

sphere

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This edition of Sphere is dedicated to Universal Children's Day by reflecting on DevTech's work to improve education for children.

Beyond Access: Improving Quality to Prevent Educational Exit

- *Retrospective on Espacios para Crecer ("Spaces for Growth") in the Dominican Republic*
- *Preventing School-Related Gender-Based Violence and Abuse*
- *Reaching Stakeholders: Why Monitoring and Evaluation Matters*

Donors design development programs with the objective of transforming a country's political institutions and building a constituency for sustained change. Yet, sustainability is often difficult to achieve in the relatively short time period that most projects receive funding. Furthermore, practical concerns of managing government programs and being accountable have had unintended consequences of diminishing opportunities for innovation. Donors bundle projects into large contracts or grants to gain efficiency. However, this can have a negative consequence of reducing opportunities for pilot activities and small initiatives. This is in contrast to compelling research highlighted in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report 2007-2008 that competitiveness is linked to a country's ability to innovate and reduce barriers of entry for new initiatives.

In this issue of Sphere, DevTech celebrates the recently-completed *Espacios para Crecer* project in the Dominican Republic, which demonstrates that innovation and partnerships that bridge the expanding divide between for-profit and non-profit organizations can deliver impressive results. After four years, this project has made a measurable difference in the lives of more than 5,000 children and adolescents. This issue also examines other lessons learned, including the observation that projects based on an evidence-based design that incorporate strong monitoring and evaluation systems are more likely to lead to real change, and improve the quality of education.

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Students from an *EpC* celebrate at the project's closing ceremony

BEYOND ACCESS:

Improving Quality to Prevent Educational Exit

The celebration of Universal Children's Day on November 20th calls for each of us to reflect on the state of children's welfare around the world. One way to measure a child's well-being is by the educational opportunities she has. Education not only is a fundamental human right, it is also a prerequisite to improving a child's opportunities.

Although countries worldwide have made serious efforts and progress in increasing educational access, today 115 million children still do not attend school. The factors restricting children's educational prospects are numerous. However, historically they have been viewed through the lens of their *exclusion* from formal education. In this sense, it is the absence of school buildings, desks, teachers, and the presence of school fees that preclude children's school involvement.

Yet, in many countries schools have been built, teachers have been hired and school fees have been abolished, but children continue to stay out of school or attend infrequently. The schools they attend are of poor quality or have violent environments, and ultimately do not provide the desired benefits. Rather than being excluded, many children and their families opt to *exit* the educational system in search of better opportunities.

Looking at out-of-school-children through the lens of *exit*¹ shows that many children and their parents choose their optimal level of engagement with schools depending on their calculation of the net benefits associated with school. That is, they make implicit cost-benefit analyses about whether to attend school, and often decide against it. This suggests that children and their families see insignificant benefits from engaging with the school system and therefore opt to engage in work or other non-educational activities.

DevTech has recognized exit as a real barrier to educational

¹ The exit/exclusion paradigm is adapted from *Informality: Exit and Exclusion*. Perry, G. et al. (2007) World Bank, Washington DC.

opportunity and has designed and implemented several initiatives to improve educational quality and increase the benefits for children and families participating in the educational system.

In this issue we discuss DevTech's experience using evidence-based program design to pilot and replicate an innovative educational after-school program that combats child labor in Latin America by creating positive school environments that are viewed as incentives rather than obligations. We also share with you our contribution to a cutting edge pilot project in Malawi and Ghana that is working to reduce the incidence of school-related gender-based violence and increase school safety so parents and their children see their schools as safe spaces for personal and educational growth. Finally, we discuss the importance of monitoring and evaluation in increasing project efficacy, so that children and their families exit the classroom only upon graduation.

Value Added: Espacios para Crecer

Between August 2003 and 2007, DevTech addressed the problem of child labor in the Dominican Republic, leading the "**Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor through Education**" project financed by the US Department of Labor (DOL). The project's goal was to withdraw working children and prevent others from entering into exploitive child labor situations through education. DevTech and its subcontractors met this challenge by designing an innovative education program that complemented the national curriculum and increased children's and parents' excitement about learning.

In the Dominican Republic, children attend school in half-day shifts due to overcrowding. The 2.6 hours they spend at school are often not enough to provide them the skills they need or the inspiration to continue learning. DevTech addressed this problem by developing a second shift of non-formal education, which not only increased the overall value of education, providing children and their families an alternative to work, but ultimately reinvigorated their desire to learn.

Preventing School-Related Gender-Based Violence and Abuse

In 2006, the United Nations published a study reporting that a fear of school-related gender-based violence was a key factor in why many children do not attend school. Whether physical, sexual or psychological and whether directed at girls or boys, school-related violence has devastating effects on learning. In particular, if the school environment is not perceived as safe by parents and other community members, they will often opt to 'exit' the educational system and keep their children out of school entirely.

Using evidence-based interventions, DevTech is addressing school-related gender-based violence related barriers to universal education through its implementation of USAID's Safe Schools Program (2003-2008). The program, which is funded by the Office of Women in Development and piloted in Ghana and Malawi, seeks to change the environment in and around schools so that the abuse of children is no longer tolerated. The Program is designed to answer the question: What interventions are most effective in reducing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)?

The Safe Schools Program is now entering its final year of implementation in 30 schools in each of the pilot countries of Ghana and Malawi. To date, approximately 30,000 students, 800 teachers, and 240 community counselors have been trained in SRGBV prevention, reporting and response. Results, while preliminary, indicate positive trends. For example, since the baseline survey in 2005, there has been an increase in the percentage of students who believe that they have the right not to be insulted by their teachers verbally and physically. There has also been a decrease in the percentage of children who reported they were victims of violence or abuse at or on the way to school. Most importantly, the Ministries of Education of Ghana and Malawi have reaffirmed their commitment to reducing SRGBV by scaling up prevention efforts nationally. The ministries also are exploring how to integrate aspects of the student and teacher manuals developed by the Safe Schools Program into pre-service training at national teacher training colleges.

Upon completion of pilot activities in 2008, the program's efficacy will be assessed through rigorous data collection and the monitoring system established at the time of the baseline survey.

The second shifts, called “Espacios para Crecer” (Spaces for Growth), or EpCs, were held in spaces provided by the local communities, such as town halls, churches, local businesses, or homes, and applied Quantum Learning® methodology, which uses the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and psycho-motor) to create a more dynamic learning experience. EpCs were led by volunteer facilitators, many of whom were teachers-in-training. The material covered in the EpCs was developed to correspond to the national curriculum and also included topics like music, theater, art, physical education and literature.

The EpCs were a great success. Children, parents, and facilitators expressed their enthusiasm and excitement about the program. The project’s original goal was to withdraw or prevent 4,200 children from the worst forms of child labor. At the project’s conclusion, 5,574 children had been withdrawn or prevented from exploitive labor. Most importantly, the project has proved sustainable as many of the EpCs continue to operate today with non-project funds, utilizing financial support provided by organizations ranging from the American Chamber of Commerce to a Dominican Hotel Association to Major League Baseball. Additionally, a consortium comprised of DevTech’s NGO partners and other in-country implementing partners, in collaboration with Secretariat of Education officials, has assumed the management of the program following the completion of DOL funding in 2007. Today they continue to build alliances, as well as work with both the public and the private sectors to develop funding sources for program maintenance and expansion.

In late September 2007, DevTech, in partnership with two Dominican-based institutions, EDUCA and INTEC, was awarded the “**Combating Exploitive Child Labor through Education in the Dominican Republic**” project by DOL. The new project is structured differently from the first, focusing not only on continuing the successes of the first project, but also on expanding its reach to offer a broader range of opportunities to Dominican children and adolescents. The project aims to prevent or withdraw 10,000 Dominican youths (7,500 children and 2,500 adolescents) from exploitive child labor. A major component of the work will be replicating the EpC model through the establishment of additional EpCs throughout regions of the country that did not

participate in the first DOL project.

DevTech and its partners are also introducing a new program geared toward adolescents. “Espacios para Emprender” (Spaces for Entrepreneurship) or EpEs will provide compensatory education programs to adolescents who have dropped out of school and lack marketable job skills. Volunteer facilitators will serve as counselors who will assess adolescents’ desired vocation and then guide them into appropriate vocational training programs. Job placement support will also be provided. Additionally, project staff will continue to work with the Secretariats of Education and Labor in a partnership to create long-term educational opportunities for all Dominican youth.

Other Related Initiatives

In addition to its implementation work in the Dominican Republic, DevTech directs the collection of data to measure common indicators for the USDOL-funded regional program in **Central America and the Dominican Republic—Primer Aprendo**. The firm works with each of the four country coordinators in conducting semi-annual surveys at the household level for 21 different pilot programs in rural and urban zones in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. DevTech compiled a database on the educational and working status, living conditions, and socio-economic status for the children and adolescents enrolled in the pilot projects. These data are critical in measuring the rate of retention and graduation, and are providing the basis for advanced analysis about the efficiency and effectiveness of the pilot programs with the end goal of providing national policymakers and donors the capacity to scale-up programs that meet the Millennium Development Goals of universal access to basic education by the year 2015.

In September 2007, DevTech began replicating the EpC program in Colombia in association with Partners of the Americas, Mercy Corps, and CINDE, a Colombian research institution. The award funds the adaptation and replication of the EpC model as part of the **Support to the Colombia Timebound Program on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor** project.

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Reaching Stakeholders: Why Monitoring and Evaluation Matters

The principal challenges of the U.S. Department of Labor Combating Child Labor projects in the Dominican Republic, Central America and Colombia as well as the USAID Safe Schools Program in Malawi and Ghana are to create educational experiences that outweigh the benefits reaped by child labor, and to increase stakeholders’ awareness of the utility of education. Monitoring and evaluation is imperative to achieve the latter as data can test causal relationships between educational outcomes and the amount a child works. DevTech contributes to project efficacy by gathering and reporting information about the differences that the program makes in the lives of participants and intended beneficiaries. Monitoring makes other valuable contributions to the project activities as well. Specifically, an effective monitoring program:

- *Fosters awareness:* Taking time to interview children, parents, teachers, local leaders, and representatives of key institutional actors, field staff, and country coordinators raises these stakeholders’ consciousness of the importance of assuring that children are removed or protected from exploitive work situations and given access to education.
- *Generates knowledge:* Statistical data about the socio-economic, educational and work status of children, and how that status changes over time in response to program interventions, provide critical cross-sectional and inter-temporal data to help researchers identify best practices and develop lessons learned for using education incentives to remove or protect children from exploitive work situations.
- *Supports advocacy:* Accurate and timely monitoring data can assist in encouraging government agencies and private institutions to reform policies that sustain efforts at assisting working and at-risk children.

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In Colombia, DevTech is leading the adaption of the Quantum Learning non-formal education methodology to Colombia's education system; providing training in the methodology to governmental and NGO representatives; and working to withdraw or prevent 12,000 children and youth from engaging in exploitive child labor. DevTech is also engaging the public via an awareness-raising campaign and guiding efforts to track the project's impact.

DevTech is honored to be given the opportunity to continue its work on what has been a challenging but rewarding effort to eliminate child labor in the Dominican Republic, Central America and Colombia. We are pleased to be partnering with a number of local organizations, whose presence in local communities will help contribute to the sustainability of the EpCs and EpEs. To achieve development, we need partnerships between diverse organizations. Our experience demonstrates that building these partnerships can contribute to measurable progress towards providing children and adolescents quality educational opportunities.

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For more information, please visit www.devtechsys.com

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Established in 1984 by economist Jorge A. Sanguinetti, Ph.D., DevTech Systems, Inc. is a consulting firm that offers technical assistance in the following practice areas:

- Economic and Social Development
- Education and Human Capacity Development
- Environment and Natural Resource Management
- Gender Integration (Women in Development)
- Governance and Decentralization
- Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

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