



The Adolescent Girls Initiative

An Alliance for Economic Empowerment

*Quality jobs for adolescent girls and young women in poor and post conflict countries:
A public-private sector partnership*

Objective

The World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) strives to promote the economic empowerment of older adolescent girls and young women by smoothing their path to productive employment. The initiative targets low-income and post-conflict countries over a three-year time horizon.

Participating Countries

The initiative is being piloted in Liberia through a partnership between the Bank, the Nike Foundation and the Governments of Liberia and Denmark. It will be expanded in the next year to include Afghanistan, Nepal, Rwanda, South Sudan and Togo.

In addition to the initial six countries, background studies will also be conducted in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Papua New Guinea, with a view to potentially expanding the initiative to these countries.

Other countries may be added to the initiative as funding allows. The criteria for selecting participating countries include country ownership and commitment; representation of a mix of post-conflict and low-income countries; and opportunities to scale up within and outside Bank operations.

Why adolescent girls?

There has been rapid progress toward gender equality in education in many countries: 83 of 106 countries are on-track to achieve the Millennium Development target of parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. At the same time, this progress in education is not being followed-up by successful school-to-work transitions. Three regions—Latin America/Caribbean, Eastern Europe/Central Asia and East Asia/Pacific—have high rates of school attendance for both girls and boys, but significantly lower labor force participation for young women than young men.¹ In other regions, girls trail in both educational enrolments and labor force participation. And, in all world regions, young women aged 20-24 are more likely than young men to be both out of school and out of the labor force.²

Limited but compelling evidence shows that investments to facilitate young women's transition to work yield higher returns than investments targeting young men (World Development Report 2007). As noted in the recent publication *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*,³ the size and competitiveness of tomorrow's labor force will depend on the skills and education girls achieve today, and whether they will be able to employ these skills productively. Returns to girls education reflect this impact on development: an extra year of secondary schooling for girls can increase their future wages by 10% to 20%, significantly higher than the 5 to 15% rate of return to an extra year of schooling for boys.⁴

Finally, the economic participation of older adolescent girls and young women generates returns beyond earnings. Employment of young women is linked with later age at marriage in developing countries and lower dependency ratios.⁵ While it is difficult to establish a direct link between labor

1 Buvinic, Mayra et al. 2007. "Gender Shapes Adolescence." *Development Outreach* 9(2): 12-15.

2 World Bank. 2008. "Ready for work? Increasing Economic Opportunity for Adolescent Girls and Young Women." Washington, DC: World Bank.

3 Levine, Ruth et al., 2008. *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

4 Psacharopoulos, George and Harry Anthony Patrinos. 2004. "Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update." *Education Economics* 12 (2): 111-34.

5 See Amin, Sajeda, et al. 1998. "Transition to adulthood of female garment-factory workers in Bangladesh." *Studies in Family Planning*, 29(2): 185-200; Mathur, Sanyukta, et al. 2003. *Too young to wed: The lives, rights, and health of young married girls*. Washington DC: International Center for Research on Women.; and Levine, Ruth et al., 2008. *Girls Count: A Global Investment and Action Agenda*. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

force participation and lower fertility due to thorny econometric issues, several studies do show such a negative relationship.⁶

Learning from Liberia

The project in Liberia will work with the private sector to identify job opportunities and will provide relevant skills training matched to these opportunities; it will also promote the entry of adolescent girls and young women into entrepreneurship. The training will focus on technical skills, as well as the integration of life-skills training to address some of the crucial barriers to the development of adolescent girls' economic independence. Impact and process evaluations will systematize the lessons learned.

Investments under the Adolescent Girls Initiative

We propose to develop and test a core set of promising interventions to promote the economic empowerment of adolescent girls and young women. The menu of interventions, based on emerging good practices around the world, includes: business development skills training and services; technical and vocational training targeting skills in high demand, combined with job placement assistance; access to micro finance; life skills training; mentoring; apprenticeship programs; wage subsidies; and intermediation services and other forms of information provision

Because the evidence on what works in facilitating the transition of adolescent girls and young women to productive work is thin, rigorous impact evaluation will be an important part of this initiative.

Financing

Reflecting the public-private partnership that is a guiding principle of the AGI, both private and public sources will provide financing. To date, commitments have been received from the Nike Foundation, Australia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Milan (Italy).

We estimate that implementation on a scale sufficient to make a difference to the lives of a significant number of young women, to influence public policy, and to permit rigorous evaluation will require approximately US \$3-5 million per country.

Two options are available for supporting the AGI:

- Investments of U.S. \$1 million and above: general support for the initiative
- Investments of U.S. \$3 million and above: general support for the initiative OR targeted support to an individual country

6 Kalwij, Adriaan S. 2000. "The effects of female employment status on the presence and number of children." *Population Economics* 13(2): 221-239; Gruben, William et al. 2005. "Apparel jobs: ladder up or poverty trap?" Paper presented at the 2005 meeting of the Latin America and Caribbean Economics Association.