Youth Pathways Central America (YPCA) Project: Longitudinal Cohort Study El Salvador and Honduras

PHASE VII -FINAL REPORT SUMMARY

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Youth Pathways Central America (YPCA) Project: Longitudinal Cohort Study.

Youth Pathways Central America is a binational iniciative (El Salvador / Honduras) that seeks to improve the livelihoods and education of youth and children (between 12 and 20 years old and 21 to 25 if there is a minor in their home who works) who are at risk of being subjected to forms of vulnerable or irregular work (for participants 18 years of age or older) or child labor in its worst forms, particularly those related to the use of children for criminal or illicit activities (for children under 18 years old). To contribute to this goal, the project provides direct services to increase their skills for employment and to stay in school, through two models:

> ***YouthBuild*** seeks to increase youth opportunities to enter employment o the formal education system. This model is aimed at young people between 16 and 25 years of age who come from areas highly impacted by violence and crime, and are unemployed and outside the formal education system. This model includes 700 hours of vocational training and guidance and training for entrepreneurship over a period of six months.
>
> ***Career Connect Clubs*** provide educational extracurricular activities that complement regular school program, for children between 12 and 17 years old. Clubs have a duration of 6 to 8 months, seeking to improve both social and academic skills.

Youth Pathways is a binational initiative (El Salvador / Honduras) which implements services and activities **in vulnerable and highly stigmatized communities**. The project had a strategy of implementing services by cohorts, where groups of beneficiaries initiated and completed the service as a group simultaneously in a same site. During the project five cohorts were developed for YouthBuild (some centers developed up to six group), serving 4,272 participants, 1,748 in El Salvador and 2,524 in Honduras; and three cohorts for Clubs, serving 3,892 participants, 2,001 in El Salvador and 1,891 in Honduras. Both services were implemented simultaneously by different implementing partners -Fe y Alegría in El Salvador and Honduras; Glasswing in El Salvador and Honduras; and FUNADEH in Honduras - at different sites and schools.

About the study

In order to evaluate the project, CRS proposed a cohort study with a longitudinal approach, which allowed to track over time the results in children and youth[1]. This cohort study included only participants; therefore, the results can only be generalized to the population that benefit directly from the project services, and not all children and youth in similar conditions. Althoug this may be a limitation, CRS considered it the most feasible option to generate evidence and test the program´s theory of change, given the vulnerable and risk environments in which services are provided.

[1] According to Project definitions, children under 18 years of age and youth, 18 to 24 years old, are beneficiaries

The main objective of Youth Pathways longitudinal cohort study, carried out in seven phases from 2017 to 2020, was to explore the benefits that participants achieved over time and to contribute to generate empirical evidence to verify validity of the theory of change underlying the intervention. Futhermore, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. ***Changes in outcomes over time***: What are the changes related to labor insertion or educational attainment of participants over time? Are there points in time after program completion when increased support services become crucial?

2. ***Hawthorme Effect***: . Among program participants, what is the impact on outcomes of extensive follow-up, compared with contact only to maintain contact information? The hypothesis is that the follow-up that will be given to the study sample may result in a positive effect; while those who are not part of the study sample cannot obtain this benefit. In other words, are there any differences in the insertion outcomes between those participants who have had a more intense follow-up and those who have only been contacted to update their information?

3. ***Participant's perceptions about Program components' contribution***: How do YouthBuild participants consider that different components –vocational, soft skills, job orientation—contributed to the outcomes they have achieved after completing it?

In order to obtain the data needed to construct the indicators and to collect information on the characteristics of participants and other contextual variables, a system of data collection instruments was developed. The system included three main sources: a) program administrative records; b) program Monitoring and Evaluation forms (entry and exit) and; c) baseline and follow-up questionnaires (one long and one short), specially designed to collect information not produced by the two previous components

In order to collect information from the participants at different moments in time and to identify the evolution of the main indicators (to answer question 1) the study was structured in seven phases: a baseline before starting the project, applied to all participants, the first follow-up at the end of the participation (applied to a sample for YouthBuild and to all participants for Career Connect Clubs); and then follow-ups every six months, approximately, to a sample of participants, alternating long and short questionnaires. This strategy was repeated for each cohort; however, the number of follow - up surveys for each cohort was different, depending on the date they began the program.

During the selection of the "study sample", a "control sample" was also selected; for each cohort, the control sample was contacted by telephone simultaneously to the study sample follow-up. This group was not asked about their job or educational status, only their contact information was updated. The purpose of keeping contact with this group was to control for any effect that the fact of being contacted periodically by the program may have on the main indicators.

During phase VII a final survey, containing a special questionnaire, was applied to a subsample of the study and control groups; the aim was to gather information to isolate the effect of the program from what is called the Hawthorne effect (to answer research question 2).

This report presents results using information gathered along the seven phases of the study. Table 1 shows the effective sample size for the longitudinal cohort study and for the final survey.

Tabla 1. Effective sample for longitudinal cohort study and for final survey

Stage	Instrument / questionnaire	YouthBuild		Clubs	
		Cohort	Total	Cohort	Total
Longitudinal Study					
Base line	Registration Form	1 - 5	4,823	1 - 3	4,710
	Survey	1 - 5	4,371	1 - 3	4,201
Follow-up 1 (after completing the program)	Exit/graduation Form[1/]	1 - 5	3,083	1 - 3	3,128
	Short [2/]	1 - 5	1,187	--	--
Follow-up 2 (after 6 months)	Long [2/]	1 - 3	779	1 - 3	617
Follow-up 3 (after 12 months)	Short [2/]	1 - 3	642	1 and 2	421
Follow-up 4 (after 18 months)	Long [2/]	1 and 2	342	1	164
Follow-up 5 (after 24 months)	Short[2/]	1 and 2	300	1	169
Final survey					
Study	Special questionnaire [3/]	1 - 4	262	1 and 2	216
Control		1 - 4	215	1 and 2	212
Total		1 - 4	477	1 and 2	428

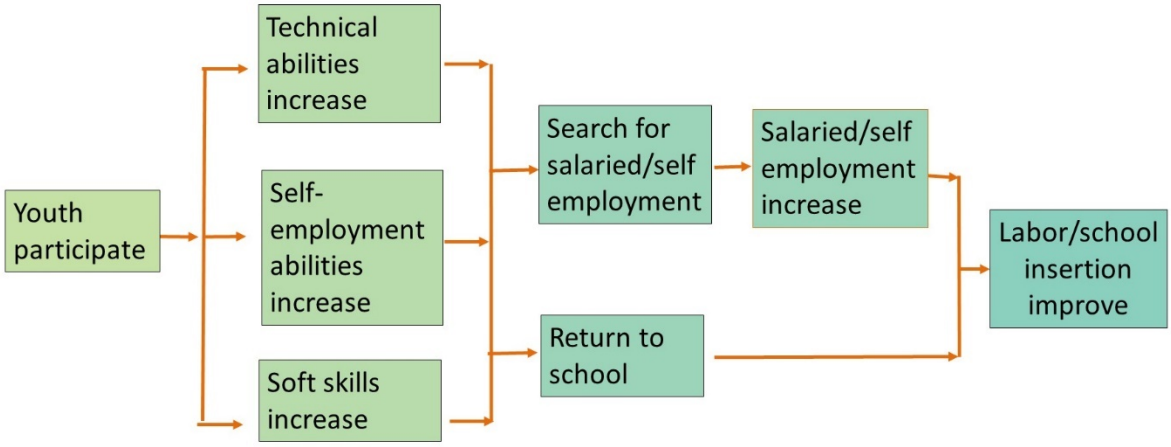
1/ Applied to all participants after completing the program
2/ Applied to the study sample
3/ Applied to a subsample of the study and control groups designed for the final survey
Source: Own elaboration

YouthBuild Program

Theory of change

For youth who are unemployed and out of the formal education system, as a result of participating in YouthBuild, it is expected an improvement in vocational, entrepreneurship and life skills, and through the subsequent support and labor market intermediation, increased opportunities for employment or reentering the formal education system. Minors are expected to remain out of child labor status. Figure 1

Figure 1. Theory of Change: YouthBuild

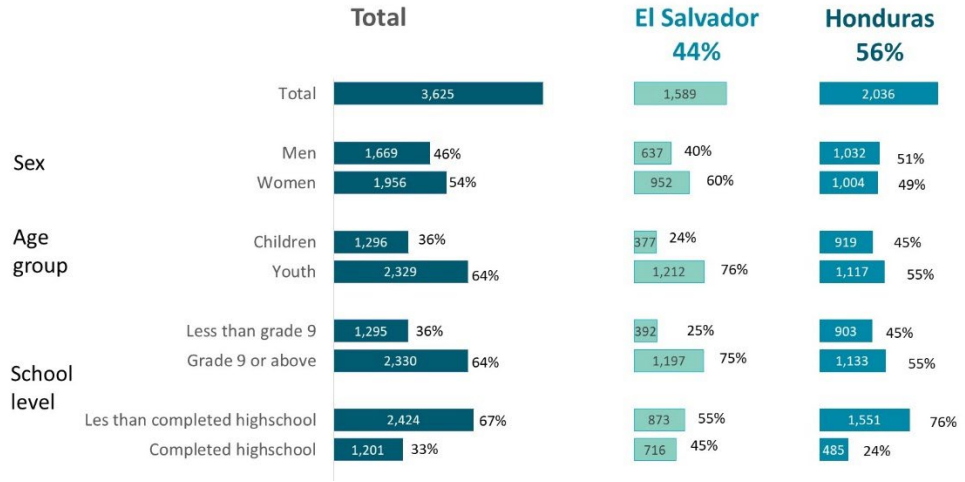


Source: Own elaboration based on CRS documentation

Characteristics of Participants

The longitudinal study is based on information gathered from participants who completed participation in the program, 44% were attended in El Salvador and 56% in Honduras; significant differences are observed at country level in the distribution of participants by sex, age and academic level (figure 2). While in El Salvador most participants are women, in Honduras the distribution by gender is fairly balanced. Three out of four participants in El Salvador are 18 years or older; in Honduras, the proportion drops to 55%. On the other hand, the education level in El Salvador is higher (75% finished at least basic education and 45% high school or higher) than in Honduras (56% finished at least basic education and only 24% high school or higher).

Figure 2. Characteristics of participants who completed participation – YouthBuild



Source: Registration Form, base line survey and administrative data from CRS

On the other hand, about 7% of participants are married or cohabiting and 10% have children. About a third of the participants live in a home that receives remittances and 2% were deported prior to participating in the program. One out of ten participants reported being detained and two out of ten said that a household member (including themselves) has been detained. One out of four participants said that his friends get into trouble and 17% reported that their friends use drugs.

Labour market training

As stated in the theory of change for YouthBuild, as a result of the participation in the program, it is expected an improvement in vocational, entrepreneurship and life skills, and through the subsequent support through labor market intermediation, increase their job opportunities or reenter into the formal education system. The results to date suggest that the theory of change can be validated.

Participants consider that their readiness and habilities to find a salaried work were greatly improved thanks to their participation in the program. Even after a while, and having faced the reality of labor market, the perception that they are prepared for job search remains high. In this respect, what is expected is fulfilled. Similarly, participants consider that their ability to start their own business improved considerably; however, after a while, perception of improvement decreases compared to

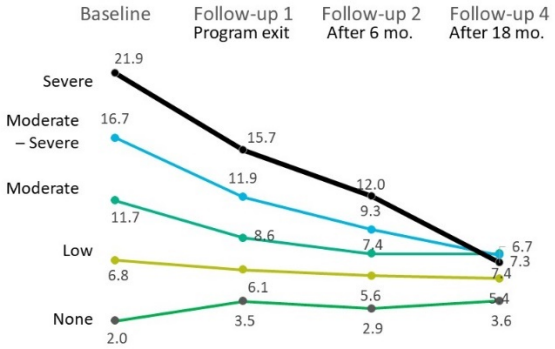
that at program exit. This would indicate that contents related to starting a businesses should be reviewed and strenghened.

Social Skills

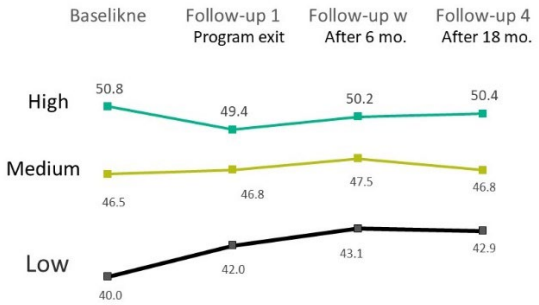
By strengthening social skills, participants are expected to be better equipped to face risk situations in their contexts, as well as to increase resistance to take part in criminal or illegal activities. The results show that depression and resilience measures did not change significantly, on average, in the short term, but an improvement was observed over time. The scores of those participants who had a less favorable condition in the baseline tended to improved in a greater proportion (Figure 3). In other words, the results suggest that, on average, the program benefits participants who start in a more disadvantaged position.

Figure 3. Social skills indicators, by base líne condition - YouthBuild

A. Depression
(Score - PHQ-9[2] Depression Scale)



B. Resilience
(Score Child and Youth Resilience Measure, CYRM [3])



The averages shown use sample weights.
Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

Labor market Insertion and return to formal education system

By improving preparation for labor market and soft skills, YothBuild was expected to contribute to participants labor market insertion and return to formal education system. The data shows a significant increase in the proportion of participants who achieved a favorable insertion[4] from 19% in the baseline to 31% in the first follow-up and, more importantly, continued to increase until 54% in the fourth follow-up; for the fifth follow-up, it experienced a slight decrease, although it remains close to 50% (figure 4). However, the percentage of participants who were not studying during the follow-up but intended to reenter the educational system has been decreasing, from 70% in the first two follow-up to 43% in the last follow-up. Very few of them said they had already registered.

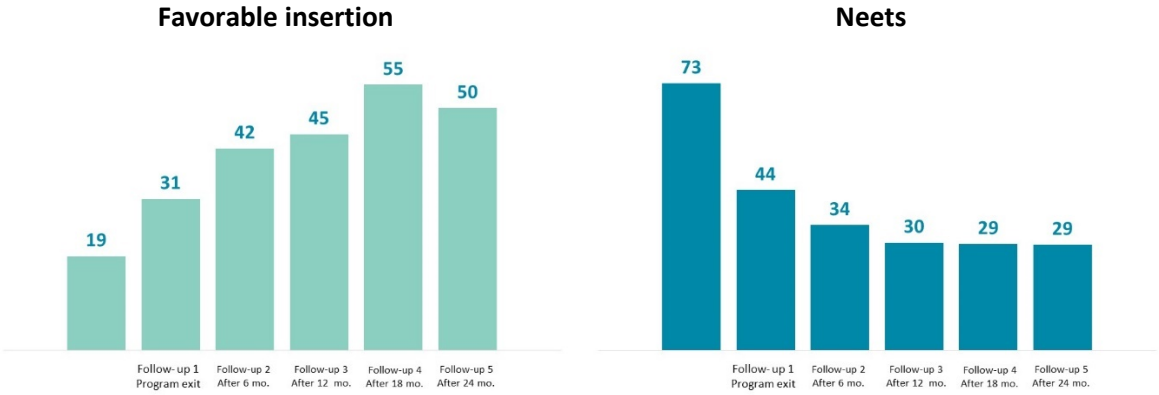
[2] For more information visit: *https://www.pcpcc.org/sites/default/files/resources/instructions.pdf*

[3] The Child and Health Youth Resilience Measure, 18 item version 2 (Ungar, 2016). For more information visit: *http://www.resilienceresearch.org/*

[4] According to the Project definitions, favorable insertion includes studying or having an acceptable work according to the project definitions, whether salaried or self-employed.

On the other hand, about 70% of YouthBuild participants were not studying or working (were "neets") when they entered the program. This percentage is higher than the regional average (approximatly 25%), which suggests that the program recruits more vulnerable youth. After participating, during the first follow-up, the percentage of neets decreased to 44% and to 34% in the second follow-up, remaining close to 30% in the three subsequent follow-ups, which is a remarkable result (Figure 4) However, the decrease in the percentage of "neets " among men (57 percentage points) was greater than that of women (35 pp).

Figure 4. Evolution of insertion indicators – YouthBuild



Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017 -2020

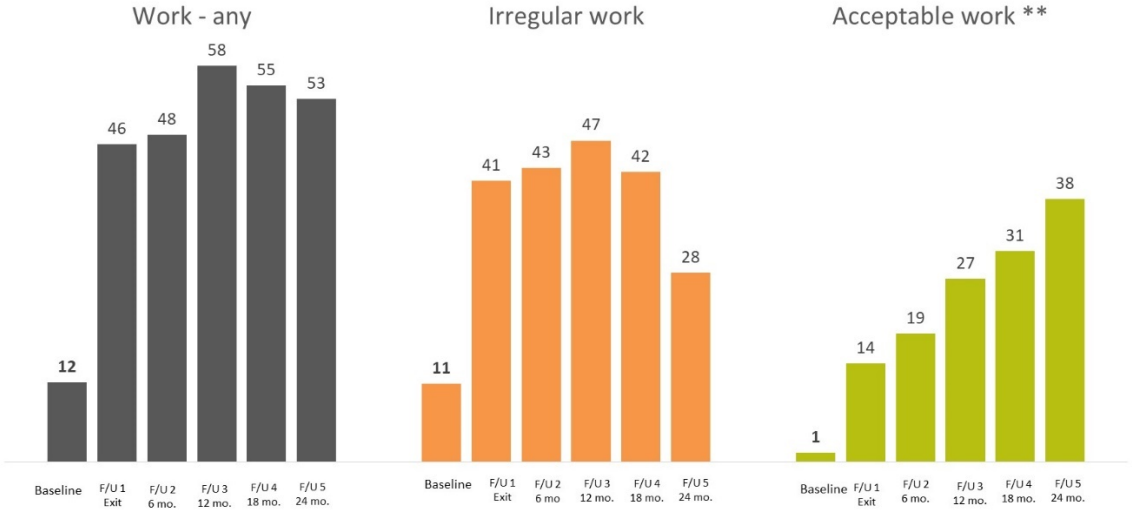
The insertion achieved by the participants who were part of the study sample or the control group, do not differ significantly. There is reasonable confidence that the results described above have not been significantly influenced due to changes in participants behavior as a result of participating follow-ups approximately every six months, to inquire about their educational or employment status (Hawthorne effect).

Youth Pathways seeks to contribute to reduce vulnerable work among youth 18 years of age and older, and therefore to increase acceptable work. The proportion of adult participants who entered the labor market increased, mainly as salaried workers, but also as self-employed; the largest increase occurred in the short term, after exiting the program (figure 5). However, the positive result continued to increase a few months later.

At the beginning of the program and during the first follow-up almost all participants were in irregular work[5]. This has changed, even though the percentage of irregular work remained higher than that of the baseline (above 40%), the prevalence of youth performing any type of work (vulnerable or not) increased more in the third and fourth follow-ups, indicating that regular employment is growing. In the fifth follow-up, the proportion of irregular work decreased almost 14 percentage points (to 28%). The most prevalent condition of irregularity is the lack of access to social security, in both countries.

[5] According to the Project definitions, irregular work includes at least one of the following conditions: earnings less tan the minimun wage, no oral or written contract, lack of access to social security protection system or Retirement Fund, casual or temporary work, less than full time job.

Figure 5. Prevalence of irregular and acceptable work (18 years and older) – YouthBuild



** "acceptable" work includes at least two of the following conditions: income equal to or higher than minimum wage, full-time job, with a verbal or written contract, with access to social security or Retirement Fund. According to Project definitions some jobs can be considered as "irregular" (not having social security, for example), although it is considered "not vulnerable" if it has two of the previous conditions (sufficient income and hours of work, for example), so it is classified as "acceptable". That is, acceptable work and irregular work are not mutually exclusive categories. Acceptable work is not synonymous with formal work.
Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

Acceptable work**, which despite not a not synonymous with formal work is and **approximation to quality work [6], increased steadily from 1% at baseline to 14 % in the first follow-up and continued to increase to 38 % in the fifth (figure 5). The improvement occurred in both El Salvador and Honduras. On the other hand, even though the percentage of men and women with acceptable work was similar at the beginning of the program, the proportion of men grew faster from the third follow-up. In addition, the average income for both men and women has increased over time, but, in all follow-ups, women have lower income than men.

Another objective of Youth Pathways is to contribute to reduce child labor and hazardous child labor. According to the Project definitions, almost all the work done by minor participants can be classified as child labor or hazardous work. For this reason, as the number of participants entering the job market increased, the prevalence of children involved in this kind of work also increased, from 9% in the baseline to 44% in the second follow-up and to 55% in the third. From the fourth follow-up it decreased to 25%, because the age of the participants increased over time, decreasing the proportion of minors; in fact, in the fifth follow-up only 6 participants were minors and none were working.

Educational and labor market trajectories

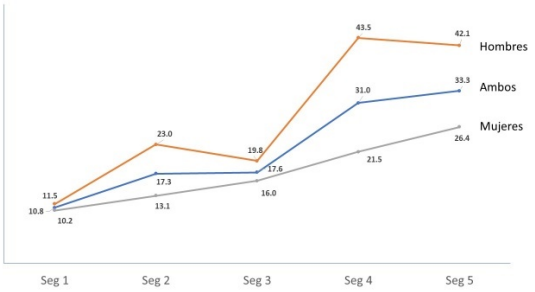
Considering only participants with at least one follow-up, their insertion status during each follow-up was compared with that of the baseline, in order to assess the educational and work trajectory followed after graduating from the program.

[6] "Acceptable" work includes at least two of the following conditions: income equal to or higher than minimum wage, full-time job, with a verbal or written contract, with access to social security or Retirement Fund. According to Project definitions some jobs can be considered as "irregular", although it is considered "not vulnerable", so it is classified as "acceptable".

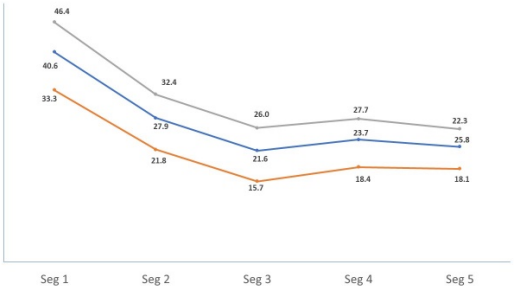
In the first follow-up, almost four out of 10 participants showed an ascending trajectory, that is, a better insertion status than that of baseline; In the subsequent follow-ups, the proportion increased, reaching levels close to 60%. Among those with ascending trajectories, the proportion with an acceptable work increased from one out of four in the first follow-up, to half of the participants in the fifth. In other words, over time the quality of job insertion increases. On the other hand, the percentage of neets (those neither studying nor working), went from 40% in the first follow-up to 22% in the fifth. Both men and women experienced continuous improvement over time (panel A, figure 6). Although the percentage of male and female neets decreased, the proportion of women in this condition remain higher during all follow-ups. (panel B, figure 6).

Figure 6. -Trajectories comparing insertion status during each follow-up with that of base line. Percentages

A. Trayectoria ascendente – a trabajo aceptable



B. Permanecieron sin estudiar ni trabajar

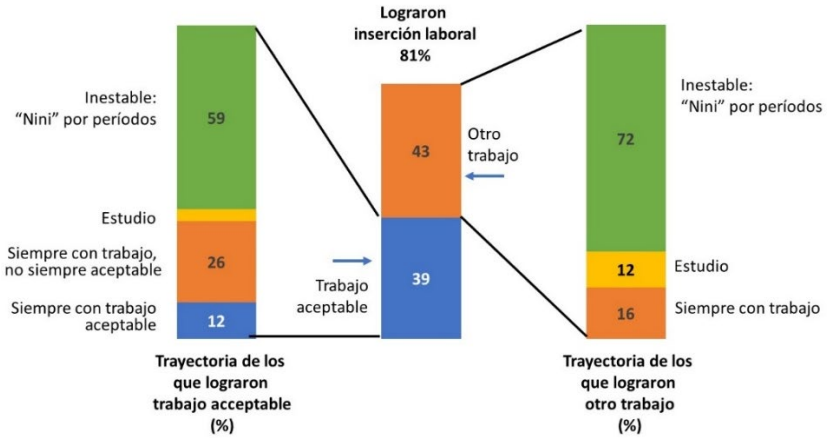


Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

Taking into account the best outcome achieved by participants throughout the evaluation period, at least eight out of ten participants were found to achieve an ascending trajectory in at least one period after graduating from the program: 36.8% achieved acceptable work and 42.5% other work. Only 11% remained unable to achieved a job or educational insertion.

To achieve a certain trajectory, does not mean that once a favorable status is reached, for example, acceptable work, that same status will remain over time. Of those participants who achieved an acceptable work (blue section of the center bar, figure 7) only 12% remain with acceptable work throughout the period, 26% continue working, but in a lower quality job; almost 60% had an unstable labor trajectory, in which at least for a time they were considered “neet”. On the other hand, of those participants who achieved another type of work (orange section of the center bar, figure 7), 16% continued working and 12% returned to study; while almost three out of four were "neets" at some point.

Figure 7. Trajectories over time of participants who achieved laboral insertion – YouthBuild



Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

Acceptable work is strongly associated with having completed high school; on the contrary, being a woman and having an incomplete secondary education is more associated with an ascending trajectory but that fails to obtain an acceptable job. Work experience is another key factor associated with a better trajectory. An apparent contradictory result is that not studying or working at baseline and at least in one follow-up, is associated with the same factors that are associated with a trajectory that achieves an acceptable work. However that could be evidence of the instability in the labor market among youth. Few participants remain in acceptable work over time, most of them experiencing episodes as "neets".

Consistent with the previous results, a man is almost twice as likely as a woman to work in any job, and also to have a salaried job (keeping the other variables constant: country of residence, age group, educational level). Youth living in El Salvador have similar results, relative to those living in Honduras. On the other hand, having a high school diploma or being 18 years or older does not modify the probability significantly. A person that had two or more jobs in the previous six months are almost 6 times as likely to be working, and three times as likely to have a salaried job (keeping other variables constant).

Perceptions of Participants towards YouthBuild components

Practically all participants would recommend participating in YouthBuild program to young people like them. In general, participants consider that all the components of the program are very useful. Post graduation support was the component better evaluated, while training for self-employment obtained the lowest score. Meanwhile, almost 90% rated vocational trainning as very useful, and more than 80% rated life skills training as very useful.

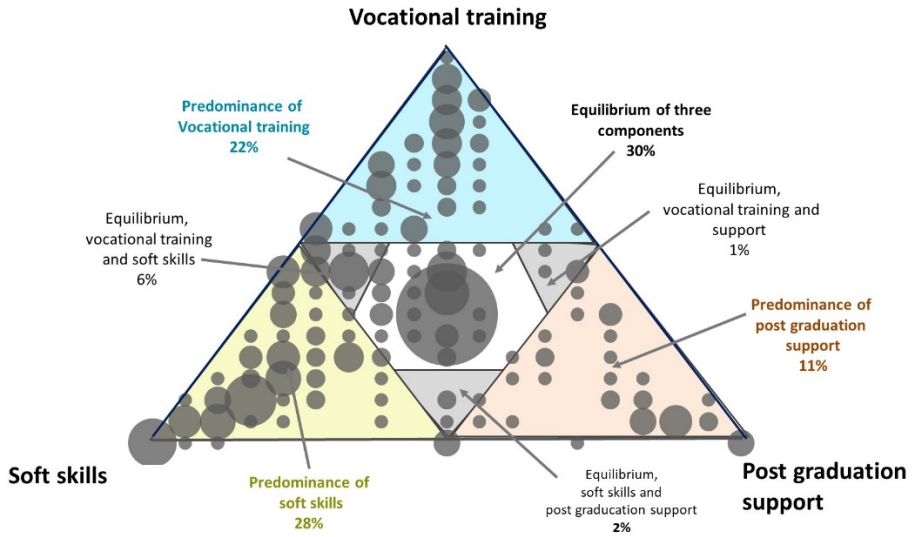
Moreover, participants were asked to indicate freely, the aspect of the program that has helped them most in their lives. Three aspects are the most valued, in that order: life skills training, which was mentioned by approximately half of the participants, a proportion that is twice as large as the mention of the second factor; vocational training and job search training. Youth were also asked to indicate factors that have influenced changes in their lives; the factors that they mentioned cover aspects along the theory of change. In some way, these results reinforce the quantitative results

discussed above. It is important to highlight that despite the very positive results related to labor insertion, participants give more value to changes related to soft skills.

These results seem to validate that life skills is enabling participants to cope with their environment; not only because is the most valued component, but also the changes they consider most important are related to this aspect.

The final survey included an exercise[7] that allows visualizing the relative weight that participants give to three components of the program, according to their post-graduation experience: vocational training, life skills training and the post-graduation support (figure 8). The most frequent answer given by participants (30%) was that the three components are equally important (center of the triangle, figure 8). Those who gave this response argue that the three components have helped them in their personal and professional life, and that they complement each other. On the other hand, for 28% of the participants life skills predominate over the other components because skills help them in their personal development, in solving personal problems and to achieve emotional stability, which in turn, allows them to perform better at the workplace and academically. For 21% of the participants, vocational training predominates because they expanded or acquired new knowledge, thereby obtaining a job or improving performance in their current job.

Figure 8. Ilustration of relative weight given by participants of YouthBuild componets



Note: the size of the circles indicates number of participants that place their valuation in that spot.
Source: Own elaboration with information from the Final Survey 2020

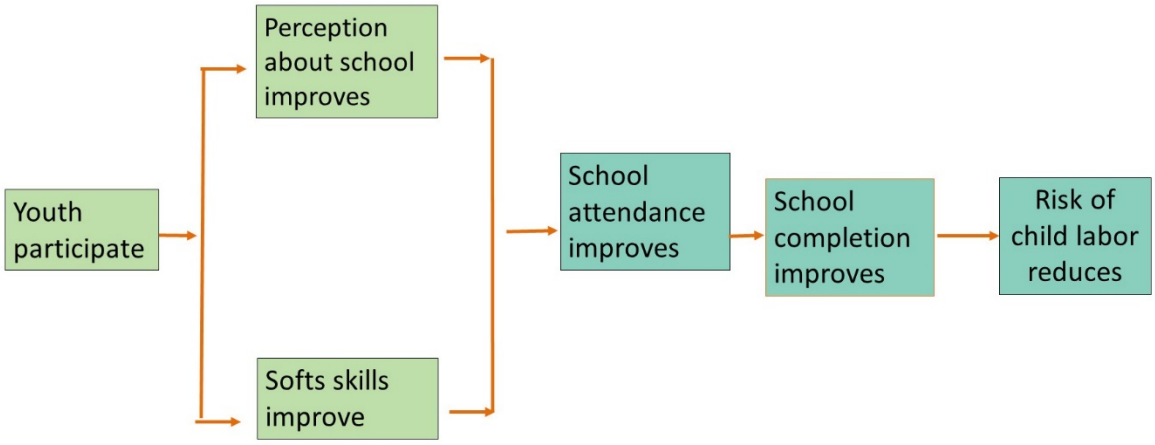
[7] An adaptation of the SenseMaker® triads to be included as part of a quantitative survey.

Career Connect Clubs

Theory of change

For beneficiaries within the school system, as a consequence of participating in Career Connect Clubs, they are expected to stay in school and finish their school year and progress to the next, or graduate if they are in the last grade of school; they are also expected to keep out of child labor status. In addition, the project seeks to strengthen social skills, so that participants are better prepared to face threatening situations in their contexts, as well as increase their resistance to participate in criminal or illegal activities (Figure 9).

Figura 9. Theory of Change: Career Connect Clubs



Source: Own elaboration based on CRS documentation

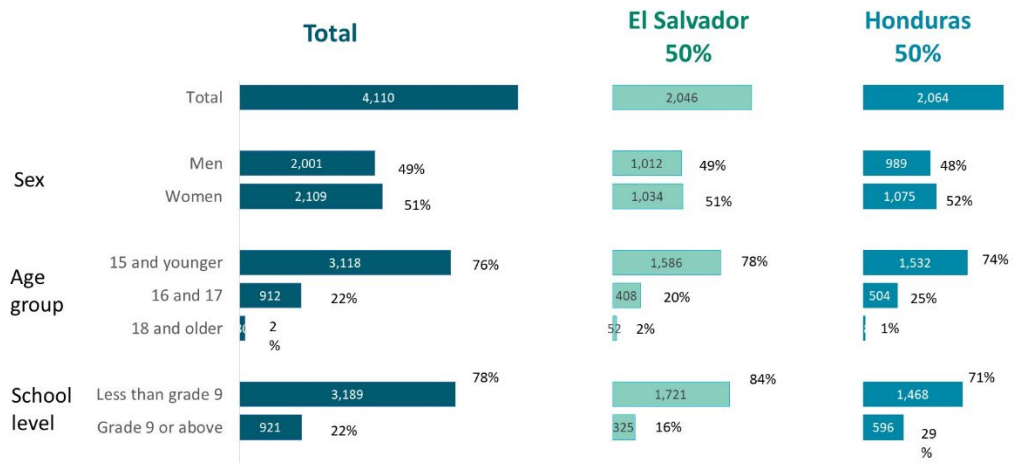
Characteristics of Participants

Almost all participants who completed the program in both countries are children under 18 years old (98%), the average age is 14 years, which is not surprising, since the program is aimed at children within the formal educational system (figure 10). About 8 out of 10 participants have not completed basic education; around 22% study high school. In El Salvador, 15% of participants are in high school, compared to 28% in Honduras. Approximately 45% of participants live in a household that receives remittances and only 0.6% were deported prior to participating in the program. Even though the proportion of participants that were deported is low, the percentage in Honduras (0.9%) is higher than in El Salvador (0.2%).

There are important differences by country in the prevalence of risk due to problems with the law. In El Salvador, the percentage of participants living in a household in which a family member has been detained (26%) is almost three times higher tan in Honduras (7.3%). Even though the proportion of participants who have been detained is low, it is worth noting that in Honduras (3.2%) it is ten times higher than in El Salvador (0.3%). Regarding the risk related to the type of friends, 32% of

participants reported that their friends get into trouble, 14% that their friends consume alcohol and 8% that their friends consume drugs. The percentages are similar in both countries.

Figure 10. Characteristics of participants who completed participation – Career Connect Clubs



Source: Registration Form, base line survey and administrative data from CRS

Perceptions towards school

According to the theory of change, through participation in program, students will improve their perceptions of the school environment, which in turn will improve school attendance and completion of the school year.

The baseline and exit questionnaires, included questions to evaluate risk and protective factors related to the School domain, following the "Communities That Care" model[8]. Risk factors are those elements in the environment that increase the probability of youth participating in behaviors that compromise their healthy development; protective factors buffer risk in adverse circumstances, either by reducing the impact of the risk or by changing the way children or youth respond to it. The results of a national survey in El Salvador that used the CTC model [9] were used as normative data, to assess the relative position of the participants. If Clubs participants are, on average, similar to national averages, the expected proportion of high risk or high protection should be close to 33%.

As expected, Career Connect Clubs seem to influence protective factors. Regarding the "opportunities for prosocial participation" factor, at baseline, the proportion of students with high protection (52%) was higher than expected (normative); this proportion increased after participating in the program, reaching 64%. This was the expected outcome, since Clubs by definition offer opportunities for prosocial participation. Similarly, the "rewards for prosocial participation" factor

[8] The Communities that Care model considers risk and protective factors in four domains: family, community, school and Individual/peer. For more details visit https://www.communitiesthatcare.org.au/how-it-works/risk-and-protective-factors#:~:text=The%20risk%20factors%20used%20in,anxiety%2Fdepression%20and%20teenage%20pregnancy.

[9] Sanfeliú M., Chávez M., Shi M. y Polanco D. (2016) "Factores de riesgo y protección en jóvenes escolares de El Salvador". FUSADES. Antiguo Cuscatlán.

improved, going from 14% at the beginning of school year to 23% at the end of the year; the increase was higher for women (10 percentage points) than for men (8 pp).

Regarding risk factors, the percentage of students who can be classified as high risk is high, compared to the expected proportions according to normative values. This is not surprising since the program serves a population considered to be at high risk. No improvement was found in these indicators.

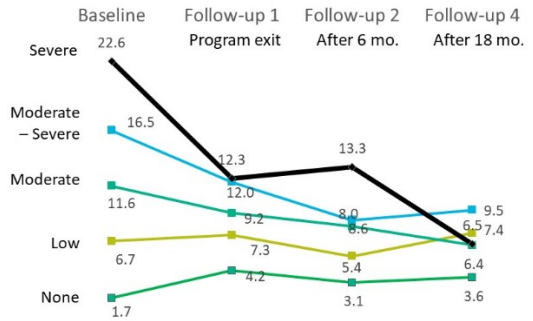
Social skills

Finally, by seeking to strengthen social skills, participants are expected to be better prepared to face threatening situations in their contexts, as well as to increase their resistance to participate in criminal or illegal activities. The results show that in the short-term depression and resilience measures did not change significantly, except for participants who had less favorable results in the baseline (figure 11). Indicators continued to improve throughout the evaluation period. For Career Connect Clubs, as for YouthBuild, the results suggest that the program benefits more youth who start in a more disadvantaged position.

Figure 11. Social skills indicators, by base líne condition – Career Connect Clubs

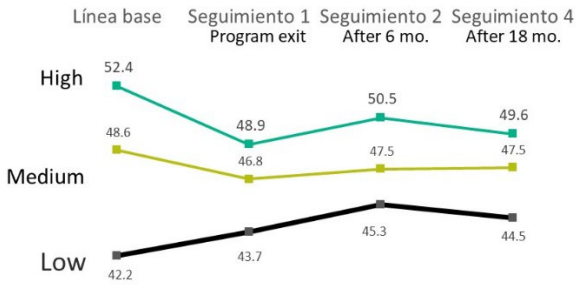
A. Depression

(PHQ-9[10] Depression Scale, average score)



B. Resilience Measure

(Child and Youth Resilience Measure,CYRM [11] average score)



The averages shown use the sample weights.
Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

Remaining in formal education

As a consequence of participating in ***Career Connect Clubs,*** *b*eneficiaries are expected to remain in school and finish the school year and progress to the next, or graduate if they are in their last grade. Those participants who were less than 16 years old at baseline stayed in school for the two subsequent school years. Those who were 16 years or older completed at least the following school year; after the second school year, the propotion leaving the system was more pronounced in this group. Results show that, for the second follow-up, which takes place at the beginning of the

[10] For more information visit: *https://www.pcpcc.org/sites/default/files/resources/instructions.pdf*

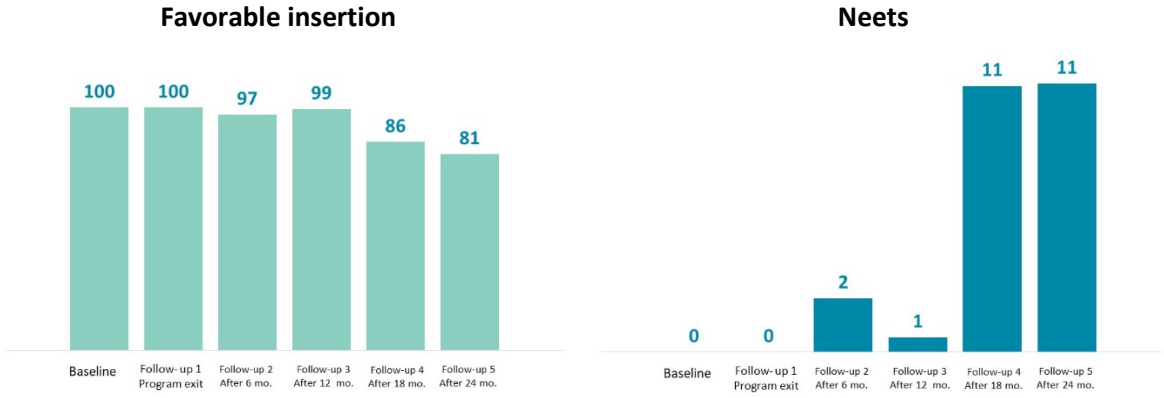
[11] The Child and Health Youth Resilience Measure, 18 item version 2 (Ungar, 2016). For more information visit *http://www.resilienceresearch.org/*

following school year, 97% were in school and only 3% were no longer studying, although all had finished high school; for the fifth follow-up, 76% of participants were still in school. In the fourth follow-up, the percentage of those who did not study increased to 17%, and then increased to 24% in the fifth follow-up; of these, only half had completed high school. On the other hand, the proportion that works (whether they also study or not) went from 11% in the baseline to 28% during the fifth follow-up. To better assess the contribution of Career Connect Clubs to the academic performance of participants, it is necessary to have access to administrative records (attendance and grades), as proposed in the original evaluation design. It would be interesting to compare the outcome of participants with the rest of students at their schools.

Labor and educational insertion

Consistent with the previous results, the favorable insertion (in school or with acceptable work) was very close to 100% during the first two school years (between the baseline and the third follow-up); after the third school year (from the fourth follow-up), it decreased to 86% and then to 85% (Figure 12). However, among participants that were 16 years of age at baseline, the proportion remained throughout the period of the study. Likewise, the percentage of neets remained low until the third follow-up; during the fourth follow-up it increased to 11%, and remain the same for the fifth follow-up.

Figure 12. Evolution of insertion indicator – Career Connect Clubs

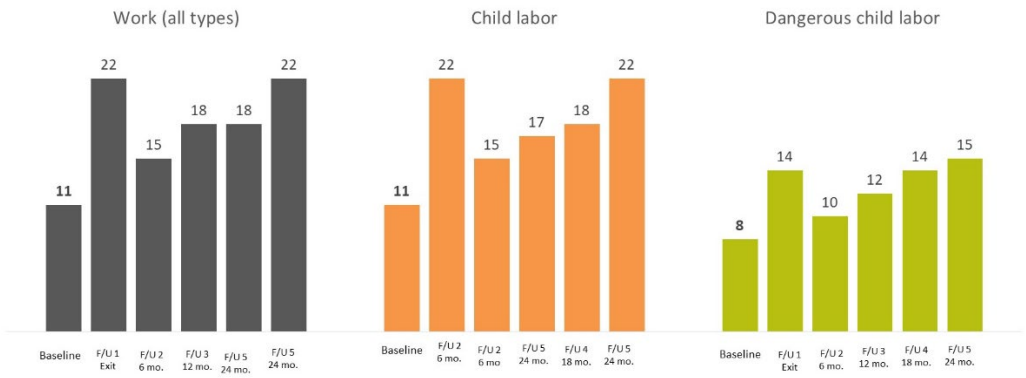


Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

For these indicators, no differences were found between the study sample and control group, therefore, it can be concluded that the results have not been significantly influenced because the participants have significantly modified their behaviors in response to having received follow-ups approximately every six months to find out their educational or work situation (Hawthorne effect).

Among participants of this program, child labor dropped from about 11% at baseline to between 18% and 22% in the four follow-ups after graduation, and reached 22% in the fifth follow-up (see Figure 13). In the case of Career Connect Clubs, although some participants do work, they remain in school, in most cases.

Figure 13. Prevalence of child labor and hazardous work (under 18 years of age) – Career Conecction Clubs



Source: Base line Survey and Follow-up Forms, Youth Pathways 2017-2020.

Conclusions

The results discussed above, overall, suggest that there is evidence to validate the theory of change, for both YouthBuild and Career Connect Clubs, specially for indicators related to labor and educational insertion. This is relevant because it shows that with a methodology appropriate to the context and characteristics of participants, vulnerable populations in stigmatized environments, their perspectives and life trajectories can be improved.

Given the characteristics of the local labor market, in which Informality prevails, and due to the definitions used by the project, it is not very feasible to expect that participants under the age of 18 will remain out of child labor when they do some work. It is more important to assess whether or not work activities prevent further study.

The results for YouthBuild show that for a program that seeks to improve employability among youth from vulnerable backgrounds, specially if they are stigmatized, providing vocational training is not always enough. It is important to recognize the contribution of other elements:

- First, the great importance of strenghening soft skills, improving self-esteem of participants, and that participants achieve the conviction that they can be succesful.
- The support that the program gives to participants after graduation in order to help them in their educational and work insertion, additionally, according to the opinion of participants, motivated them to continue with their personal develpment.
- Labor intermediation with private firms is important. In addition to helping youth access formal jobs, it lets employers overcome the stigma associated youth from certain territories considered as violent.

The results show that achieving a certain insertion does not mean that it is permanent. Half of the participants report an unstable trajectory; even those participants who achieved acceptable work, experienced periods without studying or working. These results are consistent with those reported by Beneke de Sanfeliú, et al. (2018) who found that being “neet” seems to be a temporary condition, which youth enter and leave, depending on their personal circumstances.

Although labor trajectories may be unstable, the results also show the importance of the first job. Those participants who achieved a job placement, at any time, had a better chance to get a salaried employment, or overall, a job in the future.

Also, results suggest that women face greater difficulties to participate in the labor market, which in a way is consistent with female labor force participation in the region. However, mechanisms to support women with labor insertion should be identified, in order to reduce gender gaps related to labor insertion and earnings. For example, the type of vocational training they receive could be reviewed.

Finally, it is easier to obtain an acceptable work for those participants with higher levels of education, at least complete high school. An important challenge for El Salvador and Honduras is to increase the proportion of youth who finish secondary school. Ensuring that all youth complete secondary school must be a priority both for public policies and for programs that serve young people from vulnerable environments. Programs should focus supporting youth who are in school to stay there, and motivate those who are out of the formal education system to continue their studies.

Results for Career Connect Clubs illustrate how serving participants from younger ages can contribute to the keeping youth in school