



USAID | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

AT-RISK YOUTH INITIATIVE
Annual Report
FY 2021 – October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021

Submission Date: October 31, 2021

Cooperative Agreement Number: AID-517-A-12-00002
Activity Start Date and End Date: July 5, 2012 to June 4, 2022
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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 5, 2012 to June 4, 2022
Name of Prime Implementing Partner:	ENTRENA S.R.L.
Cooperative Agreement Number:	AID-517-A-12-00002
Name of Subcontractors/Sub-awardees:	Dream Project Fundación Sur Futuro, Inc. Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral (IDDI) Plan International Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE)
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, 2020 to September 30, 2021

I.1 Program Description/Introduction

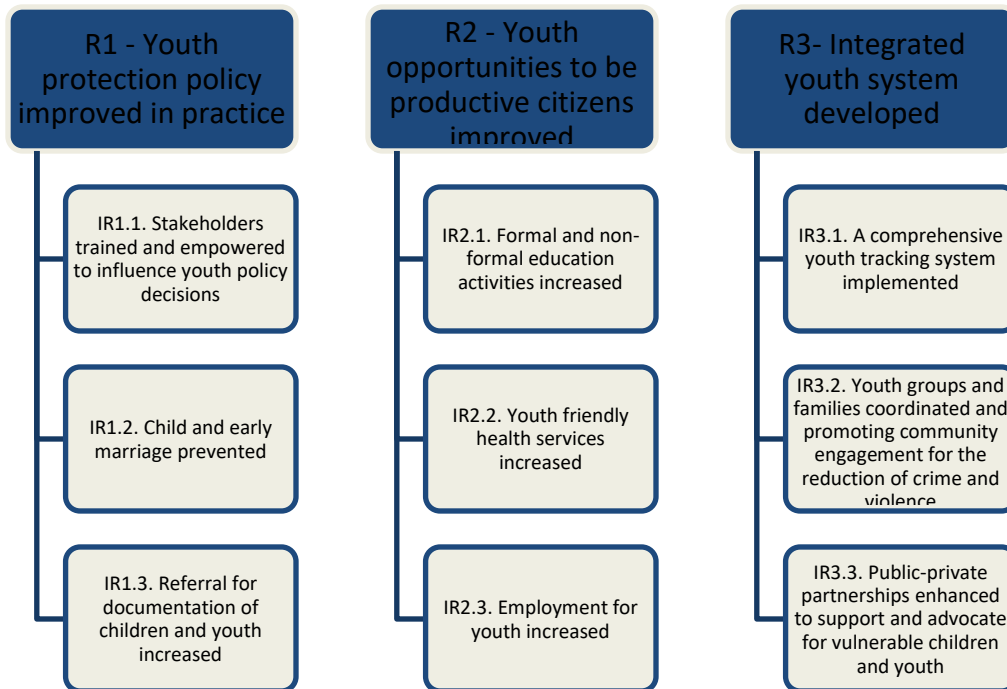
The goal of the Dominican Republic At-Risk Youth Initiative (ARYI) is to create a sustainable, multidisciplinary safety net for at-risk youth implemented to prevent crime. The technical approach develops a sustainable framework as a quality product that can positively continue to transform the lives of youth living in risky environments 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 education, employment, health, and legal status.

The initiative supports the best evidence-based practices, and produces a unique information system that tracks participants/services provided. 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 to 24. As of 2019, the geographical focus was narrowed 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 included the intended collaboration of the following six sub-awardees: IDDI, Sur Futuro, Children International, Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE), Dream Project, and Plan International. During this period, the ARYI downsized the current scope of activities and concentrated on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) prevention. Through a partnership with Plan International, a non-profit organization with expertise on the matter, the initiative integrated CEFM prevention across all activities. In August 2021, the activity signed another cost and time extension with a new end date of June 4, 2022 and implementation through planned sub-awards with six organizations: IDDI, Sur Futuro, Universidad Católica Nordestana (UCNE), Dream Project, and Center for Innovation and Professional Training (CAPEX).

Major results are presented in the chart below:



2. ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

2.1 Progress Narrative

This section is a narrative of achievements by indicator results and targets from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021. The first two subsections describe standard indicators

defined by USAID/CBSI, while the third subsection 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 for 2021: 900 participants, ages 11-14

The activity that supports this indicator is the Espacios para Crecer (EpC) school retention and reinsertion program for at-risk youth. In FY2021, with approval from UASID, the activity reoriented funding and effort away from this indicator and towards ES.1-4, given that this component depends on in-person classes. The Ministry of Education did not restart in-person classes until April 2021. To adapt to this situation, the ARYI (with support of private sector allies Diesco and Zamora Terán Foundation) conducted a hybrid part virtual, part in-person EpC model trial, through which 71 youth completed the program, equipping them with tools to successfully re-enter the 2021-2022 school year.

ES 1-4 Number of learners in secondary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance – Goal for 2021: 990 participants, ages 14-24

The school retention program Quantum Learning for Students (QLS) targets secondary school aged youth who are in danger of dropping out or already outside of the formal education system. 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 FY2021, 45 QLS groups were conducted through sub-awards IDDI, Dream Project, UCNE and Sur Futuro, for a total of 1,035 youth completing the course, representing 104.5% of the target. Of these youths, 66 percent were females. The QLS course curriculum was refined to include more academic skills and personal follow up from facilitators in an effort to increase its impact on the beneficiaries and thus better prepare them for the upcoming school year. Each QLS course lasted 40 hours and included academic skills (math, reading, and writing), life skills, and personal follow-up/coaching. The activity provided internet to ensure students who were participating in the online course could connect consistently to the internet.

EG. 5-3 Number of microenterprises supported by USG-assistance – Goal for 2021: 15 microenterprises supported

In FY2021, the Covid-19 pandemic did not allow the activity to celebrate the annual Entrepreneurship Fair, which generally accounts for the entirety of this indicator. However, through entrepreneurship courses, the ARYI provides support for

microbusiness owners to improve their business practices. During FY2021, one microenterprise received assistance through entrepreneurship training for its owner. This represents 6.7% of the target.

EG.6-3 Number of individuals who complete USG-assisted workforce development programs – Goal for 2021: 1,050 participants, ages 15-24

During FY2021, the ARYI conducted workforce development programs (through job readiness, technical and entrepreneurship training) for a total of 833 youth. Of these, 76 percent were females. This represents 79.3 percent of the target for this year. The courses were delivered through sub-awardees Sur Futuro and IDDI and included courses in pharmacy assistance, technology, entrepreneurship, cooking, customer service, sales, website design, Microsoft Office Suite, warehouse management, and bank customer service. These job training courses respond to current demands in the labor markets within the Greater Santo Domingo area, preparing youth to obtain gainful employment after completing them.

EG.6-4 Number of individuals with new employment following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs – Goal for 2021: 263 participants, ages 18-24

During FY2021, 184 youth attained new employment after having completed a workforce development program, representing 70 percent of the target. The most common new jobs were in sales, customer service, secretarial work, and machine operation, followed by jobs as teachers, supervisors, and accounting assistants. This year, labor insertion represented a challenge given the lingering economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. While overall unemployment in the Dominican Republic is at 8 percent¹, youth unemployment is at 15.5 percent², making youth one of the groups most impacted economically by the pandemic. Many businesses made cuts to both staff and hours, and reprioritized resources to ensure continuity during the pandemic. To address this issue, the ARYI emphasized forming new alliances and strengthening those that already existed with the private sector.

EG.6-5 Number of individuals with increased earnings following completion of USG-assisted workforce development programs – Goal for 2021: 315 participants, ages 18-24

This indicator monitors youth that either obtained new jobs, improved their existing working conditions or created/improved a microbusiness. In FY2021, 211 youth—81

¹ *Contexto del empleo y desempleo: ¿Qué dice el último informe de la OIT sobre RD?*. Revista Mercado, 2021. Accessed at: <https://www.revistamercado.do/economia/empleo-y-desempleo-informe-oit-rd-republica-dominicana>.

² *COVID-19 y el mundo del trabajo: Punto de partida, respuesta y desafíos en Rep. Dominicana*. International Labor Organization, 2021. Accessed at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/---sro-san_jose/documents/publication/wcms_755526.pdf.

males and 130 females—reported increased earnings after completing the job readiness component.

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 for 2021: 55 percent, female ages 11-24

In FY2021, the female participants in workforce development programs represented 61.6 percent of the total. This is 6.6 percentage points above the goal for the year of 55 percent. Sub-awards carrying out workforce development programs are instructed to promote gender equity in the recruitment for these courses as a means to engage more males, since typically a higher number of females are interested in these types of training. However, given that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in higher unemployment among women than men, a higher proportion of female participants in this program is important to supporting women's economic recovery.

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 for 2020: 84 participants, ages 11-24

During FY2021, 135 participants who reported having been victims of gender-based violence (GBV) received attention through the ARYI through referrals and participation in technical training to increase their possibility of having economic stability. Of these participants, 36 were males and 99 were females. The total represents 160 percent of the target for the year, which could be related to the increase in GBV in the Dominican Republic as a result of lockdown, quarantine and other measures taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. 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. Victims can also be referred to technical vocational training as a means of economic empowerment.

YOUTH-1 Number of youth at risk of violence trained in social or leadership skills through USG assisted programs – Goal for 2021: 2,800 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 training courses and youth network knowledge multiplier training. These programs transfer this knowledge through the Life Skills Module in the case of QLS, technical vocational training, and youth networks, and through the Personal Growth component of EpC. During FY2021, 1,781 youth were trained in social or leadership skills through these components, representing 63.6 percent of this year's target. Of these youths, 70 percent were female.

Custom Indicators

Number of identified undocumented children and youth referred to an external documentation program – Goal for 2021: 25 participants, ages 11-24

In the past decade, Dominican authorities have carried out efforts to reduce the number of undocumented children. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the National Civil Registry suspended services in March 2020 and many organizations providing documentation services reorganized their priorities to address pressing needs during the emergency. Therefore, the ARYI did not conduct referrals for documentation over the past year. This indicator is set to be eliminated in the upcoming extension period to better reflect the initiative's focus on education, job training, and youth networks.

Number of Vulnerable Youth and/or Children (VYC) reinserted into formal schooling – Goal for 2021: 180 participants, ages 11-24

FY2021 saw the reactivation of classes following the complete closure in March 2020 of Dominican public schools. Distance learning began in November 2020, with classes being offered online and over television/radio. The months of no communication between schools and families resulted in a loss of community-level connections that allow for the identification of out of school students. Additionally, the Ministry of Education was not registering new students at that time, and the 2020-2021 school year ended on July 2021. In addition to this volatile calendar, the Ministry of Education's refocusing of priorities toward technology for students and reconditioning school buildings in advance of the start of classes in September 2021 relegated reinsertion of youth to a lower priority. For the aforementioned reasons, the ARYI did not reinsert any vulnerable youth and/or children into formal schooling during FY2021.

Number of local workforce development initiatives created through USG assisted public-private partnerships – Goal for 2021: 10

This custom indicator describes the agreements made by ARYI and sub-awards with private and public sector partners in support of youth. During FY2021, the initiative and its sub-awards created 15 initiatives in favor of youth development, consisting of 12 private sector initiatives and 3 in the public sector. This total represents 150% of the target for FY2021.

Number of peer to peer youth networks working to reduce crime and violence in their communities through USG assistance – Goal for 2021: 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 (CVPP) that target specific community needs.

In FY2021, 11 youth networks worked to increase their membership and implement local crime and violence prevention activities, representing 100% completion of the target. In November 2020, one new youth network was formed in the high-crime sector of Villas Agrícolas in the National District, an area that has been prioritized in the National Citizen Security Plan. This network and two others—in Quita Sueño, San Cristóbal and Sabana Perdida, Santo Domingo—developed and launched Crime and Violence Prevention Plans. Youth conducted both online and in-person evaluations of crime hot spots in their neighborhoods, determined the major drivers of crime and violence, and then designed work plans organized around three major problems to tackle these issues.

Number of people trained in child, early and forced marriage prevention to act as knowledge multipliers through USG education assistance – Goal for 2021: 70

This indicator accounts for youth trained to act as knowledge multipliers about child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) forms of abuse and how to prevent it. Participants are trained in the methodology “Champions for Change,” developed and adapted to the Dominican context by sub-awardee 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. To support this course, the ARYI created six modules of the Champions for Change curriculum and accompanied them with videos to supplement learning in each session. This year, 75 youth completed this six-session training, representing 107.1 percent of the target. These youth went on to replicate the course with their peers, who are reported under Custom Indicator #18. Because no further knowledge multiplier training is planned, this indicator will be eliminated in FY2022.

Number of stakeholders with child, early and forced marriage prevention capacity strengthened with USG education assistance – Goal for 2021: 660

This indicator accounts for individuals whose work is directly related to CEFM prevention or who work directly with vulnerable children in their duties and receive training in CEFM prevention through the ARYI. 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 FY2021, the ARYI facilitated workshops on CEFM prevention and response for a diverse audience of stakeholders across the activity’s implementation area. As a result of these workshops, 602 stakeholders were trained, representing 91.2 percent of this year’s target. To support this implementation, the ARYI developed a brochure aimed at teachers and school administrators with information about recognizing, preventing, and responding to incidents of CEFM. These materials were printed and delivered to local schools to provide resources to the educational community and empower teachers. Because no further stakeholder training is planned, this indicator will be eliminated in FY2022.

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 for 2021: 1,215

As part of the CEFM prevention efforts, youth and stakeholders trained on the matter acted as knowledge multipliers for their peers. This indicator measures indirect beneficiaries reached by information sessions aimed at providing skills and knowledge about early and forced marriage definition, its causes and consequences, and strategies for prevention and response. These beneficiaries included youth, teachers and other school staff, social workers, and parents, mothers and legal guardians of children and youth in targeted communities. In FY2021, 1,077 people were sensitized to recognize and prevent CEFM, which represents 88.6 percent of the target. To support this implementation, the ARYI designed and printed a brochure aimed at parents and guardians that explains the problem of CEFM, contributing factors in the home, and ways parents/guardians can protect their children to decrease CEFM. These brochures were delivered to schools and youth multipliers to support workshops given to parents and guardians.

2.2 Implementation Status

This section includes a narrative of achievements and status of planned activities according to the Annual Work Plan for FY2021. Complementary activities in line with the ARYI's objectives, but outside of the planning, were also carried out.

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.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) training for GODR

In order to provide technical assistance to the Government of the Dominican Republic (GODR) on designing youth centered public policy and programs, the ARYI partnered with the Ministry of Youth in an effort to facilitate adoption of PYD across the GODR's youth-serving entities. As a first step in this effort, the initiative facilitated a PYD training to 20 technical staff from the Ministry of Youth which covered the context of youth and demographics in the DR, components of PYD, important aspects of youth development, and strategies for implementing PYD in public policies. From these 20 participants, 6 were selected by the Ministry's HR team to facilitate a follow up workshop in September 2021 for an extended audience of GODR agencies, including the Ministries of Youth, Women, and Public Health, the Office of the Attorney General, National Drug Control Agency, and Social Policy Cabinet. This was the first time that PYD content was delivered to government agencies in Latin America, and the objective of the workshop is that these agencies adopt PYD and incorporate the dimensions, characteristics and tools to strengthen their youth-centered programming.



Youth Programming Assessment Tool (YPAT)

The Youth Programming Assessment Tool (YPAT) helps youth-serving civil society organizations reflect upon their own internal programming and institutional practices and identify areas for improvement. In November 2020, the ARYI led four sub-awards, who are all youth-serving civil society organizations, in conducting an evaluation of their programming using the YPAT. Over a series of 3 meetings, 30 participants - including technical staff, program facilitators, and youth network members - reviewed the four dimensions of positive youth development and the purpose of the YPAT. Participants ranked their organization's youth programming across the four dimensions in specific areas, and then developed an action plan to address areas in which they recognized room for improvement. In March 2021, the activity held follow up sessions with each sub-award to evaluate progress in the work plans; during these meetings, the organizations demonstrated improvement across the identified issues. Completing the YPAT, refreshing their knowledge of PYD, and implementing plans for improvement allowed the sub-awards to strengthen their staff's capacity, a key component of sustainability and success of sustained youth-serving organizations.

Convention for ARYI implementing partners

The ARYI gathered technical staff and coordinators from six partner organizations for a daylong conference to review each component as well as quality control activities. Attendees also participated in team building and motivation activities to highlight the importance of communication, teamwork, and solidarity as the activity heads into the final period of implementation. The convention helped new staff learn what they needed to know to successfully implement ARYI programming and refreshed returning staff members' knowledge, especially related to specific components, USAID funding

regulations, communications guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation, thus strengthening the partners' capacity to work with USAID in the future. It also established a sense of team identity and commitment to reaching the activity's goals and targets laid out over the remaining period of implementation, to conclude the activity with high quality and sustainability at the forefront.



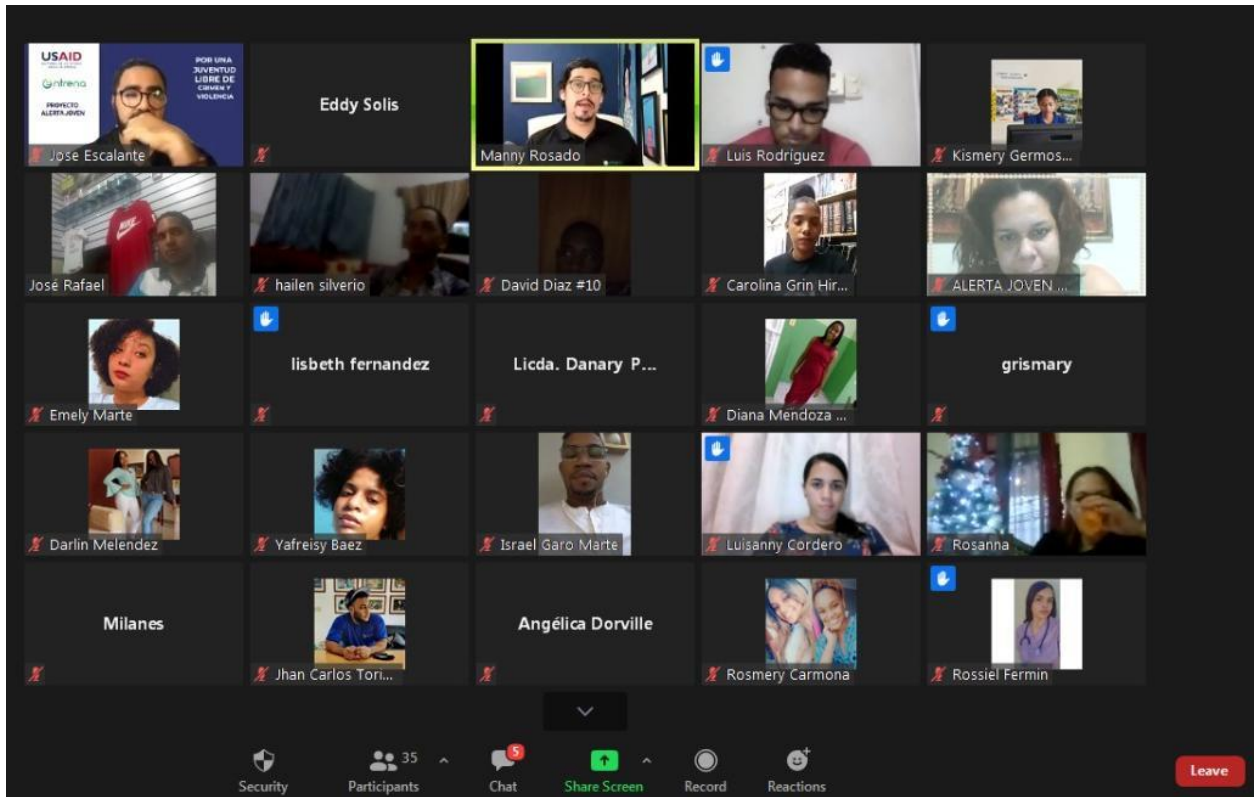
DR National Youth Day celebration

Every January 31, the Dominican Republic celebrates National Youth Day in honor of San Juan Bosco, the patron of Latin American youth. The ARYI celebrated this day by hosting a virtual event to highlight how the youth networks have created effective solutions in their communities to address the challenges the pandemic has posed to Dominican youth. During the meeting, representatives of the youth networks reported solution-oriented strategies to address the problem of youth unemployment during the pandemic, including articulating an alliance with the PIISA Industrial Park, where 150 ARYI beneficiaries received a job opportunity and specific training in essential soft skills for employment. The youth networks also discussed their experience in the integration activity Defenders of Justice, shared a success story, and presented its plan for the coming year to continue supporting young Dominicans, including the expansion of local networks to include new members and the continuous implementation of Crime and Violence Prevention Plans.



Training in facilitation methodology for youth networks

Youth networks are the main mobilizers for content replication at the community level with support from sub-awardees. The ARYI trained 55 members of the youth networks in effective facilitation methodology, which they used to train new members who join the networks. Experts in group facilitation and learning trained the participants on the theory and methodology of accelerated learning to ensure youth peer to peer training is effective and content delivery is fun, engaging and youth centered.



IRI.2. Child and early marriage prevented

CEFM prevention digital communication campaign

In January 2021, the President of the Dominican Republic signed the law that formally prohibits child marriage, marking a milestone for Dominican society and increasing legal protection for thousands of girls who for years have faced this challenge. Nevertheless, forced informal unions will continue to be a challenge, as this is a cultural practice for many poor Dominican families. Through the ARYI and in partnership with the GODR, USAID launched a digital media campaign aimed at preventing early and forced unions in the DR, as well as reminding the population about the illegality of child marriage since January 2021. Charge d’Affaires Robert Thomas delivered remarks in which he affirmed the USG’s commitment to guaranteeing opportunities for children and adolescents in the DR. The DR first lady Raquel Arbaje also spoke, recognizing the importance of changing attitudes to reduce informal unions that affect vulnerable girls around the country. ARYI beneficiaries had active roles as masters of ceremonies and in the presentation of the campaign slogan. Representatives from the Ministry of Youth, the National Council of Children and Adolescents (CONANI), GODR social assistance agency PROSOLI, and five ARYI sub-awards were also present. With this campaign, USAID seeks to effect a change in attitudes among youth, their parents, and key stakeholders regarding early and forced unions, thus reducing the prevalence of this practice in Dominican communities.



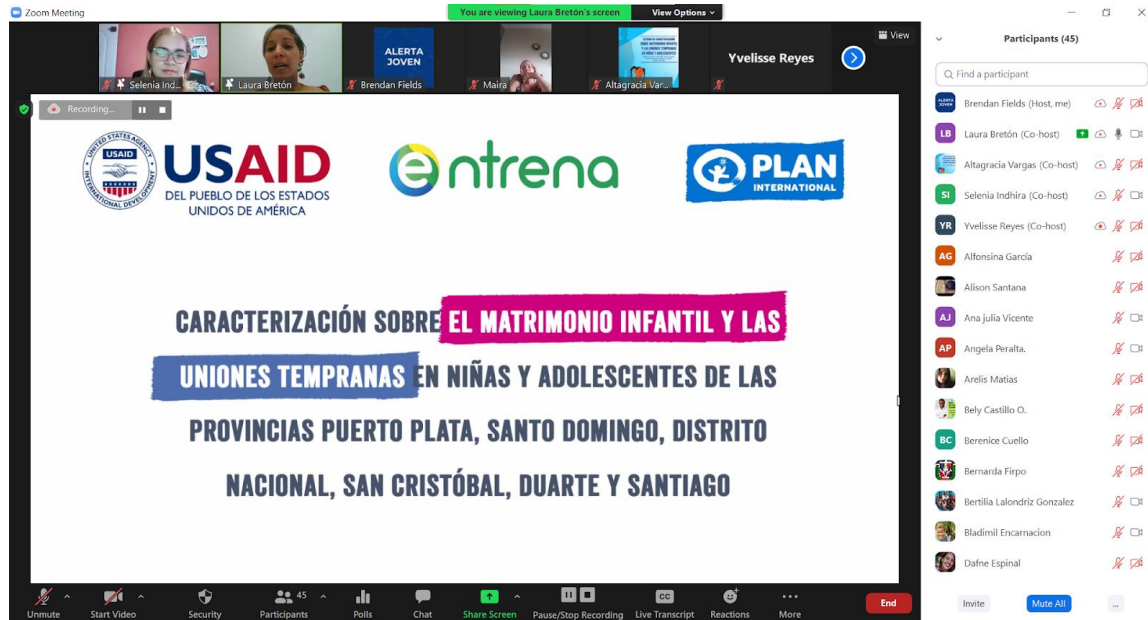
Youth knowledge multipliers sensitize peers to CEFM prevention

In order to expand knowledge of CEFM’s negative consequences at the community level, 75 youth from all 11 networks completed the six-module Champions for Change course aimed at promoting gender equality to change social norms through the participation of youth mobilizing their peers. The curriculum, developed and validated by Plan International, was adapted to the DR context and delivered through a mix of live online classes, self-directed study, dynamic videos, and creative homework assignments. The course included sessions about the history of movements for women’s equality in the DR, self-esteem, sexual health, freedom from violence, gender roles and identity, and living free from CEFM. In Q3, these youth then multiplied these sessions to their peers to spread awareness about CEFM and its root causes with the aim of preventing this practice in vulnerable communities. The facilitators were supported by ARYI through 22 monitoring sessions, during which experts observed the session and provided constructive feedback to the youth facilitators to improve their facilitation. In total, 947 youth were sensitized to CEFM through this process. The process also developed group facilitation and knowledge transfer skills among youth network members.

Research study on CEFM in ARYI implementation zone

There was previously a marked lack of data regarding risk factors contributing to CEFM at the national level in the Dominican Republic. The ARYI conducted a non-experimental, qualitative and quantitative study on the characteristics of CEFM in the provinces where the activity works. Researchers conducted interviews, focus groups and surveys with key populations, including adolescent girls in marriages/informal unions with adult men. The study’s objectives included: discover patterns in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and its correlation with CEFM; identify spatial, sociocultural, economic and legal factors that contribute to risk and vulnerability with respect to CEFM; explore attitudes surrounding concepts of “protection” and other perceived positive consequences of child marriage in low-income communities; and provide recommendations for public policies, laws, and civil society interventions to address protection and restoration of rights for victims of CEFM. Upon completion of the study, it was presented to 85 participants from ARYI partner

organizations, youth networks, other USAID activities, and local authorities. The study provides novel data about CEFM in the DR which can inform practitioners working directly with youth as they design interventions to prevent child marriage and guarantee children's rights.



Stakeholders trained in CEFM prevention

This year, as part of the CEFM prevention component, the ARYI conducted training sessions for a total of 602 stakeholders including teachers, school administrators, local government authorities, and technical staff from partner organizations. Each training event was tailored to the audience to focus on different aspects of the issue; for example, events with school teachers included content on identifying risk factors and working with parents to reduce risk. To increase the reach of this effort, the ARYI partnered with the USAID Read activity, implemented through local university UNIBE (University of Ibero-America), to deliver training to teachers. Other workshops were given to the initiative's education component facilitators who have direct contact with at-risk youth and their parents; through these workshops, facilitators learned about the context of CEFM and incorporated prevention into their education work. Lastly, technical staff from each of the activity's sub-awards received training to understand the legal and cultural context of CEFM and thus inform their work in the implementation of this component during the following year.

IRI.3. Referral for documentation of children and youth increased

The identification of non-documented youth has historically been 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 (General Direction of Special Projects of the Presidency) or to the Electoral Board. During FY2021, no documentation cases were referred due to the COVID-19 related closures of the institutions that offer those services and reprioritization of resources among NGOs that handle these types of cases.

R 2. Youth opportunities to be productive citizens improved

IR 2.1 Formal and non-formal education activities increased

Hybrid school retention and reinsertion course piloted in Villas Agrícolas

The Covid-19 pandemic presented a challenge to virtually execute both ARYI formal and alternative education programs. Youth had limited access to computers/tablets as well as poor internet connectivity. During FY2021, the ARYI successfully implemented a 160-hour Espacios para Crecer (EpC) education retention and reinsertion course that was delivered both virtually and in-person for 11-14 year olds. A total of 71 students completed the course, which was implemented in three different groups. This was the first time the EpC was implemented virtually. Partnerships with local NGOs and companies were key to making the course a reality; Fundación Abriendo Camino provided classroom space in response to public schools being closed, Fundación Zamora Terán (part of Banco LaFise) donated laptop computers to facilitate the online portion of the course, and Diesco-Polyplas (an ARYI ally since 2019) covered the salaries of EpC facilitators. The success of this pilot means that future EpC courses can be implemented virtually or through a hybrid approach. This pilot also demonstrated the impact that can be achieved through strategic partnerships with non-profit and private sector actors; the initiative hopes to deepen the collaboration in Villas Agrícolas following this successful intervention.

Secondary education retention and reinsertion courses surpassed target

With every additional year of schooling a young person completes, their potential future salary increases. Additionally, youth attending secondary education programs are less exposed to crime and are less likely to become involved in criminal activities in their communities. In FY2021, the ARYI implemented 45 groups of Quantum Learning for Students (QLS), the intensive, online course designed to equip secondary school age youth (14-25) with the academic and life skills that prepare them to succeed in formal schooling. In the beginning of the year, the ARYI reprioritized funds and effort from EpC to QLS, adapting to the sustained closure of in-person schooling that has been a prerequisite for implementing EpC. This reprioritization included an adjustment to the target for the secondary education indicator, which increased from 540 to 990 beneficiaries. The QLS curriculum was also improved in FY2021, with an increase from 24 to 40 hours of content, which includes life skills, academic skills in math and reading, and personalized follow-up with students. These improvements led to the ARYI surpassing our target for this year, providing education services to keep more at-risk youth in school and off the streets.

IR2.2. Youth friendly health services increased

Youth referred to GBV services

In FY2021, in compliance with the activity's psychosocial referral protocol, 135 youth (99 of them females) who were victims of gender-based violence were referred to support services. These services can include healthcare, legal support, counseling, hotlines, and technical training to promote economic well-being as part of recovery.

IR 2.3 Employment for youth increased

Best practices sharing for job training and labor insertion

In order to discuss best practices in labor insertion as a way to strengthen results from the technical training and job placement component, the ARYI organized an online exchange of best practices and lessons learned. Sub-awardee IDDI shared with technical staff the best practices that have worked to create relationships with employers and place at-risk youth in jobs and paid internships following their completion of technical training courses. Other sub-award staff took advantage of the opportunity to ask questions and share practices that they have found helpful as well. The ARYI also encouraged sub-awards to include the youth networks in their efforts to establish strategic job placement relationships with local businesses, citing the success story of the Haina youth network and the PIISA industrial park, which continues hiring at-risk youth after USAID funding ended in 2017. Lastly, the ARYI reviewed the application of the labor survey for beneficiaries of technical training programs to ensure sub-awards were properly reporting progress towards the job training and new/better employment indicators. This meeting was an example of using learning to identify best practices in our labor insertion component and apply them across sub-awards to improve both activity outcomes against indicators and increase organizational capacity of local NGOs.

R 3. Integrated youth system developed

IR3.1. A comprehensive youth support system implemented

Updates to web-based participant tracking system

In FY2021, the ARYI web-based participant tracking system was updated with a total of 15 improvements to data collection, visualization and analysis. New reports were added to visualize data collected under the three custom CEFM prevention indicators. The system was also equipped with the capability to import data from Excel spreadsheets, which accelerates the registration of new participant information. Contact information fields were added to reports on program desertion, allowing staff to follow up with youth who did not complete a program to reintegrate them into the activity. Other updates included adding reporting functions related to disabilities, school abandonment, and gang involvement, allowing the activity to understand the changes in risk profiles before and after participation. Lastly, a number of adjustments including data debugging were carried

out to support the cost-benefit analysis conducted through a Grant under Contract with the Latin America & Caribbean Youth Violence Prevention project.

Roadmap for transfer of participant tracking system to GODR

As part of the replication of best practices and knowledge transfer process to the GODR as the activity scales down, the ARYI met with the Ministry of Youth (MOY) to discuss the possibility of transferring the activity's web-based participant tracking system to support the Ministry's own programming. After conversations between the ARYI, the Vice Ministry for Planning and USAID/DR, the parties agreed on a path forward for transferring the system to the MOY. After transfer, the MOY will be able to track participants across multiple GODR youth-serving programs and measure changes in factors such as risk, schooling, and employment for Dominican youth. This process will be completed in FY2022 under the extension signed in August 2021.

Activity Implementation Review (AIR) for first semester of FY21

The ARYI presented to USAID/DC/DR the progress towards indicators and within key issues for the first semester of FY2021. The presentation opened by describing the DR's COVID-19 situation to provide context, and then focused on advances within the key issues of Positive Youth Development; gender equality and female empowerment; child, early, and forced marriage prevention; and public-private partnerships. Highlights of the presentation were the relationships fostered between USAID and youth-serving GODR agencies, integration with other Youth, Education and Security Office and USAID/DC funded activities, and unique research products that ARYI is producing related to at-risk youth and the initiative's effectiveness. The meeting, beyond serving to comply with the cooperative agreement requirements on AIRs, communicated the ARYI's successes in the current year to diverse audiences within USAID.

Data Quality Assessment for ARYI

The USAID/DR Youth, Education and Security (YES) Office conducted a virtual Data Quality Assessment (DQA) with ARYI staff to review data collection, storage and analysis processes for two indicators related to youth leadership training and employment. The ARYI M&E department presented descriptions of data collection processes and demonstrated supporting evidence. USAID staff suggested recommendations to improve data collection and storage for the following stage of the initiative's implementation. As a result of this DQA, we adjusted how we collect data on the youth standard indicator and redoubled efforts to collect quality data with partner organizations on youth employment following training through the ARYI. These findings and subsequent efforts helped strengthen the ARYI's online tracking system.

Baseball and education research study

During FY2021, the ARYI produced the final draft of the research study on baseball and education. The main objective of this study is to understand informal baseball training programs and the education of baseball prospects in the Dominican Republic. The study

focuses on identifying opportunities for improvement in the prospects' educational outcomes for the 97 percent of prospects who never sign a contract with a Major League Baseball team. The study also explores the educational context of those who do sign a contract, but do not reach the Major Leagues, despite playing in the minor leagues for several years. Lastly, it provides recommendations to address education disparities that affect baseball prospects. Dissemination activities are planned with stakeholders in FY2022.

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

Expansion of youth networks: formation of new youth network in Villas Agrícolas

In Q1 and Q2 of FY2021, the ARYI accompanied youth in the high-crime neighborhood of Villas Agrícolas, in the National District, in the formation of a new youth network. The founding members met in December to chart a path forward contemplating the election of a leadership committee, establishment of a social media presence, and training on life skills, leadership, and youth public policies. In January, the 24 founding members participated in a workshop on youth network structures, including leadership positions and their responsibilities, which was followed by the election of 5 youth to the leadership committee, including a female president. The election was held virtually due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Youth networks create and launch 2021-2022 Crime and Violence Prevention Plans

Three of the 11 youth networks designed new crime and violence prevention plans for their municipalities during FY2021. These networks are located in Villas Agrícolas (National District), Quita Sueño (Haina, San Cristóbal province) and Santo Domingo Norte (working with NGO Community Action for Progress – ACOPRO). Each network received coaching from a consultant to conduct community mapping exercises of their neighborhoods to identify crime and violence hotspots. The youth then identified the three primary problems contributing to crime and violence in their neighborhoods, and developed concrete actions to implement over the next year to address those problems. These plans function as work plans for the youth networks to implement community-level crime reduction activities with the support of stakeholders from local government and businesses. The ACOPRO youth network launched its plan in September with support from local government and business leaders; the remaining two networks will launch their plans in Q1 of FY2022.

Youth networks lead COVID-19 vaccination campaign focused on youth

After the DR government announced on May 10 that its National Vaccination Plan was open to everyone 18 years of age and older, the ARYI youth networks began designing a communication campaign to support this effort. From their social media accounts and in WhatsApp groups, the 11 networks published photos and videos encouraging their peers to get vaccinated, explaining the benefits, and debunking common myths. The networks also published information on the vaccination centers that are operating in each

municipality so that people know where to go. In addition to raising consciousness and informing, the youth also volunteered at vaccination centers by assisting with the flow of patients and handing out more than 700 hygiene kits containing antibacterial gel, face masks, bleach, and alcohol. In total, more than 400 youth from the 11 networks got their COVID-19 vaccines, and more than 800 other youth responded to the campaign by attending the different points of the National Vaccination Plan.

Youth networks as main actors in citizen security communications

In August, four members of the youth networks from Haina, Santo Domingo Oeste, and the National District participated in the filming of a video spot to promote a new citizen security communications campaign run by the city government of the Distrito Nacional. The participation of these four youths (two men and two women) represented a strengthening of the relationship between the ARYI youth networks, the Citizen Security Roundtables, and the National District city government.

National Youth Conference in Jarabacoa

For two days in September, the 11 youth networks from around the country met in Jarabacoa for a leadership conference where they participated in team building and motivational activities, received recognition for their work over the past year during the Covid-19 pandemic, and constructed work plans for the next six months of programs. The conference motivated the youth and aligned their local work plans with the activity's annual work plan, preparing them for the extension period in which youth networks will be formalized as independent organizations who can manage funds and implement projects. Youth also received encouragement from ARYI staff and the Vice Minister for Planning from the Ministry of Youth, Vicente de Peña. As a result, the youth were empowered and committed to continuing crime and violence prevention work through forming independent, sustainable, youth-led organizations in their municipalities, all connected through one nationwide network.

Representatives of Youth Networks join the Citizen Security Roundtables

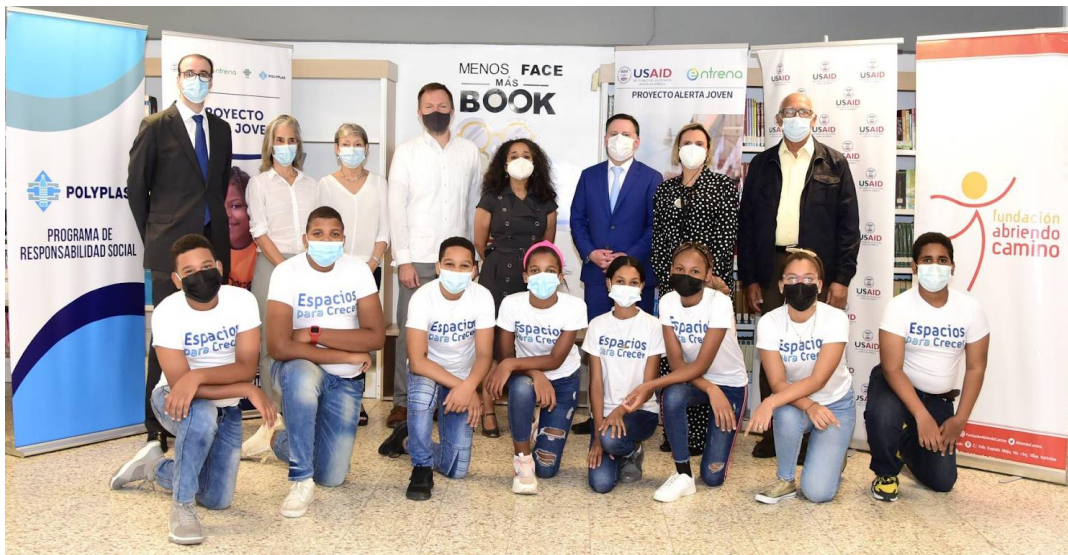
ARYI partnered with FINJUS (Foundation for Institutionalism and Justice) to conduct a training session for the youth network members selected to participate in the Citizen Security Roundtables in 10 municipalities around the DR. Participants learned about the history of the initiative and were presented with criminality data and an overview of the action plans developed by each Roundtable. Youth in attendance discussed their expectations for involvement in the program and committed to being active participants in both functioning Roundtables and those that are still in formation. The involvement of ARYI youth networks in the Citizen Security Roundtables is an important step towards including youth voices in setting policy related to citizen security.

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

Over the past year, the ARYI engaged with diverse private and public sector allies to increase opportunities for at-risk youth.

Visit from Ambassador Julissa Reynoso to Villas Agrícolas

The Chief of Staff for First Lady Jill Biden and co-chair of the White House Gender Policy Council, Ambassador Julissa Reynoso, visited ARYI activities in the National District neighborhood of Villas Agrícolas to learn more about USAID's work with youth. The visit focused on three of the activity's key aspects: education retention and reinsertion, youth networks, and private sector alliances. Partners from private sector ally Grupo Diesco and local NGO Fundación Abriendo Camino - two organizations supporting USAID's work - shared their experiences partnering with the ARYI to deliver education programming to at-risk youth. Four youth from Villas Agrícolas shared the process of designing and launching their crime and violence prevention plan, and had a dialogue with Amb. Reynoso about their relationship with the National Police in crime reduction efforts. Lastly, the delegation participated in an example of the ARYI primary education component that serves youth ages 11 to 14 who are at risk of dropping out of school or outside the education system. The visit highlighted USAID's work to support at-risk youth education while amplifying efforts by collaborating with the private sector.



Chargé d’Affaires Visit to Sub-Award Dream Project

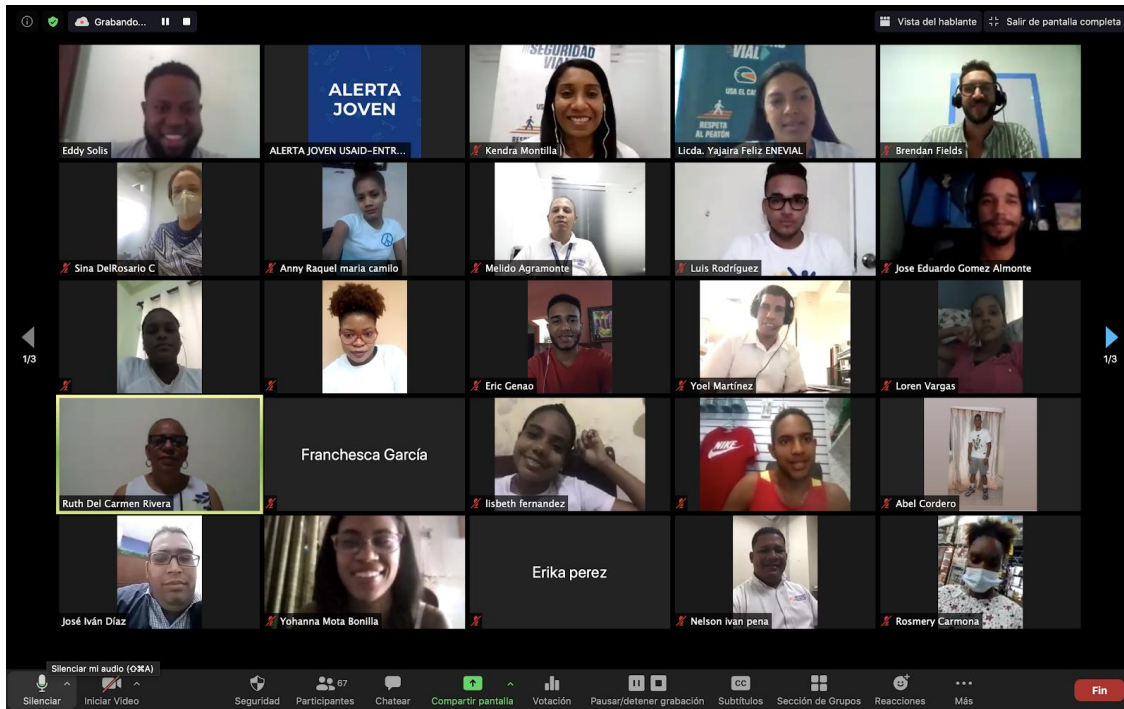
The Chargé d’Affaires Robert Thomas visited the Dream Project to observe various ARYI components that are implemented in Cabarete, Puerto Plata. During the visit, Mr. Thomas observed a session of the school reinsertion and retention component that equips at-risk youth with life and academic skills, thus ensuring their continued education in the formal school system to lesson involvement in crime. He also met with technical staff from the

project and members of the youth network in Puerto Plata, who presented their work in technical training, private sector engagement, local violence prevention work, and job insertion. These activities address the issues of unemployment, low educational attainment, and violence related to tourism and trafficking in persons that is common on the north coast. The visit highlighted the successes of USAID’s work with at-risk youth in the area and reconfirmed USG support for crime and violence reduction efforts.



Youth networks and INTRANT celebrate Road Safety Week

During the celebration of Road Safety Week 2020, 93 ARYI beneficiaries participated in a webinar focused on transportation safety with an emphasis on preventing motorcycle races. Representatives from the National Road Transportation Institute (INTRANT) discussed motorcycle safety, reviewed transportation laws, and presented statistics about deaths and injuries due to traffic accidents. The DR has one of the highest rates of fatalities from traffic accidents in the world, so this webinar aims to equip youth leaders with useful information so they can influence their peers and therefore reduce the incidence of deadly road accidents.



Law firm partner OMG facilitates workshops for ARYI beneficiaries girls club

The private sector partner, the local law firm OMG (not short for anything) facilitated a series of workshops given by staff volunteers for a group of 10 girls in the vulnerable area of Capotillo in the National District. Over the course of five sessions, the group learned about the themes of positive self-concept, emotional intelligence, the rights of children and adolescents, pregnancy and STI prevention, violence prevention, assertive communication, and goal setting. The workshops are a product of a long-term collaboration between OMG and ARYI to promote civic knowledge and engagement through mentorship programs.

Strategic meeting between ARYI, READ and Ministry of Education

As a part of a general presentation from the USAID READ activity, the ARYI met with Leonidas German, the new Director of Curriculum and Content for the Ministry of Education (MINERD). During the meeting, the ARYI provided a 5-minute general overview of the Espacios para Crecer education retention program including expected program outcomes, design, data, example of implementations in other countries, current implementation in the Dominican Republic, and basic knowledge competencies per grade. Additionally, the ARYI sent a full 30-page document to Ms. German that details further every point discussed in the brief presentation. These meetings laid the groundwork for future collaboration planned for FY2022. With the impacts of COVID-19 and the amount of youth that have dropped out of school, the program is a ready-to-use tool to transition students back into the school system and recover some of the lost time and instruction that has occurred over the past year.

2.3 Implementation challenges during the year

The continued COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on activities in the DR remained a challenge in FY2021. Below is a description of the main challenges the initiative faced during the reporting period:

- **Collaboration between youth and local authorities.** The effects of a change in national government in August 2020 were still felt in this fiscal year, as GODR institutions integrated new staff and programs for the months following the transition. This situation was complicated further by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Points of contact changed for the majority of the institutions the ARYI works with, especially the Dominican National Police, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Labor, and Prosoli/Supérate. These agencies also have local presences in the areas where the activity operates, with whom the youth networks work more closely. As these local offices established work plans and priorities, their commitment to supporting work with youth was often reduced, producing frustrating challenges for the youth networks and the activity. The ARYI invested a great deal of effort and time in establishing relationships with the new authorities and putting them in contact with our local partner organizations and youth networks. ICITAP was instrumental in facilitating conversations with the new leadership at the National Police, and our AOR was also a great support in connecting with new authorities in the national government.
- **Unclear strategies for in-person schooling from MINERD.** The Ministry of Education, a key partner for the ARYI education component, maintained an unclear strategy for its transition from suspended classes to distance learning to in-person instruction during FY2021. A delayed start to the 2020-2021 school year affected the ARYI's ability to implement the primary school Espacios para Crecer component, resulting in a cancellation of this program for all areas besides the hybrid pilot in Villas Agrícolas. Additionally, the start of the 2021-2022 school year in September was plagued with confusion and delays, meaning necessary collaboration and recruitment processes took place later than planned. The initiative was also unable to reinsert students into formal schooling due to the Ministry's lack of clarity and organization, resulting in no results reported under the associated indicator. To address these challenges, the ARYI strengthened collaboration with private sector partners and local NGOs, and adapted the Quantum Learning for Students program to be more robust and impactful for those students who could be reached.
- **Delays with technical vocational training partner INFOTEP.** The ARYI experienced a number of challenges related to the provider of technical vocational training, the National Technical Training Institute (INFOTEP). At the beginning of FY2021, INFOTEP had closed a number of its training centers and was restructuring its online platform, complicating recruitment of beneficiaries and delaying start times of a number of courses. Delayed start times affected the motivation of youth who had been identified by partner organizations, leading

some of them to abandon the course before it began. To address these challenges, the ARYI invested considerable time and effort in one-on-one follow up to youth enrolled in courses, in addition to maintaining constant communication with INFOTEP to be aware of updates to course availability.

- **Uncertainty related to Covid-19 and related restrictions.** FY2021 saw both the worst peak of Covid-19 contagions in the DR, the advent of the vaccines against the disease, and the loosening of restrictions to promote economic recovery. These events were accompanied by constantly-changing regulations imposed by the GODR, including limitations on in-person events and a strictly enforced curfew. The ARYI's annual work plan suffered a number of changes as the activity adapted to the evolving scenario. This uncertainty resulted in the cancellation of some components (such as Espacios para Crecer and school reinsertion), changes in implementation schedules (such as with CEFM prevention activities), and addition of new activities (such as virtual courses and support for vaccination efforts).

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO DO AND IR NARRATIVES

In December 2020, USAID/DR published a new Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). The following section describes how the ARYI contributes to these goals.

The At-Risk Youth Initiative contributes to Development Objective 3 (DO3): *Resilient and Inclusive Community Wellbeing Improved*. 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 3.1. Integrated Community Level Violence Reduction and Citizen Security Enhanced – The ARYI reduces the economic and social vulnerabilities in at-risk youth through its interventions, thus contributing to violence reduction and increased citizen security.

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, 2021, the ARYI has achieved:

- ✓ 47,194 at-risk youth retained in school
- ✓ 4,111 at-risk youth returned to school
- ✓ 28,279 at-risk youth completed technical/vocational training
- ✓ 7,978 at-risk youth 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, 2021 a total of 4,656 teen mothers have 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 Initiative aims to improve the life prospects of vulnerable youth in the Dominican Republic (DR) through human capacity building and economic growth. The \$26 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, out of work, teen parents, disenfranchised without legal documentation, and at greater risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Since 2012, the activity has reached over 150,000 youth in over 400 neighborhoods. During FY2021, it provided integrated educational, psychological, health, and employability services to 1,781 at-risk youth; provided workforce development training to 833 youth, of whom 211 obtained new or better jobs following training; and retained 1,035 secondary school students in school.

This year, the ARYI continued employing Positive Youth Development by supporting the work of its 11 youth networks around the country. These networks are the foundation of many activities that the initiative carries out and are also the most important investment in sustainability, as their structure and momentum will continue beyond the end of USAID funding. Among the most important developments, three of these youth networks developed new Crime and Violence Prevention Plans to implement local-level crime prevention activities adapted to the specific situation of their neighborhoods in the Greater Santo Domingo and San Cristóbal. One of these networks, in Villas Agrícolas, was newly formed in December 2020, becoming the eleventh youth network formed by the ARYI as a social support structure for at risk youth and the motor of locally-led crime and violence prevention work.

Youth networks were also the vehicles for some of the ARYI's major activities this year. The child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) component centered on training youth peer educators to effect attitude change in their communities as a way to sensitize people to CEFM and thus prevent it from occurring. The activity trained 75 peer educators in an intensive CEFM prevention course, who then multiplied what they learned to close to 1,000 youth in their communities. Youth networks also participated in the Defenders of Justice activity, which was rolled out in two phases: first, 100 youth prepared to be community resources for information on human rights, access to justice, due process, and preventing human trafficking. Then, 35 youth who stood out in the first phase participated in an advanced conflict mediation course, giving them the skills and knowledge to defuse

conflicts among their peers before they result in violence. Finally, the youth networks partnered with the USAID global activity Youth Excel, implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean by Colombian social enterprise The Biz Nation. Through this collaboration, over 150 youth completed a certification course in digital marketing, gaining skills that they can use to seek employment and freelance work, thus taking advantage of the opportunities that have arisen from the increased digitalization of work during the Covid-19 pandemic. These courses have placed the youth networks at the center of project implementation and strengthened their capacity as youth-led, youth-serving organizations in a way that empowers them as the initiative moves into its final phase.

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. The ARYI adopts a gender lens across its programming, including content in the standardized life skills curriculum that promotes gender equality and respect for diversity.

During FY2021, the activity provided life skills and leadership training to 1,781 at-risk youth, of whom 70 percent were women. This training, carried out through education, youth network, and technical training programs, gives beneficiaries the soft skills that are necessary to be successful in whatever projects they undertake in life. ARYI also conducted Quantum Learning for Students groups for 1,035 youth, of whom 66 percent were women. This program 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 prevention. This program also empowers girls with the skills and knowledge needed to stay in and excel at school, thus giving them additional stability and more options for future employment and higher education. The initiative also promotes female leadership through its youth networks component; five of the 11 networks have female presidents, and all of the networks have female members on their leadership committees.

In FY2021, the ARYI referred 99 female survivors of gender-based violence to support services during FY2021. These services include counseling, legal services, health attention, and job training. In addition to these services, the ARYI graduated 633 female participants from technical, vocational and entrepreneurship training courses in Q3, representing 76 percent of total participants in these courses. Among these beneficiaries, 130 reported increased income or new employment after completing the ARYI job insertion component, enhancing their financial independence and stability.

This year saw the bulk of the implementation of CEFM prevention activities included under the previous cost and programming extension. These activities focused on the aforementioned peer educator training for youth network members, who sensitized their peers to CEFM prevention. In addition, the activity conducted training workshops for stakeholders including school administrators, teachers, NGO staff, and local authorities as a way to educate key populations about CEFM prevention. This year, 602 stakeholders were trained through these efforts, thus strengthening organizational and community

capacity to combat CEFM. Lastly the activity reached parents and guardians through specific workshops designed for family members, who have both a responsibility and privileged position to protect youth from CEFM. These last two activities were supported by pamphlets designed specifically for families and teachers.

In addition to training workshops, the initiative also conducted parallel activities to support the effort to combat CEFM and change attitudes that influence behaviors and contribute to social permissibility of the issue. The first of these activities was a public communications campaign to raise awareness about preventing CEFM in vulnerable communities. The launch of this campaign had the support of the GODR, including the First Lady of the Dominican Republic. The campaign, called “No Es Un Juego” (It’s Not A Game) featured youth from the youth networks and was deployed through social media and in billboards posted around high-volume streets. The activity also conducted a study of CEFM prevalence and attitudes in the five provinces where USAID focuses its work. This study revealed new information about how people think about CEFM, especially in urban settings, given that previous studies have focused more in rural and border areas. The study also revealed a connection between CEFM and human trafficking in the tourist area of Puerto Plata. This information was presented to partner organizations and other stakeholders, and can be used by policymakers and those involved in youth development to more effectively address the issue of CEFM through their work.

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. During FY2021, as the Dominican Republic’s economy slowly recovered from the initial shock of the Covid-19 pandemic, alliances with private and public sector partners gained even more importance. The initiative engaged with both old and new partners to explore productive opportunities for youth.

The ARYI participated in the public review period for the proposed regulation governing non-profit public-private partnerships under the Public-Private Partnerships Law. The law was passed in February 2020 and its regulation approved in September 2020, but the regulation for non-profit partnerships remains in the draft phase. The public-private partnership model provides a potential approach to sustainability for the initiative’s activities, placing them under ownership of the GODR to ensure their continuity.

To counteract the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the ARYI’s partnership efforts focused on the private sector. To pursue opportunities for youth employment and internships, the initiative sought alliances with local companies both directly and through sub-awards. Sub-award staff members strengthened their capacity to secure employment for youth through a series of workshops on best practices for implementing the labor insertion component. As a result, 12 partnerships were formed

with private sector actors across the country. These partnerships secured in-kind support for youth network activities as well as employment opportunities in businesses such as a large supermarket chain, a delivery company, technology stores, and an insurance company.

The ARYI also strengthened its relationships with various GODR agencies to increase opportunities for youth and improve youth-related programming. The initiative connected its private sector allies to the Ministry of Labor's First Employment Plan, which provides incentives to businesses that hire youth to their first formal job. To support the CEFM prevention component, the ARYI enlisted support from the Cabinet for Children and Adolescents, led by the First Lady and consisting of multiple GODR agencies. The ARYI also implemented Positive Youth Development training in partnership with the Ministry of Youth (MOY), first in a targeted workshop for MOY programs staff, and then in a follow-up training for a wider audience of GODR institutions working with youth. This collaboration helps strengthen the public sector's capacity to design and implement productive youth policy.

The Ministry of Youth has become a more engaged ally through this process, attending the 2021 National Youth Conference to motivate youth network members as well as inviting Santo Domingo Oeste youth networks to the Ministry to discuss potential areas of collaboration. To further support the MOY's work, the ARYI has explored a transfer of the web-based participant tracking system to the Ministry, who would use the system to track beneficiaries across all its programs.

The ARYI also strengthened its relationship with the Ministry of Education and the Dominican National Police, two key stakeholders in youth development and citizen security. With the Ministry of Education, the initiative held various meetings to discuss implementation of the primary school retention and reinsertion program as a way to counteract the negative consequences of schools having been closed for so long during the pandemic. With the Dominican National Police, the ARYI connected its youth networks to the DNP leadership during multiple consultations to explore areas of collaboration. This collaboration aims to improve relationships between the police and youth, two groups who historically have suffered a crisis of distrust.

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 the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative continued to pursue productive and sustainable alliances for the future.

Public sector

- The ARYI had meaningful collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Police, including consultation of the youth networks on multiple communications strategies and the National Citizen Security Plan. The networks also presented their work to the Dominican National Police to identify potential areas of collaboration.
- Following meetings with the DR Public Private-Partnerships Agency (DGAPP), the ARYI provided comments on the draft regulation for non-profit PPPs, influencing the framework in which these partnerships will be implemented.
- The ARYI supported the Ministry of Labor's First Employment Plan by connecting the ministry to businesses that could be interested in hiring youth through the plan.
- The GODR's National Cybersecurity Center partnered with the ARYI to educate youth beneficiaries about strategies to protect their information and safety while online. This issue has become more important during the pandemic as youth are spending more time connected to the internet for school, work, and socialization.
- In the launch of its CEFM prevention campaign, the initiative secured support from the Cabinet for Children and Adolescents, chaired by the First Lady. The Cabinet helped sponsor the launch event and ensured the campaign messaging and art was published across GODR social media accounts.

Private sector

- The ARYI collaborated with two private organizations—Grupo DIESCO and the Zamora Terán Foundation—to implement the first ever hybrid Espacios para Crecer in Villas Agrícolas. Zamora Terán donated 90 laptops to provide connectivity for the virtual component, and Grupo DIESCO provided financial and human resources support to the pilot program. This coordination ensured youth of primary school age could take advantage of the program while schools had yet to return to classes, thus keeping them on track in their education and reducing risk of drop out.
- Local law firm OMG facilitated a series of empowerment workshops for girls in the vulnerable National District of Capotillo. The girls' group was founded by an ARYI beneficiary who wanted to help her peers in her community.
- This year, the ARYI collaborated with two private companies to promote youth employment through specific programs. With PedidosYa, a food delivery company, the initiative secured opportunities for youth to work as delivery drivers. With the Dominican National Brewery, the initiative explored a program called

“Women at the Wheel” as a way to promote more women in jobs traditionally held by men.

6. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Staff

During FY2021, the ARYI experienced a number of personnel departures and new hires. In addition, the organizational structure was updated to include new positions contemplated under the cost and performance extension through June 5, 2022. In total, three staff members resigned and five new staff were hired, including two newly created positions. The following is a description of the changes in personnel:

- Communications Specialist: Mirla Paulino, who served as Communications Specialist, resigned her position on July 30, 2021. Raymarie Guillén, who at that time was providing consulting services in graphic design and social media management, continued supporting the initiative’s communications needs until assuming the position of Communications Specialist as of October 1, 2021.
- Communications Assistant: Ximena Méndez, who served as Communications Assistant, resigned her position on November 18, 2020. After the departure of the Communications Specialist, the initiative hired María Maríñez as Communications Assistant on September 20, 2021 to support the department.
- Driver & Logistics Assistant: Nicolás Guerra resigned his position as driver on October 30, 2020. The initiative restructured the responsibilities of this position, adding logistics responsibility to the role. Jose Rosario was hired to fill the role of Driver & Logistics Assistant on October 26, 2020.
- Learning & Research Specialist: This role was created under Modification of Assistance #25 to carry out activities related to learning under the initiative’s MEL Plan and support research and dissemination activities. Desiree Castillo was hired for this role on September 20, 2021.
- Programs Assistant: This role was created to support the program specialists in the administrative tasks of program implementation, allowing them more time to conduct planning, execution, and quality control of the different ARYI components. María Alejandra Ali was hired for this role on September 27, 2021.

Financial Audits

In FY2021, the firm BDO Auditoría, S.R.L. was selected through a competitive bidding process to conduct the 2020 financial audit. The firm completed its audit of 2020 and delivered the final report with no observations. The exit meeting was held on July 21, 2021 between BDO, Entrena and USAID/DR, in which the parties reviewed the final report. The Office of the Regional Inspector General (RIG) approved the final report with no observations.

7. BUDGET

The total budget award, following Modification of Assistance #25, is US\$26,266,137. As of September 30, 2021 expenses over the life of the project were as follows:

BUDGET CATEGORY	Total Award Budget	Accumulated Expenditure	Percentage of Execution
LABOR	3,373,220	3,136,478	93%
FRINGE BENEFITS	1,489,883	1,173,917	79%
CONSULTANTS	1,615,864	1,474,505	91%
TRAVEL AND PER DIEM	135,212	114,444	85%
OTHER DIRECT COSTS	3,037,444	2,723,078	90%
EQUIPMENT	150,185	148,936	99%
SUB-AWARDS	15,747,201	15,344,120	97%
SUB TOTAL IN USD	24,551,756	24,115,479	94%
INDIRECT COST	717,127	573,774	80%
TOTAL IN USD	26,266,137	24,689,253	94%

As cost share, during FY2021 Entrena SRL and sub-awardees invested US\$240,064 in cash and kind. Cost share amounts to a total of US\$6,152,205 for the life of the project, which is equivalent to 24.9 percent of the budget executed and 101.71 percent of the cost share agreed upon in the cooperative agreement.

8. LESSONS LEARNED

- Close relationships with key allies are key to program success.** Across components, productive relationships with allies added value to implementation. The ARYI remained in close communication with INFOTEP and the Ministry of Education to navigate the changing landscape of Covid-19, which was crucial to making programmatic decisions about different components and supporting the timely start of courses. Youth labor insertion also relies heavily on fostering meaningful relationships with the private sector to encourage businesses to hire beneficiaries. Beyond immediate programming benefits, these collaborations also provide for greater potential sustainability of the initiative's work and impact as both private and public sector allies assume a sense of ownership.
- Youth need holistic support and motivation during programs.** The at-risk youth who are beneficiaries of the ARYI require structure, close follow up, and motivation to succeed in programming. And with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, many youth have experienced even more hardship and challenges to their mental health and motivation. Support from the initiative has focused on multiple facets of beneficiaries' lives to ensure their well-being and successful completion of programs, including working with families to support participants in

education courses and referring youth to psychosocial support services. Encompassing all areas of a youth's life is key to being able to provide needed support during interventions such as the ARYI.

- **Technology provides an opportunity during distance learning.** During FY2021, many of the ARYI components were moved online as the country responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. This required innovation in the use of technology to facilitate learning and provide follow up. In some courses, participants were gathered into WhatsApp groups that allowed for more agile communication and follow up to homework. These groups also allowed youth to share information and opportunities with their peers. Youth networks especially responded to the opportunities that technology provides, leveraging their social media accounts and other communication tools to reach peers and stakeholders. Lastly, the initiative was able to communicate with wider audiences, including USAID in Washington and participants in the global activity Youth Excel from Latin America. The value of technology was made clear by the benefits it offered our implementation during FY2021.

9. INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES WITH USAID AND OTHER PROJECTS

During FY2021, the ARYI continued to work alongside other USAID initiatives under the Youth, Education and Security portfolio and worldwide. Integration efforts are centrally coordinated through the Citizen Security Roundtables and meet common goals, results and indicators. Among major integration activities were:

ICITAP: The ARYI partnered with ICITAP to coordinate a number of exercises between the youth networks and the Ministry of the Interior and Police (which includes the Dominican National Police—DNP—and the Citizen Security Roundtables). In a year where the DNP was incorporating new leadership and undertaking institutional reforms, this collaboration gained extra importance as it highlighted the chance for youth to influence change in the institution. In November, the youth networks participated in a consultation for the DNP strategic planning process for 2021-2024 in which they shared their vision for where the police should focus their efforts over the next four years. The youth also participated in a validation session where they expressed their opinions on a public communications campaign to promote the Citizen Security Roundtables. Youth were also consulted on the National Citizen Security Plan, a major effort of the Abinader administration for this year. Lastly, in June the youth networks met with the new Director General of the DNP in a meeting facilitated by ICITAP. The youth presented the networks and their projects to the Director and expressed their priorities for crime and violence prevention. The meeting culminated in an agreement between the two organizations to undertake a series of actions aimed at improving relationships between youth and the police as a way to involve youth as promoters of citizen security.

Criminal Justice System Strengthening Project: This activity consisted of two phases to give youth the knowledge and skills necessary to promote access to justice and conflict resolution in their communities. The first phase, in Q1, was a seven-week course for 100 youth covering human rights, preventing gender-based violence, noticing and preventing human trafficking, due process, arbitrary arrests, protection of vulnerable groups, access to justice, and conflict resolution. The next phase of the project, in Q3, educated 30 youth in community justice and conflict resolution processes. This course consisted of six sessions where youth learned about alternative conflict resolution methods, including specific strategies for mediation and reconciliation. By the end of the course, the participants had learned strategies and abilities needed to act as community conflict mediators with their peers, and had practiced applying specific mediation tools and techniques to identify cases and employ the appropriate intervention. The youth who completed these courses became familiar with community justice resources to which they can refer their peers and neighbors, and are able to manage conflicts before they reach a point where people resort to violence.

Youth Excel: As part of the USAID-funded global activity Youth Excel, 75 at-risk youth became certified in digital marketing in a course facilitated by Colombian social enterprise The Biz Nation. In preparation for the course, two members from The Biz Nation team traveled to the DR and met in person with youth from each of the 11 networks to motivate them to participate in the training and encourage them to pursue entrepreneurship. The course prepared the participants to take advantage of the world of online marketing, a sector that has seen massive growth, especially over the last year as many businesses sought to improve their online presence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The youth now have sufficient knowledge to obtain formal employment or work on freelance marketing projects both in the DR and abroad. This collaboration harnessed technology and the advantages of distance learning to empower at-risk youth through skills training and economic development, keeping them engaged in productive activities while giving them tools to secure income, thus distancing them from illicit activities.

10. SUCCESS STORIES

Wester Ventura: A young Dominican discovers a path away from violence

Wester Ventura, 25, currently lives with his mother and five-year-old son in Haina, a municipality in the province of San Cristóbal, considered one of the areas with the highest crime rates in the Dominican Republic.

Living in this municipality affected by violence and the lack of opportunities for young people, Wester fell into criminal behaviors from an early age that led him to be arrested on different occasions and to be socially excluded from his community.

“I was arrested twice for robbery and illegal possession of a firearm. Because of that, my neighbors wouldn’t let me enter their houses because they classified me as a criminal,” Wester said.

Criminality is one of the problems that most affect the Dominican Republic. In 2019, the country occupied seventh place among countries with the highest crime victimization and had the highest average neighborhood insecurity compared to other Latin American countries.

Development opportunities are what guarantee a change in the life of a youth who has been penalized by law and who seeks to be reintegrated into society. Wester's mother motivated him to finish school, and his mother and son became his inspiration to seek a path away from violence.

"My mother always paid my bail with her savings and I remember crying every time I saw her come to look for me behind the bars," he stated sadly.

In 2017, Wester was invited by a friend to be part of the USAID At-Risk Youth Initiative, a project that offers development opportunities to at-risk youth between the ages of 11 and 24, helping them to discover their talents and be productive citizens in order to reduce crime and violence levels in the Dominican Republic.

Through this project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development, Wester received training in medical devices and life skills, courses that opened the doors for him to be selected as an operator in a global medical devices company. Four years after being selected for the job, Wester still works at the company.

Since its creation in 2012, the USAID At-Risk Youth Initiative has helped more than 7,000 young people like Wester to obtain a new or better job with its job placement program, and has trained more than 28,000 young people to help them access a decent job.

"I didn't have a job and the need led me to make bad decisions in my life. Now my mother knows that the money I take home is because I earned it working," he emphasized.

Wester has become an agent of change and a role model for other young people in his community. He is currently a member of the Haina Youth Network, a space self-managed by young people that seeks to contribute to the prevention of crime and violence in this municipality.

Kristal Rodríguez: Enhancing Dominican youth participation

Krystal Rodríguez lives with her parents, brothers, and grandmother in Villas Agrícolas, a neighborhood in the capital city Santo Domingo where street shootings and crime abound. At only 17 years old, she has decided to be a change maker in her community, promoting crime prevention and empowering other youth to know their rights.

The Dominican Republic is considered to have a young population, with people under age 35 representing 60.63% of all inhabitants. For this reason, supporting young people in their development and increasing their active participation in decision-making is essential to achieve significant change in the country.

One of Krystal's passions is impacting others. When she found out about the opportunity to be part of the Villas Agrícolas Youth Network, created under the USAID At-Risk Youth Initiative, she didn't hesitate.

The Youth Networks are spaces self-managed by young people, in which their greater participation, leadership and commitment are encouraged, as well as their ability to influence the design and implementation of youth policies and the development of their communities.

"Before entering the Project, I was very violent at school. The At-Risk Youth Initiative made me see everything from a different perspective. When I joined, I understood that we don't have to follow the patterns that surround us and that we are able to make a small or big change in our community," Krystal stated.

Many young people in Krystal's neighborhood drop out of school, but she didn't. Krystal graduated from high school and has the goal of going to college soon to study Marketing. She is currently the Communications Manager for the Youth Network in her community and through the network, she has received training in digital marketing, public policies and access to justice.

The network also designs and carries out a crime and violence prevention plan. This guide outlines the strategic areas in which the network will focus to promote the positive development of youth and favor citizen security in its sector.

"I want to ensure that the crime and violence prevention plan bears fruit in our community and that the young people of Villas Agrícolas know more about their rights, get involved and become part of the change," Krystal emphasized.

Currently, the Youth Network has more than 530 members distributed among 11 networks located in different provinces of the Dominican Republic such as Puerto Plata, Santiago, Distrito Nacional, San Cristóbal and San Francisco de Macorís.

II. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT YEAR INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

The following activities are scheduled under the ARYI's operational plan and are contingent on the Dominican Republic's requirements and guidelines for in-person events in response to the developing Covid-19 pandemic.

Presentation of Baseball and Education Research, TBD, 2021. The results of this research will be presented to ARYI stakeholders and important actors in the baseball and education industries in the DR. The presentation will have two parts: one in-person and one virtual. Publications will be made available in English and Spanish.

Presentation of ARYI Case Studies, TBD, 2021. The presentation will build the case for early activities for education and crime prevention to promote positive impact

among Dominican youth. Case studies will be presented via a formal conference as well as display of information products on social media.

Breakfast for Private Sector Allies, November 2021. This high-level breakfast meeting for business leaders from the Greater Santo Domingo will strengthen relationships between USAID and the private sector to increase opportunities for at-risk youth employment. ARYI partner Grupo Diesco will co-host the breakfast and invite key stakeholders to increase impact.

Launch of Espacios para Crecer with Ministry of Education, November 2021. In this event in San Francisco de Macorís, the initiative will partner with the Ministry of Education to “launch” the Espacios para Crecer education retention program that is being implemented in public schools through the ARYI. The event will connect the education component to the National Citizen Security Plan in San Francisco, a site for the pilot security program.

DR National Brand Entrepreneurship Fair, January 2022. Youth entrepreneurs with products that have exportation potential will compete in an entrepreneurship fair, where they will receive mentorship from ProDominicana, seed funding for their businesses, and inclusion in the National Brand catalogue of products for export.

At-Risk Youth Initiative Closure Event, April 2022. This event will celebrate the 10 years of implementation and impact among at-risk youth beneficiaries. The activity will also share results demonstrated through multiple studies conducted on the intervention.

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