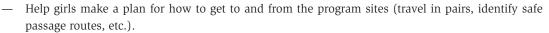# agi Adolescent Girls Initiative

How to Make Youth Employment Programs "Girl-Friendly"

Oftentimes youth programs fall short of reaching adolescent girls by failing to take a gender-sensitive approach to project design and implementation. Experience has shown that to serve adolescent girls—particularly the most vulnerable—programs should be designed to overcome gender-based constraints that prevent girls and young women from benefitting from programs in the same ways which boys do. The Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) pilots provide some straightforward lessons on how to do this in practice.

Lesson Learned: Think "safety first".

In many countries—particularly in post-conflict and post-disaster settings—sexual and gender-based violence is common. Ensuring beneficiaries' safety should be the top concern of service providers. There are several steps that can be taken to prevent violence from occurring and to be prepared to respond if a problem does arise.

— Understand what makes girls safe and unsafe—both physically and emotionally. Conduct a safety scan or community mapping exercise to inform decisions about the timing and physical location of training and work sites.

— Help girls make a plan for how to get to and from the program sites (travel in pairs, identify safe passage routes, etc.).

— Prioritize female classroom trainers. The Liberia AGI requires that 65% or more of trainers are female. All male trainers are required to be paired with a female trainer or coach.

— Build girls' social assets—good group dynamics can help girls feel safe and encourage them to look out for one another. In South Sudan, 100 village-level Adolescent Community Clubs provide safe spaces for girls and young women to receive training and to socialize.

— Conduct sensitivity trainings for providers and/or employers to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. The Jordan AGI conducted a girl-friendly work environment training for employers. The Liberia AGI ran three "Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation & Abuse in the Workplace" workshops for private sector partners. Many of the AGIs established codes of conduct to which trainers are held accountable.

— Educate girls so that they are aware of what gender-based violence is, understand their own rights, and know what to do and who to turn to in case of a problem.

— Create a resource list and referral network to be able to respond quickly in case of a problem. Service providers in Liberia all developed referral directories.

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Lesson Learned: Build the assets that girls need to make a successful transition to employment.

Due to gender inequities and social norms, the set of assets that girls need to make a successful transition to employment can be different from what boys need. Think about which assets the girls already have, what they need (and by when), and which ones your program can help build. A vulnerability assessment and consultations with girls can help gather this information. In South Sudan the AGI is addressing all four types of assets: building social assets through Girl Clubs and mentoring; addressing human assets via livelihood and life skills trainings; building physical assets with safe spaces; and bolstering girls' financial assets through access to savings and credit services. A single program cannot meet every need for every girl. Instead, identify the key context-specific bottlenecks to employment that girls face and focus on building the most essential assets.

	Social	Human	Physical	Financial
Assets:	Social networks Access to institutions	Skills & knowledge Good health Self-esteem Bargaining power	Housing Transport Personal (clothes, etc.) Tools	Cash Savings
Interventions:	Group formation Mentoring Career counseling	Vocational training Business skills training Health education Literacy programs Financial education Rights education	Safe places to meet & work Access to tools or equipment Transportation	Savings Credit Remittance services

Source: Adapted from Austrian, Karen and Dennitah Ghati. 2010. "Girl-Centered Program Design: A Toolkit to Develop, Strengthen & Expand Adolescent Girls Programs." Nairobi, Kenya: The Population Council.

Lesson Learned: Social empowerment matters for economic empowerment—promote friendship and fun.

"There were girls that could not write and felt ashamed to take part…these girls were assisted by the others who could write…and urge them to come to school regularly. With this persuasion and encouragement we were able to overcome this challenge."

Liberian Participant

Vulnerable girls are often socially isolated, and the project could provide one of their only social networks. Projects should create opportunities to have fun and socialize, building good group dynamics and trust among trainees. In turn, social empowerment can lead to better project outcomes—good behavioral and social skills matter for success in the labor market. Making the project enjoyable can increase attendance and completion rates, and social activities like role-plays and games can be good ways of reinforcing learning objectives. In Liberia, project participation is creatively incentivized through attendance prizes, contests and business plan competitions. During the classroom phase, girls are grouped into small teams to help build their social capital. Remember that behavior change is a slow process, and working with more vulnerable girls can take time and patience.

Lesson Learned: Even "free" programs have a cost—consider how to enable participation of the poorest girls.

There are almost always opportunity costs—the value of what was forgone—for people to participate in programs, even if the program is nominally "free." Because girls tend to have many responsibilities and play many roles, their opportunity costs of participation are often very high. Girls cook, clean, fetch water and firewood, and care for their own children, siblings, and elders. AGI programs plan the timing and duration of activities around girls' availabilities. In Liberia trainings are offered in both morning and afternoon sessions, and club hours in South Sudan are held after school hours. Some girls may already be involved in economic activities; participating in the program may actually reduce their income in the

short-term. Girls may also be unable to pay for transportation or for eating outside of the home on training days. Liberia and Haiti are providing stipends to girls to offset some of these costs. Stipends should be designed carefully to support vulnerable girls to participate, without unduly incentivizing participation and incurring burdensome program costs. Stipends should be administered regularly and are ideally tied to attendance rates and punctuality. Also, programs need to be very cautious about how money is given to girls, since having cash can make girls more susceptible to theft or violence. The Haiti AGI is experimenting with delivering stipends via mobile money to ensure money is safely delivered to girls and remains in their control.

Lesson Learned: Many adolescent girls are already mothers—childcare services can enable their program participation.

In many places around the world, motherhood begins during adolescence. Unless young mothers have strong family and social support systems, they may not be able to find affordable care for their children, and thus may be unable to participate in the program. Consider making childcare services available to beneficiaries.

— Understand the prevalence of motherhood among the target population through diagnostic work in order to make an informed decision about how to address the issue. In Liberia, approximately 70% of trainees have one or more children so the program decided to offer childcare services at all of its training venues.

— If the program does provide childcare, be sure to monitor the quality of services. The Liberia AGI has standardized childcare delivery to ensure that the basic parameters of each nursery are the same.

— If many beneficiaries are mothers, consider including a module on parenting education within the program's life skills curriculum. Based on a demonstrated need for this in Liberia, future rounds of life skills training will include enhanced modules on parenting.

"[The] childcare service helped those who had children and those who did not… [If] there was no childcare services [girls would] bring along their children which [would] cause problems for everyone in the class because these children would cause noise or cry in class."

Liberian Participant)

Lesson Learned: Support girls to succeed in demand-driven fields.

Girls' families, male partners, employers, or even the girls themselves, may think that certain jobs are only for men—not "women's work". Programs should create skills that address emerging market opportunities and high value-added activities. In Nepal, the AGI is training girls in fields such as mobile phone repair, motorcycle repair, masonry and electricity. In Liberia, girls are learning to be professional painters, drivers and security guards, among other trade areas. In Lao PDR, career counseling offices are providing students with job vacancy information in sectors and trades with high demand for labor. Changing gender norms can be a delicate process. Programs should support girls and be careful not to expose them to undue risk of stigmatization or rejection by their families and communities. Successful strategies include:

— Conduct a local labor market assessment to understand the major constraints facing job-seekers, to identify current labor market opportunities, and to gauge where jobs growth is most likely to occur.

— Educate beneficiaries about the relative wages offered by various trades, and encourage girls to aspire beyond traditionally "feminine" fields.

— Engage employers early on in the program. Sensitize them to entry constraints faced by girls and encourage them to consider girls in their hiring practices. The Jordan AGI provides short-term job vouchers to employers. In Haiti, the project surveyed employers early on in the design phase to generate interest in the program and identify perceived bottlenecks for girls' employment.

— Identify female role models who are succeeding in non-traditional trades.

— Engage communities, families, husbands and boyfriends in the project through community mobilization and sensitization activities.

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

Liberian Participant

Lesson Learned: Girls need added support to grow their networks and connect to the labor market.

With smaller social networks and fewer contacts, young women typically receive less information about jobs and training opportunities compared to males. Even if they know about opportunities, social norms may discourage girls and weaken their confidence. Programs need to provide added support to young women during the transition from training to the labor market.

— Provide personalized job intermediation and placement services.
— Provide coaches or mentors to follow-up with the girls after the classroom training and help them make good choices during their transition to employment.
— Use performance-based contracts to incentivize the trainers to help with placement. In Liberia, bonuses are awarded to training providers that successfully place graduates in jobs or micro-enterprises. In Nepal, service providers receive greater compensation for training and placing more vulnerable girls.
— Partner with the private sector. In Lao PDR, the program is partnering with banks to increase young women's' access to financial services. Liberia will experiment with providing tailored trainings for individual companies in return for their commitment to hire girls upon completion of the training.

Lesson Learned: Empower young entrepreneurs to be decision-makers.

"Before I joined the program, I faced significant challenges when I looked for a job," she said. *"I felt hopeless and frustrated. After I got the voucher, I had hope again. It encouraged me."*

Jordanian Participant

Going into self-employment requires a certain amount of risk-taking and is not for everyone. Still, when working in contexts where the opportunities for wage employment are limited, it is important for pro-grams to provide basic entrepreneurship skills to everyone and to have a realistic assumption of how many trainees can be placed in wage employment. Programs should build young entrepreneurs' agency to direct their lives and put their assets to use. For example, it is problematic (and maybe even harm-ful) to give a girl access to credit if she is not in charge of her own finances. Providing "start-up" kits to young entrepreneurs can be similarly futile if the girl cannot prevent others from pressuring her to sell the items for cash. Through training and mentoring, AGIs are supporting girls to make informed choices about self-employment.

Summary Checklist To Make Youth Employment Programs Girl-Friendly

✔ Is the time and location of the program safe for girls?
✔ Do girls understand their rights—as workers and as young women?
✔ Are program staff and employers sensitized to girls' safety concerns?
✔ Is the program building the key assets girls need to be successful economically?
✔ Can girls afford the costs of attendance? Can they manage a stipend?
✔ Is the program meeting the needs of young mothers?
✔ Are girls informed about labor demands and relative wages in the market?
✔ Is the program helping girls to connect to labor market opportunities?
✔ Is the program mitigating girls' risk of stigmatization or community rejection?
✔ Is the program helping to grow girls' social capital?
✔ Are girls being supported to make informed choices about self-employment?

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