

Youth-Related Fragility in Haiti and the Impact of the IDEJEN Project



Haiti has one of the youngest populations in the world.¹ At the same time, Haiti ranks among the lowest in the world for net primary and secondary school attendance.² In 2010, 4 in 10 people could not read or write. Fifty-five percent of the population fell below the extreme poverty level of \$1.25 per day. As of 2006, 20 percent of the children were malnourished, half of the population had no access to health care, and four-fifths of the population did not have access to clean drinking water.³

These statistics highlight the general poverty as well as the extremely low level of state capacity and will in Haiti at the time of the 2010 earthquake. In 2005, state revenues comprised only 9 percent of GDP (gross domestic product), compared to an average of 18 percent for other low-income countries. Access to education was notably inequitable, with rural poor families demonstrating significantly lower access to schooling than urban and metropolitan families. Access to a living wage was equally inequitable, with the main determinants of employability being education, gender, and migration status. According to a 2006 World Bank report:

Many Haitian workers are poor despite working full time, and thus it is important that the quality of jobs, as well as their quantity, is raised. The challenge of job creation, therefore, is to increase productivity and increase opportunities in the labor market for competitive wages.⁴

The report noted that each year 100,000 new workers entered the metropolitan labor market (largely Port au Prince), but that waged employment was available for only half that number and that most of these opportunities resided in the informal sector.

The *L'initiative pour le développement des jeunes en dehors du milieu scolaire* (IDEJEN) project evolved in direct response to the challenges facing Haiti's youth in this fragile context, where government institutions were failing to provide them with security and opportunities to become economically productive adults and contribute to their communities. IDEJEN was funded by USAID and implemented by the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), through the EQUIP3 project. Project activities were captured in four major objectives, each designed to address a salient aspect of youth-related fragility.

- **Objective 1: Marginalized youth are re-integrated into society.** This objective focused on the burgeoning and largely uneducated and disengaged youth population, most visibly active in the riots and lawlessness taking place in Port au Prince during 2004. It was based on the premise that youth engage in lawless behavior out of frustration and hopelessness, which were both borne of and exacerbated by the fact that they were not productively engaged in their communities.

¹As of 2009, young people ages 10–19 represented 23 percent of the total population (UNICEF (2011). *State of the World's Children: Adolescence, an Age of Opportunity*, New York: UNICEF). As of 2006, children and youth (0 through age 24) accounted for more than 50 percent of the total population. [World Bank. (2006, April 27). *Social resilience and state fragility in Haiti: A country social analysis*. Washington, DC: Caribbean Country Management Unit, World Bank.]

²Net primary school attendance ratios for boy and girls are 48 and 52 percent respectively; secondary net attendance ratios for boys and girls are 18 and 21 percent respectively (UNICEF, 2011).

³World Bank. (2006, April 27). *Social resilience and state fragility in Haiti: A country social analysis*. Washington, DC: Caribbean Country Management Unit, World Bank.

⁴Ibid.

- **Objective 2: Community organizations have increased capacity to address programming needs of out-of-school youth.** This objective focused on Haiti's rich but under-supported civil society and was composed of various neighborhood-based, small-scale community initiatives to provide support to youth. However, it needed both broader, deeper technical capacity in youth development-related activities and strong guidance with financial and organizational management.
- **Objective 3: Government of Haiti institutions are strengthened to provide and/or oversee improved services to out-of-school youth.** The goal of this objective was to assist Haiti's weak Ministry of Education to develop a non-formal education policy that could lay the groundwork for offering education and training opportunities to the country's growing population of un-educated, unskilled young job seekers, many of whom migrated to Port au Prince or Santo Domingo in vain each year. In addition, it sought to build the visibility and influence of the country's languishing Ministry of Youth, also through the development of a cogent youth policy.
- **Objective 4: HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention messages are disseminated to out-of-school youth, ages 15–24.** This objective was designed to use IDEJEN's nationwide network and broad access to vulnerable youth to lower Haiti's HIV/AIDS rate, which in 2005 was among the highest in the Caribbean. Young, out-of-school peer educators disseminated information and referrals regarding HIV/AIDS to youth and the broader community while at the same time building their own leadership and community engagement skills.

After an initial pilot phase from 2003 to 2006, IDEJEN expanded in 2007. Through the expansion, it provided 13,050 minimally educated, 15–24 year-olds in 8 of Haiti's 10 departments and in 96 of its 142 communes with an integrated package of basic education and life skills, market-relevant technical training and coaching, and placement in micro-entrepreneurship and other work experiences, or support for return to formal or technical school. IDEJEN offered this support through a network of 200 community-based organization (CBO) training partners as well as newly formed career development centers in each department. IDEJEN staff worked closely with the Ministry of Education's *Institut National de la Formation Professionnelle* (INFP) to provide technical training modules to partner CBOs and to evaluate and grant certificates to youth who completed technical training. The project also provided mentoring to youths who chose to pursue micro-enterprises.

By the time youth activities ended in July 2011, over 11,000 youth, or 86 percent of participants, had successfully completed IDEJEN's basic employability training (non-formal basic education up to a third- or fifth-grade level, plus level one certification in a technical field). Among those who had completed the program, by March 2011, 53 percent had gained employment or better employment, and 48 percent had transitioned to further education and training (the total is more than 100 percent because some combined both work and further education).

Additionally, by project end 200 CBOs had received both technical and management/financial training, site visits, and one-to-one support, and over 300 peer educators had provided HIV/AIDS information and referrals to more than 60,000 community members throughout Haiti. The INFP had added 15 technical course offerings to its original 7 and had a cadre of trained and working technical assessment officers who traveled to IDEJEN training sites to evaluate trainees for certification. The Ministry of Education had produced a draft NFBE policy, and the Ministry of Youth had begun the policy development process.

While these numbers tell some of the story, they are insufficient to describe the impact of the project on the deeper dynamics of youth, education, livelihood, and fragility. In IDEJEN's final year of implementation (2010–2011), USAID undertook a project evaluation. As a complement, EDC conducted a series of youth, CBO, and community focus groups in a subset of communities, as well as a telephone survey with a stratified sample of longstanding IDEJEN CBO partners (June 2011). The data provided useful insights into whether the underlying assumptions about fragility in IDEJEN's design were valid. These results are presented in the following pages.

Objective 1: Social re-integration of marginalized youth.

Fragility is often characterized by both a lack of basic services and the corresponding absence of citizens' respect for, or engagement with, a common set of rules or social duties. IDEJEN posited that if it provided some of the social services that the government had failed to provide—basic education and life skills instruction, technical training, and career guidance—then youth would develop a more productive relationship with their communities.

IDEJEN provided youth who had little prior education the opportunity to “get back on the bus” of social participation by offering free access to accelerated basic education in groups of their peers rather than young children and the opportunity to return to formal schooling. In focus groups conducted by USAID's evaluators and by EDC, youth said they most appreciated access to accredited skills training and paid work experience. Skills and credentials offered them a way out of their hand-to-mouth poverty. The confidence inspired by these skills and reinforced by IDEJEN's focus on individual mentoring and introduction to the labor market encouraged them to engage with their communities in ways they had not considered possible. The USAID evaluation stated:

In any case we must acknowledge that the new respect that society had for these youth after their participation in the project encouraged youth to adopt new behaviors. A number of them testified that they had stopped their delinquent behavior after returning to school. The possession of a trade increased youths' confidence in a better future, something which reduces

the probability that these youth would return to committing reprehensible acts, acts which are often the result of discouragement, distress, or hopelessness. After having taken part in the project, youth considered themselves full citizens, waiting for the smallest opportunity to make themselves useful to their communities. This social ‘revaluation’ of youth, due notably to their possession of a trade and their capacity to read and write, is what permits us to speak of the social re-integration of participants.⁵

Youths’ newfound social engagement was perhaps most notable and appreciated in Port-au-Prince in the days and months after the earthquake, as IDEJEN engaged dozens of youth in community service activities. In the six months following the earthquake, over 1,000 youth removed rubble, constructed latrines, built transitional housing, and provided hygiene and sanitation education in camps and communities.

While there is strong evidence that IDEJEN had a positive impact on youths’ social integration, or positive relationship with their communities, it must also be said that for these most marginalized individuals, social integration was not enough. Of perhaps even greater importance was youths’ *economic* integration: their ability to earn an income on a relatively stable basis within the licit economy. In essence, youth were vulnerable not only because they lacked the social standing and credentials conferred by education, but because these very deficits made it impossible for them to be productive economic citizens.

Despite IDEJEN’s broadly acknowledged success in improving youths’ social integration, their economic integration seemed to have more of a mixed success. A significant number of youth interviewed were able to seize IDEJEN’s opportunities to become self-employed, start their own business, or through skill and hard work, gain the notice of employers willing to give them a chance. This was particularly true of youth in the West department, hardest hit by the earthquake. Ironically, the devastation caused by this disaster provided both opportunity and resources for skilled, motivated, entry-level workers. Both with IDEJEN’s placement help and without it, many IDEJEN graduates were able to leverage their IDEJEN connections to gain social and economic footing.

Yet many youth were not so lucky. Either due to their remote location or to lower motivation or skill, a large number of youth interviewed both by the USAID evaluator and EDC were unable to leverage the skills and experience provided by IDEJEN to make the next step toward economic integration. In some cases, youth were able to find work via IDEJEN, either as peer educators or, in Port-au-Prince, working in sanitation activities following the earthquake; however, once the IDEJEN-sponsored peer education and sanitation activities ended, these youth found it difficult to find additional employment activities. Some were inspired to return to school. One young woman in Carrefour summarized what many came

⁵Evaluation Finale Externe de l’Initiative pour le Développement des Jeunes en dehors du Milieu Scolaire (IDEJEN) Draft 1, prepared by LTL Stratégies (www.ltlstrategies.com), January 2011, for USAID, p. 37.

to learn: “I have to finish school and broaden my skills; I don’t want to work only as an electrician.” For these youth, IDEJEN provided entry-level technical skills, improved literacy, and self-esteem but not the economic integration they desperately wanted. Many lacked confidence in either the job market or themselves to be able to find employment without assistance from IDEJEN should their current job end.

Objective 2: Community organizations have increased capacity to address programming needs of out-of-school youth.

IDEJEN looked to community-based organizations to provide the services that government could not. It created a nationwide cadre of youth-focused, neighborhood-based community institutions. Visitors to most communities where IDEJEN centers were located would quickly recognize that IDEJEN was well known and respected by community members; that it enjoyed the support of the mayor, church, and police; and that youth graduation ceremonies celebrated not only youths’ but the communities’ as well. “Thank you IDEJEN” read posters at one graduation ceremony in Mirbalais, “for giving us a chance...thank you for not forgetting us.”

Both the USAID evaluation and the EDC follow-up study affirmed that IDEJEN made partner CBOs more capable of providing youth services. In July 2011, EDC surveyed a stratified random sample of 105 CBOs that had participated in IDEJEN. Among the CBOs surveyed:

- There was an 88 percent increase in the number of CBOs that provided daily services to youth as a result of the project. Prior to IDEJEN, youth services were more sporadic or were not delivered at all.
- Over 80 percent found IDEJEN’s youth development training useful or extremely useful.
- 90 percent found IDEJEN’s management training useful or extremely useful.
- 59 percent were either accredited or working on accreditation with the INFP as a result of IDEJEN support.
- 100 percent had recommended IDEJEN’s model of non-formal basic education, technical training, mentoring, and work experience to others.
- All wanted to continue their services after IDEJEN ended.

Like the employment future of the youth themselves, however, the CBOs’ ability to continue to provide these services depends to a large extent upon the condition of the economy. Nearly three-

quarters stated that during the project's last six months they had not had sufficient funds to continue operations uninterrupted. This situation was somewhat better for those located in the West department, probably due to the increased resources and international presence there as a result of the earthquake. (One third of those who did have sufficient funds were located in the West department.)

Objective 3: Government of Haiti institutions are strengthened to provide and/or oversee improved services to out-of-school youth.

Of IDEJEN's four objectives, this one most directly addressed state weaknesses. Perhaps not surprisingly, activities designed to meet this objective produced less visible outcomes. IDEJEN sponsored a study tour for senior officials of the Ministry of Education to visit the Philippines, which has a well-developed non-formal education program. The officials were inspired by this example and enthusiastically worked with an international consultant to develop Haiti's non-formal basic education policy. The policy was widely vetted with departmental (provincial) representatives and enjoyed broad support, but it has yet to be endorsed by top-level government officials. IDEJEN provided similar policy support to the Ministry of Youth, yet due to a lack of leadership within the ministry, the youth policy had not been endorsed by the project's end.

There was, however, one way in which IDEJEN had a demonstrable influence in improving government capacity and lessening—in an admittedly small though relevant way—one aspect of the impact of the state's fragility on vulnerable youth: IDEJEN developed INFP's capacity to deliver relevant, quality technical training to both out-of-school and more educated youth, and it helped INFP develop a cadre of experienced trade skills evaluation specialists. The certificates that INFP granted allowed youth who had completed their secondary studies but had not passed their baccalaureate to gain admission to a technical training school and thus to an important pathway to work.⁶

Objective 4: HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention messages are disseminated to out-of-school youth, ages 15–24.

This objective sought to use IDEJEN's well-distributed, community-based peer educators to disseminate information regarding HIV prevention in the absence of a state preventive health infrastructure. Between 2008 (when this activity was initiated) and 2010 (when it lost funding after

⁶Evaluation Finale Externe, page 12.

the earthquake), IDEJEN established 10 HIV/AIDS centers within its own training centers, each staffed by a male and female peer educator selected from IDEJEN participants. In addition to keeping office hours, peer educators moved about in the community, visiting schools and community gatherings to disseminate HIV/AIDS information. In total, IDEJEN trained over 300 peer educators and reached over 150,000 community members with information.

HIV/AIDS prevalence did decline from a rate of 5.6 percent in 2008 to a rate of 2.2 percent in 2009 and 2010, but we cannot say what part of this decline might be due to IDEJEN's peer educator work. One aspect IDEJEN's peer educator work, however, did have a visible impact, if not on HIV/AIDS prevention, then on another of the project's objectives: that of participating in youths' social integration. The USAID evaluation states:

At the social level, the peer educators provide a strong reference for the IDEJEN model in terms of successful reintegration. Also at the economic level, they came out better than other youth. Trained in communications, with the HIV/AIDS theme, they were able to communicate in public, through religious meetings, as well as community meetings and other....The project encouraged them to open savings accounts at banks, and assisted them in developing other competencies. After the January 2010 earthquake, IDEJEN was able to place peer educators in water and sanitation projects implemented by international organizations and UN agencies. For example, these peer educators who worked for two years on honing their communication skills around HIV/AIDS prevention through IDEJEN, were easily trained to communicate about related problems in water and sanitation.⁷

Conclusion

In June 2011, EDC conducted interviews and focus group discussions in three departments: Central Plateau, West, and Grand'Anse. They spoke with youth who had completed the IDEJEN program in 2008 or later, youth who did not benefit from IDEJEN programming, CBO leaders, employers in the private sector, parents of IDEJEN youth, community members, and EDC/IDEJEN employees. Further, they shadowed IDEJEN youth in each community, conducting in-depth interviews and participatory activities and accompanying youth to various places of importance in their lives, such as work sites, schools, and homes.

Findings from this research indicate that where there are jobs—such as urban areas and particularly Port au Prince—many IDEJEN graduates, particularly in Port au Prince, found and have kept jobs (in Port au Prince this is due to reconstruction activities). In rural areas, where paid employment is scarcer, most IDEJEN youth interviewed returned to school and/or were earning income in short-

⁷Evaluation Finale Externe, page 10.

term or agricultural activities. Notably, in both rural and urban communities, youth and employers stated that IDEJEN graduates were more likely to get even unskilled jobs than were their non-IDEJEN counterparts. These youth almost seemed to receive special treatment, perhaps because the community wanted to protect and preserve IDEJEN's investment in them so that they could become a community resource for the future. In all communities that EDC researchers visited, those interviewed almost unanimously stated that their opinion of out-of-school youth had improved since participating in the IDEJEN project.

In the communities EDC visited, it seems safe to say that IDEJEN did indeed have an impact on fragility. At the individual level, it gave graduates skills, self-esteem, and a credential that they could leverage to find work or other opportunities. At the community level, it enhanced social cohesion, as employers, parents, and community leaders rallied around graduates to support their continued success. IDEJEN helped community members recognize that with investment in their training and support, marginalized youth can realize their potential to become a valuable community resource.

IDEJEN stands out in Haiti as an example of a donor-funded project that enjoys wide respect, not only within the development community but, more importantly, among Haitian youth, community members, and local institutions. Yet despite IDEJEN's contributions, many out-of-school youth—whether participants or not—continue to struggle for their livelihood and for the opportunity to demonstrate their potential to themselves and their communities. Haiti's deep and broad poverty and its history of weak government remain formidable obstacles to youth employability. Nonetheless, IDEJEN serves as a model for youth workforce development efforts that, when implemented in the context of long-term economic growth and state capacity development, can integrate youth socially and economically into their communities.