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Reducing Risk Factors for Youth on Nicaragua's Southern Caribbean Coast: An Evaluation of FADCANIC's Development Model for At-Risk Youth

April 2016

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INDEPENDENT EVALUATION REPORT

April 2016

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIR	American Institute for Research
B	Beneficiaries of Education For Success
BICU	Bluefield Indian and Caribbean University
CAYAC	Community At-risk Youth Advisory Committee
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CEAA	FADCANIC´s Center for Agroforestry and Environmental Education
COPRAJ	Occupational Center for Prevention and Rehabilitation of Youth and Adolescents (Centro Ocupacional para la Prevención y Rehabilitación de Jóvenes y Adolescentes)
DO	Development Objective
EFS	Education for Success
FADCANIC	Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of Nicaragua's Atlantic Caribbean Coast (Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua)
GON	Government of Nicaragua
INATEC	National Institute of Technology (Instituto Nacional de la Tecnología)
INIDE	National Institute for Development Information (Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo)
IR	Intermediate Result
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEFCA	Ministry of Familial Economy, Community and Associative (Ministerio de Economía Familiar, Comunitaria, Cooperativa y Asociativa)
MiFamilia	Ministry of Family
MINED	Ministry of Education
MOU	Memoranda Of Understanding
NB	Non-Beneficiaries of Education for Success
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NR	No Response
OECD-DAC	Office for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OPHI	Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative
RACCS	Nicaragua's Autonomous Region of the Southern Caribbean Coast
RACS	Nicaragua's Autonomous Region of the Southern Caribbean
SEREJUVE	Regional Secretary of Youth (Secretaria Regional de la Juventud)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
URACCAN	The University of Nicaragua's Caribbean Autonomous Regions (Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense)

USAID	United States Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the Education For Success (EFS) development model for at-risk youth. The model was developed by FADCANIC, the implementing agency of the USAID-funded project also called EFS, which was carried out in five municipalities of Nicaragua's Autonomous Region of the Southern Caribbean Coast (RACCS). The EFS model is designed to strengthen institutions, promote social cohesion, and improve youth employment and formal and non-formal educational opportunities for at-risk youth.

This evaluation finds the model has made important contributions to youth development in the region, but has not reached its full potential in achieving some of its goals. The report shows the EFS model to be highly relevant to youth risk factors and other related youth development strategies on Nicaragua's southern Caribbean coast. It also shows the model has produced many outputs and, as demonstrated through a representative survey, established some links to positive longer-term outcomes, such as improved youth aspirations. This evaluation proposes actions to improve the design of the model, make the model more sustainable, and strengthen the model's capacity to create employment opportunities – a major constraint to the model's effectiveness in Nicaragua's southern Caribbean coast.

This report begins with a description of the evaluation's research methodology. It describes the EFS model, its goals, and the regional context in which it operates. Next it examines the model design's relevance to the region's youth risk factors and other pertinent development strategies. This is followed by an examination of the EFS project's inputs and outputs, and presents survey results to gain insight into the longer-term outcomes of this model. The report concludes by analyzing the sustainability of the EFS model and offering summary remarks and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

This evaluation assesses FADCANIC's at-risk youth development model, Education For Success (EFS). The EFS model broadly defines "youth" as individuals between the ages of 10-29,[1] which is consistent with USAID's definition. The model defines "at-risk" youth as, (1) youth of school age but not attending school, (2) youth in school but failing, and (3) youth of working ages but not employed or in school. The initial terms of reference for this evaluation highlighted several research questions. These include:

- How has the model contributed to building youth development networks, systems, and connections?
- What do youth participants perceive as the impact of the youth at-risk model?
- What do community members perceive as the model's impact?

[1] Originally, EFS defined youth as between the ages of 10 and 24, but this definition was expanded to include 25 to 29 years olds, who, it was learned, could also benefit from the model.

- What are the educational and employment outcomes of this model?
- What management and institutional capacity is necessary to operate this model?
- What are the core aspects of the model that can be scaled and sustained?
- How is the model incorporating an inclusive development approach?

Box 1: Distinguishing EFS the project from EFS the model
Education For Success is a project for at-risk youth development carried out by FADCANIC on Nicaragua's southern Caribbean coast. The experience from carrying out this project produced a model for at-risk youth development. We refer to this model as the "EFS model" throughout this report. In other words, "the EFS project" is the implementation of EFS in the RACCS, while "the EFS model" is the general design and structure of this project. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the EFS model, not the EFS project. To differentiate between the project and the model that emerged from that project, this report evaluates the relative strengths and weaknesses of EFS' design and implementation in the RACCS, but it does not evaluate FADCANIC's capacity or effectiveness as EFS' implementing agency. As such, this evaluation does not propose actions to improve project implementation by FADCANIC, but proposes actions to improve the general design of the EFS model under the assumption that this model could be applied to different areas, demographics, and development challenges by different implementing agencies. For a more detailed evaluation of EFS' project implementation and FADCANIC's role, please refer to the 2013 mid-term evaluation of EFS (USAID 2013).

RESEARCH TEAM

The research team consisted of a team leader, a senior specialist, two "youth assessors," an independent statistician, and partners at Bluefield Indian and Caribbean University (BICU) who carried out the survey. The two Nicaraguan "youth assessors" were both younger than thirty years old. The purpose of using youth as researchers was to integrate younger perspectives into the research model. This had the benefit of allowing young researchers to carry out focus group discussions with other young Nicaraguans. Such a strategy helped bring a new perspective to the evaluation and improved the comfort level of the focus group discussions. At the same time, youth assessors had inconsistent capacity and less experience, which made vetting candidate qualifications more difficult – fewer professional references, less prior experience in the tasks they would carry out. Despite this, both youth assessors engaged in advanced-level research for this project, with one assessor acting as the regional coordinator for both the qualitative and quantitative data collection components.

The team used the research questions to guide the evaluation activities, which included a review of secondary data and the collection of primary qualitative and quantitative data. The specific research tools used are examined below and include:

- A literature review;
- Key informant interviews;
- Focus groups; and
- A municipal-level survey.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research team carried out an extensive literature review. This included research undertaken independently and by USAID and FADCANIC related to EFS and the RACCS. It also included a review of FADCANIC and EFS' external and internal documents. These documents included annual and quarterly reports, a sustainability plan, outreach documents, guides and manuals, strategy documents, and monitoring and evaluation reports. To identify relevant documentation, researchers carried out online scholar searches and asked key informants if they knew of any information that would prove valuable to the evaluation's objectives. FADCANIC also supplied the team with relevant documentation. The literature review took place throughout the entirety of the evaluation. The reference section at the end of this report lists the documents that informed this evaluation.

INTERVIEWS

The research team interviewed key informants to understand EFS and the socio-economic context of the RACCS. Interviewees were typically experts in some regional or technical area of the evaluation. This helped guide the research team to other relevant research and contextualized the regional and socio-economic situation in which EFS operates. Interviews took place in all five EFS municipalities and in Managua. In total, 39 people were interviewed for this evaluation. A complete list of interviews can be found in Annex A.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were used to deepen the secondary research and incorporate the voices of certain demographics not included in the survey. Overall, 11 focus groups were carried out in the five municipalities in which EFS operates. Focus group characteristics were determined in collaboration with USAID Nicaragua. In order to attain uninfluenced perspectives from focus group participants, different demographics were separated into different focus groups. For example, girls participated with other girls, rural youth with other rural youth, and so on. The demographic breakdown by municipality is presented in Table 1. The youth assessor, who facilitated the focus groups, underwent a training to use participatory and interactive discussion techniques, like community mapping. The utmost care was taken to craft questions in non-leading ways. Questions were often indirect and open-ended, which helped discussants feel at ease and carry the conversation. Facilitators were instructed to pay close attention to focus group dynamics, and instructed to manage groups to achieve maximum participation from all discussants. EFS promoters, who work with FADCANIC in each project municipality, helped recruit the focus group participants.

Focus groups were selected based on certain demographic characteristics related to age, gender, location, risk level, and educational status. These were used to supplement the survey, not duplicate it. EFS beneficiaries between 14 and 29 years old, the survey's target population, were not specifically targeted for a separate focus group, since most focus group participants fell within this general age range. However, 10 to 14 year olds were targeted as a separate focus group to help ensure that older participants did not drown out the voices of the youngest beneficiaries.

Specifically, focus group demographics included: age: adolescents (10-14) and adults (over 30); gender: boys and girls; ethnicity: mestizos, indigenous, and afro-descendants; location: urban and rural and by municipality; risk status: in-school (low-risk) and out-of-school and not working (high-risk); employment status: graduates of vocational training and Community At-risk Youth Advisory Committee (CAYAC) members (Table 1). Overall, 89 individuals participated in focus group discussions. The focus groups had a slightly stronger male than female voice, as 55 percent of participants were male (Figure 1). Ethnically, most discussants were mestizo, which reflects Nicaragua's demographic make-up, but there was also a strong representation from individuals of indigenous or African descent (Figure 2). Most focus group participants were from Bluefields or Desembocadura, while the fewest were from Corn Island, where there were difficulties organizing participants (Figure 3).[2]

Table 1: Focus group characteristics.

Individual focus groups were selected in each of the municipalities based on the characteristics listed in the table. For example, in Kukra Hill, two focus group discussions took place, one with adolescents and another with EFS vocational graduates. It is worth noting that in Desembocadura there were two focus groups – one for youth in-school and another for CAYACs. However, all participants were from rural areas, so both focus groups were considered to be rural.

	Boys	Girls	Adolescents (10-15)	High-risk youth	In-school	CAYACs	Urban	Rural	EFS vocational graduates	Mixed[3]
Bluefields										
Laguna de Perlas										
Kukra Hill										
Corn Island										
Desembocadura										

Figure 1: Focus group respondents by gender

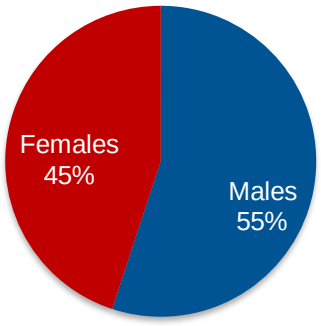
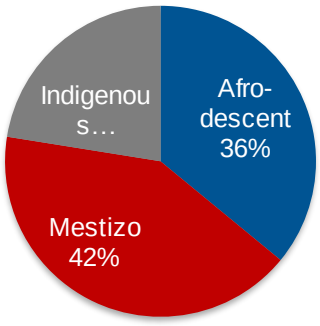


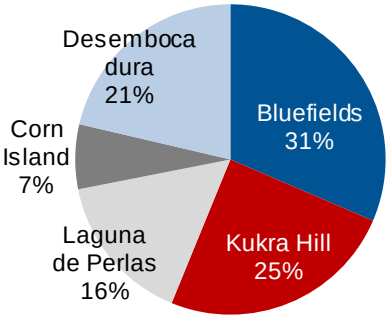
Figure 2: Focus group respondents by ethnicity



[2] In Corn Island, the EFS promoter and youth assessor were unable to recruit enough focus group participants. This was attributed to a lack of sufficient outreach to these youth and a lack of incentives to entice these youth to participate.

[3] A mixed focus group is one with participants not separated according to age.

Figure 3: Focus group respondents by municipality



MUNICIPAL-LEVEL SURVEY

The municipal level survey was used to measure EFS perceptions and EFS outcomes by both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the model. The survey results are representative of current EFS beneficiaries, while non-beneficiaries are used as a control group and to gain external perspectives on the EFS model. Among beneficiaries, the survey is also representative according to gender and municipality, but is not representative of community, ethnicity, or level of risk. The following are some of the key survey characteristics:

- Interviews were conducted in person, face-to-face with randomly selected households.
- Survey participants were between the ages of 14 and 29 years old.
- Participants were from the five EFS municipalities: Bluefields, Kukra Hill, Corn Island, Laguna de Perlas, and Desembocadura del Rio Grande.
- The sample was split with a slightly higher representation of girls than boys.
- The survey consisted of 623 individuals, of which 293 were beneficiaries and 330 were non-beneficiaries (see Table 2).
- The survey's margin of error is less than or equal to five percent.
- The survey has a 95 percent level of confidence.

Table 2: Sample details of municipal-level survey

MUNICIPALITY	EFS BENEFICIARIES		NON-BENEFICIARIES	
	Gender		Gender	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Desembocadura	26	26	25	24
Laguna de Perlas	24	28	35	43
Kukra Hill	18	18	18	18
Corn Island	17	9	18	18
Bluefields	57	70	58	73
Totals	142	151	154	176

ABOUT THE EDUCATION FOR SUCCESS MODEL FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

The Education for Success project for at-risk youth is financed by USAID through Cooperative Agreement No. AID-524-A-10-00005. FADCANIC, a civil society organization, is the project's implementing agency. FADCANIC's mission is to deepen, strengthen, and develop the autonomy of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. It aims to benefit ethnic and indigenous communities by transforming social, cultural, political, and economic relationships in the region. FADCANIC has largely concentrated on improving the quality and access to formal, and some non-formal, educational opportunities for youth, but has expanded into many other areas of development, like life skills training, with the EFS model (see "outputs" below).

The EFS project began in 2010 in three of the region's coastal municipalities. In October 2012, it expanded into two more municipalities and is set to continue until September 2017. Each of the five municipalities in which the model operates is characterized by high poverty rates, limited access to health and education, high unemployment rates, broken homes, and high levels of drug and alcohol consumption (LAPOP 2015). These municipalities generally have higher levels of insecurity than the rest of the country (LAPOP 2015). These five municipalities include Bluefields, Kukra Hill, Corn Island, Laguna de Perlas, and Desembocadura del Río Grande.

The EFS model aims to benefit youth between the ages of 10 and 29. Its goal is to improve the human development of at-risk youth by providing scholarships, vocational training, and "life skills" training. The "life skills" training is centered on supporting alternative educational opportunities in sports, music, and the arts. The model also looks to strengthen community participation in youth development, establish linkages between the private sector and youth development, and strengthen the institutional capacity of FADCANIC. Below is a more comprehensive list of EFS activities.

The main objective of EFS is to support the project communities' youth in preparing for "work, citizenship, and community life." This main objective is supported through three intermediate results (IRs), described below.

The first intermediate result (IR 1) is to increase the skills of at-risk youth in Caribbean Nicaragua. This has two sub-objectives:

1. To increase youth access to formal and non-formal educational opportunities.
2. To improve the quality of formal and non-formal educational opportunities.

To achieve these objectives, EFS carries out several activities. These include:

- Providing scholarships in formal education for students to complete their primary and

secondary studies.
- Providing scholarships in vocational training, in coordination with the National Institute of Technology (INATEC) for youth to obtain certification in technical careers.
- Awarding scholarships to youth based on an assessment of that individual's level of risk.
- Providing tutoring services to scholarship students in remedial math, English, and Spanish.
- Helping students who receive technical training through EFS to find employment.
- Training youth in "life skills," which include the arts, music, media, and athletics.
- Providing social counseling to youth.
- Training youth in peer methodologies.
- Training teachers to educate youth in "life skills" and social emotional learning.
- Developing a strategy and curriculum for "life skills" education.
- Installing computer labs in project municipalities.
- Creating interest groups for youth to raise awareness on the risks they face.

The second intermediate result (IR 2) is to improve family and community engagement in the EFS program. This has four sub-objectives:

1. To improve the capacity of youth, parents, and Community At-risk Youth Advisory Committees (CAYACs).
2. To improve the awareness of youth risk and its effects on public security.
3. To improve public participation in community activities.
4. To increase municipal and private sector investments that support local youth.

To achieve these objectives, EFS carries out several activities. These include:

- Operating the project in 58 communities in five municipalities in the RACCS.
- Organizing teachers, parents, and community leaders into CAYACs.
- Training parents of EFS scholarship students in "good parenting" practices.
- Raising money from individuals and businesses to facilitate EFS activities.
- Developing memoranda of understanding with youth organizations, professional associations, private businesses, and municipal governments to support youth through internships.
- Developing a weekly youth-led radio program to engage local authorities, community leaders, and project stakeholders on youth issues.
- Organize activities to improve the voice and leadership of youth.

The third intermediate objective (IR 3) is to improve FADCANIC's technical, managerial, and organizational systems. This has two sub-objectives:

1. To strengthen FADCANIC staff's capacity to design, manage, and evaluate programs and projects.
2. To improve FADCANIC's internal and external communications.

To achieve these objectives, EFS carries out several activities. These include:

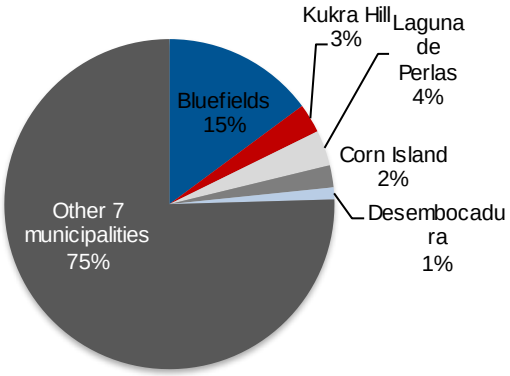
- Conducting a study on youth vulnerability in the five project municipalities.
- Conducting a quantitative baseline study of EFS.
- Developing an online monitoring and evaluation system for EFS.
- Training FADCANIC staff in managerial skills.
- Developing seven manuals to modernize operations on administration, internal finance, and acquisition control.
- Developing a Strategic Plan (2013-2017) for FADCANIC.
- Developing a Gender Strategy and Operational Plan.
- Developing a policy for working with youth.

SCOPE

The EFS model operates in five municipalities in the RACCS that, at any given time, include between 1,000 and 1,500 beneficiaries. At the time of this report, there were 1,135 youth participating in EFS (this does not include previously enrolled or graduated youth). The five municipalities covered by EFS stretch along the entire southern Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. These municipalities include: Bluefields, Kukra Hill, Corn Island, Laguna de Perlas, and Desembocadura del Rio Grande (see Figure 4). The five municipalities represent approximately 25 percent of the population of the RACCS (see Figure 5)

Figure 4: EFS municipalities (FADCANIC, 2015)

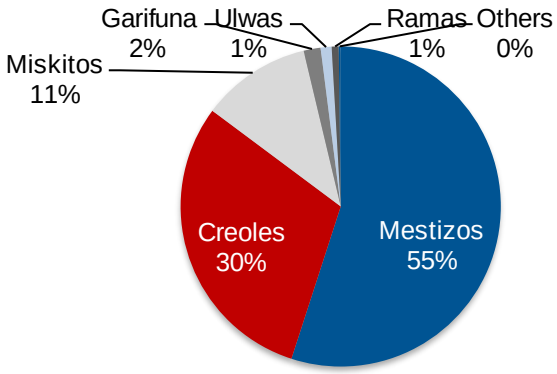
Figure 5: RACCS municipal populations (AIR 2013)



REGIONAL BACKGROUND

In 1987, the Nicaraguan constitution established two Coastal regions. Today these regions are called the Autonomous Region of the Southern Caribbean Coast (Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Sur - RACCS) and the Autonomous Region of the Northern Caribbean Coastal (Región Autónoma de la Costa Caribe Norte - RACCN). The RACCS occupies approximately 21 percent of the country's land mass and is home to a population of about 375,000 people, or about six percent of the national population. The region has a majority mestizo population but with a significant representation of indigenous people and afro-descendants (see Figure 6, LAPOP, 2015). This ethnic diversity makes the region relatively wealthy in certain social capitals.

Figure 6: Ethnic makeup in RACCS (LAPOP, 2015)



The population of the RACCS is made up mostly of people under 15 years old. This is consistent with the general youth bulge in Nicaragua. Over the next 30 years, these children - now dependent on their parents - will seek to enter the labor force. This could present opportunities in economic and productivity terms, but also pose challenges to development. The Caribbean also has higher fertility rates than the rest of the country so demographic issues will continue to be especially acute in the RACCS (UNDP, 2011). This phenomenon implies a major challenge for regional institutions in all facets of development, but especially in providing coverage or opportunities in education, employment, and reproductive health.

Generally, the RACCS is economically poorer than the rest of Nicaragua. Historically, this has meant more severe poverty (OPHI, 2014) and lower levels of human development (UNDP, 2005) in the

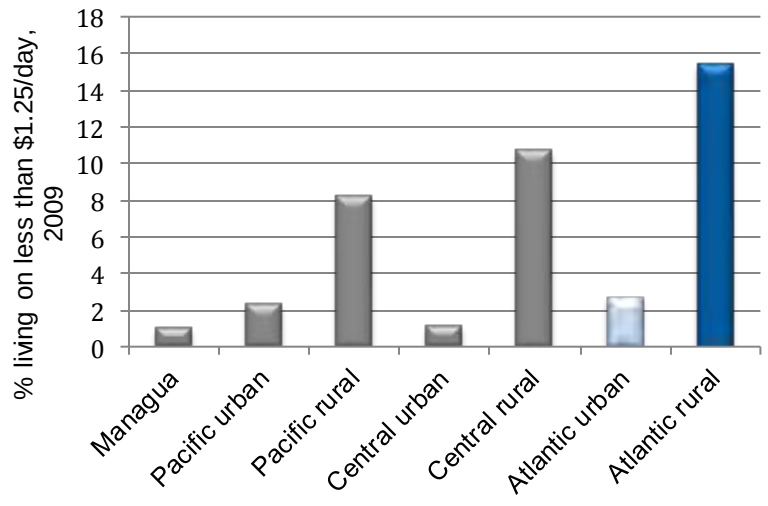
RACCS than in the rest of the country, which is already one of the poorest in Latin America. The problem of poverty is especially acute for youth: in the RACCS, poverty affects over fifty percent of the population between 10 and 29 years old (Barrios et al, 2015) (see Table 3). Poverty rates in rural areas lag behind urban areas. Rural areas on the Caribbean coast are the poorest areas in the country (see Figure 5; INIDE 2011).

Table 3: percentage of the population between the ages of 10 and 29 years old living in poverty (consumption) in the RACCS (Barrios, Soto, & Henríquez, 2015)

POVERTY AMONG YOUTH				
Poverty 2005	**Total population 2005**	**Youth population (10-29) 2005**	**Total population 2009**	**Youth population (10-29) 2009**
Extreme poverty	21.1%	18.8%	19.8%	20.3%
Poverty	37.9%	39.8%	34.7%	32.7%
Not in poverty	41.0%	41.4%	45.5%	47.0%

The RACCS has higher youth unemployment and lower rates of school enrollment than the Nicaraguan average. Poverty has a direct impact on the educational achievements and employment opportunities of youth. In the Caribbean regions, between 33 and 48 percent of the population between 15 and 24 years old has less than four years of schooling (Barrios et al., 2015). From a human development perspective, fewer than twelve years of schooling is shown to hinder the accumulation of skills needed for quality employment (Barrios et al, 2015). According to Barrios and others (2015), 59 percent of the Caribbean population between 20 and 24 is underemployed, and 47 percent of the population between 25 and 29 is underemployed. According to the Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE, 2005), 55 percent of girls between 15 and 24 years old in the five EFS municipalities are neither in school nor employed; it is nine percent for boys of the same cohort. Nationally, 38 percent of girls in this age bracket are not in school or employed, compared with 14 percent of boys.

Figure 7: Percent of Nicaraguan's living on less than $1.25 per day, 2009 (INIDE 2011)



The majority of employment in the RACCS is concentrated in primary economic activities such as fishing, forestry, and agriculture. Jobs in these sectors usually pay low wages and require little formal education. There are also more medium-skilled occupations in the region such as construction and manufacturing, but there are few high-skill employment

opportunities (Barrios and Sequeira, 2013).

The RACCS region is generally less secure than the rest of the country. The homicide rate in the southern Caribbean region is much higher than national levels, which have generally declined since 2006 (see Figure 8; National Police, 2013). If the RACCS were its own nation, it would have one of the 10th highest homicide rates in the world. Figure 9 shows that the amount of sexual crimes in the RACCS is more than double the national average, while Figure 10 shows there are more robberies per capita in the RACCS than the national average (National Police, 2013). Despite these higher levels of crime and violence, Figure 11 shows there are many fewer police per square kilometer than national averages (National Police, 2013).

Figure 8: Homicide rate per 100,000 people. RACCS vs. National Average (National Police Statistics, 2013)

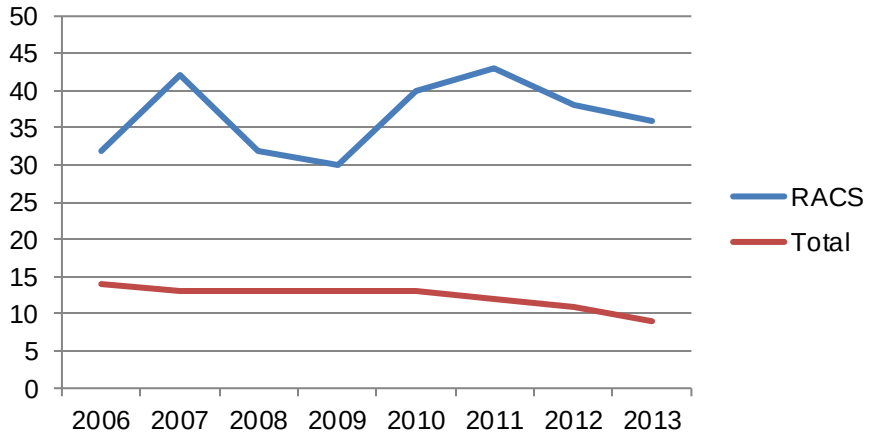


Figure 9: Sexual crimes per 100,000 (National Police Statistics, 2013)

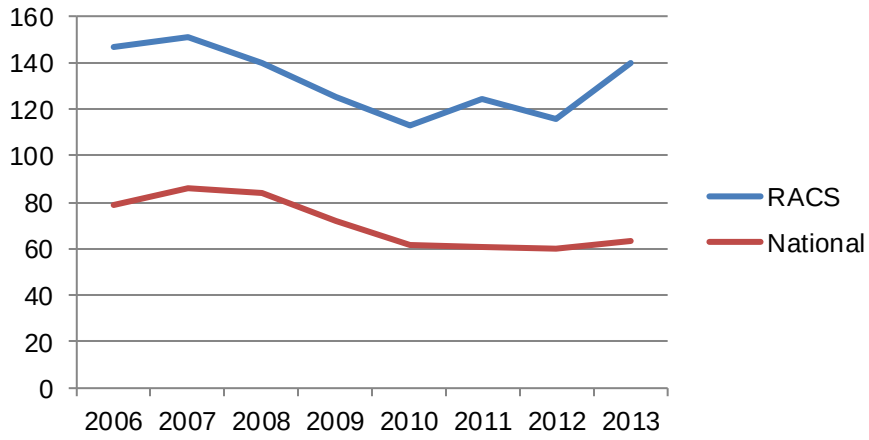


Figure 10: Robberies in all forms per 100,000 people (National Police Statistics, 2013)

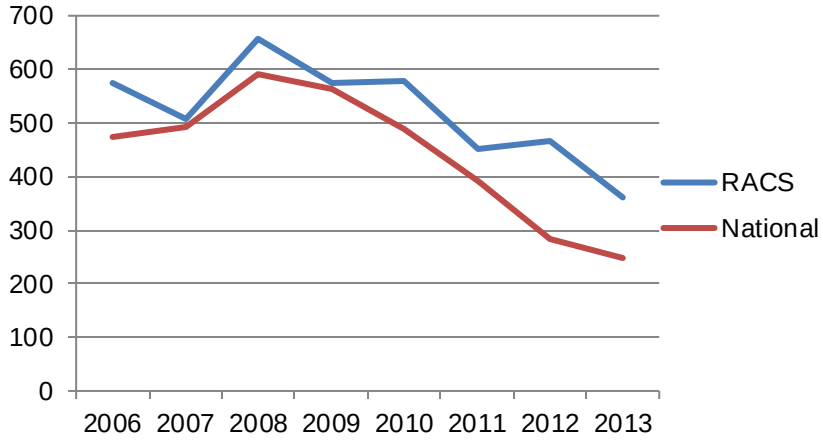
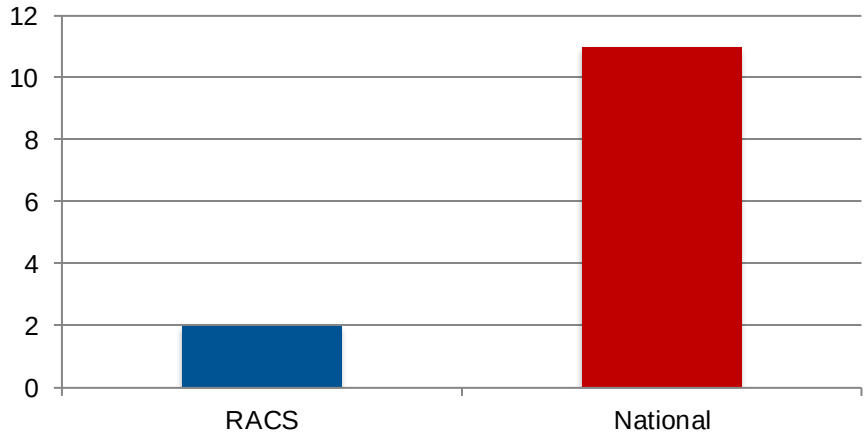


Figure 11: Police per 100km^2 (National Police Statistics, 2013)



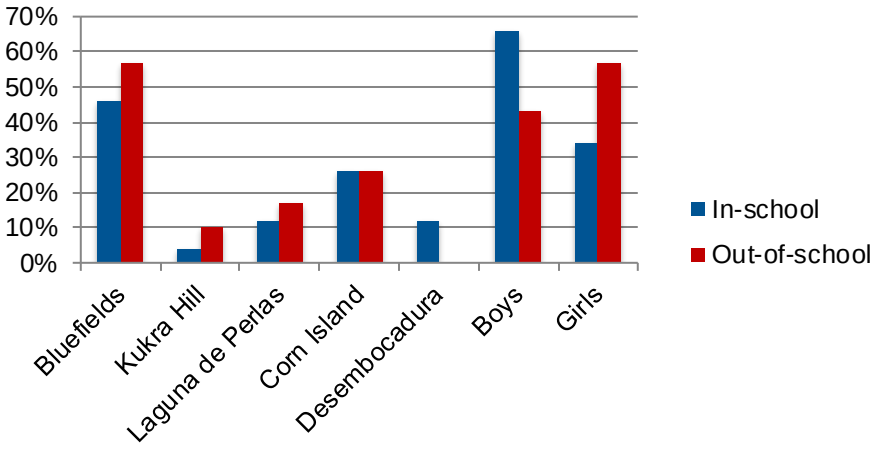
RELEVANCE

The EFS model is highly relevant to the situation of youth risk in the southern Caribbean coast, and to USAID's, FADCANIC's, and the Government of Nicaragua's development strategies. For this section, we define relevance as, "The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies" (OECD-DAC, 2010). We use three measurements of relevance: high, moderate, and low. High relevance is when EFS' strategy directly benefits a defined strategy objective. Moderate relevance is when EFS' strategy indirectly benefits a defined strategy objective. Low relevance is when EFS' strategy does not benefit a defined strategy objective. Below we examine the relevance of the EFS model to key USAID strategies, FADCANIC's organizational strategy, the government of Nicaragua's youth strategy, and the general situation of at-risk youth in the RACCS.

RELEVANCE TO THE GENERAL SITUATION OF YOUTH RISK IN THE RACCS

There are five main risks to RACCS' youth, as defined by Zamora (2014), one of the lead authors of the EFS baseline study in 2013 (AIR, 2013). Besides poverty, which is the biggest risk and a contributor to all other risk factors, the five major risks include: high-risk sexual activity, drug and alcohol abuse, vulnerable work, crime and violence, and learning limitations.[4]

Figure 12: Youth who have had sexual relations (AIR 2013)

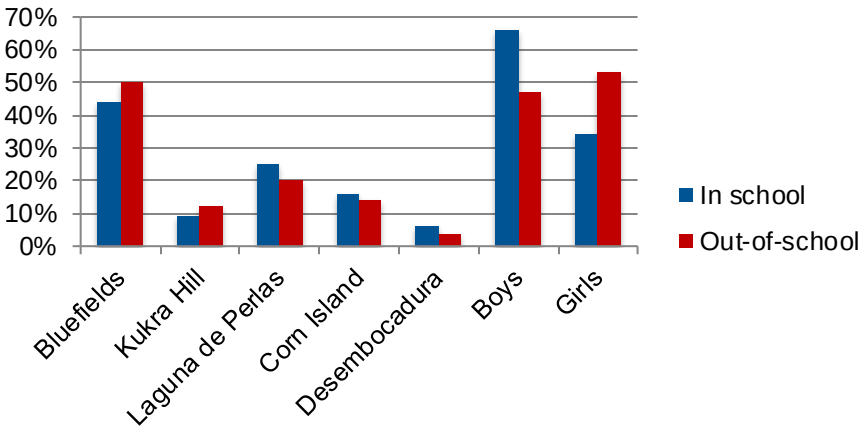


One major risk for youth in the EFS program is teen pregnancy and high-risk sexual activity, such as unprotected sex. Over half of youth respondents from the 2013 baseline study have had sexual relations. This has led to destructive consequences such as sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy, unsanitary abortions, and students leaving school to seek work to support a child. Figure 12 shows the rates of sexual activity for youth in the five EFS municipalities. The highest rates are in Bluefields (AIR 2013). The EFS model does not have a specific objective related to this risk factor as it was determined that other regional institutions have a comparable advantage to respond to this issue. Still, raising awareness on teen pregnancy and high-risk sexual activity is a component of the EFS model's counseling and good parenting services.

Alcohol and substance abuse is another major risk for youth in the RACCS. Figure 13 shows this is a major issue in Bluefields, with substantial levels of consumption also in Laguna de Perlas (AIR 2013). Reducing drug and alcohol consumption levels is not a specific intermediate objective of the EFS model, but raising awareness on this issue is an objective of the counseling and life skills activities. Still, the EFS model does not provide any rehabilitation services to youth who struggle with addiction. It was determined by project managers that including youth with addiction problems would require additional tools and resources. Instead, FADCANIC introduced a referral system to guide youth addicts they encounter to specialists.

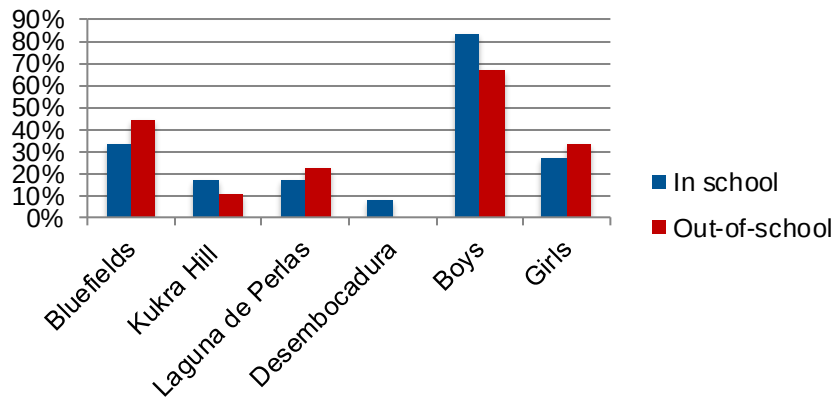
[4] In Spanish these risks include: "abuso sexual / embarazo precoz, exposición a drogas y alcohol, trabajo infantil, violencia, limitaciones en el aprendizaje."

Figure 13: Alcohol consumption (AIR 2013)



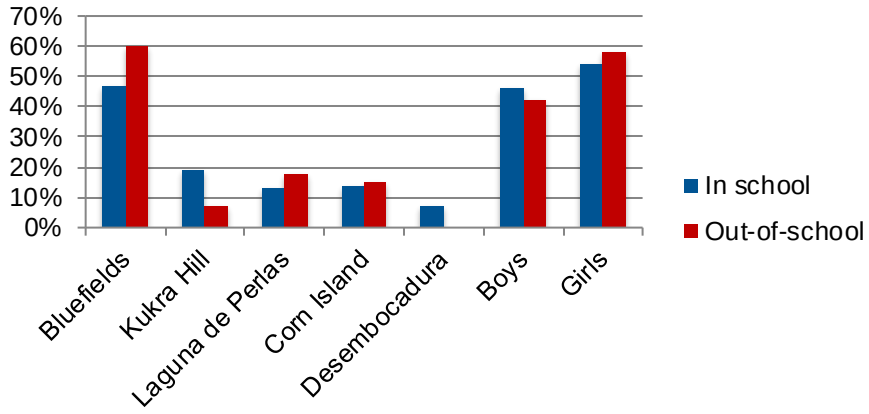
Vulnerable work situations are another major risk for youth in the southern Caribbean. Youth who work outside of the home are often exploited, working in poor conditions for little and inconsistent pay. Also, a child who works is often one who cannot attend school, which stunts the region's overall human and early childhood development, both of which contribute to strong economies and societies. Figure 14 shows the percentages of youth who work outside of the home. This is much more common for boys than girls, with the highest rates in Bluefields (AIR 2013). The EFS model seeks to make work situations less precarious for youth by providing vocational and technical training. So far, however, the ability for youth graduates of this program to attain work has been inconsistent, as will be discussed further.

Figure 14: Youth working outside of the home (AIR 2013)



Crime and violence are major sources of risk for youth in the RACCS. Violence can come in many forms, such as violence outside the home; violence within the family; and violence motivated by theft, hate, a person's gender, or other reasons. Generally, criminality and insecurity are synonymous with violence. Figure 15 shows that girls fear criminality more than boys and that the fear of violence is much higher in Bluefields than the other EFS municipalities (AIR 2013). The EFS model seeks to reduce crime and violence by providing formal and non-formal educational opportunities and counseling and good parenting services. These activities keep at-risk youth away from criminal behavior and engaged in productive endeavors.

Figure 15: Fear of criminality (AIR 2013)



Learning limitations are also considered a major risk for youth in the region. These can be related to math, writing, or reading comprehension. They can also be related to a child's basic ability to follow a teacher's instructions. Figures 16, 17, 18, and 19 show that Bluefields has the highest rates of learning deficiencies (AIR 2013). The EFS model seeks to reduce these limitations through its tutoring program.

Figure 16: Percentage of youth who struggle with math (AIR, 2013)

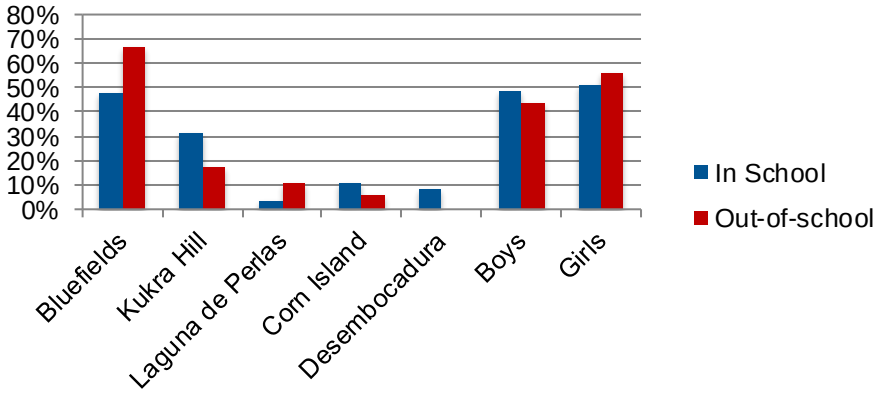


Figure 17: Percentage of youth who have difficulty following teacher instructions (AIR, 2013)

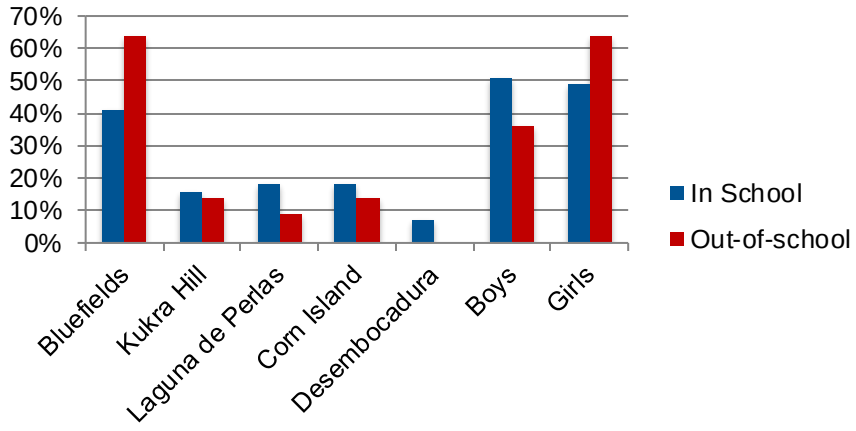


Figure 18: Percentage of youth who struggle with reading comprehension (AIR, 2013)

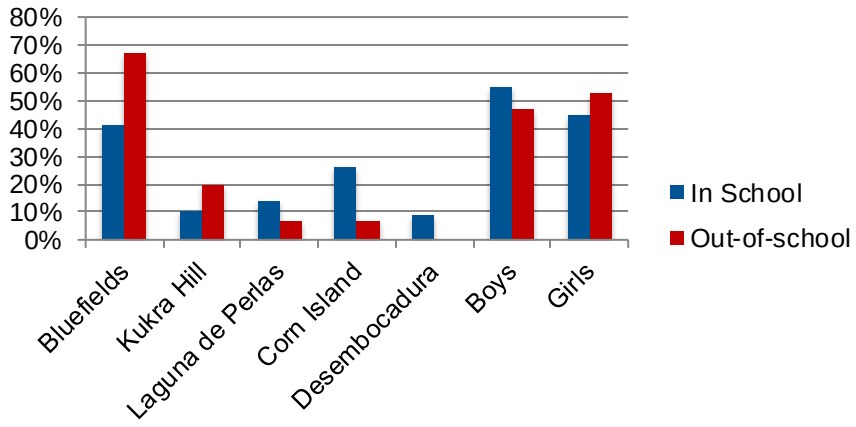
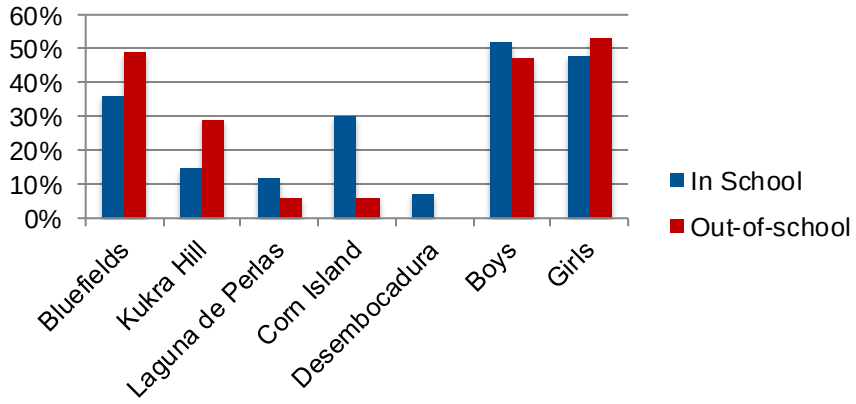


Figure 19: Percentage of youth with difficulty writing (AIR, 2013)



EFS relevance: high. Overall, EFS' activities directly meet these five youth risks. If one of these risks is not mentioned in the EFS results framework, it is still a key topic within the model's activities.

RELEVANCE TO USAID'S YOUTH POLICIES

In 2012, USAID published a new youth development policy to guide youth development activities for country missions (USAID, 2012). The policy has a main goal to "Improve the capacities and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to and benefit from more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities and nations." The policy's two objectives are:

1. Strengthen youth programming, participation and partnership in support of Agency development objectives.
2. Mainstream and integrate youth issues and engage young people across Agency initiatives and operations.

These objectives have several guiding principles, including:

- Recognizing that youth participation is vital for effective programs.
- Investing in assets that build youth resilience.
- Accounting for youth differences and commonalities.
- Creating second chance opportunities.
- Involving and supporting mentors, families, and communities.
- Pursuing gender equality.
- Embracing innovation and technology by and for youth.

EFS relevance: high. The EFS model's first intermediate objective is highly relevant to USAID's Youth Policy. The EFS model directly "improves the capacities and enables the aspirations of youth" and "strengthens" and "mainstreams" youth programming. EFS IR1 also directly abides by each of USAID's guiding principles.

RELEVANCE TO USAID'S CDCS WITH NICARAGUA

In 2013, USAID released a new Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) with Nicaragua (USAID, 2013). The new policy will govern the US' development strategy in Nicaragua from 2012 to 2017.

The CDCS' second development objective (DO2) is to contribute to reducing insecurity along Nicaragua's southern Caribbean coast, through the following Intermediary Results:

- IR 2.1 – Reading performance improved,
    - Sub-IR 2.1.1: Access to Formal and Informal Reading Programs Increased.
    - Sub-IR 2.1.2: Quality of Teacher Performance and Materials Improved.
- IR 2.2 - Workforce and life skills increased,
    - Sub-IR 2.2.1: Relevance of Employability and Life Skills Programs Increased.

    - Sub-IR 2.2.2: Access to and Completion of Employability and Citizenship Programs Increased.
- IR 2.3 – Sustainable community engagement in creating a positive environment for at-risk children and youth increased.
    - Sub-IR 2.3.1 - Capacity of Local Organizations Increased.
    - Sub-IR 2.3.2 - Community Mobilization in Support of Education and Security Increased.

EFS relevance: high. The EFS model is directly and highly relevant to each of the intermediate results of DO2 of the CDCS. In fact, the IRs of the CDCS would seem to have informed the definition of EFS' IRs, but this was not the case.

RELEVANCE TO USAID'S EDUCATION STRATEGY

In 2011, USAID published its education strategy (USAID, 2011). The current strategy only lasts until the end of 2015 but USAID is presently updating it. The current strategy has three main goals:

1. Improve reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades.
2. Improve the ability of tertiary and workforce development programs to generate workforce skills relevant to a country's development goals.
3. Increase equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments for 15 million learners.

The EFS model is highly relevant to each of these goals and their sub objectives, which include:

Goal 1:

- Improved reading instruction;
- Improved reading delivery systems;
- Greater engagement, accountability and transparency by communities and the public.

Goal 2:

- Increased access to vocational, technical, and tertiary education and training for underserved and disadvantaged groups;
- Improved quality of tertiary education and research in support of country development priorities;
- Improved relevance and quality of workforce development programs.

Goal 3:

- Provide safe learning opportunities for children and youth;
- Strengthen crisis prevention efforts; and
- Strengthen institutional capacity to provide services.

EFS relevance: high. The EFS model's activities tackle each of these goals directly.

RELEVANCE TO USAID'S GENDER STRATEGY

The USAID Gender and Female Empowerment Policy (USAID, 2012) requires all USAID programming integrate the following outcomes:

- Reduce gender disparities in access to public and political decision-making spaces and positions at local and regional levels;
- Reduce cultural acceptance of GBV; and
- Increase capability of women, girls and boys, particularly from ethnic and linguistic minority populations, to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making in households, communities and societies.

EFS relevance: high. These are not direct objectives of EFS, but they are inherent in the model. The EFS model seeks to reduce gender disparities by including an equal number of boys and girls in its programming. It also seeks to reduce sexual and gender-based violence. Most importantly, it targets girls and boys from diverse ethnic and socio-linguistic backgrounds.

RELEVANCE TO THE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT'S YOUTH POLICY

Nicaragua's National Youth Policy is valid until the end of 2015. This policy aims to, "improve the quality of life and create opportunities for Nicaraguan youth through social integration, greater autonomy, increasing youth potential, and by recognizing that youth are a strategic focus of the nation's development." Specific objectives include:

- Improving employment opportunities for youth;
- Improving youth access to a quality education;
- Improving the health of youth;
- Increasing youth participation in the nation's development;
- Promoting sport and cultural spaces for youth; and
- Preventing youth violence.

EFS relevance: high. The EFS model's programming is highly relevant to Nicaragua's youth policy objectives. The model helps youth employment, improves access to education, helps prevent violence, and promotes sports and cultural spaces. Although, the EFS model does not specifically address health improvements for youth and the Nicaraguan government's idea of youth participation in development is closely aligned with party loyalties and increasing youth participation in the Sandinista Youth group (Juventud Sandinista) – two areas in which EFS' youth development model does not align with the government's youth development model. The government also has a general development strategy for the autonomous Caribbean regions (GON, 2012). The EFS model is relevant to this too.

RELEVANCE TO FADCANIC'S MISSION

FADCANIC's ten guiding principles are as follows:

1. Promoting regional development in way specific to ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity,

2. Utilizing the region's biodiversity and natural resources in a sustainable way that benefits the population,
3. Preserving and enhancing the region's autonomy,
4. Strengthening human resources,
5. Ensuring the full participation of women,
6. Prioritizing children,
7. Enhancing opportunities for afro and indigenous populations,
8. Improving employment opportunities without discrimination,
9. Protecting and nurturing cultural diversity, and
10. Promoting regional, national, and international knowledge exchanges.

FADCANIC's education program is the most relevant to EFS. The four objectives of this program include:

1. Using education to build human resources for the future,
2. Preparing youth to become leaders,
3. Improving the ability and capacity of teachers, and
4. Improving literacy rates.

EFS relevance: high. EFS model components are highly relevant to strengthening human resources, prioritizing children, and enhancing opportunities for Afro and indigenous populations. They are either indirectly relevant or not relevant to FADCANIC's other guiding principles. EFS model components are highly relevant to FADCANIC's education goals.

INPUTS AND OUTPUTS

The EFS model, as implemented in the RACCS, is generally cost effective, though capacity to fully execute the monitoring and evaluation system is limited. This section will briefly look at the inputs and outputs of the EFS model in the RACCS. Based on these, we carry out a simple cost effectiveness analysis and point out some capacity constraints. We define inputs as "the financial, human, and material resources used for the development intervention" and outputs as "the products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes" (OECD-DAC 2010).

INPUTS

The EFS project is a $6.7 million dollar program that aims to benefit 4,420 youth between the ages of 10 and 29; 2,100 parents; 190 teachers; and 90 youth mentors. Funding for the project began in October 2010 and will finish by September 2017. Since 2010, the project has spent approximately $3.7 million, or 54 percent of the total budget. In addition, a countless amount of volunteer time has been dedicated to the project.

OUTPUTS

Table 4: Major EFS outputs by intermediate result (IR), October 2010-June 2015 (FADCANIC 2015)

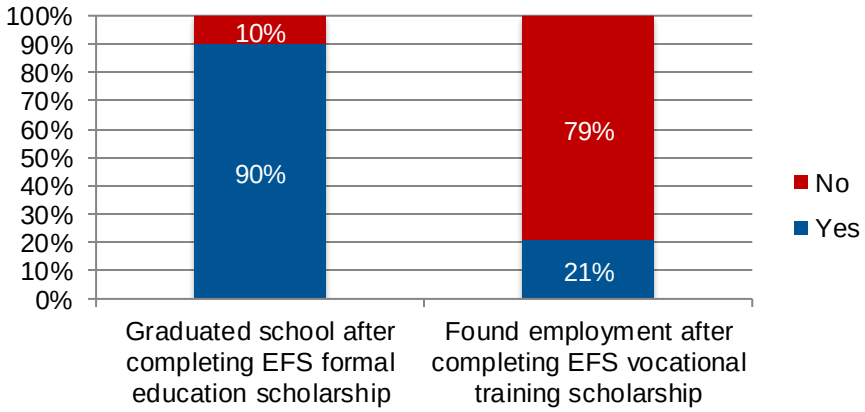
IR 1 – Increase skills of at-risk youth	
Provide formal education scholarships.	1,513 scholarship students complete primary and secondary studies. 90% graduation rate.
Provide vocational scholarships	1,363 youth receive technical certifications.
Award scholarships to youth based on an assessment of that individual's level of risk.	Youth risk assessment designed.
Provide tutoring services to scholarship students in remedial math, English, and Spanish.	232 tutors have tutored scholarship students.
Help students find employment.	290 youth gained new or better jobs in areas related to their vocational training.
Train youth in "life skills."	1,464 youth trained in "life skills."
Provide social counseling to youth.	247 students received group counseling; 202 students received individual counseling.
Train youth in peer methodologies.	267 youth trained.
Train teachers to educate youth in life skills and social emotional learning.	336 teachers trained.
Develop a strategy and curriculum for life skills education.	Curriculum developed and implemented.
Install computer labs in project municipalities.	Seven computer labs installed.
Create interest groups for youth to raise awareness on the risks they face.	Interest groups created.
IR 2 – Improve family and community engagement with EFS	
Operate the project in communities within the 5 municipalities.	Operating in 58 communities
Organize teachers, parents, and community leaders into Community At-risk Youth Advisory Committees (CAYACs).	167 CAYAC members.
Teach parents trained in "good parenting" practices.	1,252 parents trained.
Raise money from individuals and businesses to facilitate EFS activities.	$568,964.70 raised in private donations and cost sharing.
Develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local organizations to support youth through internships.	27 MOUs signed
Improve local outreach.	Developed a weekly youth-led radio program to engage local authorities, community leaders, and project stakeholders on youth issues. Social media outreach is underway as well.
IR 3 – Improve FADCANIC's technical, managerial, and organizational systems	
Conduct studies to generate knowledge.	A youth vulnerability study and a baseline study, KAP on Life Skills, KAP on policies for youth, a good parenting manual, EFS scholarship cost study, a youth recreational and sports infrastructure assessment, a

	socio-economic study of the five EFS municipalities, and the baseline study for EFS.
Improve monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity.	Developed an online M&E system and conducted an external mid-term evaluation.
Improve management capacity.	Trained FADCANIC staff in managerial skills.
Modernize operations.	Developed seven manuals on administration, internal finance, and acquisition control. Also, set up a human resources unit.
Develop clear strategies.	Developed a Strategic Plan (2013-2017) for FADCANIC, a Gender Strategy and Operational Plan, protocol for life-skills training, a policy for working with youth, and a sustainability plan.

SCHOLARSHIPS, PERSONNEL, AND OTHER DIRECT COSTS

The most expensive activities of the EFS model in the RACCS were the scholarship programs. These comprised approximately $1.2 million from October 2010 until September 2014, equivalent to 47 percent of the allotted budget for scholarships for the life of the program. Despite this, EFS is ahead of schedule in terms of scholarship enrollment. There have been a total of 2,876 youth enrolled in formal education or trained in a vocational skill through scholarships, which is 65 percent of the target population for these programs. This means that spending has been more effective than originally planned.

Figure 20: Success rate of EFS scholarships (municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

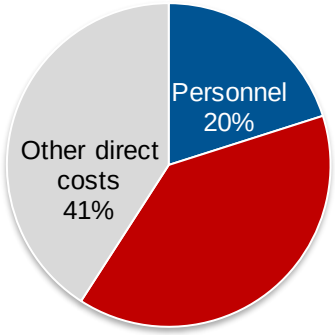


Both educational and vocational scholarships have been effective towards reducing youth risk. Of the 1,513 youth with scholarships in formal education, there is a 90 percent graduation rate. Of the 1,363 youth who completed scholarships in vocational training, 21 percent (290 youth) have been able to find work (see Figure 20). The high graduation rate could reflect FADCANIC's uniquely long history and high capacity in providing formal education opportunities. By contrast, providing non-formal education is an activity in which FADCANIC is relatively less experienced. More importantly, there is a severe lack of employment opportunities in the RACCS, so a 21 percent

employment rate should be considered a success. This is 290 more jobs than would have existed without the project and there is no way to quantify the short- and long-term impact of keeping over 1,300 at-risk youth off the streets and engaged in productive activities. Moreover, the inability of the other 79 percent of vocational graduates to attain employment is more a reflection of the RACCS' weak labor market. This is a constraint to implementing the EFS model in a part of the world with a stagnant job market. It should be noted that finding employment is not an objective of the EFS model, only to improve formal and informal education opportunities.

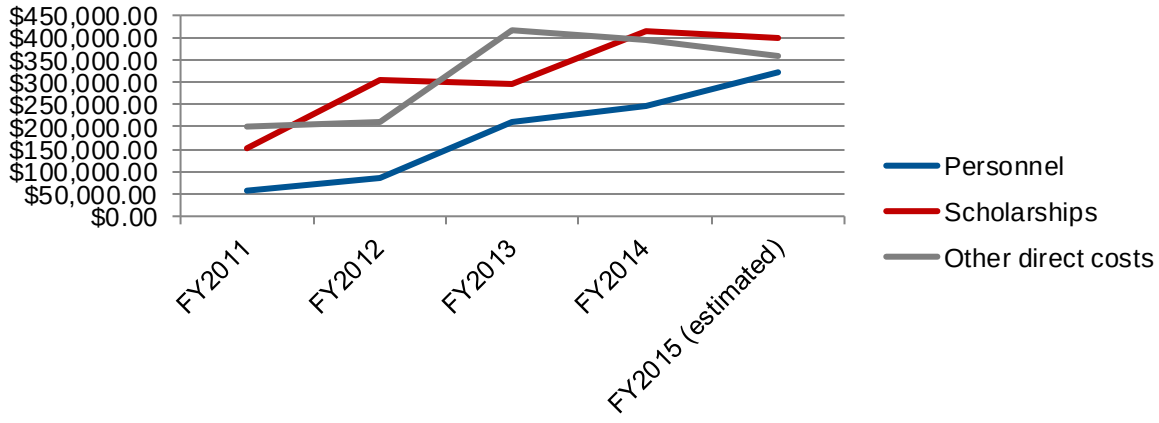
Spending on personnel is the lowest expense among personnel, scholarships, and direct costs (figure 21). This means that human resource overhead is not necessarily a huge burden to overall model costs; it is only 20 percent of total costs through the first five years of EFS. This low spending, therefore, does not detract from project components.

Figure 21: Expenditures from October 2010 to September 2014 (FADCANIC Annual Budget, 2014)



Spending on "other direct costs" is significant. Much of this budget is dedicated to the logistics of operating the model in a region with poor infrastructure. Many of the communities within EFS are only accessible by boat, so travelling expenses are high. This is a peculiarity of working in the RACCS, and it is reasonable to assume that the logistics of operating this model in regions with greater connectivity would be less costly.

Figure 22: Expenditure trends from October 2010 to September 2015 (estimated) (FADCANIC Annual Budget, 2014)



The $6.7 million cash infusion into FADCANIC for the EFS program represented an opportunity, but also a challenge. This is a significant amount of money for a regional implementing agency. As we have seen in the case of the EFS project, FADCANIC staff had to expand into newer areas of operations, such as non-formal education. They also had to assume the financial and administrative responsibilities of managing such a large investment. This is an inherent difficultly in absorbing cash infusions that represent a major portion of an institution's funding. Organizations are forced to scale up, which can be a challenge. For example, one area in which FADCANIC struggled was with the implementation of the modern, but cumbersome, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system required by USAID (see Box 2). Given these challenges, FADCANIC staff has generally met the new capacity requirements for executing such a large program, and scaled up effectively. This may be more or less problematic for other implementing agencies tasked with implementing this model. For this reason, the large financial investment and capacity requirements should be considered a real risk if the model is duplicated elsewhere.

Box 2: Monitoring and evaluation

The EFS project's statistical monitoring and evaluation (M&E) database has exceeded the technical capabilities of FADCANIC staff. The new M&E database started operating in 2013. In this system, information from all 58 EFS communities is collected and entered into an electronic registry. This data tracks the more than 3,000 youth who are participating or have participated in EFS. It requires consistent data inputs from promoters from each municipality. FADCANIC staff estimates that promoters dedicate one day in five to inputting data. But, the FADCANIC team is still in the process of familiarizing itself with this system. Training was provided in 2013, but shortly after receiving it, FADCANIC's former head of M&E left for another job. His replacement was thrust into this position without any formal training in the system. When asked if they are capable of executing this monitoring system, FADCANIC's new head of M&E said, "as beginners, yes. We are 65 percent capable." This M&E system is very comprehensive and functional; but the staff responsible for it has not yet received adequate training.

EFFECTIVENESS: OUTCOMES AND SURVEY FINDINGS

This evaluation shows the EFS model has been effective in achieving many of its intended outcomes. EFS is increasing the skills of at-risk youth in Caribbean Nicaragua, improving family and community engagement in the EFS program, and improving the implementing agency's technical, managerial, and organizational systems. Effectiveness is defined as, "The extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance" (OECD-DAC 2010).

Measuring EFS' outcomes is a challenge. Outcomes are defined as, "The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs" (OECD-DAC, 2010). Measuring long-term effects is difficult in the absence of specific data points that can measure the impact EFS has

had on outcomes. Moreover, measuring outcomes can have problems of attribution. Attribution is defined as, "The ascription of a causal link between observed (or expected to be observed) changes and a specific intervention" (OECD-DAC, 2010). Outcomes such as reductions in violence or higher employment cannot be causally linked, or attributed directly, to EFS outputs. Such socio-economic improvements could be a result of many factors and processes.

For this reason, we relied on the perspectives of EFS beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries to measure the effectiveness of the EFS model. These perspectives were collected as part of a survey that is representative of all EFS beneficiaries by gender and municipality. The perspectives of a non-representative control group of non-EFS beneficiaries were also collected to improve challenges of attribution and provide a limited counterfactual. Below, we present some of the survey's general findings and EFS model outcomes in education, employment, life skills, violence, and inclusiveness. After, we look more generally at perceptions of the EFS model by both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

EDUCATIONAL FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

Most students living in the five municipalities are enrolled in the public education system. Youth within the EFS program tend to rely on public education more than youth not involved in the program, with 97 percent of EFS youth at public schools, but only 80 percent of non-EFS youth in public schools. Approximately three percent of EFS youth are enrolled in private schools, compared to 17 percent of non-EFS students. This finding reflects territorial inequalities in socio-economic wellbeing. The majority of private schooling, which is of a higher quality, but also more expensive, is found in Bluefields and Corn Island. Of the five EFS municipalities, these two are the most urban and have the most diversified labor markets. This finding also shows that the EFS model is successful in targeting poorer at-risk youth who cannot afford private education.

For surveyed youth in the formal educational system, school represents a strategic investment that allows them to improve their living conditions over the short- and medium-term. When asked, "What have you learned from your education that will help you find employment or start a business?" the responses from both EFS youth (94 percent) and non-EFS youth (87 percent) were positive (see Table 5). From an urban-rural or municipal perspective, there were no major differences. The main answers given were that education helped them: succeed at work, gain responsibility, improve job opportunities, and build knowledge or organizational skills.

Table 5: Linking education to employment opportunities (municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

"What have you learned from your education that will help you find employment or start a business?"												
	EFS youth						Non-EFS youth					
	Desembocadura	Laguna de Perlas	Kukra Hill	Corn Island	Bluefields	Total	Desembocadura	Laguna de Perlas	Kukra Hill	Corn Island	Bluefields	Total

Improved job opportunities	6.4%	20.8%	32.1%	15.4%	15.8%	16.7%	11.1%	30.4%	8.8%	61.8%	18.6%	24.1%
Succeed at work	19.1%	37.5%	39.3%	7.7%	27.2%	27.0%	35.6%	40.6%	8.8%	32.4%	17.7%	26.4%
Strengthen knowledge and oragnizational capacity	25.5%	10.4%	17.9%	19.2%	26.3%	21.7%	33.3%	15.9%	8.8%	2.9%	28.3%	21.0%
Improve interpersonal skills	10.6%			3.8%	6.1%	4.9%	11.1%	0.0%	11.8%	0.0%	3.5%	4.4%
Gain more work responsibility	38.3%	29.2%	10.7%	53.8%	23.7%	28.9%	11.1%	30.4%	8.8%	61.8%	18.6%	24.1%
No response		2.1%			.9%	.8%	0.0%	1.4%	2.9%	0.0%	.9%	1.0%

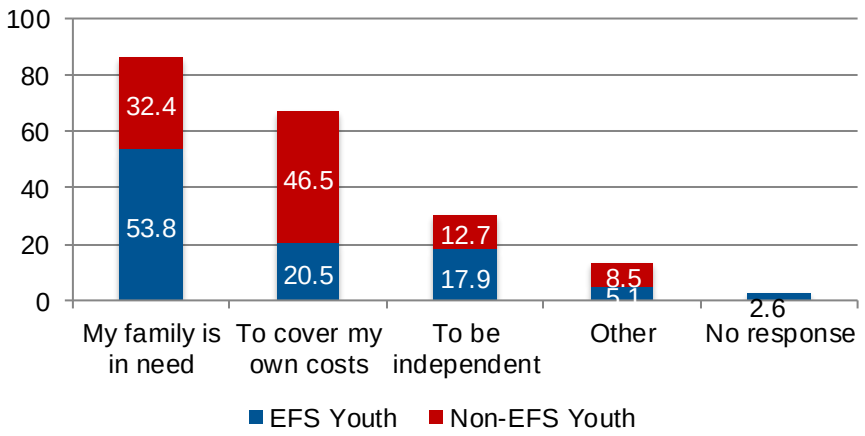
Learning difficulties tend to be worse in rural areas. This was shown clearly among non-EFS youth in the five municipalities, especially Desembocadura, where 32.7 percent of respondents claimed learning difficulties and Kukra Hill, where 25 percent of respondents claimed the same (see Table 6). These two municipalities are the most rural of the five. This lack of comprehension could lead to long-term negative impacts on literacy and other educational outcomes. It could also hinder the ability of youth from these areas to develop the skills necessary for better employment opportunities. Youth aspirations could be stunted.

Table 6: Perceived difficulties in reading comprehension among non-EFS youth (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

	Municipality					Total
	Desembocadura	Laguna de Perlas	Kukra Hill	Corn Island	Bluefields	
Yes	32.7%	16.7%	25.0%	16.7%	20.7%	21.6%
No	67.3%	83.3%	75.0%	83.3%	79.3%	78.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

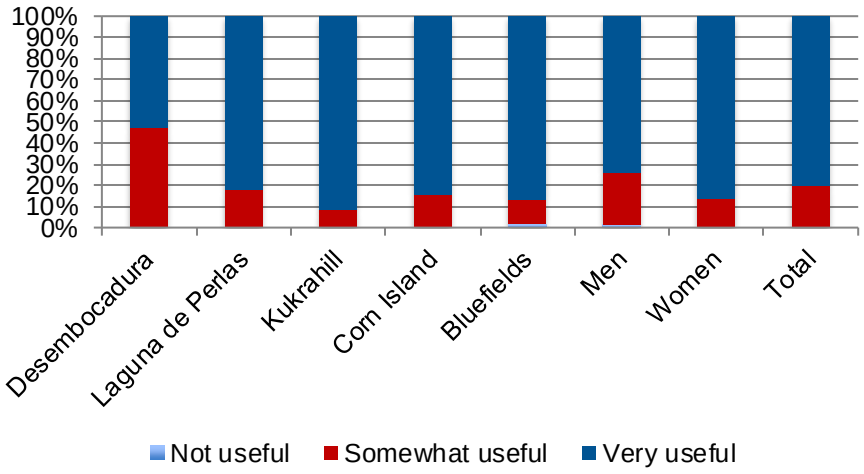
Youth tend to drop out of school because of poor personal or family living conditions. Most survey respondents said they left school because "the family is in need" or to "cover one's own costs and be

Figure 23: "Why do you need to work?" (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



independent" (see Figure 23). This tradeoff between continuing school and working is a common one in the RACCS. It is a scenario where survival strategies in the short-term directly limit long-term development.

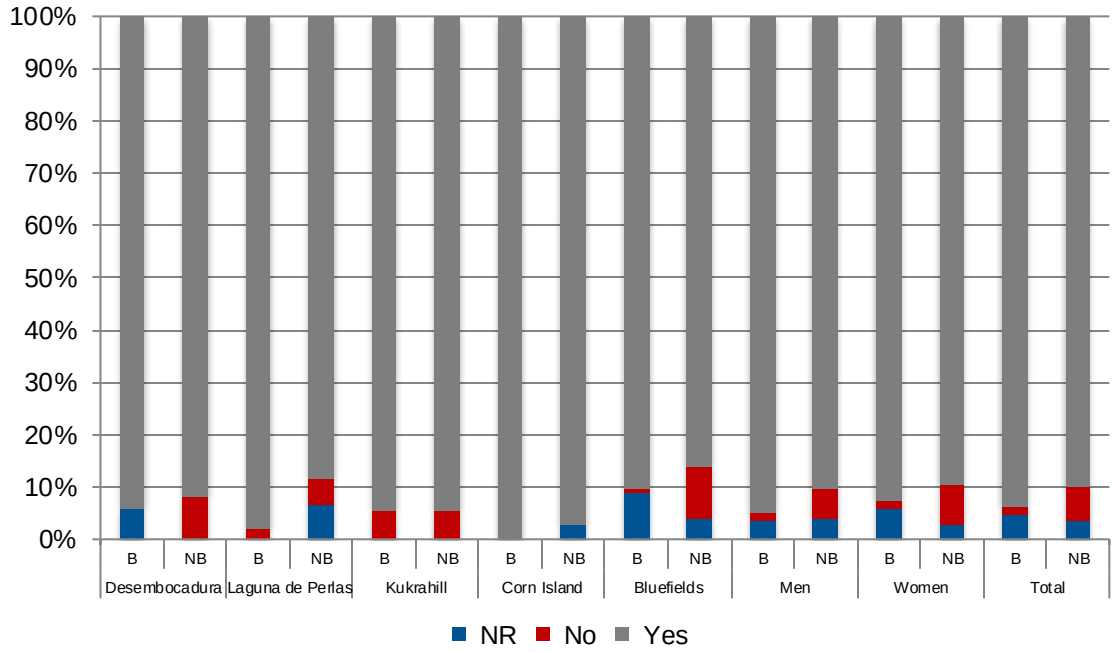
Figure 24: How useful have EFS' educational services been for your family (survey of beneficiaries) (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering



EFS beneficiaries believe that their EFS-supported education has been very useful. Only in Desembocadura did a significant portion (almost half) of respondents say their education was only somewhat useful (see Figure 24). This could reflect the rural, isolated nature of Desembocadura and the fact that a formal education is relatively less imperative than in areas with a more diverse labor market and greater connectivity to non-local opportunities. This outlook by EFS beneficiaries shows the EFS model is succeeding in improving the quality of educational opportunities, but, again, this is difficult to measure directly.

Generally, EFS youth believe their education will help them find work (Figure 25). In each of the survey municipalities, most youth responded favorably to the question "Will your education help you find employment or start a business?" Moreover, in four of the five municipalities (except Kukra Hill), a greater percentage of EFS youth responded favorably to the question than non-EFS youth responded favorably. This means that the EFS model has done a good job of imparting the long-term value of education on its beneficiaries.

Figure 25: Will your education help you find employment or start a business? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



EMPLOYMENT FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

EFS youth tend to encounter more precarious work situations than non-EFS youth. Four out of ten survey respondents say they work, which is true for both EFS and non-EFS youth. But, when we look closer, we see some differences. For EFS youth, 26 percent were self-employed, and 32 percent worked in their family's business. For non-EFS youth, 47 percent found salaried work, and 27 percent were self-employed. The lack of salaried jobs for EFS youth shows they have higher employment vulnerability than non-EFS youth, which is possibly a reflection of fewer opportunities associated with living in a higher state of risk. Figure 26 supports this by showing that only 26 percent of EFS participants who work are provided benefits from their employer, such as social security or another type of support if in need, while 50 percent of non-EFS youth receive these benefits. Sixty-three percent of EFS youth with a job say they receive no benefits at all from their employer.

Figure 26, which shows EFS youth work in vulnerable conditions, presents an interesting contrast to Figure 27, which shows that EFS youth are highly optimistic about finding quality work. This can be partially explained by the type of training provided by the EFS model in life skills and entrepreneurial skills. This training teaches empowerment and that education and job training can help one find a good job, which is reflected in Figure 27. But, youth in the RACCS are confronted by the hard reality that there are very few secure work opportunities in the municipalities, especially for at-risk youth. Still, even if youth cannot find employment in the RACCS they are better trained to seek work elsewhere if they migrate. There is very little data on the benefits the EFS model has on potential migrants. In theory, all graduates of the EFS programs are better

equipped to work. Still, the completion of the program could present a small risk by creating an exaggerated sense of hope and greater frustration for EFS youth when that hope is not realized. Figure 27 reaffirms what this suggests and should generally be considered a positive outcome, that the EFS model has been effective in raising the hopes and aspirations of its beneficiaries.

Figure 26: What does your work provide you with? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

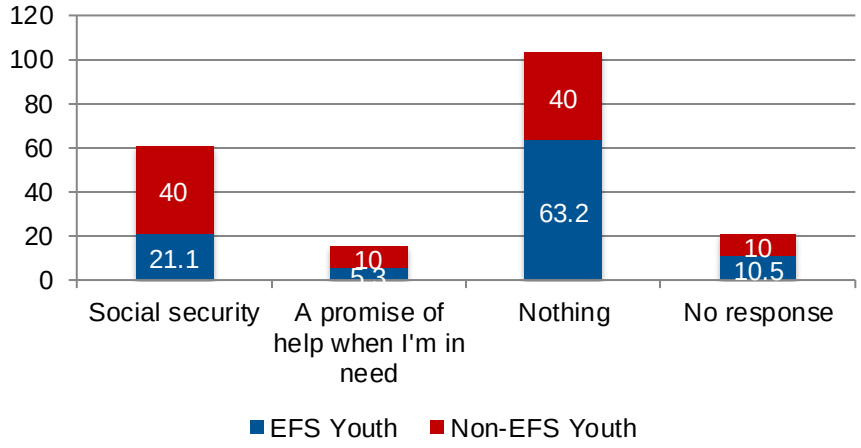
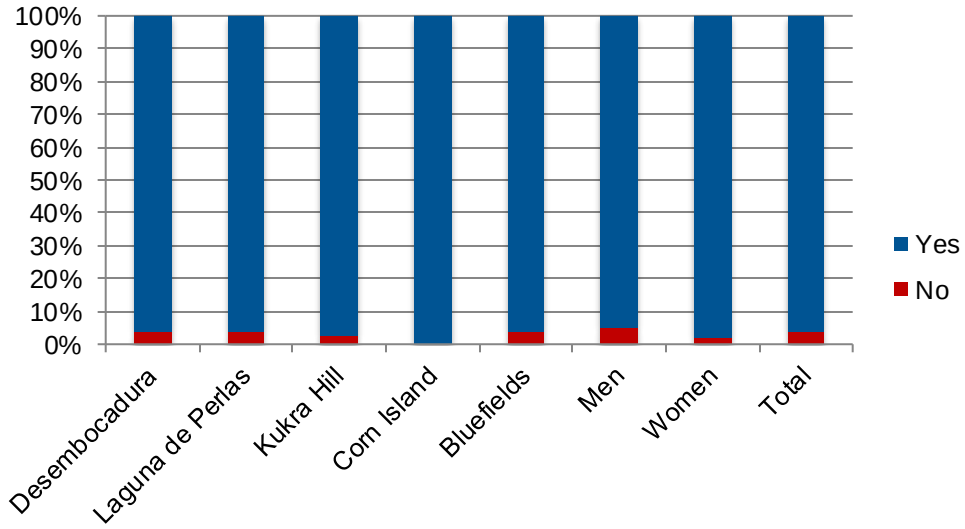


Figure 27: Has EFS increased your aspirations and optimism? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



EFS youth believe their career trajectories are improving. Despite the structural difficulties of finding secure work in EFS communities, 60 percent of EFS youth said the training they received helped them find work (see Figure 28). This is despite the fact that only 21 percent of EFS' technical training graduates have actually found work as a result of their training. This seems to suggest a disconnect between the positive outlooks of EFS youth and the reality of the RACCS' job market. Figure 29 affirms this by showing EFS youth beneficiaries are more likely than non-beneficiaries to say their career prospects are improving. Figure 30 shows that the overwhelming majority of EFS youth found vocational training to be beneficial to their families. Focus groups show this is because of the youth's higher prospect for landing a job and their general sense of accomplishment.

Figure 28: Did EFS vocational training help you find a job? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

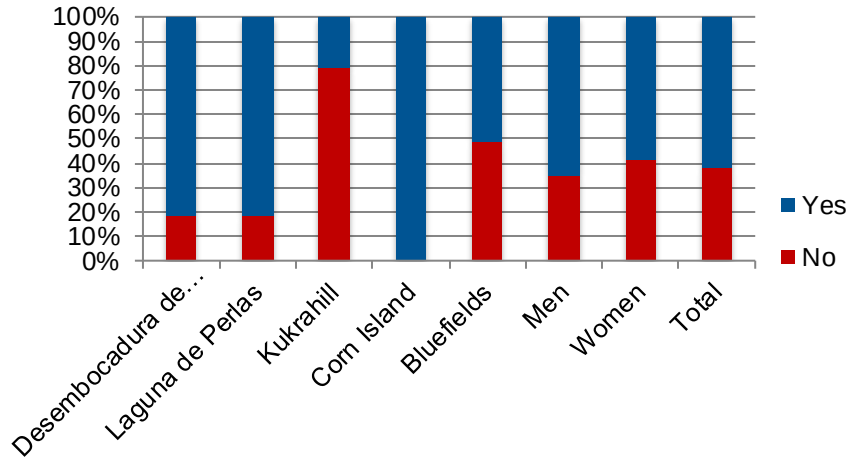


Figure 29: How do you evaluate your work trajectory? **B=beneficiaries; NB=non-beneficiaries; NR=no response. No data available for beneficiaries of Kukra Hill (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)**

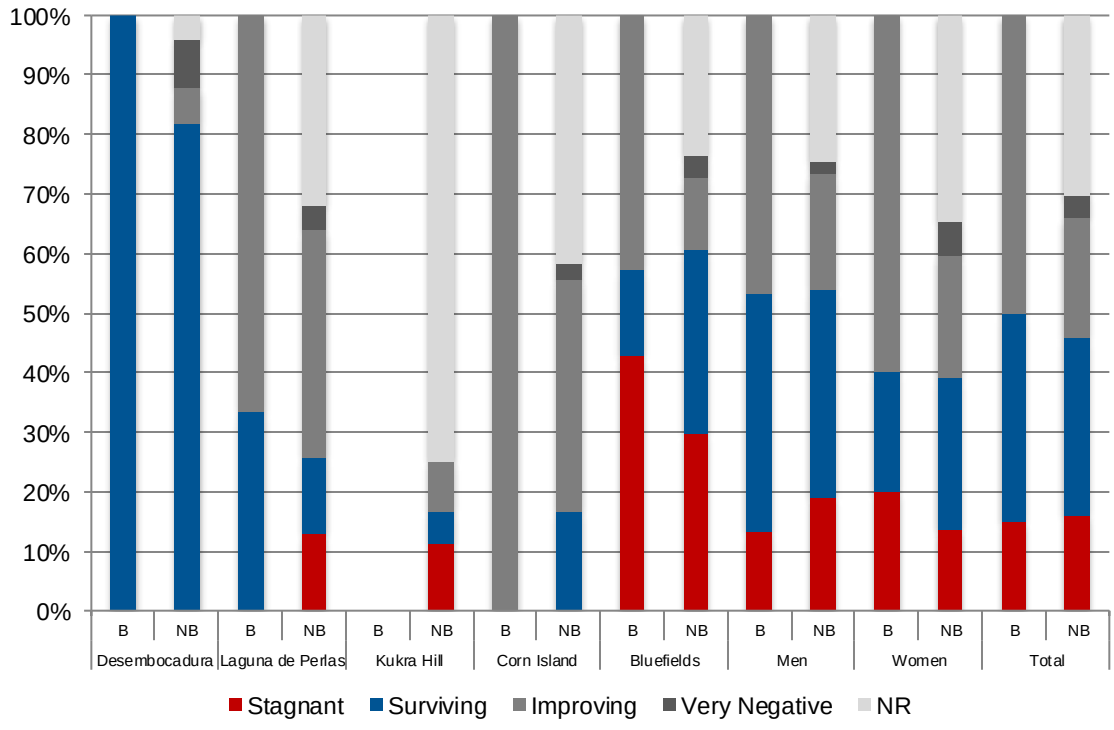
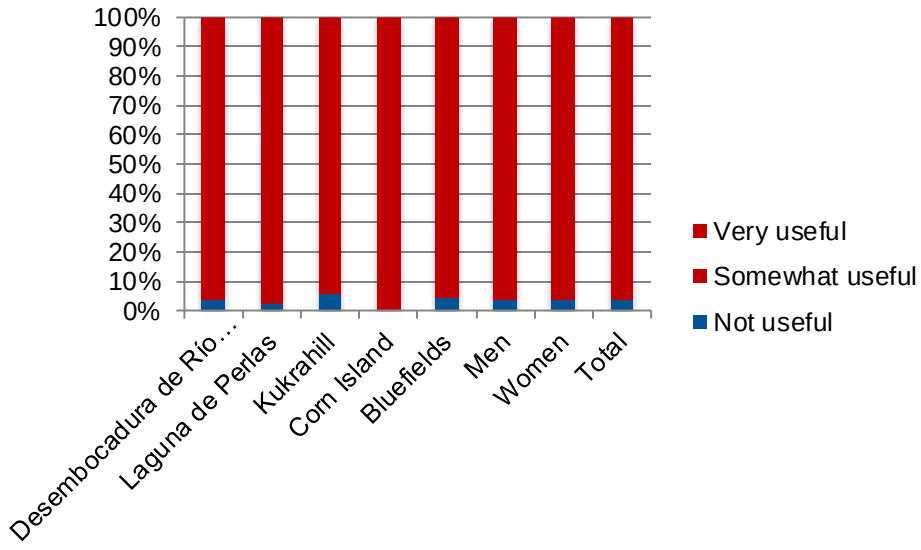


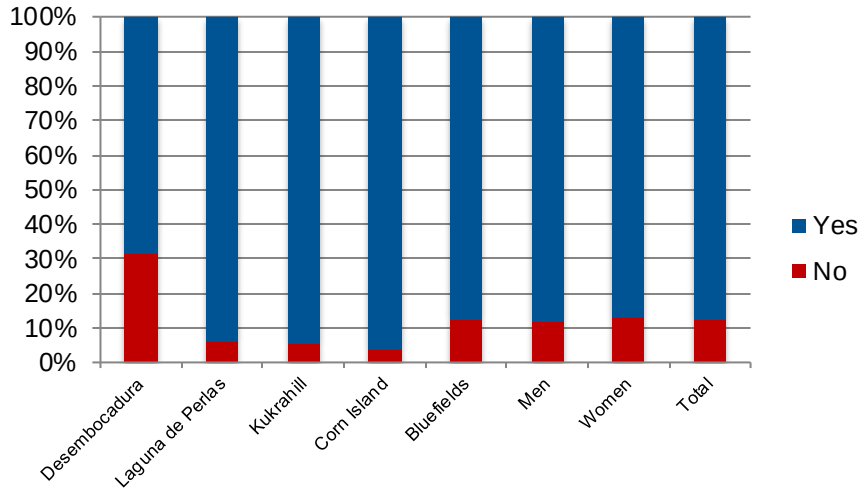
Figure 30: How useful has EFS vocational training program been for your family?
(Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



LIFE SKILLS FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

EFS youth generally believe that life skills training benefitted their family. In all, 88 percent believed this (see Figure 31). EFS youth prioritized the components of the life skills training that were the most important; computer training was ranked the most important, followed by sports, music, and art. This suggests that life skills trainings are succeeding in providing alternate activities to high-risk behavior for youth. It also shows that the menu of activities is relevant to the interests of local youth. Focus group discussions show that this component has had problems maintaining trainers for these activities, but this does not seem to have created a negative perception towards the program

Figure 31: Has your family benefitted from EFS' "life skills" program? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



EFS youth in Desembocadura, on average, found each of the youth activities less helpful to their families than the rest of the municipalities, though all overwhelmingly found these activities helpful. In Desembocadura, they found the educational, vocational, and life skills trainings all less helpful than did the other four communities (see Figures 24, 30, and 31). This is interesting because it contradicts the general sentiment within EFS that the model works the best in Desembocadura and Kukra Hill, but is the most challenging in Corn Island and Laguna de Perlas (interview with Hazel Wilson, EFS Coordinator, August 7, 2015, Bluefields). Specifically, about Desembocadura, FADCANIC said the community is excited to make the components work, not that the components have worked. It is possible that this community lacks enough market and educational opportunities to take full advantage of the project components, but have the motivation to do so. Again, the limits of the model are exposed by the hard socio-economic realities within the communities.

Boys found the life skills training more helpful to their families than girls, while girls found the educational and vocational trainings most helpful to their families (see Figures 24, 30, and 31). This could possibly reflect gender norms in the region. It is probably more acceptable for boys to engage in activities such as sports, music, and art. Girls, on the other hand, may find the practical aspects of EFS more helpful because gender norms have traditionally made life skills – such as art, sports and music - more acceptable activities for boys.

VIOLENCE FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

EFS youth tend to be more informed about the challenges associated with violence than the group of non-EFS youth. The EFS youth explain violence in terms of being victims of it. This could reflect the higher risk living situations of EFS youth than non-EFS youth. From a territorial perspective, Bluefields is perceived as the least safe municipality; with 45 percent of respondents saying it is not safe. By contrast, only 23 to 30 percent of respondents from the other municipalities say their

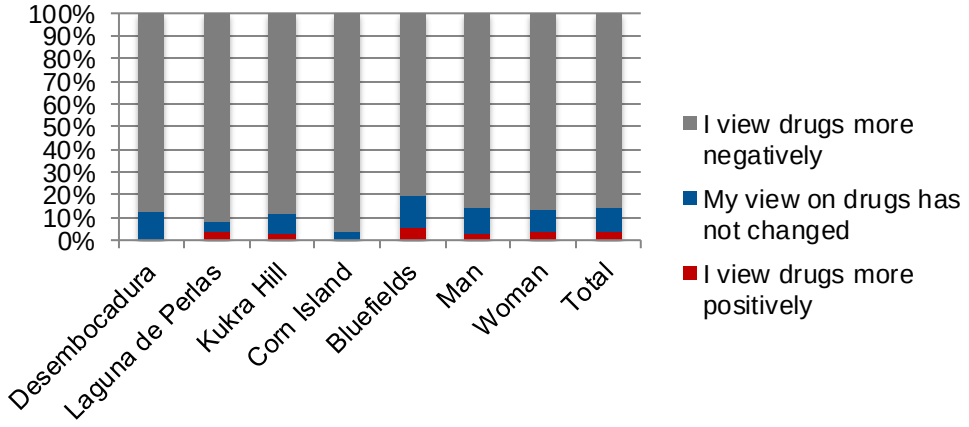
communities are unsafe (table 7). This general perception of insecurity, especially in Bluefields is consistent with the 2013 baseline study (AIR, 2013).

Table 7: Perceived levels of neighborhood security in each municipality (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

	MUNICIPALITY					
	Desembocadura	Laguna de Perlas	Kukra Hill	Corn Island	Bluefields	
Not Secure	23.5%	25.0%	27.8%	30.8%	44.9%	34.2%
Secure	64.7%	73.1%	63.9%	69.2%	50.4%	60.3%
No response	11.8%	1.9%	8.3%		4.7%	5.5%

The EFS model appears to have been successful in improving perceptions on crime and violence. Figure 32 shows that over 85 percent of respondents say their view on drugs has become more negative. In Bluefields, 80 percent of respondents agree, though a slightly larger proportion of these respondents say their views on drugs are positive or have not changed compared to the other municipalities. There are no discernible gender differences.

Figure 32: How has your view towards drugs changed as a result of EFS? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



INCLUSIVENESS OF EFS

EFS youth are in a state of higher risk than non-EFS youth. Perceptions of crime and violence show some divisions between EFS youth and non-EFS youth. Most EFS youth have a better understanding of the threat of crime and violence. This includes more nuanced views on drug consumption, access to firearms, and problems with drug trafficking. These differences in knowledge likely reflect the state of risk between the two groups, with EFS youth living in higher

risk situations. As a result, both EFS youth and non-EFS youth tend to believe the EFS model is most beneficial for high-risk youth (Figure 33). This can be considered a success for EFS since the model targets higher risk populations.

Figure 33: Is EFS more beneficial to high- or low-risk youth? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

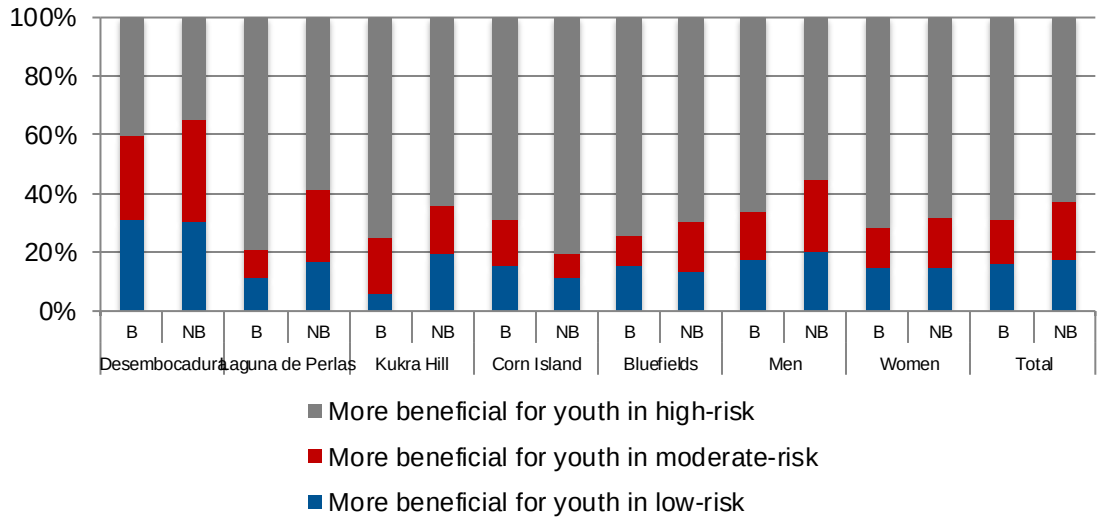
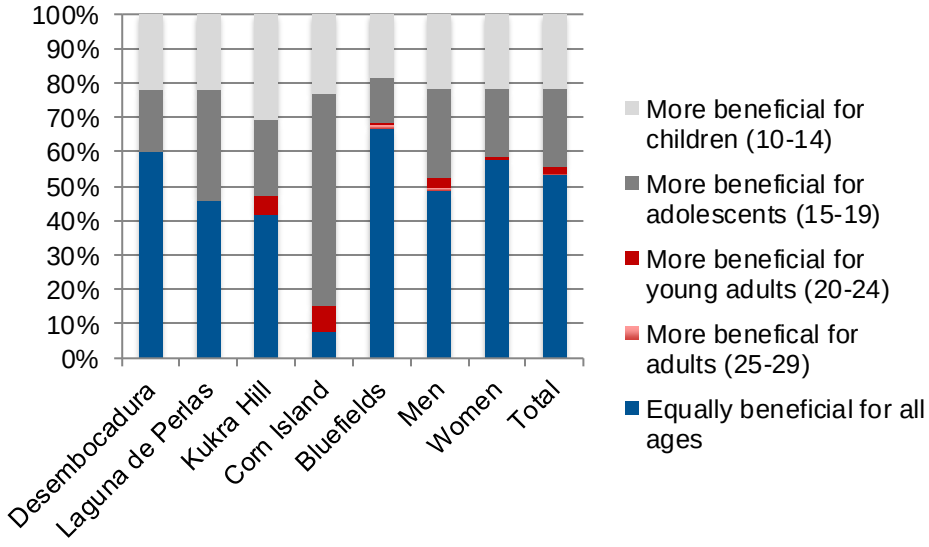


Figure 34 shows that EFS youth believe that EFS benefits younger individuals. Most respondents said they believe the program benefits all ages equally, but when one looks closer there is a clear belief that adolescents and youth between 10 and 19 are benefitting more than young adults. This would support what some focus groups and interviews suggest (Jessi Castro, August 9, Bluefields),[5] that the EFS model is more beneficial for adolescents, but less so for the older end of the highest-risk populations, which are between 15 and 24 years old.

Figure 34: For what age group is EFS the most beneficial? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



[5] President of the Youth Council (Consejo de las Juventudes) of Bluefields and Secretary of the Sandinista Youth (Secretario de la Juventud Sandinista) in the South Caribbean.

According to Mr. Castro, "Those are the youth on the corners." Corn Island is the only municipality where there is a clear trend to benefit the 15 to 19 year old population group.

Most EFS youth believe the EFS model benefits both genders equally (Figure 35). This would seem to be supported by project indicators that show an equal number of boys and girls have participated in the program. Figure 36 shows that EFS youth view violence against women negatively, by a large margin, with only a slightly higher proportion of girls viewing it negatively than boys. A large majority of project beneficiaries also say the EFS model has helped reduced teen pregnancy, with boys tending to be a little more optimistic on this issue than girls (see Figure 37).

Figure 35: Is EFS more beneficial for girls or boys? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

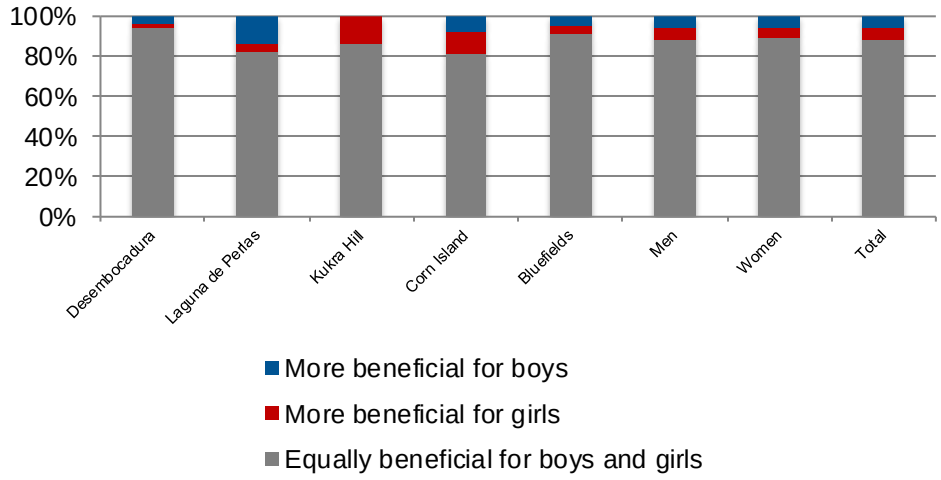


Figure 36: EFS beneficiary views on violence against women (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

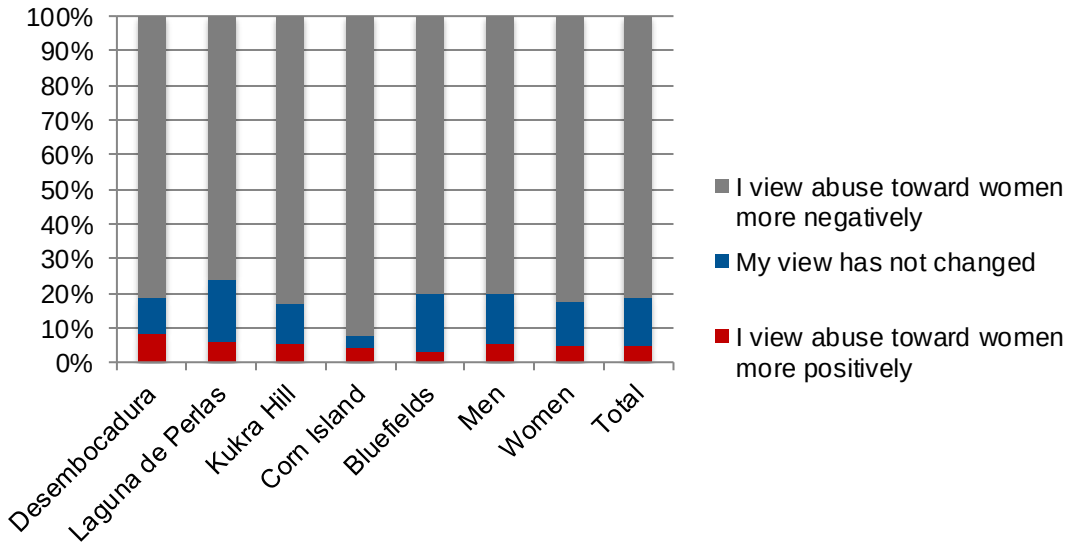
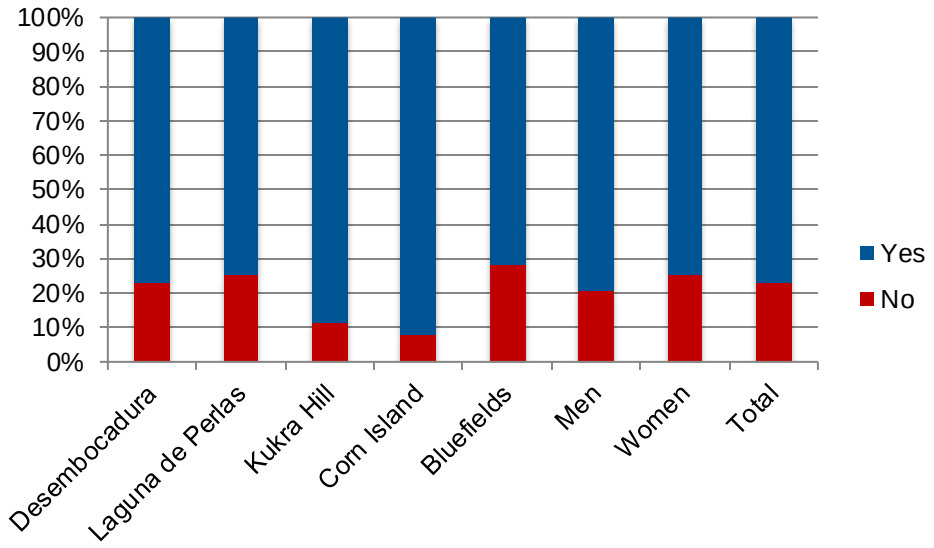


Figure 37: Has EFS contributed to a reduction in teen pregnancies? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



The EFS model does not actively target youth who struggle with substance abuse or have a criminal history. The EFS model lacks a systemic approach to work with these youth, who by most accounts are at the highest risk. The rational for excluded them is understandable. First, FADCANIC does not have the capacity, expertise, or specialized skills to work in rehabilitation. Second, allowing these troubled youth into EFS could destabilize gains or even endanger other youth in the program. Georgina Ferrer, Director of the Occupational Center for Prevention and Rehabilitation of Youth and Adolescents (COPRAJ) in Bluefields, reaffirmed this. She said:

> "These kids don't attend classes. I tried to involve them in FADCANIC programs, but these programs have strict rules, and these kids don't follow rules. For this reason, we don't have any rules at COPRAJ, other than to not consume drugs or alcohol or provoke violence while in the Center. But these kids are not going anywhere, so we have to go to them. They come to the Center when they want and leave the same way."

OTHER PERCEPTIONS OF EFS

EFS youth tend to believe the model has strengthened community connections more than non-EFS youth believe (see Figure 38). This could likely reflect EFS youth's familiarity with model activities, but also may reflect the limited outreach the EFS model has among non-beneficiary populations, which is beyond the scope of the model. Figure 39 shows that EFS youth generally believe the EFS model has improved community cohesion. This is especially true in Desembocadura and Kukra Hill, where FADCANIC personnel said that EFS has had the most success (confirmed in an interview with Hazel Wilson, EFS Coordinator, FADCANIC, August 7, Bluefields).

Figure 38: How well has EFS strengthened connections between members of the community? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

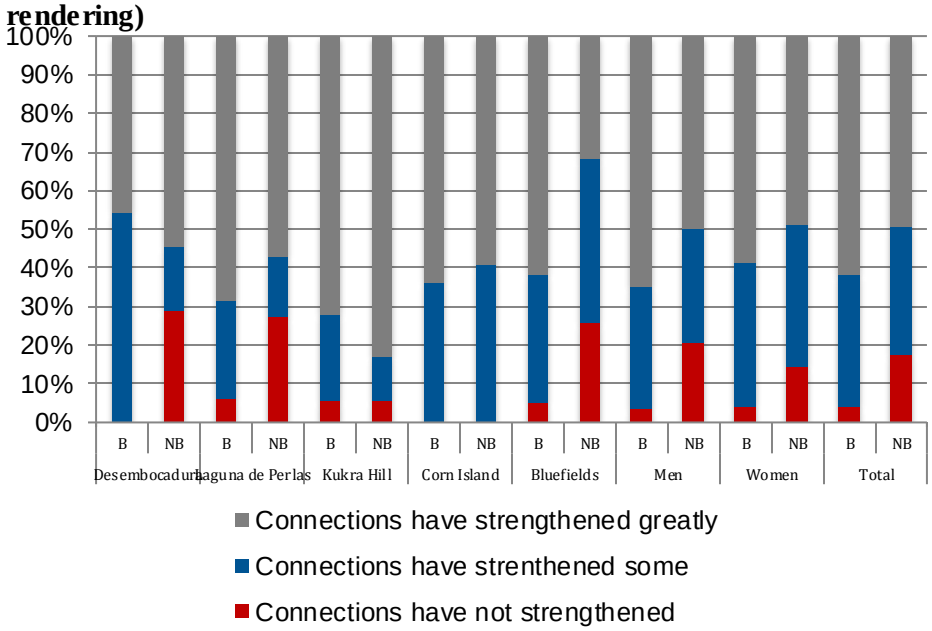


Figure 39: Has EFS contributed to greater community cohesion? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)

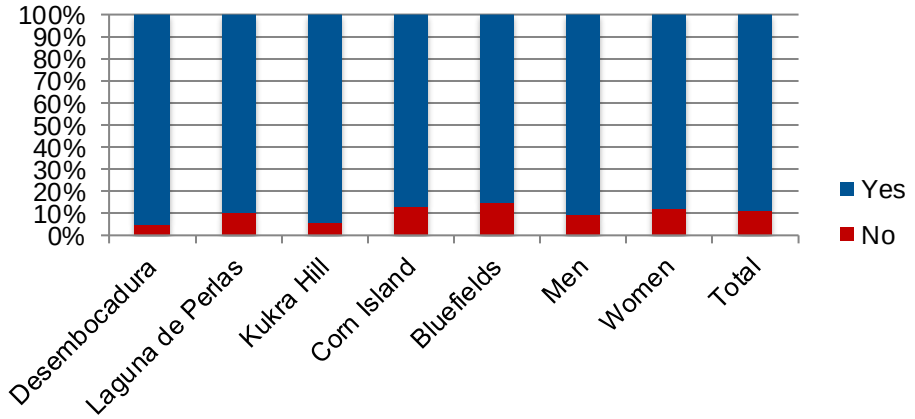
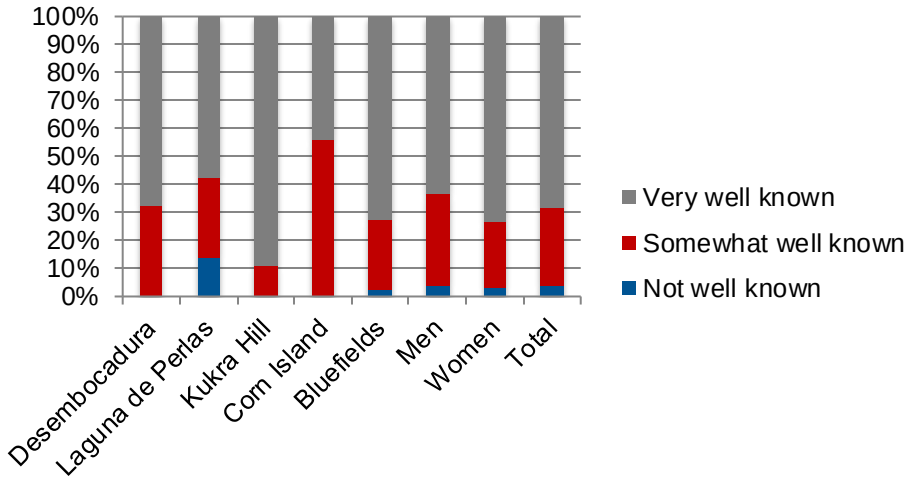


Figure 40 shows that EFS is generally well known in the communities. It is interesting to note that Laguna de Perlas and Corn Island have the lowest proportion of respondents saying EFS is "very well known." This is consistent with what EFS personnel told us about Laguna de Perlas and Corn Island being the most problematic for the program among all the municipalities. This may suggest

that one of the challenges in these communities for EFS is people lack a clear understanding of the model's purpose or even its existence. This can inhibit higher participation rates.

Figure 40: How well known is EFS in your community? (Municipal survey results, authors' rendering)



SUMMARY REMARKS ON OUTCOMES

The survey results clearly show a number of positive attitude and behavioral changes have occurred as a result of the EFS model. The positive changes are related to drug use, unsafe sex, teen pregnancy, and community cohesion. In this sense, high-risk practices that were perhaps previously justified are now perceived as a violation of rights and negative influences on the community. These attitudinal changes have helped generate a virtuous cycle of community participation, relationships with family, and confidence in decision-making.

The EFS model has also contributed to the development of skills and positive aspirations for at-risk youth. The model's deliberate strategy to work with at-risk youth has generated positive outlooks by them towards their future, their employment opportunities, and their education as a means to achieve personal and professional development.

The EFS model has improved the confidence of its beneficiaries. These contributions have helped dismantle negative paradigms around issues such as drug use and the lack of opportunities. The EFS model has instilled a recognition among participants that, by taking action, they can shape their destinies over the medium- and long-term. In this sense, the EFS model has helped build personal confidence, interpersonal skills, assertiveness and increased emotional intelligence in its beneficiaries that will have long lasting and immeasurable impacts on those individuals and their communities.

BOX 3: Why is the EFS model more successful in some municipalities than in others?

In trying to understand why EFS has functioned well in some municipalities and less so in others, we can only offer some hypotheses. Generally, the EFS model has been applied uniformly to each municipality without much room for local adaptation. The populations of these five municipalities are highly diverse, but this is not a sufficiently detailed rationale for adjusting activities. Below we look at other factors that may have determined project effectiveness in the different municipalities

In some municipalities, certain project components function well, while in others they do not. Some examples include:

- The vocational training program requires some sort of private enterprise involvement to provide jobs to program graduates. While private enterprises with available job opportunities are limited in the entire region, they are completely nonexistent in Desembocadura.
- Certain municipalities have important work seasons. For example, Laguna de Perlas has a fishing season, during which most youth are at sea trying to make a living. During this time, it may be more difficult to encourage youth participation in the model. But, this is not the case in other communities where the agricultural calendar is more important. Therefore, EFS activities must be sensitive to these seasonal issues.
- The life skills component involves sports, art, music, and computer equipment, the resources for which tend to be centrally located in a youth center or other facility. Youth from communities that are isolated or are a great distance from these centers will naturally be less inclined to participate. This is especially the case for more rural areas and demonstrates the distinctly urban bias of the EFS model.
- Certain municipalities have better access to resources. For example, Laguna de Perlas has access to the School of Excellence, while Desembocadura has closer access to the vocational training sites in Wawashang.
- Some communities have more acute youth vulnerability. For example, crime prevention in Kukra Hill has been complicated by the ineffective control of narco-trafficking by police. This is a risk that other municipalities also face, but not in the same way. Moreover, Bluefields has more frequent instances of crime and violence.
- The good-parenting and CAYAC models function better in areas with strong social cohesion. For example, according to focus group discussions, Desembocadura has high social cohesion, while Bluefields, Corn Island, and Laguna de Perlas have lower social cohesion, which makes this component more difficult in those municipalities.

SUSTAINABILITY

The EFS model for at-risk youth in its current form is not completely financially sustainable, but in many ways it is socially sustainable. The model required an external investment of $6.7 million over

seven years, and, as of December 2015, the EFS project raised $568,964 in private sector contributions and cost sharing. Of this, $207,114 is contributions from businesses, universities, and individuals. But, sustainability is much more than a simple question of financing. We define sustainability as, "The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed. The probability of continued long-term benefits. The resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time" (OECD-DAC, 2010). In this section, we examine the model's political and institutional sustainability, social and cultural sustainability, and financial sustainability.

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

The experience of EFS in the RACCS shows that political and institutional sustainability is an important requisite to the model's sustainability. If the EFS model does not foster strong relationships with political and institutional actors, it cannot carry out work programs past the financial life of the project. But, in this case, FADCANIC's political and institutional alliances have helped position it to sustain aspects of the model's programming.

The EFS model in the RACCS has a strong local presence because FADCANIC has built a network in the five municipalities of the program. Each municipality has a local EFS representative (a promoter), and most have a youth center that is associated with the model. These established ties in the communities are important aspects of sustainability.

There is a general consensus in the region about the nature of risks facing youth. Regional actors tend to agree on what are the main socio-economic vulnerabilities. Having this mutual understanding among partners and potential partners allows institutions to focus actions and pool resources for commonly identified challenges. This is an important benefit of operating in the RACCS.

Because of its long history of working in the RACCS and experience with EFS, FADCANIC is generally accepted as an authority on youth development in the region. In this sense, the institution is well positioned to carry on interventions that reduce risks for youth. In general, FADCANIC maintains excellent relationships with the Regional Secretary of Education, the Ministry of Education (MINED), the Ministry of the Family (MiFamilia), the National Institute of Technology (INATEC), and municipal authorities. These types of relationships, if formalized, would allow the implementing agency to continue EFS-type interventions past the project's financing end date.

The EFS model has developed a communications strategy that includes social, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic elements from the region. The Regional Secretary of Youth (SEREJUVE) works with EFS to broadcast radio programs in Bluefields and other municipalities and communities (Desembocadura lacks these facilities, for example). This ability to communicate and promote local voices has raised awareness about FADCANIC and the importance of the EFS model, even among people who have not benefitted from the program. This local awareness and acceptance allows FADCANIC the possibility of sustaining EFS' presence in the regions.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

The EFS model's sustainability depends largely on the level of appropriation of the model's elements by local leaders, families, and beneficiaries, among others. In this sense, EFS has made great gains in assimilating afro- and indigenous populations into the program by included them among the program's beneficiaries. The same is true of women. This diversified community involvement increases the likelihood that elements of the EFS model can be sustained.

One factor that favors the sustainability of the EFS model in RACCS is the existence of local leaders who have an interest in reducing youth risk, but lack the skills to do so. Some of these leaders include teachers, religious leaders (pastors and priests), professionals from different disciplines, and citizens from all walks of life. These disparate individuals often share an interest in organizing efforts to confront community problems such as youth risk. The EFS model provides them a platform to do so.

As part of its intention to improve community engagement in activities, the EFS model builds networks of volunteers to support the program. In the RACCS, these volunteers are organized into CAYACs, interest groups, and mentoring networks. To a certain extent, these volunteers can assume the roles of staff in the absence of funding. The main function of the CAYACs is to empower the community and make the model more sustainable. Focus group discussions demonstrate that CAYAC members show great ownership over EFS, and it is because of these groups that EFS has integrated into the communities to the extent it has. This shows that volunteer participation is an important aspect of the model's sustainability.

The EFS experience in the RACCS shows that using CAYACs has had some challenges, too. For example, focus group discussions with CAYAC members show they believe that EFS planning happens "from above" and that community inputs and decisions are devalued within the program. CAYAC members also believe they could be used to a greater extent in negotiating with government agencies. As it is now, they voice their concerns to EFS representatives, who in turn communicate with the authorities. CAYAC members believe they should have a direct line to regional decision makers. In Desembocadura, this is the case, which shows that the scope of the CAYACs very much depends on the community in which they reside. To help resolve these issues, in September 2015, a number of CAYACs and EFS representatives gathered in Corn Island and agreed to collaborate to produce quarterly plans. Future interventions should consider the delicate balance of maintaining volunteer support and developing proper channels to enhance participation.

Youth tutors are also important program stakeholders for the EFS model. These youth help tutor EFS students who have difficulties in school. The EFS model supports this process by training these tutors. To make the EFS model sustainable, it is important to strengthen the skills and capacity of these youth tutors. Youth volunteering is especially valuable in the context of the RACCS. In this region, poverty forces families to seek paid work, even if short term and unskilled. As a result, valuable volunteer opportunities are often overlooked as a means to build skills and human capital.

To sum, the EFS experience in the RACCS shows it is crucial to raise community participation in the EFS model's planning, strategy, and implementation. This is the key to making many of the model's components, such as tutoring, sustainable. The implementing agency must concentrate on building the capacity of volunteer networks with tools to make the model sustainable without large infusions of cash. FADCANIC is well positioned to carry this out, given its strong relationship with local NGOs and social movements, but this could be a challenge for implementing agencies less well integrated in regional development efforts.

BUILDING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Community, political, and institutional support are important for the EFS model's sustainability, but receiving financing is still the most important factor determining sustainability. For this reason, the model's implementing agency should actively reach out to public institutions interested in replicating the EFS model, or its components. The implementing agency could also reach out to the private sector, but in the case of the EFS model in the RACCS, interviews show the local private sector has demonstrated little interest in social responsibility in the region. Despite this, FADCANIC has signed several MOUs with local businesses to support youth.

The EFS model in the RACCS shows that establishing relationships with public institutions can play a role in financially sustaining the program. In the RACCS, these institutions include MINED and INATEC. MINED is particularly well placed to replicate EFS model components in their own programming. The components of the EFS model that MINED could easily adopt include: tutoring, school counseling, the good-parenting program, accelerated primary schooling, and the training of teachers in psycho-social sensitivity. The model's financial sustainability is dependent on the capacity of local public institutions and their willingness to participate. These potential partnerships should be mapped before any future EFS-type model intervention.

In order to conserve the hard investments in infrastructure made through initial EFS project funding, it is important to train volunteer networks in the region of implementation to care for these tools. These hard investments include musical and sporting equipment, computers, and pedagogical materials. Volunteer networks could hold raffles or other small-scale fundraising efforts to repair or replace old or aging equipment. Maintaining this equipment is a necessary action for achieving a level of resource sustainability.

Future interventions of this model should foster partnerships with regional universities so they can take the lead in generating new knowledge. These universities can help diagnose the situation of youth and provide strategic, empirically based directions for future interventions. The knowledge and skills these universities can generate will last well beyond the project's lifetime. FADCANIC has established relationships with universities, and the EFS experience in the RACCS shows that local universities can be leveraged to sustain the knowledge generation elements of the model.

Box 4: What is FADCANIC's plan for sustaining the model after 2017?

"The strategy is to concentrate efforts in technical and vocational educations. What will the impact be in the five municipalities if we have 2,000 youth with solid

technical capacity, carrying out their own workshops and running their own businesses, hiring others? With higher incomes than they currently earn. Repairing stoves, cars, or any other piece of equipment that currently must be sent to Managua. In these workshops, they are developing a new generation of technical specialists and professionals. The priority should then be to empower these specialists to carry out their own trainings and workshops. Currently, there are no resources for this. But, there will come a time when the government will want to follow the path laid out by the Technical Education Center in Wawashang." - Interview with Ray Hooker, Director, FADCANIC, August 27, 2015.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The EFS model was effective in reducing youth vulnerabilities in the southern Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. Given the context of the region, the EFS model can be viewed as a long-term, strategic investment in human development. It is highly relevant and focused on a population living in conditions of poverty and exclusion, with poor family planning, high exposure to alcohol and drug abuse, and different types of violence.

The EFS model is highly inclusive. EFS' goal is to build the capacity of youth from all cultural and socio-linguistic backgrounds through scholarships in primary and secondary education, vocational courses, and life skills training. All of these activities are placed within a model that fosters social inclusion and promotes the participation of parents in the education process and teachers in the capacity building process. In the RACCS experience, girls play an equally important role in the model as boys.

The EFS model is relevant to many ongoing strategies on the Caribbean coast. These include the Nicaraguan government's Youth Policy and Development Strategy for the Caribbean coast; USAID's country strategy in Nicaragua and its international youth and gender policies; and FADCANIC's institutional mission, among others. The emphasis on employment, education, inclusiveness, human development, and youth participation and empowerment in the south Caribbean tie the EFS model to each of these strategies. This shows that the model strikes a balance between popular youth development strategies and achieving results for at-risk youth.

Survey results show the EFS model changes youth attitudes. Perspectives on drug use, sexuality, physical violence, the importance of education, and how to pursue opportunities to achieve aspirations have all become more positive. The EFS model has given youth in the RACCS a greater sense of control over their own destinies. This is an important and unquantifiable contribution to a region that suffers from persistent poverty, violence, unemployment, and hopelessness. This is a likely outcome to applying the model in different regional and socio-economic contexts.

The EFS model should maintain its goal of building the implementing agency's capacity. In the case of the RACCS, FADCANIC is well positioned to remain an authority on youth development. In 2010, when EFS began, the RACCS lacked any similar at-risk youth models. But, FADCANIC's historical work in education, natural resource management, environmental issues, and the strengthening of the autonomy process – in addition to the implementation of the EFS model and the experience and enhanced capacity that comes with it – have allowed FADCANIC to position itself institutionally and politically as an authority among government and civil society actors. The EFS model's grassroots integration into the five project municipalities further entrenched FADCANIC in this role. This strengthened institutional capacity has important ramifications for the sustainability of future implementations of the model.

CHALLENGES

The EFS model needs to improve its M&E training. FADCANIC's staff readily admitted that they still did not totally grasp the EFS model's M&E system. This is especially true for monitoring former participants of the program who have since graduated and moved on with their lives. No tracer study was ever completed. There is only a process of keeping track of participants from the vocational trainings for one year after their graduation. With constant movement and migration, keeping track of former participants remains a challenge. These shortcomings made tracking down EFS beneficiaries for the survey difficult.

A significant challenge for the model is achieving strong coordination among other youth and development institutions. In the RACCS, FADCANIC made concerted efforts to coordinate with other agencies. For example, FADCANIC has worked with MINED and the Escuela Normal in Bluefields for two-and-a-half decades. Despite this, gaps still exist. For example, partnerships with MEFCA, SEREJUVE, and local governments could be strengthened to achieve greater sustainability. These gaps could be the result of a results framework that focuses on the achievement of certain targets and indicators, but does not include strong targets for cooperation with other institutions. In another context, this could lead to serious gaps and many missed opportunities, as potential partnering institutions are in a critical position to plan and execute comprehensive development strategies focused on building sustained employment opportunities. This need to create employment falls outside of the model's scope, yet achieving the greatest levels of success with the model is absolutely contingent on creating these opportunities.

The RACCS experience shows that for the model to be fully successful, it must link youth who receive training to concrete employment opportunities that meet their growing aspirations. While the EFS model provides technical certificates to youth who complete vocational training courses and provides some funds for the development of small enterprises, it cannot possibly address the region's huge deficiency in job opportunities. The model is developing skills and building youth capacity, but these efforts have led to employment for only one in five youth who complete the program. This is not a flaw in execution; it is, rather, a result of the structural challenge of executing this model in a region with a weak labor market. Theoretically, this model could be a better fit for a region that has available jobs, but lacks skills, whereas the RACCS simply lacks jobs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations focus on actions that can help make the EFS model for at-risk youth more effective in future implementation scenarios. These actions include creating employment in the implementing region, making the model more sustainable beyond its funding life, and improving the design of future program models. The mid-term evaluation sufficiently highlighted programmatic changes that could be made to improve the EFS project's current operations (USAID, 2013), so we will not repeat these here.

Creating employment

As mentioned above, a shortcoming of the EFS model's design, at least in the RACCS, is that it focuses on vocational training in a region that lacks available employment opportunities for that training. FADCANIC has attempted to adapt the model to the peculiarities of the region in several ways. First, it provides flexible formats for building work and life skills that make trainings accessible to a population that is (a) geographically disperse, (b) multilingual, and (c) has a low level of formal schooling which limits their access to other educational opportunities. Second, the EFS project offers community-based vocational training in the location or near the location of the youth, and basic and secondary technical training at FADCANIC´s Center for Agroforestry and Environmental Education (CEAA) in Wawashang and at INATEC in Bluefields. Third, the EFS project's technical and vocational training program includes: employability training, business training, and seed funding for small youth business; individual support services for job placement for participating youth, professional references to support the youth's job search, and personalized tutoring and coaching to develop youth business plans. The program also coordinates with local institutions to organize promotional events such as youth business fairs.

Still, for future design scenarios, we recommend implementing the model in areas with greater employment opportunities or expanding the responsibility of the implementing agency to work with local governments to more actively improve regional employment opportunities. This can be accomplished through the following actions, which are currently outside the scope of the model:

- Design and implement a strategy of inter-agency cooperation with government agencies experienced in small business and enterprise development. For example, in the RACCS this would include agencies such as MEFCA and its Department of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.
- Promote the development and adoption of a regional plan to create youth employment. In the RACCS, a regional development plan would augment the national plans and help create synergies among development institutions to create employment opportunities.
- Develop partnerships with local universities. In the RACCS this would include higher education centers like BICU and URACCAN. Local universities can act as incubators for the fledgling companies started by graduates of the EFS model.
- During the model planning phase, draft a research and innovation plan to identify unexplored economic sectors in the implementing region that can absorb youth trained through the EFS model. This could be executed in partnership with local universities. FADCANIC has made efforts to do parts of this by selecting vocational courses based on

local and regional market demands. These demands have a strong tendency toward trade professions — cooks, welders, plumbers, seamstresses, electricians, and motor mechanics — that offer self and permanent employment opportunities. Our recommendation is to strengthen and formalize this planning phase.

Strengthen the EFS model's sustainability

The EFS model should develop a detailed plan with clear target indicators to achieve sustainability beyond any given project's lifespan. For example, in the RACCS this would include prioritizing and budgeting for project components to continue after the close of the EFS project in 2017. This would include a close monitoring of project impacts and the creation of a sustainability strategy that operationalizes FADCANIC's previous sustainability plan. Accurately understanding program and operational costs is critical to defining a funding strategy and determining which components should be prioritized. For example, how many resources should come from the implementing agency, volunteer networks, employers, or other actors? Also, the implementing agency should explore ways to retain key staff after project funding is exhausted. In the case of FADCANIC, there is the risk that talented managers may leave the agency towards the end of the project because of uncertainty about their job stability.

In seeking to develop sustainable elements of the EFS model, it is important to establish realistic deadlines. As the project end approaches in the RACCS, decision-making and financing should be geared towards sustainability, not only project completion. In theory, this could mean that certain project components should continue to receive funding or technical support after the close of the project. Having a detailed and realistic sustainability plan that allows flexibility to adapt to practical challenges could make a difference in scaling and sustaining key components of the EFS model.

Another area that would significantly improve the EFS model's impact is strengthening the implementing agency's capacity to utilize and manage the required M&E statistical database. In the case of FADCANIC, interviews suggest that staff responsible for managing the EFS model's M&E system have not been properly trained. As a result, FADCANIC has had difficulties tracing former graduates of the EFS model. USAID did provide training in this system, but the individual who received it left FADCANIC. Additional training was needed. Without proper monitoring capabilities, it is difficult for USAID or the EFS model's implementing agency to quantify the program's outcomes and make the case for continuing the model.

Another sustainability strategy is to strengthen the capacities of local volunteers. In particular, the EFS model should strengthen volunteer involvement in the participatory planning of project activities and enhance volunteers' ability to enter into dialogues with municipal and state agencies.[6] The implementing agency should consider training volunteers in the proper use and care of the model's tools and infrastructure so they can continue to use them after the project's completion. Also, the model's implementing agency should familiarize volunteers with fundraising tools to

[6] It should be noted that USAID has certain limitations in working directly with the Nicaraguan government.

assist with acquiring resources to cover the basic costs of carrying on elements of the model after the completion of the project.

Applying the EFS model to another country or regional context would further validate and substantiate the model. As mentioned above, the hard socio-economic realities within RACCS communities make it difficult to fully test the validity of the model. The likelihood of positive outcomes in a new region is high given the many successes of the model in the RACCS, but not guaranteed. On the one hand, different regions may not have the same labor market constraints or issues with insecurity as the RACCS. On the other hand, different regions may have weaker institutional capacity or any other number of complications. Once the new pilot is validated and the model's design is formalized, USAID can begin transferring this knowledge to public and private institutions through guidebooks and implementation templates. Currently, the model is not defined, only as EFS, and only as implemented in Nicaragua's southern Caribbean coast.

Improving future program design

There is a strong rationale for the EFS model to target the highest risk youth in future program design. For example, the EFS model, as implemented in the RACCS, does not allow youth with a criminal history or alcohol or drug addiction problems to enter the program. This is understandable, considering FADCANIC has no experience in working with these youth, and because these youth could be a poor, unstable influence on other EFS model participants. But, youth with addiction problems or a history of criminality are ultimately in the greatest need of support. One way to approach this challenge would be to have the implementing agency partner with rehabilitation centers. In the RACCS this would mean FADCANIC entering into agreements with rehabilitation centers such as COPRAJ to target these youth, helping them receive education, vocational, or life skills training. Safeguards could be put in place in future model designs to limit the negative impacts these youth could have on the program.

Future program models should also more actively involve older youth in their programming. The results of the survey show that the primary beneficiaries of the model's programming are youth between the ages of 10 and 19. This has certain long-term benefits as it reduces the risk of these youth when they enter the higher-risk age group of 15 to 24 years old. Still, adjusting the EFS model's programming to meet the needs of 20 to 29 year olds could help capture and reduce risks for this demographic.

More efforts should be made to understand the local differences among the various communities within the model. In the case of the RACCS, this would mean greater efforts to understand the local contexts in the five EFS model municipalities. As the RACCS experience shows from interviews with FADCANIC staff and focus group discussions (see box 3), the model functions better in some communities – such as Kukra Hill and Desembocadura - than others – such as Laguna de Perlas and Corn Island, according to interviews with FADCANIC staff. Developing a better understanding of why this is the case would be a worthwhile activity in any future implementation of the model.

The model's inherent urban bias should be reduced as much as possible. Executing the EFS model in the RACCS was an especially challenging endeavor given the rural, isolated nature of the region. Many areas are only accessible by boat or by foot. Connecting at-risk youth in these areas to training, youth centers, and project resources was a constant challenge, since these resources are usually located in the most centrally located and well-populated areas. This arrangement makes resources accessible to the greatest number of beneficiaries, but still may be out-of-reach for the most isolated families. This is an innate problem that strategies in territorial development can help mitigate. For example, project resources can be decentralized and project decision-making can be shared. Moreover, labor market opportunities more relevant to the least connected communities can be fostered.

Lastly, future results frameworks for similar programs should include measurable outcome and sustainability targets. Currently, the EFS model measures output targets but, as mentioned above, a weak long-term results framework and problems with attribution make model outcomes hard to measure. It is clear from the survey that the EFS model has made impressive gains in reducing youth risk and FADCANIC has improved its own capacity as well as the broader capacity within the region to take on these challenges. But, these advances have proven difficult to measure. For example, how can one measure the counterfactual of keeping a youth occupied with a productive activity versus the impact that youth may have otherwise had on the streets? A stronger results framework that ameliorates attribution issues would improve these measurements and help verify the positive linkages between the EFS model and reduced youth risk. This would, in turn, provide stakeholders with critical information to promote future programs that support at-risk youth.

In sum, the EFS model has made important contributions to youth development on Nicaragua's southern Caribbean coast. It addresses the region's main youth risk factors and is highly relevant to the region's other important youth development strategies. The model has not yet reached its full potential, but with the above-mentioned recommendations to improve the model's design, it can become more sustainable and contribute even further to creating employment and other opportunities for at-risk youth.

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ANNEX A: LIST OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Name	Organization	Responsibility	Location
Adilia Brenes	CAYAC in Corn Island	Member	Corn Island
Alan Sandoval Molina	Municipality of Laguna de Perlas	Director of planning	Laguna de Perlas
Amanda Castillo	Hotel Tía Irene. Property of URACCAN University	General Manager	Bluefields
Ana Alvarado	EFS Regional / FADCANIC Goodparenting program	Education specialist	Bluefields
Cindy Sinclair Allen	Hospital psychiatrist	Responsible for adolescents	Kukra Hill
Cristino Salgado	Graduate of EFS vocational training	Cell phone repairman	Bluefields
Daira Valle	Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Publicas	Coordinator of Seguridad Democrática	Managua
Deborah Robb	EFS/ FADCANIC	Supervisor	Bluefields
Dominga Hernandez	EFS / FADCANIC	Coordinator of Life Skills component	Bluefields
Eddy Allen Sacasa	Municipality of Kukra Hill	Director of social promotion	Kukra Hill
Eddy Reyes Oliva	Instituto Nuestra Señora del Rosario	Support teacher	Bluefields
Edgard Santiago	EFS/ FADCANIC	Promoter in Karawala	Desembocadura
Genoveno Peréz Chacon	Morava church in Karawala	Reverend	Desembocadura
Georgina Perret	COPRAJ (Occupational Center for Prevention and Rehabilitation of Youth and Adolescents)	Director	Bluefields
Grace Gordon	EFS / FADCANIC	M&E specialist	Bluefields
Hazel Wilson	EFS / FADCANIC	Coordinator	Bluefields

Hugo Mendoza	EFS' vocational training programming	Trainer in cell phone repair	Bluefields
Israel Huerta Obando	Casa de Jóvenes Bluefields	Musician and Director of FADCANIC's music program	Bluefields
Jessi Castro	Sandinista Youth and the Southern Caribbean Council on Nicaraguan Youth	Coordinator	Bluefields
Josselyne Campbell	At-risk youth	Left school two years ago	Bluefields
Juan José Montoya	Fishing business CAF	General Manager	Bluefields
Kenny (unknown last name)	Boy Scouts of Nicaragua (SCOUT)	Leader	Bluefields
Keyson Timothy Forbes	Municipal Youth Council (COMAJ)	Member	Corn Island
Lissa Suyen Rove	Inhabitant	Inhabitant	Corn Island
Lizan Juanita Campbell	EFS / FADCANIC	Promoter	Corn Island
Mable Nelson Pondler	Communal government	Member	Laguna de Perlas
Maria Ivette Fonseca	AIR	Coordinator of FADCANIC assessment	Canada by Skype
Norman Howard	UNDP	Coordinator of Caribbean Coast	Bluefields
Onysha Morgan	Inhabitant	Inhabitant	Corn Island
Ray Hooker	FADCANIC	Director	Managua
Rudy Pamiston	Communal Authority of Karawala	Local judge (Whita)	Desembocadura
Sadie Roxana Cononnly	Instituto Nuevo amanecer	Counselor, primary school teacher	Bluefields
Shayron Tower	Municipal Youth Council (COMAJ)	Member	Corn Island
Shila Howard	EFS / FADCANIC	Promoter	Laguna de Perlas
Silvio Heberth	MINED	MINED delegate	Desembocadura
Tyrone Aburto	MDS (Movement for Sexual Diversity)	Coordinator	Bluefields
Warner Cayasso	Communal government	Coordinator	Laguna de Perlas
Yancy Lanuza	FECONORI project for handicapped people	Coordinator	Bluefields

Yarid Villalta	Municipality of Kukra Hill	Secretary of youth	Kukra Hill

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