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## **REVIEW OF CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES’ “IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN LIVING IN THE STREETS OF SANTO DOMINGO (PROJECT NINA)”**

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**REVIEW OF CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES’  
“IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR VULNERABLE  
CHILDREN LIVING IN THE STREETS OF SANTO DOMINGO  
(PROJECT NINA)”**

July 31 – August 4, 2006

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
CONANI	National Child Welfare Bureau
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DCOF	Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
DR	Dominican Republic
ILO	International Labor Organization
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NGO	nongovernmental organization
SO	Strategic Objective
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Project NINA**

Since late 2004, the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) has been supporting a consortium of five street-children-serving NGO's in the Dominican Republic who have come together under the umbrella of "Project NINA," a three-year initiative whose objectives are:

- (i) Vulnerable and displaced children have improved ability to exercise their abilities, rights, and opportunities,
- (ii) Increased numbers of children are successfully reinserted into families and/or other appropriate care-giving situations,
- (iii) Five (5) local organizations increase their capacity and viability to serve and protect vulnerable and displaced children, and
- (iv) Community and political alliances strengthen community support and protection of the rights and needs of vulnerable and displaced children. Addressing this objective should include fostering a more supportive policy environment that promotes the protection of children's rights and the meeting of their basic needs—while at the same time building support among the broader community for sustained funding and political support for street children programming

The Consortium Members are "Ninos Del Camino," "Quedate Con Nosotros," "Yo Tambien," "Accion Callejera," and "Caminante."

### **August 2006 Technical Visit**

In response to a proposal submitted by the office of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the Dominican Republic, DCOF requested the transfer of \$1,500,000 to USAID/Dominican Republic, which established agreement #517-A-00-04-00114-00 with CRS for "Improving the Quality of Life for Vulnerable Children Living in the Streets of Santo Domingo (Project NINA)." The project began on August 31, 2004, and is scheduled to end August 30, 2007. Two technical visits have been made by DCOF staff and consultants, the first in April 2005, and the second in August 2006.



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO USAID/DOMINICAN REPUBLIC BY THE DCOF TECHNICAL TEAM

Based on the observations and conclusions of DCOF's technical team, the following six recommendations are submitted for the consideration of USAID/Dominican Republic. The basis for these six recommendations includes direct conversations with key members of the CRS leadership team, USAID personnel, Project NINA technical staff and lead consultants, and Team Leaders representing each of Project NINA's five consortium members, as well as the review of relevant documents. All six recommendations were shared verbally with CRS during a debriefing session on August 4, 2006, at CRS's Santo Domingo offices. In addition, CRS was invited to comment on a draft of this report.

1. **Impact on Children and Families** – CRS should work with consortium members and project NINA technical staff to ensure that additional emphasis is placed on achieving measurable impacts on children, their families, and their community support systems (as envisioned under goals 1 and 2 of the project description), and these changes should be consistently documented and cumulatively reported to USAID/Dominican Republic and DCOF. These impacts should be defined and measured in terms of reach (total number served), depth (relative frequency / intensity of services provided), and results (overall change in condition or outcome fostered by project interventions). Early work in the area of self-esteem is promising, but it is recommended that additional outcome measures of family reunification, community integration, educational achievement, improved health, and psychosocial well-being all be integrated into project monitoring and reporting.
2. **Monitoring and Evaluation System** – CRS should work with consortium partners to address significant deficiencies in reporting on the project's current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators. This would require significant improvements by partners in their use of existing quarterly indicator tracking tables to report their results to CRS in a timely and comprehensive manner. Indicator tracking tables should be included in each report to USAID/Dominican Republic, and these should include both progress achieved during the reporting period as well as cumulative progress. It is understood that this work will likely require the immediate services of an M&E specialist familiar with programming for vulnerable children (and USAID M&E standards) in order to develop revised indicators and reporting tables. This work may also require additional administrative support and management oversight resources from CRS to ensure timely and comprehensive implementation by all partners. Further, CRS should strongly consider increasing the frequency of its reporting to USAID/Dominican Republic from a semi-annual to a quarterly basis. This will facilitate USAID's tracking of the changes that the program makes to address the concerns and recommendations presented in this report.
3. **Technical and Organizational Capacity Building of Consortium Members and Improving their Future Viability** – CRS and Project NINA consortium members should continue and reinforce existing efforts to effectively increase the capacity of all participating institutions to extend the reach, depth, quality, and effectiveness of their efforts to improve the lives of street-active children and to improve conditions in their families and community-based systems of care. CRS should also give significantly greater attention to improving the

organizational functioning and continuity of consortium members. This work will need to address:

- a. Clarifying the consortium members understanding of capacity building – CRS and implementing partners must recognize that this involves more than simply increasing staff size or range of services provided. Effective capacity building requires that the partners effectively incorporate strategies that (i) increase the overall numbers of children and families served, (ii) ensure high-quality developmental impacts for beneficiaries, and (iii) enhance the organizational functioning and financial viability of participating organizations beyond the life of this project.
  - b. Completing outstanding efforts to improve operational systems – This includes (i) testing a common information tracking system and the consortium members and CRS making it operational, and, (ii) documenting, systematizing, and disseminating in written form (and via workshops) accumulated expertise and programming models of consortium members in the areas of HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, integrated approaches to health, flexible education approaches, and vocational/technical training.
  - c. Exploring opportunities to draw on effective practices and program models of other organizations in the Dominican Republic (including but not limited to USAID grant recipients) in such areas as (i) HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment, and (ii) economic strengthening for families. This might lead to incorporating these models and practices during the current project NINA life-cycle, or in future consortium-driven programming.
  - d. Continuing to increase the capacities of partners to secure and manage new funding from sources other than Project NINA.
4. **CRS’s Project Management and Technical Capacity in Street Children Programming** – It is recommended that CRS review current management (and related administrative support) staffing levels and work priorities in order to ensure that Project NINA has a substantially improved degree of program oversight and adequate capacity to implement the changes recommended above. It is further recommended that CRS ensure that the Project NINA leadership team has access to appropriate technical advice in the area of best practices in street children programming, taking advantage of existing expertise internal and external to CRS. The purpose of both of these recommendations is to ensure that the project has sufficient management oversight capacity and technical competency to effect the comprehensive completion of all major project deliverables under all four of the project’s objectives.
5. **Planning For Project Completion** – It is recommended that CRS begin to work with Project NINA consortium members to plan for the end of the current DCOF supported phase of project activities in thirteen months time. This work should focus on:

- a. Addressing the relative financial dependence of some consortium members on Project NINA funding to cover core operating costs – and the related need for focused fund development and institutional service planning efforts to prepare for the end of USAID funding in August 2007.
  - b. Exploring the leadership structure, institutional agreements, and ongoing technical supports required to continue the work of the Project NINA consortium as an effective vehicle for shared capacity building, joint fund development, and collaborative advocacy beyond the life of the current project. (It is understood that CRS may or may not decide to continue its role in the consortium beyond the life of this current project and that this would imply either a new structure or the end of the consortium.)
  - c. Continuing to provide information regularly to the USAID/Dominican Republic on projected expenditure of remaining project funds, to clarify whether the project will end on schedule or if CRS may request and provide a justification for a no-cost extension.
  - d. Exploring the possibility of seeking new funding from other donors to sustain the NINA consortium.
- 6. The Possibility of Technical Support from DCOF** – It is recommended that USAID/Dominican Republic and DCOF defer any decision related to the provision of additional technical support to Project NINA until after CRS has developed its operational response to the above five recommendations.



# INTRODUCTION

## Situation Analysis<sup>1</sup>

The presence of children living and/or working in the streets of the Dominican Republic is a reflection of the extreme poverty and the lack of social services<sup>2</sup> that are endemic in many highly populated urban areas throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. These children often flee poor, dysfunctional family backgrounds and, once on the street, are isolated from the support structures of their families, communities, and the formal education system. These children are highly vulnerable and frequently unable to realize their full potential. Instead, street exposure increases the likelihood of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse; infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; and the devastating consequences of drug consumption.

## Children Living in the Streets

Working with children who live in the street presents many physical, social, psychological, and other challenges, due to their especially precarious situation. A study conducted by *Niños del Camino* and *Centro de Estudios Sociales P. Juan Montalvo, S.J.*, found that 94.74 percent of the cases were boys who came from unstable, often female-headed family situations with various dysfunctions: physical, verbal and/or sexual abuse; neglect; parental domestic violence; drug abuse; and extreme poverty<sup>3</sup>. Many participants in the study identified one or more of these factors as the determining trigger for leaving their homes. Most of the boys were between the ages of eleven and fifteen, mostly involved in activities such as shoe-shining, street vending, cleaning windshields, stealing, transporting and selling drugs, domestic work, and prostitution.

## Children Working in the Streets

Many children who still live at home engage in street-based work similar to that of children who both live and work on the street. The risks they face are also very similar to the risks faced by those who live in the streets – as many of them are also exposed to drugs, and sexual and/or physical abuse in the streets. However, alternative approaches to street life are easier to provide to them, given their familial and community support systems. In this case, it is crucial to help prevent their abandoning their homes and increasing their involvement in risky activities.

## Sexually Exploited Children

The majority of children exploited in the sex trade are girls, but the practice also involves boys. A significant number of working children engage in the Dominican Republic's sizeable sex trade, particularly in Boca Chica and other tourist centers. Numbers are difficult to obtain due to the clandestine nature of the activity, but it is widely acknowledged that a segment of tourists to Dominican Republic visit specifically to have sex with children. The children earn up to \$35 for several hours of sexual work in a day. According to a recent study from the International Labor

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<sup>1</sup> The Situation Analysis section is based on the official Project Description for "Project NINA."

<sup>2</sup> The annual investment in social services is 12 percent of the GDP, one of the lowest in Latin America. *World Bank Report, 2001.*

<sup>3</sup> Psycho-social Profile of Children and Adolescents Living in the Streets. *Social Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, Number 128, April-June 2002.

Organization (ILO), their ages range mostly between ten and seventeen years, with 29 percent of the sexually exploited boys being younger than fifteen, and 5 percent of the girls being younger than fifteen.

## **Haitian Children**

Another important dimension to consider when dealing with vulnerable children in the Dominican Republic, is the problem of trafficked children from Haiti. An estimated 2,000 Haitian children<sup>4</sup> per year fall prey to a well-established and sophisticated network of traffickers.<sup>5</sup> Like Dominican street children, most of them work informally as shoe shiners, vendors, and in the cases of young girls, as domestic servants and prostitutes.

## **Geographic Prevalence of Vulnerable Children**

The presence of children living and/or working in the streets is highest in the two most populous cities, Santo Domingo and Santiago, and in main tourist centers such as Boca Chica, located near the capital city. Project NINA consortium members estimate that 1,500 children live in the streets of the Dominican Republic.

A study carried out in 2002 in Santo Domingo by the non-government organizations *Niños del Camino* and *Centro de Estudio P. Juan Montalvo S.J.*<sup>6</sup> revealed that the majority of minors living in the streets originated from poor neighborhoods in the city (including Cristo Rey, Los Mina, María Auxiliadora, Guachupita, and la Ciénaga y los Alcarrizos) and that the next largest group came from the impoverished southern region of the country. The same study indicated that 75 percent of the children had lived on the streets for less than three years. Project NINA is intended to provide services to the children in the destination areas and in their communities of origin.

## **The Displaced Children and Orphans Fund**

Established in 1988 by an act of the U. S. Congress, the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) is administered by the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance of the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It provides funding and technical assistance for initiatives to benefit especially vulnerable children, especially children affected by armed conflict and children on the street or at risk of moving onto the street. The Fund was the first arm of the U.S. Government to respond to the issue of children being orphaned and otherwise made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, and it continues to provide technical support to that type of programming, although it is not providing new funding in that area. DCOF is managed by Lloyd Feinberg and is supported by the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund, War Victims Fund, and Victims of Torture Fund Technical Support Project managed by Manila Consulting Group, Inc.

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<sup>4</sup> Although difficult to quantify, it is estimated that as many as 2,000 minors are trafficked annually to the Dominican Republic from the three Northern departments in Haiti. . . . Almost without exception these children are exploited as agricultural workers, in the informal sector or in organized groups of beggars. " *Trafficking Haitian Children into the Dominican Republic.* " UNICEF/IOM, July 2002.

<sup>5</sup> "The Dominican Republic is a source, transit, and destination country for persons trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labor. . . . Haitian children are trafficked into the Dominican Republic." *US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2003.*

<sup>6</sup> *Psycho-social Profile of Children and Adolescents Living in the Streets.* Social Studies, Vol. XXXVI, Number 128, April-June 2002.

DCOF has evolved into a program that seeks to improve and expand interventions to benefit children in the developing world affected by family separation or significant loss or displacement. It provides funding and technical support for programs and facilitates networking for information exchange and collaboration among organizations concerned with especially vulnerable children. Because annual DCOF funding is limited in relation to the massive problems it addresses, USAID uses these resources very selectively to support promising, innovative projects, to learn lessons that can be applied in other situations, and to share these as widely as possible with practitioners. DCOF's fundamental approaches are to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to protect and care for especially vulnerable children as well as strengthening children's own capacities to provide for their own needs. In keeping with DCOF's standard approach, "children" in this report are considered to be below eighteen years of age.

### **DCOF Technical Support Visits to the Dominican Republic**

In response to a proposal submitted by the office of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the Dominican Republic, DCOF transferred \$1,500,000 to USAID/Dominican Republic, which established agreement #517-A-00-04-00114-00 with CRS for "Improving the Quality of Life for Vulnerable Children Living in the Streets of Santo Domingo (Project NINA)." The project began on August 31, 2004, and is scheduled to end August 30, 2007. Two technical visits have been made by DCOF staff and consultants over the life of the project, the first in April 2005, and the second in August 2006.

In cooperation with USAID/Dominican Republic, DCOF carried out a review visit April 5 to 9, 2005, to develop a better understanding of the project's consortium-driven approach to street children services and to determine what lessons might be learned from an ongoing technical collaboration with Project NINA relevant to this and other DCOF-funded projects working with street children. That visit was carried out by Lloyd Feinberg and David James-Wilson, technical specialist and consultant to DCOF.<sup>7</sup>

This report concerns the second technical support visit related to Project NINA by DCOF, carried out July 31 to August 4, 2006. It was carried out by the two-person team of David James-Wilson, an independent consultant with extensive experience in programming for street children, and John Williamson, DCOF's senior technical advisor. The aims of the visit were, together with USAID/Dominican Republic, to:

- Contribute to DCOF's internal review process regarding programming for street children,
- Better understand project NINA's common data gathering efforts,
- Assess the financial sustainability of the consortium's work,

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<sup>7</sup> See the trip entitled "Building Bridges to Mainstream Opportunities for Street Children in the Dominican Republic: A Report on the DCOF Engagement Mission With Project NINA and its Consortium Members -- Dominican Republic, April 5-9, 2005."

- Clarify the emerging emphasis within Project NINA on enhancing “self esteem” among participating children, and
- Determine priorities for ongoing technical assistance from DCOF.

The detailed Scope of Work is found in Appendix A.

This report includes observations and recommendations in support of USAID/Dominican Republic's management of the project. The team’s itinerary is included in Appendix B; the list of its key contacts follows in Appendix C; and the key resource documents are listed in Appendix D.

## **Project NINA<sup>8</sup>**

Catholic Relief Services has designed, developed, and implemented Project NINA within the framework of a carefully structured, highly participatory, and collaboratively led consortium. The consortium model was designed to build upon CRS’s strengths as a well-regarded community development and social-justice-oriented institution with a strong track record in the design and delivery of programs for USAID and other international funders. The consortium was also structured to benefit from, and build upon, the core capacities of a cluster of local direct service organizations who have worked with street-involved children for many years.

The five local NGO members of the Project NINA consortium respond to the reality of vulnerable and displaced children at the grass-roots level in the Dominican Republic:

- **Acción Callejera** provides focused attention to street children between ages seven and fourteen, including educational support, arts education, recreational activities, self-esteem building, and legal support for documentation.
- **Quédate con Nosotros** [Stay with Us Program] provides temporary shelter and provides personal development and social integration services to children in Santo Domingo between ages eight and thirteen who have lived on the streets for less than six months.
- **Caminante Proyecto Educativo** [“Traveller” – Street Children Education Program] works with street children in the tourist town of Boca Chica providing services in: 1) technical/professional training; 2) advocacy for the defense, dignity, and rights of mothers and children; 3) preventive methodologies increasing the physical/mental health of the children; 4) recreational activities; 5) increased access to and attendance by children of formal education; and 6) educational processes encouraging family and community integration.
- **Niños del Camino** promotes the social integration of vulnerable and displaced children, raises public awareness of the plight of these children, and advocates for public policies that

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<sup>8</sup> The text (up to the section, “DCOF Review of Street Children Programming”) is taken from the official “Project Description” for Project NINA.

protect child rights. It provides ambulatory services to children throughout the displacement cycle, from a child's first night on the streets through family reintegration.

- **Programa Yo También** ["Me Too" Program] is a residential program for boys who have left the streets of Santo Domingo. It provides shelter, food, and educational and recreational activities. The goal of the program is for children to leave the street and find an appropriate family setting.

**Strategic Framework.** The Strategic Objectives of Project NINA is to increase the quality of life of 1,500 vulnerable or displaced children by intervening at three societal levels (individual, family, and community). Its strategic objectives (SOs) are presented below. SO's 1 and 2 are directed toward individual children and their families, SO 3 is directed exclusively toward the Dominican consortium organizations, and SO 4 focuses on communities and political alliances which deal with vulnerable or displaced children.

**Objective 1: Vulnerable and displaced children have improved ability to exercise their abilities, rights and opportunities:** The project description foresees a participatory process with children to improve their overall well-being. The proposed activities aim to help vulnerable and displaced children analyze their current situation and recognize themselves as persons with potential. Children are to be provided opportunities to exercise their rights and develop their full potential. For example, the right to an identity is to be met through appropriate documentation, such as birth certificates, which facilitate access to education and health services. Legal support will help children who have been wrongly imprisoned or mistreated by law enforcement officers. Consortium members in their current programs provide many of these services, and Project NINA seeks to improve, systematize, and document them.

**Objective 2: Increased numbers of children are successfully reinserted into families and/or other appropriate care-giving situations:** Reintegration into society and care-giving situations is an essential yet delicate process for vulnerable and displaced children. Each reintegration case will vary in terms of time and effort, and the process can be very slow and uncertain for children who live on the streets. Consortium members believe that, if at all possible, children living on the streets should spend some transitional time in a shelter to receive consistent health care, psychosocial support, and substance-abuse rehabilitation. Special care must be taken to establish a child's sense of safety and desire to strive toward a more positive lifestyle.

Many children who live in the streets may be reluctant to return home because they left violent domestic situations. To address the issue of domestic violence, Project NINA members must visit families; evaluate the family environment, family members, and their circumstances; and sometimes providing counseling. In some cases NINA members may conclude that returning home is not a safe option for the child and will review extended family and other options for care.

**Objective 3: Five (5) local organizations increase their capacity and viability to serve and protect vulnerable and displaced children:** Project NINA seeks to build management and programmatic capabilities of its Dominican partners with the ultimate aim of improving their ability to provide needed services to vulnerable and displaced children. Consortium members

selected the programmatic and management areas that would best enable them to increase the quantity and quality of services to vulnerable children. Technical areas identified include: information technology and case documentation, HIV/AIDS treatment, substance abuse, integrated health, advocacy, and vocational/technical training. Each consortium partner is supposed to develop expertise in one of these fields. Each will then provide technical support and guidance to the other members in its designated area of expertise. Also, the partners must develop the capacity to carry out accurate reporting, monitoring, evaluation, accounting, strategic planning and fundraising. Key activities and milestones identified in the project description include: the completion of a baseline study to provide accurate data to be used by all institutions; the establishment of a consistent system of documentation and record-keeping by all partner organizations, the usage of a database by all partners, and the improvement of fundraising abilities. By building Dominican partner capacities in such critical programmatic and management areas, CRS/DR intends to pave the way for improved, sustainable, quality services for vulnerable/displaced children beyond the project period.

**Objective 4: Community and political alliances strengthen community support and protection of the rights and needs of vulnerable and displaced children:** This aim of this objective is to educate key actors and advocate for the rights of vulnerable and displaced children; this will help ensure greater project impact and sustainability. Supportive community groups and strategic political and organizational alliances will help reintegrated children to remain with their families; provide a safety net in times of need; and encourage community-led, customized preventive mechanisms for at-risk children who may separate from their families.

The role of the partner organizations on the community level will focus largely on outreach, relationship building, and targeted advocacy and educational activities. Consortium members have each strategically selected communities using the following criteria: a high number of vulnerable children originate from these communities and they either have active PTAs [parent teacher associations] or community groups, they are an area where consortium members provide services, or both. Entering communities through the schools, consortium partners will make contacts with local PTAs and community groups with interests in child welfare. At local meetings, the partners will assess the needs and interests of the groups, and if these coincide with the strategy of the partner, it will subsequently collaborate with them to design and provide training in desired areas.

Three Project NINA consortium members are part of the Coalition of NGOs for Children, which also includes government agencies and is part of the process to implement the recently established *Dominican Law 136-03, for the Protection and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents*. That law consolidated all nationally recognized rights of children and created mechanisms to fulfill them. With the support of the *NGOs for Children* coalition and other institutions, Project NINA will advocate for the rights of vulnerable and displaced children. The consortium is committed to identifying cases of child sexual exploitation or other forms of child abuse, promoting the citizen participation components of Law 136-03, and actively defending children's rights. The Government of the Dominican Republic is currently integrating Law 136-03 into national, municipal, and local practices, though resources to do so and ensure enforcement are limited. Project NINA will support this process by educating community groups in the communities where children live or originate.

**Intended Beneficiaries.** Data gathering is challenging for Project NINA because of the target population's transitory nature. The intended direct beneficiaries of Project NINA are children in Santo Domingo, Santiago, and Boca Chica who live and/or work in the streets or who are sexually and commercially exploited. Currently, partner NGOs provide many different services to approximately 600 of these children a year. An additional 600 adults are indirect beneficiaries of current partner initiatives, as most of the children's households of origin have one parent. Project NINA aims to gradually increase by 50 percent annually the number of beneficiaries of its partners over the project's three-year span. The consortium projects that, collectively, partners will provide services to 750 children in year two, and 900 in year three. These figures total 2,250, but as a portion of the children, particularly those who receive ambulatory services, receive services for more than one year, Project NINA seeks to reach 1,500 individual children over three years (with widely varying degrees of services offered to each depending on their need and their ability/willingness to benefit from intensive family/community re-integration efforts).

### **DCOF Review of Street Children Programming**

Since 2005, DCOF has been concurrently engaged in a review of its projects that serve street children. This review has included a desk study, a series of field visits to existing street children activities, along with the ongoing development of a guidance document on DCOF's funding of street children programming. The objective of that review has been to ensure coherence and cross-learning among DCOF projects in this area, and to enhance DCOF's grant-making work in this particular area of programming for displaced children. An additional dimension of the August 2006 technical mission to the DR involved an intentional effort on the part of DCOF to incorporate emerging effective practices and key lessons learned from Project NINA into its ongoing internal review of street children programming. Opportunities were also sought to ground truth with consortium members, consultants, and key CRS staff, conclusions articulated in DCOF's draft guidance document for this area of programming.



## ACTIVITIES DURING THE VISIT

DCOF's technical team—along with the USAID/Dominican Republic's cognizant technical officer (CTO) for Project NINA (Norma Paredes)—worked with Project NINA technical staff to design a four-step process of meetings and field visits. These steps included:

- (i) **Engagement Activities** – These included individual site visits and meetings with key project stakeholders in order to develop a more complete understanding of Project NINA activities, key program development priorities, and critical next steps toward successful completion of the project. These sessions included site visits to the offices of CRS, Quédate Con Nosotros, and Yo Tambien.<sup>9</sup>
- (ii) **Exchanges of Best Practices** – These activities brought together practitioners and policy makers to discuss the state of the art of street children programming in the Dominican Republic. The activity was a one-day colloquium on the theme of “First Contact: How Approaches to Initial Relationship Building with Street Children Impact Later Intervention Steps.” This colloquium brought together representatives of the Project NINA consortium members, CRS Project NINA personnel, personnel from other local child-serving NGOs and representatives of Government institutions with an interest in vulnerable children such as the Tourist Police (POLITUR), the Ministry of Labor, and the National Child Welfare Bureau (CONANI). Project NINA was able to highlight its work codifying and articulating a common seven-step intervention process, and consortium members were able to speak about shared efforts to systematize best practices and strengthen capacity.
- (iii) **SWOT Analysis Activities** – This work involved Project NINA consortium members and key USAID and CRS personnel in a critical review of accomplishments to date; the identification of opportunities for improvement, enrichment, and continued excellence; and key obstacles currently impeding project completion. This work took place in two sessions, the first on August 1, the second on August 3. (This work built upon a more extensive “mid-term” strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis carried out in recent months by an external consultant – the results of which have yet to be tabulated and released.)
- (iv) **Joint Action Planning** – This activity sought to take conclusions from SWOT analysis sessions, and then build consensus among key stakeholders (CRS, USAID, DCOF, and Consortium Members) regarding key recommendations for program improvement and critical action items for the successful completion of Project NINA.

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<sup>9</sup> For more details see the filed visit itinerary found in Appendix B.



## KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on its meeting with all the key stakeholders in Project NINA<sup>10</sup> and review of relevant documents, the DCOF technical team has the following observations and conclusions with respect to Project NINA's progress toward achieving its four principle strategic objectives.

**Objective 1: Vulnerable and displaced children have improved ability to exercise their abilities, rights and opportunities.** Consortium partners and key stakeholders spoke in general terms regarding accomplishments under this objective, but during the SWOT analysis session with the consortium members, it was evident that far greater emphasis has been placed on accomplishing Objective 3 (institutional capacity building) and Objective 4 (policy and advocacy efforts). Some groups reported having new staff resources available to them for the delivery of day-to-day programming and many cited anecdotal evidence of the ways that programming activities had benefited the children and families served. When asked to make more specific reference to impacts captured by program indicators, consortium members were unable to respond in systematic or comprehensive ways. CRS has reported semi-annually to USAID/Dominican Republic on Project NINA. Consortium members have been expected to complete and provide to CRS quarterly indicator tracking tables, which include indicators jointly identified by NINA partners at the start of the project. However, a quick audit of the quarterly indicator reference tables submitted to CRS showed that consortium members have been struggling to document and measure impacts using the common indicator framework – with the majority of the internal quarterly reports submitted to CRS indicating no progress across a wide range of indicator categories. Partners have not submitted these forms consistently, and one partner had submitted none.

Discussion with consortium team leaders revealed that many struggled to make sense of the large number, and relative complexity, of current indicators – although all were developed during a participatory planning exercise and several follow-up meetings in the first year of Project NINA. Others spoke of the challenge of tracking results and measuring impacts with a population as “transitory” and “hard to change” as street children. They also shared common frustrations with staff turnover and the difficulty in keeping and developing skilled staff. It appears that work will need to be done to re-focus existing indicators and to establish an oversight system that ensures compliance by all consortium members in the timely and comprehensive completion of their quarterly indicator tracking tables.

Consortium members focused their positive comments on the growing openness and ability among consortium members to share the case management of individual street children – citing growing instances of referrals among projects, clinical consultations, and joint planning regarding the hardest to serve children. Consortium members also indicated that their joint work on the self-esteem project (in the final stage for development) seems to hold good promise for the development of more intentional interventions with regard to self-esteem building at each stage of their work.

**Objective 2: Increased numbers of children are successfully reinserted into families and/or other appropriate care-giving situations:** As in the case of Objective 1, Project NINA

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix B for additional details

Consortium members and senior CRS staff did not have statistical or other systematic information regarding progress to date in this area. Overall indicators and quarterly indicator tracking tables for this objective include far too many indicators that have not served the project well, and consortium members have not completed these in a timely or comprehensive manner. Consortium members acknowledged at a meeting of the Team Leaders that work to reintegrate children into families requires considerable time and often involves multiple false starts before success is obtained.

It was completely unclear whether the project had made any progress toward its goal of enabling 1,500 children to reunite with their families or otherwise be reintegrated adequately into communities. Participants asserted that family and community re-integration work has recently become more difficult due to growing economic pressures on poor families in the Dominican Republic – though groups did cite some cases where a successful return to community living arrangements had occurred. It seems clear that this work requires a level of institutional capacity and technical skill that many groups find hard to marshal and sustain. It also seems clear that groups need intermediate (or leading indicators) that capture progress toward re-integration before re-integration actually occurs (which may be a multi-year process for some of the more heavily street involved children). These indicators could be linked closely to the “Seven Stages of Work” jointly identified by Project NINA partners – which provide a conceptual basis, along with a program implementation framework, for developing indicators to measure intermediate progress.

In addition, participants spoke about the need to do more early intervention and preventive work with children [and families] new to street involvement – drawing on teachers and other community resources to help identify cases where early intervention might forestall the need for more extensive (and expensive) reunification efforts down the line. Groups such as *Quedate Con Nosotros*, *Caminante*, and *Accion Callejera*, who do community-based outreach work with vulnerable children and their families, may well decide to develop further technical capacity in this important area of early intervention, and can certainly draw on successful models from other parts of the region.

**Objective 3: Five (5) local organizations increase their capacity and viability to serve and protect vulnerable and displaced children:** In a joint SWOT analysis (and in more informal group and individual discussions), it was clear that members of the Project NINA Consortium perceive some of the most important impacts of Project NINA to have occurred at the level of institutional capacity building. Participants spoke at length about being afforded an important opportunity to systematically review, document, organize, and describe their work (many for the first time). Team Leaders from the consortium members also spoke of the enormous value of comparing notes with counterparts from other organizations – and acknowledged that CRS staff, and CRS consultants, had played a major role in breaking down longstanding barriers of mistrust and misunderstanding between consortium members (most of whom had had to compete in the past for funds, staff, and recognition in the community).

Project NINA consortium members all highlighted the value and impact of the five main collaborative capacity-building efforts that they have all been engaged in over the past twenty-three months, including:

- Shared work on the **baseline study** and upcoming **mid-point study** – with the baseline representing one of the most comprehensive examinations of the street children phenomenon to date in the Dominican Republic;
- Mutual investment in the **effective practices in self esteem-building** activity – which was led by an outside consulting team, and which many groups said provided them a unique opportunity to compare practices and challenge long-standing assumptions about their respective work;
- Common efforts to systematize and disseminate **effective practices in the area of non-formal education** (with a working group on course to complete this report in the near future);
- Shared investment in the development of common community and organizational **diagnostic tools** (completed in February 2006); and
- Significant joint efforts to contribute to the development of a common **information system** software package – currently in the final stage of development by a leading independent consulting firm, with detailed input from consortium members.

While more effort and progress has been made by the partners in addressing capacity-building, many are substantially delayed in their timelines and deliverables, and at the current rate many may not produce pilot tools and materials until the final six months of project activity. In some cases, the scope of work given to consultants may be too ambitious, given the limited human resources of consortium members to contribute to material development and field testing as well as to sustainable application of final products.

Additionally, in the realm of the common computer-based information tracking system, the question has arisen as to the ability of consortium members to use these tools given current limits to computer access and the unreliability of the electricity supply. It was also a concern for DCOF technical staff that software developers may not have given sufficient attention to the key design variable of time required on a daily and weekly basis to complete data entry. This has proven to be a key feature in the success or failure of other similar information system initiatives globally.

Another challenge facing consortium members is that there does not appear to be a clear understanding of what capacity building is, nor what some of the broad indicators of success in this programming area might look like. Audited quarterly indicator tracking tables showed almost no discernable results under Objective 3 (despite significant anecdotal evidence of achievements in this area in narrative reports), and many groups seem unsure of how to capture or measure results in this domain. In another DCOF-funded, capacity-building project focused on organizations working with street children and orphans, participating organizations were able to measure progress by tracking changes in two broad indicators—the increase in the number of children served and the increase in the funding base of each agency—as a way of capturing meaningful impacts of this work<sup>11</sup>. Another approach is the use of *participant defined quality*

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<sup>11</sup> See “Assessment of the Street Children and Orphans Component of the Pact NGO Sector Enhancement Initiative in Ethiopia” [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pdabs670.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdabs670.pdf).

tools to capture change in the quality of services from the perspective of staff, beneficiaries, and other key community/organizational stakeholders.

Another significant concern that the DCOF team raised in relation to the achievement of the third objective is that project efforts have focused on increasing the day-to-day operational capacity of the partners but have not addressed their longer-term “viability.” Almost 64 percent of the total budget of Project NINA is designated for sub-agreements, so, on the positive side, CRS is making substantial funding available to its local partners. The down side, however, is that it appears that these funds are being used almost entirely for staff salaries and other operational costs. Consequently, it is not clear that funds are also being used by the partners to strengthen their ongoing operational capacities and effectiveness in ways that have or will enable them to attract funding that will enable them to continue and increase their results after the current project period ends. One noteworthy exception, however, is that two of the partner organizations, because their profile and credibility has been raised through Project NINA, have been able to secure modest one-year grants from the Ministry of Education. Of significant concern to DCOF is that it appears one member (Caminante) has around 50 percent of the operational budget sourced from Project NINA funds. The rest of the partners rely on DCOF funds for between 20 to 40 percent of their budget. This apparent dependency in some cases raises the possibility of a significant decrease in their staffing and operational capacity after the project ends.

**Objective 4: Community and political alliances strengthen community support and protection of the rights and needs of vulnerable and displaced children:** Another area of important progress for the Project NINA consortium has been in the establishment of new opportunities for advocacy and dialogue with government entities (such as CONANI, the Ministry of Education, and the Justice Department) along with new forums for consultation and discussion with community-level stakeholders. Project NINA has, according to many, raised the profile of street children programming at the national level, and some initial success has been achieved as a result of joint advocacy efforts. Speaking together with one voice via the consortium structure has opened doors for member institutions – the two grants from the Ministry of Education are an example. Progress with CONANI has been slower – though no less important – and the consortium expects to have a memorandum of understanding with that body in place within the next six months.

Once again, impact in this area is not currently well captured or measured by current indicators or via the existing quarterly indicator reporting table. Results under Objective 4 have not been adequately documented and work needs to be done to revise and focus outcome indicators for this important strategic objective.

### **CRS’s Leadership Role**

A final cross-cutting area to address is CRS’s role as the convener, technical secretariat, and overall program manager for the Project NINA consortium. CRS’ leadership team spoke in an eloquent fashion to DCOF and USAID personnel about the significant challenge they took on at the start of Project NINA – both because of the complex nature of programming for street children, and because it represented a new area of work for CRS in the Dominican Republic. They also spoke in a convincing manner about the challenges of working with such a diverse and

varied group of implementing partners, and of their careful attempts to build flexibility and responsiveness into the original program design and final program description.

Project NINA consortium members spoke in consistently positive terms about CRS' leadership style and identified a number of important qualities among CRS' current technical leadership team, namely:

- An ability to provide direct and challenging feedback without being disrespectful or controlling,
- A willingness to follow-up patiently when documentation is delayed or work incomplete,
- A capacity to coach and accompany consortium members as they take on new responsibilities such as the development of quarterly work plans, and
- A respect for the diversity of consortium members, while at the same time developing the discipline of members to communicate and act in close collaboration.

DCOF's technical team saw evidence of this positive collaboration between CRS and consortium members and recognized the important coordination and administrative support roles played by Eric Gomez and Ivelisse Reyes Durán, her assistant.

However, a number of challenges and shortcoming were also identified by DCOF's technical team, especially in the area of project management and oversight:

- (i) It seems that the reach, depth, and quality of developmental impacts on children and their families are seemingly neither at the forefront of strategic planning efforts, nor at the heart of the current M&E system. CRS's technical leadership in this domain seems to be in need of further focus and follow through.
- (ii) It was of significant concern to learn that consortium members have not been systematically and comprehensively using quarterly indicator tracking tables to capture and measure ongoing and cumulative impacts of project activities. The absence of completed tables from all partners for all project quarters is a substantial deficiency that must be addressed. CRS's oversight of partner reporting seems inadequate in this regard.
- (iii) It is of additional concern that three of the project's six key deliverables under Objective 3 are still in preliminary or draft form as the project moves into its third year of work. It is understood that there were some significant delays to program roll-out in the first six months of Project NINA, but it is expected that CRS will dedicate the management, technical support, and administrative support resources required to complete the deliverables in a timely and comprehensive manner. There also seems to be a need to clarify the broader intent of capacity building efforts, and to track the overall institutional viability of consortium members beyond the life of this current grant. Finally there is a need to carefully track the rate of project expenditures to determine whether the full budget allocated to project NINA is

expended by the contractual close of program activities on August 31, 2007 or a timely request (with a strong justification) is made for a no-cost extension.

The DCOF technical team appreciated the statement of commitment to ensuring the success of this project made by the senior management personnel of CRS/Dominican Republic – both as a platform for ongoing work with street children in the country and as an important contribution to work with vulnerable children in other parts of the LAC region. DCOF requests that USAID/Dominican Republic forwards a copy of CRS’s written plan for addressing the six recommendations described in this report and considers carefully any requests for further DCOF technical assistance.

## **APPENDIX A: SCOPE OF WORK**

### **Project NINA: August, 2006 DCOF Field Visit Scope of Work for Street Children Advisor (David James-Wilson)**

#### **A. Background:**

Since late 2004, DCOF has been supporting a consortium of street children serving NGO's in the Dominican Republic who have come together under the umbrella of "Project NINA," a three-year initiative designed to:

- Increase the capacity of vulnerable and displaced children to exercise their rights and develop their skills and abilities.
- Successfully re-integrate children into family and/or community settings – including the use of foster families.
- Develop the technical capacity, and institutional viability of the 5 consortium member organizations toward making a sustained contribution to serving and protecting vulnerable and displaced children.
- Foster a more supportive policy environment that promotes the protection of children's rights and the meeting of their basic needs – while at the same time building support among the broader community for sustained funding and political support for street children programming

Project NINA is now reaching the mid-way point of its initial DCOF grant, and the lead local organization (CRS) along with the local USAID Mission team, have asked for technical support from DCOF in order to build on emerging strengths and to address identified gaps in programming.

Since 2005, DCOF has been concurrently engaged in a review of its portfolio of Street Children serving projects. This review has included a desk study, a series of field visits to existing street children activities, along with the ongoing development of a guidance document on DCOF's funding of street children programming. The objective of this review has been to ensure coherence and cross-learning among DCOF projects in this area, and to enhance DCOF's grant making work in this sub-set of displaced children programming.

#### **B. August 2006 Field Visit**

In order to both fulfill the technical support request of the local USAID Mission and CRS leadership team, and to advance the work of DCOF's internal review of Street Children funding, DCOF is sending a two-person TDY team to the Dominican Republic with the mandate to carry out a series of technical review sessions and related site visits. The overarching goals of this field visit will be to:

- ✓ Contribute to **DCOF's internal review process** by answering questions such as: What can be gleaned from the DR grantees in terms of their potential contribution to the network of those DCOF supports in similar programs? What can be learned from sharing preliminary thinking from DCOF's guidance document with Dominican Republic (DR) partners?

- ✓ Better understand project NINA's **common data gathering efforts** (including the planned upcoming application of common evaluation instruments) in order to address questions such as: Can the team evaluate the quality of the data currently collected? How do the grantees use the data? Is it shared among the partners? Is it something worth sharing outside the DR? How are they positioned to collect data on: 1) #'s of kids in specific sectors, e.g. social protection, education, health, etc., 2) # of people trained/ # of organizations strengthened, etc.
- ✓ Assess the **financial sustainability** of the consortium's work by addressing the question: What percentage of other money supports these programs?
- ✓ Clarify the emerging emphasis within Project NINA on **enhancing "self esteem"** among participating children -- with a view to addressing the following guiding questions: What does CRS mean by 'self-esteem' (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> narrative report: "self-esteem-development activities . . . we believe them to be a key element in the lives of children and their families") and how is the concept being incorporated into actual programming/service delivery
- ✓ Determine priorities for **ongoing technical assistance** from DCOF as part of an overall strategic review of projects NINA's progress to date and agreed upon areas for improvement/enhancement in the consortiums portfolio of activities

This field visit will be carried out via three principal phases of work, each of which is described in more detail in the following LOE chart:

### C. Deliverables and LOE for Street Children Advisor:

Deliverables:	Time Frame	LOE
<p><b>Phase 1 – Preparation for Field Visit:</b> This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) establishing communication with the CRS leadership team in order to negotiate the agenda for the field visit;</li> <li>(ii) following up with USAID personnel in order to finalize the itinerary for site visits;</li> <li>(iii) preparing all of the logistics for the visit, along with a SOW; and,</li> <li>(iv) doing background reading / training design related to the technical support priorities identified by CRS and the USAID team</li> </ul>	July 2006	2 days
<p><b>Phase 2 – Field Visit</b> This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Initial meetings with the Project’s Coordination Team</li> <li>(ii) Meetings with the projects Directors and Leadership Team at CRS</li> <li>(iii) A one day joint Capacity Building Workshop for Project NINA members and collaborating partners in the government and NGO sector</li> <li>(iv) A SWOT analysis session for key CRS staff, USAID staff and project NINA consultants -- reviewing progress to date and identifying areas for improvement</li> <li>(v) Site Visits in Santo Domingo</li> <li>(vi) Final Evaluation session and planning re ongoing technical support (see attached draft itinerary for further details)</li> </ul>	July 31- August 4	5 Days
<p><b>Phase Three: Field Visit Follow-Up:</b> This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Drafting of Trip Report</li> <li>(ii) Immediate follow-up re technical support to CRS leadership team</li> <li>(iii) Briefing of DCOF team re field visit findings and implications for internal review of street children projects / guidance document</li> </ul>	August 2005	2 Days

### D. Timeframe

The work of this SOW will be completed between July 1 and August 31, 2006.



## APPENDIX B: ITINERARY

(July 31 - August 4, 2006)

Monday July 31

Location	Activity
USAID	-Initial orientation session with Norma Paredes
Quedate Con Nosotros	-Site visit by DCOF and USAID staff

Tuesday August 1

Location	Activity
CRS	-Initial briefing by CRS staff re project's progress to date
CRS	-Initial orientation session with Project NINA Coordinators from each of the 5 consortium members
USAID	-Briefing by Mari Castillo, USAID HIV/AIDS & TB Activities Manager at the mission regarding USAID-funded activities related to HIV/AIDS and children in the DR
USAID	-Daily de-brief with Norma Paredes

Wednesday August 2

Location	Activity
Clarion Hotel	-Full day workshop/colloquium hosted by Project NINA for NGO and government stakeholders focusing on approaches to the "Initial Contact" phase of street outreach work
Esperanza	-Briefing by Executive Director, Carlos Pimentel Sanchez, on the microfinance services provided by project Esperanza to marginalized families
Hilton Hotel	-Daily de-brief with Norma Paredes

Thursday August 3

Location	Activity
Consultant's Offices	-Briefing on the ongoing development of a common information tracking software package for Project NINA
Hilton Hotel	Discussion with Peter De Wannemaeker, family and child psychologist, about the Circle of Security approach to working with children and families
CRS	-Review of quarterly results/ indicator tracking tables from Project NINA consortium members
Yo Tambien	Site visit by DCOF and USAID staff.
CRS	-Briefing by CRS Management Team re overall progress of Project NINA -Discussion of preliminary findings from DCOF Technical Team
CRS	-Modified SWOT analysis session with Project NINA Coordinators from 5 Consortium members
Hilton Hotel	-Daily de-brief with Norma Paredes

Friday August 4

Location	Activity
Hilton Hotel	-Elaboration of preliminary recommendations
CRS	-Presentation of preliminary recommendations to Project NINA coordination team



## **APPENDIX C: RESOURCE DOCUMENTS**

David James-Wilson, “Building Bridges to Mainstream Opportunities for Street Children in the Dominican Republic: A report on the DCOF Engagement Mission with Project NINA and Its Consortium Members – Dominican Republic, April 5-9, 2006.”

“Project NINA, Guaranteeing Quality Services for the Protection of Children and Adolescents in the Dominican Republic, Third Narrative Report October 2005-March 2006.”

USAID Grant Agreement 517-A-00-04-00114-00 with Catholic Relief Services for “Improving the Quality of Life for Vulnerable Children Living in the Streets of Santo Domingo (Project NINA),” August 31, 2004.

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