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**FADCANIC Capacity Building Activity
Quarterly Report
October 1- December 31, 2012**



Submitted by:

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Title of Project: FADCANIC Capacity-Building Activity under the EQUIP1 Project “Expansion of Centers of Excellence in Nicaragua with Emphasis on the APA Methodology (EXCELENCIA)”

Main Contractor: American Institutes for Research (AIR)

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Sep 30, 2013 (end date of currently approved activities)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The FADCANIC Capacity Building Activity is an 18-month activity funded by USAID/Nicaragua under the EQUIP1/EXCELENCIA Project, implemented by the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

The Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast (FADCANIC) is a civil society, non-governmental organization located in the multi-ethnic region of Caribbean Nicaragua. The organization is a major implementer of development projects in this region of Nicaragua, with a particular focus on environmental, agricultural, education, and youth development programs, and funding from diverse organizations and funders.

AIR provides FADCANIC with technical assistance in institutional and programmatic areas to manage USAID funds according to USAID standards. The objective of the activity is to strengthen FADCANIC's capacity to manage USAID funds, and to know, master, and comply with USAID's complex requirements for adequate program implementation, including reporting and achieving results.

AIR assists FADCANIC in developing management practices in the areas of administration and finance, personnel management, monitoring and evaluation, and strategic planning. AIR also provides technical programmatic assistance in approaches in working with youth to develop activities that will introduce life skills and better employment opportunities.

The agreement modification initiating the activity was signed in July, 2011; implementation and technical assistance were then scheduled to be completed by the end of calendar year 2012. In June 2012, AIR submitted to USAID a request for a no-cost extension to enhance impact and allow time for close-out. A work plan and a revised budget for the no-cost extension that would see the project close in Sep 2013 (with major activities ending in June 2013) was submitted during this quarter and subsequently approved on January 15, 2013.

Activities under each result during the October-December 2012 period are described below.

RESULT 1: FADCANIC's ORGANIZATIONAL, MANAGEMENT, MONITORING & EVALUATION SYSTEMS IMPROVED

3.1 Administration and Finance

1. Evaluation and monitoring of the use of policy manuals, rules and procedures put into effect by FADCANIC. (2nd. Stage; October, 2012):

The evaluation was carried out in two phases. First an initial evaluation and gathering information about the extent the different staff members have been involved with using the manuals and a second phase in which participants were directed to (re)-reading the manuals and to complete the evaluation forms again with feedback.

This evaluation took a long time to complete because of the following complexities: a) the personalized character of the evaluation, b) the three locations in which it had to be carried out (Bluefields, El Rama y Managua), c) taking account of the time constraints of the interviewees so as not to interrupt their regular activities. (Most of the process completed by the end of September although the last evaluations were completed in early October which is why it is reported here again in this quarterly report). Eight out of 19 evaluated did not provide answers to the 2nd format.

A report about the personalized assessment of the use of the manuals was prepared taking into consideration the two stages and was presented on October 31, 2012. While it has to be noted that some staff members displayed a lack of interest in participating in the second phase of the evaluation, overall the effort has proved to be very valuable, raising the knowledge and awareness of staff members of the tools created by FADCANIC through USAID funding to help in their jobs.

The achievement in this activity was to make employees aware of the effort that FADCANIC has made through donor support to make properly documented tools available to them that allow each of them to raise their levels of efficiency at work. After looking at the consolidated results the following can be noted: The employees that have been evaluated improved - on average - from a basic capacity (41-60%) to a moderate capacity (61-80%). Employees of the Administrative-Financial are improved – on average - from moderate capacity (61-80%) to strong capacity (80-100%)¹. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the evaluation plus training approach.

¹ Numbers in parenthesis denote the number correct answers in the evaluation tool

2. Evaluation of the Use of Manuals. Evaluation Phase on the Efficiency and Sufficiency of the contents of the Manuals.

In order to achieve a complete and comprehensive analysis of the manuals, after completing the evaluation of the use of the manuals, we proceeded to evaluating the content of the manuals to see if they are efficient and sufficient, meet the needs of current and future growth of FADCANIC, as well as internationally established standard procedures and if they adhered to the requirements of USAID. This activity took place in the month of November 2012.

Next steps

- A final report with recommendations on the manuals is expected to be submitted to FADCANIC in mid-February for review with a final discussion and recommendations for modification to the manuals to be developed in March for FADCANIC board approval.
- Preparation of training materials on administrative and financial procedures in accordance with the provisions of the manuals including additions and modifications resulting from the previous activity.

3.2 Personnel Management

1) Status Update on Development of Personnel database with standard employee information for all personnel:

- Fall of 2011 – FADCANIC HR Manager created an excel spreadsheet as a database shell for all personnel. All employee data was entered and managed through the excel tool.
- Winter of 2012 – HR manager worked on creation of an online database system (system developed).
- Spring through Summer of 2012 – roll out/implementation of online database
- **December 2012 – fully functional HR database**

Achievement

The system began working at the end September 2012 but needed fine tuning and was actually in full usage by the end of the year 2012. It is a complete system which also includes a part dedicated to the Financial and Administrative Department. The part pertaining to HR is comprised of all personal data for each employee (i.e., full name, title, date of birth, social security number, copy of id, copy of titles and certificates, date of hire, salary, contracts, recommendation letters, and project aligned). There is a part for promotion, salary increase, demotion etc. There is also a section for the control of vacation and one for pay roll. At the present time the HR Manager creates the pay roll for all workers on the South Autonomous region; Because of the distance pay-roll for the North region is created and managed there.

At present all employee documents are scanned (i.e., employment contracts, recommendations, letters of reference, photocopies of id etc., converted to PDF and uploaded in the Data Base.

The HR part of the system creates two reports: one is a full list of all employees with all data needed; the other is the vacation situation for all workers.

To date there are 206 formal workers at FADCANIC who are inscribed in the Nicaraguan Social Security System. There are some vacant posts yet to be occupied so by the end of February the total number of staff could increase.

Development of training materials for FADCANIC managers and scheduled training session during trip scheduled for November 7 - November 15, 2012: RAAS and RAAN Managers.

Manual of Personnel Policies: The manual was validated and during the last STTA trip of the HR expert the following activities took place: 1) review what the different steps of an interview process and the overall procedures of FADCANIC are as currently laid out in their newly designed policies; 2) train managers to understand how to conduct interviews and make sure job descriptions are aligned for positions that are being recruited for; 3) review of concept of performance management.

A decision was made to first train managers to increase their awareness of FADCANIC Human Resources policies and procedures, prior to training all employees. The strategy was that managers would review the content and be able to refer to policy manuals as needed, and be able to take some of the training materials back to their offices and share information with employees.

The training sessions included employees of both RAAS and RAAN:

Training sessions:

- Friday November 9, 2012: Bluefield Office – RAAS (14 managers attended)
- Monday November 12, 2012: Managua Office – Thalia Coe and 3 Senior Managers from RAAN and Wawashang attended
- Tuesday November 13, 2012: Managua Office – 5 Staff Members, either already managers or soon to take on the role of staff manager in their office (RAAN: Rosita and Bilwi)
- The training was done in Spanish and materials were provided in Spanish as well as English.

Training content:

1. Review of FADCANIC policies and procedures (provided to all employees)
2. Review of Recruiting and hiring process at FADCANIC (based on the policies and procedures established 2011)
 - Review of process
 - Interview techniques
3. Review of Performance Management Process
 - Review of process
 - Coaching techniques for performance management and employee development
 - Review of Performance management template to be used as standard

The visit also included a “Training of Trainers” for the HR Manager so she can introduce policies to new employees as they come on board. The training is to become part of a formal onboarding process.

Forms were created for recruiting processes such as a technical screening form or an interview form; a policy acknowledgment form for all employees to sign, to acknowledge review of policies was created for placement in the employees’ files as they are introduced to the policies. Also the accessibility of the policy handbook in the office was reinforced.

Performance management forms defining project goals and employee personal development were created and reviewed by Thalia Coe; forms were presented as part of the Performance Management training. Managers have returned to their office with an increased understanding on how to manage expectations and monitor employee performance around them.

Achievement:

- Number of Personnel trained in HR policies and management, went from zero to 23.
- The HR Policy manual was validated and the November training increased its awareness among managers.

2) Overview of possible next steps in 2013:

- Create shorter version for Employee Training on Policies and Procedures to ensure all employees’ awareness.
- Review/Finalize Induction/On-Boarding program: All new employees need to receive a copy of the policies and sign acknowledgment form – Onboarding Process is currently in a draft mode and will incorporate feedback received from training sessions.
- Create short modules (i.e., concept of weekly or bi-weekly “brown bag” or short meetings to assist managers in reviewing policies with employees in their respective offices, small introduction, review of individual sections at a time, focus on themes such as workplace environment, performance, time management, etc.)
- Develop a shorter version of performance management process training to be provided to employees to increase their understanding of the concept of performance management.

Workforce planning and staffing plan: Workforce planning and staffing plan will be easier to create once the 5 year strategy for the organization is approved and implemented, with a clear sense of business development, workforce planning and succession planning.

Assistance needs will be discussed with FADCANIC and may include: 1) creating a staffing plan (project and business development based); 2) Lining up all staff members according to their project and end dates of projects: a) Identify skills on demands (i.e., measure and evaluation, teachers, teacher trainers, etc.); b) Align business development needs and forecast to current internal supply of skills; c) Assess if staff not fully utilized can be crossed shared among projects (if not fully billed to one project) 3) Aligning business development forecasts to staffing needs and anticipated recruiting needs; 4) Creating a succession plan: a) Identify keys positions and timeline for actions, b) identify potential successors (internal and external).

3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Most other M&E activities fell under the cross-cutting activity “Baseline data collection for the new youth project”. Please refer to the Youth Development section following under Result 2 for details.

3.4 Strategic Planning

The main activity for this period consisted of planning for and holding the board of directors’ retreat on November 9, 2012. The agenda of the meeting consisted of an in-depth review of each of the five strategic goals and the steps required for moving forward each of the pieces of the plan. In addition, board members analyzed in detail all the strategies required to accomplish the desired future state of FADCANIC. The board also conducted an in-depth review of existing financial and human resources available, or missing, for the implementation of each of the strategic goals of the strategic plan. Based on the result of this exercise the Board of Directors learned that there are enough funds in hand to accomplish and carryout approximately two thirds of the goals and strategies. In fact, some of the activities listed in the plan are already in motion. The retreat was followed by a series of post-retreat meetings in Managua and Bluefields.

For the remainder of the reporting period, the strategic planning expert was engaged working on the different sections of the strategic plan, including work plans, and tables of key performance indicators.

Achievement:

On January 28, 2013 a copy of the final draft of the different sections of the strategic plan were submitted to FADCANIC for review and approval by the board of directors. It is attached to the submission of this report.

The evaluative comments by participants at the end of the retreat confirmed our initial assessment that the plan enjoys a high level of ownership among those who helped shape it. We credit the highly participatory nature of the process on all levels although it meant moving forward at a slower pace.

The final draft of the strategic plan includes a whole Objective dedicated to financial sustainability (Objective IV). Moreover, at the end of the retreat a financial analysis was conducted which allowed board members and program directors to gauge the amounts of funds available and missing for the implementation of each of the tasks contained in the plan.

Challenges:

Although enough funds exist for completing many of the activities and tasks contained in the strategic plan, FADCANIC will still have to raise a significant amount of funds to accomplish and sustain all the strategic goals, especially funds required for replicating their successful programs in other communities of the region.

Another concern is that not everyone who is going to have to implement pieces of the plan has a full sense or understanding of how complex, disruptive or demanding the strategic tasks can be, especially if the work load is not realigned to accommodate for added-on work stemming from the strategic plan. Continued communication of the importance of the plan and to roll it out in as much detail possible, to including strategic plan activities in monthly and annual work plans and staff expectations, may help minimize problems with implementation.

Next steps:

- Continued assistance to FADCANIC through monthly teleconference “check-ins”
- Assistance with tools for strategic plan implementation planning, including financial planning

RESULT 2: FADCANIC’S CAPABILITY TO IMPLEMENT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IMPROVED

The lead youth consultant for the project Ivette Fonseca jointly with FADCANIC’s technical team and the AIR Project Manager continued to oversee and organize capacity strengthening activities in the priority areas of Youth programming and M&E providing follow-up to outcomes and deliverables in those areas (e.g. Life Skills; Success Stories of youth who have benefitted from the EduExito project in the last three years).

Some of the tasks progressed slower than anticipated due to strong demand on FADCANIC staff in the start-up phase of the EduExito project expansion. Moreover, the last two weeks of December are only partially available for project work in Nicaragua due to the holidays.

Providing and organizing technical support to the area of M&E for FACCANIC's USAID funded youth at risk program.

AIR Consultant Joel Zamora provided technical accompaniment in this area which resulted in the following achievements:

- Information on the main achievements of the EduExito project between 2010-2012 was collected and has been analyzed by the M&E Specialist and the Lead Youth consultant. A summary will be finalized in the next quarter for inclusion in the publication of Success Stories of youths who have benefitted from the project.
- A draft version of the Success Stories has been translated to English and a first layout for a bilingual version of the document has been produced.
- A first review of the project's logic framework allowed for an analysis of the coherence between project's objectives and results and its main strategies identifying the main aspects to be monitored and evaluated during the 2013-2017 project implementation period. This first screening indicated the main criteria the M&E system needs to have and the conditions and resources required for its effective and efficient functioning.
- The main M&E indicators were reviewed jointly with FADCANIC staff. Given that many repetitions or omissions were encountered in that version, the need to develop a proposal for an improved set of indicators arose. A proposal of M&E indicators was submitted to USAID for its approval on Dec 31, 2012.
- In close cooperation between Mr. Zamora, Ms. Fonseca and FADCANIC staff, the selection criteria for EduExito beneficiaries were refined prioritizing six risk areas on which the project can intervene and make meaningful changes in the lives of youths. These criteria will also be a key part of the final M&E document.
- A session redefining CAYAC's role took place and a format of selection criteria was developed to be used by CAYAC's volunteers' members during the selection of new beneficiaries 2013. The format focuses on the assessment of the main risks and the level of life skills of each candidate.
- Based on USAID requirement, a wider and public invitation was organized to invite youth to apply to become an EduExito beneficiary in the five municipalities selected. Steps of the process were jointly defined such as i) a questionnaire format to be filled by the applicant, ii) the pre-selection process under CAYAC's responsibility, iii) visits to preselected candidates' households to confirm the family situation and iv) the final selection.
- A first draft of the Baseline (BL) survey was designed by AIR consultants with the input and review by the FADCANIC M&E Specialist.

- A draft sampling design of the population of the EduExito target group for the BL has been developed by the M&E Consultant with input from the FADCANIC M&E Specialist.

Next steps

- An M&E database will be developed and validated coupled with ongoing training to staff involved and in charge of running the database. Finalization of M&E indicators on which the collection, analysis and documentation of the information in the database will depend.
 - Sustainability strategies for EduExito will be developed jointly with key Project personnel and AIR consultants.
 - An M&E manual documenting procedures, formats, levels of decisions of the M&E system will be developed.
- ii) To provide technical accompaniment to develop Life Skills as a documented project's strategy in coordination with other consultants
- A final version of a document on the Life skills (LS) program was delivered to FADCANIC in early October after a week feedback received from technical staff.
 - The document contains a conceptual framework of LS and methodological and an organizational strategy to develop the three priority life skills within the target group of youth. General methodologies, activities and recommendations for parents and families were included in each of the sections.
 - The SEL approach introduced to FADCANIC staff confirmed to them its importance for youth programming.
 - A draft proposal on self-evaluation mechanisms of Life Skills changes among youth beneficiaries was developed.

Issues and challenges

- The LS program was designed before the new EduExito expansion phase was approved and its content needs to be adjusted and approved taking into account new strategies agreed to provide attention to the target groups.
- Prioritized LS's capacities (3) are already included in draft M&E indicators; their monitoring needs to be tested.

Progress in next 3 months

- Continued technical support to develop viable strategies and procedures to measure LS youth changes and achievements.
- Begin work on updating and expanding documentation of LS strategies

iii) Outcomes have been developed in articulation with other AIR staff and consultants managing ongoing technical support processes.

- Various versions of terms of references of a proposed KAPP survey and a training process for FADCANIC were developed.

Next steps

- A final confirmation of this consultancy still pending to be developed within the first semester period of 2013.

- AIR made detailed suggestions on how to broaden and deepen the scope of the task of developing a Code of conduct for FADCANIC based on a Children' Rights approach.

PROJECT MONITORING AND EVALUATION

AIR consultant Jose Antonio Cordoba participated in a USAID training on the use of the TRAINET system. He then coordinated the collection and processing of information on trainings executed by AIR staff and consultants under this project for the quarter July to September 2012 and the FY 2012. Because this was the first time that this activity happened, all trainings had first to be identified with each consultant, participant details and cost information were collected and the information was entered into the system according to the requirements established by TRAINET. This activity was conducted during the period from October 16 to November 9, 2012.

Moreover, a document describing the project achievements so far as well as any major changes between the previously approved and the current work plan were submitted to USAID.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Please refer to achievements described in the individual sections.

ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR NEXT QUARTER

Please refer to the individual sections.