Study to Validate the Strategies Utilized to Prevent and Reduce Exploitive and the Worst Forms of Child Labor in the Dominican Republic: A Quantitative and Qualitative Study

English Executive Summary

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The study was designed and implemented by INTEC under the USDOL funded Combating Child Labor through Education II Dominican Republic program, known in Spanish as: *Educando para Combatir la Explotación Laboral Infantil en la República Dominicana.*

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In 2003, DevTech Systems, Inc. (DevTech) and its Dominican partners developed the Spaces for Growth education program (*Espacios para Crecer*, or EpC, in Spanish) in the Dominican Republic (DR). With funding from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) (2003-2007 and 2007-2011), DevTech and its partners provided non-formal educational services to children in the DR who were engaged in or at risk of becoming engaged in exploitive child labor. The EpC program complemented the formal education children ages 6-14 received in public schools by offering a structured environment for them to develop academically and socially during the half of the day when they were not in school – thereby providing an alternative to exploitive child labor.

This study of the program, *Validating Strategies to Prevent and Reduce Exploitive and the Worst Forms of Child Labor in the Dominican Republic*, was conducted by the Technological Institute of Santo Domingo (INTEC in Spanish), which was also the Associate member of the team responsible for performance monitoring. Other local and international NGOs delivered the educational services utilizing the EpC program model.

The study's objective was to examine the project's impact on the first cohort of children who completed the EpC program in June 2009.[1] During the period of the grant (2007-2011), Cohort 1 children attended EpCs between January 2008 and June 2009. The study examined the children's attitudes and perceptions of school, work, and life plans roughly 1.5 years after completing the EpC program. It also looked at their academic achievement and attendance habits. Finally, the study investigated parents', teachers', and EpC facilitators' attitudes and perceptions of child labor and school.

INTEC used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect information on cohort 1, which consisted of 2,891 children throughout the DR. Information was obtained from a random sample from this cohort (240 children). According to the National Survey of Child Labor (2000) conducted by the International Labour Organization, the age group in the DR with the highest levels of exploitive child labor was 10 and 14 years old. Consequently, the majority of the children interviewed as part of the survey were in this age group.

Data were collected via 1) a questionnaire on children's attitudes and perceptions, which was used to interview EpC beneficiaries, and 2) a questionnaire on students' academic performance and attendance, which was completed with school officials. In addition, focus groups were conducted to collect information from cohort 1 participants' parents, teachers, and EpC facilitators on their attitudes and perceptions of child labor and school. INTEC researchers and data collectors led all data collection efforts, including the interviews and focus groups. The following sections provide an overview of the report's major findings.

[1] Two additional cohorts completed the EpC program during the grant period. To measure the effects over time only Cohort 1 is included in this study.

Changes in attendance and academic achievement

In general, INTEC found that cohort 1 children in the sample were actively enrolled and participating in school roughly 1.5 years after their cohort completed the program. It found no significant difference between girl's and boy's enrollment. Some enrolled students were working at the time of the survey; however, school attendance remained either better than average or average for both children that worked and those that did not. During the 2009-2010 school year, 85 percent of children who were working attended school regularly and 89 percent of children who were not working attended school regularly.

Cohort 1 children who were surveyed maintained average academic performance in curricular subjects both during and after participation in the EpC program. Academic performance was found to be similar among boys and girls, and those that worked and did not. Unfortunately, the study found that many children were still achieving below their grade level. While students who worked were slightly more likely to repeat their grade, the study found this difference to be insignificant.

Changes in working status/conditions

INTEC determined that 63 percent of the children interviewed from cohort 1 were not working at the time of the survey (November 2010). Of the children already engaged in child labor when they entered the program (classified as to be withdrawn), 54 percent were no longer working at the time of the survey. Of the children who were at-risk of being engaged in child labor (classified as prevented when they entered the program), 76 percent maintained the same non-working status.

The study found that the majority of the children 14 years and older who were working at the time of the survey were engaged in legally permitted work in accordance with Dominican law. The law permits children 14 years and older to engage in certain classes of work (non-hazardous and formative), provided the work totals less than 20 hours per week. In the study, children who were 13 years of age (those approaching eligibility for legal work) had among the lowest incidence of working (only 24 percent were working at the time of the survey). Furthermore, most of the children under the age of 14 (70 percent of those surveyed) that reported they were working were performing tasks related to domestic work at home, domestic service, or light agricultural collection activities.

According to children participating in the evaluation, these domestic activities did not take up an excessive amount of their time. Combined with the findings on parents' attitudes and perceptions of child labor (see below), this demonstrates the need for continued awareness-raising among parents and families about the negative consequences and problems associated with child labor.

Children's opinions of child labor and education

The majority of cohort 1 children in the sample demonstrated an understanding of the principal aspects of child labor, including those required to meet the definition of child labor. Despite this, the majority of children justified the work they did, noting that they liked work, that working was

an important means to contribute to family financial resources, and that by working they were able to spend more time with their parents and other family members. They also held the view that children are needed to help with domestic chores in their family's household on a daily basis. The majority of the children in the sample also believed that child labor had potential negative impacts on health, education, and personal recreation time, unlike their parents and families.

The majority of the children surveyed viewed school as a positive place to learn and important to achieving their life goals. Almost all of the children also stated that both work and school were important for personal development and quality of life.

Parents' and teachers' opinions of child labor and academic achievement

While some parents of cohort 1 children said school should be the "only work for children" and affirmed that child labor is illegal, overall the parents held the view that child labor was justified, particularly if/when their family confronts economic challenges. Additionally, parents noted that their children's work is a dignified pursuit, demonstrates the children's ambitions, and teaches them values. They believed that in this case child labor was a means to family income and support. However, parents also expressed the need for their children to study and also recognized the importance of school in order to succeed later in life.

All of the teachers of cohort 1 children were emphatic that labor offers children no advantage or payoff. They lamented that so many children in the community continue to work. Teachers also noted that child labor negatively affects children's academic performance. However, in some communities teachers noted that child labor is simply a reality and a necessity for family survival. Teachers viewed the EpC program very positively, stating that the EpC helped students integrate better into the school and kept students occupied so they would have less time to become involved in child labor.

EpC facilitators exhibited the lowest tolerance for child labor of the adults surveyed. In addition to the negative impacts cited by parents and teachers, EpC facilitators pointed out that child labor does *not* help children become more responsible because their responsibility is to focus on school rather than work. EpC facilitators recognized that child labor continues to take place in their communities, and primarily cited persistent poverty as the reason for that.

During the focus groups that were conducted, all stakeholder groups asserted that child labor negatively impacts school achievement and is usually related to problems such as poor school attendance, grade repetition, increased school drop-out rates, and children being older than the typical age for their grade.

All stakeholders interviewed said they found the EpC program to be a positive strategy for working with children. They noted that the program promoted integrating at-risk children back into schools, and contributed positively to their academic achievements and school life.