



# COLOMBIA

## My Body, My Home

Including Vulnerable Youth Through Innovative Arts-based Education

Cartagena de Indias (Cartagena of the Indies) is a city on the Northern Coast of Colombia. A tourist destination and economic centre in the Caribbean region, it is one of the most populated urban areas in the Country. As in other urban areas, outward prosperity can mask painful contrasts in wealth distribution and access to services. An estimated 70%

of the population of Cartagena lives below the poverty line (CIA World Factbook 2009). Higher school drop-out rates, poor school performance and a displaced and commonly demobilized youth escaping from war zones in rural areas have contributed to an unfortunate increase of violence and poverty levels.

### The Project

In October 2006, the Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF), provided a grant of US\$950,000 aimed at improving the quality of life of 1,200 vulnerable youth living in the marginalized urban zones of southeastern Cartagena.

The project's original name, "MA: my body, my home", is based on the Japanese concept of 'MA', which implies silence, pause, interval and creative space. The grant supported an original arts-based educational model implemented by 'El



Colegio del Cuerpo' - The School of the Body (ECdC), with the support of 'Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social' - (the Presidential Agency for Social Action (PAS)) and the District's Secretary of Education. ECdC is a local NGO which runs a modern dance and arts school.

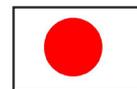
Established by Alvaro Restrepo in 1993, the school moved to Cartagena in 1997. More than ten years experience have allowed the development of a youth-focused model with the potential for deep social impact, in terms of education, arts, culture and human growth.

The methodology is designed to integrate academic training with physical, artistic, humanistic, cultural and ethical education; encouraging creativity, mutual respect, collaboration and solidarity among teachers and students.

Some of the children that participated in the inception of the school in Cartagena, are now teenagers and have grown up in parallel with ECdC. Some of them, have become 'trainers of trainers' - multipliers of this model, and many are professional dancers.

*"The general objective of this project was to improve the 'quality of life', that is, to develop skills, behaviors, and attitudes through an innovative model that has the potential to make an impact on the whole society, making the youth actively involved, better students, and better citizens."*

- Martha Laverde,  
Task Team Leader  
World Bank



### Project Data

- Implementing Agency: *El Colegio del Cuerpo*
- Grant (TF057249) Amount: *US\$950.000*
- Implementation Period: *2006-2010*

The objectives of this JSDF project were to:

1. Rebuild the self-esteem and psychological well-being of underprivileged youth who have been victims of abuse, violence and displacement.
2. Provide the students with an alternative to violence and self-destructive behavior through training and education related to the arts (dance and music).
3. Work with the community on peace building and non-violent conflict resolution

These objectives were achieved through three components:

#### **A - Adaptation of the integrated education model created by ECdC**

During the first stage of the project, ECdC, with the support of the District's Secretary of Education, targeted 7 schools in low income urban neighborhoods and introduced the program to principals, teachers and community leaders.

To facilitate the teaching process, the project renovated seven learning centers and established proper classrooms using a dance studio layout. The centers were open to students between the ages of 9 and 13, from the Districts of Olaya, El Bosque, Nelson Mandela, Santa Rita, Daniel Lemaitre, Isla de Barú y Pontezuela - Bayunca.

The youth were able to voluntarily register for the classes and could attend up to 25 workshops during non-school hours. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was the youngsters whose lives had been most affected by poverty and/or violence, that were most attracted and engaged in the classes.

Participatory workshops were held with school principals, teachers, and students to assess the particular problems of this historically poor area. This participatory element not only helped design an effective program that was tailored to alleviate the specific needs of the students, but also provided invaluable baseline data (see Box right). Around 2,548 students were asked about violence, habits at home and at school, after school activities and, life expectations. The baseline data allowed rigorous monitoring during the course of implementation and an *ex-post* impact evaluation.

The component also supported the development of a communication strategy that used wide ranging communication channels (press, audiovisual media, etc.). A series of monthly sensitization workshops were also set up between the community (parents,

teachers, students) and school principals, to provide information concerning the subjects covered in the ECdC education model. Topics include: sexuality, domestic violence, addictions, health and nutrition, arts and physical education.

#### **B - Mainstreaming the model in selected schools**

This component aimed to introduce the ECdC model into the formal education system and replicate it in 18 schools, selected on the basis of vicinity and socioeconomic criteria. Each of the seven learning centers worked with approximately 2-4 of these selected schools. The project had five key performance goals that were continuously monitored throughout the project:

- Improve the quality of life of young people
- Lower drop-out rates in participating schools.
- Lower the number of school and family violence cases in participating schools and communities.
- Encourage public-private partnerships in districts with large settlements of displaced student population.
- Implement an innovative and culturally appropriate educational model and methodology in schools in the poorest areas of Cartagena.

#### **C - Institutional Strengthening.**

This component developed tools for managing the technical, administrative, and financial aspects of the project. This included an accountability system that used social, administrative, and financial indicators.

#### **Baseline Data**

initial findings from the baseline data (2,548 students) include:

- 88% of the students have the desire to go to University.
- 80% of the students consider their school to be a non violent and secure place.
- 58% of the students do not know what to do with their spare time.
- 79% of the students do not believe that they will live to reach old age.
- 57% live with both parents, 30% with only one parent (the mother).
- 77% find their mother at home and 41% find their father at home when coming back from school.
- 20% of their parents have graduated from school.
- 32% of the students sleep with three or more people in their room.
- 26% of the students do not have a toilet at home.
- 95% of their homes have a TV and a fan.
- 63% of the students state having violent (shouting and insulting) discussions at home.

## Initial Results

Provisional outcomes from the project can be found in the two main phases of the project:

### Phase One - Research and Adaptation of the ECdC Education Model

During the implementation process of the project, it was clear that it is having a remarkably positive impact on both schools and communities:

- 1,280 students between the ages of 9 and 13 have benefited from the project and 64 teachers have been trained.
- Seven classrooms (dance studios) have been furnished with professional wooden dance floors, air conditioners, fans, TV's, DVD's, Stereos and pedagogical material related to the project. These rooms represent a real contribution to the Districts, and today, they have a multifunctional purpose, being used for other cultural events and art-related activities.
- The project has promoted community involvement in several ways - through the building of furniture for the learning centers, the provision of food and refreshments for the kids, as well as attendance at the monthly workshop. The workshops are directed by professionals hired by the project. Forty school teachers are currently attending workshops every month. ECdC is training them to implement the pedagogical model and to extend the program to other classes not included in the project. Participating teachers receive modest incentive payments of around US\$ 400 at the end of each school year.

### Phase Two - Intervention

During the second phase of the project, the 1,280 students who joined the program were provided 12 hours of workshops per month. These workshops were coached by "The Company" (the professional dancers) of ECdC. The workshops were as follows:

- **Body Recognition and Contemporary Dance:**  
*How to* respect and re-discover their own bodies through relaxation and to appreciate silence and music as a way to leave their conflicts and violence behind.
- **Sexuality:** This course includes topics such as the language of sexuality, teen sexuality, pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual abuse related topics, such as prevention, who to talk to and what to do.
- **Violence:** Explores the concept of violence, how to express anger, ways of dealing with violent situations and resolving

*" [This program] brought some dignity to our school, and our students wish they could have more opportunities like this one."*

*- Teacher from Olaya's Learning Center*



conflict.

- **Addictions:** This course aimed at providing the tools to identify risk factors and biological, social, cultural and economic consequences of addiction.
- **Identity and Rights:** This workshop intended to briefly show the students their background, Caribbean history, local folklore, and civil rights.
- **Arts, Literature, Music, Theatre, Painting and Photography:** These workshops aim to develop intellectual, imaginative, and creative skills and explore a range of ideas about different art-related topics.

## Impact of the Project and Emerging Lessons

The ECdC education model has had a significant impact on the schools and communities involved in the program, improving the lives of the youth and channeling their energies to learn and develop.

While the project is still under implementation and has not been formally evaluated, some of the emerging lessons are as follows:

### **Involving communities creates ownership -**

During both the first and second stages of the program, the project has involved the communities situated around the learning centers. The communities have not only have been participating by improving the learning infrastructure and equipment used in the arts-based program, but have benefitted from dialogue around important issues relevant to the upbringing of their children. The open discussion of often sensitive subjects related to their children's mental and physical health has helped sensitize parents to these topics and to better relate to their children.

The project has also worked closely with principals and teachers. ECdC is building their capacity to

implement the educational model and to extend the program to other groups not included in the project. The teachers from the ECdC have also benefitted from this experience - it has allowed them to put their talents and passion for teaching, into practice.

**Lessons on Methodology** (i) Future workshops will be more focused on the pedagogy used by ECdC and less on theoretical courses; (ii) Workshops and activities which bring together teachers and parents will be strengthened; (iii) Further efforts will be made to increase the involvement of school principals.

**Positive changes in the children** - There were generally high levels of satisfaction among parents, children and teachers in the program. Parents acknowledged lower levels of aggressiveness, and better school performance, notably in math and science. Students also exhibited higher levels of concentration and took more interest in their school work. Their relationships with family members have also improved.

**Interinstitutional Cooperation** -The project benefited from committed participation from, among others, the District's Secretary of Education as well as ECdC and the implementing schools



and centers. Nevertheless, replication of this model across the whole country will likely require the increased involvement of the Ministry of Education in order to ensure that the successful elements of the model are incorporated in the PEI- School Institutional Educational Project- the main instrument used in Colombia for school-based management.

#### **ECdC methodology: A Talent Seedbed**

*“One day a friend invited me to a cultural fair at a local district. I saw a contemporary dance company directed by Alvaro Restrepo. When I saw the company on stage, I had a revelation, perhaps this is what I am and what I have been all my life: a dancer. [...]”*

*Something that struck my attention at the School of the Body was precisely the body. Everything was focused on the concept of the body as heritage, a place where life occurs... a notion of wealth. That is what I liked most. Now I'm a multiplier of this experience, capturing other youth - like I was captured at some point, and offering them an option for professional and human fulfillment through dance.”*

- Lobadys Perez  
Dancer and Teacher at ECdC

#### **Sustainability and Scale-up**

As a result of the success of the project, additional funding was provided and the closing date was extended to the end of 2010.

The additional funds (15% of the original allocation) will be used to strengthen the ECdC model in the selected schools and facilitate the mainstreaming of the program on a national basis, if this proves feasible. An additional US\$52,700 will also be allocated by the Secretariat of Education in Cartagena to complement some project activities, such as the impact evaluation, strategic communication campaign and teacher and principal training. As resources are limited, the additional funds will target 3 out of the 7 schools, selected based on their performance rating and their potential to scale. The target will be to reach around 380 students. Additional support from the Secretariat of Education of Cartagena and from two large private foundations that have helped the ECdC during the last two years will also be requested.

**The Japan Social Development Fund** -- The JSDF is a partnership between the Government of Japan and the World Bank that supports innovative social programs in developing countries. JSDF grants are executed by NGOs/CSOs and local governments and implemented at the community level. JSDF projects meet four basic requirements: (i) they target and respond to the needs of poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups, and aim to achieve rapid results, (ii) they are innovative and pilot alternative approaches or partnerships, (iv) they use participatory designs and stakeholder consultation to design inputs and as an integral part of monitoring and evaluation, (iii) they empower local communities, local governments, NGOs/CSOs through capacity building and rapid feedback of lessons learned, and (v) they focus on scale-up potential, replication and the sustainability of interventions.

