



Formative Evaluation of the Youth Policy and Operational Strategy 2020 and Youth-Related Operations at the Caribbean Development Bank, 2020–2025

Strategic Intent and Purpose Scope and Core Questions

The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has long recognised that the region’s youth are not just beneficiaries but are **central to sustainable development**, with over USD 1 billion invested in youth-related programmes throughout the Bank’s history. This evaluation serves as a critical milestone as the Bank prepares its **2026-2035 Strategic Plan**, where youth is positioned as a main axis.

This is a **formative evaluation**. Its primary purpose is to provide timely, evidence-based insights to enhance the ongoing implementation of the **Youth Policy and Operational Strategy (YPOS)**. Rather than measuring long-term impact, this exercise focuses on **strengthening the Bank’s capacity**, identifying implementation gaps, and ensuring the Bank is “fit-for-purpose” to deliver on its youth-focused commitments.

The evaluation covered the conceptual design and initial activities of the YPOS from its launch in 2020 through early 2025. The scope included all **Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs)**, with deep-dive thematic case studies on three priority areas: **Youth Economic Empowerment, Youth Crime and Violence Prevention, and Youth Engagement in Environmental Resilience**.



The assessment was framed around three Evaluation Questions:

1. To what extent is the YPOS design robust, evidence-based, and aligned with the aspirations of Caribbean youth?
2. What early steps have been taken regarding institutional mechanisms and meaningful youth engagement?
3. What internal and external factors (e.g., partnerships, institutional culture) have influenced implementation?

Methodology

The evaluation followed a **utilisation-focused, participatory, and inclusive approach**, aligned with international standards and the Bank's own Gender Responsive Evaluation Guidelines.

- **Mixed-Methods Approach:** Data collection involved an extensive document review, a comparative analysis of five other Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), and field visits to **Belize, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia**.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The team consulted **214 stakeholders**, of which **109 were youth** (51% of total participants). Specific attention was paid to creating "safe spaces" and using youth-friendly methods to engage marginalised and at-risk voices.
- **Systems Lens:** The evaluation applied the **Institutional and Organisational Assessment (IOA)** framework to look at the Bank's internal ecosystem and the **Socio-Ecological Model (SEM)** to understand youth development within the wider Caribbean social context.

Governance

A cornerstone of this evaluation's rigour was the establishment of the **Evaluation Reference Group (ERG)**, which provided high-level quality assurance and governance throughout the process.

Characteristics of the ERG:

- **Internal & External Composition:** The group featured a balanced mix of key CDB staff (from the Social Sector Division) and **external Youth Ambassadors**.
- **Advisory & Validation Mandate:** The ERG was consulted during the inception phase to validate the methodology and again during the reporting phase to vet preliminary findings.
- **Co-creation Role:** Unlike traditional review bodies, the ERG participated in dedicated workshops to **co-create the final recommendations**, ensuring they were grounded in the lived realities of Caribbean youth while remaining operationally feasible for the Bank.

Key Lessons

- **The “Action” Gap:** A high-quality policy design is not enough. Without an approved Action Plan and dedicated human resources, policy implementation remains fragmented and overly reliant on individual “champions” rather than institutional systems.
- **Trust and Continuity:** Ending projects abruptly without clear handover plans or feedback loops can **damage the Bank’s credibility** and shatter the self-confidence of at-risk youth.
- **Holistic Programming:** Interventions yield meaningful gains only when they address the **structural constraints** of the socio-ecological model—such as linking skills training to actual market demand.
- **Internal Awareness:** Inward-facing communication is as vital as outward policy; many staff remain unclear on how to apply youth-mainstreaming “teeth” to sectors like infrastructure or climate finance.

Recommendations for the Board and Management

To transform the YPOS from a document into a driver of regional transformation, the evaluation proposes six strategic actions:

1. Appoint a Senior Management Champion
2. Resource the 2026–2029 Action Plan
3. Institutionalise internal capacity
4. Strengthen the Future Leaders Network (FLN)
5. Expand strategic partnerships
6. Establish a Dedicated Youth Fund



Analogy for Understanding:

The YPOS 2020 provided the Bank with a world-class blueprint for a regional bridge. However, the evaluation shows that while the blueprints are sound, the construction crew (dedicated staff) and the building materials (the Action Plan and Youth Fund) have not yet been delivered to the site. To complete the bridge and allow our youth to cross into a resilient future, the Bank must now provide the necessary investment and leadership to turn those designs into reality.

