

Buenos Aires, 13 December 2010 (IPS) - Convincing young people who have dropped out of school to resume their studies is no easy feat. Which is why a group of social organisations in Argentina are joining with the government to launch a different kind of campaign to bring young people back into the classroom in 2011.

"What we're doing is not entirely new to us, but this is the first time we've had the opportunity to take our work to such a large scale," Miguel Vidal, of the Argentine Forum of Community Radio Stations (FARCO), one of the organisations taking on the challenge, told IPS.

The first task these organisations -- which all have experience in social work at the grassroots level -- have set for themselves is to go out and find elementary and high school dropouts. This groundwork will later be boosted by a radio and television campaign to raise awareness on the importance of receiving an education.

Through the government-sponsored campaign, the administration of Cristina Fernández hopes to draw up to two million young people back into the educational system or into job-training programmes. The target group includes anyone from 18 to 29 years of age who dropped out of primary or secondary school.

The Ministry of Education called for interested applicants to present proposals for implementing the campaign, which will have a budget of 800,000 euros (over one million dollars) financed by the European Union. The call drew primarily large media groups and advertising agencies, in addition to the consortium of civil society organisations.

"Our group's proposal was selected because we have people working throughout the country, and that gives us an advantage, as we can provide information on education and training opportunities available to potential students right in their hometowns," Vidal said.

The entire programme has a total cost of 30 million euros (almost 40 million dollars) and focuses on actions aimed at strengthening and expanding education and training options outside the capital, both in large cities and small towns or villages.

A little under a third of that cost (800,000 euros) will be used for the promotional campaign awarded to the consortium formed by FARCO, Fundación SES (a foundation that implements social inclusion initiatives for young people), and Red GESOL (a network of 60 organisations working to reduce poverty and marginalisation).

The idea is to go beyond convincing dropouts to go back to school, and to "raise awareness among young people about their right to quality education and to participate fully in a community," Adrián Falco, of Fundación SES, told IPS.

FARCO, which groups 65 community radio stations, already has a track record in public interest campaigns and has worked in state programmes and for initiatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

For example, it joined the Ministry of Health in a sex education campaign targeting teenagers, which was conducted in four indigenous languages.

"This project is new to us only because of its scope," the FARCO representative said.

The programme will reach out to young people from 150 cities, towns and communities in 10 provinces with the aim of drawing them back into formal education or some form of training that will enable them to access the job market.

Falco explained that the campaign will include an initial stage, prior to the media awareness campaign, in which educators from Fundación SES will meet personally with young people who have abandoned their studies.

"The fact that we work with other organisations through our network will make it easier for us; we can go directly to the schools and consult enrolment records, so that we know which students have dropped out," he said.

The next step will be to launch the radio and television campaign.

"In our proposal we suggested using actors, singers, and sports stars to speak out to young people and inspire them to go back to school," Vidal said. "Anyone interested can then contact one of our organisations in their area."

These organisations will provide them with tools and contact persons to help them apply to their nearest school or professional training centre.

The winning proposal also includes an opportunity for the public to validate the campaign, as it will convene a group of 30 communications students and young representatives from social movements and political parties, to provide their input and suggestions.

Vidal said that, unlike the proposals presented by media companies or advertising agencies, the consortium's initiative "is not just an advertising campaign" and instead seeks to lay the groundwork for a state-civil society collaboration to achieve the campaign's ultimate goal.

He also denied that the government's awarding of this advertising campaign to a group of civil society organisations is in any way related to the controversial media law passed in October 2009, which was backed by civil society organisations and fiercely resisted by large media corporations, like the Clarín group, because it limits monopolies.

But Vidal admits that the high-profile debate prompted by the law -- still pending implementation due to legal actions filed by Clarín -- did help.

The controversy "gave greater visibility to non-commercial media, and forced large profit-oriented communications companies to include spaces for this kind of campaign," he said.

Source: [IPS](#)