

## Master Thesis

### Youth Poverty in the Dominican Republic: The dis-empowered next generation

**Linda Natalie Borho**

**Supervisor**

Kjell Havnevik

*This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.*

University of Agder, 2012  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Department of Development Studies

## **Abstract**

This qualitative case study reveals crucial insights on youth poverty in two communities in the Dominican Republic. Young people are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, dis-empowerment and risky behavior. They are politically neglected, socially and economically marginalized.

The structure and the nature of accessible opportunities shape the platform on which young people can develop themselves. The personal agency of a young person is closely linked to the available opportunity structure; both elements can weaken or strengthen each other and as result they can 'produce' youth at-risk or change agents. Sound agencies can overcome failures in the opportunity structure, but informal and formal institutions need to recognize and to support the young generation.

Youth living in poverty is often overburdened when combining work and education already in young age. The scarcity of resources can push young people into unsustainable and dangerous survival strategies, catalyzing the establishment of criminal and violent neighborhoods, and furthering the negative development trends in the country. Yet, synergetic empowerment strategies can mitigate the loss of potential change agents.

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms:**

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BSA	British Sociological Association
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
Chap.	Chapter
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Est.	Estimated
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labor Organization
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONE	National Office for Statistics of the Dominican Republic
Para.	Paragraph
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRSC	Social Christian Reformist Party
PRD	the Dominican Revolutionary Party
SCR	Social Capital Research
TI	Transparency International
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	U.S. Dollar
U.S.	United States of America



The Child's Name is 'Today'  
We are guilty  
Of many errors and many faults,  
But our worst crime  
Is abandoning the children,  
Neglecting the fountain of life.  
Many of the things we need can wait.  
The child cannot.  
Right now is the time  
Bones are being formed,  
Blood is being made,  
Senses are being developed.  
To the child we cannot answer "Tomorrow."  
The child's name is "Today."

—Gabriela Mistral,  
Chilean Nobel Laureate Poet

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Major parts of the Dominican youth struggle to survive in an environment in which poverty, joblessness, and criminality are common problems in their daily life. Young Dominican girls and boys belonging to the lower social class find themselves in socially and financially vulnerable positions in which their development and well-being depend severely on the quality and the quantity of opportunities and the supportive structure provided by formal and informal institutions, especially in their community (Cunningham et al., 2008;). The nature of the supportive structures and the accessibility to opportunities shape the ‘frame of existence’ for the young generation. This reality can enable and empower, or exclude and dis-empower the local youth.

The local opportunity structure implies the general life conditions in the community, the infrastructure, the digital divide, employment opportunities, the access to education and the local security situation. Within this framework young people form a personal agency that embodies their skills, ambitions and attitudes. In the Dominican Republic, the next generation faces a gap between their personal agency and the available opportunity structure. They also experience weak opportunity structures impacting the establishment and the nature of their personal agency.

For over 50 percent of the youth in Latin America and the Caribbean, a subsequent consequence of this situation is the involvement into illegal, criminal and dangerous activities, becoming youth at-risk (Cunningham et al., 2008). Thereby, youth re-enforces negative development trends in their communities and country.

From a developmental perspective, young people in the South have the potential to act as change agents for the development in their country (World Bank, 2006a). In reality, Caribbean governments and the civil society seem to be over-burned by coping with high criminality and unemployment rates among their youth.

Moreover, the young generation is politically marginalized and neglected (World Bank, 2003) and the overall awareness within formal and informal institutions towards the next

generation's needs and capabilities is lacking, catalyzing the vicious cycle of youth impoverishment and youth at-risk.

This qualitative study provides insights on how young people perceive their local 'framework of existence', and it illustrates the essential links between youth poverty, the local opportunity structure and the personal agencies of young boys and girls in two communities in Bonao in the Dominican Republic. It also reveals crucial dis-empowering factors hindering young people from becoming change agents, impacting the social, economic and political development in the country. Finally, this case study sheds light on the complex task managing youth development through empowerment strategies in its local realities.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The aim of the research is to understand how young people perceive and assess the available formal and informal opportunity structure in their community. Further, it is vital to see how they cope with such local conditions. The research focuses also on the ability of youth to overcome weak opportunity structures and the possibility to improve unsound personal agencies through supportive formal and informal institutions. It is crucial to see which empowerment approaches are useful and sustainable for the development management of young people in the communities of research.

## **1.3 Research questions:**

- 1.) How do young people perceive and assess the local opportunity structure?
- 2.) How is youth poverty linked to the quality and the nature of the local opportunity structure?
- 3.) How does the local opportunity structure impact the personal agencies of youth and vice versa?
- 4.) How can youth be empowered in order to overcome lacking opportunities and to improve unsound agencies?

## **1.4 The research outcome**

The study shows close re-enforcing links between the impoverishment of young people, failing supportive institutions and young people being at-risk. Young people struggle often to combine work, school, and financial responsibilities for themselves and their families. They need to work in order to ensure livelihood security and education. And they need to study in order to find work in the future. In consequence, they are overburdened and high rates of school drop-outs are common. This situation is caused by failures in the opportunity structure which make it difficult for poor youth to benefit from the available educational and vocational possibilities.

Criminal, violent and dangerous neighborhoods are a reason for and a cause of youth at-risk and youth poverty. Both issues impact the opportunity structure and the nature of personal agencies. The dis-empowering structure of the community contributes to the lack of social capital in the neighborhood and the loss of human capital among the young generation. Inefficient formal institutions strengthen this negative trend.

Empowerment strategies that are based on bottom-up approaches in which NGOs build synergies with the community members, youth workers and the local youth to create places-to-be for boys and girls have very positive influence on the learning process of youth, their skills and ambitions, their social integration and the social capital in the community.

## **1.5 Methodology in brief**

This empirical part of the thesis is grounded on the qualitative fieldwork in the Dominican Republic of two months between January and March 2012. The research strategy has an iterative approach with a constructivism perspective. Hence, the research design is a case study, using several qualitative methods for the collection of data such as open-ended and semi-structured interviews, focus groups, a self-completion questionnaire and observation. The diversity of the methods enables the cross-check of findings. A document analysis complements the contextual knowledge of the researcher.

## 1.6 Thesis outline

**Chapter 1** introduces the reader to the research background, the research objectives and it gives a short overview on the research outcomes and the employed methodology.

**Chapter 2** offers an overview on the research area, the historical and political context, and the socio-economic conditions of the Dominican Republic. The chapter ends with a short description of Bonaio and the gatekeeper NGO, the Falcondo Foundation.

**Chapter 3** provides a literature review on the challenges to mitigate youth poverty in Latin-America and the Caribbean with a special focus on the opportunity structure in the Dominican Republic. The issue of political marginalization and the concept of youth friendly policies are illustrated and the chapter ends with a short presentation of empowerment approaches.

**Chapter 4** demonstrates the theoretical framework for the thesis, linking concepts of development, empowerment, opportunity structure, personal agency and youth poverty to each other.

**Chapter 5** describes the methodology in detail, including the research strategy, the research design and the methods used in the qualitative data collection. The ethics, on which the study is based, and the challenges and limitations in the fieldwork are mentioned as well.

**Chapter 6** presents the findings and the analysis of the collected data. It shows the difficult life circumstances for the poor local youth that seeks to combine work and education suffering from failures in the opportunity structure. Further, the dis-empowering structure of the community and its impact on the vicious cycle of youth poverty are discussed. Finally, existing empowerment strategies in the communities of research are explained in its function and significance.

**Chapter 7** provides the final conclusions on the literature and on the findings, linking the research results to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

## Chapter 2: The Research Area

### 2.1 The Dominican Republic – an overview

Map 1: The Caribbean and the Dominican Republic and



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Table 1: Overview on the Dominican Republic

Capital	Santo Domingo
Government type	Democratic Republic
Official language(s)	Spanish
Area	Land: 48 320 sq km Water: 350 sq km Coastline: 1 288 km
Population	10 088 598 (July 2012 est.)
Population growth	1.3% (2012 est.)
Ethical groups	Mixed 73%, white 16%, black 11%
Religions	Roman Catholic 95%, other 5%
GDP per capita (PPP)	9.300 USD (2011 est.)
Main exports	Textiles, ferronickel, sugar, coffee, tobacco, meats

Sources: CIA, 2012; World Bank, 2012b

## 2.2 Historical and political context

The arrival of Christopher Columbus in Santo Domingo in 1492 initiated the Spanish colonization of the Eastern part of the island Hispaniola. The indigenous population of Hispaniola - the Tainos - was reduced from 1 million to the amount of 500 people in a period of just 50 years by the European conquerors. From the year of 1503 on, African slaves were brought by ship to the island as labor force for the plantations. From 1697 onwards, the Western part of Hispaniola came under the French governance, and the Republic of Haiti was declared in 1804. From 1822 on, whole Hispaniola was under Haitian control, until Juan Pablo Duarte achieved the independence and the declaration of the Dominican Republic in 1844. In 1965 the Dominican Republic gained its colonial independence from Spain as well (U.S., 2012).

In 1916, the United States occupied the Dominican Republic, and justified its action by the supposed “threat of the European intervention” and by the country’s economic instability. Some American documents on the history of the Dominican Republic claim that their occupation was successful because it led to a “democratically elected Dominican Government” (U.S., 2012). Yet, the real outcome was the establishment of an oppressive dictatorship under Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molinas for the next 31 years to come. On one hand, the average economic situation and the infrastructure of the country were improved under Trujillo; on the other hand, the Trujillo family controlled the politics, the economy and the industries of the country and enriched itself limitless at the expenses of the population. In 1937, Trujillo proved his cruelty by giving the order to kill 20 000 Haitians living on the Dominican side of the shared border. Until today, Haiti and the Dominican Republic have a tense relationship, sharing the borderline of 275 km. In 1961, Trujillo was assassinated and his family had to escape into European exile (Haggerty, 1989).

In the following years, the transition to an elected government was marked by an unstable political situation and by a civil war in which the United States intervened in 1965 (Haggerty 1989). In 1966, Dr. Joaquín Balaguer (PRSC- Social Christian Reformist Party) started his 22 years long career as an authoritarian president (1966-1978; 1986-1996) - shortly interrupted by the presidency of Guzmán (PRD- the Dominican Revolutionary Party) and Blanco (PRD) (Haggerty, 1989). Until recently, Leonel Fernández from the Liberation Party (PLD) was the

state of head. But on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2012, Danilo Medina (PLD) took over as the new president of the Dominican Republic.

Under the fieldwork from January till March, the election campaigns of the main presidential candidates - Hipolito Mejia (PRD) and Danilo Medina (PLD) - were dominating the media and the look of public places and roads which were paved with political propaganda.

According to the local population, the period of elections is feared by many people due to violent demonstrations and dangerous confrontations between the various party members.

Related to the research topic, open-ended discussions with young people indicate a political confusion and frustration among Dominican youth - feeling forgotten and betrayed by politicians in general.

### **2.3 Socio-economic conditions**

The Dominican Republic has the largest economy in Central America and the Caribbean with a PPP of 9 3000 USD (est. 2011) (CIA, 2012). Obviously, the Dominican government favors urban investments in industry, tourism and the related service sector, ignoring the marginalization of rural areas, economically and socially (IFAD, 2011a, para.2; Steven, 2007, chap.1-2). In the aftermath of the banking crisis in 2003 the average poverty rate rose by 15 percent, and this *“economic downturn hit young people disproportionately hard”* (Vermehren in World Bank, 2006b, para.2). The consequence is increased youth impoverishment which catalyzes the rural exit and the loss of potential human resources due to urban and overseas migration. Demographic data indicate that 68 percent of the Dominicans live already in urban areas, and the rural-urban migration is still increasing. The urban population is actually growing with an annual rate of 2.6 percent (UNICEF, 2010).

In addition to this, the youth unemployment rate in the Dominican Republic is around 30.3 percent (2007), even though the overall unemployment rate in the Dominican Republic is only about 13.3 percent (CIA, 2012). Moreover, the low amount of financial investments per capita in education by the Dominican state in relation to its GDP is striking - it is much lower than in other economically poorer Caribbean countries; and in the international ranking the country invests less money in education than Bangladesh and Angola (CIA, 2012).



In general, the Dominican Republic suffers from great income inequalities among the population and between the various regions, with a Gini Index of 48.4 (2007) (CIA, 2012). Data claim that about 20 percent of the Dominican population has no or insufficient access to social assistance programs (IFAD, 2011a), and that 42 percent (2004) of the Dominican population lives under the poverty line (CIA, 2012). Finally, in the rural areas more than 50 percent is considered as being poor due to the lack of essential resources and income opportunities (IFAD, 2011a). Yet, the average life expectancy in the Dominican Republic is 77 years (CIA, 2012). And the reason for the high life expectancy is probably that the country is a middle-income country, but the high income inequality and problems of employment for youth make their situation particularly difficult.

## 2.4 Monseñor Nouel and Bonao

Map 2: Bonao



The fieldwork is conducted with the support of the NGO Falcondo Foundation which has offices in Santo Domingo and Bonao. The gatekeeper NGO has CSR (corporate social responsibility) projects and social networks in two communities of Bonao which fitted the research objectives.

Bonao is the capital of the province Monseñor Nouel which is one of the 31 provinces (and one district) in the country. The province is located in the center of the Dominican Republic - called the *Cibao Central*. The area is 99 239 sq km and it is divided into three municipalities:

Bonao, Maimón and Piedra Blanca. The overall population of this region is about 200 000 and 158 000 of them live in the municipality of Bonao (ONE, 2012).

Bonao is ca 100km away from Santo Domingo and the main highway *Autopista Duarte* goes through the city, connecting the Northern and the Southern part of the island.

The region is experiencing increased immigration from Santo Domingo, La Vega and other (rural) areas of the country due to its wealth on natural resources, the fertile soil and the favorable climate, but also due to its economic development and the educational opportunities (RD, 2012).

The communities of research belong geographically to Bonao: Villa Liberación is a community in the outskirts area of the town not far from the center. It is a poor community but its closeness to the center of Bonao makes it possible to find a job also outside the community. El Caribe is situated 5 km away from Bonao in a rural area, close to the Falcondo mines in Monseñor Nouel. In El Caribe people live from agricultural products and the mineral mine has also been an important work opportunity. Yet, its capacity of employees is fluctuating over the years. Even though, El Caribe is located more rural than Villa Liberación, it is not isolated and people travel a lot to Bonao for work or for education and they seem to be as ‘urban’ as people from the other community Villa Liberación. Therefore, there is not made a difference between the two communities in terms of rural and urban backgrounds in the analysis of the collected data.

Bonao is often brought into connection with the biggest mineral mine of the country, the mine of the Falcondo Company, extracting ferronickel since 1971. The Falcondo Company belongs to the international Xstrata mining Company. The activity in the mine and the scale of employment fluctuate with the global price for nickel and oil. In 2008, a combination of low nickel prices and high oil prices led to the consequence of a temporary shut-down of the mine. But its activity has been re-initiated with up to 50 percent of the installed capacity since March 2011 (Xstrata Nikkel, 2012a). The mine is a potential employer for citizens of the region, but embodies also environmental damage to the area.

## 2.5. The Gatekeeper: The Falcondo Foundation

Within the framework of corporate social responsibility, the Falcondo Foundation was established by the Falcondo Company in 1989 with two offices, one in Santo Domingo and another one in the city of Bonao. The Foundation is a non-governmental and private organization, working with a bottom-up approach in order to empower the civil society and the community structures in the districts of Monseñor Nouel and La Vega.

The organization describes its working strategy as *“the empowerment of actors within their realities through programs that contribute to the creation of an institutional framework in which the human and social capital, the economic opportunities and the civic participation are improved”* (trans. from Spanish), (Fundación Falcondo, 2009). The main focus is on the local health facilities, the educational opportunities, the cultural activities, and on sustainability in the management of natural resources and the environment (Fundación Falcondo, 2009; Xstrata Nikkel, 2012b). Thereby, the emphasis is put on a participative development management and the integration of the local population within the process of achieving increased well-being and better life conditions in the communities.

This NGO attributes itself the following values guiding them through their work in the local development: dignity, justice, tolerance, fairness, respect and responsibility (Fundación Falcondo, 2010).

The overall aim of the organization is to support the social and economic development of the region. Hence, it is a fine line to balance between having social responsibility, facilitating resources and avoiding dependencies between donor and receiver.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### 3.1 Definition of ‘Youth’

Generally, the defined group ‘youth’ describes boys and girls who find themselves in a transition phase from childhood to adulthood, in the age between 15 and 24 years (World Bank, 2011b). In reality, some people can due to their behavior and life circumstances belong to the youth even when they are younger than 15 years or slightly older than 24 years. The study covers respondents from 13 until 27 years, which is justified by their state of education, work and general life conditions.

### 3.2 Development management of the next generation

*“The time has never been better to invest in young people living in developing countries [...]. The number of people worldwide aged 12–24 years has reached 1.3 billion, the largest in history. It is also the healthiest and best educated - a strong base to build on in a world that demands more than basic skills. Today’s youth are tomorrow’s workers, entrepreneurs, parents, active citizens, and, indeed, leaders [...]. Rich and poor countries alike need to seize this opportunity before the aging of societies closes it. Doing so will enable them to grow faster and reduce poverty even further”* (Wolfowitz cited in World Bank, 2006a, p.xi).

The World Development Report 2007 emphasizes the potential of the next generation to act as positive change agents carrying on the human, economic and political development in their country and the South in general. And according to Sen (1999, p.19), a change agent is *“someone who acts and brings about change and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives”*.

Further, the report highlights the importance of investing in the future by creating opportunities for the young generation (World Bank, 2006a, pp. 25- 42). Hence, also the UN-Millennium Development Goal target no.16 underlines the significance of making the youth

to a crucial 'target group' when creating poverty mitigation strategies for the development management in the South (Benell, 2011, p. 1).

This emerging attention from international development organizations towards this potential of the youth in developing countries is absolutely necessary as young boys and girls are politically and socially marginalized and neglected by policy makers in formal and informal institutions, and in local and global contexts. Nowadays, the youth in the South faces an economic crisis and an uncertain future: The International Labor Organization (ILO) claims that *"in recent years, slowing global employment growth and increasing unemployment, underemployment and disillusionment have hit young people hardest. As a result, today's youth are faced with a growing deficit of decent work opportunities and high levels of economic and social uncertainty"* (ILO 2005 cited in Benell, 2011, p.4). This means that potential change agents in developing countries can be overlooked because they are trapped in poverty and social exclusion.

### **3.3 Youth poverty**

*"Targeting youth may be a starting point for reducing poverty and inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean"* (Cunningham et al., 2008, p. 26).

Youth poverty in developing countries implies not only the loss of potential human and economic capital, but it 'produces' youth at-risk: boys and girls who are involved in criminality, violence, substance abuse, drug dealing, risky sexual behavior and prostitution. Thereby, adolescents endanger not only their own well-being and health (the highest HIV/AIDs rate outside Africa is to find in the Dominican Republic), but they also impact the life conditions for the rest of the population (World Bank, 2003, pp. xv, 15-27). Hence, youth poverty is often caused by and it is also the reason for youth at-risk. This vicious cycle does not only have negative impacts on the immediate environment, but it also affects the overall development outcome of a country. Such strengthened negative development trends increase the likelihood for and the frequency of youth impoverishment again (Cunningham et al., 2008, pp. 73-117).

Moreover, researchers assume that the risky behavior of the young generation in Latin America and the Caribbean leads to an annual reduction of the economic growth with 2

percent and of the GDP with 1 percent in this region. Yet, the governments tend to underestimate the high costs for the state and the society which are caused by youth at-risk; and in subsequence, they also invest too low amounts of money and other resources in the next generation (Cunningham et al., 2008, pp. 5-6). In addition to the lack of political awareness, those societies are severely overburdened by coping with the development management of youth.

### **3.3.1 The concept of youth at-risk**

Literature categorizes youth at-risk in three different groups indicating how much young people are actually at-risk. This definition depends on possible push-factors like school attendance, family background, sexual behavior, social class, grade of poverty, and the co-occurrence and re-enforcing nature of those factors (Cunningham et al., 2008, p. 66).

The following table concretizes the conceptual approach on ‘youth at-risk’ by illustrating possible push-factors for risky behavior, the meaning of risky behavior and its negative outcomes for the individual, the community and the society. This framework presents negative development trends among the youth in Latin America and the Caribbean which need to be addressed and managed in a sustainable manner.

Table 2: Youth at-risk

	Risk Factor	Risky Behaviors	Negative Outcomes
Individual	Low self-esteem Minority status	High absenteeism from school, poor school performance	School drop-outs Early pregnancy outcomes, unsafe abortion
Micro Level:  Interpersonal (family, peers)	Parental abuse, neglect or violence  Household poverty	Early sexual activity and unprotected intercourse  Use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco	Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS  Incarceration
Community (schools, neighborhoods, police, health care centers)	Low access to schools and training  Unsafe neighborhoods  Police abuse  Easy access to drugs and alcohol	Criminal and violent activities  Running away from home  Premature entry into labor market	Unemployment or premature entry into labor market  Addiction to drugs and alcohol  Social exclusion
Macro Level: (poverty, media, laws, cultural norms)	Poor economic and social conditions  Weak drug and firearms policies  Stigma of poverty		Suicide

Source: Cunningham et al., 2008, p. 58

In order to complete the context of youth poverty, it is important to consider that in some cases, young people can get consciously or can get accidentally involved in risky actions due to the feelings of anger, frustration and desperation: they can feel neglected or miss-understood by their families, the community, the employers, the educators and other powerful decision-makers (World Bank, 200, p. xvi).

Literature defends young peoples' destructive and partly unwise behavior also by acknowledging the fact that in general, their psychological, biological and social development stages influence the way in which they make their decisions and the way they lead their lives (Cunningham et al., 2008, p. 26). Thereby, their patterns of thinking and evaluating situations differ from those of adults due to a distinct psychological state and a lack of life- and professional experience.

To a certain extent, their responsibility for their actions is taken off of them: Their reactions can be understood as reflections of processes which occur in the families and the society in which they are growing up - like a mirror - because the youth is a product of its society.

Or as Sen (cited in Morán, 2004, p.76) puts it: *“The success of an economy and of a society cannot be separated from the lives that members of the society are able to lead”*.

And, the success of a society does not necessarily depend on its economic situation, rather on prioritizing investments in human development (Sen, 1999, p.45).

### **3.4 The Dominican opportunity structure for young people**

#### **3.4.1 Unemployment and joblessness**

*“If you are young and poor in the Dominican Republic, chances are slim you'll finish secondary school and get a steady job. And chances are good you'll be caught in a poverty trap”* (Vermehren cited in World Bank, 2006b, para.1).

The Dominican Republic is a typical example of a society in which youth poverty and youth at-risk are linked issues that do re-enforce each other negatively:

It is assumed that over 50 percent of the 12 to 24 year old citizens in Latin America and the Caribbean are involved in risky behavior in varying forms (Cunningham et al., 2008, p. 4).



And at the same time “*a sizable percentage of Dominican youth is highly vulnerable and lack access to needed resources*” (USAID, 2010, p.1).

The unemployment, under-employment and joblessness rates are high within this specific group and they impact the already socially disadvantaged position in which many of them are caught. Unemployment describes the situation in which young people have no formal or frequent job, whereas under-employment means to have a part-time job in the formal or informal sector that does not provide enough work and income. Thus, joblessness is the situation in which young people have nothing to do neither working nor attending any sort of education. They are bored and hanging around; and out of this ennui and the lack of financial means, they can involve themselves into criminal activities or behaviors which endanger their health, well-being and future, considering the exposure to poverty and criminal neighborhoods (Cunningham et al., 2008, pp. 83-88).

Being unemployed or jobless does not only limit the economic mobility and the social power among adolescents, it can also influence their personality and their ambitions negatively: youth is a stage in which people develop their personality and a personal agency, and the feeling of ‘being useless’ can cause lower self-esteem and self-confidence.

According to Sen (1999, p. 21), “*unemployment contributes to the social exclusion of some groups, and it leads to losses of self-reliance, self-confidence and psychological and physical health*”. Obviously, a strong personality and a job providing a frequent and a sufficient income can protect young people from jeopardizing health and livelihood security by becoming youth at-risk.

The Dominican Republic has an official youth unemployment rate of 30.3 percent (2007) (CIA, 2012), but this unemployment rate does not include young people who are jobless or inactive. The lack of work and income opportunities indicates the deficiency of an opportunity structure. The poorly maintained education system and the scarcity on vocational training as a preparation for the labor market are also elements of a failing opportunity structure.

The fact that those failures in the opportunity structure for youth is ignored by important stakeholders leads to an increased likelihood for and frequency of an *intergenerational transmission of poverty* within disadvantaged parts of the population (Gayle and Levy, 2009, p. 51; Israel and Seeborg, 1998, p. 772; Morán, 2004, pp. 9, 62;). In this context, Sen (1999,

p.45) argues that the lack of social opportunities for parts of the population cannot be justified by a low GDP of a state only; it is rather a question of prioritizing resources and politics by this state and its decision-makers.

### **3.4.2 Inefficient public education**

The Dominican government spends only 2.3 percent of its GDP on education (2009). This means that its investments in education are the lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean (CIA, 2012), which is critical as the Dominican Republic is a categorized upper middle income country, spending less than other poorer countries on education (World Bank, 2012). This illustrates the political disregard towards the education sector and the missing political accountability and responsibility towards its young generation.

Nevertheless, the Strategic Education Development Plan of the Dominican Republic for 2003-2012 is ambitiously claiming that:

*“The access to relevant quality education will be provided to all in the Dominican Republic with a view to uphold the principle of diversity, to strengthen cultural identity, to promote education for democracy and active life; and to foster new attitudes, the transformation of society and collective welfare, as a way to ensure sustainable development and a culture of peace” (OECD, 2008, pp.53, 54)*

Still, besides the unequally spread education opportunities within the country and between urban and rural areas, the main issue in the public Dominican education system is the inefficiency in its educational services. High rates of repetition, over-aged children in the classrooms, poor academic performances and enormous drop-out rates indicate a low quality of the public Dominican education system (UNESCO, 2012) - affecting the capabilities, the skills and the professional careers of young people.

Education is a vital contribution to the development of human capital. Thereby, human capital has positive influence on the economic development of a country as well.

### 3.4.3 Supportive social structures

A qualitative case study from the neighbor country Jamaica describes the situation of young working-class people in a visual manner which can be transferred to the life conditions of the Dominican youth as well, compared to the reviewed literature in the former paragraphs.

In the Jamaican society a common expression for describing young people is ‘forced ripe’: A forced ripe is a fruit which seems to be matured because it was exposed to too strong sunlight and in consequence it took on the typical color of a ripe fruit. But the maturing process itself was too fast and too harsh. So, the fruit looks good but it lacks taste and nutritive substance and it is not eatable or ‘useful’ (Gayle and Levy, 2009, p.1).

According to this illustration, young boys and girls within the transition phase from childhood to adulthood are physically developed but they still lack the psychological capability, the life experience and the knowledge to face a difficult reality.

This case among other literature claims that young people depend not only on opportunities provided by formal institutions, but also on supportive social structures provided by their family and other adults giving them emotional and financial support, and guidance. Hence, the significance of the latter issue has been recognized in most concepts of family integrated development strategies, yet its realization seems to be difficult in certain societies due to the lack of knowledge or resources (World Bank, 2003, pp. xvi-xviii, 10). Empirical data indicate that in many cases “*adults expect youth to serve rather than to be served*” (Gayle and Levy, 2009, p.12). But parents, the society and the state have the responsibility to facilitate resources which do further the development of capabilities, skills and knowledge among the youth.

Additional external factors which shape the life conditions of the Dominican youth today are a deficient welfare system, a weak social safety net, an insufficient infrastructure provoking geographical marginalization of rural areas, and finally the lack of identity papers as an obstacle for education and citizenship (Brook and Holland, 2009, pp. 39-441; Cunningham et al., 2008, pp. 4-14; ECLA, 2003; Gayle and Levy, 2009, pp. 11-20; Morán, 2004, p. 39; USAID, 2010, pp. 1, 9-14, 20-21, 27).

### **3.4.4 The Migration of the Dominican youth**

*The lack of support means that youth are in hurry to leave”* (Gayle and Levy, 2009, p. 23).

The migration of young people in the Dominican Republic in order to find employment and to escape poverty traps is a common household survival strategy and has to be mentioned in this context of youth poverty (ECLA, 2003, p. 11; ILO, 2010, pp. 89-104; Vargas-Lundius et al., 2008, pp. 27-29). Not only the impoverishment, but also the reproductions of the ‘urban paradise’ or the ‘Western paradise’ by media are push-factors making the rural youth leaving home, temporary or forever (Lunde, 2010, pp. 25-28; World Bank, 2006a, p. 187-209). Due to rural-urban migration the urban population is growing with an average 2.6 percent yearly in the Dominican Republic (UNICEF, 2010, para.6), causing an increasing demand for food, energy, land, clean water and air, leading to a scarcity of natural resources in and around the cities. The increasing waste production and the pollution of natural resources put further pressure on essential natural resources (Kisner, 2008, p. 1). Mougeot (2006, p. 4) states that *“one predictable outcome of this massive population shift is urban poverty”* especially in the developing world. Thus, for young migrants the problem of poverty seems to be re-located but not solved.

Moreover, the global economic situation and increasing unemployment rates in the bigger cities has led to a higher percentage of young emigrants returning to their hometowns - often in the countryside (Benell, 2011, p.7). Therefore, the urban survival strategy of emigration for the Caribbean youth has become less relevant and the need for local poverty alleviation strategies focusing on the young generation is more crucial than ever.

### **3.5 Political marginalization of the Youth**

There is no lack of international development literature acknowledging young people’s developmental potential and special needs, as *“half of the MDGs include indicators directly related to youth, and all of the MDGs are indirectly related to youth”* (World Bank, 2005a, p. 35). Today, this target group has an enormous size of nearly 1 billion persons (15-24), and 90 percent of those are citizens of a developing country (U.S Census Bureau 2004 cited in World Bank, 2005a, p. 35); yet it seems as if the political will is missing as demonstrated by the

lacking opportunity structure for the young generation in the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean countries.

The logical conclusion is that the awareness of youth specific needs and problems should be attended to in a way that improves the opportunity structure, by involving the youth itself into the policy making process and by addressing crucial decision makers in the governmental and formal institutions. In theory, the top-down as well as the bottom-up approach seem to be useful tools when targeting the overall opportunity structure for young people, as both approaches can catalyze development.

Yet, in the Dominican Republic as in most parts of the developing world, elite-driven politics still dominate and shape the political and social landscape (Kalu, 2004, chap.2). Civil society organizations and especially youth organizations are often under-developed and face difficulties in participating in decision-making processes (Brinkerhoff and Crosby, 2002, pp.73, 74). Due to unbalanced power relations in this society - between rich and poor, old and young, urban and rural - the setting of the political agenda is in the hands of urban elites. And they tend to oversee the importance of prioritizing social issues, such as useful and sustainable poverty alleviation strategies (Kalu, 2004, chap. 2, 3), unless powerful individuals, political communities or civil society organizations push such policies forward (Sutton, 1999, p. 31).

### **3.5.1 Social capital and synergies**

Collaborations between young people, informal and governmental institutions can have a synergetic character in order to overcome the problematic gap between civil society and formal institutions under the process of policy making and policy implementation. Evans (1996b, p. 1119) amongst others believes that a synergy between the state and the civil society can catalyze social, political and economic growth in developing countries. Synergies between the national, regional or local government and people, communities or civic organizations can be based on *complementarity* or/and *embeddedness* (Evans, 1996b, pp. 1120, 1121). *Complementarity synergies* are characterized by mutually supportive relations and the interactions between the government and the civil society (Evans, 1996b, p. 1120). The government provides common goods, financial means and a legal framework such as the rule of law, while the private sector provides goods like labor, time, human skills, local

knowledge and experience. Both kind of inputs ‘complement’ each other and increase the quality and quantity of the outputs. The cooperation between the private/informal institutions and the public/formal institutions incorporates a divide of labor and the dependency on each other’s commitment (Evans, 1996b, pp. 1120, 1121).

*Synergies through embeddedness* occur due to personal ties between people who make part of the civil society and people who work in governmental institutions with the access to important resources. The scale of embeddedness depends on the permeability of sectors and bureaucratic structures; it also depends on people’s social network and social capital (Evans, 1996b, p. 1121). Embeddedness can be a powerful tool when public officials due to personal relations or personal interest support for instance development project in their hometown. The assumption is that local knowledge and experience are more highly valued and local needs better recognized when public officials are personally involved in the community and the project.

A synergy based on complementarity can ensure the provision of certain common goods due to the division of labor and the rule of law. Hence, social capital is the key to efficient embeddedness synergies. Both synergies span the great divide between the private and the public on different levels (Evans, 1996a, p. 1034). But it is important to mention that the existence of personal ties between the public and the private sectors can only be positive if the motives are sound ones. Corruption and nepotism are quite common, where informal relations are used for political and economic advantages (Evans, 1996b, p. 1126) - as it is the case in the Dominican Republic with a corruption perception index of 2.6 on a level with Honduras and the Philippines (TI, 2011, p. 4). On the other hand, when public officials involve themselves in a community and a project, *“they can either escape uncomfortable censure if they are seen to be performing poorly, nor ignore representations made to them by members”* of the community (Moore, 1989, p. 1742 cited in Evans, 1996b, p. 1121). Therefore, embeddedness may even increase the positive attitude of the public sector to perform well and to pay respect to their ‘clients’. Young citizens may also feel empowered by governmental support and may increase their efforts and participation in development projects - not only targeting the youth in particular, but the community as a whole. According to Evans (1996b, p. 1123), the embeddedness synergy and the complementarity synergy support and enforce each other. Thereby, they are filling the gap between the public and private institutions. The assumption is that the creation of synergies is easier to conduct in *“egalitarian societies with robust public bureaucracies”* (Evans, 1996b, p. 1129) and it leads more likely to positive

development outcome than in societies like the Dominican Republic - with high social, economic inequality and corrupt politicians.

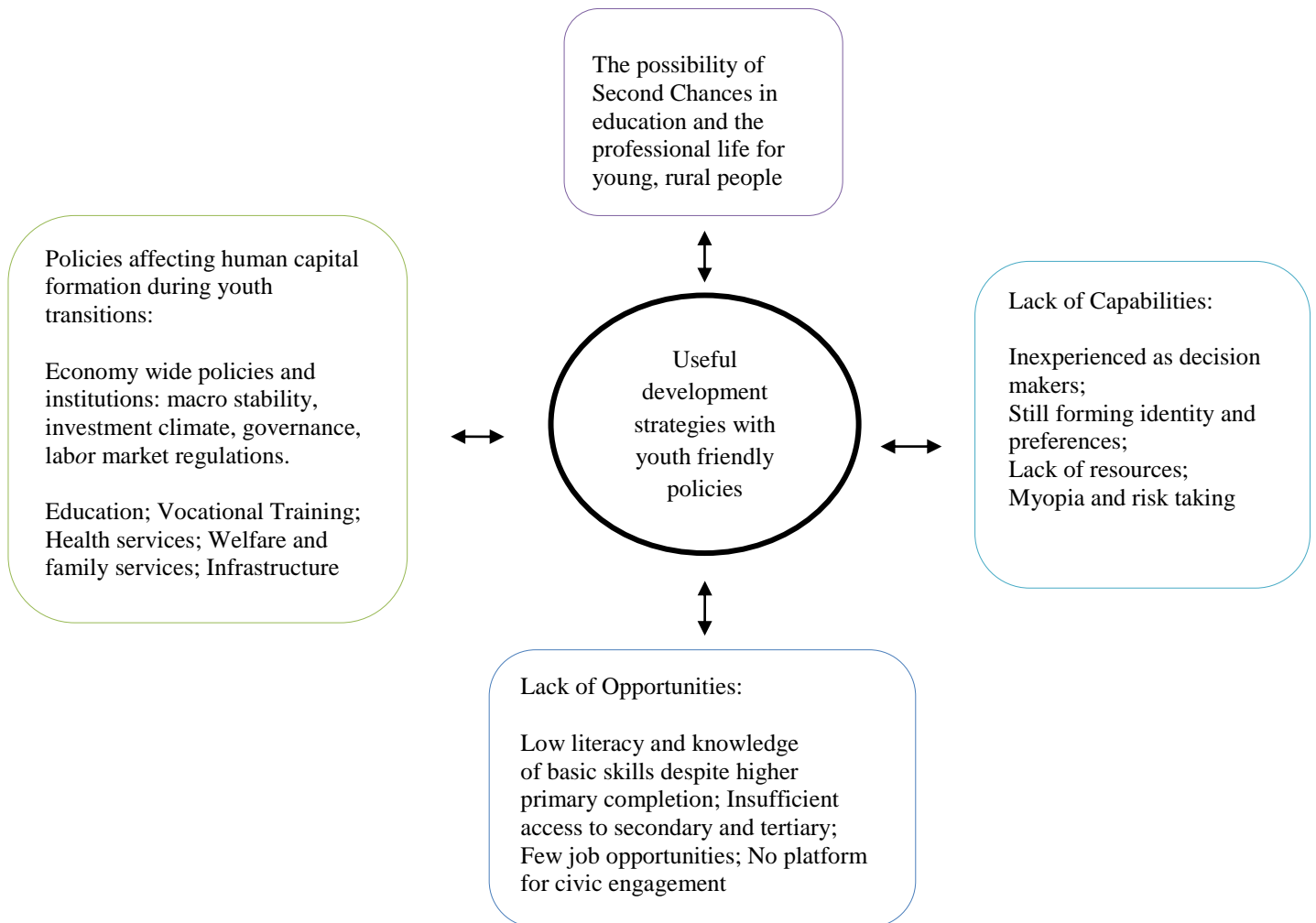
### **3.5.2 The concept of youth friendly policies**

A vital empowering strategy for young people which combines top-down, bottom up and synergetic approaches is the concept and especially the implementation of youth friendly policies: The rationale behind youth friendly policies is the assumption that young people pass different transition phases from being a child to become an adult. These transition stages contain possible primary, secondary and tertiary education, followed by the first steps into a professional life where young people sustain their livelihood and establish their own families finally. Good health and a growing social and political awareness among the youth are along all stages vital. This model of the development of young people in our society is only realizable if a) external circumstances such as implemented youth friendly policies enable young people to learn and to become part of the social and professional life and b) if young people themselves have the ability to participate and to use available opportunities.

The capability among the youth to benefit from existing opportunities depends strongly on the nature and the quality the provided services by informal and formal institutions and their development strategies. The vital aspect of youth friendly polices is the opportunity for youth of getting 'second changes' in education, capacity building and work. Second chances can re-integrate young people into the society and enable them to live a decent life. Thereby, the number of youth being at risk can be reduced, the loss of human capital reversed and an overall negative impact on the society avoided (World Bank, 2006a, p. 11).

The following figure illustrates the meaning of youth friendly policies and it shows also which aspects and special needs have to be considered when creating, implementing and evaluating poverty alleviation strategies with the focus on young people.

Figure 1: Youth friendly policies



Source: World Development Report 2007 (World Bank, 2006a, p. 11)



### 3.6 Empowerment approaches

The concept of empowerment implies the idea that people can influence and improve their own life conditions due to skills and knowledge, and due to the access to social, human and economic resources, with the pre-condition of the awareness towards the existence of different opportunities. Thereby, they can be enabled to take control over their own lives and their own development outcome.

A participative bottom-up development strategy is a powerful tool to empower people, but in the greater context it is obvious that the overall political and social structures within a society impact people's life severely. The nature of the education system, the infrastructure and the political stability do encourage or can hinder social, human, political and economic development, influencing the life conditions for people from above.

Therefore, empowering strategies and structures can also be sustainably planned and implemented within a top-down approach.

According to NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation), the general meaning of empowerment of disadvantaged parts of the population is to strengthen "*the power to make decisions, the power to have your voice heard, the ability to put things on the agenda and to negotiate on something that is not negotiable, and [finally] the power within yourself to challenge past customs*", (NORAD, 1999, p. 4).

In addition to this, Nayaran's (2002, pp.18-23) four principles of empowerment challenge unequal power relations within Southern societies which do further under-development. He claims that the access to information, the civil inclusion and participation, the social accountability of authorities and the local organizational capacity are vital empowering means for the management of development.

The objective of empowerment strategies and empowerment processes is to enable people to make choices which affect their lives positively within a process of change. But only *dis-empowered* people can be empowered. Thus, being dis-empowered means to be poor on alternatives and opportunities to choose from due to a scarcity of essential resources, due to lacking awareness, knowledge or power. All of these aspects can re-enforce each other and do co-occur (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).

When empowerment is "*the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied*", then it is vital to consider the different

natures and the hierarchy of various choices in its importance for people's life conditions and in its sustainability for a positive development outcome. But the emphasized argument is the ability to make choices, it is not the sort of choice, even though the consequences of people's choices are essential (Kabeer, 1999, pp. 437, 439).

The ability to make 'good choices' depends on the quality of three linked areas:

a) *the resources* of a person such as accumulated and accessible financial, human and social capital; b) *the agency* of a person which contains the skills, attitudes and the future ambitions; and finally c) *the achievements* for the individual and the community (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437).

Kabeer's notions of *resources* and *agency* are described as *capabilities* by Sen which are defined as "*the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of being and doing*" (Sen, 1985 cited in Kabeer 1999: 438).

There is a close link between the capabilities of an individual and the social, political and economic structure in a society because they can strengthen or weaken each other. In this way, the external structure can shape the capabilities of a person and vice versa, meaning that they can initiate change processes on each other as well.

A successful development process is possible when people have the capabilities (agency and resources) to develop themselves and to shape their environment positively, influencing the present social and political structure. If this individual and collective evolution has been initiated and continues, then the situation of *unfreedom* for a society is declining and development is proceeding (Sen, 1999, pp. 17-19).

## **Chapter 4: The Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The theoretical framework includes various concepts and ideas from the literature review which are inter-connected from different perspectives. The content of this framework gives indications for the choice of a useful research strategy and research design to achieve relevant insights into the topic of youth poverty in the local reality.

Thereby, logical links between the research questions and the theoretical framework - and thereby between research questions and the literature review - are the pre-condition for a reasonable argumentation throughout this study.

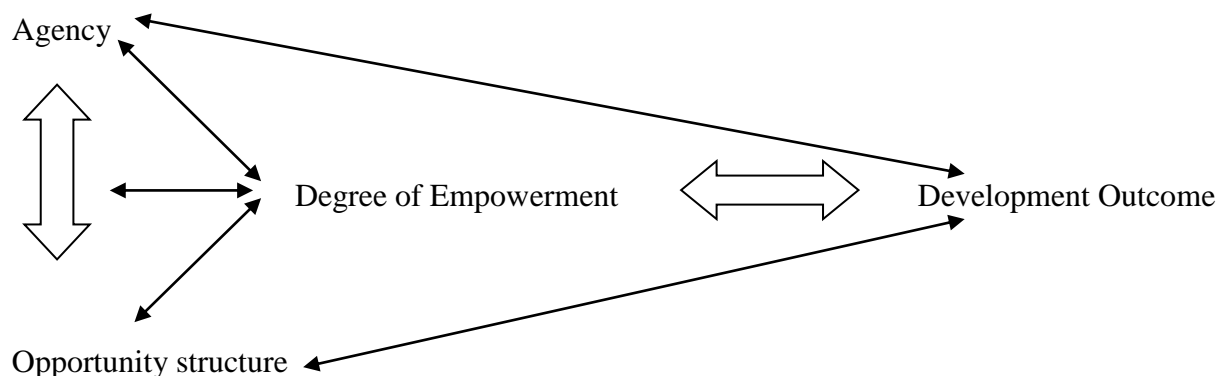
The essential concepts of this framework and the choice of methodology shape the sort of glasses the researcher wears when observing and evaluating the field of research. Further, it suggests a way in which the researcher perceives and categorizes people and their interactions in their living worlds. Therefore, the theoretical framework is a vital point of reference when analyzing the findings from the fieldwork and when comparing those empirical findings with already established approaches and concepts.

## 4.2 Essential theoretical concepts

### 4.2.1 Empowerment for development

From a holistic perspective, the following figure shows an overview on the re-enforcing and inter-linked relations between agency and the opportunity structure, and its connection to the overall concept of empowerment, in which the degree of empowerment and the nature of development outcome co-occur and impact each other as well. Every element of this figure is vital in itself, yet it also belongs to a potentially positive cycle of development. But, the lacking existence or the insufficient quality of one aspect can boost a vicious cycle of negative development.

Figure 2: Empowerment for Development



Source: Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, p. 6

### 4.2.2 Empowerment and opportunity structure

The opportunity structure of a community or a society is crucial in its existence and in its quality within an empowerment approach. An opportunity structure has two sides: a) the opportunity structure is a sort of facilitator providing possibilities for people in terms of

education, employment, health care and infrastructure which are financed by the government and other formal institutions; and b) a well-established opportunity structure needs strong informal organizations and social structures with supportive functions for individuals and the community.

The 'formal' opportunity structure can be impacted and changed by top-down strategies. Even though civil society organizations can take over the governments 'role as facilitator in certain cases, the main power to improve life conditions in a country is in the hands of governmental authorities.

The informal institutions and their ability to act in favor of the well-being of citizens are affected by developmental strategies which trickle down from governmental institutions. But the civil society and civic organizations can re-shape the existing opportunity structure to a certain extent by bottom-up approaches and participative projects.

Hence, the suggestion is that both elements of an opportunity structure - the formal and the informal - are required to empower the civil society.

The assessment of a local opportunity structure is challenging due to its variety in components and characteristics. So, the evaluation of empirical data on the empowering nature of the opportunity structure in the area of research refers partly to a theoretical concept created by Alsop and Heinsohn (2005, p. 10) analyzing the *existence, the use and the achievement of choice* as following:

1. *Whether an opportunity to make a choice exists (existence of choice).*
2. *Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose (use of choice).*
3. *Whether the choice resulted in the desired result (achievement of choice).*

#### **4.2.3 Synergies and opportunity structure**

In the case that the reason for a deficient opportunity structure is a gap between civil society and formal institutions under the process of policy making and policy implementation, the co-

operation between formal and informal institutions in terms of building synergies - either based on embeddedness or complementarity - can overcome such situations (Evans 1996b, pp. 1119-1121).

The use of synergies enables the civil society to become more involved into the actual implementation of top-down policies, and it gives people the possibility to establish social relationships and social capital to crucial decision-makers and authorities, gaining political power through social capital.

The literature demonstrates the political neglecting of youth. Hence, synergies can be useful tools for this target group to win more political power and political significance - emphasizing the importance of youth friendly policies and of the need to invest in human and social development. This concept implies the pre-condition that politicians and governmental employees are willing to enter into such co-operations with the civil society in the first place.

So, the quality of the existing opportunity structures and of the present synergies can be linked to each other in the way that the better the actual synergies are, the better is the opportunity structure which again has positive effects on the process of social, economic and political development.

In conclusion, synergies can build the basis for development strategies which are created within an empowerment approach, because they have crucial influence on the opportunity structure which again is essential within empowerment strategies.

#### **4.2.4 Agency and opportunity structure**

Empowerment as a strategy to manage development for the improvement of life conditions in the South contains the objective to provide a variety of opportunities and alternatives to choose from for the civil society. The other meaning of this concept is to enable people to make 'good' choices - 'good' in a sense of being sustainable and positive in its present and long-term effects on the well-being of the individual, family and/or community.

The assumption is that the ability to make ‘good’ decisions can be enhanced by having education, knowledge and helpful guidance. Especially the latter can influence decision-making of adolescents as they still lack life experience and knowledge.

Another idea is that being in good health and experiencing social and economic well-being can enhance the likelihood of making sustainable choices.

In other words, ‘good decisions’ emerge from the nature of a personal agency: A personal agency reflects the capability or the potential to make ‘good’ decisions, considering the ambitions, attitudes and skills of a person. Such personal characteristics and capabilities can be impacted by the opportunity structure a person is facing. A well-established opportunity structure can encourage and influence people in their creation of a personal agency. Thus, it also can dis-empower and affect the personal agency negatively in the case of impoverishment and the lack of resources.

Further, the formal and the informal elements of an opportunity structure impact the nature of the personal agency. The personal agency determines again how the available opportunity structure is used.

#### **4.2.5 Opportunity structure, agency and youth poverty**

It is crucial to underline the fact that this theoretical framework is linked to the literature on youth and not to adults in general, since literature claims that adolescence is an exceptional stage in life in which irrational thinking and unwise decision making are common - increasing the likelihood of becoming youth-at risk.

Within this context, the availability of facilities, the access to resources, and the existences of supportive informal structures within the family and the community are vital tools for the development management of youth.

The access to education and especially to the labor market in the late phase of adolescence is a critical factor which can push young people at risk. The close link between unemployment and joblessness and being a young person at-risk is demonstrated by Cunningham (et al. 2008, pp. 83-89). The hypothesis is that the opportunity structure is in its function such a powerful tool for empowerment that it can determine whether young people become a youth at-risk, or whether they can act as change agents.

In a bigger scale, the overall development of Latin America and the Caribbean depends (amongst other factor) on a sustainable development management of the young generation because young people have the power to influence the social, economic and political situation of this region negatively as well as positively.

Change agents are according to Sen (1999, p. 19) persons who create improvements and changes, for themselves and for the society as well. Yet, their own perception and evaluation of changing processes has its origin in their “*values and objectives*”, meaning that the personal agency shapes the characteristics of the actions carried out by the change agents. Since the agency is strongly linked to the opportunity structure, the opportunity structure is connected to the change agents through their agency. And in addition to this, the present opportunity structure limits the framework in which the change agent can actually act. Therefore, a change agent experiencing a strong opportunity structure and having a well-established agency can accomplish greater developmental efforts and positive changes.

In conclusion, two situations are possible: In scenario a) empowerment strategies influences the opportunity structure and the personal agency of a young person. The opportunity structure and the agency are impacting each other positively, which encourage young people to act in a way as change agents. Having a strong personal agency enables youth to make sustainable decisions for their future life. Thereby, they ‘produce’ positive development trends from which they and the following generations can benefit.

Scenario b) describes the contrary situation in which dis-empowering structures and the lack of empowerment strategies weaken the opportunity structure and the personal agency, resulting in the increased likelihood for risky behavior patterns among youth, and affecting their ability to make ‘good’ decisions. This leads to negative development trends in the end.

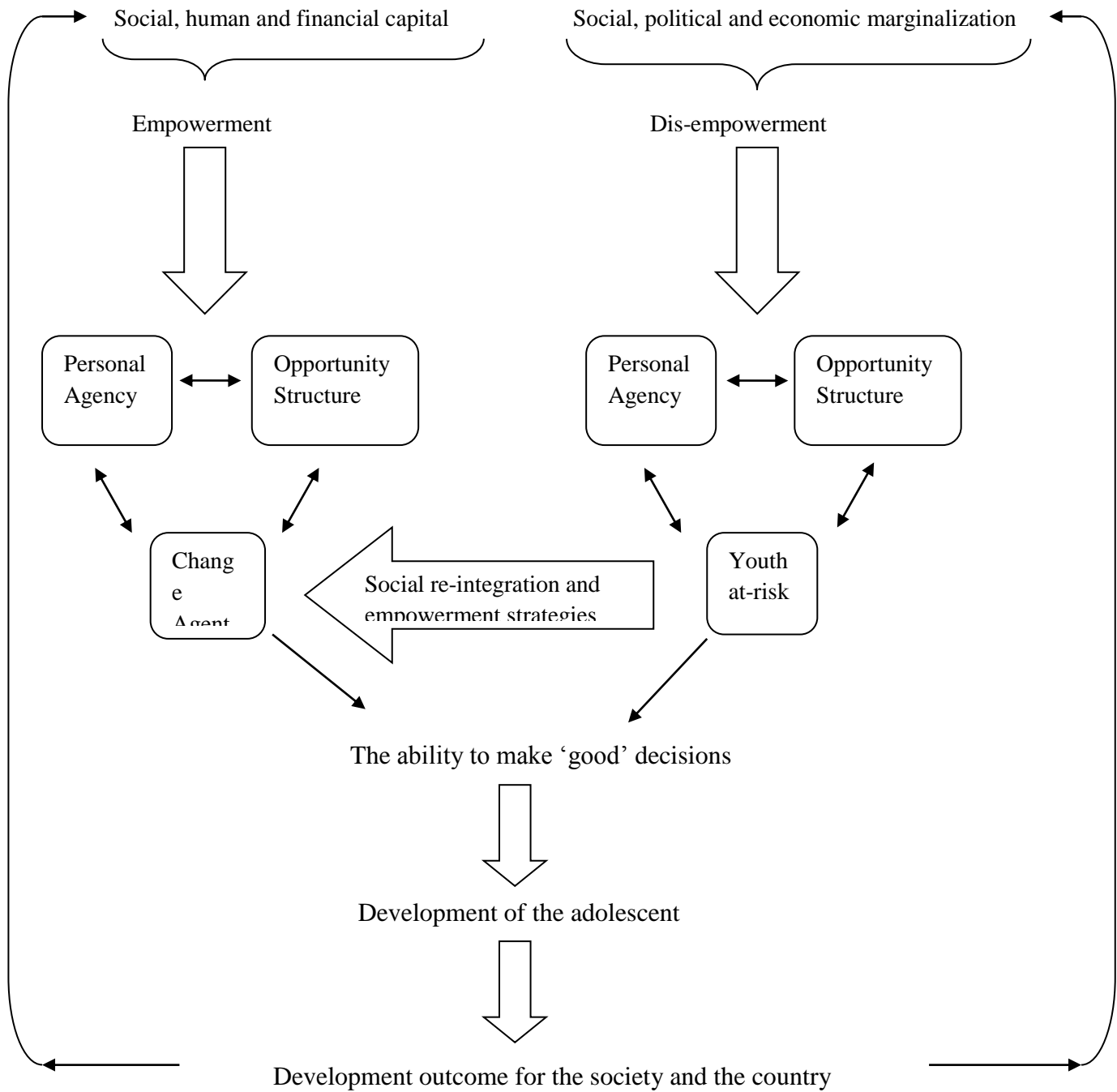
The assumption is further that empowerment strategies can enable young people who are at-risk to improve their agency and to become change agents, as illustrated in the figure.

The terms change agents and youth at-risk describe two extreme scenarios of the impact a young person can have on its own and on the local development. In reality, people can experience both scenarios within varying contexts or at different times in their lives.

Clearly, this illustration is simplified and excludes ‘grey zones’ but it demonstrates the overall meaning and significance of the correlations between those aspects within an empowerment approach.



Figure 3: Change agent or youth at-risk



Source: Author

## Chapter 5: Methodology

### 5.1 The Research strategy

*“The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not ‘mean’ anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist - social reality - has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting and thinking within it”* ( Schutz, 1962, p. 59 cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 16).

The concept of *interpretivism* as an epistemological framework is present throughout this study - in opposition to the *positivism*, which claims the study of social actors and societies to be equal to the research on natural sciences. Within a positivism approach, the causal explanations of human behavior are more emphasized than the understanding why individuals and societies act the way they act, seen through the eyes of the actors themselves (Bryman, 2008, pp. 13-17).

In addition to this, the study communicates *“a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive”*- as social interactions among individuals and groups shape and re-visit their reality and the overall reality constantly. The ontological perception within this study belongs to theoretical approach of *constructivism* and suggests that social categories and meanings are constructed continuously by the society itself. The counter concept to constructivism is *objectivism* which embodies the independent existence of social phenomena and categories from the specific society and its actions (Bryman, 2008, p. 19).

The selected research strategy provides information on the nature of the relationship between the theory and the empirical research within a study.

The *deductive* research approach is created around a hypothesis that grounds on an established theory. The nature of the hypothesis itself defines the possible methods for the collection of data. The findings confirm or question the hypothesis and can lead to the revision of the theory in the end. This linear research process determines the way in which the researcher perceives its environment and the research field from the beginning on, as the theoretical framework provides prior concepts and opinions on the subject.

In comparison to the deductive approach, the *inductive* research strategy emphasizes the findings as source for the theory. Hence, in this study the “*weaving back and forth between data and theory*” implies an *iterative* approach - combining inductive and deductive research concepts to a certain extent (Bryman, 2008, pp. 9-12). The analysis of qualitative data has to be understood as a non-linear process, where the data collection and the analysis of data are not clearly separated in place and time (Bryman, 2008, p. 545).

Such iterative methods are reflected in the analysis of qualitative data through *grounded theory* in which the research questions guide through the theoretical sampling and the following data collection. The first coding of the data collection can provide initial concepts and ideas. These concepts initiate further theoretical sampling and data collections in order to improve and to confirm the concepts. This non-linear process between the first steps leads to the creation of certain categories through the coding. The next step is to reveal the connections between the various categories and to express those in a hypothesis, again through theoretical sampling and data collection until the point of saturation is reached. In the end of such a process, the aim is to establish a substantive theory and a formal theory (Bryman, 2008, pp. 541-546).

Clearly, the taken choices on the theoretical approaches put the focus on *qualitative methods* to collect data in the field. The main difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is the nature of gained knowledge: Quantitative methods are useful to collect data from a high amount of respondents providing broad knowledge and information on a topic which usually can be expressed in numbers and statistics (Bryman, 2008, pp. 21-23). Research results from quantitative data are more generalizable, but also more superficial than qualitative data (Bryman, 2008, pp. 393, 394).

Within a quantitative approach, the relationship between the actor and the researcher is distant and instrumental, whereas the qualitative research requires a close and trustful relationship between respondents and investigator in order to be able to see the world through the eyes of the observed and interviewed (Halvorsen, 2008, p. 132). The researcher becomes an instrument of research himself/herself which puts the challenge on him/her to keep the required distance - in order to assure objectivity within the interpretation and analysis of data - and at the same time to create the required proximity to the actors (Repstad, 2004, pp. 17-19).

Finally, the practical realizations of all single components of the research strategy - and their interactions - affect the scale of the reliability, the replication and the validity of the research results (Bryman, 2008, pp. 31-34).

## 5.2 Case study design

This study grounds mainly on the conducted research in two communities in the surrounding area of Bonaó, besides general information on the topic from other sources and communities. These communities match the requirements for a *representative or exemplifying case study* on the topic of youth poverty (Bryman, 2008, pp. 52-57).

The chosen communities for the case study suit the research topic well and they do not differ much from other communities in the area, struggling with the same youth related issues. Yet, they are slightly varying in its social structure and security situation, but the overall factors that can dis-empower the local youth are the same and differ in its scale only.

In both communities, the gatekeeper NGO provides a social network which enables the researcher to conduct fieldwork quite efficiently, to win entrance into the field and to establish trust to possible respondents. The chosen communities are easy to reach by taxi and both provide locations - a school and a youth club house - where many young people can gather for focus groups or individual meetings.

On one hand, a case study with an *explorative approach* enables the researcher to develop a holistic depth-knowledge on the local and current situation of a community, organization, family or even a single person (Bryman 2008: 52-53). On the other hand, the generalizability of such findings into other contexts can be limited (Bryman 2008: 185). But despite the chosen design of a case study here, the possibility to generalize the research outcomes is to a certain extent given due to the exemplifying character of the selected communities.

## **5.3 Sampling**

### **5.3.1 Using a gatekeeper**

The use of a NGO as gatekeeper to enter the field of research appears to be very helpful, also in order to save time and to enter the field faster. Yet, it incorporates the risk of possible manipulation of the researcher, the data collection and of the data interpretation by gatekeepers. In this study, the communities of research were chosen through discussions with the local staff of the Falcondo Foundation in which the researcher communicated the research topic and the research strategy; and in exchange, the local staff provided their professional experience and knowledge on the region which led to the identification of possible communities of interest.

Under the first field visits, employees of the Falcondo Foundation accompanied the student in order to become introduced to local youth workers, and to ensure the security of the researcher. The security situation is critical, especially in one of the communities. Therefore, the up-coming meetings with focus groups and single respondents were held in the local school and the youth club. The support of the NGO simplified the establishment of contact to possible respondents, but it put the researcher also in the position in which she was perceived as a facilitator working for the Falcondo Foundation. Fortunately, the staff of the Foundation handled this issue very openly and supported the master student in clarifying her independence and scientific intention in the field.

### **5.3.2 Finding respondents**

The overall idea was to find respondents of the target group ‘youth’ who explain their thought and describe their life conditions from their point of view. The opinion and knowledge of youth workers were essential in order to complete the information and the complex picture of youth poverty. Also the statements of adults on the topic of youth at-risk and on youth poverty in general were useful for the research. They made it possible to put the data from local boys and girls into the context of the overall situation of the community and of the social structure.

The concept of theoretical sampling described by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 201 cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 415) claims that the *“data gathering [is] driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory and based on the concept of ‘making comparison’, whose purpose is to go*

*to places, people, or events that will maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of properties and dimensions*". Within this process the data sets and categories are constantly improved and compared, as well as the researcher has good access to potential respondents and sources, and a high amount of time available for the collection and the analysis of information.

Theoretically, the data collection in this study is based on the concept of theoretical sampling but in reality the method of snowball sampling is used in addition to it.

The snowball sampling is a useful tool to gain entrance to a certain milieu or target group and to increase the number of respondents quickly (Bryman, 2008, p. 185). A vital argument for the snowball sampling is the aspect of confidence between the researcher and the interviewees, which can be established by being introduced by former respondents to the new participants. The Falcondo Foundation as gatekeeper opened the field for the researcher by presenting relevant youth workers in the different communities and the youth workers introduced the researcher to local boys and girls later on. Those young people invited their friends in a snowball sampling to join the next meeting or the focus groups, eventually. Yet, the overall disadvantage of snowball sampling is that the choice of respondents may not be representative of the population but a generalization is not the main objective of a qualitative case study (Bryman, 2008, p. 185). Yet, the issues of trust and personal relationships have been central throughout the process of sampling and enabled the researcher to collect data.

Coming back to the theoretical sampling, the researcher always had the possibility to re-direct the sampling and to find respondents and secondary data besides the vertical snowball sampling, also in other places than the two main communities of research in order to complete and to compare data and categories, but the use of a gatekeeper led to the combination of both sampling concepts in the end.

In the field, the nature of sampling caused a certain exclusion of criminal or severely at-risk youth, which was welcomed by the gatekeeper organization - which felt responsible for the security of the researcher - but it diminishes the variety within the spectrum of respondents and within the collected data. In this case, most young people were engaged in the activities of the local youth club, most of them attended school and they were able to write and read, some were even studying at university. There was a slight majority of boys. Yet, all of them

belonged to youth of the lower social class and were facing the difficult life conditions in their communities - and thereby, they were qualified to be an actor within this research.

#### **5.4 Qualitative data collection**

The data collection was conducted in a period of 2 months from January till March 2012. In the beginning of the field work, I spend 10 days at the office of the Falcondo Foundation in Santo Domingo in order to collect secondary data on the topic and to gain an overview on life conditions for young people in the Dominican Republic in general. This first period was useful in order to refresh language skills and to win contextual knowledge on culture and region. Thereafter, the office of the Foundation in Bona0 took over the role as gatekeeper and the field work started quite efficiently. The interviews with boys and girls were conducted in the local school in Villa Liberación and the youth club in El Caribe. Other interviews with professional youth workers were held in the natural settings of their working places. The impression that respondents perceived the use of a recorder under the interviews as being uncomfortable and the feedback from the supervisor, led to the decision to take extensive and good notes instead of using the recorder for the collection of data.

Table 3: Overview of methods, respondents and number of interviews per person

<b>Method</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Number of interviews per respondents</b>
Open-ended interview (up to 1hr)  <i>to gain an overview on the subject</i>	Falcondo Foundation	7	1-2
	Young girls in Los Dajaos	4	1
	Youth Worker in Los Dajaos	1	1
	Health worker women's group from different communities around Bonao	6	1
Semi-structured interview (1-2hrs.)  <i>to win depth-knowledge on the topic</i>	Falcondo Foundation	1	1
	Youth worker in El Caribe	1	1
	Youth worker in Villa Liberación	2	2
Focus groups (2hrs.)  <i>to understand the perception among the local youth on their own life conditions in their community</i>	Local boys and girls from El Caribe	12	1
	Local boys and girls from Villa Liberación	8	1
Self- completion questionnaire (2hrs.)  <i>to cross-check the collected data from the interviews and the focus groups</i>	Local boys and girls from El Caribe	11(14)	1
	Local boys and girls from Villa Liberación	9 (12)	1

Source: Author



### **5.4.1 Open-ended and semi-structured interviews**

Open-ended interviews were conducted especially in the beginning of the research to gain first insights on the topic within a Dominican context, finally providing a broader overview on the youth-related issues, and leading to the re-adjustment of the research questions.

The research statement and the current research questions shaped the outline of an interview guide which was dominated by open questions. Under the collection of data, the interview guide had been adapted to the course of data collections and it had become more and more specific. However, the guide was used as orientation tool only and more emphasis was put on the respondents' space and motivation to tell from their lives and point of views. Clearly, the method of semi-structured interviews provided enough flexibility for the researcher in the case of unexpected statements and data, also in accordance with the explorative design (Bryman, 2008, p. 439).

The challenge of being a good interviewer in a foreign language was a learning process in itself and even though literature provides information on the required skills for effectively interviewing - such as being balanced, knowledgeable, clear, gentle, remembering and interpreting (Kvale, 1996 cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 445) - the learning by doing approach was most vital.

### **5.4.2 Focus groups**

The nature of the topic and the characteristics of the target group showed quickly that discussions in focus groups appeared to be wise.

So, leading questions and probe questions directed the actors through the discussions, without being interrupted or stopped by the interviewer.

However, the use of the snowball sampling implicated that the composition of the focus groups was not totally under the control of the researcher and interesting group-dynamics developed itself under the discussions. The different character of the two focus groups from the different communities was striking. The positive processes revealed reasons for "*why people felt the way they do*", for the researcher (Bryman, 2008, p. 475); but the negative group dynamics strengthened the dominance of certain participants to the disadvantage of others, definitely making *their* voice heard (Repstad, 2004, pp. 98-100; Bryman, 2008, pp.

475, 476; 480-482). The nature of power relations between youth workers and the local youth and between younger and older local boys and girls was observable. From the researchers' angle, the male participants were less reluctant to tell their story than the girls.

### 5.4.3 Qualitative self-completion questionnaire

Photo 1: Focus group working with the questionnaire



Source: Author

The manner of sampling and the nature of relationships among the interviewees caused group dynamics in the focus groups which justified the introduction of the *anonymous* self-completion questionnaire in addition to the oral interviews, as an attempt to balance the dominance of some and the shyness of others in the group, enabling them to answer freely on similar questions which had been discussed in the focus groups earlier. Thereby, the former data collections were cross-checked and completed with additional information. Hence, the aspect of anonymity - not only towards the master student, rather towards the rest of the group - assumed greater freedom and space for personal opinion of the interviewee. As all respondents were able to write and read, this method of data collection was employed to the

end of the fieldwork. The questions posed in the questionnaire were based on data collected in the focus groups, the interviews and the literature review. Some questions were formulated in a very open manner; others provided alternatives for the answers. The latter was chosen in order to cross-check information from the interviews and also to win time for the open questions which were expected to give a better insight into the personal opinions and aspirations than it was revealed in the focus group discussions; and also in order to avoid fatigue among the respondents.

#### **5.4.4 Observation**

This research topic includes various external and internal factors influencing the development outcome of young people. Therefore, the researcher needed to work as holistically as possible in order to really understand the local circumstances, the crucial factors and realistic developmental measures. At the same time, the research field had to be narrowed down enough in order to conduct qualitative in-depth research in the design of a case-study. Even though this research focuses on the stage of adolescence, the crucial influence of the childhood on the young persons' further development when growing up cannot be ignored when evaluating the overall situation of the local youth. Hence, conducting observation - not only in the communities of research but in the daily life situations of Dominicans in general - enhanced the knowledge on the locally political, economic and social circumstances and on cultural aspects. Hence, such data were vital contributions to the overall interpretation and the analysis of the information provided by respondents. But generally, the method of observation requires self-reflection identifying the origin of the observer's understanding and interpretation of the made observations in order to keep the research data as objective as possible within the framework of a qualitative research (Repstad, 2004, pp. 71-74).

#### **5.4.5 Document analysis**

The analysis of secondary documents related to youth poverty in the Dominican Republic had an important function in strengthening the data collections from the field. The quality and

hence the relevance of such documents is to be assessed through the criteria of *authenticity*, *credibility*, *representativeness* and *meaning* (Scottt, 1990, p.6 cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 516). Authenticity questions the reliability of the documents origin or author, whereas the credibility aspect concerns the quality and the plausibility of the document's content. The third criterion addresses the representativeness or the uniqueness of the document's statement and the final point investigates the comprehensibility of the text.

Different types of documents are used here: on one hand documents with a developmental background, and on the other hand some documents which make part of the daily life of young Dominicans, reproducing youth related issues:

Firstly, international and local NGOs provide useful information on the situation of the local youth on their homepages which in addition to the annual report from the Falcondo Foundation give insights into the complex subject of youth poverty.

Secondly, development literature pinpoints the issue of youth migration in the Caribbean as consequence of poverty and lacking opportunities among the young generation. Under the fieldwork-stay, the local mass-media published articles on topics such as young Dominicans drowning in the sea on their illegal migration attempt to other countries.

As young people are the target group, the significance of music and its lyrics which are written and presented by Dominican youth itself needs to be acknowledged. Music itself takes a huge space in the Dominican culture and young people use music also as a tool to speak out and to communicate their perceptions of and their problems in the Dominican society.

The revealed data from the document analysis were not directly employed in this study, but they contributed strongly to the contextual knowledge of the researcher.

## **5.5 Ethics**

The physical and psychological protection of the participating respondents in a study is crucial and it has to be prioritized by all actors involved - not only under the collection of data but also after the researcher has left the field and the country. By being a knowledgeable, respectful, sensitive and at the same time focused investigator significant research can be conducted, and situations can be avoided which may jeopardize the social or economic well-

being of interviewees. The researcher has a great responsibility towards the participants. The following ethical principles specify the meaning behind these responsibilities:

First, the avoidance of emotional, physical, social or financial harms to participants - the study does not provide names or specific addresses of quoted respondents (Bryman, 2008, pp.118-125).

Secondly the ensuring of the informed consent of respondents, implying that “*the sociologist [needs] to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted*” (BSA, n.d., cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 212). Here, the use of observation as research tool can limit the informed consent to a certain extent. Clearly, under the meetings of the focus groups and other interviews, the informed consent was fulfilled. But when conducting fieldwork, the researcher never stops working and observing in the daily life and activities, and some people enter and leave the lens of observation even without recognizing, as their actions and inter-actions happen in the natural settings in which the researcher is present, coincidentally.

Thirdly, the investigator needs to respect the privacy of his/her interviewees. And in addition to this, the researcher needs to ensure the avoidance of deceptions among participants (Bryman, 2008, pp. 118-125).

The researcher has not only the responsibility towards the actors, but also towards the quality of the own work and study, providing the highest amount of credibility, validity, reliability and relevance as possible to the scientific field and other actors involved in the management of development (Bryman, 2008, pp. 31-34).

## **5.6 Challenges and Limitations**

It was challenging to conduct a productive fieldwork in a former unknown country within the framework of qualitative research. The establishment of trust between the researcher and the participants was crucial in order to collect data and it was a demanding task to keep the balance between necessary proximity and distance to the respondents in order to avoid subjectivity (Repstad, 2004, pp. 17-19) which required the sensitivity and self-reflection in order to handle personal interviews and observations.

Besides, having the Falcondo Foundation as a gatekeeper put the investigator in difficult situations in the beginning of the research and it required efforts to be perceived as an independent researcher, and not as a facilitator from Falcondo, despite the fact that this issue had been discussed with potential respondents every time when entering new fields. Hence, an essential challenge throughout the fieldwork was to avoid the influence of the presence of the researcher on the nature and quality of the collected data, preventing bias-data sets.

Collecting data in a foreign setting is very interesting and inspiring, yet it demands the will of the investigator to open-up towards the cultural context in order to avoid miss-interpretation of data and the researcher needs to make efforts to improve local language skills. In this study, no interpreter was used with the intention to be able to establish closer relationships to the respondents without having the interpreter in between. The cross-checking of data and statements by using different methods in qualitative researching reduces the likelihood of overseeing or miss-understanding data provided by the participants. The interviewees were asked to speak slowly - as their natural way of speaking Spanish is fast in comparison to Bolivian Spanish for instance - and the possibility to ask back or to pose probe questions in order to avoid mistakes was always given. The way in which Dominicans express their disagreement with certain things by making jokes, was actually helpful in reading between the lines of the statements. In addition to this, the observation of the body language of single respondents and between actors played a vital role as well.

Moreover, regarding the limited time available for the work in the field, a flexible and efficient co-ordination of the fieldwork and the respondents was required. It was a challenge to agree on a date where the focus group could meet. It was not possible to meet after the sunset because it was too dangerous and in daytime most people were occupied with different things, so the time window was narrow. Due to the pressure of time, it was always wise to have a plan B when respondents had to postpone meetings or other respondents suddenly were available. Clearly, more time in the field could have given more insights on details related to the topic.

It is left to say that the warm welcome in the Dominican field and the great motivation of people to participate and to use their time and energy for this research made the fieldwork to a positive experience and a source of motivation for me.

## **Chapter 6: Findings and Analysis**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings and their analysis from the fieldwork in the communities Villa Liberación and El Caribe.

Thereby, the iterative research strategy allows putting the data from the field into relation and into comparison with the already established literature and theories on the topic, revealing analogy or contradictions between local empirical findings and provided literature and concepts. Hence, the research questions are an important tool guiding through the process of coding and selecting all data available in order to keep the focus on the research objectives. And they also provide a framework for the analysis of the research result.

When writing down qualitative research result, the challenge is to select data wisely from the big amount of data collections, getting rid of less important facts and statements, without losing or excluding crucial information (Bryman, 2008, p. 665). Especially, inconsistent data - in relation to other information - is a vital contribution to the holistic analysis of the overall situation of young people in this local setting, because they reflect the diversity in opinions and life circumstances among a certain population or target group. The complexity of the research topic, the individual realities and the different life experiences allow a certain amount of flexibility or inconsistency within the qualitatively collected information. Yet, the analysis focuses on main arguments which obviously belong to the frame of existence among the majority of the young respondents.

The theoretical framework influences the researcher's perception and understanding of the respondents, their statements and their realities when entering the field. But the overall research objective is to re-produce youth poverty related issues from the perspective of young people themselves - seeing the world through their eyes. The data are bias in the sense of being mostly focused on the life conditions of young people and their opinions and ideas. Intentionally, the majority of the respondents are young people - giving them a voice to be heard.

## 6.2 The youth's perception of work and education

### 6.2.1 Work to study or study to work?

The following findings aim to provide an holistic insight on two major elements of the living world of youth - education and work: The way in which young people perceive their situation within the local labor market, and the way in which local educational possibilities and circumstances are evaluated by them illustrate a crucial part of the frame of existence for these local boys and girls. Hence, it describes the framework of opportunities in which young people are acting, and it provides insights to outsiders on possible obstacles for youth's development in terms of lacking opportunities and impacted personal agency.

Field findings highlight the significance of strong personal agencies, when young boys and girls seek to overcome the poor quality of established vocational and educative possibilities by being strongly engaged and ambitious in order to aim personal goals. It requires hard work, optimism and often the support from family and friends to span the gap between available opportunity and personal ambitions. Optimism seems to be a useful attitude as the Dominican youth struggles with an uncertain future due to lacking work opportunities even for highly educated people and a politically and economically unstable situation in general. Family and friends form the informal supportive opportunity structure for youth, in many cases compensating for the weak formal opportunity structure.

In the lower social classes, working and studying are no separate life stages; they proceed rather parallel to each other. Coming from a poor family and having the goal to fulfill the basic education or to achieve high education requires hard work and motivation from these young citizens.

*“My parents prefer that I study and work, because they cannot pay for my studies and if I work I can pay them by myself. [But] I would prefer to study only, if I had enough money to pay my studies”, (Girl, 20 years, Villa Liberación).*

The qualitative questionnaire conducted in the communities of Villa Liberación and El Caribe among local youth confirms that combining work and education is most reasonable within this specific social and economic context.



This questionnaire is certainly limited in its representativeness as it contains the answers of 20 persons only between the ages of 13- 27 years from both communities; however its results are concurrent with other information from the field collected through different methods and so its results are relevant in this case study.

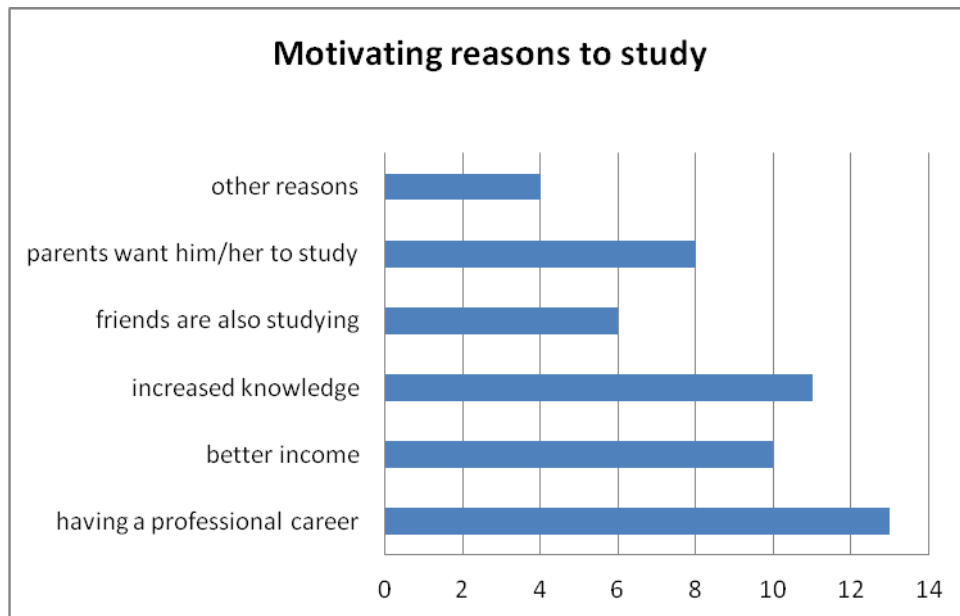
The data show that out of 20 young persons, 14 would prefer to study and to work at the same time if education and work were sufficiently accessible, whereas 6 persons would choose to study only. Out of the same 20 respondents, 16 say that their parents prefer them to work and to study; just 3 parents want their children to focus on their studies only. And the assumption is that the latter parents belong to the minority of parents in these communities that is able to support the education of their kids sufficiently with financial means (appendix 1).

The questionnaire shows further that the family is the most important supportive institution motivating for the achievement of basic and/or higher education: 52 percent of the participants name their parents, and 11 percent the sisters and brothers, and another 11 percent their friends as being important supporters - multiple answers were possible. In conclusion, informal institutions account for 74 percent of the supporting structure, whereas the community, the school, the government (scholarships) and other organizations collected reach 26 percent only (appendix 1).

In addition to this it is asked which sort of support these students receive: 44 percent of them feel supported in terms of emotional motivation and 40 percent are benefitting from financial help. Only 16 percent receive help with their homework - reasons for this can be the lack of writing and reading skills among parents, the possible lack of time due to work, or the missing awareness or appreciation towards education (appendix 1).

In general, the perception of education as an investment for the future is present among this group of adolescents, but the lack of financial resources among youth and among their parents can hinder the realization of the wish to finish basic education, to achieve additional education or to enter university. Despite the high costs for education - such as the loss of time at work, the cost for the school materials, school fees and transport costs, most participants of the focus groups think that education is useful. On the question why they want to study their wish for increased knowledge, a professional career and the hope for a better income are the most vital reasons (appendix 1).

Figure 4: Motivating reasons to study



Source: Author, appendix 1, question 11

Besides working to study, Dominican boys and girls from the lower social class often have partly economic responsibility for their families from the time on they are ‘able’ to work and to contribute to the livelihood security to a certain extent. From early years on, they need to carry the burden of combining school and work at the same time. Adolescents may even have families on their own to support in addition. The early establishment of a family is common in the Dominican culture and it can but does not have to be ‘caused’ by pregnancy.

Yet, the frequency of premature pregnancy is high in this area according to statistics (Cunningham et al., 2008, pp. 75-85; UNESCO, 2012 ;). Several life stories of actors describe the difficulties for young people when they seek to combine education, job and family, struggling with poverty and economic immobility.

In the field, the lack of working opportunities can restrict the possibility for young people to fulfill or to improve education - they need to work in order to afford education and to ensure their and their families livelihood security.

When living in poverty, work providing income besides school is a necessary part in the life of adolescents but respondents also express the risk of prioritizing work and income at the

expenses of education - which may promise a better income in the future, but is perceived as an additional burden in the present. Basic needs and the present livelihood security are naturally prioritized over further education which may bear fruits in the future. And their frustration over high unemployment rates serves as a justification for their choice as well. Even though it is reasonable that long-term plans to finish or to continue education are held back in favor of the survival of today, this situation has an impact on the quality and the quantity of the education among young Dominicans and it limits their possibility to ensure a frequent and higher income later on as an adult.

The latter fact is also underlined by the high education drop-out rates in the Dominican Republic in general (Cunningham et al., 2008, pp. 75-85). As an example from general observations and the questionnaire, the bad writing skills even among university students are striking and this does not concern simple misspelling, rather very distinct and creative ways of writing Spanish.

The overall situation is on a bigger scale an obstacle to the development of human capital among young Dominicans, and human capital is a vital aspect of the economic, the political and the social development as well.

And it leads to the question whether actually available educational and professional opportunities can be used, or whether external social and economic conditions weaken the significance and the outcome of vital parts of the accessible opportunity structure.

Linking this reality to the theoretical concept in which Alsop and Heinsohn (2005, p. 10) ask “*whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose*”, it must rather be asked whether a person *is able to* use the opportunity to choose or if cultural, social and economic restrictions deny such active choice. Also when questioning “*whether the choice resulted in the desired result*” (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, p. 10), it is additionally useful to investigate the internal and external factors impacting and shaping the outcome, especially when the results are not the desired ones, rather than looking for a yes or no answer on the nature of achievements.

Back to the field: Obviously, it is not possible to avoid that young students work besides school - even if it may affect their educational performance, but a part of the problem can be approached by addressing the work conditions for youth, protecting them from abusive employers, bad working conditions and severely under-paid jobs.

The high unemployment rate makes young people accept poor working conditions, because a) they know that they can be re-placed by other young boys and girls who take any work due to a scarcity of economic sources and resources; b) there is no alternative providing income, except from illegal and risky activities, and c) they feel powerless and forgotten. Out of this situation it occurs that a young person seeks to upgrade a low income from a legal work with illegal activities besides, such as part-time drug dealing or prostitution. Unfortunately, the Dominican Republic struggles with abusive child labor and the awareness - not only towards the working conditions for children, but in this context especially for youth - is lacking and requires recognition within top-down and bottom-up approaches.

#### Box 1: Abusive child labor

***A look aside: Situations of Risk in the Dominican informal Labor Market***

*“In the Dominican Republic the rates of child labour, abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children between the ages of 6 and 12, imply situations of severe violation of their rights. The National Child Labour Survey (ENTI by its initials in Spanish) carried out by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2000, indicates that close to 66% of the children who work (436,000) are between the ages of 5 and 14; and that 42% of this population entered the labour market before the age of 10. The early age at which children start working, which competes with school attendance, and its degree of danger, expose many children to situations that endanger their health, education and personal security.*

*Moreover, a study carried out in 2002, from a sample of 118 minors exploited sexually and commercially in the National District and the city of Puerto Plata, shows that 14.4% of them could not read or write, and that 13.6% had no schooling. Results also showed that their first sexual relations occurred at a very early age, often resulting from sexual abuse.”*

*Sources: UNESCO, 2012*

Improving working conditions and protection laws for young people seems to be a useful and necessary developmental strategy: Not having a work can limit to attend education, yet having a work can also reduce the quality of educational outcomes, such as lacking writing skills or the achievement of a formal degree. Low payments (in abusive work conditions) do not cover their material and basic needs. Poverty is the essential factor complicating the lives of the

local youth in these communities. So, frustration among the respondents is a natural outcome of this dilemma.

From another perspective, it is not only the lack of work, but also the difficulties in finding a job that is related to the accomplished education or vocational training.

*“You learn how to be a mechanics and then you have to work in the tobacco field”*

(Focus group, El Caribe). The term of ‘working in the tobacco field’ symbolizes bad payment under hard working conditions in a job with low social prestige.

On one hand, they react with anger and frustration on the low amount of adequate jobs available, and on the other hand several respondents complain over nepotism and corruption within the labor market, especially concerning better paid jobs in higher positions. Belonging to the poorer social class, they feel dis-empowered by the social structure and social discrimination in their country.

Some young interviewees even express their resentments towards their globally economic marginalization from a North-South perspective. Hence, in El Caribe, they do not only mean the poverty issue in general but they speak specifically about the production of tobacco and cigars: in El Caribe one of the worldwide most expensive Dominican cigars is produced. The local youth and other adults working in the tobacco fields are aware of the huge gap between their salary and the high price people pay for the locally produced cigars in Western countries.

### **6.2.2 Opportunities in the future**

Even though, young people struggle with difficult life circumstances and poverty, they do not lack ambitions and hopes for the future. Their ability to reach those goals may be limited or impeded by lacking skills or knowledge in some cases, but the assumption is that having ambitions and dreams for the future is a first step into the right direction for the achievement of well-being, especially when being a impoverished young person who needs to resist the temptation of risky behaviors, experiencing social and political marginalization and the lack of resources.

The following extract from the field gives some insight on wishes and hopes for the future that seem to be significant for young respondents in Villa Liberación and El Caribe. Young

people mainly hope for the chance to achieve education, to have a job or career and to be able to sustain livelihood security. It is essential to have an opportunity, but the crucial aspect is its outcome, like a good income and social prestige; young people often formulate such social and material goals by saying that “they want to be someone in the future”.

Box 2: Hopes for opportunities

**For which opportunities do you hope in the future?**

*“For the opportunity to be a well-educated person, [for the opportunity] to create a library in my community and [for the opportunity] to establish my own business; I want my children to have the best possible education. I would like to build houses for poor people, not only in my community but also in another community called Los Jovos where they live like in another time without light nor TV”, (Girl, 20 years, El Caribe).*

*“I would like to get the opportunity to continue studying and to enter the university and to study [the profession] in which I want to work in the future. This is everything I wish for my own future”, (Girl, 18 years, Villa Liberación).*

*“I hope to get the opportunity to play football for the school in my community; and I pray to Gud that he sends help to those persons who need support”, (Boy, 22 years, Villa Liberación).*

*“I would like to finish my studies, I do not know when, but that is what I want; and I want to have a work which allows me to continue studying and that my income covers my needs; what I earn now is not enough for anything”, (Boy, 27 years, Villa Liberación).*

Source: Author in fieldwork

The meaning and the significance of a certain opportunity for young people, and the link between personal agency, accessible opportunity and its outcome was a crucial part of the fieldwork. Therefore, the respondents were asked about their wishes and future hopes in a similar way, this time with the pre-condition that financial resources are available, yet their statements are alike.

Box 3: Wishes for the future

**If you had enough money, what would you do with it?**

**What would you like to buy?**

*“I would buy a nice house for my parents. I would provide the best education and schools for my children and help other poor people and the school in my community and I would buy a house for myself”, (Girl, 20 years, El Caribe).*

*“First, I would like to have a house, clothes, food and secondly - also something very important- I would like to continue studying to be someone in the future”, (Girl, 20 years, El Caribe).*

*“I would build a big house for my mum and another for my dad”, (Boy, 18 years, Villa Liberación).*

Source: Author in fieldwork

However, the reality also shows the great amount of frustration, anger and even resignation among young people, being overburdened and “tired of the daily struggle”.

### **6.3. Dis-empowering social structures**

#### **6.3.1 Violent and insecure neighborhood**

Even though, this research is based on a case study limited in its universality and generalizability, it is obvious that the characteristics of an environment have influence on the way in which the younger generation thinks and behaves. The community provides a certain nature of economic, educational and social opportunities; it affects the personal aspirations and attitudes of its citizens. Sen (cited in Morán, 2004, p. 76) underlines the close link between the ‘success of a society’ and the lives that people are able to live within such a society. Further, young people are the ‘product’ of a society or community in the sense that they reflect the environment like a mirror.

From a developmental perspective, social capital can be a powerful tool for the civil society to enhance a positive development in a neighborhood and in a country but “*the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit*”, (Putnam, 1995, p. 67 cited in SCR, 2012) are poorly established in Villa Liberación and this lack contributes most likely to the slow-going development process in this area.

It is assumed that the main reasons for the missing social capital are to find in the social problems of this community: Villa Liberación located in the outskirts area of Bonaño has a common reputation in the region as being a dangerous neighborhood with high rates of violence, criminality and drug traffic.

From the perception of local people, the structure of Villa Liberación is fragmented; it is rather a community where people move to from all over the country, often for a short period of time only. Several respondents claim that some people moved to this community because they had no other place to live due to a criminal past, poverty and other financial or social problems. Such statements as the latter are made by various respondents, yet it is unclear how much gossip and how much truth are hidden behind these statements.

However, the main issues in this context are the missing social connections between the citizens and the lacking feeling of having responsibility for each other in this place.



On the contrary to Villa Liberación, the second community of research - El Caribe - has been established by local families who are related to each other, often over several generations. Even though, this community struggles with youth poverty and youth at-risk as well, the overall security situation was clearly better in El Caribe than in Villa Liberación. It was not recommended to foreign researchers to move alone and freely in the latter community due to the security problem. Yet, the respondents living in Villa Liberación claim that the security situation has been improved in the last years, as more and more young people turn away from criminal behavior: *“They have seen people getting killed in the streets here. They don’t want this anymore”*, says a local youth worker (33 years, Villa Liberación).

When a high percentage of the local youth actively participates in illegal activities – partly due to poverty - creating a climate of criminality and violence, the overall security situation of a neighborhood is endangered. Growing up in a dangerous place means to see and to experience violence in very early years. Hence, such experiences affect young people’s development negatively and it shapes their attitude towards the use of violent means by themselves. Thus, it is normal - especially among young boys - to wear knives or pistols in order to be able to defend oneself, not only in the communities of research.

The assumption is an existing correlation between insecure neighborhoods, violence within families, young people experiencing violence and youth acting violently in the streets, at school and at home. Such social realities shape the environment in which young people grow up and it forms the platform on which young people establish their personal agencies. The existence of social capital enhances the quality of an opportunity structure, and the nature of the opportunity structure affects the agency of a person.

The use of violence is in its nature an obstacle to communication between community members, families and young people; and the structure of the community provokes a lack of social capital and it indicates the missing social responsibility among the citizens. In other words, this community lacks *“the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms [which are] shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them”* (Fukuyama, 1997 cited in SCR, 2012). In addition to the lack of social capital, the scarcity on human and financial capital, and the political marginalization impact the livelihood security and it catalyzes impoverishment, especially among the vulnerable local youth.

The livelihood insecurity and the bad security situation in the community are linked to each other, as poverty can be the cause for criminal and/or violent behavior among community members, creating an atmosphere which is perceived as dangerous and unpredictable by other residents. Thus, the critical security situation complicates the struggle to survive for local citizens and increases the likelihood for impoverishment. Thereby, illegal alternative survival strategies to ensure livelihood security do emerge as discussed in the chapter on ‘the easy way’.

### **6.3.2 Losing human capital**

The following observation includes kids who are younger than the defined target group ‘youth’, but this information is relevant for a holistic understanding of the situation of the local adolescents. The nature of their development starts in the early years of childhood, and an insight into the daily routine of a local school in this community informs on the meaning of the external factors affecting childhood and later adolescence:

Photo 2: Kids in Villa Liberación

Source: Author



The school of interest is newly constructed with financial help from the Falcondo Foundation, and the kids are between 6 and 18 years but students are often over-aged in relation to their actual level of education due to the high repetition rate among them.

The school staffs describe restless and critical behavior patterns among kids and adolescents which at least partly seem to be linked to the community structure, family problems and poverty issues.

The teachers notice that many students have difficulties in concentrating and learning when they are at school, and they assume that many students have their mind occupied with worries and emotional traumas; or they are longing for attention as they have been neglected at home in certain forms and they express themselves in rather destructive ways - such as being aggressive and 'out-of control'. In consequence, the pedagogic means are strict and a *"hard hand is required in order to keep control over the students"*, adds the director of the local school in Villa Liberación. Another issue is the high drop-out rate in this school - *"here, the students go and come"*, says school staff, as remarkably many parents move away from this community after a short while and take their kids out of school. This means for the students that they cannot really settle down or establish long lasting social relationships on one hand, and on the other hand their education is affected negatively. Young people are hindered in attending the school properly, in focusing on their education and in revealing their intellectual potential early. Theoretically, children and young adolescents are protected by the Dominican law and the vital link between a safe childhood, good education and positive development outcomes is acknowledged by international literature: *"Investments in early childhood are important in their own right because they pave the way for a lifetime of improved health, mental and physical performance, and productivity (...)"*, (Iglesias cited in Morán, 2004, p. 79). In reality, children and young people are socially marginalized and powerless.

The main argument here is that the nature and the structure of the community can dis-empower the young generation, in their childhood as well as in their adolescence.

From a developmental angle, the loss of potential human capital due to difficult life circumstances for kids and youth, and the lack of positive - not criminality related - social capital impact indirectly the economic situation of Villa Liberación, and thereby it also affects the well-being of all members of the community. They are trapped in poverty and social problems.

### 6.3.3 Youth in the society

*“Giving young people a voice will work only if adults are willing to listen”*

(World Bank, 2005a, p. 49).

From one certain point of view, critical community structures affect young people’s life in a destructive manner, yet from another angle the local youth impacts the life quality in the community as well. Open-ended interviews among various adults on the topic of youth poverty showed that community members are often terrified of the local youth and of their potential for criminal behavior and unpredictable actions:

*“Young people are dangerous for people living in the community; they kill each other because of a cellphone. We [our society] are lost. I believe that the reason for the problems of young people - and so many have problems - is the lack of work and jobs. If they had work, they could be some place, they could do something. But then again, there is lack of education. But they want to buy themselves a cellphone or other things and then they get involved in drugs. This is part of our daily life- our society is lost”,* (Female community health worker, 55 years, Bonao).

The relationship between youth and adults seem to be tense in many perspectives: Young people depend on the guidance and support from their families and the community, but there is a certain suspicious attitude towards the local youth which makes it hard for young people to get socially accepted – especially after they have ‘socially failed’ by getting involved into drugs or other negative behavior. Besides, young people at-risk can feel ashamed about the way they lead their lives and they can isolate themselves from their healthy environment, entering a vicious cycle.

The awareness of providing second chances for the local youth by re-integrating them into the school and the social life is lacking. Young respondents complain about the few re-socialization opportunities available for former drug-addicts, making it almost impossible for them finding their way back into education, job and a normal life. Observations in the field indicate that the society is actually aware of those problems, but are restrained in their will and resources to attend those short-comings.

Discussions with youth workers in both communities revealed that it is not easy for former youth at-risk to join activities that are offered by the youth club, because it requires courage and self-confidence to face and to overcome a bad social reputation within a small community. One case illustrates that young people who are endangered by substance abuse and criminality can find confidence in youth workers who were involved in drugs or other criminal activities themselves earlier in their lives - they feel understood and not judged. Thereby, they can leave their social exclusion.

It is not only the society who pushes youth related problems aside, the young respondents agreed on the perception of being forgotten by the government - "*politicians try to avoid us*" (Focus group, EL Caribe) - referring not only to the youth at-risk but especially to the 'healthy youth' (*la juventud sana*): young people who are studying and/or working, sometimes providing for their own families or/and parents in addition, not being involved in risky behavior, but they are highly motivated to fulfill education and to work. Those young boys and girls have ambitious personal agencies and they put a lot of efforts in their education and work in order to get out of poverty and to sustain their future well-being. But the lack of opportunities and the quality of the available opportunities in their community are obstacles to the fulfillment of their personal agencies, regarding education, work and income.

Moreover, the social marginalization and the political neglecting are closely connected and cause a general political frustration among young people in the communities of research. Youth worker from both communities describe political engagement as being difficult and dangerous to a certain extent. In the period of the research, one student got shut by a policeman in Bonaó, in a demonstration in which citizens from El Caribe demanded asphalt streets in their community. Another respondent tells about the dangerous time of the elections, when supporters of the political parties express their political opinion in a violent way, endangering their own lives and the security of other citizens. Therefore, it seems to be more reasonable for many young people to stay out of political activities, accepting political failure and dis-accountability with resignation.

The culturally based unequal power-relations between young people and older persons in which the respect and the obedience towards older people play a vital role seem to enhance the already socially weak position of young boys and girls. The fact that younger people stand

hierarchically under older people is not problematic in itself, it is rather the situation in which young people are getting ignored and overseen by adults as their perception and knowledge is not valued. In other words, the communication among young and old is poor.

Besides, the participation of the researcher in an educational event (*capacitaciones*) for female health workers from the region of Bonaó, clearly showed that the lack of good communication between young and old in families and in the local health station were a point of concern among social workers and the staff of the Falcondo Foundation.

The overall conclusion is that the social exclusion, the political avoidance and the lacking attention towards the positive potential of the young generation weaken the position of young people in the Dominican society. This situation boosts frustration among youth and especially youth at-risk can express their frustration through violence. The youth has the power to spread fear in the community. And maybe, some adolescents feel that this is the only sort of power they have at the moment.

This situation in all its varieties impacts the strength and the nature of the personal agency of young citizens. A strong personal agency can overcome failure in the opportunity structure; but a weak personal agency and a lacking opportunity structure are obstacles to a positive development of adolescents.

#### **6.3.4 Youth in a vicious cycle**

*“Every young person who is not going to school or does not have a work is potentially at-risk in our society”* (Staff from the Falcondo Foundation, 2012).

The majority of the literature on youth poverty addresses the argument that young people are mostly concerned with the daily struggle to cover the basic needs such as food, rent and transport. This is not wrong, but in the field, the mayor parts of the Dominican youth - in the urban as well as in the rural areas - have developed needs which go much further than basic needs. These needs are rather socially constructed and reflect partly the life style of American youth in form of clothes and technological accessories.

When young girls and boys belonging to lower social classes, are sitting in front of poorly constructed houses chatting on their Smartphone, they are dressed in American style clothes and they are listening to local *Bachata* music, it appears to be a clash of two different worlds, where West-American and Dominican youth culture mix each other. In this case, the Smartphone is as a symbol for material needs and ‘things-you-need-to-have’ originally coming from the Western world.

It is nothing new that young people express their social or cultural belonging through clothes, music styles and technological equipment, but in this case young people experience a strong social pressure to spend money for things they actually cannot afford: It is not only expensive to buy a Smartphone, it also costly to use it. On the other hand, young people try to escape from a digital divide through the Smartphone - they can participate in social media and communicate with their friends and family. The social life takes a huge place in the Dominican culture. Another aspect of the social life of young people, especially for the boys is to spend money on the week-ends to go out and to buy alcohol (or other substances). Field observations indicate that young boys often feel the pressure to ‘show-off’ their financial means - also in order to impress girls. The cultural traits of ‘machismo’ and unwritten social rules implicate that (young) men stand for the main financial support of the family.

The conclusion is that those socially constructed behavior patterns influence the way in which young people prioritize their spending. But even more crucial is the fact that the discrepancy between their low budget and the costs to cover their needs can push young people into an economic vulnerable situation in which they experience financial pressure and which can catalyze short-sighted decision-making in the favor of ‘alternative’ ways to provide financial means, risking their future well-being.

### **6.3.5 The ‘easy way’**

‘The easy way’ is a common expression among old and young Dominican people and it implies everything from prostitution, dealing drugs, stealing or other criminal activities which provide a possibility to earn money quickly but illegally.

Besides, the open manner in which people in these communities speak about the issue of drug dealing shows how naturally it belongs to their every-day-life. The harsh life conditions and

the poverty put drugs into a position of being “*a possible way to gain income*” (youth worker, 33 years, Villa Liberación).

At the same time, the ‘easy way’ can imply the membership in ‘alternative institutions’ such as street gangs which offer a dangerous but profitable alternative social and economic opportunity structure for the local youth - providing social and financial capital. Young people who are involved in such activities or such social networks are at-risk.

In addition to this, respondents named other crucial factors which can influence the decision to involve oneself in risky actions, criminality or as substance abuse: the loss of employment, the loss of income, the death of a partner or family member, premature pregnancy, difficulties in learning, being over-burdened by combining low-paid job and school, having financial responsibilities for the family, and feeling frustration over being poor or not succeeding with the own agency. The spectrum of possible at-risk factors is complex and concerns most young people at least at one point in the course of their adolescence. But the field observations are concurrent with literature that claims that girls and boys who are studying and/or working are less willing to accept the risks of alternative activities and societies, refusing the ‘easy way’.

### **6.3.6 The main impacts of dis-empowering structures**

The weak social structure in this neighborhood enforces youth poverty and it catalyzes a critical security situation. This severe security situation makes part of the vicious cycle furthering poverty and social problems again.

Youth poverty, the quality and the quantity of the opportunity structure and the nature of personal agencies among young boys and girls are linked. Yet, the actual community structure is a critical base for the establishment of a sound personal agency, also due to the local security and violence issues impacting the opportunity structure negatively.

Here, young people experience high economic vulnerability and low economic mobility. Thereby, the scarcity of resources and the additional socially constructed needs create financial burdens for youth. Out of this situation, the temptation to satisfy economic and social needs by choosing alternative ways to provide income and social capital occurs, putting them at-risk in consequence. Thus, the youth criminality causes tense social relationships within the community between young and old. And youth criminality tends to catch the



attention of media and the society, taking the focus away from the special needs and problems which young people have when living in difficult life circumstances and poverty.

Compared to adults in general, youth is socially in a weak position: Young people are threatened by social exclusion, economic and political marginalization. The political neglecting of youth enforces their social marginalization and vice versa.

Finally, the loss of social and human capital is obvious, impacting the human development and the local economic development. This means also that a development strategy which seeks to empower young people needs to include the community and the family in order to create sustainable outcomes.

## 6.4 Opportunities and participative integration

This chapter provides an interesting participative approach on how to address problematic personal agencies, meaning the lack of ambitions on one side and the missing skills and knowledge on the other, and on how to improve the local opportunity structure for youth.

Photo 3: Places-to-be for youth in El Caribe



Source: Author

Obviously, it is important for young people to have a place where they can spend their leisure time, meet friends and organize activities together - 'a place to be', such as youth clubs, parks, and football, volleyball, baseball or basketball fields. In the case of El Caribe, a youth club house and a basketball field were built, financially supported by NGOs.

The club house and the basketball field were constructed by the local youth under the guidance and the supervision of youth workers and other helpful community members. The boys and girls also share the responsibilities to maintain this place in good conditions in the future. Using the work force of the local youth is not only a saving measure; it is rather the

empowering integration of young people into the working process. It is also reasonable to assume that through this project and collaboration, older community members enhance their understanding for the significance of guidance, informal vocational training and support for the local youth. The construction of the club house and the basketball field is *a participative learning process* in which construction skills, the capability to work together and the ability to take responsibility are taught in a useful way. And the pride over and the enthusiasm for their self-made places are apparent. This experience can encourage youth and their agencies, because it enables them to discover their interests and talents, and to develop self-esteem and self-confidence. Moreover, in such youth friendly spaces young people can improve their social and human capital. They have the feeling of belonging somewhere, having the opportunity to use those places as a positive and supportive platform in order to develop themselves and in order to learn from each other how to cope with their lives and problems.

These facilities are not only ‘places to be’, they are rather opportunities for young people to escape from problems at home, criminal neighborhoods or ‘dangerous’ boredom. In the urban as well as in the rural communities around Bonao, many young people are jobless. Hence, Cunningham (et al., 2008, p. 83) describes the correlation between joblessness and an increased likelihood for risky behavior as significant in the context of youth at-risk in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Of course, it is not deniable that dealing drugs can take place in these meeting points as well, but its public location and the overall attitude and the awareness among young people reduce the likelihood and the frequency of such incidences here.

In conclusion, this case describes various forms of synergies between different stakeholders creating useful strategies to manage youth development directly, and the development of the community indirectly. The original concept on embeddedness synergies is first and foremost constructed relating to personal ties between people who are part of the civil society and people who work in governmental institutions with the access to important resources; yet this approach is transferable to the collaboration between NGO, community members and the youth. The NGO embodies the role of a facilitator, having the political power to initiate the project and to provide the financial resources. Community members, youth workers and the adolescents are the partners of the NGO within this collaboration. Hence, there is a useful exchange of labor, guidance and knowledge between youth workers, other community members and young people, working together under the establishment of the new facilities.

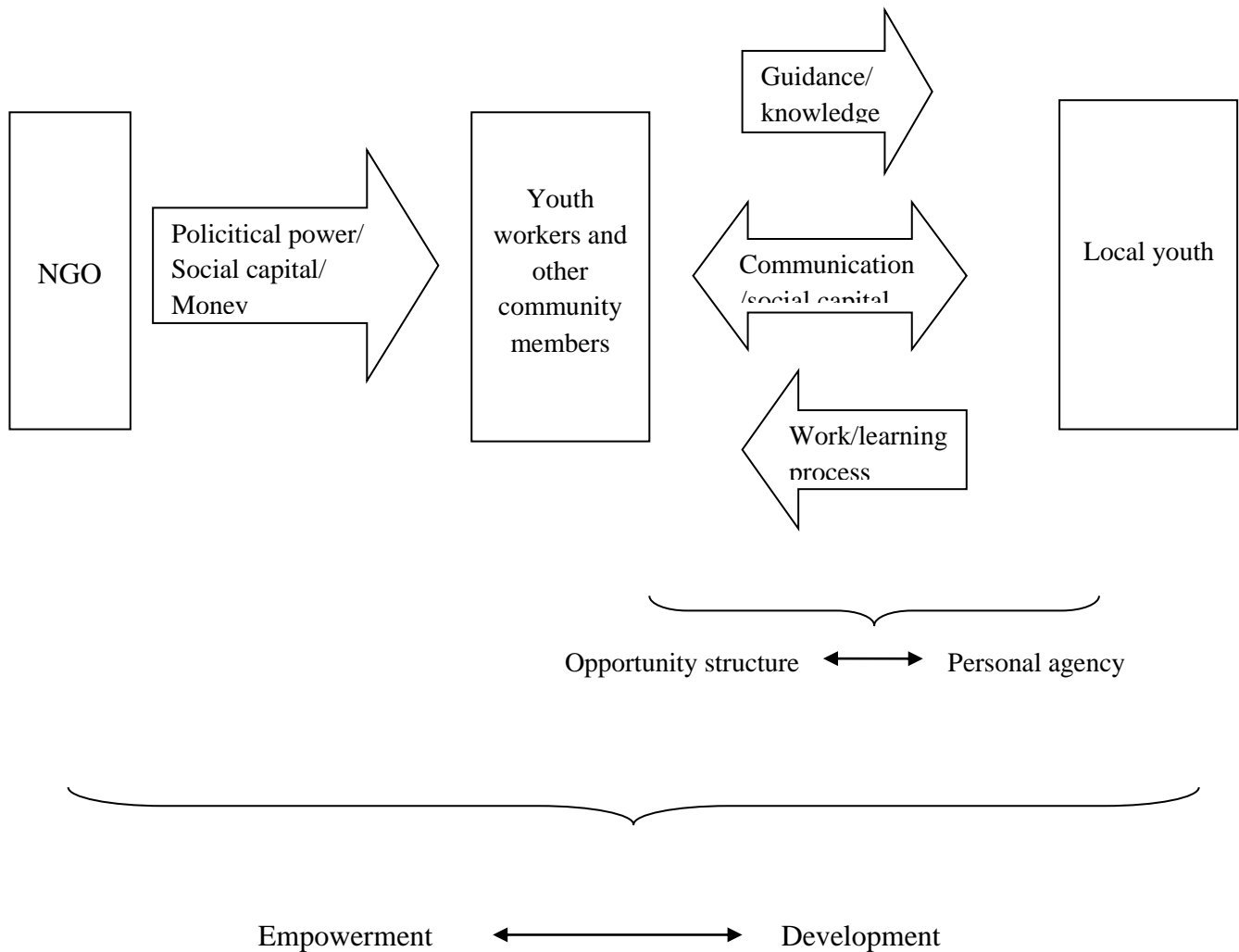
Personal ties between the NGO and the community are an advantage, considering the fact that the NGO prioritized this locality over other possible projects in various communities.

Moreover, this synergetic project has the potential to strengthen young people's agency and it produces new facilities; hence it improves the local opportunity structure for adolescents in El Caribe. The creation of opportunities and a platform for youth to work, to learn, to establish social capital and to feel a part of the community impact personal agencies - their skills, ambitions and attitude – positively. It also reduces social marginalization of boys and girls. Even youth at-risk can be re-integrated into the society by projects like this.

Another outcome is the establishment of social ties to important decision-makers outside the community, and the strengthening of social capital within the community between young people and other community members. Social capital embodies also social responsibility and the communication between the various stakeholders. When young people feel that they belong to their community, it is likely that they are more willing to avoid the creation of a dangerous neighborhood such as in Villa Liberación. Both communities struggle with similar youth poverty related issues, yet El Caribe provides a better opportunity structure to support the development of their youth at the moment; also because the acceptable security situation embodies better conditions to implement projects and policies.

But, the empowerment of youth and the community development outcome are linked, so it is not possible to wait with the implementation of empowering measures until the security situation is getting better by itself in Villa Liberación. It is more sustainable to address parts of the opportunity structure, despite the violence and criminality in the streets already now and to focus on positive re-enforcing processes which enhance social awareness and responsibility, improving the security situation slowly, but creating better conditions for following projects. It has to be started at *some* point in order to initiate the establishment of an improved opportunity structure and a better platform for youth development.

Figure 5: Local empowerment strategy in El Caribe



Source: Author

In conclusion, this case illustrates the approach on empowerment by collaborations between various stakeholders, and the valuable correlation between empowerment and development, linked to opportunity structure and personal agency and their re-enforcing nature. Definitely, the experience in El Caribe inspires for similar projects in this area managing the development of the next generation.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

### **7.1 Background of the study**

Significant development literatures put emphasis on the necessity and on the challenge to manage the youth in the South in a sustainable manner in order to mitigate negative development trends and the impoverishment of the young generation.

The economically difficult situation in most developing countries hits young people from lower social classes extremely hard due to their economic immobility and a lack of resources and opportunities (ILO 2005 cited in Benell, 2011, p. 4). But young people have the potential to act as positive change agents if formal and informal institutions provide supportive structures and the access to resources (World Bank, 2006a).

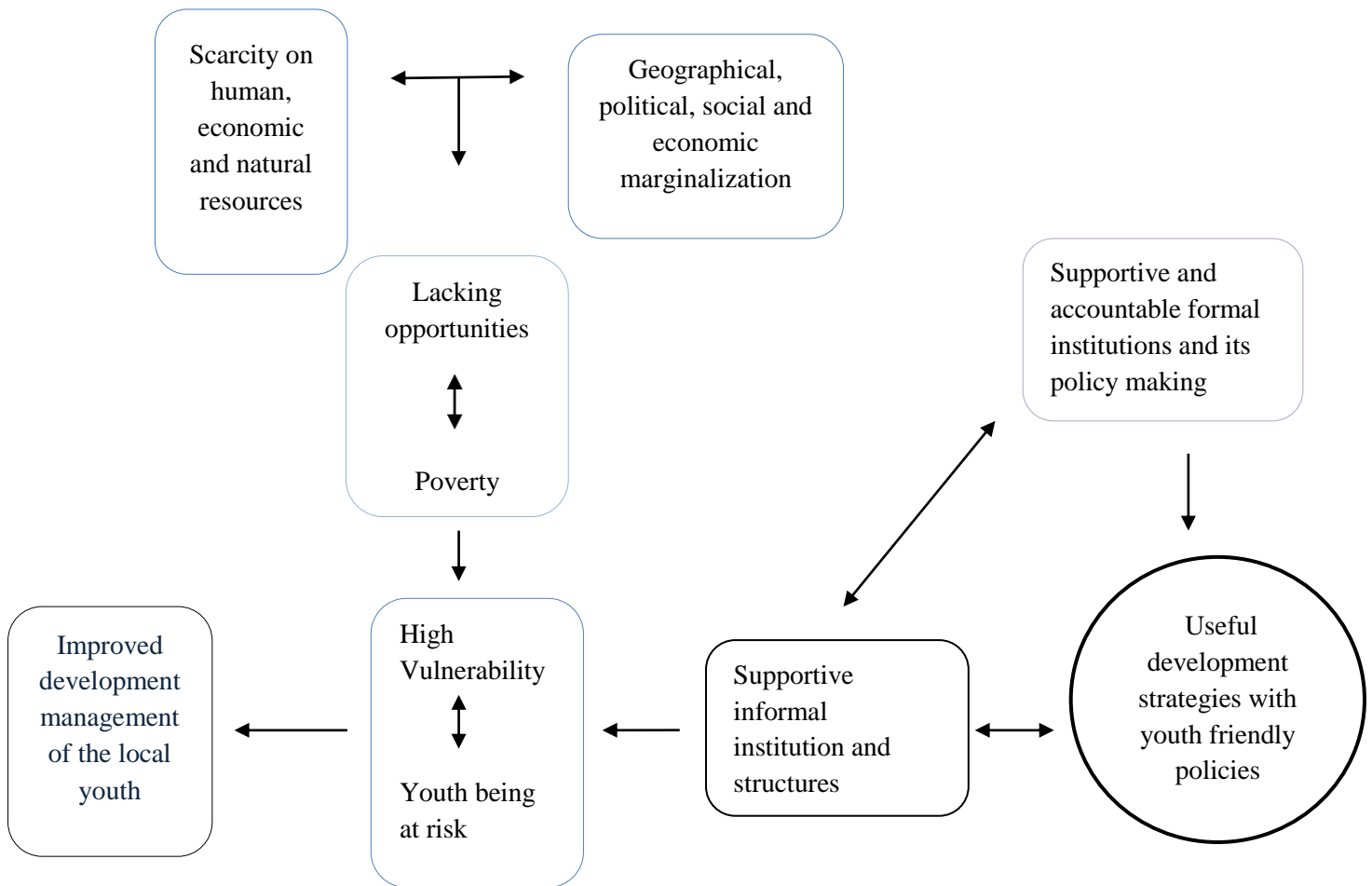
Youth poverty catalyzes the loss of potential human, social and economic capital among adolescents. It ‘produces’ youth at-risk and it impacts the overall development of the country severely. In Latin America and the Caribbean, it is estimated that over 50 percent of the population between 12-24 years is at-risk participating in illegal and dangerous activities (Cunningham et al., 2008, p.4).

In addition to this, in the Dominican Republic the investment in education is the lowest in Latin America and Caribbean even though the country is categorized as upper middle income country. An unemployment rate among young Dominicans of 30.3 percent, not including the high rate of jobless youth puts further perspective on the difficult situation for young people to survive and to achieve well-being when coming from lower social classes (CIA, 2012). Hence, the political marginalization of the youth and the high income inequality in this society indicate the missing awareness on the need to invest in the next generation.

In order to overcome poverty, migration has become a household survival strategy in the Dominican Republic. Yet, the global economic crisis causes partly re-migration of young people returning to their home town. This situation underlines the need for local poverty mitigation strategies in the Dominican Republic - not only in the urban areas but especially in the rural parts of the country where the migration rates are highest (ECLA, 2003; ILO, 2010). The following figure illustrates the most common circumstances for youth poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, underlining the complexity of youth development management

due to its diversity of stakeholders on different levels, in the formal and in the informal institutions.

Figure 6: Contextual overview on youth poverty mitigation



Source: Author

In the development discussion, empowerment strategies aim to improve the capacity of a person to make ‘good’ choices with a sustainable and positive outcome for their life circumstances and realities (World Bank, 2011a). The essential elements of empowerment

approaches are the personal agency of a person - the skills, ambitions and attitude of the individual - and the local opportunity structure providing accessible resources and possibilities enabling the positive development of a person.

There are close links between empowerment and development, between empowerment and the opportunity structure, between personal agency and the opportunity structure; and finally between opportunity structure, personal agency and development outcome (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, p. 6). Transferring this concept to the topic on youth poverty, the nature of the personal agency and the nature of the opportunity structure can determine whether a young person is able to act as a change agent or whether a young person gets caught in poverty, criminality and social exclusion being at-risk.

## **7.2 Research results**

When coming from a poor family, the access to education and to legal work can help young people to avoid an intergenerational transmission of poverty. Obviously, the general life circumstances make it actually difficult for the local youth to use such available opportunities, because they need to work in order to finance studying - school materials, fees and transport - which can affect the quality and the quantity of their education in the end; and they need to study in order to ensure a better income in the future.

Moreover, the financial responsibility several young boys and girls have towards their family or their kids, the financial burden through youth-related material needs in addition to the basic needs, and the awareness of facing an uncertain future in the labor market put much pressure on young people. The adolescents that choose to combine work and education are clearly overburdened, but they agree on the need to work and to study at the same time. Hence, from a short-sighted perspective the work gains more importance than education as it provides income now.

Even though, it is a natural reaction to prioritize work over education considering the scarcity of resources in this population, this process provokes high school drop-out rates and the loss of human capital in the young generation and for the whole Dominican society.

On the other hand, the lack of work and the lack of income restrict the possibility to attend education as well. And, the lack of legal work can push boys and girls into the illegal labor market and into unsustainable survival strategies, jeopardizing their long-term well-being and health.



External circumstances should not hinder but they should enable youth to attend school properly and to work besides if they need to. Hence, it is crucial that working conditions and the law protect young employees better than it is the case today.

A sound and ambitious personal agency can help youth to find the strength and the energy to finish education and to overcome obstacles which occur out of a deficient opportunity structure and the challenging life circumstances. Their agency can also determine whether they choose alternative and dangerous ways to provide income over the legal but underpaid work.

Yet, the establishment of such an advantageous agency is difficult when the environment is characterized by poverty, violence, fear and social problems, as it is the case in Villa Liberación. Both communities of research struggle with dis-empowering social structures but the case in Villa Liberación is worse than in El Caribe and it illustrates clearly which significance the nature of the community has for the life conditions of the young generation. The youth in this community is poor and highly at-risk to become involved into illegal and criminal activities. The high involvement of young people in criminal and violent activities impacts the way in which they are perceived by other community members, as being dangerous, unpredictable and irresponsible. The missing awareness among the population for the necessity of providing second chances for youth at-risk instead of excluding them socially and thereby enforcing a vicious cycle of poverty and criminality, is critical. As a result, there is a tense relationship between the society and youth as a group, affecting the lives of adolescents negatively, putting them in a vulnerable and at the same time excluded position. Hence, the awareness towards such youth related issues needs to be strengthened by top-down as well as bottom-up strategies to address the failing social structures which feed negative development trends in this country.

Young people need help from formal and informal institutions to overcome lacking opportunity structures or a critical personal agency. The society and the politics need to take their responsibilities towards the next generation seriously. Even though top-down strategies are crucial in order to influence failures in the social, political and economic structure, bottom-up projects have absolutely the potential to improve the local environment and its developmental outcomes.

Hence, supportive informal institutions such as friends, family and the community can compensate for the failure of the formal institutions and opportunities to a certain extent. They

can provide guidance, emotional and financial support and they can transfer their knowledge and skills to the younger generation - enriching the personal agency of their kids, friends or neighbors. Hence, social capital plays a vital role for the development of human development, especially in the context of poverty. Social capital enables the community and the families to create an environment which is secure and advantageous for the development of adolescents. Thereby, they improve the conditions for youth to create a personal agency, and then they enable their kids to realize their agencies.

Thus, the formal and informal institutions need to collaborate and they need to build useful and sustainable synergies to improve the quality of the essential opportunities in this region. A synergy between NGO and the local population, youth workers and young people led to the establishment of 'places to be' for the local youth in El Caribe. Boys and girls built the places under the guidance and surveillance of youth workers and other community members and the NGO provided the financial means. The developmental value of this project is to find in the participative learning process for youth, and the increased communication and the social ties between young and old. With the support of the community and the NGO, the boys and girls themselves created social and educative opportunities - a platform on which they can improve their own agency. Such empowerment strategies are cheap and sustainable; they fit into the realities of young Dominicans and involve the howl community.

Clearly, the awareness towards the link between youth poverty and national negative development trends has to be enhanced in the government, the formal institutions and in the civil society. The low governmental prioritization of investments in youth is critical and this ignorance endangers the well-being of the Dominican society. It furthers poverty instead of development.

### **7.3 Final comments on the research strategy**

The security situation in the field led to the exclusion of severely at-risk youth as possible respondents. Even though the situation of this group is partly illustrated in literature and their circumstances have been described to me by other interviewees, the point of view of the socially most marginalized boys and girls would have been interesting.

Another aspect of the research design has been the consideration to compare both communities of research to each other since the security and the criminality situation is worse in one than in the other place, yet under the first field trips it became clear that the same social problems were present in both places. But, Villa Liberación suits better to illustrate the bad impact of a violent and criminal community on youth, whereas El Caribe presents a good case study for the creation of developmental synergies. Yet, both aspects are to find in both places, they differ only in their scale or the process, but not enough for an academic study.

Therefore, there was not enough material to compare the communities to each other. Besides, this research aims to be qualitative and I assume that to be able to compare communities within this topic, quantitative methods and a much bigger amount of time is necessary.

Most literature available on the topic of youth poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean comes from the same development agencies. And most of the existing literature is quite uniform and it does not leave much space for discussion.

This is not the case with the main literature reference for this study. Cunningham (et.al, 2008) provides a deep and holistic insight on the topic of youth poverty and youth at-risk in Latin America and the Caribbean. But, the small amount of academic literature specifically on youth poverty in the Dominican Republic is striking. And another aspect is the lacking availability of academic work written by Dominicans. Their work would complement the research made by foreign researchers in a positive manner.

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## Appendices:

### Appendix 1: Qualitative self-completion questionnaire

(Original with English translation)

#### Cuestionario /questionnaire

Lugar y Fecha place and date:

Sexo gender:

1. Cuántos años tienes? How old are you.....

2. Donde vives? Where do you live? .....

3. Cuantos hermanos y hermanas tienes? How many brothers and sisters do you have? De cuál edad? In which age?

.....  
.....

4. Con quien vives? With you do you live?

a) Mamá mother

b) Papá father

c) Abuelo/abuela grandfathers

d) Amigos friends

e) Solo/sola alone

f) Esposa/esposo wife/husband

g) Hijos kids

f) Hermanos/hermanas brothers/ sisters

f) Otros. Con quién? Others. Who? .....

5. Cual grado en la escuela terminaste? In which year did you finish/leave school?  
.....

6. Has realizado otros estudios fuera de la escuela? Cuáles?  
(computadores, idiomas, electricidad, plomeria, carpintería, belleza, modesta...) Have you participated in other professional or educative courses except from those at school?

.....  
.....

7. Estas estudiando hoy? Are you studying today?

a) Si yes    b) No no

8. En el caso de SI, cual curso/ en qué grado estas ahora? If yes, which level level/class are you attending at the moment?

.....  
.....

9. De quien recibiste ayuda para realizar los estudios? Who supported you with your studies?

- a) De tus padres parents
- b) De tus hermanos/hermanas sisters/brothers
- c) De la comunidad community
- d) De la escuela school
- e) De tus amigos friends
- f) Del gobierno (beca) government (scholarship)
- g) De otras organizaciones? Cuáles? Other organizations? Which ones?  
.....

10.Cuál fue la ayuda recibida? Which kind of support did you receive?

- a) Dinero para pagar la escuela y para comprar libros y otras cosas Money to pay school fees and to buy books and other materials
- b) Ayuda con las tareas Help with homework
- c) Motivación Motivation

11. Por qué estás estudiando? Que es tu motivación? Why are you studying?

What is your motivation?

- a) Tener una carrera Having a career
- b) Ganar mas dineiro Earning more money
- c) Quieres tener mas conocimiento Increasing my knowledge
- d) Tu amigos están estudiandos tambien My friends are also studying
- e) Tus padres quieren que estudias My parents want me to study
- f) Otros razones. Cuales? Other reasons. Which ones?

.....  
.....

12. En el caso de NO, por qué no estás estudiando hoy? If no,why are you not studying right now?

- a) No es necesario estudiar mas, porque ya tienes empleo I don't need to study because I have already a job
- b) No tienes tiempo para estudiar porque estás trabajando también I don't have time to study because I am working
- c) Tienes que viajar lejos para llegar al Centros de estudios I have to travel very far to the school/university
- d) No tienes tiempo porque tienes cuidar de tus hijos o/y hermanos I don't have to study time because I have to take care of my kids
- e) No tienes dinero para estudiar I don't have money to study

- f) No tienes motivación I am not motivated to study
- g) No hay empleo para la gente con buena educación después de los estudios There are no jobs for people with high education
- h) No te gusta estudiar I don't like studying
- i) No sabes escribir o leer muy bien I don't know reading and writing good enough
- j) Repeteste varias veces algún curso Did you have to repeat some courses at school?

13. Estas trabajando? Are you working?

- a) Si yes
- b) No no

14. En el caso de NO, porque no estás trabajando? If no, why are you not working?

- a) No hay empleo There are no jobs
- b) No hay empleo en tu carrera/estudios There are no jobs in my profession or education
- c) No tienes motivación para trabajar. Por qué? You are not motivated to work. Why not?

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- d) No necesitas trabajar, porque tu familia te ayuda con dinero I don't need to work because my family supports me financially
- e) No quieres viajar lejos para trabajar I don't want to travel so far to work
- f) Tienes otro planes? Cuáles? Do you have other plans? Which ones?

.....

15. En el caso que SI trabajas, donde trabajas? If you work, where do you work?

.....

16. Por cuánto tiempo estás trabajando allá? For how long have you been working there?

.....

17. Que prefieren tus padres? What do you parents prefer?

a)..que estudies y trabajes?...that you study and work?

b)..que trabajes?...that you work?

c)..que estudies?...that you study?

18. Por qué ellos prefieren eso? Why do they prefer that?

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19. Y tú, si tu tendrías suficiente tiempo y dinero que prefieres ...

And you, if you had enough time and money, what would you prefer?

a) Estudiar y trabajar? Studying and working?

b) Solo estudiar? Studying only?

c) Solo trabajar? Working only?



20. Por qué prefieres eso ? Why do you prefer that?

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21. Trabajan tus padres? Do you parents work?

a) Si yes                      b) No no

22. Donde trabajan tus padres? Where do you parents work?

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23. Si tu tuvieras mucho dinero, qué querias harías? Qué te gustaría comprar con ese dinero? If you had a lot of money what would you do with it? What would you buy?

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24. Por qué son esas cosas importantes para ti? Why are those things important to you?

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25. Cuéntame de una persona en tu familia o en tu comunidad que tu admiras mucho? Tell me about a person in your family or your community which you admire a lot?

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.....

26. Por qué admiras esa persona? Cuáles son las cualidades más importantes de esa persona? Why do you admire this person? What are her/his most important qualities?

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27. Cuéntame de una persona de cualquier sitio en el mundo que tu admiras mucho? Tell me about a person of any place in this world which you admire a lot?

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28. Por qué admiras esa persona? Cuáles son las cualidades más importantes de esa persona? Why do you admire this person? What are her/his most important qualities?

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29. Qué piensas que TÚ tienes que hacer para conseguir tu carrera o/y tu educación? What do you think you have to do in order to succeed with your education and/or professional career?

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30. Cuáles oportunidades esperas tener en el futuro? For which opportunities do you hope in the future?

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## **Appendix 2: Interview guide for youth (English version)**

This interview guide has been used in different variations and lengths adjusted to the nature of the respondents and the situations.

1. How old are you?
2. Where and with whom do you live?
3. What is the profession and work of your parents?
4. Do you have sisters or brothers?
5. Do they live with you/ your family?
6. Do they work or study? Or both?
7. Where and what do they study?
8. How do they finance their studies?
9. And you are you going to school?
10. If no, why are you not going to school (anymore)?
11. If yes, in which year are you?
12. And how many years more would you like to study?
13. Who pays your school? Who is supporting you financially?
14. What would you like to do after you have finished your school? Would you rather prefer work or going to university? Or both?
15. What is the reason for this decision?
16. What would you like to study?
17. How do you think to pay for the university?
18. Would you parents prefer that you work or that you study after school?
19. Why do they think this way?
20. Do you have plans HOW to realize your future plans after you have finished your school?

21. What do you think YOU have to do in order to achieve what you wish for?
22. Do you know about institutions or organizations here in this community which can help you with scholarships or information?
23. With whom do you speak if you need help with such things like education, career or employment, here in your community?
24. How would you describe the kind of help and support they offer? How helpful is it?
25. Who supports you in your plans to study?  
(Community, school, friends, family, government, organizations)
26. How would you describe the help you received from those?
27. If you did not receive help, what do you think is the reason for that?
28. How would you describe the relationship between young people and older people in general in this place?
29. Why, do you think, are these relationships the way they are?
30. Do you have plans moving away from here?
31. Where to?
32. Why do you want to move to this place?
38. Do you have experienced projects (from Falcondo)? Did you participate or are you currently participating?
33. If yes, how do you feel about the project? Which impact does the project on you and on your life?
34. How is life for young people in this community?
35. What kinds of problems are common among young people?
36. Why do these problems occur here?
37. What needs to be done to improve the situation of the youth here in this community?
38. What kind of support and help do young people need here?
39. Is there anything you would like to add here?
40. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

### **Appendix 3: Interview guide for youth workers, organizations and community members on the topic of youth poverty (English version)**

This interview guide has been used in different variations and lengths adjusted to the nature of the respondents and the situations.

1. How would you describe the situation of young people in the DR today?
2. What are the main issues they are struggling with?
3. What are the external and /or internal reasons for the high rates of poverty among young people in the DR and especially in this community?
4. How would you describe the role of education for the positive development of young people in this community?
5. Which other tools are crucial for the development of young people from your point of view?
6. What can the government do to support a positive development of young people?
7. What can the community do to support a positive development of young people?
8. What can the schools do to support a positive development of young people?
9. What can the parents do to support a positive development of young people?
10. What can young people themselves do to achieve well-being?
11. From your point of view, how does the poverty among young people impact the Dominican society in general and the life in this community in particular?
12. How does the poverty among young people impact this community?
13. How can the poverty among young people impact family life?
14. How much attention does the government/this organization/ this project/this community pay on youth in poverty as an important issue for the local human, social and economic development? Why is it the way you describe it?
15. Do you believe that the situation for young people in this community in general is improving? Why? How?

