



Adolescent  
Girls Initiative

## Including Childcare in Youth Employment Projects

In many settings, women are the primary childcare providers, and motherhood begins during adolescence. For young mothers without strong family and social support systems, lack of affordable childcare can prevent them from participating in youth employment projects. Accessible childcare services can increase young women's participation rates in training, their productivity (in terms of decreased absenteeism and retention), and there may also be benefits for children's development outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Increasingly, the potential for packaging childcare into economic interventions for poor vulnerable women is being considered, for example into agricultural extension services.<sup>2</sup> Youth employment projects in Latin America have traditionally included childcare in the program design. Similarly, some of the AGI pilots—mainly the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) project in Liberia—integrated childcare into the package of services designed to increase young women's employment and earnings.

### **Lesson Learned: Projects should do their demographic homework to make informed decisions about offering childcare.**

The AGI pilots conducted diagnostic work including vulnerability assessments to understand the prevalence of motherhood among the target populations and assess the need for services. At the same time, projects considered the local supply of childcare services to make informed decisions about the program design. In Liberia, the decision to include childcare in the project was informed by a Girls' Vulnerability Assessment that identified pregnancy and the need to take care of their children as constraints to young women's participation in the labor market and in skills training projects. In the EPAG pilot, nearly 70% of EPAG trainees had one or more children, and the percentage of young mothers in the project continues to increase (to 91% in Round 3) as EPAG expands to more rural areas.

### **Lesson Learned: Design a childcare delivery model that fits the local context.**

There are several options for the provision of services:

- Direct delivery of the childcare services by skills training providers;
- Community-based informal childcare arrangements;
- Vouchers/payments for private service providers; or
- Childcare facilities in markets (if training is provided in marketplaces).

The design choice will largely depend on the location of the project and the particular options available in the area. In contexts where there is a healthy supply of public or private childcare providers it might be more cost-effective to offer vouchers rather than to establish new services.<sup>3</sup> In Liberia the preferred

*"The childcare service] made it difficult to have any excuse for missing class".*

**(Liberia EPAG participant from Red Light Market Community)**

model is for on-site care at all of the training centers, after the first round of training demonstrated that uptake of services was higher when childcare was provided on-site. The designated childcare rooms are nearby the training classrooms (to accommodate lactating mothers), but are not in the same room as the training is conducted.

### Lesson Learned: Encourage the use of existing care and support systems.

The provision of childcare services within youth employment projects is not intended to substitute for existing family or community childcare and support systems. Whenever possible, participants should be encouraged to continually use such services. In South Sudan, the AGI included childcare at some (but not all) of the livelihood training sites, depending on the availability of other means within the communities. In Rwanda, many rural participants prefer to leave their children at home rather than to travel with them to the training site.

### Lesson Learned: Establish clear eligibility criteria for participants and qualifications for childcare providers.

If the project does opt to provide services directly, it is important to establish criteria for both the beneficiaries and the providers to maintain a quality program and keep the scope manageable. In Liberia, EPAG provides on-site childcare to children up to age five. Each EPAG trainee is limited to a maximum of two of her own children. The project developed a clearly defined terms of reference for childcare providers, for example requiring a background or minimum training in First Aid or Nurse Aid.

### Lesson Learned: Define quality assurance mechanisms and do routine monitoring.

EPAG carefully defined basic quality standards, and the project's Quality Monitors make routine, unannounced monitoring visits to ensure that the service providers are in compliance. EPAG's Childcare Guidelines outline the minimum services that childcare must include:



*"The service was a good thing, because it [helped] mothers to have their children close to them whenever they needed to be breast fed."*

(Liberia EPAG participant from Bentol)



Photo credit:  
EPAG MoGD

*“The caregivers used to bathe, change diapers and also wash the soil off the babies. Having such care for the babies encouraged the mothers to relax and focus on the training.”*

**(Liberia EPAG  
participant from  
Gotomo Community)**

- First aid: The administration of pain killers / fever reducers, cleaning and bandaging of bruises and cuts, etc.;
- Sanitation: Bathing and changing diapers;
- Feeding. This primarily entails helping the children eat food provided by their mothers; and
- Protective confinement: Keeping the children, especially toddlers, within the secure environment of the training venues.

The Childcare Guidelines also require service providers to ensure that clean water, soap, a first aid kit, clean mattresses, blankets, towels, toys, and snacks are available in each childcare venue.

## Lesson Learned: Childcare can be included in youth employment projects at a relatively low-cost.

In Liberia, the costs that go into childcare services include:

- Child caregivers stipend;
- Supplies: snacks, mattresses, blankets, towels, toys;
- Facilities: childcare venue rental, etc.; and
- Basic sanitation and first aid supplies.

In EPAG Round 3 the total cost for childcare services for the four month classroom training period was approximately \$17,500. These costs are budgeted directly into the contracts with the service providers. Given that EPAG Round 3 is benefitting 1,000 young women, this means that per student cost of childcare is \$17.50. The monthly cost is US \$4,375, and the monthly per student cost is just US \$4.38. Childcare can be an affordable project component, and can be well worth the cost when trying to reach vulnerable young women.

## Lesson Learned: Childcare provides an opportunity to intervene and benefit children at early ages.

Delivering early childhood development (ECD) services to poor children at young ages can help break the inter-generational cycle of poverty and its associated outcomes. Exposure to quality early childhood education has been shown to improve children’s cognitive development, leading to better performance in

*“The caregivers made it their business to ensure that the babies were brought to the center clean by their mothers. The caregivers also took time to educate the mothers on childcare during recreation time.”*

**(Liberia EPAG participant from Mandingo Quarter Community)**

school and lower dropout rates throughout the education cycle.<sup>4</sup> Simple quality enhancements in childcare programs may dramatically improve early childhood development. For example, it may be possible to improve the quality of learning materials available at the center, or to coach teachers on activities that promote children’s development, or to provide guidance to parents on nutritious meal preparation. The EPAG project in Liberia is currently being reviewed to assess the quality of the childcare services provided at the training sites and make low-cost recommendations for improvements in the delivery of this service in the next round of training.

## Lesson Learned: Youth employment projects working with young parents may be an entry-point for cultivating good parenting skills.

Because EPAG is working with so many young mothers, the project has integrated a unit called “Family Skills” into the life skills training curriculum. In addition, one of the EPAG service providers—the International Rescue Committee—has piloted a parenting skills module called “Parents Make the Difference” (PMD).<sup>5</sup> The training includes child development, appropriate expectations, communication with children, empathy, positive discipline, etc. Participants are also given a small baby/child kit upon completion of parental skills modules as an incentive for participation. Parenting skills training can also provide an important entry point for engaging men and fathers in responsible parenting and encouraging more gender-equitable division of childcare duties.

### Summary Checklist for Integrating Childcare into Youth Employment Projects

- ✓ Has the project conducted diagnostic work to assess the prevalence of motherhood and the demand for childcare services among the target population?
- ✓ Has the project chosen a childcare delivery model that makes sense in the local context and considers the local supply of care services?
- ✓ Has the project exercised care not to disrupt existing care and support systems?
- ✓ Is the childcare accessible and nearby the training site?
- ✓ Are there clear eligibility criteria for participants?
- ✓ Is there a terms of reference for childcare providers that calls for some basic qualifications?
- ✓ Are there quality assurance mechanisms to ensure childcare services meet basic standards of health and safety?
- ✓ Is the project monitoring the quality of the childcare services?
- ✓ Could the services be tailored to improve children’s development outcomes?
- ✓ Has the project looked for opportunities to cultivate good parenting skills?

## Endnotes

1. Buvinic et al, 2013 report that the effects of childcare on child health and development are generally found to be positive, but there needs to be more systematic research on child outcomes along with adult labor market outcomes and effects on fertility is needed to fully assess the effectiveness of childcare programs.
2. Buvinic M, et al, 2013.
3. Buvinic M, et al, 2013.
4. World Bank. 2010. “Investing in Young Children: An Early Childhood Development Guide for Policy Dialogue and Project Preparation.” Washington DC: World Bank.
5. This model is based on learning from the EPAG pilot and an IRC pilot project conducted in Lofa County, Liberia in 2012–2013.