC) school retention and reinsertion program for vulnerable ARY. During Q4 of FY20, the EpC program was not operating since it concluded in May with the end of the school year. This fiscal year 62 EpC through Sur Futuro, UCNE, Dream Project, Children International and IDDI sub-awards, served a total of 1,807 participants. This represents an achievement of 91.8 percent of the goal set. Out of these, 1,032 were males and 775 females. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in February, in-person classes had to migrate to an online format and the opening of 3 EpCs scheduled by the second quarter of 2020 had to be cancelled, resulting in a decrease in the achievement of set goals.

ES 1-4 Number of learners in secondary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance – Goal 2020: 533 participants, ages 15-24

The school retention program Quantum Learning for Students (QLS) targets this population. It is implemented at the secondary level through educational centers of the Dominican Ministry of Education (MINERD). Centers from the PREPARA network are prioritized. PREPARA is a program designed to accommodate youth who have previously dropped out of school, and now wish to complete their high school degree through a flexible attendance scheme. During Q4, 145 youth concluded the QLS program through the Children International, Sur Futuro, UCNE and IDDI sub-awards. A total of 424 participants completed the program during FY20, out of which 140 were males and 284 females. This accounted for 79.5 percent of the target set.

Due to COVID-19, this program had to be implemented in a virtual format starting in Q3. This resulted in achieving lower results than expected given the vulnerability of ARYI's target population, for whom lack of connectivity was an issue to guarantee permanence in the program. This issue was addressed through the provision of internet credit to program participants, which contributed to boosting retention.

EG. 5-3 Number of microenterprises supported by USG-assistance – Goal for 2020: 15 microenterprises supported

During Q4 FY20, 1 microbusiness received assistance by the US government, for a total of 7 during the year, representing 46.7 percent of the target set. Due to COVID-19, the National ARY Entrepreneurship Fair, in which a significant number of youth receive personalized mentoring and seed funding to improve or install their microbusiness, had to be cancelled. The cancellation of this event resulted in a lower number of microbusiness reached.

EG.6-3 Number of individuals who complete USG-assisted workforce development programs – Goal for 2020: 2,088 participants, ages 15-24

During Q4, 312 youth completed technical vocational training courses, for a total of 1,441 during FY20. This represents 69 percent of the target set. Out of the total, 467 were males and 974 were females. Training provided during this year included the following areas: customer service, entrepreneurship, sales assistance, basic accounting, basic computing, pharmaceutical assistance, electricity and secretarial services. Because of distancing measures and shutdowns put in place by the Dominican government, technical training centers were closed. Although they eventually began offering online courses, the catalog was limited to just 25 percent of what is normally offered, meaning youth had fewer options of TVT classes to take.

EG.6-4 Number of individuals with new employment following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs – Goal for 2020: 600 participants, ages 18-24

During Q4, 40 participants obtained new employment, for a total of 145 during FY20, representing 24.2 percent of the target. Female participants obtained 71.7 percent of these positions. Out of the new jobs reported during this fiscal year, 73 were permanent positions, 42 paid internships, five new microenterprises and 25 temporary positions. New employment obtained by youth during the year occurred in the following positions: 56 in customer service, 26 in administrative support positions, 17 in sales, 10 in waitressing, seven in pharmaceutical assistantship, eight as mechanicals, six in assembly line work, five as cooking staff and the remaining 10 in various positions.

Formal employment decreased significantly during the second semester of FY20 due to a reduction of economic activities as a result of COVID-19. According to the Superintendence of Pensions of the Dominican Republic, in the formal sector there were 1.96 million employees paying contributions to social security in March 2020, and by June this number was 1.4 million. By September, this figure slightly recovered to 1.65 million employees. These numbers suggest a decrease in formal employment of 32%, either because of temporary or permanent suspension of employees from their duties. Young people were the most impacted age group. Formal employment decreased 36.2% for those 19 and below and 23.8% in the 20 and 24 range. This impact on youth employment reflects on the level of results achieved in this indicator.

EG.6-5 Number of individuals with increased earnings following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs – Goal for 2020: 731 participants, ages 18-24

During Q4, 53 participants reported having increased earnings. This accounts for a total of 186 during FY20, equivalent to 25.4 percent of the target. Positions with increased earnings during this fiscal year have occurred due to the following reasons: 140 youth obtained a new position, five created a new business, two improved an existing business, 35 migrated to jobs with better salaries and five obtained additional benefits, such as professional development or medical insurance. The underperformance of this indicator is associated with the slowdown in the Dominican economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cross-Cutting Indicators

GNDR-2 Percentage of female participants in USG-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources (assets, credit, income or employment) – Goal 2020: 55 percent, female ages 11-24

This indicator reflects the number of female youth involved in workforce development programs who improved their access to productive economic resources, such as employment. During Q4, out of 50 youth that increased their earnings after concluding a technical vocational training, 32 were females. In FY20 in general, 131 out of 186 participants who increased their earnings were females, representing 70.4 percent of female participation in this indicator.

GNDR-6 Number of people reached by a USG funded intervention providing GBV services (e.g., health, legal, psycho-social counseling, shelters, hotlines, other) – Goal 2020: 420 participants, ages 11-24

This indicator reflects all services provided to GBV victims under the initiative. Cases of GBV identified on the Entry Survey, are referred for appropriate care, including legal advice, medical assistance and psychological support. Also, victims can be referred to technical vocational training as a means of economic empowerment. From Q2 through to Q4, no referrals were reported. During Q1, sub-awardees Children International and FPUM were able to report this referral. A total of 104 youth, including 32 males, were reported under this indicator. This number represents 31.0 percent of the target.

As a result of social distancing and quarantine measures imposed by the Dominican government due to COVID-19, the process of identifying and supporting youth in receiving GBV-related services was halted. Since these services often involve sensitive issues and require physically filling out specific paperwork and permissions, the ARYI did not consider promoting the provision of virtual psychological, medical, and legal services.

YOUTH-1 Number of youth at risk of violence trained in social or leadership skills through USG assisted programs – Goal 2020: 4,638 participants, ages 11-24

This indicator presents the number of participants trained in social or leadership skills through the EpC program, the QLS program, technical vocational courses and youth network knowledge multiplier training. These programs transfer this knowledge through the Life Skills Module, in the case of QLS and technical vocational trainings, and through the Personal Growth component, in the case of the EpC. During Q4, 456 youth concluded

one of these programs. A total of 3,648 youth, out of which 2,011 were females, was trained in social or leadership skills during FY20, accounting for 78.7 percent of the target.

Custom Indicators

Number of identified undocumented children and youth referred to an external documentation program – Goal 2020: 50 participants, ages 11-24

In the past decade, Dominican authorities have carried out efforts to reduce the number of undocumented children. These efforts are evident in the increase of the Efficiency Rate of Timely Birth Registration in prioritized hospitals, which grew from 41% in 2012 to 66% in 2017. As a result, the number of undocumented youth in the areas where the ARYI operates has reduced. To reflect this decrease, targets for FY20 were adjusted. A total of 8 youth were referred for documentation during FY20, representing 17.4 percent of the target. Out of these, seven have been of Dominican descent. However, from Q3 onward no documentation efforts were carried out. The National Electoral Board, a public office to which youth are referred to obtain documentation, was closed due to COVID-19.

Number of Vulnerable Youth and/or Children (VYC) reinserted into formal schooling – Goal 2020: 233 participants, ages 11-24

During Q3 and Q4, no reinsertion efforts took place, since this typically occurs during Q1 and Q2 given the school year calendar. A total of 78 youth were re-enrolled in school during FY20, representing 33.5 percent of the goal. Of these, 61 were females and 34 were youth ages 18 to 24. Reinsertion occurs through the public school education system and CENAPEC, and is confirmed with the issuance of a letter emitted by the Ministry of Education (MINERD).

Number of local workforce development initiatives created through USG assisted public private partnerships – Goal 2020: 20

This new custom indicator replaces the indicator “*Number of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) created through USG assistance*”. The purpose of this revision is to better reflect the work conducted in collaboration with public and private ARYI allies for the development of youth. In Q4, six public-private partnerships were signed to carry out initiatives for the development of youth. Three of these partnerships were directly managed through Entrena, while the remaining five were accomplished through sub-awards. With these partnerships the total for FY20 totals eight initiatives, representing 40% of the set target. It is worth noting that long standing partners with whom the ARYI had scheduled activities for this year were dismissed after they decided to concentrate their energies and resources on facing the pandemic.

The six partnerships secured during Q4 had different purposes. The following agreements or initiatives were reached: the Zamora Terán Foundation and Fondo Quisqueya agreed to provide technological equipment to ensure beneficiaries continue with their online education; Fundación Alda promoted the consolidation of youth leadership through the celebration of an International Youth Forum held on September 26, 2020; The United States Cooperation League will include the ARYI’s technical vocational training graduates

in their internship program; Community Justice Houses will facilitate soft skills training; and San Martin de Porres School will support school retention and reinsertion program by habilitating a space to execute these programs.

Number of peer to peer youth networks working to reduce crime and violence in their communities through USG assistance – Goal 2020: 11

Youth networks are organized groups formed by young leaders aged 11 to 24 with the capacity to produce changes in the lives of their peers and their communities. Participants in youth networks reside in the areas of intervention, are willing to get involved in the activities of the network, and receive certified training as youth network leaders. This training covers the following topics: a) Structure and Purpose of Youth Networks, b) Life Skills Training module, c) Conflict Mediation program and d) Development of Crime Prevention. These trainings help the networks in developing and implementing Crime and Violence Prevention Plans which target specific community needs.

Currently, there are 10 youth networks operating, representing 90.9% of the established target. The networks with Crime and Violence Prevention Plans structured and under implementation are the following: Distrito Nacional; Puerto Plata; San Francisco de Macorís; El Café de Herrera, Manoguayabo and Buenos Aires from Santo Domingo West; Santiago de los Caballeros; Acopro from Santo Domingo Norte; and Haina and Quita Sueño from San Cristobal. The first seven networks operate under sub-awards Children International, IDDI, Dream Project, UCNE and Sur Futuro to deliver their programs with the support of Entrena. The latter three networks operate independently and were formed during the ARYI with former sub-awards.

Number of people trained in child, early and forced marriage prevention to act as knowledge multipliers through USG education assistance – Goal 2020: 0

This new indicator was included during Q4 to monitor results from Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) prevention activities. This indicator accounts for youth trained to act as knowledge multipliers about this form of abuse and how to prevent it. Participants are trained in the methodology “Champions for Change” developed by Plan International, designed to provide skills and knowledge about the definition of early and forced marriage, its causes and consequences, as well as training on how to reduce its effect on youth. Training that supports this indicator will start during Q1, FY21.

Number of stakeholders with child, early and forced marriage prevention capacity strengthened with USG education assistance – Goal 2020: 0

This new indicator was also included during Q4 to monitor results from Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) prevention related activities. Stakeholders refers to individuals whose work is directly related to CEFM prevention or who work directly with vulnerable children in their duties. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals linked to schools, government offices and local and international organizations working with children, youth and gender equality. During Q4, a total of 63 participants from USAID implementing partner organizations were trained in CEFM prevention. This goal is part of 660 participants scheduled to be reached by the end of FY21.

Number of people sensitized to recognize child, early and forced marriage prevention forms of abuse through campaigns led by peers through USG education assistance – Goal 2020: 0

As part of the CEFM prevention efforts, youth and stakeholders trained on the matter will act as multipliers of knowledge in their communities. This process of information sharing will be registered under this new indicator. The aim is to carry out information sessions aimed at providing skills and knowledge about early and forced marriage definition, its causes and consequences, and strategies for prevention and response. Expected participants include youth, teachers and other school staff, social workers, and parents, mothers and legal guardians of children and youth in targeted communities. These sessions are expected to take place during FY21 after the training process of facilitators is concluded.

2.2 Implementation Status

This section includes a narrative of achievements and status of planned activities according to the Annual Work Plan for FY20. In addition, complementary activities in line with the ARYI's objective, but outside of the planning, were also carried out. The activities described in the following section correspond to the Results Framework B introduced in the Program Description section of this report.

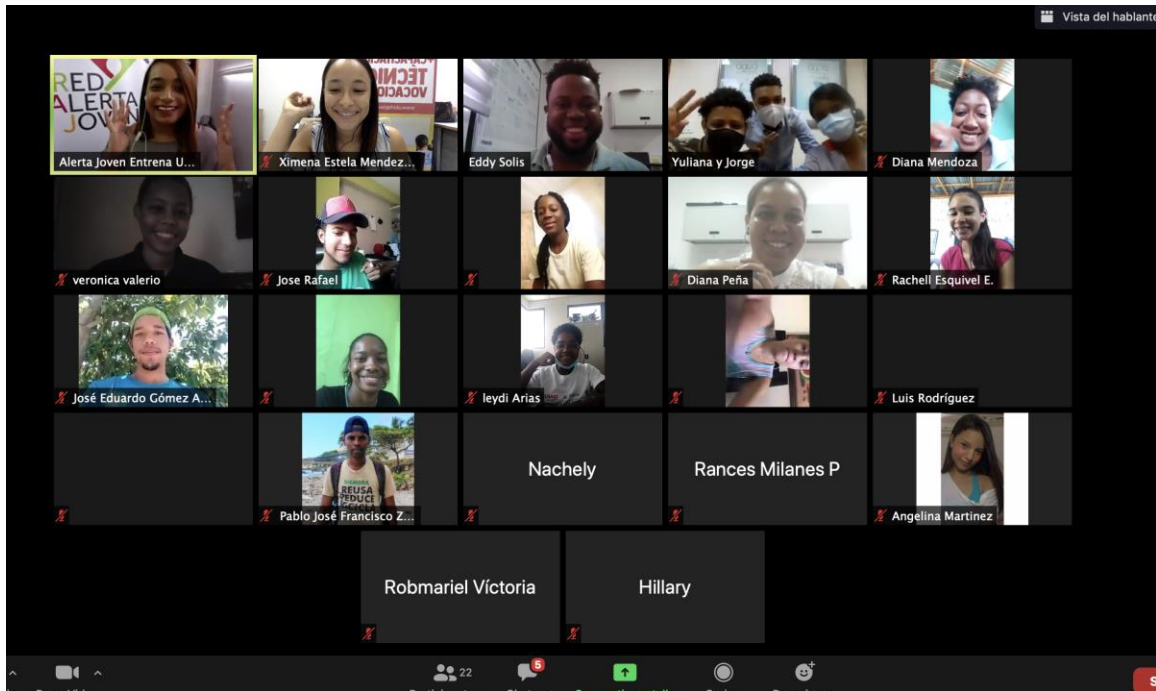
R I. Youth protection policy improved in practice

IR 1.1 Stakeholders trained and empowered to influence youth policy decisions

This year, the ARYI continued conducting events to train and empower youth networks, implementing partners and other stakeholders to be able to influence youth policy decisions and implement youth programming effectively.

Supporting sustainability through training of At-Risk Youth Networks

During FY20, the ARYI conducted multiple training events for members of the youth networks. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 57 members of youth networks received training on the 8 keys of excellence and leadership, as a way to inform their work as community leaders. Youth networks also participated in a social media workshop with the ARYI communications department, where they learned how to develop a social media strategy and create compelling content as a way to increase engagement from local stakeholders. In addition to these workshops for youth network leaders, new members were recruited between June and July, and they were trained on the National Youth Law and life skills as part of their orientation. These training events have focused on building capacity among the youth networks so they are better prepared to operate independently beyond the activity's implementation period.



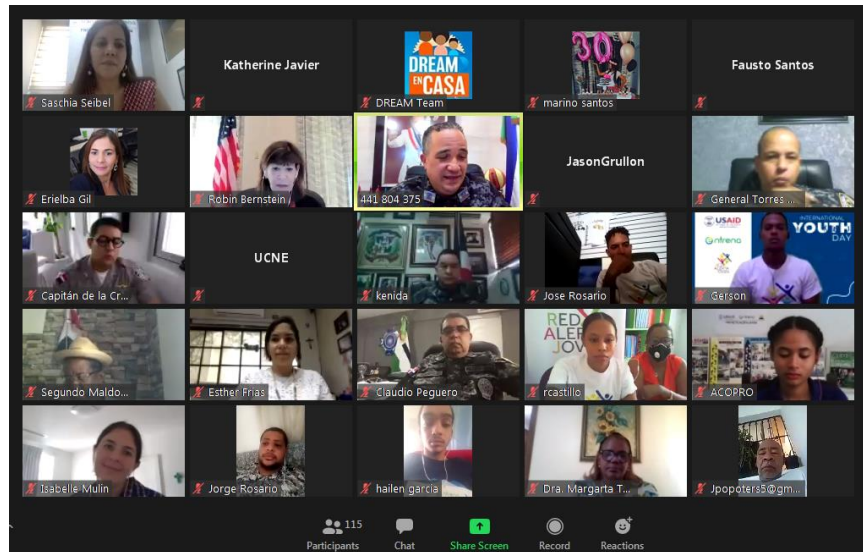
Organizational strengthening for sub-awards staff

As part of its commitment to strengthening the capacity of local implementing partners, the ARYI facilitated a number of specialized training sessions for the staff partner organization. At the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak in the DR, the ARYI made the decision to transition programs into virtual implementation, which introduced challenges to both staff and beneficiaries. Implementing partners' technical staff were trained on data collection and virtual program implementation to maintain program quality through the quarantine. Facilitators for education programs Quantum Learning for Students and Espacios para Crecer were also given refresher training on the programs' strategies and goals. To support implementing partners' ability to respond to emergency situations, an external consultant facilitated a refresher workshop for program staff on the Psychological and Social Referral Protocol. Support staff also received training in monitoring and evaluation practices, proper usage of branding and marking, and financial management and reporting.

International Youth Day Celebration

On August 12, USAID held a virtual event with the ARYI youth networks to commemorate International Youth Day which was attended by 115 people and transmitted live via YouTube. The Ambassador of the United States to the Dominican Republic, Mrs. Robin Bernstein and General Ney Bautista, Director of the National Police participated in the meeting along with national and local government authorities. The Ambassador highlighted the work youth networks have been carrying out, including creating for the first time a partnership between the National Police and youth. She also applauded the

continuity of their work during COVID-19. The ARYI youth network members commented on how this initiative has impacted their lives through increasing their leadership abilities and promoting positive change in their communities. These networks will continue operating throughout the fiscal year and establishing links with local authorities. The aim is to strengthen these organizations, promoting their independence and preparing them to become sustainable in their work towards the reduction of crime and violence.



Sustainability Committee activities

A meeting to present USAID’s journey to self-reliance model and the work of the ARYI in this regard, was held with the Sustainability Committee and sub-awards. USAID Deputy Director Haven Cruz, Senior Economist Paul Rivera and Youth Specialist Mariela Pena, as well as the ARYI Direction led the meeting. They presented the areas in which the country has opportunities to improve and the actions taken within the ARYI to catalyze the sustainability of the activity. To this event attended 20 representatives from the private sector, partner organizations and the government, including the Attorney General for the Children and Youth Direction and the Deputy Director for the Direction of Special Projects of the Presidency. The attendants reaffirmed their commitment in working to reduce crime and violence among youth, provided the contact of potential business partners that could join in supporting the initiative and agreed to collaborate in presenting the initiative to presidential candidates as a means to guarantee its inclusion in their government proposals.

Case study of ARYI beneficiaries

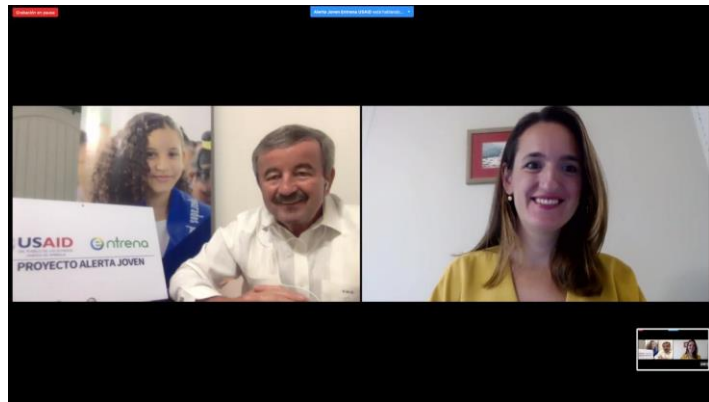
During the second semester of FY20, a qualitative evaluation of ARYI beneficiaries was carried out by sociologist Jerson del Rosario. The study summarized the experiences of youth matching five different profiles addressed in ARYI programs, highlighted the impact of the activity, and offered recommendations for the youth development community. The main findings of the study demonstrate that participation in ARYI programs leads youth to experience important changes in their way of thinking about themselves, their life plans,

and their communities. Beneficiaries expressed reducing negative behaviors and adopting positive habits, and many recognized life skills as an important part of their experience. The Espacios para Crecer program, in addition to its function in school retention and reinsertion, served as an important entry point for youth who went on to benefit from other programs. This is the first qualitative study undertaken to demonstrate the long term effects of the program on Dominican youth.

IRI.2. Child and early marriage prevented

Sub-award and work plan with Plan International

As part of USAID efforts to promote positive youth development the ARYI was awarded with special funds to implement and early unions and child marriage prevention program (CEFM). To carry out this effort the initiative partnered with Plan International DR, an organization with a long standing tradition of advocating for the rights of girls in the Dominican



Republic. The signature of this sub-award was performed virtually between the Saschia Seibel COP of the ARYI and Virginia Saiz, Director of Plan International. A total of 45 people attended the event, including staff from both organizations, USAID-DR Youth and Inclusion specialists, and personnel from other sub-awards who will be implementing this program with the assistance of Plan International. Also members from the youth networks who will act as multipliers of the program were present at the call. Work on this matter initiated in Q4 in a virtual format.

Training for USAID implementing partner staff

In August 2020 implementation of the first CEFM prevention activities began. Staff from USAID, the ARYI and local implementing partners participated in a virtual training on child marriage. The workshop introduced participants to the concept of CEFM, outlined the legal framework of child marriage in the Dominican Republic's civil and criminal codes, and presented findings from academic studies on attitudes and behaviors surrounding child marriage and gender roles. The workshop ended with a collaborative activity in which participants brainstormed strategies to prevent child marriage and forced unions, which included interventions focused on families, minors who are already married, government authorities, and the media. Participants completed a pre- and post-test of content related to the workshop and were also invited to fill out an evaluation of the workshop and facilitators. The aim of this workshop is to ensure program staff have an understanding of the issue of CEFM before implementing the initiative with other ARYI partners.



IR 1.3. Referral for documentation of children and youth increased

The identification of non-documented youth has continued to be performed through sub-awards, managing the cases internally, either through their legal departments, special programs, such as the case of DREAM Project, or through the support of external legal consultants. Those cases that cannot be handled by the organization are referred to DIGEPEP or to the Electoral Board. During FY20, referrals of documentation cases ceased in March due to the COVID-19 related closure of the institutions that offer those services. Q3 and Q4 had no documentation referral cases due to these closures.

R 2. Youth opportunities to be productive citizens improved

IR 2.1 Formal and non-formal education activities increased

School retention and reinsertion programs

In FY20 the school retention and reinsertion program Espacios para Crecer graduated 1,807 participants across 62 EpC. With the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, in-person schooling was suspended and with it in-person EpC courses. In Q4 ARYI focused on laying groundwork with implementing partners and the Ministry of Education for the potential reopening of schools and Espacios para Crecer in January 2021. This preparation work has included training activities for EpC facilitators and an adaptation of the program's methodology and structure to both fully virtual and semi-virtual implementation.

The education program Quantum Learning for Students, benefiting youth who are not enrolled in formal school or who are taking class through the government's PREPARA program, was successfully maintained during FY20 despite the pandemic. In March, ARYI

migrated its QLS program to a virtual format, ensuring that 569 youth completed the 24-hour program during the second semester. Throughout the year, ARYI also delivered training to QLS facilitators from sub-awards and the Community Justice Houses to expand the use of the Quantum Learning approach and improve educational outcomes.

Partnership with Zamora Terán Foundation to support Espacios para Crecer

In Q4 ARYI secured support from the Zamora Terán Foundation in the form of donated laptops and internet access for 90 beneficiaries of Espacios para Crecer, the school retention and reinsertion program, in the Villas Agrícolas neighborhood of Santo Domingo. The partnership will also feature training for facilitators, teachers, and parents of students enrolled in the selected EpC related to using technology for education. The aim is to support the transition of these EpC to a fully virtual model from the current in-person model.



IR2.2. Youth friendly health services increased

Refresher course on psychological and social referral protocol

On June 19, the ARYI carried out a workshop to strengthen the knowledge of the Psychosocial Care Protocol among sub-awards technical personnel. A total of 23 participants from Children International, IDDI, UCNE, Sur Futuro, Dream Project and Entrena attended the virtual event. Psychologist Fior D'Aliza Alcántara, the consultant who helped develop the protocol, led the session. She shared a presentation on the objective of the protocol, the different risk situations it addresses, and the different routes for referral of youth to appropriate care. She also highlighted the importance of applying the techniques described in the protocol to detect cases and beneficiaries at risk, especially amidst the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff from sub-awards were

able to clear up doubts and suggested use of the protocol be extended to additional populations, such as the youth networks.

USS Comfort exchanges with ARYI beneficiaries

In Q1 of FY20, ARYI hosted multiple sessions for youth in the context of the visit of the USS Comfort hospital ship. On October 16, 11 volunteers from the USS Comfort and USAID staff visited ARYI sub-award Fundación Pediátrica por un Mañana and delivered talks on various health topics to 70 youth. Participants in the talks were pregnant teenagers and adolescent mothers, and the topics covered nutrition during pregnancy, breastfeeding, pre- and post-natal physical changes, child care and nutrition. Attendees participated in small breakout groups where they had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss more in depth with health specialists. On October 18, 200 beneficiaries from ARYI technical and vocational training programs met with health professionals from USAID and the US Marines. The youth participated in multiple activities, including a session on sexual and reproductive health and a Q&A about general health issues led by medical staff from the ship. In collaboration with Humano, an ally in the health insurance sector, youth also participated in a workshop on sexual education and healthy lifestyles.

IR 2.3 Employment for youth increased

FY20 saw a sharp reduction in employment for youth due to COVID-19 and the measures taken by the Dominican government to slow the spread, which resulted in reduced economic activity. The transition from in-person to virtual classes offered by INFOTEP also represented a challenge in the achievement of the target. However, the first semester of FY20 was successful in regards to youth completing technical and vocational training courses.

Technical and vocational training graduations

On December 12, 190 ARYI beneficiaries celebrated the completion of their technical & vocational training in a variety of courses offered through INFOTEP. The graduation took place in Capotillo, a vulnerable neighborhood in the Distrito Nacional. In March, 150 youth graduated from courses through CAPEX in Cienfuegos, Santiago. Youth graduates received certificates in customer service, accounting, entrepreneurship, computer science, warehouse assistant, pharmacy assistant, and cashier. Upon completion of their courses the youth were provided with assistance for job and internship placement with ARYI allies in the private sector, and invited to join the ARYI youth networks in their respective communities.

R 3. Integrated youth system developed

IR3.1. A comprehensive youth support system implemented

In FY20, the ARYI added three custom indicators to capture progress towards IR1.2 - Child and early marriage prevented. These indicators measure the number of youth network members trained as knowledge multipliers, the number of stakeholders with strengthened

capacity for CEFM prevention, and the number of people sensitized to CEFM through peer-to-peer knowledge sharing in the ARYI area of intervention. ARYI also updated the indicator measuring public-private partnerships to support youth professional opportunities to better reflect the reality of these kinds of relationships. Custom indicator #14 measures workforce development initiatives created through public-private partnerships, which are focused on creating employment or supporting training and education for youth.

To react to the COVID-19 pandemic and continue building capacity among partner organization staff, the ARYI added an Annex to the MEL Plan describing the status of each program being implemented during the pandemic and strategies for collecting, validating and digitizing program data. Technical staff at sub-awards were also trained on the new requirements.

Also this year, the USAID-DR YES office conducted an Activity Implementation Review in which ARYI staff presented financial results, indicators performance, and communications and integration activities. ARYI staff highlighted that youth have occupied a leading role in designing and organizing activities, such as the creation of the youth networks' brand identity and the elaboration and implementation of Crime and Violence Prevention Plans, in line with USAID's Positive Youth Development approach.

IR3.2. Youth groups and families coordinated and promoting community engagement for the reduction of crime and violence

Throughout FY20, the At-Risk Youth Networks have prioritized the development, presentation and implementation of their Crime and Violence Prevention Plans, establishment of strategic relationships with partners from national and local government authorities, and expansion of their membership by training new members in the National Youth Law, leadership and life skills. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, youth networks adapted quickly, engaging actively in virtual activities and promoting group cohesion through constant contact over WhatsApp and other tools while maintaining physical distance.

Presentation and implementation of Crime and Violence Prevention Plans

In the framework of "National Youth Day " and as part USAID-DR efforts to promote the implementation of public policies that favor positive youth development, youth networks launched their Crime and Violence Prevention Plans in January. These plans were presented simultaneously in the six provinces where the initiative operates: Puerto Plata, Santiago, Santo Domingo Oeste, Distrito Nacional and San Francisco de Macorís. Approximately 800 people attended these events, including government authorities (mayors, deputies, local directors of National Police), community leaders, representatives of the Community Justice Houses and the Citizen Security & Gender tables, as well as youth from the different locations. The plans presented include actions focused on: a) Empowering communities through knowledge of citizens' rights, b) Developing skills in families to prevent violence, c) Fostering behavioral changes in youth to reduce school dropout, d) Improving the police-community relationship and defining roles in crime prevention, and e) Youth sharing their demands for public services and peaceful

coexistence. The implementation of these plans consolidates the structure and operative processes of youth networks, ensuring the long term sustainability of their work for the reduction of crime and violence.

Strategic work with National Police

In addition to presenting the Crime and Violence Prevention Plans to local governments and police, the youth networks established strategic partnerships with the National Police. On June 2, the three networks operating in Santo Domingo Oeste met with the Director of the National Police, General Ney Aldrin Bautista, to discuss their progress towards implementation of the Crime and Violence Prevention Plans. The youth shared activities they had conducted, including conflict mediation workshops, training to out of school youth and organizing donations to fight the pandemic. In addition, the youth briefed police authorities on compliance with quarantine and physical distancing measures established by the government and their impact on the levels of community, intra-family and gender based violence.

International Women's Day

Youth networks commemorated International Women's Day with different activities to promote female empowerment, equality and participation of women in all areas of society. In San Francisco de Macorís youth held a conference for more than 140 participants on "The Rights of Women". In San Cristobal, the Haina youth network organized a panel of five young women who shared their stories of overcoming challenges for an audience of 50 young women from the community. The National District youth network organized a monologue contest around the theme of non-violence against women in which 100 youth and teachers participated. In two other vulnerable neighborhoods in the National District, youth networks held a parade to promote a culture of peace and the prevention of femicides where more than 120 people from the community marched in solidarity.

Youth networks establish relationships with elected authorities

Following the municipal elections in March 2020, youth networks worked to establish productive relationships with the newly-elected municipal and provincial authorities. The Quita Sueño network in San Cristóbal met with the district director Antonio Brito, where they shared their work and priorities for the community. Mr. Brito expressed support for the network in the form of student transportation and scheduling networking visits for youth to different businesses in the area. The Haina youth network presented progress of their CVPP to the mayor of Bajos de Haina, who in turn offered a monthly stipend and meeting space for the youth network to continue carrying out education and outreach activities. In Santo Domingo Norte, the Acopro youth network met with the director of state-subsidized pharmacy network PROMESECAL to address access to medication and personal protective equipment in their communities, as well as internship and education opportunities to youth. The strategic relationships formed by youth networks with local authorities are key to ensuring sustainability of the youths' work in reducing crime and violence.



COVID-19 prevention with youth networks

At the outset of the pandemic, ARYI youth networks took advantage of education on COVID-19 prevention. On April 5, Jennifer Gómez, member of the Haina youth network, participated in a panel alongside 12 Jamaican youth leaders residing all over the world. This Instagram Live event was organized by Jerome Palmer, a young consultant for the prevention of violence and peace in Jamaica, whom the Haina network had the opportunity to meet during the 2019 CBSI conference. During Jennifer’s intervention she discussed the coronavirus situation in the Dominican Republic and shared the initiatives the youth network had carried out to prevent the spread of the virus, such as awareness campaigns on COVID-19 prevention measures through social media. Events like this strengthen the bond between youth, allowing them to exchange best practices on how to reach youth and work for community development, as well as being an opportunity to solidify their leadership skills and engagement with social issues.

IR3.3. Public-private partnerships enhanced to support and advocate for vulnerable children and youth

FY20 saw a clear before-and-after divide in the productivity of public-private partnerships related to COVID-19. Q1 and Q2 saw a number of meetings with strategic partners from government and the private sector to form new alliances in support of youth employment and development. During the second semester of FY20, on the other hand, activities related to these partnerships were put on hold as private sector partners were forced to reprioritize resources and cease new hiring while weathering the pandemic and its economic effects. However, the ARYI PPP specialist maintained communication with these partners to keep them engaged and interested in the initiative’s progress and opportunities to support youth.

Presentation of ARYI results to potential partners

In November, the ARYI and the Sustainability Committee held a meeting with potential private sector partners to present the initiative and explain opportunities for collaboration

to support youth. Twenty representatives of leading companies in the country participated, including: Capilo, HIT, HEINZ, Starbucks, Humano and Banco Popular. Saschia Seibel, ARYI COP presented the results of the activity to date, accompanied by testimonies from Banco Popular, Fundación OMG and the ITABO Industrial Park, who shared their experiences in promoting education and employment opportunities for vulnerable youth. Karina Mancebo, executive director of ANJE and member of the Sustainability Committee, delivered the results of a study showing the impact of citizen insecurity on the business climate. This intervention reinforced the main message of the ARY initiative and the importance of investing in youth to reduce crime and violence. This meeting opened the doors to establish new alliances for the benefit of vulnerable youth.

Ministry of Youth awards scholarships to ARYI beneficiaries

As part of a strategic partnership between the Ministry of Youth and USAID, 47 university scholarships were awarded to ARYI beneficiaries. In an event celebrating the award, the Minister of Youth Robiamny Balcácer and ARYI COP Saschia Seibel offered words of encouragement and motivation to the young students, highlighting the importance of attaining a college education to be prepared to take advantage of employment opportunities. The scholarships were awarded in conjunction with universities in the country for undergraduate degrees in Business Administration, Technology, Modern Languages and Architecture, among others.

Strengthening OMG mentoring program

In December, ARYI staff met to evaluate and provide recommendations on the Mentoring and Coaching Plan developed through a partnership with OMG Foundation, a Dominican law firm. Entrepreneurs participating in the program attended the meeting with OMG staff. Entrepreneurs described what they had learned, including managing finances, diversifying their products portfolio, and administrating resources to improve sales. They also recommended improvements such as delivering training topics individually, conducting practical exercises for each lesson, and assigning an OMG contact to each participant as a mentor. Although follow up activities for this partnership were halted by the pandemic, OMG has remained in contact with the ARYI to identify ways to continue supporting youth, including collaborating on social media campaigns to inform about COVID-19 and offering a webinar about the newly passed Public-Private Partnerships Law and its implications.

2.3 Implementation challenges during the year

This fiscal year was unusual in terms of the number and magnitude of challenges faced by the initiative. Between presidential and municipal elections, social distancing measures imposed by the government in response to COVID-19, and the economic recession product of reduced market activities given the pandemic, the ARYI had to innovate beyond usual to achieve set targets. Below is a description of the main challenges the initiative faced during FY20, divided by program.

School retention and reinsertion

- ***Virtual implementation of the EpC program.*** On March 17, schools closed due to COVID-19, preventing in-situ implementation of the EpC program. The program was implemented virtually, with tutors receiving the education materials that are usually stored in schools so they could assist their students with the assignments. In addition, a digital version of the AMPARO family manual through which parents are taught to relate with their children was shared with tutors. These materials were shared through WhatsApp groups created for the program facilitators, who in turn used the same mechanism to disseminate the information among students and parents. Furthermore, the ARYI had to come up with alternative strategies to continue activities, such as awareness campaigns to prevent the spread of the disease.
- ***Delays in the application of exit surveys.*** Since the closure of the program was conducted virtually, exit surveys could not be applied in person during the final course sessions. The information required for monitoring purposes is crucial to document and report the initiative's progress. Considering a higher response rate would be achieved with the application of in-person surveys, this approach was prioritized instead of applying virtual questionnaires. However, the rise of COVID-19 cases has delayed the completion of the surveys. Through Q4, only 2 out of 5 sub-awards have been able to complete the surveys for their beneficiaries. In light of this reality, the period to submit the surveys has been extended. Nonetheless, there is a possibility of not reaching all participants in the application of these surveys.

Technical vocational training

- ***Administrative issues delayed program kick-off.*** A formal agreement with INFOTEP is still not signed. Therefore, during the first months of the fiscal year, partner organizations carried out individual negotiations for the implementation of technical vocational courses in different communities. These required more time than planned, causing significant delays in the start of the program. Another administrative issue that caused delays in the implementation of this program were internal organizational changes within the Children International sub-award. The ARYI proposed to strengthen the implementation in the city of Santiago with an additional partner (CAPEX), but with the arrival of the pandemic this alternative was dismissed.
- ***Adaptability of support structures to carry out virtual programs.*** Due to COVID-19, technical training was moved to a virtual format. This required extensive efforts from both the ARYI and sub-awards staff. The transition implied preparing the necessary logistics and adapting pedagogical resources to restart the courses through virtual platforms. One of the main challenges was lack of connectivity, since the majority of youth beneficiaries did not possess sufficient internet access. This situation posed difficulties to ensure their participation in the program. The initiative addressed the issue by providing prepaid internet packages for the

participants most in need. However, a process of requesting approval to USAID, obtaining quotes, purchasing and delivering these prepaid packages created delays in program implementation.

- ***Difficulties on the virtual closure of programs.*** The closure of technical vocational programs was conducted virtually. The ARYI developed a protocol for the closure of virtual programs, including the application of Exit Surveys. Under this protocol, beneficiaries of technical training had to access a link and complete the survey online. However, some of the beneficiaries have changed their phone numbers and are difficult to locate to send them the survey link. Also, the survey is lengthy, which has discouraged some beneficiaries from completing it. Sub-awards took measures to increase the response rate, such as assisting youth in completing the surveys by phone and in some cases visiting beneficiaries (using masks and maintaining social distance). Surveys were completed, but the total number of beneficiaries was not reached.

Job placement

- ***Below expected job placement levels.*** Two reasons were identified as the main causes. In the first place, there was an uncertain environment typical of election years, but with the aggravating element of suspended elections. For the first time in Dominican history, municipal elections were suspended because of issues with the digital voting process. This situation generated a widespread sentiment of discomfort among the population, especially youth, developing into a wave of massive peaceful protests throughout the whole country. The National Electoral Board set March 15 as the new election date, extending the period of uncertainty and impacting economic activity for a longer period than anticipated. This perceived instability impacted business decisions, including those related to job placement. Later, the surge of COVID-19 cases and the increase in preventative social distancing measures resulted in a decrease in economic activity. According to the Dominican Central Bank, in August 2020 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) registered a 7.2% decrease compared to 2019. In consequence, many companies have closed their doors or suspended employees, removing the possibility of job placement for youth.

Youth networks

- ***Ensure continuation of CVPP implementation.*** All in-person activities were suspended on March 17, 2020 because of the pandemic. This led to the interruption in the implementation of Crime and Violence Prevention Plans. To continue the work of youth networks, the ARYI elaborated an agenda of virtual training sessions, for both the prevention of COVID-19 and the enhancement of youth's soft skills. These trainings, delivered through Zoom, included: My Life Project while Adapting to Changes, Creative Mentality and Innovation, and Leadership in Times of COVID-19.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO DO AND IR NARRATIVES

The ARY Initiative contributes to Development Objective 1 (DO1): *Crime Prevention Strengthened*. The intervention program seeks to reduce the vulnerability of at-risk youth in the poorest, most violent, and most populated urban areas of the country.

IR 1.1. Reduction in Youth Participation in Criminal Activities – The ARY Initiative reduces the economic and social vulnerabilities in at-risk youth through its interventions.

Mission Objective: Help more than 80,000 young people between the ages of 11-24 to finish school, obtain vocational training, find work, and develop better skills – From July 5, 2012 to September 30, 2020, the ARY Initiative has achieved:

- ✓ 46,088 ARY retained in school
- ✓ 4,559 ARY returned to school
- ✓ 26,915 ARY completed technical/vocational training
- ✓ 7,046 ARY with a new or better employment/internship or started a business of their own, from those who completed technical training

Mission Objective: Reduce teen pregnancy and gang recruitment in selected neighborhoods – From July 5, 2012 to September 30, 2020 a total of 4,519 teen mothers attended programs to finish school, and received technical training for income generation through employment or entrepreneurship, contributing to this goal.

4. INTEGRATION OF KEY AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

This section includes a description of advancements in integrating cross-cutting issues and USAID priorities.

4.1 Youth Development

USAID/DR's At-Risk Youth activity aims to improve the life prospects of vulnerable youth in the Dominican Republic (DR) through human capacity building and economic growth. The \$25 million activity, funded through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, benefits a population ages 11 to 24 in high-crime, high-poverty communities. The initiative targets youth who are school drop-outs, low-skilled, teen mothers, commercial sex workers, disenfranchised without legal documentation, including Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitians living in the DR, and at greater risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Since 2012, the activity has reached youth in over 400 neighborhoods. During FY20, it provided integrated educational, psychological, health, and employability services to 3,648 at-risk youth; re-inserted 78 into the formal school system; and provided workforce development

training to 1,441, of whom 186 obtained new or better employment. The activity has also referred 8 youth to obtain documentation, allowing them access to education and employment opportunities.

This FY20, the initiative focused on Positive Youth Development (PYD), through the strengthening and expansion of youth networks. These are spaces where young leaders support peers and partner with communities to promote youth development and refer at risk youth to services offered through the ARYI. During this period the ARYI closely monitored and supported youth networks in their execution of their Crime and Violence Prevention Plans (CVPP) launched in January 2020. Support included the provision of training to empower them and give necessary tools to display leadership roles within their communities. Also, it included the generation of meetings with relevant local stakeholders, including new government authorities, to ensure the smooth implementation of these CVPP.

However, given the COVID-19 pandemic from Q2 onward youth networks focused on reshaping and carrying out their CCVP under difficult sanitary conditions. The ARYI provided additional support in the form of specialized training on using virtual tools to reach other youth and to keep engaged through social media. The initiative also provided connectivity in order to make sure youth had access to the internet in order to attend such virtual training. Important virtual meetings and encounters took place such as the one with the Police Chief in which he listened to situations youth were facing during the pandemic, how risk situations were increased and vowed to work along with them to find solutions for their neighborhoods.

In addition, during Q4 the ARYI team concluded its annual operational plan for FY21, which includes activities to further promote youth development through ensuring the sustainability of youth networks. The experience of youth networks will be documented, from the process of their creation to the lessons learned during their CVPP implementation. Also a governance structure for the national Alerta Joven youth network will be designed with the active collaboration of its youth members. It is expected that by 2021, these networks will become autonomous and self-sufficient. Sustainability of these spaces refers to their capacity to replicate activities that positively impact their surroundings and to do so by being administrative and financially independent.

4.2 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

The Dominican Republic (DR) faces several barriers to gender equality, including violence against women and girls, high teenage pregnancy rates, and cultural norms that foster *machismo* and unequal gender role responsibilities.

During FY20, 3,648 at risk youth were provided education, training and support services through the initiative, of whom 55 percent were females, to increase their financial and social independence. The activity helped female youth of marginalized communities, through the provision of technical and life-skills training to 974 women to promote their participation in the formal economy. As a result, 131 women currently have new or better

employment. Also, 72 female victims of gender based violence were referred for appropriate care, including psychological, medical and legal support.

The ARYI results framework was revised in FY20 to incorporate activities related to the prevention of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM), supported by additional Gender & Development funding through MOA 21 and 22. To support implementation of these activities the ARYI signed a new sub-award with Plan International, the leading NGO in the Dominican Republic working on CEFM prevention. The intervention is divided into three components: 1) Building capabilities for CEFM prevention; 2) Elaborating and facilitating education materials; and 3) Increasing awareness on CEFM. The following key populations will be targeted in these activities: 1) Youth Networks; 2) Fathers, mothers and guardians whose children are beneficiaries of the activity; 3) Facilitators of the Espacios para Crecer program; 4) Public school teachers and counselors where USAID programs are implemented; 5) Youth in technical and vocational trainings; 6) USAID activity and portfolio partner organizations; and 7) Municipal authorities, grassroots organizations and community leaders across ARYI implementation areas.

Activities were originally scheduled to begin in June 2020, but the calendar was adjusted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the CEFM activities in FY20 focused on formalizing relationships with implementing partners, reorienting annual work plans to include CEFM prevention, and continuing ARYI education activities that include a CEFM component. In Q3 and Q4, 334 youth completed Quantum Learning for Students, which features a life-skills component that covers cross-cutting themes of gender inclusion, sexual and reproductive health, domestic and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and early marriage. In August, the ARYI began delivering training to implementing partner staff. A total of 63 technical staff participated in training workshops where they learned the legal and social contexts of CEFM and discussed strategies for prevention and response.

4.3 Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

PPPs are essential for the sustainability of USAID programs that support at risk youth in the Dominican Republic (DR), as PPPs facilitate better outcomes in school re-insertion, school retention, job insertion, and crime and violence reduction. USAID/DR's At Risk Youth Initiative emphasizes positive youth development by engaging the private sector in providing young people the support and job training opportunities they need to develop professional skills through on the job training, allowing them to grow into healthy, responsible, and productive adults.

Fiscal year 2020 was a challenging period in terms of new PPPs concretion and sustainability of current ones. The state of emergency the world is experiencing due to COVID-19, being the Dominican Republic no exception, impacted not only families and communities, but also all productive sectors and the government which constitute ARY's main partners. Long standing partners such as Banco Popular Dominicano and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce focused their efforts and budgets on addressing the pandemic, hence, were not able to provide support to the initiative. Given this scenario the initiative concentrated efforts in taking advantage of existing partnerships where the pandemic impact was positive. This is the case of some industries like Polyplas and PIISA Industrial

Park, which shifted their production to manufacture protective equipment against COVID-19, and as a result hired 19 youth from the National District and 150 youth from the self-sustained Haina youth network.

Despite the setbacks, the ARYI and its sub-awardees managed to form new 8 PPPs with private partners over the course of the year. Five of these partnerships were directly managed through Entrena, while the remaining 3 were accomplished through sub-awards. The initiative established agreements to carry out youth development efforts with different institutions in three areas: education and training, employment and soft skills development.

During FY20, the ARYI established partnerships to support beneficiaries' education process. This year, COVID-19 led to the digitalization of programs, two of the new partnerships focused on equipping beneficiaries for their journey in virtual education. In this regard, the Zamora Terán Foundation signed an agreement committing to provide laptops to further the education of 90 students under the Espacios para Crecer program. In addition, the US-based non-profit Fondo Quisqueya donated 55 tablets to support ARYI youth beneficiaries currently studying in universities on scholarships through the Ministry of Youth. In addition, an agreement was signed with San Martin de Porres School, a public educational institution, so their facilities are used in implementing the school retention program Espacios para Crecer in the Guachupita neighborhood of Distrito Nacional.

Three of the partnerships established focused on facilitating employment opportunities to ARYI beneficiaries. ARYI's allies in this regard were the following: a) Movil Port, SRL, a company dedicated to product distribution, b) Operadora de Servicios Macajo, a franchisee of the international food retailer McDonald's and c) The United States Cooperation League, which agreed to include ARYI's technical training beneficiaries in its paid internship programs.

Finally, two of the partnerships were aimed at strengthening leadership and other soft skills in youth. During Q4, Fundación Alda, a Paraguayan organization that contributes to improving educational quality of children and youth, provided 45 beneficiaries the opportunity to participate in the International Youth Forum on challenges faced by youth. While the Community Justice Houses, a non-profit organization aimed at improving citizen access to justice and current USAID/DR partner, delivered training for the development of a culture of peace in the Dominican Republic. Events such as these boost youth's civic engagement capacity and foment skills that will serve them for their personal and community development.

5. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

This section includes a description of current and ongoing stakeholder participation and involvement in program activities (may include government, regional organizations, NGOs, private sector, academia, and other donors).

Even under a challenging environment due to COVID-19, the initiative continued to pursue productive and sustainable alliances for the future.

Public sector

- On February 27, then-President Danilo Medina signed the Public-Private Partnerships Law 47-20. Immediately following the passage of this law, the ARYI revised the new law with support from law firm and private sector ally OMG. During Q4, the ARYI made contact with the newly created General Directorate of Public-Private Partnerships (DGAPP). This entity is in charge of managing all partnerships between the public sector and the social and private sectors. A meeting was scheduled for Q1 FY21 with the DGAPP to introduce the ARYI and identify mechanisms in which the initiative can collaborate to continue working for youth development.
- Another public entity that cooperated with the initiative was the National Cybersecurity Center. The ARYI met with Mr. Carlos Leonardo, Incident Response Director, to hold discussions on cyber risks and attacks and the importance of informing and educating young users amidst the current increase in time spent online. An agreement was reached to carry out a series of cybersecurity awareness workshops for the members of the Youth Networks to learn to prevent these attacks and safely navigate while performing their virtual education activities.
- As part of an ongoing partnership between USAID and the Ministry of Youth of the Dominican Republic, during FY20 an additional 31 beneficiaries received scholarships to attend higher education institutions.

Private sector

- The initiative worked closely with current partner and industry leader Polyplas to rapidly refer youth to job openings during the pandemic. Polyplas became highly involved in the manufacturing of personal protective equipment at the beginning of the pandemic, shifting their target business to provide supplies of such equipment where needed to address COVID-19. As a result, 11 youth were employed in the Polyplas manufacturing plant in Villas Agrícolas in the Distrito Nacional.
- As an example of local sustainability, the youth network in Haina continued to work closely with PIISA Industrial Park in Haina. This network has not received funding from USAID since 2018 and they continue to function independently, working together with the local municipality and the private sector in expanding the initiative's programs and services. As a result, 228 youth secured their first employment in PIISA, specifically in companies such as Baxter and Fresenius Kabi who manufacture personal protective equipment.
- During this year, the Sustainability Committee maintained its commitment in supporting the project, through their involvement in different initiatives. The ARYI

kept the Committee informed on the initiative's activities and provided appropriate follow up via email, phone calls, and one-on-one virtual meetings.

6. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Staff

During FY20, the initiative experienced significant changes to its organizational structure. As a result of the new extension, personnel was reorganized to better reflect the reduction in the scope of works and the inclusion of CEFM activities. Overall, four positions were eliminated and two roles created. Below is a description of the main changes in the personnel structure by type of role:

- *Program Specialist* - Erielba Gil, who served as Program Specialist, left the organization on May 25, 2020, to take the lead of a Higher Education Partnership USAID/DR activity. Since the ARYI was in a closure period, no person was sought to occupy this role.
- *IT Specialist* - Carlos David Baez occupied the position until July 31, 2020. IT services were outsourced to the company People Ware, which provides assistance to the ARYI's platform maintenance since January 2020.
- *M&E Assistant* - Jean Hernandez was dismissed from his duties on September 15, 2020. The position was permanently eliminated and all pending activities carried out under this role were assumed by the M&E Specialist.
- *Deputy Project Director* - Katherine Javier occupied this position until September 10, 2020, when the role was eliminated. Ms. Javier handed in pending deliverables to ARYI's management and trained Mr. Brendan Fields in part of her duties. Ms. Javier continues acting as a consultant for the ARYI in matters where her expertise is required.
- *Technical Officer* - Brendan Fields joined the ARYI on August 17. This is a new position which combines parts of the Program Specialist and Deputy Project Director functions. Mr. Fields is in charge of providing adequate follow up to the implementation of the annual operating plan.
- *CEFM Specialist* - Altagracia Vargas, part of Entrena's staff, joined the ARYI on August 1 with 50% time allotment to serve as Child and Early Marriage Prevention Specialist. She acts as a liaison between sub-awards, Entrena, and Plan International, the main implementing partner for CEFM activities.

This personnel was duly notified and corresponding severance payments were disbursed. Other positions are scheduled to be eliminated or modified throughout the course of FY21 as the ARYI's phase out initiates.

Financial Audits

After a competitive bidding process, the firm Campusano & Asociados was selected to carry out the audit for year 2019 (January 1st to December 31st). The contract was signed

on March 3 and on March 16 the work started with the request of a series of documents and financial information.

The original deadline to conclude the process was June 5, 2020. However, given the implementation of the audit coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, this deadline was extended. The scheduled date for conclusion and receipt of the final audit draft is November 2020. By the end of December, TORs approved by USAID to perform the year 2020 audit will be sent to firms inviting them to submit their proposals to participate in the bidding process.

7. BUDGET

During FY20, an extension of the initiative was approved, increasing the budget award to US\$25,165,297. As of September 30, 2020 expenses were the following:

BUDGET CATEGORY	Total Award Budget	Accumulated Expenditure	Percentage of Execution
LABOR	3,133,844	2,808,315	90%
FRINGE BENEFITS	1,412,860	1,057,674	76%
CONSULTANTS	1,519,334	1,341,171	80%
TRAVEL AND PER DIEM	124,837	108,931	86%
OTHER DIRECT COSTS	2,796,876	2,623,134	91%
EQUIPMENT	150,534	147,704	97%
SUB-AWARDS	15,413,070	14,873,295	98%
SUB TOTAL IN USD	24,551,756	22,960,225	94%
INDIRECT COST	613,541	458,248	75%
TOTAL IN USD	25,165,297	23,418,473	93%

As cost share, during Q4 US\$56,483 was invested in cash and kind by Entrena SRL and sub-awardees. This amounts to a total of US\$344,217 for FY20 and US\$5,915,051 for the life of the project, which is equivalent to 25.3% of the budget executed.

8. LESSONS LEARNED

- ***Embracing virtual education and devising adequate implementation strategies.*** It is necessary to understand and adopt the paradigm shift COVID-19 has brought to the educational system. Educational institutions should strengthen their process for creating virtual content and strategies, as well as recognize that this modality has its benefits in terms of access, costs and flexibility of education. In addition, programs have to ensure youth have access to the resources required to participate in virtual education, such as a computer, internet access and a stable electrical connection. Through the ARYI internet packages were provided to youth enrolled in programs. However, in the long run the facilitation of technological resources should be considered during the design phase of programs.
- ***Motivation is an important determinant of youth permanence in virtual programs.*** Some youth did not adapt to the virtual education format since it required a greater level of commitment and they lacked the support they enjoyed in in-person classes. Despite being provided with constant follow-up and internet, some students abandon the courses. Greater efforts are required to maintain the active attendance of youth in online trainings. It is necessary to increase their motivation and help generate a sense of belonging with their virtual study groups. The use of strategies to make the learning process more dynamic and engaging is crucial to keep youth enrolled in education programs.
- ***Alignment of monitoring and evaluation systems with virtual programs to ensure appropriate program tracking.*** It is necessary to introduce modifications to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in order to facilitate adequate tracking of programs. This entails the elaboration of digital forms and surveys, the identification of new evidence of indicator compliance, the creation of processes to capture and report data, as well as training in the use of new procedures and tools. The ARYI designed a new M&E protocol and trained involved staff, but since virtual education is here to stay, these processes should be revised and strengthened.
- ***Identify alternatives for youth since their employment is the most vulnerable during economic crises.*** Training of youth and partnerships with businesses are essential to achieve youth employment. However, during economic crises these elements do not seem to be sufficient in providing employment opportunities for youth. The scenario of economic instability the Dominican Republic is currently experiencing has further demonstrated the vulnerability of youth employment. Individuals aged 18 to 24 were shown to be the most susceptible population subgroup with respect to suspension or removal from their jobs. The ARYI defined an employment target; however, job market prospects made the target impossible to achieve. Therefore, it is important to provide youth with alternatives in these cases, for example, highlighting the potentialities of entrepreneurship or

encouraging them to continue polishing their academic profiles until markets recover their dynamism and begin to offer new employment.

9. INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES WITH USAID AND OTHER PROJECTS

National District Citizen Security Roundtable

One of the main integration efforts carried out this year is USAID financed initiatives unifying participation in the National District through the Citizen Security Roundtable (CSR). The ARYI has been actively engaged in the planning phase, by identifying programs and activities that can be carried out in alliance with all members of the CSR. The second circumscription of the National District was selected as the focus area for implementation, including the barrios of Villas Agrícolas, Gualey and La Zurza. Youth leadership, participation and ownership will be vital in ensuring that the CSR attracts and targets youth in order to get their input. During this period, and to further strengthen youth participation, the initiative has promoted the creation of an additional youth network for this area. 25 youth from this circumscription have been selected to complete the first phase of training and will become the main youth actors within the CSR in FY21.

10. SUCCESS STORIES

JHOAN: MANAGING TO STAY IN SCHOOL AND DISCOVERING HIS VOCATION

One of the greatest challenges facing the Dominican Republic with respect to education is keeping students in school, which has become one of the factors that most contribute to an increase in delinquency and criminality.

There are many reasons why a child drops out of school, either to support their family financially or because they have to take care of their siblings while their parents work. There are other factors related to the system that have a powerful impact on school dropout, such as deficiency in the available education options and the lack of adaptation to allow children who have limitations to keep up with learning in the classroom.

Jhoan was 13 when he dropped out of school for the third time, something that had become a habit for him. His mother, due to economic hardship, had to spend most of the day away from home to provide for her family and fulfil the needs of an absent father.

He was in 6th grade and did not know how to read or write. While his mother was away at work, Jhoan took the opportunity to play with his friends in the municipality of Villa Rivas

in the Province of San Francisco de Macorís, where he lives. It is a community where acts of violence are constant, described by Jhoan as “a neighborhood where there are many drug dealing spots, a lot of insecurity and few sources of work.”

His mother enrolled him in school again, but this time his teachers, due to his learning limitations, proposed he join a school retention and reintegration program supported by the ARYI called Espacios para Crecer (EpC). This program was designed specifically for children like Jhoan to improve their academic performance through best practices in neuroscience and life skills coaching, while keeping them in the school system and supporting them to ameliorate their vulnerable situation.

Jhoan entered Espacios para Crecer with behavior problems and attendance issues, situations that received timely intervention from the EpC facilitator through the Quantum Learning methodology, which offers children meaningful learning and strengthens their life skills, enhancing the individual academic development of each child.

Only a few months had passed when Jhoan was already reading and writing EpC songs with his classmates, demonstrating that education is a joint training process, where both soft skills and structured pedagogical processes influence learning.

It has been three years since Jhoan participated in the EpC. Now, at 16, he is grateful for having been part of the program. “Before entering the program I dropped out of school, I had no study habits, and I did not know how to read. I am grateful to the organization for having motivated me to continue with my studies and having given me that opportunity,” says Jhoan.

Jhoan has not only been a beneficiary of Espacios para Crecer; he has just finished training as an Informatics Technician through the ARYI vocational education program, which supports the professional and educational development of vulnerable youth and allows them to have job opportunities in the future. “Now I have a dream to fulfill: to be a great engineer,” he says.

Jhoan is living proof that a youth who receives an appropriate educational intervention can reduce their vulnerability and move towards a considerable change in their quality of life.

ARLENY: BUILDING HER FUTURE THROUGH HER FIRST JOB DURING COVID-19

COVID-19 devastated employment in the Dominican Republic, further increasing levels of unemployment for youth who were already facing numerous challenges before the pandemic. According to the International Labor Organization in their Labor Panorama study of Latin America and the Caribbean 2019, the youth unemployment rate in the country increased by 2% between January and September 2019, going from a rate of 13.5% in 2018 to 15.5%. This number is double the national unemployment rate which was 6.2% according to ECLAC. In addition, the Dominican Social Security Agency states that between January and June of 2020 there were 14% fewer active formal workers compared to the same period in 2019, demonstrating the harsh effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment.

For youth, this global emergency situation represents challenges at the occupational, social and educational level; they have had to adapt to online education, stay in quarantine and limit their recreation. This is the case of Arleny Arias, a 19-year-old Dominican woman, who had to abruptly adapt to the new modality of digital training while struggling to access a better quality of life.

Arleny and her parents live together in the municipality of Montellano in the Puerto Plata Province, and are also in a highly vulnerable situation due to their low income. Montellano is a town where violence is increasing, primarily due to the micro-trafficking of drugs that is common in the area. "The danger is palpable and the insecurity is worrying," says Arleny.

Before the pandemic, Arleny was finishing her high school studies and facing the reality that her parents could not cover her university expenses, a situation that would limit her economic and social integration. In this difficult scenario of not being able to access higher education, Arleny felt excluded and frustrated because she did not have better opportunities for her development.

Being able to access a professional education meant that Arleny would be able to lead the way towards financial stability for her family. Determined to change her outlook, she began searching for opportunities that would allow her to develop her potential. That was when she discovered an initiative that offered technical training options to vulnerable youth in her community through recommendations of friends who had been beneficiaries. Arleny decided to enroll in the program.

She had found the technical vocational training program developed by the ARYI in the Dominican Republic, in which vulnerable youth between the ages of 18 and 24 receive professional training to be able to enter a formal job and develop their productivity, while reducing their situation of risk.

"I attended the first day of registration and decided to enter the program," says Arleny. She started the program, but a few days after classes began, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Dominican Republic. Arleny and more than 300 other beneficiaries that were participating in the technical training program sponsored by the ARYI had to switch to online courses. It was a challenge for Arleny because she didn't have Internet in her home, but the ARYI was able to adapt to the new reality by covering youths' connectivity costs and supporting the facilitators with new digital training skills.

The technical course in which Arleny participated was Customer Service, a program that is divided into three phases: 1) strengthening life skills, 2) training for employment and 3) supervised internships in companies. Within the training classes, the program includes an English for work module as a way for students to increase their job skills.

Arleny concluded her technical training virtually with the support of the ARYI and received her first job opportunity in a cell phone store, a victory that has filled her with hope in the middle of the uncertainty imposed by the pandemic. "I am applying what I learned at the cell phone store and I feel more than fortunate to have found a job in these

difficult times” says Arleny, who now has the opportunity to pay for her university studies and further develop her potential.

Since 2012 more than 26,000 at risk youth like Arleny have participated in the technical vocational training program developed by the ARYI in the Dominican Republic, and have gained the opportunity to become more productive entities and enjoy a more prosperous future.

II. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT YEAR INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

The following activities are scheduled under the ARYI’s operational plan. However, their execution is subject to the evolution of COVID-19 and decisions made by the Dominican government regarding activities and events.

- November 6 – Launch of the program Defenders of Justice: In alliance with the Community Justice Houses, 100 members of the ARYI Youth Network will be trained in access to justice, human rights, and conflict mediation.
- November 13-18 – Training for multipliers of ARYI Youth Networks: 55 members of the youth networks will receive training on strategies and methodology for multiplying workshops on: life skills, National Youth Law, volunteering, leadership, and promotion of justice, among others.
- November 16 – Launch of Espacios para Crecer virtual model: 10 EpCs will be opened under the online education model with approximately 150 students to be divided into groups of 15 to guarantee personalized attention.
- November 17 – Road safety training for members of the ARYI Youth Network in alliance with the National Institute of Traffic and Land Transport: As part of the celebration of Road Safety Week, members of the ARYI Youth Network will participate in an awareness-raising activity on accident prevention.

12. HOW IMPLEMENTING PARTNER HAS ADDRESSED A/COR COMMENTS FROM THE LAST QUARTERLY OR SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT – N/A

13. ANNEX A: QUARTERLY DATA REGISTRY

14. ANNEX B: OTHER DELIVERABLES AND STUDIES – N/A