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YOUTH FORUM RESULTS

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Thirty five young people from 20 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean participated in the Consulta de San Jose (CSJ) Youth Forum (YF). The participants were chosen by the Research Department of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and INCAE Business School via a rigorous selection process, and included a mix of Master's degree students, doctoral candidates, and young professionals from the private, public and civil sector. All demonstrated outstanding academic and/or professional backgrounds in economics, social science, business administration, economic development, and related fields. Nineteen participants were supported by scholarships from the IDB.

The Youth Forum operated in parallel to the CSJ Expert Panel, and was assigned the same task – prioritize a range of solutions to pressing regional problems based on benefit-cost analyses presented by noted experts. The same papers and experts presented to the Expert Panel, were also presented to the YF. The YF was coordinated by INCAE Professor Lawrence Pratt, and the various presentation sessions were moderated by INCAE faculty members.

Both INCAE faculty and the paper presenters found the group of students to be outstanding. The participants made an outstanding effort to carefully consider the proposals and benefit-cost analyses, and to place them in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean. Faculty and experts were very impressed by the quantity and quality of their engagement, and most notably by the sophistication of their inquiries. They exhibited high levels of intelligence and extraordinary dedication to completing the assigned task of considering a large number of proposals on a broad range of topics. They asked tough questions with great eagerness and seriousness.

While noting the fundamental importance of benefit-cost analysis, the Youth Forum group discussion clearly expressed the belief that other factors should also be considered when making decisions on such important issues. However, despite the group's interest in considering other elements beyond benefit-cost analysis (discussed below), they willingly accepted the Copenhagen Consensus Center methodology and focused their questions on clarifying the authors' assumptions, approach and calculations. Their rankings demonstrate a clear understanding of the benefit-cost implications, but also their consideration of other factors (discussed further below).

Over three full days, the YF and the Expert Panel considered 44 proposals in 10 different areas of development policy. At the end of the third day, they each ranked all the proposals to reflect their recommendations for investing scarce development resources. Appendix I presents the overall results. The top 10 ranked solutions are:

1. Nutrition programs for preschool students
2. Nutrition programs for poor children
3. Conditional cash transfer programs for education
4. Increase access to healthcare
5. Improve efficiency and equity of public spending and taxes
6. Conditional cash transfer programs to combat poverty
7. Efficiently spend at least 3-6% of GDP on infrastructure
8. Increase the level of political party and party system institutionalization
9. Improve performance and cut corruption in regulation, taxation, and government procurement
10. Adopt policies and services to facilitate trade

Several key themes surfaced in the discussions and voting results.

1. Focus on Human Capital

Voting results and questions raised by the participants showed that they clearly favored investments in solutions and areas that would have the largest and most lasting impact on human capital in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Education and poverty solutions, particularly those targeted at young children, ranked high, in daily preliminary voting and in the final ranking. More broadly, questions posed to the authors centered on how solutions in labor markets, fiscal policy and infrastructure— for example – would affect and develop human capital directly.

2. Concern for Youth

Voting results (and discussions in the YF) also showed that the participants placed great value on solutions targeting youth, especially children aged 0 to 5. They indicated that they believed that these solutions would be the most effective to break the cycle of poverty. Education and poverty solutions for pre-school and infants, in particular, were ranked high.

3. Limited Range of Solutions

Youth Forum participants noted frequently, and with a certain level of frustration, that the solutions offered by the papers offered a very limited set of options to consider. The group showed particular concern about leaving out practical and important solutions with great potential for impact solely on the basis that not enough statistical data existed to carry out a proper benefit/cost analysis. Many Forum participants commented on other topics and solutions that they thought might be more effective, have more of an impact, or were more feasible for the region. Further, they noted that focusing on solutions with reliable B/C estimates implies necessarily recommending approaches that have been tried before, rather than new approaches that could conceivably be more effective.

4. Importance of Impact

The Forum participants expressed great interest in finding solutions that would have a meaningful impact – whether it be in the short-term or long-term. The concern voiced was that solutions may present outstanding benefit/cost ratios, but may not have significant impact (marginal or total) on the pressing problems of the region. The group tended to favor proposals with logical connections and reasonable expectations of real impact for Latin American and Caribbean populations.

5. Concern about Implementation

Forum participants were not only engaged in understanding the impact the solutions would have, but they also expressed concern about how the solutions would be implemented. They asked very practical questions relating to who would pay the costs for implementation, and how political obstacles might be overcome. They also pressured the authors to ground their solutions and ideas into specific policies that could be implemented. They showed an interest in wanting to take meaningful action now.

6. Linking Solutions and Topic Areas

Finally, the Youth Forum participants demonstrated a keen ability to link the solutions offered in each topic area and combine them to find the most effective combination of outcomes. They questioned how solutions from one area would affect others -- in particular synergistic effects -- and they were both quick and creative in making connections between them. Most notable were their recommendations for nutritional programs that impact both education and poverty reduction goals.

7. Undervalued Solutions

The group identified several inherent biases in the voting methodology. For example, detailed questioning in the environmental area revealed that three (and perhaps four) of the proposed conservation solutions were largely “additive” in their benefits (e.g. the same action in the same geographic areas leads to several benefits). Together, the benefits

would have had a rather high B/C ration, but taken separately as presented for voting, they each ranked fairly low.

Final Observations

All of the participants commented that the YF presented them with an outstanding opportunity to learn about new issues, explore the current “state of knowledge” on a number of topics, and work with others with similar interests. The group did an excellent job – taking their responsibilities seriously. All who interacted with them noted their professionalism and intellectual curiosity. Finally, the rankings they generated as a group reflect a well-debated and sound (economically and from a development perspective) set of recommendations for policy makers.

Table 2: Overall Ranking of 45* Proposed Solutions

POSITION CODE	SOLUTION NAME
1	ED1 Education - Nutrition Programs for Pre-School Age Children
2	PI1 Poverty - Nutritional Interventions
3	ED2 Education - Conditional Cash Transfer Programs
4	HE1 Health - Increase access to care
5	FP4 Fiscal Problems - Improve efficiency and equity of spending and taxes
6	PI2 Poverty - Conditional Cash Transfers
7	IN1 Infrastructure - Spend at least 3-6% of GDP and spend better on infrastructure
8	DE1 Democracy - Increase the level of political party and party system institutionalization
9	PU1 Public Adm. - Improve performance and limit corruption in regulation, revenue raising and procurement
10	ES(A1) Employment - Job training in place of minimum wage reduction
11	IN3 Infrastructure - Adopt policies and services to facilitate trade
12	PI3 Poverty - Early Childhood Development
13	HE2 Health - Raise quality
14	FP2 Fiscal Problems - Consolidate the budget process – Fiscal rules
15	PU5 Public Adm. - Improvements in judicial and prosecutorial independence and performance
16	IN2 Infrastructure - Adopt policies aimed at improving the efficiency of service logistics providers
17	VC2 Violence - Comprehensive program to deal with youth and gang violence
18	VC1 Violence - Comprehensive programs targeting at-risk mothers and young children under age 5
19	FP3 Fiscal Problems - Policy evaluation agency
20	FP1 Fiscal Problems - Improve debt management – Contingent debt instruments
21	HE3 Health - Improve efficiency of delivery
22	PU3 Public Adm. - Government monitoring – Audit agencies, Ombudsmen, etc.
23	ES4 Employment - Reduction of the Minimum Wage and introduction of EITC-type transfers to the working poor (DIP)
24	HE4 Health - Reduce ignorance or misinterpretation
25	PU4 Public Adm. - Grassroots monitoring with technical assistance and information provisions by government or NGOs
26	VC4 Violence - Domestic Violence Prevention and Control
27	HE5 Health - “Basic package approach”
28	ES2 Employment - Redesign of Job Security Legislation into an UI Account
29	ES3 Employment - A combination of redesign of pension programs and job security legislation
30	ES1 Employment - Redesign of Pension Programs
31	ED3 Education - Voucher Programs
32	VC5 Violence - CPTED and hot-spot policing
33	EX5 Environment - Expanding Protected Areas
34	PU2 Public Adm. - Increase contracting out to NGOs for service delivery
35	EX4 Environment - Protecting Forests for carbon values
36	EX3 Environment - Protecting Ecosystems for ecosystem services
37	EX2 Environment - Protecting Forests to prevent carbon emissions
38	HE6 Health - Calculations for health insurance extension approach
39	HE7 Health - Tobacco Excise Tax

40	HE8	Health - Alcohol Excise Tax / Restrict Hours of Alcohol Sales / Ban Alcohol Advert
41	DE2	Democracy - Women's representation: 50% quota, zippered lists, full compliance
42	EX1	Environment - Protecting Biodiversity for its value in drugs
43	VC3	Violence - Comprehensive Prison Treatment and Reintegration Program
44	DE3	Democracy - Women's representation: 50% quota, zippered lists, no other changes to existing legislation
45	DE4	Democracy - Women's representation: 50% quota, zippered lists, electoral rules, but no change to the party list format

* 44 solutions were initially proposed to the Youth Forum. An additional proposal in the "Employment Area" was proposed in the Alternative View paper and subsequently included at the request of the participants. Note that this proposal was ranked 10th.

