**Guidelines for EPAG Round Three Recruitment & Selection**

**Introduction**

This document describes the strategy for recruitment and selection of trainees for the third round of EPAG. The goal of the recruitment effort was to recruit 1,000 adolescent girls and young women into EPAG’s training programs in 12 communities in Monrovia, Kakata and Grand Bassa. A total of 815 (82%) of the girls are being trained in business development skills and 185 (18%) are receiving job skills training. Training classes for job skills started on October 30, 2013, and business development skills commenced on September 14, 2013.

EPAG Round Three has extended into Grand Bassa County and still remains in Kakata, Margibi County and Monrovia. Although the recruitment process in Round Three was different from that employed during the pilot phase, it remained well-coordinated and consolidated, reflecting the highest standards for transparency, nondiscrimination, and fairness. All measures were taken to protect the credibility and integrity of the EPAG project, making sure no one trainee gets undue advantage over others.

**Eligibility criteria**

Based on experience from the first two rounds of training, and knowing that information about girls during recruitment will largely be self-reported, the team was careful to keep secret the specific eligibility criteria. Otherwise, candidates would have adjusted their profile to fit the parameters set in the criteria. Additionally, where applicable, candidates were obligated to provide proof of the information they provided (e.g. proof of age, date of birth, school status, etc.). For the job skills applicants, additional criteria were used to validate the information provided by the girls. These criteria included conducting background checks and interviews with all short-listed applicants to verify the information provided by the girls.

The eligibility criteria for the EPAG Round Three were:

1. **Age**: The participants must be aged 20-24 for job skills (JS), and 16-24 for business development skills (BDS).
2. **Education / Literacy**:
   1. The participants for job skills have more advanced literacy skills and schooling (compared to the BDS trainees). They comprise a mixture of high school graduates, high school dropouts, and high school (night school) students. A limited number of JS trainees are enrolled in post-secondary education.

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* 1. The participants for business development skills have more limited literacy and schooling (but not zero literacy). These trainees fall within the “NEET” categorization as much as possible (“NEET” = not in education, employment, or training). BDS trainees are primarily school dropouts or night school students, with a small number of girls who never attended formal school.

1. **Residence:**

In Round Three, BDS venues continue to be community-based, meaning BDS trainees reside in or very near the community in which their training center is located. For JS in Round Three, the two training venues (one in Monrovia and one is Buchanan) are centrally located, with JS trainees coming from various locations across town to attend class. The program is aware that it was not always possible to obtain written documentation to confirm the above criteria. As such, screening process relied predominantly on the self-reported information from the applicants. The main exception was literacy, in which a basic literacy / numeracy assessment was administered – different versions were tailored for the JS and BDS trainee profiles. For JS, background checks and interviews of short-listed applicants allowed the program to verify the information provided by the girls. For BDS, verification of age or residence status were verified on a case-by-case basis when the information provided by the girl was called into question by the screener or recruitment supervisor. Moreover, random spot-checks were done by the EPAG PIU team in the field to ensure quality control.

1. **Timeline for the recruitment process**

* Recruitment was scheduled to be conducted across the 12 communities over a period of three weeks, but given the challenges encountered by the team in reaching the needed number of girls for BDS, an additional three weeks were allotted to allow the teams reach the needed number of girls.
* Not surprisingly, JS recruitment was a smoother process, as it was easier to find 185 girls from across Monrovia and Buchanan meeting the age and education / literacy requirements. One additional week was needed to complete JS recruitment.
* As expected, recruitment of 815 girls meeting the BDS criteria was a serious challenge—particularly because so many girls are in formal day school (which is good progress for Liberia, but makes it harder to find out-of-school girls for the training). Thus, the extra three weeks was needed to meet the recruitment numbers in the 10 BDS communities.

1. **Responsibilities of MoGD and SPs**

* The MoGD worked closely with the service providers (SPs) in planning, designing, and implementing the recruitment exercise. This process included the design of tools, coming up with workable recruitment strategies, training SP staff on the usage of designed tools, designing and administering the “warm up exercise” (the literacy / numeracy assessment), and implementing the actual recruitment exercise. The recruitment tools included a well-designed form that was presented, discussed, and adapted by staff of MoGD and SPs. The forms were used to register girls who showed up during the registration process.
* The SPs were involved in the actual recruitment of girls in their respective communities. The SPs worked with community dwellers as well as EPAG Trainee Mobilizers (EPAG graduates) to carry out the mobilization of applicants in these communities.
* Communities in which both the JS and BDS SPs work, they collaborated closely on the recruitment process (e.g. Buchanan City, ELWA, GSA, Duport Road, select communities along Somalia Drive, etc.).
* SPs and the MoGD were responsible for ensuring the objectivity of each member of their staff: i.e., that their staff do not reveal the exact program eligibility criteria, and do not try to influence who gets information about the program or who gets selected for the program.

1. **Planning for Recruitment**

* MoGD led a process in which series of meetings were held with SPs to review, discuss, and adapt strategies for EPAG Round Three recruitment exercise. The following were outcomes which facilitated the entire recruitment process:
* It was made clear that transparency and openness in the selection process were of paramount importance and random spot checks would be done by the EPAG team to ensure quality control. A strong policy of non-discrimination governed trainee selection, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion, political affiliation, familial status, or disability.
* A standardized registration form that was used to gather information on girls’ name, age, education background, training suitability, literacy, and contact information.
* Development of factsheets which contained brief explanations of EPAG Round Three. The explanations included information on job skills and business development skills. The factsheets were produced and made available to community residents and other stakeholders.
* The recruitment strategies also instructed SPs to locate and define catchment areas to ensure that girls can safely travel to and from the training centers.
* MoGD met with SP teams to specifically review procedures and assign responsibilities for the recruitment exercise. The MoGD PIU invited other staff from the Ministry (specifically from the Women’s Division) to participate in the recruitment exercise.

1. **Awareness and Mobilization for Recruitment**

* Some of the techniques used to mobilize the communities for recruitment are included in the list below;
* Mass awareness campaign carried out by the recruitment teams. The teams used loud speakers mounted on vehicles in each community and move around the communities with one person using the microphone to explain about EPAG Round Three.
* The message on the microphone was clear and explained the purpose of EPAG, the high level of transparency, and non-discrimination that is practiced by the project. The message went on to say that EPAG is a project that is free to all girls and young women with in the communities, regardless of your tribe, religious and political affiliations, you are welcome to come and register. The date of registration was also made clear as the message went on.
* It was also made very clear in the message that registering does not guarantee anyone’s acceptance in the program. The public was informed that the listing of the selected girls would be posted up in the communities after the entire recruitment exercise.
* The team was careful to not reveal to the public specific eligibility criteria (e.g. age range) because then many girls would present themselves to fit those criteria, making verification more time-consuming and possibly contentious.
* During the mobilization and awareness period, outreach did NOT occur in schools, because as a good practice, the MoGD in no way wanted to tempt girls who are in school since the program is not for girls who are in school.
* The recruitment teams distributed factsheets within the communities and during community meetings and also at mosques and churches. The team posted factsheets in areas where target population could easily see them, such as health centers, video clubs, night clubs, market areas etc.
* Community meetings were held at times designed to allow the maximum number of community dwellers and stakeholders to participate. Also, the meetings were held at times that were safe enough for girls to travel home after the meetings.
* To ensure equal participation of girls across the communities, the recruitment teams also employed a door to door recruitment strategy to recruit girls. This strategy was applied for both JS and BDS.

**Important:**

It was imperative that at any time during the recruitment process, if the staff member determines that the girl did not meet the program’s eligibility criteria, the staff member did NOT disclose this information to the girl. The only information that was given to the girls was that after the registration period, the listing of eligible girls would be posted in the communities and every one will come and see.

The following were part of the information given to the communities before the start of registration.

* A girl’s acceptance into the program is NON-transferrable to any other girl.
* If successful, a girl may NOT transfer to any other site, or to the other type of training.
* If successful, the girl must be ready to start training on September 30, 2013.
* The girl IS NOT GUARANTEED employment or a loan upon completion of the program.
* The girl must attend regularly or else she will be asked to leave the program.
* Once a girl drops out of the program, she will not be allowed to rejoin at a future date.

1. **Registration for both JS and BDS**

After the intensive awareness raising about the start of EPAG’s recruitment process within the communities, the recruitment teams began the registration process of interested girls who showed up at designated registration sites. The process was well planned and was carried out in an orderly manner. The team used a standardized form that was developed by the recruitment team headed by the MoGD PIU prior to the registration. The information that was collected through the forms included girls’ age, education levels, current school status, address and so on. The information was needed to make preliminary decisions on accepting the girl to form part of the “warm up exercise” and overall acceptance and placement as relates to the two training components (JS and BDS). The registration was done for both training components separately.

1. **JS Registration**

In Montserrado County where both the JS and BDS training are ongoing, the registration was done separately in communities where the JS stand alone. For example, the registration in the Old Road and the Susan Barry Communities were carried out only by staff of LEED (the JS service provider).

For communities in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, the registration for both the BDS and JS was done together at the same registration sites (with the exception of Gorblee).

In order not to waste time in sorting out the forms for the two components, both teams quickly exchanged forms in respective of information provided on the forms. The exchange of forms was based on information suitability for either of the two training component. Given the challenge in identifying the targeted number of girls, the registration for the JS was extended for additional one week following an appeal from LEED that was granted by the MoGD.

**BDS Registration**

Throughout the three counties, the registration for the BDS component took place at designated venues where interested girls gathered. Because the eligibility criteria were not disclosed to the communities, the BDS component registered a lot of girls and young women who did not meet the age eligibility criteria. MoGD was involved in the entire recruitment exercise starting from mobilization to registration and the administration of the warm up exercise. Given the huge number of girls who turned out to registered, staff members from the MoGD including the Women’s Division helped in the registration process in Buchanan Grand Bassa County. Additional three weeks was given to the BDS registration process because the outcome of the registration did not yield the number of eligible girls needed for the BDS component.

**Sorting out the forms after registration**

After the registration process, the teams sorted out the registration forms on a daily basis to determine the number of girls who met the eligibility criteria. While analysing the forms, the teams were keen to note information about girls’ age; current school status; whether girls were in school at the time of recruitment; and if a girl was in school, what session she is attending. These were among the primary decision-making information in order for a girl to be accepted into the program. Because so many Liberian girls are now in formal day school, in many instances only a small number of girls could qualify out of large numbers of applicants. For example, in many cases, only one girl could qualify from among ten girls. The teams decided to analyse and sort out the forms in order to reduce the number of girls who were taking the “warm up exercise,” as it was a futile use of time having so many ineligible girls sitting for the assessment.

**Posting the names of girls for the warm up exercise (BDS)**

The names of girls who met the initial criteria for BDS were then posted to come for the warm up exercise. The team was careful not to characterize the warm up exercise as a test, per se, because that has the propensity to scare girls away. The girls were called and then sat for the assessment.

1. **Administering the warm up exercise**

Literacy / numeracy assessment, called “warm up exercises” were designed for both the JS and BDS trainee profiles, with the JS assessment being a little more advanced and the BDS assessment being very, very basic. The assessments were drafted, tested, and revised prior to the recruitment exercise. Detailed scoring instructions for the assessments were also delineated to ensure consistency and fairness, including, for example, instructions for grading on a curve for each community.

**Selecting the names of girls who pass the warm up exercise**

After marking the papers and applying the scoring criteria, the names of girls who passed the test were processed from among the rest of the names. These names were entered into an excel spread sheet from which further processing was done. The selection process was done separately by the JS and BDS service providers.

**Sorting out successful trainee listings**

A critical part of the recruitment process was designing which criteria to use in coming up with a final listing of selected girls that would be posted within the communities. The aim was to have both a final listing and a standby listing, knowing that not all girls would be available to join the program. Moreover, in the instance where there was a surplus of eligible girls, it was important to have priority criteria, consistently administered, in order to come up with the final lists. In this instance, references were made to different sources in order to ensure transparency and fairness in the selection process, for example, prioritizing younger girls, prioritizing girls living near the training venues, prioritizing girls who provided all the required contact information on the registration form, etc. The project was also keen to consider the school status of the girls, i.e. whether a particular girl is in formal day school or not. In this case, priority was given to girls who were dropouts or girls who were in night school, etc. If a girl was in formal day school during the time of recruitment, the time of her classes was considered to see if she might still be able to participate in the training. This final sorting process was done extensively by the PIU at the MoGD. This was part of the strategies put in place to ensure transparency and to avoid people being favoured by any member of the recruitment teams or the SPs.

1. **Posting the names of successful candidates**

The final stage of the recruitment process was posting the names of successful candidates. This process again was led by the MoGD. After the SPs submitted all the lists of girls who passed the warm up exercise, the MoGD used the lists to sort out the number of girls that were needed per training venue using the above selection criteria. The names were carefully processed and placed on separate sheets per registration sites. The MoGD instructed the SPs to post the listing at the various registration sites in the three counties. The JS lists were posted before the BDS. The delay in posting the BDS list was due to the extension in the BDS recruitment process.

**Posting factsheets along with the lists**

Before the final list of girls who were successful was posted in the communities, the team met and agreed on designing a factsheet that would be used for information dissemination. The factsheet was clear in providing the necessary information that the public needed on the recruitment process.

**Preparing and using the standby list**

Given EPAG’s experience from the first two rounds of implementation, the project team was aware of the importance of preparing a standby list. As evidenced from the previous rounds of the project, not all of the selected girls show up for training. Therefore, at the time of creating the final lists for JS and BDS, the team also reviewed and prepared a standby list to be used as needed. As a way to avoid having inadequate number of trainees, two weeks was given to the originally selected girls to see whether they would show up and attend classes. After observing and noting the attendance of trainees for the first two weeks, the MoGD through the PIU requested the names of girls who have not shown up for the period. The PIU than went back to the standby list and sorted out again following the same order to select the required number of girls from among the names in to be issued as replacements.

In two BDS communities, where there were not adequate numbers for standbys, the PIU worked with the service provider to create a transparent community selection method in which names of eligible candidates were sent to the PIU and the team randomly selected a portion of those names for the training. (This process was modelled on a method used during Round Two of the project.) This process, which the team dubbed “Filling the Gap” was used for 22 trainees.