

gender equality as smart economics

G Empowering Girls and Young Women

in LIBERIA

ADOLESCENT GIRLS INITIATIVE

The Adolescent Girls Initiative is part of the World Bank's Gender Action Plan: Gender Equality as Smart Economics. In Liberia the AGI is called EPAG—The Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women.

Liberia: Country Overview

Liberia is Africa's oldest republic. Under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first woman to be democratically elected head of state, Liberia is working to revive its economy and consolidate a peaceful society following 14 years of conflict.

World Bank Photo: Eve Lotter



Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, surrounded by girls from the program, presides at the official inauguration of the AGI/EPAG in March 2010. Minister of Gender and Development Varbah Gayflor (right of the President) and Minister of Youth and Sports Etmonia Tarpeh (far right in photo) also officiated at the event.

- Population: 3.9 million
- Life expectancy: 57 years (men), 59 years (women)
- GNI per capita: US \$170
- 12,000 strong UN peacekeeping mission

World Bank Initiatives in Liberia

Liberia joined the World Bank in 1962. Currently, the Bank supports more than 20 projects in all major sectors, including: infrastructure, economic governance, health, and agriculture & forestry. With a dominance on rehabilitating infrastructure, the Bank also assists in the rebuilding of core state functions and institutions and facilitating pro-poor growth, health, agriculture and social protection and labor.

Project Overview

EPAG is a pilot project that focuses on giving young Liberian women practical training to help them find jobs. The project marks a new form of public-private partnership between The Liberian Ministry of Gender and Development, the Nike Foundation, the World Bank and Bilateral donors. The project will run for three years in nine communities in greater Monrovia.

World Bank Photo: Eve Lotter



A young woman learns new painting skills as part of her job training.

The aim of the project is to find safe, sustainable employment for 2,500 young Liberian women between the ages of 16-27 years. A focus on practical, demand-driven skills, identified through extensive private sector consultations, aims to prepare older adolescent girls and young women for the world of work

and smoothing the path to employment in the private sector. By testing and refining best practices, the project partners hope to eventually see the work expanded in Liberia and replicated in other countries.

World Bank Photo: Eve Lotter



Young women learn how to set the table and serve guests as part of their job training.

Skills Focused

The legacy of civil conflict and a high incidence of poverty—by 2007, nearly 64 percent of Liberians lived below the poverty line—places girls in Greater Monrovia in a very fragile environment fraught with risks—dealing with the challenges of broken homes, sexual violence, and prostitution as a means to survive everyday life. Therefore the training offered to participants focuses on technical as well as life-skills training to address some of the crucial barriers to the development of young women in Liberia.

The EPAG project has four key components:

- Job skills training for wage employment, combined with job placement assistance
- Business development skills training and links to microcredit for young women entrepreneurs
- Project monitoring and a rigorous impact evaluation
- Institutional strengthening and capacity-building

Innovation

The Liberia experience has shown that an ambitious project bent on increasing young women's labor market participation in a post-conflict context can be undertaken, and provide appropriate training, albeit the risks.



World Bank Photo: Shubha Chakravarty

In consultation with the private sector, the project identified professional cleaning as a growth sector in the Liberian economy.

Examples of innovation in the project include:

■ *Incentives for Service Providers*

Performance bonuses will be awarded to training providers that successfully place their graduates in jobs or in small businesses. It is one of the first times performance incentives have been used to promote a demand-driven approach to high quality training in West Africa.

■ *Community Participation*

The absence of protective factors and healthy development for young Liberian women meant that the project team had to invest in creating some of these social networks. Local NGOs spent a great amount of time meeting with the pilot communities. At first the project was met with a great deal of skepticism, but their perseverance paid off, and the communities became enthusiastic about the project and supportive of their young women's participation.

■ *Monitoring and Impact Evaluation*

A pilot is all about what works, and what can be improved on; thus the need to show demonstrable results by using rigorous statistical analysis. A key design element of the AGIs is the focus on continuous and rigorous monitoring and impact evaluation.



World Bank Photo: Shubha Chakravarty

The project trains young women to work in the hospitality sector.

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