

## Opportunities for Disadvantaged Children and Youths.

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The Foundation for Children and Youths (Opportúnitas) is an interesting example of how to build alliances among national and international partners. Since 1998, Opportúnitas has promoted and implemented innovative programs to create more opportunity for Venezuelan children and youths. In a country where more than 50% of the population is under 30 and the official unemployment rate is 20%, addressing the economic future of young people is critical to stability.

Opportúnitas' success can be attributed to two basic principles. First, you must have a clear, realistic vision of how you bring together the goals of the different actors, both beneficiaries and partners. Second, you must encourage business participation by highlighting its potential to be positively recognized which in turn could motivate other public and/or private organizations to participate. Consequently, Opportúnitas found a third principle -- that businesses were ultimately interested in more than the recognition they would gain by participating in the program. They were also inherently interested in the population that comprised their future workers and consumers.

### **The Participants.**

Based on these principles, Opportúnitas set out to develop ambitious plans to improve the lives of Venezuelan youth. With its clearly articulate vision, Opportúnitas attained significant financial and advisory support from the private and public sectors. From the local private sector, Opportunitas established relationships with Sincrudos de Oriente (SINCOR), CANTV, Banco Federal, Banco de Venezuela, Shell de Venezuela, Ruedas Aluminio (Rualca), Cerámicas Carabobo, and the Asociación Bancaria de Venezuela. Contributions were both financial and participation as Board Members. From the public sector it received support from Petroléos de Venezuela (PDVSA), the Government of Carabobo and the Office of the Mayor of Baruta. Finally, in a country with limited international donor presence, Opportúnitas developed significant contacts with international organizations both public and private. They included the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), the International Youth Foundation (IYF), Lucent Technologies, JP Morgan Chase Bank, the International Women's Forum, and Microsoft.

### **PDVSA.**

Why has Opportúnitas has significant success creating partnerships with the private sectors? Consider its relationship with PDVSA. As an international energy corporation

### **Opportúnitas**

Between 2000 and 2003 the Inter-American Foundation will commit US \$240,000 to the Venezuelan Foundation Opportúnitas. Additional inputs from Opportúnitas, Lucent Technologies, the International Youth Foundation and other companies totals \$1,475,335.

\*The scope of Opportúnitas's activities goes beyond IAF funded projects.

owned by the Venezuelan government, PDVSA conducts operational and commercial activities in Venezuela and abroad. After 27 years of operation, PDVSA is one of the world's most important energy companies, with assets of approximately 860 million dollars.

PDVSA had an eight-year, co-financing agreement with the IAF to co-fund self-help development projects in Venezuela. As a result of that agreement, PDVSA as evolved its concept of Social Investment. That evolution included moving from a top-down social attitude to a responsive one; from a case-by-case focus, based on isolated contributions, to a competitive program devoted to sustainable development; and from an isolated philanthropic effort to one of responsibility shared through tri-sectorial alliances. In 1999 PDVSA funded Opportúntas' program activities in the State of Anzoátegui under a three-year, 110,000 bolivar grant.

The purpose of the grant is to promote the generation of income and employment for young people. Opportúntas conducted a feasibility study to determine the economic potential in four municipalities in the State of Anzoátegui. Specifically, Opportúntas wanted to align employment needs with training opportunities offered to youths by the various organizations in the region. As a result of this effort, a series of traditional jobs to include: plumbing, electrical work, and tourism were identified as priority human resources by the local business market. Opportúntas then worked to ensure it provided the appropriate training to maximize the potential for these young people to obtain and/or generate their own employment.

#### **CANTV.**

To execute its program in Caracas, Opportúntas developed a strategic alliance with CANTV, Venezuela's largest telecommunications company. In conjunction with CANTV its affiliates -- Movilnet, Cantv.net, and Caveguías -- offer their clients comprehensive solutions for their telecommunications needs, be they for wireless, fixed, data transmission, Internet, or information services and telephone directories.

CANTV's CSR efforts focus on grants to community organizations that support on-going programs dedicated to Venezuelan children and youth. The alliance with CANTV was officially established in 2001 with a contribution of 40 million bolivars. The project goal was to consolidate a replicable model for training impoverished youths in vocational technology. Ultimately, the program hoped to create more job opportunities for these urban youth.

#### **The Project with the IAF.**

In 2000, the IAF made a grant to Opportúntas to capitalize on the strategic corporate alliances it had made. The grant focused on four basic activities: establishing three regional committees that would support local groups implementing programs for children and youths; training local groups to enable them to more effectively and efficiently formulate, operate, and coordinate youth programs; providing financial resources to establish three regional funds to finance local initiatives for children and youths; creating publicity campaigns to promote Opportúntas goals in the states where it was active.

Over two years, more than 1,400 children and youth participated in the program. Each

state drew different issues to be addressed based on the local needs. For example, in Caracas, Oportunitas focused its efforts on diminishing the technology gap by training low-income, youths and teachers in basic information and communication technology tools. In the State of Anzoátegui, however young people were trained in more traditional jobs that fell outside the petroleum sector and focused on self-employment. Finally, in the State of Carabobo, the program focused on inserting disadvantaged children and youth into society through a comprehensive training program that addresses personal, social, educational, and cultural development.

The programs were further reinforced as they established networks and regional committees to support the various local groups undertaking projects for children as well as those directing regional strategies to benefit this same population.

### **The Beneficiaries.**

The success of these alliances will be judged insofar as they result in jobs and attaining skills desired by potential employers. In the State of Anzoátegui, training was tied specifically to local demand; however in Caracas, the program has a broader vision which is reflected in the training of youth for more global job requirements as it is a technology driven program.

To date, the program has had strong results in the State of Anzoátegui. Participants in the program have been placed in jobs or have generated their own employment. Furthermore, the grassroots organizations, *Asociación Capacitación Educativa, Vocacional y Productiva* and *Asociación Paragüero*, which worked with these youths can clearly see an improved level of self esteem and positive feedback from society and families.

In Caracas, two courses were taught: one to train the young people the other to train their teachers. Youth were trained in preventive and corrective PC maintenance. Tecnoscopio allowed the participants to repair computers at its office. Teachers were taught in the use of information and communication technologies to enhance their skills and enable them to use these abilities in the teaching and learning processes. The future of the program looks as bright as it's past. There are plans to engage the communities through establishing "School Data Transmission Centers." Selected teaching and management personnel will be trained by Red Interactiva Educativa C.A. (RIE-DUC).

Although the situation faced by Venezuelan youths is very serious, Oportunitas, armed with a clearly articulated vision and strong private sector alliances, is helping to find a way out for Venezuela's most disadvantaged youths.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Imitation is the highest form of a compliment; social investment programs that seek corporate support should find prestigious partners that will attract others;
- Alliances that bring together several partners benefit from a clearly articulated plan as well as in-depth analysis of how to tie together individual partner and overall program goals;

- Having the financial and technical support of various national and international actors ensures a sound basis for project development.

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