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Higher Education Partnerships - Dominican Republic Attachment A

In order for the Dominican Republic (DR) to remain relevant and competitive in today's global economy, DR Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must train and equip students for a high-tech world. The Dominican Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MESCyT) established priorities in a 2008-2018 National Plan for Higher Education, which included increased enrollment, expansion of career options, and improved technology. Higher Education (HE) quality and access must be addressed in order to bridge the gap between MESCyT's priorities and the realities in the DR. Although the sector faces significant challenges, these issues also present opportunities to find creative solutions to transform capacity and strengthen Dominican HEIs to respond.

Dominican Republic Higher Education Context

With a population of nearly 11 million people and a stable economy, the Dominican Republic (DR) is considered an upper middle-income country. Notwithstanding region-leading annual economic growth, there exists poor quality and inequitable access¹ to higher education. These factors negatively affect labor quality and productivity as the pool of human capital is unable to meet the increasing demand of high-technology, skill-intensive jobs needed in a global economy.²

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2016 study ranked the DR last among 72 countries surveyed in science, reading, and math - which are important predictors of higher education (HE) success.³ Additionally, Dominican HEIs lack comprehensive retention strategies evidenced by 10-year desertion rates ranging from 39% to 76%. Low- and very low-income students fare much worse than their wealthier peers with desertion rates of 61% and 70% respectively.⁴

Abysmal country PISA rankings, coupled with weak HEI retention capacity, leave marginalized Dominicans ill-prepared to succeed in HE. Students are either unable to pursue or abandon HE in their first year of studies for a variety of reasons including inadequate academic preparation; inability to keep pace with academic rigor; disillusionment with first-year class offerings; lack of available tuition grants/scholarships; and continuous financial pressures. Beyond tuition assistance, financial demands stem from the opportunity cost of foregoing work for higher education, as well as the expectation to contribute income to the household and/or care for siblings or children.⁵

¹ Equitable access as defined in <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3721education2.pdf>

² World Bank. (2006). *Dominican Republic Country Economic Memorandum. The Foundations of Growth and Competitiveness*. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/683811468027848454/Dominican-Republic-Country-economic-memorandum-the-foundations-of-growth-and-competitiveness>

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment. (2016). Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/>

⁴ La Encuesta Nacional de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples. (2015). Available at: <https://www.one.gob.do/encuestas/enhogar/enhogar-2015>

⁵ It is important to note that the DR has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Latin America.

USAID's Response

Interventions in the DR that have helped students overcome barriers to being successful in achieving HE are few, and overall country HE data is scarce and/or outdated. Given this context, USAID/DR recently surveyed Dominican HEIs to better understand challenges faced by youth, capacity needs, and community/private sector engagement challenges and opportunities. Survey results, as well as feedback from a roundtable discussion with 20 HEIs, identified the following:

- Limited pre-college preparation/career counseling or first year retention programs;
- Limited education financing beyond tuition assistance to support student retention;
- Outdated curricula and underuse of extension and digital curricula for college readiness and first-year retention; and
- Weak engagement with high schools, communities, and the private sector for curriculum development and student support.

This addendum seeks concept notes which will support a consortium of institutions made up of at least two Dominican HEIs (academic and vocational), at least one U.S.-based HEI, and at least one DR private sector education development organization to address the issues noted above.

The main objective is to increase the capacity of DR HEIs to advise, support, and prepare marginalized⁶ youth, (including those with disabilities and women) along with their families and communities so that youth⁷ are empowered to reach their full potential through bridge programming between secondary and post-secondary education. By working towards securing admission, financing, and completion of higher education, academic or vocational, youth build skills, assets, and competencies; thus having the necessary tools to foster healthy relationships, strengthen the environment and transform systems. DR partners will learn from proven diversity recruitment and retention strategies, as well as inclusive education practices by U.S. HEI partners through an innovative local adaptation/design process and collaborative learning.

The partnership should ensure academic excellence and experience in international academic collaboration, in alignment with an approach that promotes self-reliance through building strong and sustainable partnerships. The partnership should integrate knowledge from international best practices on student success and retention, including U.S. higher education culture and values of academic freedom. The new program should be built on a system that strengthens higher education results through long-term relationships between both institutions and individuals, resulting in research collaborations and student experiences that exist long past the initial assistance period.

Illustrative activities could include:

- Develop HEI staff capacity to use innovative approaches and analytics (including predictive analysis) to collect information on the DR's HEI and specifically to assess and respond to the needs of marginalized students;
- Establish innovative pre-college/first year student support/career counseling programs (e.g. Makerspace, Innovation Hubs, Career Centers, Cross-curriculum studies etc.);
- Establish pre-college or bridge programs linked to select high schools and/or community

⁶ Per the USAID Education Policy, USAID defines marginalized groups as girls, children affected by or emerging from armed conflict or humanitarian crises, children with disabilities, children in remote or rural areas (including those who lack access to safe water and sanitation), religious or ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS, child laborers, married adolescents, and victims of trafficking.

⁷ Positive youth development engages youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems. Learn more at: <https://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>

- extension/learning/outreach centers;
- Develop work-study, apprenticeship, and/or internship programs responsive to and co-designed by private sector;
- Identify and develop areas for digital curriculum development, blended learning, and/or distance learning models; and
- Create replicable, sustainable models to scale up and expand nationwide.

Dominican HEIs should experience meaningful institutional changes through a dynamic program design process in targeted communities supported by collaborative learning exchanges with those based in the U.S. The Consortium should design interventions in consultation with stakeholders (students, parents, high school/community, industry/business, and/or donors) and tailor programs to address local context. Activities should be designed to foster measurable improvements in financing options, retention rates, and completion rates in HE in the DR.

Given the DR's robust economic growth, private sector solutions in HE are vital to its journey to self-reliance. Lessons learned from U.S.-based models will strengthen DR HEIs overall approach to recruitment, retention, and desertion of students, particularly marginalized students, and allow for scaling.

Additional Resources

- Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) Dominican Republic: <https://www.usaid.gov/dominican-republic/cdcs>
- ENHOGAR. Educación superior en la República Dominicana. <http://www.one.gob.do/enhogar>
- Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017 edition Dominican Republic Fact Sheet: http://reports.weforum.org/pdf/gci-2016-2017/WEF_GCI_2016_2017_Profile_DOM.pdf
- How-To Note -- Disability Inclusive Education: <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/how-note-disability-inclusive-education>
- Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology: <http://www.mescyt.gob.do/>
- Reviews of National Policies for Education: Higher Education in the Dominican Republic 2012: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/reviews-of-national-policies-for-education-higher-education-in-the-dominican-republic-2012_9789264177055-en
- Plan Decenal de Educación Superior: <https://ceritoycruz.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/8-plan-decenal-de-educacion-superior-completo.pdf>
- UNCTAD. (2012). Science, Technology & Innovation Policy Review Dominican Republic. Available at: https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/dtlstict2012d1_en.pdf
- World Bank. At a Crossroads. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/271781495774058113/At-a-crossroads-higher-education-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean>