

Mentoring for Success in the Labor Market

Why Does Mentoring Matter?

Mentors can motivate young women and help them persevere in the face of difficulties with their businesses or employment, as well as in their personal lives. Studies from developed countries show that mentoring can have positive motivational outcomes that could in turn lead to better educational and professional outcomes.^{1,2,3} Mentoring has been shown to lead to the development of coping skills and an increased willingness to challenge oneself and attempt new experiences.⁴ Mentors can also serve as role models who help grow girls' aspirations and provide them with active reinforcement to overcome gender bias in labor markets. In India, Beaman et al (2012) found that exposure to women in positions of leadership and power has a role model effect that can change adolescent girls' preferences around education, desired fertility and their desired occupation.⁵ Campos et al (2013) suggest that exposure to role models can be a critical determinant of whether or not women cross-over into male dominated sectors.⁶ Mentors may also play an important role in access to information, a proven barrier to girls' successful entrance into the labor market. Mentors can inform young women about educational or employment opportunities, and can link them to other services and networks. Mentors can play an important role in youth employment programs by reinforcing training lessons outside of the classroom and after the classroom training period concludes.⁷

"I was not keeping record on the small business that I have, but when my mentor visited my business area, and found out that I was not keeping records, she taught me the importance of record keeping, and she now inspects my records on a weekly basis."

(Liberia EPAG Participant)

Do Mentoring Interventions Improve Labor Outcomes?

Mentoring is thought to be important for improving young women's economic standing in developing countries, but it is largely unproven as an intervention. Much of the existing mentoring literature in developing countries focuses on mentoring for and by adult female entrepreneurs, explicitly focused on creating networks for businesswomen.⁸ Buvinic et al (2013)'s literature review on promoting women's empowerment states that mentoring for young women is a high potential intervention on conceptual grounds, but notes the lack of empirical evidence.⁹ Mentoring may be an effective program component or delivery mechanism within comprehensive economic empowerment programs. Several economic empowerment interventions have been rigorously evaluated and show significant labor market effects.^{10,11,12,13,14} Generally speaking, these interventions combine mentoring with economic asset building through vocational skills training, livelihoods training, financial literacy skills, and/or access to financial services. However, similar to the AGI evaluation designs, the isolated contribution of mentoring to project outcomes is not explicitly explored in these evaluations.

How Does the AGI Incorporate Mentoring?

Several of the AGI pilots incorporated a mentoring component into the project design as a practical strategy for achieving the project goals. The designs of the mentoring components vary across the pilots, as do the profile and role of the mentors (see Table 1).

"She [the mentor] encouraged us not to depend on men or our beauty, which in the long run will fail us, so we should take the training seriously."

(Liberia EPAG Participant)

Measuring Access to Mentors in the AGI

AGI impact evaluation surveys measure girls' social support because these social assets can be both a determinant of success in the program and a potential outcome of the program. Surveys inquire about girls' access to a mentor, as well as whether or not there are women engaged in similar business ventures within their communities whom they look up to as role models.

Results from Liberia show that those in the treatment group were 38 percentage points more likely to report that they had someone in their life who they regarded as a mentor. When asked how often they spoke with their mentor about business matters, treatment group respondents reported significantly more interaction than their control group counterparts.

In Nepal, those who completed the project in the 2010 cohort were 10 percentage points more likely to report that they had a business mentor. Considering that the Nepal AGI did not have an explicit focus on pairing participants with mentors, researchers hypothesize that increasing girls' access to skills training alone can improve their access to business mentors.

Lesson Learned: Mentors can help youth employment projects achieve their intended outcomes, typically at very low cost.

By encouraging young people's social and economic empowerment, mentors can be valuable resources to youth employment projects. For example, in Liberia coaches serve as assistant trainers in the classroom and "play ma" to the class. Coaches also provide critical follow-up services to troubled trainees and to all graduates after the classroom training phase is complete. In the Haiti AGI, mentors deliver the life skills training, provide psycho-social support, and help trainees make decisions about the training courses and internships. In South Sudan the Adolescent Leaders are in charge of all club activities and serve as the life skills training instructors. Experience suggests that, at a very low price tag, mentors have led to increased motivation among the trainees, reduced absenteeism, and reduced attrition from the projects.

Lesson Learned: A mentor can wear many "hats"—establish clear expectations about roles and responsibilities.

Because mentors can be incorporated into youth employment projects in a variety of ways, it is important to define the duties and time commitment very clearly. Mentors should also have clear expectations of what they can expect in terms of support from project staff. Projects should produce terms of reference for mentors and follow-up to ensure that mentors understand and accept these terms. Some potential roles that mentors can play include:

- *Advisor:* Mentors can share their knowledge and experience with mentees, and provide advice on business start-up and employment, as well as other issues affecting young people's development.
- *Role Model:* Mentors can demonstrate appropriate and positive behavioral choices. Mentors can follow-up with youth in their daily lives to make sure they are making good choices.
- *Resource Helper:* Mentors can help refer mentees to services (e.g. business advisory services, education and training opportunities, health services, etc). Projects should help mentors to be aware of their limits and encourage the referral of mentees in cases beyond the purview of mentors.
- *Friend:* Mentors can encourage mentees, listen without judgment and help solve personal problems.
- *Teacher:* Equipped with the appropriate training and capacity-building, mentors can serve as educators (e.g. Life Skills in South Sudan).

Table 1: Mentoring in the AGI Pilots

	Ratio	Role of Mentors	Profile	Benefits to Mentors
Haiti	1 Mentor per class (approx. 25)	Mentors conduct the life skills training and provide psycho-social support to participants in individual sessions. They help young women make informed decisions about the type of training and internship; they provide a network of peers and role models for guidance; they try to motivate young women who do not attend classes regularly or dropped out to go back to the program.	Young educated women with experience in community work within their neighborhoods.	Monthly salary of USD \$200 approx. Training from the NGOs and scholarships from technical centers to receive additional training.
Laos	1 Mentor per finalist	Mentors provide support in business start-up and expansion to business competition finalists.	Members of the Young Entrepreneurs Association of Laos (YEAL), successful female entrepreneurs and trusted adults.	Volunteer positions.
Liberia Round 1	1 Mentor per every 7 trainees	Mentors provided support, encouragement and guidance to trainees on their businesses or jobs in 56 hours of group and one-on-one sessions, mostly outside the classroom.	Respected community women.	Service to the community plus a small (\$3.00/hour) mentoring stipend.
Liberia Rounds 2 & 3	1 Coach per class (approx. 25)	Coaches attend the classroom training and serve as assistant trainers and mothers to the class. Coaches follow-up with absentee or troubled trainees. They also follow-up with girls after the training at their jobs or businesses.	Respected community women.	Coaches benefit from the training and receive certificates during the graduation. They also receive a volunteer "coaching stipend" of USD \$50.00 per month, a \$10.00 calling card each month, and a savings account is opened for each coach (with a USD \$5.00 deposit).
South Sudan	1 Adolescent Leader per club community	Adolescent Leaders manage the club activities in the community and facilitate life skills trainings.	Young women (age 19-22) who are residents in the communities, and possess basic literacy and leadership skills.	The Adolescent Leaders receive a small honorarium and benefit from capacity-building trainings in operational management, leadership, and life-skills facilitation.
Rwanda	4 mentors serving 20 cooperatives (621 trainees)	Mentors assist trainees with cooperative formation (including articles of incorporation and registration), identification of market opportunities, development of the business plan, and support in savings and access to finance, and liaise with local authorities.	Successful business women from within the community.	Salaried positions.

Lesson Learned: Recruit mentors whose skills and experience are appropriate for the project and match the trainees' needs.

Considering the role that the mentors will play, think carefully about the desired profile of the mentors. For example, the profile of a life skills mentor will be different than for a business mentor (see Table 2). If possible, include girls and young women in the process of defining mentor qualifications to improve the likelihood that the match will be sustainable. When defining mentor qualifications, think about the following:

- *Location:* AGI mentors typically reside in the same communities as the mentees to maximize interactions.
- *Appropriate age and gender:* The AGI uses only female mentors. In South Sudan the Adolescent Leaders are young women themselves, and are able to communicate as peer educators. In Liberia older women are respected and are more effective mentors.

- *Professional standing:* If the mentor is expected to provide business or professional advice, they should meet some minimum qualifications in this area.
- *Skills:* Depending on the role of the mentor, basic literacy may be required. Leadership, communication and listening skills are also all very important.
- *Personal commitment:* Mentors should demonstrate a sense of dedication and commitment to the job. On a practical level, ensure that mentors have sufficient time in their schedules to do a quality job.

Lesson Learned: Maximize frequent, meaningful interactions between mentors and mentees.

Practical experience indicates that more frequent interactions are important for nurturing relationships between mentors and mentees. The Liberia Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) project switched to a classroom-based coaching model in Round 2 based on feedback from trainees who wanted more frequent interactions with mentors. Consider:

- *One-on-one versus group interactions:* This will depend on the project design and the duties of the mentor, but small group mentoring is usually more cost-effective and easier to monitor and supervise than on-to-one arrangements.
- *Ratio of mentors to mentees:* This varies across the AGI pilots, but generally speaking lower ratios can allow mentors to focus more intensely on the needs of each mentee. A suggested group mentoring ratio is 2 mentors to 20 mentees (2:20).
- *Dosage and frequency of interactions:* Again this varies across the pilots, but practical experience indicates that mentoring can be more effective if it allows for substantial interaction and occurs on a regular basis.

Lesson Learned: Support mentors with capacity-building and supervision monitoring.

Mentors need to be supported to build their capacities throughout the project cycle. Some best practices include:

- *Mentor training:* Projects should include a mentor training at the onset of the project to ensure that mentors understand their roles and feel equipped to carry out their duties. If mentors will be instructing life skills or other trainings, this is an important time for them to review content and practice facilitation. In Liberia, the project organized a two-day mentoring training at the beginning of the project that introduced mentors to the EPAG project design, discussed the duties of the mentors,

"By then I was really, I was very stubborn somehow, I could not even get to what my parents are telling me. But since I have become a leader, I have realized myself and other people."

(Adolescent Girl Leader, South Sudan)



Liberia EPAG Mentors. ©EPAG/MoGD

Table 2: Comparing Life Skills Mentors and Business Mentors

	Life Skills Mentors	Business Mentors
Profile	Life skills mentors are young women (age ~18 to 30) who reside in the project communities. They are typically out of school with some basic literacy.	Business mentors are accomplished female entrepreneurs who are respected in their community.
Capacities & Duties	Because they are based in the communities, life skills mentors are well-positioned to help girls with community and family problems. Using a training of trainers (ToT) model, mentors can be trained to form a cadre of life skills trainers.	Business mentors advise younger women on their businesses and are role models of success. While they might also be a resource for girls' personal problems, they are uniquely qualified to provide business mentoring.
Availability and Remuneration	Life skills mentors are typically paid a small stipend for their time and effort.	Business mentors may have less time if they have their own successful business to run. They may demand a salary, or it may be possible to recruit them as volunteer community servants.
Supervision & Monitoring	May require more intensive training, capacity-building, and monitoring from the program staff, particularly if they are being trained to implement a life skills program.	Will require routine supervision and monitoring.
Scale	Increasing the scale is feasible because there is typically a high supply of community-based mentors and the costs are low.	This model may be more challenging to scale if there is a low supply of successful female business mentors, particularly outside urban centers.

included of capacity-building activities on communication and problem-solving, and addressed the limits of the mentors and how to react in situations involving abuse, health, or safety issues.

- *Routine mentor meetings:* Regular meetings provide an opportunity for program staff to “check-in” with mentors and problem-solve on issues as they arise. They can provide an opportunity for mentors to exchange ideas and discuss challenges, and can help build trusting relationships between project staff and mentors.
- *Refresher trainings and on-going coaching:* Periodic refresher trainings are particularly important if the mentor is delivering content such as Life Skills Training, where incorrect information on certain topics could actually cause more harm than good. These can be as frequent as monthly or bi-monthly. In South Sudan BRAC conducted refresher trainings for Adolescent Leaders every six months.

Lesson Learned: Retain mentors with appropriate incentives and rewards.

Being a mentor can entail a substantial commitment of time and energy. Projects should acknowledge mentors' contributions, compensate them for costs incurred by mentoring activities, and provide some incentives to encourage their retention. Compensation and incentives can be in the form of a small stipend, access to professional development skill-building and/or certification, mobile phone cards, etc.



Joyce, age 22, is an Adolescent Leader in her AGI club in Juba, South Sudan.

"She [mentor] was my inspiration to pursue business, I can see myself in her being so successful and it motivates me to go out of my comfort zone and fulfill my dream".

(Lao STEPS winner)

Summary Checklist for Incorporating Mentoring into Youth Employment Projects

- ✓ Are the mentor's roles and responsibilities clearly articulated? Are they reasonable and achievable?
- ✓ Has the project established clear qualifications for mentors?
- ✓ Is the profile of the mentor appropriate for meeting the project's objective and serving the mentee's development needs?
- ✓ Is the mentoring dosage and frequency likely to nurture meaningful relationships?
- ✓ Are mentors supported with opportunities to exchange experiences and strengthen their capacities?
- ✓ Is the project monitoring the mentoring component and soliciting beneficiary feedback?
- ✓ Are mentors recognized and commended for their efforts? Do they need other incentives for retention?

Endnotes

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