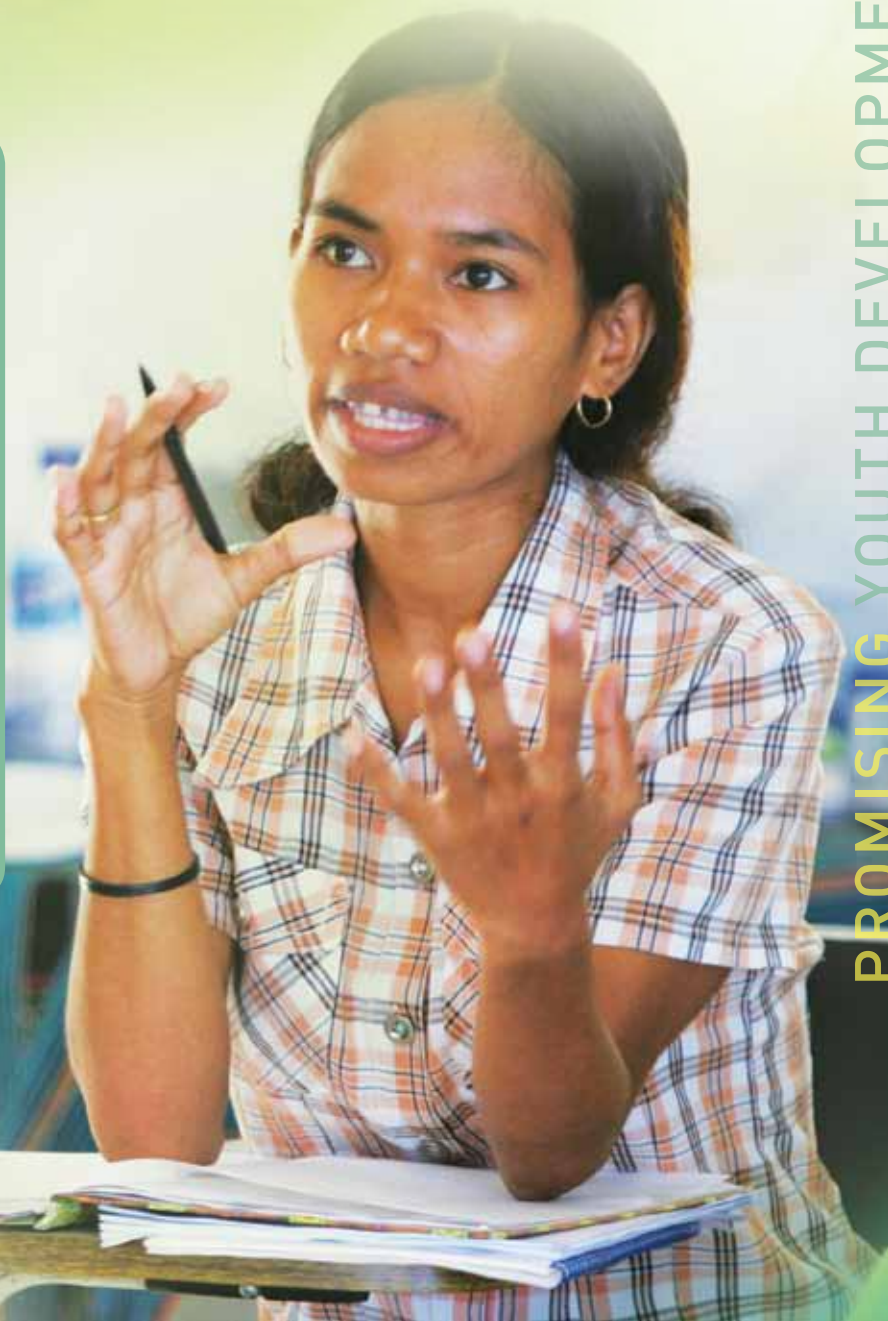


GENDER IN YOUTH LIVELIHOODS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

This program note summarizes key gender issues in livelihoods and workforce development programs and discusses EQUIP3's approach to addressing gender, using examples from specific EQUIP3 youth projects to illustrate lessons learned.

The USAID-funded Educational Quality Improvement Program 3 (EQUIP3) was a nine-year program designed to improve earning, learning, and skill development opportunities for out-of-school youth in developing countries. EQUIP3 operated under a Leader-with-Associates Cooperative Agreement that included 25 Associate Award projects in 26 countries. EQUIP3 comprised a partnership with USAID, a consortium of international partner organizations, and host country public and private institutions. The EQUIP3 consortium of international partners included Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), as the prime, and other organizations, such as the International Youth Foundation and FHI 360 (formerly the Academy for Educational Development).



WHY CONSIDER GENDER IN YOUTH LIVELIHOODS AND WORKFORCE PROGRAMS?

There is growing evidence that investments in women's economic development contribute to improved broader development outcomes related to health, education, poverty reduction, and economic growth. Economic empowerment is not only one of the most direct ways of allowing women to achieve their potential; it also strengthens countries' economic growth.² In fact, women's exclusion from the workforce in some countries can reduce the GDP by as much as 2 percent.³

For these and other reasons, gender mainstreaming has taken center stage in develop-

ment in the past decade—with the Millennium Development Goals, in the UN's creation of the cross-sectoral entity on gender equality (UN-Women), in the *World Bank's World Development Report 2012*, and even in USAID's 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy. USAID's new Gender Policy and its anticipated Youth in Development Policy both recognize "that gender norms determine the way households allocate resources to sons and daughters, through decisions about boys' or girls' education, where they work, and how they spend their time."⁴ The Gender Policy emphasizes the importance of taking a gender lens in approaching youth programs: "Closing gender gaps in adolescence is particularly important since gender inequalities in education, time use, and health can accumulate across the life cycle if not broken early."⁵ The policy further urges programs to consider gender throughout the span of a program for improved outcomes.

Gender Under EQUIP3

Ten of the 18 youth assessments conducted by EQUIP3 highlighted gender as one of the major issues impacting young people's opportunities and challenges, with 6 assessments specifically naming gender discrimination toward women and a lack of female empowerment as major issues.

In their original project designs, 7 of the 25 EQUIP3 Associate Award projects (Education for All [EFA] Challenge Grant Program in Jamaica, Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment [SKYE] Project in Guyana, Young Entrepreneurs Program [YEP] in Kosovo, Advancing Youth Project [AYP] in Liberia, Assessment of the Literacy and Community Empowerment Program [LCEP] in Afghanistan, Minority Education for Growth and Advancement and Skills Training for Youth [MEGA-SkY] in India, PAJE-Nièta [Projet d'Appui aux Jeunes Entrepreneurs, or Support to Youth Entrepreneurs Project] in Mali, and Bangladesh Youth Employment Pilot [BYEP]) specifically targeted reaching either young men or young women. Two other EQUIP3 Associate Award projects (East Timor and Haiti) developed strategies to address gender issues once the project was underway.

Data collected across EQUIP3 projects in 26 countries confirm common findings from other vocational training programs—that is, that fewer female youth actually complete training programs: 59 percent of the males completed work readiness training vs. 40 percent of the females; 64.7 percent of the males completed vocational training vs. 35.3 percent of the females; and 56 percent of the males completed entrepreneurship training vs. 44 percent of the females. In addition, fewer females than males generally report finding a job or starting income-generation activities.



KEY GENDER ISSUES

While there are numerous programs focused on adolescent girls' empowerment, these often do not address workforce preparation. In its research on more than 300 projects for girls, the Population Council found that only 18 percent of them included livelihood or vocational training.⁶ Moreover, in general vocational training and workforce development programs for out-of-school youth, gender is rarely a consideration. Few programs include strategies to ensure that training, job placement, and other services respond to the unique needs of young women as well as young men.

Socio-cultural norms that shape what are acceptable economic sectors for young women often hinder young women's access to job opportunities in growth sectors that may be considered inappropriate for females. By the same token, women may limit their own vision for skills training to programs in less dynamic economic sectors (such as hairdressing or handicrafts) because those traditionally female trades are better known to them and therefore more accessible.

Socio-cultural norms shape young men's and women's definitions of masculinity and femininity. These manifest in certain behaviors and self-perceptions that can ultimately contribute to alienation, frustration, and violence in families and communities.

The ability and motivation to start a business or livelihood varies between men and women, as well as between older married women and younger unmarried women. These differences can have implications for what support or coaching is most needed. For example, young women starting a business are likely to have less education than men, and they are less likely to seek any formal financing for their business, relying more on personal savings or family funds.⁷

Young women are more burdened with household and childcare responsibilities than young men, so the time that young women have available to participate in education and training may be significantly limited.

Young women's mobility is more constrained than young men's, due to security concerns or to socio-cultural norms that deem it inappropriate for women to travel alone or frequent public places at night.

More conservative contexts may dictate the formation of separate male/female training classes, and an appropriate balance of male and female trainers, to ensure that females and males are comfortable and are participating actively. In addition, partnering with local religious and community leaders and NGOs in conservative societies helps to achieve longer-term outcomes and greater progress toward gender equality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EQUIP3 experience supports the larger body of research on gender, which demonstrates that integrating gender into broader vocational, livelihood, and workforce programs will lead to stronger program outcomes—and that “integration” means more than just creating women-focused education and training projects. Some overarching recommendations for future programming are described here.

- **Integrate gender-sensitive content into trainings.** Work readiness trainings should provide the information and skills that young women and men need in order to navigate the new dynamics and challenges they may face in the workplace and in their communities. For example, training content might include information on sexual harassment and local labor laws, reproductive health, gender dynamics, and negotiation skills.

The Prepara Ami ba Servisu (PAS) Project

The Prepara Ami ba Servisu (PAS) Project (2007–2011) in East Timor was a four-year \$5.5 million project that improved the capacity of local institutions to provide accessible and relevant workforce development and work readiness training to rural youth to enable them to earn a better livelihood.

All PAS project trainees received work readiness training, which addressed gender issues through lessons on goal setting, appropriate workplace behaviors, and job search techniques. Female trainees were exposed to mixed-sex training classes as well as work settings with male supervisors and colleagues, perhaps for the first time in response, program managers included training on sexual harassment and reproductive health issues. These elements of gender-sensitive strategies also illustrated how programs not explicitly focused on gender from the onset can, nonetheless, incorporate important strategies that promote gender equality and help advance program objectives.

Of the 1,600 youth who completed the PAS program, more than half were female. More than 900 PAS graduates became employed or started a business; 485 of them were young women and 433 were young men. Of those 485 young women, 60% chose to start businesses while 40% gained employment. The micro-businesses that the young women started were primarily kiosks or small shops, which allowed them to stay close to home to attend to household responsibilities while also earning some money.

► **Provide role models who instill confidence.**

Positive role models are an effective way to reinforce young people's confidence and their own ability to adopt positive behaviors. In youth workforce projects, trainers, volunteers, and mentors can serve in this role. As the volunteers in the MEGA-SkY project demonstrated, older girls and boys and community elders can serve as role models while also advocating for youth's rights. The EQUIP3 programs demonstrate that the advancements made by these programs in increasing the confidence and self-worth of program participants, both male and female, are some of the programs' most lasting achievements.

► **Address the underlying cultural factors that define gender norms about work.**

When workforce and livelihoods programs address gender issues, they tend to focus on providing resources in either training or financing, while not addressing the underlying factors that contribute to the young men and women's economic roles, which impact their likelihood of maintaining productive economic activities in the long term. Approaches such as those used in the MEGA-SkY project (see box), which included working closely with community leaders to shift attitudes toward women's roles, can be effective.

The MEGA-SkY Project

The MEGA-SkY Project (2009–2011) was a two-year \$2 million project to create educational and skill-building opportunities for marginalized children and youth, especially within the Muslim community. MEGA operated at the formal and nonformal levels to facilitate access to quality educational opportunities for the acquisition of livelihoods and life skills. SkY worked at the policy level to incubate and replicate successful private sector vocational programs.

In the MEGA component, **Community Support Groups** fostered a relationship of mutual trust and accountability with communities by monitoring project activities, opening up discussion on the benefits of education, and tailoring approaches to reach different subsections of the population (e.g., creating mothers' groups and meeting with religious leaders). Community centers became safe environments for community meetings, skills training, bridge courses, and coaching for both in-school and out-of-school children and youth. Centrally located within their villages, these centers were monitored by the Community Support Groups and operated by youth volunteers from the community, encouraging parents who previously resisted sending their girls to school to allow their daughters to attend.

The **youth volunteers**, almost half of whom were female, served as instructors, links to the community, advocates for girls' and young women's education, and role models for the other girls. Many female youth volunteers reported that they experienced increased respect in their communities and that their previously reluctant parents became advocates for girls' education. Several parents articulated how their priorities for their daughters—which formerly were early marriage and taking care of their families—now included education as well.

"I am very happy that my children are learning skills and learning to read. This will ensure that my daughters will be self-reliant ."

—Mr. Ahmed, MEGA-SkY, India

- ▶ **Ensure that both men and women complete training and apply their new knowledge and skills.** While youth programs may have a goal of 50-50 participation among male and female participants, the real challenge lies in ensuring that both males and females complete a training program and then apply their training to work or further education. As the EQUIP3 data show, there is often a disparity between male and female youth program completion and job placement rates. Program managers must understand the factors that impact young women and men's training participation and retention as well as their ability to apply the training, and then devise appropriate strategies to address these factors.
- ▶ **Carefully select safe spaces.** Female and male youth need a safe space where they can gather for training and other project activities—and what is “safe” for young women may not be the same for young men. Familial approval, the presence of same-sex trainers and mentors, and distance from home should all be considered when selecting locations for program activities.
- ▶ **Disaggregate data by gender.** Don't assume that gender is not a relevant factor to track and measure. Ensure that monitoring and evaluation systems disaggregate data by sex and include questions in evaluations that attempt to assess gender outcomes. This does

The Education for All (EFA) Youth Challenge Grant activity in Jamaica

The Education for All (EFA) Youth Challenge Grant activity in Jamaica (2005–2007) was part of a small (\$187,000) multi-country effort to work across USAID missions to strengthen the youth workforce and improve youth's life skills and opportunities by focusing on cross-sectoral strategies and youth engagement.

The project targeted 78 15–24-year-old men in Jamaica who were living in a violent, inner-city neighborhood, those who were largely out-of-school or unemployed, and those who were at risk of or engaged in gang-related activities. Throughout the 13-month program, the educational and academic training these young men received, along with the small-group discussions, time for reflection, and group/community activities, yielded a transformation. These men showed gains in their educational outcomes, their concentration levels, and their completion of planned activities. They also found a safe haven to discuss—and make sense of—social issues, such as discrimination and gender violence, and their responsibilities in countering the negative influences in their society.

Of the 50 youth who completed the program, over a quarter successfully passed the national educational entry exam; 90 percent of the men became involved with community development activities (and some qualified to serve in the National Youth Service program for Jamaica), and 60 percent passed the aquatics exam for future employment in the tourism industry. All of the young men developed business plans that eventually received startup funding.

“The program has stimulated us to think, communicate and to act like winners, learning how to make rational decisions, solve problems, resolve conflict, control anger and stress as well as working with others effectively to achieve success.”

—Male participant, Jamaica EFA Project

not necessarily require separate or additional evaluation tools, but the integration of questions that can analyze gender outcomes and results. While USAID's Automated Directives System has continually mandated gender-disaggregated data in monitoring and evaluation analyses, USAID's recently released Gender Policy offers updated guidelines and practical indicators to assist implementers in what aspects to consider and how to dedicate adequate resources when designing programs to ensure the best possible program outcomes.

► **Highlight entrepreneurship as an option that allows young women to have flexible working conditions.** As the BYEP experience (see box) highlights, entrepreneurship may be a particularly effective approach for reaching young women, due to the more flexible conditions that self-employment offers, allowing women to better meet their household responsibilities. Assessment of the potential barriers or challenges that young women may face in starting a business should be done as part of the design of entrepreneurship training programs and complementary services.

The Bangladesh Youth Employment Pilot

The Bangladesh Youth Employment Pilot (**BYEP**) (2008–2010) was a \$538,570 project that focused on the challenges and opportunities for improved vocational skills for youth in the fast-growing aquaculture industry.

BYEP targeted female youth by developing a training program for the growth sector of shrimp farming, which offered the potential for both employment and self-employment. The project raised awareness among parents of the importance of livelihoods skills for their daughters, which resulted in the recruitment and retention of 161 young women (more than 40 percent of the trainees) in the training program. BYEP trainers also shifted mindsets among hatchery operators by inviting them to watch the female trainees demonstrate their skills, showcasing their dedication and ability to complete physical tasks long considered to be "men's work."

Of the 161 women participating, 45 started their own businesses (including home-based farming activities), 50 gained formal employment, and 10 re-enrolled in education programs. Interviews conducted two years after program completion demonstrated impressive shifts in the women's confidence levels and their increased comfort in working with—and even managing—male colleagues. Several women commented on the increased level of respect they have earned from their families, communities, and peers.

"My learning was much easier because of practical sessions. Seeing and doing by myself was the most important way of learning for me."

—Lovely, female BYEP participant

"Yes, I am now comfortable working with women. Earlier I thought they are incapable of any hard work and often they are lazy. But now I know they are the same like us and can sometimes be more sincere."

—Kutub, male business owner, BYEP

(ENDNOTES)

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