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FADCANIC Capacity Building Activity
Quarterly Report
April 1-June 30, 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)”

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

RESULT 1: FADCANIC’s ORGANIZATIONAL, MANAGEMENT, MONITORING & EVALUATION SYSTEMS IMPROVED..... 3

RESULT 2: FADCANIC’s CAPABILITY TO IMPLEMENT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IMPROVED 6

PROJECT MONITORING AND EVALUATION..... 7

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED 7

ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR NEXT QUARTER..... 7

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 through June 2013 for the activity, to enhance impact and allow time for close-out.

Activities under each result during the April-June 2012 period are described below.

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

In June, after preparatory planning sessions with the strategic planning committee, the strategic planning specialist facilitated a FADCANIC board retreat. Participants reached consensus on the current state of and the desired future state of the organization, and agreed on the strategic goals to be pursued by FADCANIC over the next 5 year period.

During this quarter, the AIR human resources specialist traveled to Nicaragua to work with her counterpart in reviewing existing HR policies and documents and in planning how training sessions can best be organized around the HR policies and documentation. She also identified gaps in policies and materials required to address needs in this area.

Additionally, the first training session focused on monitoring and evaluation concepts was held. Moreover, terms of reference for consultants were developed to present a proposal to assist and

build capacity of FADCANIC staff to develop a baseline for the upcoming expansion of FADCANIC's youth-at-risk project.

Additional details in each area are described below.

3.1 Administration and Finance

In this quarter, the baseline report for the dimensions rated in the organization capacity assessment (OCA) tool was developed. Moreover, work towards evaluation and training tools started. In coordination among FADCANIC staff, AIR, and local finance specialists, a work plan for future activities was developed that refined the content and timing of activities for the rest of 2012.

3.2 Personnel Management

In May, the AIR HR specialist travelled to Nicaragua to work with her FADCANIC counterpart. Her work included detailed review of FADCANIC HR materials, including the internal labor regulations and manual of policies and norms, in order to fully understand and crosscheck the existing policies and documentation in this area and how specific training sessions can be organized around these policies and related documentation. These training sessions for FADCANIC staff will next be developed, piloted, and rolled out with the support of the HR specialist prior to November. Training sessions topics identified to date include a general overview of organizational policies and procedures, performance management, orientation and on-boarding processes, and recruiting. Other topics that have been discussed include workforce planning and the identification and management of key staff talent and skills within FADCANIC.

Additionally, the AIR HR specialist worked on the documentation of FADCANIC's baseline status in the human resource areas of the administrative and management performance tool. She also defined the actions and steps needed to reach the objectives in areas including recruitment and retention polices, job descriptions, personnel policies, staff performance management, and salary and benefit polices, as well as steps needed to achieve longer term goals in these areas.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A two-day workshop on basic monitoring and evaluation concepts was held June 20-21 in Bluefields with participation from four M&E officials and program managers. The workshop had both theoretical components/presentations as well as a hands-on team working component. The following contents were covered:

- Basic concepts and the project cycle of social projects
- Diagnostics and establishment of a base line
- Project indicators
- The logical framework in social projects
- M&E as tool for decision making

Feedback from participants in the workshop was positive and a second workshop on the same topic is planned for the next quarter for FADCANIC staff members in the RAAN.

Moreover, terms of reference for consultants were developed to present a proposal to assist and build capacity of FADCANIC staff to develop a baseline for the upcoming expansion of FADCANIC's youth-at-risk project. The diagnostic of FADCANIC practices, challenges and needs in the area of M&E was finalized during this quarter.

3.3 Strategic Planning

The current quarter proved to be a productive period in the strategic planning process, with participants in the strategic planning process and FADCANIC leadership reaching a shared understanding of the current and future states for FADCANIC.

The AIR strategic planning specialist held a series of working and planning meetings in Nicaragua with members the Strategic Planning Committee, developing preliminary strategic goals. This was followed by consultations with the two regional directors and with program directors to present drafts of preliminary strategic goals and to receive feedback on them, in preparation for the June strategic planning retreat with the board of directors.

During the board member retreat, participants reached a consensus on the current state and the desired future state for FADCANIC. Participants also agreed on the strategic goals listed below, and on the steps required to reach each one:

1. Strengthen the organizational management and development of FADCANIC.
2. Improve the quality of inter-cultural and bilingual education programs (with improved Youth Programming addressed under this goal).
3. Improve and increase the use of strategic communications at all levels of the organization.
4. Strengthen FADCANIC's organizational sustainability and fundraising capacity.
5. Strengthen and replicate FADCANIC's model for managing and sustaining natural resources and the environment.

These goals define the basis for the strategic plan currently under development. A key consideration as the process moves forward is the design and incorporation of mechanisms and procedures to monitor the implementation of the strategic plan. These will be developed with the assistance of the AIR and local m&e specialists and included as part of the strategic plan document.

Another critical issue is FADCANIC's ability to secure additional resources for successful implementation of its strategic plan. The strategic planning specialist will work with the team to review what resources FADCANIC currently has at its disposal, apart from the technical assistance provided by AIR during the life of this activity, and what areas will need additional resources (including time, expertise, and funding). Resource requirements will be one of the areas addressed in the sustainability plan.

RESULT 2: FADCANIC's CAPABILITY TO IMPLEMENT YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IMPROVED

During this period, AIR contracted as a consultant the Nicaraguan specialist María Ivette Fonseca. She conducted an assessment of FADCANIC's vision, current approaches and practices, and staff preparation in the area of youth programming. Based on this, she prepared recommendations for prioritized areas for capacity strengthening between June and December 2012.

The assessment was carried out from early May through mid-June, with the consultant working with the project's technical team during the process and coordinating with FADCANIC leadership and staff.

During the course of the assessment, the consultant reviewed documents and conducted 30 interviews with adolescents and youth-at-risk, parents, members of community-based advisory groups known as CAYACs, teachers and staff at the Wawashang agricultural school, and FADCANIC project directors and board members. The consultant also participated in an exchange with over 100 of the beneficiaries of FADCANIC youth projects in order to understand and incorporate youths' perspectives and suggestions for achieving more and better impact in their lives.

Ms. Fonseca developed and used an analysis matrix to map the scope of programs (objectives, outcomes, strategies and activities), with a focus on relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. The results of this analysis were presented to and discussed with FADCANIC technical staff, serving as a starting point for a discussion through which a common and better understanding of strengths and gaps in youth programming was achieved.

Meetings were also held with staff of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) youth program *Voz Joven* to discuss the program's work in promoting life skills among youth and to facilitate future exchanges and coordination between FADCANIC and *Voz Joven*.

Findings and recommendations of Ms. Fonseca's assessment, which will inform AIR support over the coming months, include:

- The educational programs offered by FADCANIC for adolescents and youth-at-risk are considered to be relevant. Additionally, vocational and technical courses provided by FADCANIC and linked to employment are an effective strategy for creating opportunities for youth in the RAAS, but there should be a focus on reaching more vulnerable youth, including targeting scholarships for this group.
- Life Skills programming is critically important in work with youth-at-risk, as these youth often suffer from low self-esteem and lack experience with positive family patterns of interaction. However, better documented and more consistent methodology and training in Life Skills is needed to increase impact. In order to address this need, a structured, cross-cutting Life Skills component should be developed and incorporated into educational programming.

- Sports, culture and recreation have been included in FADCANIC programming, and there is a strong need to further develop this strategy both as a key part of holistic youth development and as a way for youth to express themselves and exercise their rights.
- The number of youth-at-risk reached through programming remains relatively small, in relation to the problematic context and the funds provided by the donor. Additionally, selection criteria should be reviewed to ensure that youth with the most need are being reached.
- Stronger m&e systems and competencies are needed in order to provide quality information on - and to – youth-at-risk, their families, schools and communities. M&E systems also need to be strengthened in order to provide relevant data for policy and decision makers at all levels.
- Employability skills should be defined as a desired outcome and incorporated into all educational programming, reflecting coordination with the private sector.

PROJECT MONITORING AND EVALUATION

During this period the project team made additional revisions to the Performance Management Plan (PMP) based on discussions with USAID personnel, and worked on the preparation of the baseline report for the activity.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- While the strategic planning process has encountered delays at times, FADCANIC leadership has made good use of the strategic planning process as an opportunity for organizational self-examination and exploration of solutions to on-going challenges.
- The diagnostic evaluation and the collaborative process to define priority areas for improvement and suggested next steps by the consultant in the youth programming area was very well received by FADCANIC staff and represents a strong starting point for addressing capacity building needs in this area.

ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR NEXT QUARTER

- Completion of draft strategic plan followed by review and discussion of plan;
- On-site verification of the use of manuals and procedures in the finance and administrative area; presentation of findings and most commonly encountered issues, recommendations for improvements, and development of a training plan based on the findings;
- Preparation of trainings and materials on HR procedures and personnel policies;
- Hands-on training of FADCANIC M&E specialists in designing and conducting baseline studies and developing indicators, through the process of planning, conducting, and analyzing data for a baseline study in new implementation areas for a possible youth-at-risk project expansion;

- Excel training session for FADCANIC staff in July and August in both RAAS and RAAN;
- Second installment of basic M&E concepts workshop for FADCANIC staff in the RAAN;
- Experience exchange in the M&E area with other Nicaraguan NGOs and the US Department of Labor/ENTERATE Project M&E specialist;
- A learning exchange between FADCANIC youth programs and the UNFPA *Voz Joven* Program;
- Documentation of FADCANIC's work in Life Skills including the conceptual framework, methodologies and material;
- Start facilitation for the development of a FADCANIC Code of Conduct regarding work with children and youth, including children and youth rights and standards of participation; and
- Develop methodology for study on the needs of youth-at-risk.