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SPECIAL SERIES: Doing Gender in LAC



Boys at Risk: A Gender Issue in the Caribbean Requiring a Multi-Faceted and Cross-Sectoral Approach

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The Latin American and Caribbean region has made significant progress in some basic indicators of gender equality (access to education and health services and female labor force participation) and lags behind in others. However, a second generation of emerging issues suggests that, although women continue to be disadvantaged in a number of indicators, boys' underachievement in education and their participation as perpetrators and victims of violent crime require a new gender paradigm that includes male issues.

Despite the traditional focus on female-related indicators, there is a clear gender dimension to the problems of at-risk youth, since young boys and girls engage in different kinds of risky behaviors and in different ways. Boys and girls also tend to engage differently with schools, communities, and the labor market. This implies that programs and policies need to be designed and implemented with different approaches and tools to benefit and to reach effectively both girls and boys.

In developing countries, youth comprise half of the population and approximately 60 percent of the poor. In Latin America and the Caribbean, of the 100 million young people, more than half are "at risk:" engaging in or expected to engage in risky behavior, dropping out of school, committing crime and violent acts, having unsafe sexual relations, and abusing drugs and alcohol (Cunningham, McGinnis, García Verdú, Tesliuc, and Verner, 2008).

Addressing youth at risk with a gender differentiated perspective is particularly important in the Caribbean,

where the challenges related to crime and violence, access to the labor market, and poverty alleviation are dominating policy agendas and are crucial for economic and social development. Studies show that countries like Jamaica and Haiti, for example, could boost economic growth by 5.4 percent per year if homicide rates were reduced to that of Costa Rica (UNODC and World Bank, 2007).

However, the region's average youth unemployment is 17 percent; in some countries, it is more than 30 percent. The number of "idle" youth—neither working nor in school—is also high. In addition, the gap between boys' and girls' participation and performance levels in education is growing (Cunningham et al., 2008). For example, in Suriname, the ratio of female to male enrollment in secondary education was 138.9 in 2007, up from 116.3 in 2000. In the Dominican Republic, the female to male ratio of enrollment in secondary school was 120 in 2006. Such idleness is a main contributor to risky and violent behavior, and school attendance/connectedness is the single most important factor in reducing violent behavior (Blum et al., 2003).

Regional Caribbean Initiative on Keeping Boys Out of Risk

In response, the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat joined forces to work on a **Regional Caribbean Initiative on Keeping Boys Out of Risk**. The initiative seeks to address the cross-cutting problem of boys at risk as a gender issue related to development challenges, such as alienation from education, dropping-out, crime and violence, male marginalization, access to the labor market, and poverty alleviation.

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The initiative includes three main pillars to identify, share, and promote experiences that have demonstrated success in engaging youth at risk:

1. A **High-level Regional Caribbean Conference** to share and analyze experiences on boys' underachievement in education, skills development and response to labor market challenges.
2. A **Regional Contest** to identify and promote successful initiatives that target youth-at-risk. Top-rated programs included teaching boys car repair in Suriname, a mentoring plan linking delinquent boys with men who can serve as role models in Dominica, entrepreneurial training in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and conflict resolution activities in Jamaica (see Box 1 for an example).
3. **Knowledge Dissemination**, including a Best Practices Fair to share innovative experiences and ideas from and among a range of stakeholders on best practices that target at-risk youth, as well as the development of materials such as a Resource Kit, videos and a Web site.

Sharing these experiences and the lessons learned served as a constructive tool to inspire and motivate stakeholders to cooperate and to deal with these issues in an effective manner. This is evidenced by the key outcome of the Regional Conference: "A Common Platform for Action to Keep Boys Out of Risk." This platform identifies specific measures to keep boys out of risk in the region, sets country level priorities and actions, and creates opportunities for further cooperation.

Caribbean Countries Emphasize Need for Attitude Shift

In the **Regional Caribbean Conference on Keeping Boys Out of Risk**, country delegations from 15 Caribbean countries identified the priority issues to address boys at risk in the thematic areas of *schooling and education*, and *skills development for labor market insertion*, with some issues of a more general *cross cutting nature*. Recurring priorities, described in Table 1, are related to the need for behavioral and attitude changes at all levels of society, the importance of life skills training, and the provision for comprehensive interventions to bridge existing gaps in a more inclusive manner.

Policies and Approaches for Boys at Risk

The World Bank publication *Supporting Youth at Risk: a Toolkit for Middle Income Countries* (Cunningham, McGinnis, Cohan, and Naudeau, 2008) describes core policies, promising approaches and general policies for an evidence-based framework to guide the work on at-risk youth. They should form part of an overall strategy. The **core policies** have an established track record in preventing

Box 1. Discussing Masculinity in Jamaica

The *Male Awareness Now (MAN)* Project is managed by the Jamaican non-governmental organization Children First. The main objective of the project is to address the impact of culture and the need for re-socialization of young men's behavior and attitudes. The project provides out-of-school young males from poor and unruly communities with the vocational skills training and life skills education required to enter into formal schools, training programs, or employment opportunities.

Key Enabling Factors for Success:

- Active participation in the design has led to a sense of ownership of the project by the young men and provided them with the opportunity to identify key masculinity issues for discussions, to share the project model and their experience with adults, and to monitor and evaluate project implementation.
- Ongoing involvement of the parents in the project provides space for dialogue and bonding amongst the children and the parent(s).
- Community "buy-in" fosters community spirit and interest in the project. Community activities such as career expositions offer both adults and young people the possibility to explore employment and educational opportunities.
- The skills component of the project instills a sense of pride and accomplishment in participants.

disadvantaged children and young people from engaging in risky behavior. The **best approaches** focus on helping those affected by risky behavior to recover and return to a safe and productive path to adulthood. Although few of these interventions have been evaluated, there is sufficient evidence to make some recommendations. The **general policies** address critical risk factors at the community and macro levels, but have also been shown to be particularly effective at reducing risky behavior by young people.

Table 2 presents the core policies and approaches that respond to the priority issues identified in the Conference. It contains examples corresponding to the seven finalist initiatives of the **Regional Caribbean Contest: Keeping Boys Out of Risk**. Addressing the needs of boys at risk requires a multi-faceted and multi-sectoral approach. For that reason, the distribution of policies and approaches into one of the three thematic areas of schooling and education, skills development for labor market insertion, and cross

Table 1. Caribbean Priority Issues for Addressing Boys at Risk

Thematic Concept Area	Schooling and Education	Skills Development for Labor Market Insertion	Cross Cutting Issues
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve literacy and numeracy skills Support youth with behavioral disorders or learning disabilities to successfully complete secondary school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster mentorships and career development opportunities Focus on early childhood development, including early and continuous exposure to life skills training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide life skills training Tackle peer pressure and drug abuse Reshape ways in which masculinity is constructed and expressed
Family/household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities for parents/families to engage with schools Provide support to build strong schools and parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and build national parental support groups to assist parents in managing at-risk youth, including focus on skills development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support services to parents and orientation on 'parenting', in particular related to raising boys and managing at-risk youth Address issues of absentee fathers and lack of positive role models
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve school - community relationship Develop adequate programs for community engagement in children's development activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalize participation of the private sector in building employability Provide a way for youth voices to be heard and for young people to engage in activities that impact their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve and increase community involvement in children's development activities and develop and use effective community role models Provide recreational facilities and activities to provide useful leisure time for young people, including youth to youth programs
Local Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a relevant and creative curriculum with updated materials Develop school administration capacity to manage at-risk youth Deal with gender stereotyping in schools Change teachers' negative attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop skills for life but also for labor markets Develop youth to youth programs and encourage peer to peer leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure programs for marginalized males Provide counselling support for boys
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the status of teachers; improve teacher training facilities, provide retraining of principals and teachers for more effective pedagogy, and establish and promote gender units within teacher training institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include youth participation in program design and ensure programs for marginalized males Include entrepreneur and apprenticeship programs as part of youth education Continuously match curriculum to labor market needs and include IT; provide relevant training for teachers Provide certification of youth skills and competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote multi-sectoral approaches and strategies, and innovative programming Provide a rehabilitative focus for correctional programs for at-risk youth Foster positive media policy and messages to influence boys and youth Promote conceptual understanding of gender at all levels (including policy planning level)

Source: Based on the results of the **Regional Caribbean Conference on Keeping Boys Out of Risk**, Jamaica, May 2009.

cutting issues is not rigid or exclusive, but aims to provide a more structured presentation based on the priorities identified in the Common Platform for Action.

Generating the Evidence to Become More Effective

Well targeted boys-at-risk programs reduce insecurity and provide opportunities to spur economic development, but a broader exchange of experiences is crucial to understand the effects of boys' risky behavior on society as a whole and to identify adequate policies and instruments to address the problems.

The knowledge exchange and learning stimulated by the **Regional Caribbean Conference on Keeping Boys Out of Risk** is valuable to broaden and deepen the discussion. However, the opportunity to scale up and replicate good practices to enhance the impact of the exchange is limited by the evidence available. While there is an agreement on

the diagnosis and consensus on the problem of boys at risk, there is a vacuum when it comes to measuring the impact of youth at risk programs. This gap is even larger when it comes to generating the gender sensitive evidence needed to provide feedback to support improvements in the design of programs and policies.

To contribute to the design and implementation of policies and strategies that effectively redirect young men from risky behavior to economically productive activities, countries need a sound and reliable framework of lessons learned. This framework should be based on impact evaluations for an evidence-based understanding of the gender differentiated impact of projects and programs that target at-risk youth. To that end, the World Bank has secured funding from a Dutch trust fund to implement important activities that have been identified as priorities in the region and provide the evidence necessary to identify adequate policies and instruments to address the needs of boys at risk.

Table 2. Policies, Approaches and Examples of Initiatives Addressing Youth at Risk

	Policies and Approaches	Examples
Schooling & Education	<p>Core Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep children in school until they have completed secondary education Use students as a captive audience in schools to give them key risk prevention messages and Identify at-risk youth who need remedial support <p>Promising Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide financial incentives to young people to promote good decision making Offer activities for youth in youth-friendly spaces within existing public buildings 	<p>"Alternative Dispute Resolution Services and Training For At-Risk Youth", Dispute Resolution Foundation, Jamaica</p> <p>"A Golden Future: Training and Mentoring Program for At-Risk Students", Stichting Projekta, Suriname</p>
Skills Development for Labor Market Insertion	<p>Core Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for skills development for employment <p>Promising Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in education equivalency degree programs for over-age young people who want to complete their formal education Invest in job training programs that include a mixture of technical skills, life skills, and internships Provide targeted employment services to at-risk youth Support pilot self-employment programs 	<p>"Training Young Men to Become Car Mechanics", Stichting TANA, Suriname</p> <p>"Build Your Dreams: Youth Business Plan Competition" Peace Corps & Plan International, the Dominican Republic & Haiti</p>
Cross Cutting Issues	<p>Core Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the first five years of life to prevent risky behavior among young people Promote effective parenting as the cornerstone of policies and programs for at-risk youth Use national and local media to expose young people to social marketing messages and reduce their exposure to negative behaviors <p>Promising Approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish programs in which caring adults mentor at-risk youth Incorporate life skills into all interventions targeted to at-risk youth <p>General Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce youth crime and violence by focusing on rehabilitation and on providing second chance opportunities for young offenders 	<p>"Engaging Young Men From Inner City Communities", People's Action for Community Transformation (PACT), Jamaica</p> <p>"Male Awareness Now (MAN) Project", Children First Agency, Jamaica</p> <p>"From Offending to Achieving: Skills and Personal Development for Juveniles", The Social Centre, Dominica</p>

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The Gender Team is part of the Poverty and Gender Group in the Latin America and Caribbean (LCR) Region's Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) Unit of the World Bank. The mission of the LCR Gender Team is to contribute to the quality and effectiveness of development interventions and outcomes through the inclusion of the gender perspective in World Bank's work in Latin America and the Caribbean. www.worldbank.org/lacgender

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