



Preventing Crime and Violence among Youth in Jamaica



USAID/Jamaica used evidence from a successful program evaluation to strengthen localization efforts, improving their understanding of effective programming for at-risk youth. As a result, the Mission extended subaward timeframes to align with local needs, increased private sector engagement, and incorporated youth voices in planning and leading activities.

CONTEXT

Through its Local Partner Development (LPD) activity, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Jamaica built the capacity of local civil society organizations (CSOs), government entities, and the private sector to prevent youth crime and violence. Running from 2017–2023, the activity originally focused on strengthening CSO and government capacity to improve citizen security and social cohesion. LPD shifted objectives at its midway point when the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, the cooperative partnership that funded LPD, identified the need to strengthen the capacity of targeted organizations to use evidence-based strategies to reduce crime and violence among at-risk youth.

To implement the new youth focus and provide practical examples of successful, evidence-based interventions in this area, the Mission and its implementing partner conducted a study tour to USAID/Mexico. Representatives from USAID/Jamaica, the implementing partner, the Government of Jamaica, the private sector, CSOs, and non-governmental organizations learned about the Mission's youth crime and violence prevention programs, including the use of risk assessment tools and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) methodology.

Ultimately, LPD used a practical approach to strengthen local capacity, piloting youth development activities alongside local partners so they could learn by doing. Learning and adapting continuously throughout the activity, LPD helped local organizations use data and evidence from communities to contribute to improved outcomes, identify hotspots for at-risk youth, target programming for this group, and implement the best mix of interventions, including life skills training, vocational training, apprenticeships, drug treatment, mentorship, and CBT.

USAID commissioned a final performance evaluation of LPD to determine the extent to which: a) targeted youth, their families, and communities perceived that LPD's strategic approach improved their resilience to crime and violence; b) targeted local organizations were able to implement evidence-based programming to contribute to improvements in activity outcomes; and c) private sector engagement contributed to the sustainability of program interventions.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate LPD and validate its theory of change. The evaluation team gathered qualitative evidence through 42 key informant interviews with activity stakeholders, including national government, grantees, CSOs, and private sector organizations, as well as eight focus group discussions with youth participants. Additionally, the team drew quantitative data from a non-random, purposive sample survey of 149 youth participants and family members, as well as from monitoring and evaluation data and program reporting documents. A local evaluator served as a key team member and contributor. After collecting data between November 2022 and January 2023, the team triangulated quantitative and qualitative evidence to produce findings, conclusions, and recommendations. For a detailed description of the methodology, see the [evaluation report](#).

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation found that LPD's model, which integrated life skills training, vocational training and apprenticeships, CBT, and other components, was a key contributing factor to increasing the perceived resilience of youth in a short period of time. Individualized elements, such as case management and mentorship, also contributed significantly to these results. The evaluation found that the USAID/Mexico study tour effectively helped attendees learn about and believe in the importance of evidence-based approaches, while increasing knowledge about the effectiveness of the CBT model and risk assessment tools. Study tour respondents indicated that the experience was highly motivational, moving them to be more active LPD implementing partners. In addition to the study tour, stakeholders from the Government of Jamaica, CSOs, and the private sector participated in awareness and engagement workshops, specialized training, and collaboration opportunities to increase understanding of and ability to implement evidence-based interventions. In addition, the evaluation found that private sector engagement was a critical component of the activity.

LPD faced external challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, gaps in grantee capacity, and limited time and resources. On an administrative level, the evaluation found that several factors, including timelines being too short to see results, hampered sub-grant administration and effectiveness. Potential barriers to the sustainability of program outcomes include limited funding, hesitance among local businesses to employ at-risk youth, and high program attrition. The evaluation also recommended that the Mission should consider commissioning a cost-effectiveness study to analyze and determine the optimum level of support needed for technical and psychosocial support to youth to effectively reduce their risk factors.





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High-risk youth and parents shared their personal experiences with the USAID/Mexico violence prevention program with study tour participants.

ACTION BASED ON EVIDENCE FROM THE FINDINGS

Because of the Mission’s intentional and adaptive approach to learning, USAID/Jamaica was able to incorporate many lessons learned under LPD into other programming, even before finalizing the evaluation. This included the USAID Positive Pathways activity, which started in 2020 and was in its second year of implementation when the LPD evaluation was completed.

While case management can be a relatively costly and time-intensive approach, the LPD evaluation found that it resulted in a reduction in the risk level of targeted youth, higher satisfaction among program participants, and lower attrition. As a result, Positive Pathways uses case management to keep youth engaged, especially when they leave the program to pursue economic opportunities. Additionally, the evaluation found that low parental engagement “limited activity results and brought into question the interventions’ sustainability.” As a result, Positive Pathways has dedicated activities for youth and parents to spend time together, such as trips to national sites that give youth the opportunity to see the world outside of their neighborhood and bond with their parents or caregivers.

Private sector engagement was a key aspect of LPD. The evaluation recommended that future programming provide sustained funding to recruit and maintain private sector support while strengthening local organizations’ capacity in “social development, programming approaches, project management, and skills in connecting with

and navigating the donor community.” As a result, USAID/Jamaica is working more closely with private sector actors to improve their ability to work with and tailor programming for at-risk youth, and to incentivize them to work with this group. This incentivization includes building on current corporate social responsibility activities by providing training, co-financing, and ongoing technical support; offering study tours; and facilitating expert international technical assistance and co-funding. Additionally, under Positive Pathways, USAID/Jamaica increased the funding timeframes for some subawards, from six months to multi-year activities. By enabling recipients to have a longer implementation period, their interventions can deepen engagement with targeted youth and increase the likelihood of success.

While LPD successfully incorporated youth feedback to improve its programming, the evaluation recommended going even further by involving youth at the activity design phase. In response, USAID engaged youth to share their experiences during co-creation of the USAID Youth Empower Activity. The activity also consults youth in important logistical considerations, such as the location and timeframe of program activities. USAID/Jamaica is seeking to work more with youth-led organizations, so that youth are in charge of leading activities.

Finally, USAID/Jamaica is commissioning cost-effectiveness studies based on an evaluation recommendation. The study will help find the optimal mix of interventions to treat at-risk youth and the optimal age to begin interventions.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ▶ **Go backwards to move forward.** Learning is an active, intentional process and cannot sit on a shelf. By learning from mistakes, projects can continue to improve. Across the board, the evaluation found that “a core component of LPD’s success was the activity’s willingness to adapt over time by adding components that emerged as necessary (such as travel stipends), sequencing components to enable sustained participation, and scaling up components that proved successful (such as case management/mentorship).”
- ▶ **Harness opportunities to learn together and showcase new approaches.** Inspire action and commitment by exploring new, dynamic, and practical ways to learn from one another. Eleven CSO, private sector, and Government of Jamaica organizations attended the study tour in Mexico, learning first-hand how USAID/Mexico approached crime prevention through the risk assessment tool and CBT model and seeing what was working, what was not, and how to adapt their approaches in Jamaica. The study tour built buy-in, helping stakeholders better understand USAID/Jamaica’s vision and express enthusiasm and optimism for the new approach. All evaluation interviewees that participated in the study tour reported learning about the effectiveness of the CBT model in reducing crime and violence in the Mexican communities they visited, which had similar economic and social conditions to those in LPD’s target communities. They also agreed that this experience helped them see the importance of evidence-based approaches and private sector engagement in reducing youth crime and violence. Finally, they reported that the experience was highly motivational for them to be active LPD implementing partners.

- ▶ **Adapt, adapt, adapt! Throughout the activity, LPD continuously adapted based on new needs and evidence.** During the evaluation process, the team struggled to find a large enough sample size of former participants for the survey, as many of this target population are in conflict with the law, resist responding to unsolicited phone calls, and change their phone numbers often. As a result, the team extended the end date of the award multiple times to complete the survey. LPD’s experience showed the Mission the particular challenge of organizing an evaluation of at-risk youth, and they weighed the value of a statistically robust sample size against the reality on the ground. Going forward, the Mission will de-emphasize survey sample sizes in future evaluations, instead prioritizing a rigorous qualitative study over a longer time frame that uses surveys to complement results.



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The USAID/Mexico study tour helped attendees learn about the effectiveness of the CBT model and risk assessment tools.

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