

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIP1 to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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Educating Marginalized Populations

Who are the marginalized? They are those who are denied, or have very limited access to, privileges enjoyed by the wider society. They form a marginalized class because they are perceived as deviating from the norm, or lacking desirable traits, and therefore are excluded or ostracized as outsiders. Exclusion and stigma allow marginalized populations little capacity to help themselves or be helped. Some can become skeptical, embittered or violent, and they often model and raise children to think and act similarly.

While some forms of exclusion, such as the caste system in India, are highly developed and supported by the general society, there are also less obvious ways of thinking and acting that can create marginalization. Failure to provide educational options for those with special needs is one example.

The international development community works with marginalized people in several different domains; social, health, educational, economic and political. Some populations are marginalized in one of these domains, but many more are affected by marginalization in more than one. Regardless of the category of marginalization, policymakers and practitioners face the challenge of identifying and encouraging the undertaking of activities that promote the reintegration of the excluded population into its community.

The articles included in this issue of the *EQ Review* touch upon a few programs that work to provide opportunities to marginalized populations: development of policies that allow deaf people to obtain a teaching degree, thereby empowering them to educate other deaf students in their own language; microfinance programs for youth affected by political instability and violent conflict; youth centers designed as refuges for youth affected by gang violence; and a literacy and community engagement program for the profoundly illiterate. These four projects show how targeted programming designed for the specific marginalized population can empower its members to improve their lives. Each program was successfully able to identify the most serious issues that had to be overcome and tap into their participants' desire to become reintegrated into communities. As a result of these interventions, participants have gained the knowledge base, skills and confidence they need to become contributing members of society.

For more information, please contact EQUIP3 Project Director, Paul Sully, psully@edc.org

Strategies to Build Opportunity and Reduce Conflict within an Illiterate Youth Population

Youth and young adults in the southeastern forest region of Guinea are struggling to create a secure future in the face of extreme instability. Political and social turmoil in the region has resulted in the abduction and recruitment of young soldiers, extensive socio-economic and cultural upheaval, and extreme poverty. The American Refugee Committee (ARC) PATHWAYS project, in conjunction with Making Cents International, is aimed at addressing these challenges and providing youth with a means to define an alternative future for themselves and decrease their participation in destabilizing and violent activities.

Funded by USAID/Guinea and the USAID office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM), the PATHWAYS program is designed to create a scalable, relevant and engaging program to increase the economic opportunities of the mostly illiterate male and female youth populations.

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The three zones targeted by PATHWAYS, Lola, Yomou and N'Zérékoré, together have a population of 545,172 inhabitants, 25% of them between the ages of 15 and 25. A 1997 government study revealed that 55.9% of men and 80.2% of women had never been to school.

The first component of the PATHWAY microenterprise (ME) program is a 20 hour cross-sector ME training course, containing key learning areas relevant for retail, manufacturing and service businesses. Successful course graduates are then eligible to apply for a small grant to assist with business start up; they are also provided vocational training in such areas as metal working, carpentry, embroidery, tailoring, and mechanics. Graduates of the program with successful start-up businesses are then referred to local micro-finance institutions, increasing their access to financial services and business growth potential. A cadre of 250 local youth facilitators was selected to maximize the number of youth impacted by the program. In addition, this brings a youth perspective to identifying business opportunities and enables the program to focus on developing the enterprise skills truly required by the participants.

To ensure the youth facilitators are well equipped to offer quality and appropriate cross-sector ME training, PATHWAYS developed a culturally relevant set of training materials for illiterate youth, utilizing role plays, illustrated visuals, simulations, group work and facilitated discussion to teach fundamental skills such as communication skills, basic math skills and budgeting, marketing, accounting and planning. Provision of the materials is accompanied by a rigorous training of trainer course to develop the youth facilitators' experiential learning-based facilitation skills, as well as to strengthen the facilitators' planning and leadership ability. To help ensure the quality of their training and increase their confidence, the youth facilitators deliver trainings in two-person teams, each charged with reaching 40 youths over a six month period. During year two of the project, ARC added a literacy component due to high demand by the participants.

A Knowledge, Attitudes, Perceptions (KAP) study, administered at conclusion of the first year of the project, revealed promising results in both increasing income and decreasing youth's role in instability. Key results included:

- The number of respondents who have an income of less than \$1 a day fell from 72% to 62%
- The number of ex-volunteer combatants who are prepared to take up arms again fell from 82% to 46%
- Respondents who participated in violent conflict in the last three months fell from 21% to 15%
- Respondents who have heard of or known about conflicts in their communities fell from 65% to 50%

Success factors of this program are:

- It is youth driven, which helps to ensure relevancy;
- High and clear expectations were set for both the youth animators and the beneficiaries;
- Access to professional and thorough capacity building and training ensured that both youth facilitators and beneficiaries had the necessary skills and knowledge tailored to their level of literacy and experience.

For more information, contact LeAnna Marr e-mail LMarr@usaid.gov

“There are none so deaf ...”

Deaf-community members in Africa (around .5 % of population) as elsewhere, regard themselves as marginalized by their minority language, sign language, rather than by deafness. Severe prelingual deafness precludes mother-tongue learning and enculturation (unless the parents are Deaf). The grammatical structures of sign language are unlike those of spoken instructional languages. Most rural, Deaf Africans in Kenya use basic, homemade signs lacking cultural and linguistic elements of a formal language, but there is an established Kenyan sign-language.

Most hearing teachers of the Deaf are rarely fluent signers, preferring oral instructional methods. Thus only the brightest Deaf learners succeed to secondary school. There, without appropriate support, most struggle and fail the unforgiving state exams, dropping into society's outskirts. Conversely, Deaf teachers are masters of their own language, empowering Deaf pupils to succeed academically, vocationally and in Deaf community development.

USAID is collaborating with Global Deaf Connection (GDC) and local stakeholders to employ Freirian advocacy with the goal of forming appropriate educational policies for the Deaf in Kenya. GDC advocated to the Ministry of Education (MoE) a reduction in the college entry requirements for the Deaf to a C - . This exception allows Deaf learners to enter the Machakos Teachers' College (MTC), where they are supplied with interpreters and tutors, and ideally catch-up with their hearing cohorts.

As a result of the USAID support to GDC, MTC has graduated over twenty Deaf teachers. An additional twelve Deaf teachers will graduate from MTC in the next two years.

Using youth facilitators helps to maximize the number of youth impacted by the PATHWAYS project.

The quality of instruction to the Deaf students at MTC has largely improved following the first-ever workshop for sign language interpreters in August 2006, supported in part by a USAID/Kenya grant. With their newly enhanced skills, the interpreters are more able to interpret the MTC course content to the Deaf teachers in training. The Kenyan MoE agreed to employ these interpreters from November 2006, relieving USAID funded GDC of this burden.

GDC and stakeholders now advocate new Deaf-centric policies: 1) Making Kiswahili optional for Deaf learners; 2) Mandating that the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) hire Deaf MTC graduates to teach deaf students; 3) Advocating Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) as a national language; 4) Developing a national training curriculum and its standardization for KSL interpreters; and 5) Extending university enrollment to Deaf students, enabling graduates to teach deaf students at secondary and vocational training schools. For disenfranchised African Deaf youth, language can become a liberator, rather than an imprisoner.

For more information about this activity, please contact CTO Dr. Sarah Wright, sawright@usaid.gov.



A deaf student receives his teaching certificate.

Afghan Youth – Regionally Marginalized

There are well-documented links between a nation's literacy level and its indicators of social, political and economic development: in most cases, countries with high rates of illiteracy also suffer from relatively low economic growth, high poverty rates, and poor life expectancy. And in an age in which economic growth is increasingly based on synergies created by new technology and a skilled, knowledgeable labor force, the more people with access to knowledge and skills, the greater a given country's economic potential. Thus, a country's average literacy score can serve as a potent indicator of general economic potential.

By comparing Afghanistan's literacy rates with those of its neighbors, therefore, we get useful information regarding this nation's current and future capacity to engage and/or compete with its immediate trading partners. This information, in turn, will give us a glimpse of Afghan youths' prospects for prosperity now and within the next ten years. The following table juxtaposes youth literacy rates in Afghanistan with the average youth literacy rates in countries in the Central Asia and the South and West Asia regions¹.

Table 1. Total Youth Literacy Rates by Region (ages 15-24)

	2000-2004 (%)	Projected 2015 (%)
Afghanistan	34.3	48.6
South and West Asia	72.2	81.5
Central Asia	99.7	99.6

Source: UNESCO 2006

A quick review of these statistics is sobering: as of 2004, youth in Afghanistan's neighboring countries were two and three times more likely to be literate than were Afghan youth. By 2015, prospects are only slightly improved with youth literacy rates for the region roughly double those for Afghan youth. The implications of this status are clear. Either Afghan youth become literate on a massive scale within the next ten years, or their prospects for partnering or competing with their peers throughout Central, South and West Asia are alarmingly poor.

What makes this challenge even greater is the recognition that becoming literate means more than just learning how to read and write. Literacy experts agree that literacy gains among individuals—and the societies they inhabit—are only sustainable if neo-literates can function in a 'literate environment', in which printed materials are available and used in the home, in the workplace and in public, and in which a 'culture of literacy' is promoted.

In short: Afghan youth must have the opportunity and the support to use their emerging reading, writing and computing abilities within an ever widening and self-reinforcing circle of real-life applications.

Since April 2005, the USAID-funded EQUIP3 Literacy and Community Empowerment Project (LCEP) has offered literacy, numeracy, civic participation and livelihood generation training to approximately 8,900 learners. Seventy eight percent are youth between the ages of 15 and 30 years of age and 88 percent having had less than 1 year of formal education. For most of these learners, LCEP represents an unprecedented opportunity to make up for lost learning time, and to put newly acquired skills to work.

Through daily literacy instruction (2 hours per day, six days per week), youth learn to read, write and perform basic mathematical computations within the context of village-level governance and savings, investment and business development activities.

¹ Central Asian countries include: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakstan, Georgia, Kyrgistan, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan. South and West Asian countries include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

Outside the learning center, youth have the opportunity to practice these skills both generally within the community and more specifically through voluntary *youth committees*. Nearly four hundred boys' and girls' committees have been established since April 2005. Through these committees, targeted youth apply newly acquired literacy skills in their development of livelihood opportunities in the areas of handicrafts, tailoring and animal husbandry (girls) and the buying and selling of gas, mobile cell phone cards, stationery, fruit and vegetables (boys). Youth have also established holy Quran and English language courses and have contributed socially by helping with harvest collection, road and canal maintenance, organizing sporting teams and events and helping community development councils to record meeting minutes and document development plans in the village book.

For more information please contact Jim Sarn, USAID/Afghanistan, at jsarn@usaid.gov.

Youth Alliance in Guatemala- Providing an Alternative to Gang Life

Statistics show that this is a bad time to be young and living in Guatemala due to the fact that both urban and rural youth lack access to education, job training and employment opportunities and many come from broken homes. Youth is also exposed to the proliferation of gangs, high levels of crime, extra-judicial killings, and the escalating percentage of youth homicides. The high incidence of gang activity among Guatemalan youth has impacted society's perceptions of youth, who are now stereotypically considered violent, thus marginalizing the age group and further diminishing its opportunities.

Without opportunity, youth are driven to seek identity and acceptance on the streets, falling victim to the exploitive labor practices, drug trafficking and abuse, gang culture and violence that has absorbed more than 150,000 youth in Guatemala. Parents in high-crime barrios (neighborhoods) fear for their own safety and that of their children. They must be ever vigilant against petty thievery and gang members who actively recruit their young children, often at nine or ten years old.

USAID/Guatemala's Youth Alliance Program has been working in collaboration with churches in some of Guatemala City's most violent barrios to keep vulnerable youth away from crime and gangs. USAID assessed the availability of active youth programs in vulnerable neighborhoods. Finding none, the Program opened five new youth outreach centers to help at-risk youth survive the temptations they face in the streets. One of the three centers is located where the notorious Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) controls the neighborhood.

The centers are open 10 hours a day, six days a week. Each day the centers together serve nearly 450 youths between ages seven and 25. Those who attend school go to the center right afterward to participate in sports, learn computer skills, complete homework and enjoy other activities. The older youth use the centers as a refuge or "safe place" and learn new skills for employment. Each center relies on different skills and abilities that volunteers can offer. Volunteers provide expertise, knowledge, and experience in varied areas; classes are available in information technology, cooking and sewing, cosmetology, marimba, song, and guitar. A project consultant once taught a short course on small business development and as a result the center launched its own micro-enterprise. In less than two-months, the centers logged over 2,000 hours of volunteer time from 90 volunteers.

Another crucial part of the program is the involvement of the private sector. Local businesses have been brought in by the project to partner with the youth outreach centers to provide job training in fields such as tourism, culinary arts, clothing production and entrepreneurship.

The centers are cost-effective. The initial USAID investment of \$16,000 per center covers equipment, training of volunteer trainers in micro-enterprise, and six months of salary for the coordinator. Micro-enterprises that the centers run generate funds for operating expenses. The church-owned and managed centers are sustainable and continue to leverage support from community members and other volunteers long after the Program is over.

A lesson learned is that although the operation of the centers doesn't require a significant financial investment, it is management intensive. The management of the centers requires a tremendous amount of local commitment, which is not easy to replicate everywhere. Other management issues like engaging local leaders and dealing with hostile police have not been easy. The greatest revelation of the project is the solid and unconditional support that local groups and volunteers provide to save Guatemala's youth, and in the process, reduce crime and violence.

For more information, contact José Garzón, USAID/Guatemala at jgarzon@usaid.gov



A Youth Alliance volunteer gives a guitar lesson