

# 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.

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## 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.

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## “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.*



