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EPAG PROJECT OFFICE

Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women (EPAG) Project

To date, very few initiatives in Liberia have promoted the successful entry of young women into productive employment. As in many other conflict affected countries, emergency skills training and public works programs in Liberia have targeted mostly male youth ex-combatants. The few skills training programs targeting adolescent girls and young women have focused on traditionally “female” skills—such as soap-making, pastry-making, or sewing—for which there is a high labor supply and little market demand. Overall, existing skills training programs are criticized by employers for generally being low quality. At the same time, private sector representatives in Liberia have noted the difficulty in finding young employees with the appropriate job skills, including technical knowledge and basic professional skills such as the ability to show-up for work on time, interact positively with colleagues, and take initiative to solve problems.

EPAG PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Ministry of Gender & Development’s Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women (EPAG) project aims to break these patterns of low-quality training. A collaboration between the Government of Liberia, the World Bank, Denmark, and the Nike Foundation, the EPAG project seeks to smooth the path of adolescent girls to productive employment through job skills training and business development services. The training offered to participants 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 in Liberia. These include, for example, early pregnancy, social restrictions from family and community members, and forms of GBV, including sexual exploitation and abuse. Four NGO training providers have been selected on a highly competitive basis focused on quality: CEP, LEED, ARC (working with CESP and NAEAL), and IRC (working with CAP and Educare). 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.

EPAG PROJECT COMPONENTS:

The project has four key components:

1. Skills training for wage employment, combined with job placement assistance
2. Business development services and links to microcredit for young women entrepreneurs
3. Institutional strengthening and capacity-building
4. High quality project monitoring and a rigorous impact evaluation

EPAG PROJECT TRAINEES & LOCATIONS:

- **2,500 TRAINEES:** The three-year pilot project in Liberia will provide skills training to ~2,500 adolescent girls and young women with the goal of increasing their employment and incomes. Approximately 1,250 of these girls will be trained in the first round of training, scheduled to begin in February 2010.
- **NINE COMMUNITIES:** The project is focused in nine target communities. These include Kakata, Margibi County and eight communities in Montserrado Country and Greater Monrovia: Bentol, Red Light, Old Road, West Point, Battery Factory, Doe Community, Bassa Community, and New Kru Town.
- **UNBIASED RECRUITMENT:** In line with EPAG’s commitment to a rigorous impact evaluation, the project team will implement a uniform recruitment strategy across all nine communities and across the two types of training. The strategy will ensure that the resulting sample group of trainees is unbiased (in other words, does not unfairly give some girls an advantage over others).

The EPAG project is designed to be a unique public-private partnership aimed at creating meaningful economic opportunities for adolescent girls and young women in Liberia. By testing and refining best practices, the project partners hope to eventually see the work expanded in Liberia and replicated in other countries.

For more information, please contact:

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