EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE POETA PROGRAM ON THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA)

IDRC CRDI

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Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA): Examining the impact of the POETA program on the lives of People with Disabilities

Final Technical Report

By The Trust for the Americas

Washington DC, USA

June 30thth, 2012

IDRC Project Number: 106307-001

Country/Region: Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru

Implementing Institution: The Trust for the Americas, Organization of American States - OAS

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ABSTRACT

The Trust for the Americas has been addressing the social and economic exclusion of people with disabilities (PwD) in the western hemisphere through the Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA) program. Since the opening of the pilot center in Guatemala in 2004, the program has expanded to 20 countries in the region. POETA partners with local organizations to establish centers which provide job readiness and technology training to PwD. As the program expands, it was important to understand how and for whom the program works, to improve specific components that generate high impact, and to identify areas for improvement with respect to economic inclusion of PwD. The Trust is also aware of the need for a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation framework to measure quantitative and qualitative impact of the POETA program. This project was design to responds to those needs through: (i) research on the impact of the program on PwD, (ii) the design and implementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, and (iii) building the capacity of the local partner organizations serving PwD. The project was implemented in four countries where the POETA program provides training to PwD: Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru. The outcomes of the project were expected to benefit the POETA program as a whole, while also serving as an important research case for organizations utilizing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to facilitate inclusion and skill development of PwD.

This technical report summarizes the main findings produced by previous reports. As such, parts of this report have also appeared in previous ones.

KEYWORDS: Training, Social Inclusion, Employability, People with Disabilities, Information and Communication Technologies, Context, Mechanisms, Outcomes, Monitoring & Evaluation, critical realism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was made possible thanks to funding from the International Development Research Center (IDRC), Microsoft, and Fundación Saldarriaga Concha, as well as the institutional support of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Ministry of Labor in Argentina. The Trust for the Americas looks forward to continued collaboration to address the situation of People with Disabilities in the Americas.

The Trust wish to acknowledge the contributions of the research team, consultants, Trust Staff, and POETA local Partners in Argentina: CILSA- Centro de Integración Libre y Solidario de Argentina and Fundación PAR; in Guatemala: Benemérito Comité Pro Ciegos y Sordos and Fundabiem; in Colombia: Corporación Matamoros, Grupo Empresarial Arcángeles, Fundación Carvajal, CIREC - Centro Integral de Rehabilitación de Colombia and Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar; and Peru: MecVida, COPEME - Consorcio de Organizaciones Privadas de Promoción al Desarrollo de la Pequeña y Microempresa and Fundades - Fundación para el Desarrollo Solidario.

Finally, the Trust would like to acknowledge the POETA Program participants who provided meaningful feedback on the program through their interviews.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 3

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 4

RESEARCH PROBLEM 6

OBJECTIVES 6

GENERAL OBJECTIVE: 6

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: 7

METHODOLOGY 7

PROJECT ACTIVITIES 10

PROJECT OUTPUTS 17

PROJECT OUTCOMES 23

RESEARCH FINDINGS 18

OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS 26

RESEARCH PROBLEM

There are over 50 million PwD in Latin America and the Caribbean[1], many of whom do not have access to opportunities to develop their skills, gain employment, and be engaged in society. Approximately 82% of PwD in the region live in poverty and approximately 80-90% of them are unemployed or outside the workforce[2].

The Trust for the Americas (the Trust), a non-profit affiliate of the Organization of American States (OAS), has been addressing the social and economic exclusion of different target populations (people with disabilities, youth at risk, and people affected by armed conflict, among others) through its POETA Program (Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas). This initiative works with local partner organizations to establish technology community centers that provide technology and job readiness training in order to increase employment and social opportunities for the aforementioned vulnerable populations.

After seven years of implementation, the Trust identified areas that needed improvement, refinement and assessment to ensure that the program's impact was effective. This project was developed to understand how, for whom, and in what context the program works, to enable the improvement of components that create higher impact based on a participatory methodology. The project designed was based on as a participatory methodology with the following goals: (1) research and examine the impact of the program on the lives of PwD, (2) design and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that will be integrated by the local partners, and (3) strengthen capacity of the local partner organizations serving PwD.

OBJECTIVES

After a face-to-face participatory meeting with the project team, including Trust staff, consultants and local partners, the interaction among the participants enable the project's objectives to be redefined in order to capture a consensus of the main stake-holders. As a result, the objectives were stated as follows:

GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

To strengthen the continuous learning of organizations, in order to improve social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities.

[1] Inter-American Development Bank. 2006. IDB Fund to Invest in Groundbreaking Micro-Insurance Venture
[2] The World Bank. 2004. Fact Sheet: Disability in Latin America and the Caribbean.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

1. Improve understanding of the general impact of PwD training on participants with respect to: employment, professional development, education, entrepreneurial skills, and participation in the community/public sector.

2. Design and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework (continuous learning), based on a collaborative approach.

3. Disseminate results in order to influence the practices of other organizations.

We could conclude that objective 1 and 3 were met, but objective 2 was not met. Throughout this report and in in particular the outcomes section we highlight the reasons why each objectives was or was not met.

Objective	Degree to which objective was achieved (and why)
1. Improve understanding of the general impact of PwD training on participants with respect to: employment, professional development, education, entrepreneurial skills, and participation in the community/public sector.	Fully met: During 2012 POETA Local partners, Trust Staff and personnel from the Argentinean and Colombian Government, were able to understand the dynamics of the POETA program. For local partners, they got a consensus on the topics and mechanisms that run the POETA Program and that it was built on a participatory approach (Trust, local partners and final beneficiaries). For Trust staff, the feedback obtained by local partners, interviews and focal groups of PwDs and the perspective of Governmental Institutions help them identify new and improved strategies to do M&E and to work with local partners. Finally for the Ministries the case study on telework of for PwDs helped to fuster a detail dialogue about the use of Adapted technologies for PwD in the region. Futher details could be found in the outcome section.
2. Design and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework (continuous learning), based on a collaborative approach.	No-met: This was a product that the Research Team needed to develop and implement with both Trust staff and POETA local partners. The Research time was able to deliver a 23 page document which highlights the main idea and foundation of how an M&E framework should be developed. This product was delivered outside of the expected time-line and due to time constrains it was

	impossible to fully design and implement the framework.
3. Disseminate results in order to influence the practices of other organizations.	Fully-met: the research project Document and the Case Study was disseminated to 20 institutions across the region, including multilateral organizations, Governmental Institutions and local partners that work with the POETA program. In addition the Trust for the Americas so far had a presentation about the IDRC project at a telework Conferencia in Bogota, Colombia in July 2012.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Project was conducted using the Collaborative Action Research and Evaluation methodology (CARE) that integrated local partners and POETA Program participants in each stage of the research.

The CARE methodology is an innovative approach to research that does not have fully defined steps. This methodology focuses on the participation of local partners and program participants in the evaluation process and utilizes participants' responses to research the impact of the POETA Program. Local organizations and POETA Program participants were essential actors in the development of the basis of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

The Project consisted of two interlinked phases: a) Conduct research to generate findings that could help the Trust and local partners understand the perception of the beneficiaries of the POETA Program and its impact on their lives, and b) Design and Implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, based on the research finds.

Using a "realist" approach, researchers identified various dynamics of change experienced in the POETA Program as well as the key elements or processes that contribute to these dynamics. Also, it was possible to understand the conditions (the context) that had a more direct impact on the goals and objectives of the project.

The purpose of the research component was to understand the perception of the beneficiaries of the POETA program and its impact on their lives. Especially explore the experiences of PwD who have engaged in the POETA program and the impact of the POETA program on the lives of PwD.

The research central question was: How the POETA centers influence on the lives of participants with disabilities?

While this research was being conducted, a separate case study with the goal of understanding the performance of Telework Training Programs for PwD was conducted by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, and Security in Argentina. This research began as a joint initiative between Trust for the Americas and the Ministry in order to identify the best ways to adequately address the needs and interests of PwD, to identify labor inclusion strategies, and to contribute to the construction of public policies. This case study was a complementary activity for the project, since it wanted to measure in a multi-sector (Government, private sector and civil society) scenario the outcomes of training for persons with disabilities managed by Governmental entities.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

In both the case study and the POETA Program research, semi-structured interviews were used as the main technique for data collection. This technique has many advantages including the flexibility it gives participants to lead the discussion and the level of intimacy because the interviews are one-on-one. Moreover, its open style allows for intensive, holistic, contextualized, and personalized information on the subject of study. This technique was an effective and appropriate method because it helped the Research Team to go in depth with stakeholders (Trust staff, local partners, final beneficiaries) that have different profiles and ideas of the impact of the POETA program in their life and communities.

However, like other techniques, semi-structured interviews present potential issues, such as the responsiveness, reliability, and validity of participant responses, and general time constraints.

The interview outline was designed to include a series of open-ended questions used by the interviewer to guide the respondent's answers. This mechanism allowed the free expression of the respondent to give rise to new topics. Through the development of a series of questions it was possible to confirm in detail how the POETA Program has impacted participants.

44 interviews were conducted with POETA Program beneficiaries from Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru. Respondents were selected using the following criteria: - Graduates of POETA centers in those countries (with more than 6 months of training)

- Clearly communicate their ideas in Spanish
- Had participated regularly in the POETA Program activities, and they
- Agreed to participate in the interview through a consent form.

Regarding the case study, interviews were conducted with companies that have incorporated PwD beneficiaries of the Program into their staff (YPF and Telecom), the company trainer (Advice S.R.L), PwD who participated in the training, and public officials responsible for program management.

DATA ANALYSIS

Both in the case study and POETA Program research, we proceeded to analyze the information through thematic analysis. This refers to the processes of recovery of themes (elements that occur frequently in the text) that are embedded in the evolution of the meanings and images of the transcripts of the interviews.

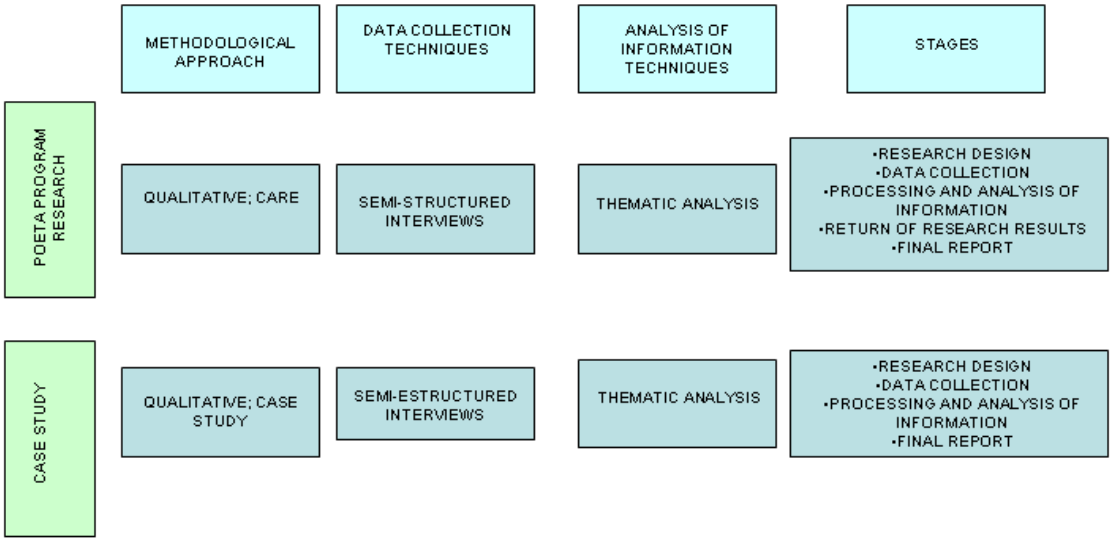
DESIGN OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The inputs used by the research group for the development of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework were:

- Analysis of previous POETA Program evaluations.
- Literature review using a realistic approach.
- POETA Program research.
- Feedback from local partners and participants.

Within this first approach to a Monitoring and Evaluation system, the research team identified and described the principle POETA components (Training, Social Interaction and Employability), the main contextual factors relevant to POETA, and each of their mechanisms.

The graphic below illustrates the design of the methodology, the techniques used to collect data, and the analysis of the data. Furthermore, the graphic illustrates the steps undertaken to carry out the POETA research in four countries (Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Guatemala) and the case-study conducted in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour of Argentina. Details of the case study can be found here.



Even though the Research Team produced a document that generally illustrates the essential idea and analytical tools which could lead to the development of a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation tool, the development of the framework was not delivered by the Research Team, due to time constrains and externalities out of the reach of the Trust Project team. In addition, the product delivery was delayed according to the project schedule and was not able to translate to Spanish and disseminate with local partners and program's participants.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project involved different activities in order to achieve the overall goal of strengthening the continuous learning of organizations in order to improve social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. The main activities were:

PROJECT DESIGN AND PLANNING MEETING

This meeting took place in January 2011, and involved the following people: Asha Williams, Maria Liliana Mor and Vanessa Ramirez (Program Managers) and David Rojas (Unit Director) from the Trust, Matthew Smith (Program Officer) from the IDRC, and Joyojeet Pal and Marcia Hills (Consultants) for Research and M&E component. The meeting's objective was to refine roles and responsibilities of key actors and to outline a action plan for the project. This session allowed the team to share initial perceptions about the project, to work together to find common goals, and to unify these intentions regarding the project.

FIRST FACE TO FACE MEETING

During the first stage, the inquiry group (researchers, local partners, research assistants, and Trust staff) met in Bogota, Colombia, in February 2011 to receive training in the CARE research methodology. Moreover, the inquiry group met to jointly define the objectives of the research and the main issues to investigate. After this meeting, local partners went back to their countries and presented the information developed in Bogota to their organizations. Local partners were responsible for getting feedback from their organizations and for emphasizing the importance of carrying out this case study. The participation of local partners was voluntary, although there were minimum requirements that needed to be met.[3]

This meeting allowed local partners, main researchers, and research assistants to get to know one another. Moreover, this first meeting promoted the exchange of experiences of different POETA centers, the delineation of roles and functions of each team member, and the planning of the project's activities.

After that first meeting, Parquesoft Pasto (a local partner in Colombia) and ASSOLI (a local partner in Peru) did not participate of the whole project. Parquesoft stated that there were other projects related to fundraising that demanded most of their time, and ASSOLI did not meet the all of the minimum requirements. It is important to note that even though these two organizations did not participate, they and other local partners who are part of the POETA network in the 20 countries will have access to these outcomes.

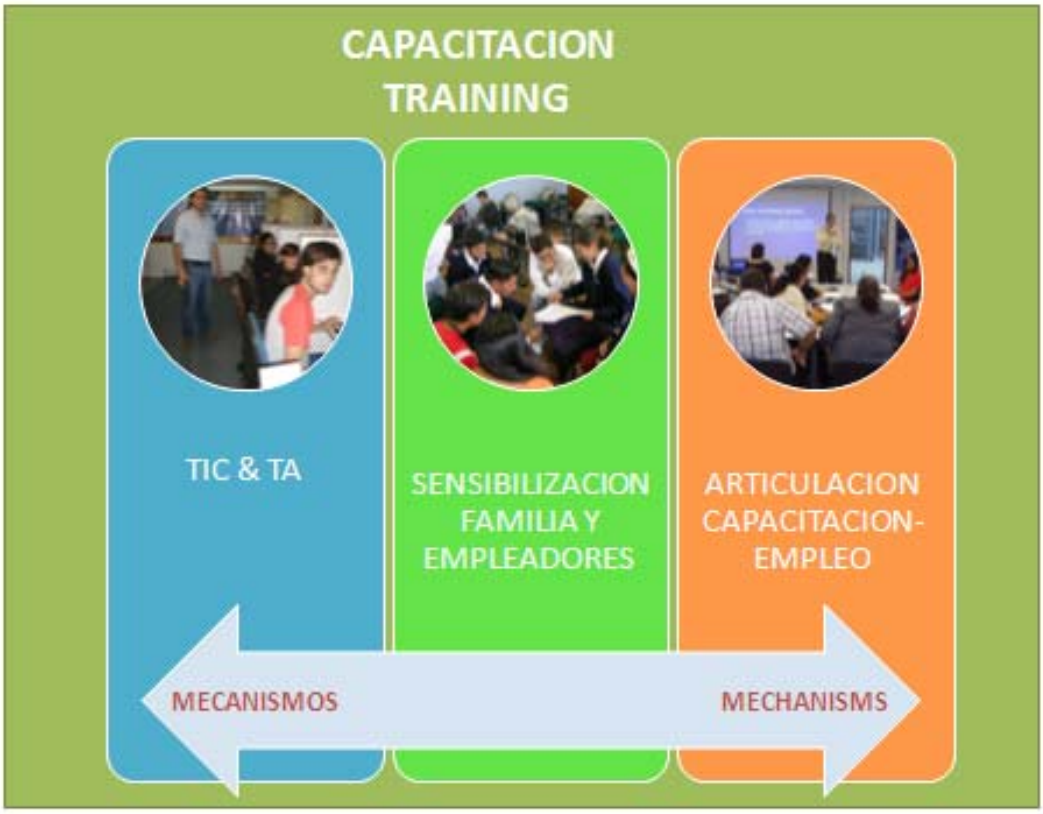
One interesting participatory process that occurred during the first meeting was the joint process to determine the project objectives, based on the participatory research methodology. Each of the proposed activities was designed and intended to foster interaction between organizations. The activities focused on the fact that all participating organizations had a common interest in the POETA Program and served as a forum for organizations to express their expectations for the program.

During this meeting, the organizations involved were given the opportunity to redefine the way the project will be executed. This was a major challenge because organizations in Latin America are generally used to following previously established guidelines. During the meeting in Colombia, there was much time spent in trying to identify what they wanted from the project, which gave some participants the perception that there were no guidelines defined by the Trust. The Trust worked to explain to local partners that the project was not about setting guidelines and rules, but enabling them to define the project direction so it could more effectively address their needs.

[3] Detailed in the Research Final Report

One of the main lessons learned during the meeting that took place in Bogota, is that, even though it is important to take into account the opinions of the local partners to get consensus, there should be basic parameters to guide some processes, since the absence of this can create confusion among local partners. For this particular reason, there were moments during the first meeting in which the group seemed to be circling around the same ideas, without making any decision and determining next steps. In conclusion, even though the process to get into a consensus was long and energy consuming, this transition helped the assistance to share different perspectives in a participatory way and help local partners' representative and Trust staff to get to outputs that some-how reflected the ideas and realities of all the stakeholders that works around the POETA program. Please find bellow the outputs of the meeting regarding the main component of POETA Accesible model:

INCLUSION SOCIAL
SOCIAL INCLUSION
CAPACITACION
TRAINING
OPORTUNIDADES DE EMPLEO
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
INTERACCION SOCIAL
SOCIAL INTERACTION
MECANISMOS
Sostenibilidad - Sustanability
Incidencia - Advocacy
Alianzas - Partnerships
MECHANISMS


CAPACITACION
TRAINING
TIC & TA
SENSIBILIZACION FAMILIA Y EMPLEADORES
ARTICULACION CAPACITACION-EMPLEO
MECANISMOS
MECHANISMS

After many years of working with over 50 local organizations throughout Latin America, the Trust understands the importance of receiving feedback from local partners. Moreover, the Trust have learned through this project, that there was an urgent need to systematized and give simple guidelines on how to run and operate the POETA in order to adequately communicate to local partners what are the basic requirements of the POETA programa what is the methodology and how they could enrich the program by adding their own experience and particularities. In the Outcome section we highlight how the trust experience with this project had help it to re-define the way of operating the program and improve the relation with local partners.

INTERVIEWS

Once the main program components to be surveyed and the research questions were defined, the research assistants coordinated with local partners about the interview process. Some interviews were conducted virtually through Skype, others through social media, and others in person. After conducting the interviews and processing the information, the research assistants, with the support of the researchers, proceeded to analyze the main results.

At first, the analysis was done by country and a global analysis that took into account the results of all the countries was later completed. Using an iterative and participatory methodology, this data was returned to local partner organizations for their input and feedback.

VIRTUAL SESSIONS

Between the first and the second meetings the research team facilitated five virtual sessions, during which the local partners in the four countries were informed about the progress of the project and the next steps. The objectives of these virtual meetings were: To review and make suggestions regarding what had been agreed at the meeting in Bogota (components, devices and research questions), to review the work plan (discuss the activities, responsibilities and schedule), to discuss the interview protocol, and to coordinate the interview process.

SECOND FACE TO FACE MEETING

An initial report was presented to the local partners in a meeting in Bogota in late September 2011 with the following objectives: to share results and to get feedback from local partners. All the comments and suggestions of local partners were taken into account and incorporated into the report.

As part of the second meeting, which took place in Chinauta, Colombia, the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Security of Argentina presented the main results of the case study about the Training Program in Telework for PwD. Subsequently, representatives of the Colombian Ministry of Information Technologies and Communication presented various actions implemented by the Colombian government related to the social and labor inclusion of PwD through ICT.

In addition, existing monitoring and evaluation documents used by the Trust and local partners were reviewed in the final meeting in Bogota and an outline of the Monitoring and Evaluation tool was presented by the main researchers. The iterative process was applied again to refine and finalize the general outline of the framework by exchanging it between the inquiry group and the local partners.

The main outputs of the meeting were:

- 33 people from Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and Argentina participated in the first face to face meeting. There were present local partnes and Trust Staff from the field and Head Quarters.
- Re-design of the General and specific objective of the project was accomplished by using a participatory method proposed by the Research Team.
- A visit to a POETA center (Centro POETA Arcangeles) was conducted to evaluate the main components that a POETA staff/coordinator should take into account when designing and implementing a POETA project.
- A group activity per country was conducted to analyze the information collected when training and evaluating PwDs participants at each center in each country. The data collected with this activity serverd as a start of the foundation of the M&E framework.

RETURN OF RESULTS

Virtual and face to face meetings were conducted by the research team to discuss the results of the first and second meeting. They coordinated meetings with local partners, and with the beneficiaries who had been previously interviewed. During those meetings, the research assistants presented the main results of the POETA Program research and the basic elements of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Both local partners and beneficiaries made interesting suggestions and contributions related to the data presented that they were incorporated into the final document.

In June 2012, a final version of the research document was presented to local partners and POETA participants in order to share results, to get final feedback from local actors, and to highlight paths to development that arose from the research. The findings of the research could be found on the research document.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

The main outputs of this project were:

- Training of **Twelve social organizations** on collaborative action research and evaluation methodology (CARE).
- Training of four research assistants in CARE and realist research.
- **One Publications** of the POETA Program Research Paper (with the main results and the methodology applied) and the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (inputs used and the initial elements).

- **One Publication** of the case study about the Training Program in Telework for PwD of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Security of Argentina. http://www.trabajo.gov.ar/downloads/teletrabajo/AR-REP-teletrabajo_compartir_SL.pdf
- Dissemination of POETA Program research document to **two major government entities**: Ministry of Labor, Employment and Security of Argentina and the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia.
- Distribution of the Argentinean Case Study and the Research Document to **20 institutions** form the public, private, non-profit sector and multilateral organizations.
- Summary of the case study included in printed version of a telework book published by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Security of Argentina; they are planning to post the case study one-line at www.trabajo.gob.ar/ott
- Publication and dissemination of Research results within the network of 109 POETA centers in the region.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

In this section we lay out the major outcomes of the project. To report on some of the outcomes, the Trust for the Americas conducted a series of phone-interviews to be able to get an idea of the behavioral changes that resulted from the project activities.

The Trust identified **5 major conclusions** that were **divers of change** throughout the project:

1. **Exchange of experiences between different local partners and public institutions dedicated to social and labor inclusion of people with disabilities:** Meetings between local partners and public functionaries have created important venues to exchange significant practices regarding the social and labor inclusion of people with disabilities.

2. **Gaining knowledge about qualitative methodologies:** This research and knowledge has been useful in developing future lines of inquiry regarding the IDRC project and other topics and problems of interest.

3. **Impact analysis of the program:** The impact analysis has demonstrated results for public and private stakeholders, and has helped spread awareness of the actions taken as part of this program.

4. **Monitoring and evaluation framework:** The initial development of a monitoring and evaluation framework represents a major advance that will encourage the local partners and the Trust to develop information collection systems that better reflect the development of the POETA program.

5. **Usefulness of Case Studies:** The Trust believe that the case study was useful in helping participants understand the strengths and weakness of the telework training program, which helped align the principal project components. Similarly, the case study was a valuable tool for demonstrating results and spreading awareness of the Ministry's initiatives regarding the employment of people with disabilities, not only in Argentina, but also in all the other countries that participated in the project.

CASE STUDY AND PUBLIC SECTOR OUTCOMES

- We believe that the project has contributed to the Argentinean government re reevaluating its training processes and working to improve existing programs. Since the execution of the case study, the Argentine Ministry of Labor has proposed to strengthen its instructor-training programs by providing expert certification to twenty (20) individuals in the field. The Ministry is also planning to use POETA centers in Argentina to be part of this training session.

- Furthermore, program participants in Argentina now have the opportunity to receive certification for various skills, which will then increase their opportunities for inclusion in the labor market. A list of possible certifications can be found that the following link: http://www.trabajo.gob.ar/teletrabajo/certificacion.asp .

- The Argentina Ministry of Labor has also begun providing more incentives for businesses that hire telecommuters who are part of vulnerable social groups including but not limited too: people with disabilities, people over the age of 45, and at-risk youth. These two changes, as well as the participation of various businesses in videoconferences discussing the importance of telework, have already provided more opportunities for these vulnerable groups with regard to inclusion in the labor market.

- Finally, since the completion of the case study, programs have been altered in order to provide training to a wider group of beneficiaries. The Argentina government has recently launched the first training program for the visually impaired using a new software. Moreover, new materials written in Braille are currently being prepared. Once finished, these documents will be distributed throughout the country. According to the Argentinean representative Eliana Lucia Loiacone, their participation in the Project has helped them generate direct dialogue with Organizations of persons with disabilities to jointly discuss about the difficulties that PwDs face in the framework of ICT for development and how they could collaborate and advocate and promote public policies focused on training with social and labor inclusion practices. The POETA model provided the Argentinean government useful content and different dynamics regarding training in ICT and job readiness skill for PwDs that have been useful to incorporate to the telework programs of the Ministry of Labor.

- The Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia since 2011 was invited to some of the IDRC project meeting in Bogota with Trust for the Americas and Fundacion Saldarriaga Concha, thanks to the open dialogue in those meetings, the Ministry decided to partner with the Trust for the Americas to help implement some of the activities of the Vive Digital Action Plan, which main purpose is to provide TIC training and job readiness training to vulnerable communities. The Trust will directly support the Ministry in the development of a Public Policy on use and empowerment of ICT by vulnerable communities and to create a strategy on public-private partnerships on the matter.

- It is important to note that the participation of the Ministry of Labor of Argentina and the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications of Colombia in the project fostered the creation of spaces for dialogue between government and civil society and channels of cooperation and assistance towards the development, research and implementation of training programs. These entities had a one-one meeting in Colombia by the end of August-2012, to share experiences and information about the contents and dynamics which apply ICT and job-readiness training and other relevant information such as telework training for vulnerable communities.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF RESEARCH ASISTANTS OUTCOMES

- It is important to note that t this project allowed the research assistants to gain important and career building experience. First, the perceived effectiveness of the participatory approach allowed the participants to share and apply this style of research in their workplace in their respective countries. In addition, research assistants in Peru and Guatemala were able to continue research projects related to PwD, ICT and social inclusion, topics that are not often seen in the research and evaluation field and know they think they could contribute to further findings in this crucial development matter.

- The research training given to the research assistants along with the quality of the collection and analysis of information were important elements that allowed the researchers to work on new projects with other international organizations.

LOCAL PARTNERS OUTCOMES

- In the latest interviews conducted to local partners, all agreed that during the face to face meetings there was a fluid exchange of experiences and learning between local partners, research team and representatives of the Trust. This encouraged joint action between organizations from the same country as well as organizations from different countries In Colombia Fundacion Carvajal and Fundacion Arcangeles have been trying to put some project together, Cilsa in Argentina started a closer relationship with the Ministry of labor.

- Two of the regional research assistants (Colombia and Argentina) shared that their interaction with the local partners and program participants during the meetings and interviews facilitated a

reflective process, which was valuable for all the stake-holders, because in the past none of the participants or the staff that oversees the POETA project had the opportunity to reflect and analysis how the project impacted them or their organizations and they felt comfortable that an outsider was able to gather information about their project's perception and the transfer that to the Trust for the Americas for future improvements.

- The research assistant in Colombia was able to identify that after the face to face meeting in her visit or virtual meeting to the local partners some of them were starting to use participatory practices/session with the program participant to identify the progress while they are being trained at the centers. The researcher especially mentioned the case of Fundacion Carvajal in Cali, Colombia.

- Furthermore, two local partners specifically shared participatory monitoring practices that they have used since the project was finished:

    - COPEME, one of our local partners in Peru have conducted interviews and focal groups to analyze the situation of potential PwD participants in Lambayeque and Cajamarca for a new project with Fondo Empleo a governmental program. In addition by the end of the training period they are conducting open session for feedback, so that they instructors could improve the quality of the training based of the needs of participants.

    - Local partner CILSA realized that it was one of the few centers that offer training to people with all types of disabilities. CILSA has been able to take advantage of the experience of other centers that provide services to people with a single disability, and also how they other POETA partners p integrates with organization's other initiatives, how programs are financed, and the difficulties that centers face in recruiting and retaining participants. While few local partners are able to dedicate extensive resources to job placement, those that are have significant experience, from which CILSA was able to take valuable lessons as it seeks to promote job placement among its beneficiaries. CILSA's leadership believes that the organization still stands to gain from continued interaction with other POETA centers to transfer effective practices.

- Finally, it is important to emphasize that this project has raised awareness among local partners about the importance of the collection and systematization of information and has improved the access and quality of the data necessary for the monitoring and evaluation of the Program.

THE TRUST FOR THE AMERICAS OUTCOMES

- For the Trust this project has promoted the development of future qualitative research that will deepen some research findings. Also, local partners will be able to use research results in order to improve other programs run by their organizations.

- Regarding The Monitoring and Evaluation framework, Trust for the Americas is working internally to implement the initial steps produced by the project, as part of the POETA program Strategy of Monitoring and Evaluation. In the mean-time, we are applying to "Development Innovation Ventures" (DIV) that aims to find and support breakthrough solutions to the world's most important development challenges. DIV seeks applications that have ideas for addressing development challenges (including Monitoring and evaluation innovative ideas) more effectively and more cheaply. The Trust will submit a Letter of Interest to DIV to be able to take a step further and finish the Framework and actually implement it with the local partners that were part of this project. For this proposal we will like to see how IDRC could get involve as and advisor or parent for this proposal.

- The Trust has learned a lot form this project and research experience, which has influenced our practice. Some specific examples:

    - Training process of POETA centers: the Trust is in the final stage to finalizing a POETA TOOLKIT which encompasses the central principal of POETA Program, how it operates, and the methodologies for each of its components, and the minimum requirements regarding training, curricula, sustainability and monitoring and evaluation practices. The most important thing about the tool-kit is that it was built in conjunction with local partners from 5 countries in the region. The Trust has included experts in each area to serve as mentors and advisors. The final product will be ready by November 2012.

    - The Trust is giving more responsibility to the POETA centers, which will become POETA Academies, where they will train potential local partners that are interested in becoming part of the POETA network, these Academies will get ownership of the program and will help the Trust identify, things that need to be improved. Currently we have selected 5 POETA pilot Academies in Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico and El Salvador.

- Finally, in order to guarantee that local partners start to understand and create a culture of analyzing and recording metrics, the Trust is in the process of creating an online information system where the Trust and local partners can register their results and achievements. In our Action Plan for 2013, we aim to develop an on-line reporting system, but the lessons learned in this project helped us to set-up metrics and crucial questions for this reporting system. Through this system, which can be found at http://registro.trustfortheamericas.org/, the Trust and local partners will have access to different sources of information surrounding the results of training including metrics provided by centers and specific process from program participants and employers.

- The Trust used an international venue, the Teleworking Fair in Bogota, Colombia on July 27th, 2012 where the Argentinean Case Study and the research finding of the IDRC project were presented to more than 100 attendees from Colombia, Argentina and Mexico, the minutes of the event could be found at: http://www.colombiadigital.net/teletrabajo/item/3641-t%C3%ADtulo-memorias-feria-internacional-de-teletrabajo.html and the Trust for the Americas presentation which include the case study could be found at: http://www.colombiadigital.net/images/stories/teletrabajo/presentaciones_feria/9-Maria-Liliana-Mor.pdf.

- Furthermore, this meeting increased publicity for the POETA Program and allowed for the promotion of program participants in the labor market through government policies. Finally, both ministries (Colombia and Argentina) had the opportunity to present potential public policies that are being developed with respect to ICT training and disabilities in the region.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research suggests that POETA program plays an important role in impacting the lives of participants in the areas of social support and inclusion, personal growth and employability. Based on the research results, it seems that the three main program components are the key elements of the POETA efforts and that each component has definite social mechanisms that drive positive change towards desired outcomes (See table below).

Furthermore, the results of the research suggest the importance of the approach taken by the project in its essential steps to development of the M&E Framework. The combination of the CARE approach and the realist methodology meant that it was possible to repeatedly investigate the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that have the most direct impact on the successes and challenges of the POETA program. This type of information is much harder to extract using traditional quantitative survey methods. We have unearthed not just certain technical issues that constitute themes for POETA participants but, also, their cognitive, emotional/affective interaction with the program and how these interactions led to concrete outcomes for the participants.

Program Components	Social Inclusion through ICT Training	Theme Two: Impact of the organization and the POETA program on personal growth.	Labor Inclusion from the POETA experience
Drivers of change	Learning and Motivation	Personal Growth Motivation	**Expanded skills:** Training Enhances Job Opportunities
	Social Networking	Family Support	**Partnerships**: Organization's Support in Creating Opportunities Through Partnerships
	Knowledge Sharing	Group Support	
		Organizational Support	
		Teacher Support	

INCREASED SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR PWD THROUGH ACCESS TO SENSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO ICT

As confidence and self-esteem are gained through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, PwD gain further motivation to learn. This then enables PwD to access and take advantage of the social networking opportunities the new ICTs offer. Finally, PwD who participated in the POETA program discovered new opportunities that allowed them to understand their own potential when they can competently share their new knowledge with other PwD, friends, or family members who don't have knowledge of ICTs.

It is important to highlight that access and the ability to use ICTs can totally transform the lives of PwD from people who are almost completely socially isolated to people who are more socially active due to the chance to interact, both in the classroom and virtually, with others on a daily basis. While there are still major hurdles for PwD to become more socially included, training in ICTs can remove many of the physical, mental, and emotional barriers to their social inclusion.

PERSONAL GROWTH

The second component of the POETA program impacts the social interactions and personal growth of PwD is crucial. Respondents mentioned repeatedly how the support of teachers, other students, family and the POETA Center's welcoming environment had a positive impact on their capacity for social interaction and personal growth. Often, the impacts were caused by subtle things the teacher did or said that demonstrated their caring attitude toward the students. For people so used to being rejected due to social stigma, being treated with respect was a transformative and emotional experience. Furthermore, knowing that other people were going through the same types of challenges was also a comfort for many participants.

The impact of the training likely has varied results depending on the type and severity of the disability but even a small positive impact can make the difference. Some respondents expressed that before they entered the POETA program they were very depressed and some had had suicidal thoughts. This highlights how the program can be seen as a lifeline for some PwD, which is a profoundly positive outcome.

A key finding was that opportunities for further advancement offered by POETA made a step-change in how students perceived themselves and their potential for growth. Another key finding was how POETA programs could transform the relationships PwD had with their families, who now respected and praised them for their new found knowledge and skills. A fascinating discovery was the indirect effect the environment or atmosphere of a POETA Center had on personal growth and social interaction.

INCREASED JOB OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRAINING OFFERED AT THE POETA CENTERS

The interviews conducted demonstrated how varied the impact of the POETA program is with regard to employability. Some respondents were very pleased with what POETA training offered but noted that the level of competency in ICTs that they acquired was not quite advanced enough to really give them a competitive opportunity in certain labor markets. However, it should be noted that many participants in the POETA training started from having no knowledge or skills at all with basic computer use. Thus, the impact of the training, while not always guaranteeing a job, made their prospects for future inclusion in the labor market exponentially better than they were before the training.

Another key point is that, even if PwD acquire the necessary knowledge and skills, continued societal discrimination had a profound impact on their employability. The local labor market perspective about disabilities may just be negative in general - thereby affecting employability negatively with contextual factors outside the control of the PwD or the POETA program. Most importantly, we learned some of the underlying, sometimes subtle and indirect, ways POETA had a positive impact on PwD and that, if anything, PwD wanted the program enhanced and expanded.

PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT BY LOCAL PARTNERS

The return of research results and the first approach to POETA Monitoring & Evaluation Framework was carried out with local partners and participants from Argentina, Colombia[4], Guatemala and Peru between June 14 and June 20 2012. The inputs received are concentrated in three areas: 1) information validation, 2) usefulness of information, 3) design and implementation of Monitoring & Evaluation Framework.

VALIDITY OF FINDINGS

In general, local partners and program participants interviewed, who were present during the meeting where the results were presented, considered that the research results presented are consistent with their experience and perception of POETA. Also, they believe that the contextual elements and dynamics of change identified are also accurate. It is worth mentioning that many of them gave interesting contributions to the information presented. A small minority of participants felt that social interaction, specifically through social networks, did not apply to them and that in their experience the mechanisms that impacted to them were training and employability.

[4] Only in the case of Colombia, returns of results meetings were scheduled outside these dates. Meetings with one of the local partners and with respondents from all centers were conducted in the week of June 25. For this reason, these comments are not reflected in this document.

The contextual determinants of the Program's impact, as identified by local partners, include: the specific characteristics of each organization, the aims it pursues, the participant's profile, the organization's resources—both human and material/financial--, and social groups which focus on their actions. For example, an established organization with a long history and with financial and human resources will be better prepared to provide more updated training programs, to ensure continuity, to have adequate staff and even add activities that complement the training (such as those related to raising awareness in society about PwD and influence on their labor inclusion), and thus ensure that their actions have a high impact.

However, the specific priorities of the Program also determine the level of scope or impact that it can achieve. While POETA plays an important role and is the backbone of the program for some partner organizations, for other organizations POETA corresponds to a separate working area and occurs in parallel with other activities that receive equal or greater attention from the organization. The overall assessment is that this Program provides basic tools to open doors to substantial changes in the lives of PwD.

The country context is also considered by local partners as a key contextual factor to consider for the operation of the Program. High rates of violence, cultural practices that turn their backs on the inclusion of PwD, or social policies that not favor the PwD, are some situations that define the context. These conditions directly impact the Program development and therefore should be considered when setting a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework. One point emphasized by the local partners and participants was that the existence of government policies or laws to promote better opportunities for PwD affects the inclusion at micro and macro level of this group. In some countries, local partners and participants acknowledged the direct benefits of the existence of a good regulatory framework in favor of the rights of PwD. However, this information is not widespread and the application of the benefits about rights and duties are not monitored or encouraged, therefore the potential for social and labor inclusion is not articulate and post-Program benefits to the participants are diminish.

Also, local partners consider that deeper analysis about gender approach is very important as a key contextual variable that directly influences the project. In this sense, it is necessary to clarify that the theme of inequality between genders was considered across the study, from the formulation of objectives to the analysis of main results. As it is well known, women tend to experience more discrimination and social exclusion than men as evidenced by the higher number of women in low-paying jobs and overall lower educational levels among women.

The age of the participants also is a key variable. Older adults have more difficulties acquiring knowledge or learning new technologies and informatics tools than young people and this makes them a vulnerable group under the digital exclusion.

Finally, some local partners believe that the type and level of disability of the person not only influences the project but also play an important role the characteristics of his personality and life story. Features such as low self-esteem, dependency or depression negatively affect the development of the person under the Project. Also, it was found that familial relations play a key role in the development and integration into society of PwD. However, although PwD do not always receive positive family support, the interpersonal relationships and bonds that are generated from participation in POETA significantly offset the first deficiency.

Regarding the dynamics of change identified in the study, both local partners and participants interviewed also highlighted relevant points. On the one hand, with regards to the training component, many assert that the teachers' personal qualities – his/her high commitment and dedication or empathy with the participants, among others – are more important as catalysts of change than training or previous experience. However, the latter remains an important requirement.

On the other hand, in terms of personal growth, respondents agreed that the training allowed them to formulate new goals based on self-confidence and renewed self–esteem as a type of the service received. Some even mentioned that the Program had encouraged PwD who did not participate with POETA but knew about the benefits of the program to "leave home" and become active members of society. A group of respondents reported that the results of the Program had an impact within the PwD and managed partnerships to sensitize the community, which increased the visibility of PwD and thus led to the opening of several jobs for the group of graduates of POETA, among other opportunities.

Finally, regarding the employability component, some consider that job training is essential and is one of the most important driving forces of change of POETA Program. Some of the components taught through the Program include how to write a resume, how to act during a job interview, and how and where to look for a job.

USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION

The first question made by the majority of local partners was the usefulness of the informational reports. However, as the discussion and exchange of ideas expanded, some important points about its future implementation were mentioned. First, the local partners identified that the findings contribute to sustainability, both social and economic, and that it is a crucial condition of the Program with which they must deal from the beginning of its implementation. Due to the scarce efforts that are directed towards their inclusion, the organizations that implement POETA must contend with constraints such as the low number of trained staff, low enrollment number, and scarce funding, among others.

That is why the informational reports were found to be important, both to show the real value of the Program to communities that are uninformed and unwilling to open up to the PwD as well as to be able to withstand the multiple demands for assistance that allow the continuation of the Program, this time aimed at other social institutions, such as public, private and cooperative.

In some particular cases, local partners have expressed interest in directly involving local and regional governments and having them adopt the Program in order to consolidate it, expand it, and make it permanent through regulations that expand the local partner's reach. In some cases, this close relationship with public entities has brought benefits in terms of ensuring certain local resources such as materials for implementation. Despite this, the local partners have not achieved real support for the objectives of the Program or for greater intervention in order to increase respect for the rights of PWD. However, reports of this kind bring new light and hope to the decisions well informed authorities could promote for example: a) the ratification or reformulation of regulations at the organizational, local, national and even international level that have a direct impact on social inclusion and employment of PwD, b) presentations at regional/ international multi-stakeholder level, c) development of collaborative spaces and to share learning.

There has been a change in work teams in relation to their perception and interest in research and what is more, they have developed in the same capacity to carry out tasks of this style. Having obtained similar responses POETA centers nationwide and in the group of Latin American countries that participated in the study, it allows the identification of the importance of guiding the next steps towards the development of national and regional networks of work as well as research. This will enhance the outcomes of POETA and other programs with similar goals, by having both organizations with an efficient background and a greater number of actors in society.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

When presenting recommendations for the development of the Monitoring and Development Framework to local partners, many of them relied on the support of the research team to define next steps. Likewise, local partners wondered which tools were required to observe the relevant contexts, elements and mechanisms during the development of the Program. For instance, in certain centers, informal mechanisms of monitoring are being implemented, as it is the case of open consultations to the participants to know the causes for beneficiary drop out, as well as trainee satisfaction levels, resulting in information that is not registered. It was also expressed that it would be interesting to evaluate the feasibility of formalizing these practices with experts' support. Moreover, a group of local partners expressed their concerns about the future and scope of POETA: which direction will the Program take? What is it expected of the Program after this research? Will there be any sort of support during the next steps (in terms of consolidation and sustainability of the Program)?

Local partners also noted that, even if there were a general framework, particular characteristics of each organization should be taken into account to adapt such framework to local needs. On the other hand, there were partners who did not considered viable the development of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework at the POETA network level since they believe organizations' characteristics and the way that the Program is implemented in each one are too different. For example, there are organizations where the Program covers other training dimensions as well as more target groups, as it is the case of organizations that offer training to participants' relatives. These multiple Program dimensions were not part of this study but have been considered as relevant for future research.

For interviewees, the importance of research goes beyond the goals of POETA's impact monitoring and evaluation. For them, it was important to be able to share their experiences in POETA with others and was important to contribute to the Program's improvement. Through this, participants felt as if they were helping to enhance opportunities for PwD and it opened the possibility of participation in the formulation of public policies that will directly affect PwD. In this sense, it is important to mention that a great number of participants stressed the value the POETA Program has for them and asked for it to be expanded to other locations, particularly rural areas. Furthermore, there was a great demand to maintain POETA centers as permanent training spaces.