

FieldNotes

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Improving Gender Equality in Youth Livelihood Programs

"I had heard about gender inequality but never realized that I had been party to it by being insensitive towards women in my family. I have found a new respect for women." — Harshal, participant, IYF's Planning for Life training in India

The magnitude of the global youth employment challenge cannot be overstated. As many as 100 million young people around the world are unable to find decent work, and many more are underemployed, often in unsafe, dead-end seasonal jobs. Moreover, the world's youth population is rapidly expanding, predominantly in developing countries, placing even greater pressure on governments and society to address this crisis. It is thus essential to prepare youth not only for jobs in the formal sector but also for self-employment—so they can create the businesses that will generate employment for their peers.

A critical part of stimulating meaningful and sustainable economic growth, through youth livelihood programs, is to improve gender equality in the marketplace.

Today, gender stereotypes, norms, and expectations prevent millions of both men and women from pursuing their interests and reaching

their full potential. These gender limitations, which are often reinforced by both sexes, swiftly cap national human capital and curtail national economic growth, food production, and quality of life indicators. Structural limitations restrict access to education, training, skill development, employment, promotions, loans and credit, and opportunities in general. The result: growing disparities between males and females relating to their participation in the formal economy, wages and benefits, as well as their virtual absence in various sectors, professions, or the higher levels of management and leadership.

In response to these challenges, this issue of *FieldNotes* is dedicated to sharing lessons from the International Youth Foundation's (IYF) global livelihood programs about how practitioners—throughout the program cycle—can become better informed about gender considerations and thus tailor programs and services to address and overcome the structural limits imposed on both young men and women participating in livelihood programs. This publication also highlights

Globally, organizations and governments have been seeking to understand how gender inequality impacts economic and human development and to better guide public policy and development programs to improve services and opportunities for both males and females. USAID's recently published [Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy](http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/policy_planning_and_learning/documents/GenderEqualityPolicy.pdf)¹ provides the Agency and its partners with guidance on how to pursue more effective, evidence-based investments in gender equality and female empowerment and integrate these efforts into development programs.

¹ http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/policy_planning_and_learning/documents/GenderEqualityPolicy.pdf

key lessons learned and effective practices that can be used to improve gender equality in the youth employment field.

Looking at Gender Throughout the Program Cycle

IYF has found it useful to examine gender issues at three program stages: planning; program design and implementation; and monitoring and evaluation. Following is a review of how gender can be addressed at each stage.

Planning

Conducting a gender analysis as part of program planning allows implementers to build in elements, additional services, or targets to address gender inequalities. At IYF, gender analyses are conducted through a review of existing data, focus group discussions, and interviews with stakeholders of various sectors—including, most importantly, youth. Such analyses help identify issues that may prevent young men and young women from benefitting equally from a proposed program and can be used to help design the program to minimize the effect of these imbalances. Likewise issues identified in the local context may warrant greater design changes to target just young men or women due to their relative disadvantage or risk levels.

When conducting gender analyses, IYF examines traditional roles; barriers to completing training and entering the workforce; access to resources for training and financial credit; disparities in education or skills levels that may exist between young men and women entering the program; availability of community resources and gender differences in provision of services; and other issues that may impact the implementation of the program. Depending on the context, it may be preferable for interviews about gender issues and inequalities to be conducted in segregated settings with interviewers the same gender as respondents. It is critical to include equal numbers of respondents from both sexes in the research.

Program Design and Implementation

The results of the gender analysis must be translated into programmatic changes and considerations for youth employment and

entrepreneurship programs to address the identified gender issues and improve equality of males' and females' opportunities. Depending on the results of the studies, IYF and its partners often incorporate the findings of gender analysis into the following aspects of the program:

Outreach to and selection of youth for training: It is crucial to identify and recruit youth in practical ways. Consider where the target population is located, how they spend their time, how they get information, and who influences their decision-making regarding their education and employment. The answers to these questions may be different for men and women. Thus, differentiated approaches may be required to reach equal numbers of males and females; or youth that are more marginalized or at-higher-risk of dropping out of school, entering early marriages, or already victims of gender violence. Local partners can help in reaching these youth, as can youth themselves. In the Caribbean, IYF partners reach marginalized males by having trusted peers recruit them on the streets. This increased the participation of young at-risk males and broadened the reach of the program into communities that were otherwise hard to approach. In Peru, IYF partner TECSUP found it was necessary to go house-to-house to encourage young mothers in rural and semi-rural areas to enroll in their training program.

Selection and preparation of trainers: Trainings are more youth-friendly and therefore more effective if trainers have a strong rapport with youth. It is beneficial for trainers to serve as role models to the youth—thus it is important to have both male and female trainers. Trainers should be made aware of gender considerations and related local issues as well as methods to create better equality and opportunities for men and women. In a number of countries, female trainers are used to train female students to increase comfort level of families and thus facilitate greater female participation.

Times, places and composition of training classes: In many regions, females hold greater household responsibilities and family obligations than males and face pressure to prioritize those often time-consuming responsibilities over their professional interests and obligations. Conversely, males often face greater pressure to earn income instead of investing time in training programs. The timing and duration of trainings should take into account such considerations. IYF's **Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program** (CYEP) adjusted the hours that training was offered in order to accommodate child care and other family obligations of the youth they were serving. Depending on the context, training classes may also need to be segregated by gender to allow females to attend. For example, in Jordan IYF offers sex-disaggregated training courses in some locations, which has successfully increased women's participation.

Provision of support services: Support services can be vital to youth's enrollment, participation, and completion of programs. While support services may require additional program investment, they are often necessary to combat constraints that hinder youth

participation in some contexts. For example, males and females may need stipends to defray transportation costs or provision of transportation for guaranteed safety in order to attend training or get to work. Single parents may benefit from childcare stipends or an offer of on-site childcare at training and job sites. CYEP offers childcare and safe transportation to training or job sites to facilitate participation of young mothers, who otherwise have difficulty complying with the required schedules. Providing these services increased completion rates and decreased drop-outs. Some populations may need additional services such as remedial education or psycho-social support to become prepared for the workplace. In Jamaica, when it was discovered that young males' education attainment and performance as well as literacy rates were lower than their female counterparts, the *Obra* Caribbean partnership added a program component to provide at-risk males with an intensive self-development curriculum in addition to vocational skills training to help young men improve their chances of competing for jobs. *Youth:Work Mexico* connected young women enrolled in their Youth Camps who were affected by domestic violence to social services that could assist them.

Outreach to parents and community: Youth support networks—often their parents or caretakers, teachers, and communities—must also be considered in efforts to address gender equality. IYF programs conduct awareness sessions for parents about gender bias and constraints and work to secure parental support for youth participation. It is also helpful to clarify the goals, benefits and expectations of workforce training and placement as well as benefits of self-employment, in the context of gender-specific cultural biases.

Guidance and mentoring for workplace transitions: Young women often face gender-related challenges in the workplace, thus it is helpful to provide specific supports for these women as they transition into the workforce, particularly when pursuing nontraditional career paths.

"Mariela began skipping training classes because of a lack of childcare for her 4-year-old daughter. The program arranged care through a local church daycare. As a result, Mariela was able to finish her training and move out of informal work into a permanent position in an asparagus company." — Program Trainer, entra21, Peru

IYF programs educate young women about how to deal with workplace inequities and introduce them to successful female role models who broke out of local gender norms. Some programs also create mentor relationships between these role models to help guide young women through the challenges they would likely face after job placement. Young men can also benefit from mentoring and role models, particularly if they are entering nontraditional careers

Work with employers to ensure workplaces meet needs of both sexes:

Similar to outreach to parents, programs need to educate employers about gender equality laws and gender specific benefits—such as equal pay stipulations; the benefits of hiring females at all levels and for all jobs; ways to incentivize males and females to work in non-traditional careers; and strategies to create safe, harassment-free and productive environments for employees of both sexes.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, gender considerations and objectives should be incorporated into a programs' Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plans. Gender-specific data collection from the beginning is important for understanding if and to what extent programs are reaching males and females equitably and whether males and females alike are accessing the same services, successfully acquiring the skills and knowledge

Youth:Work (YW) is a Global Development Alliance Leader with Associates mechanism that USAID and other U.S. government agencies can use to access the youth employability programs, services, and expertise of IYF. Now active in 16 countries, it focuses on comprehensive youth employability and entrepreneurship initiatives. Gender analyses of YW programs uncovered the following issues and concerns that were then incorporated into programs design and strategies:

- *Middle East:* restrictions exist on movement for young females; there are limited perceptions of 'acceptable careers' for males and females
- *Jordan:* a "culture of shame" exists around working in certain jobs, especially for young men
- *Jamaica:* young males' education attainment and literacy rates are lower than females, hindering equal access to jobs
- *Mexico:* domestic violence is a reality for some young women targeted by the program, impacting their abilities to pursue livelihood opportunities
- *Caribbean:* single mothers have difficulty attending training and jobs due to child care needs
- *Peru:* more women are in informal employment, often due to childcare responsibilities, making their job situations more precarious



Youth from Jordan Valley (left) and Zarqa (below) participate in Youth:Work Jordan-supported classroom and on-the-job training courses.

required for local jobs, obtaining loans to start businesses, and securing safe and high-quality employment.

Through such data, IYF is able to hold programs and implementers accountable for addressing and monitoring gender inequalities and improvements. More importantly, managers and trainers can analyze results during program implementations and make adjustments accordingly. For example, in an early stage of *entra21*, an IYF employability program in Latin America, it was found that not only were the odds of women getting jobs after the program significantly lower than those of men, they also earned lower wages. This finding contributed to changes in program design going forward such as more intensive outreach efforts with employers to secure internships for females and encouraging females to get training in occupational areas of high demand.

"The fact that many of the parents allowed their daughters to pursue this opportunity (work in a crystal manufacturing company) is evidence of the success in changing parents' thinking and decision-making processes." — *Trainer, Youth:Work Jordan*

Key Lessons Learned and Successes in Improving Gender Equality

1) Involving families in programming builds support for youth to break traditional gender roles

Male and female youth often face different, but equally challenging barriers imposed by their families in joining the workforce. In its programs in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, IYF has encountered challenges due to low family support for young women's participation in training programs and securing work due to cultural preferences that include keeping daughters at home and having concerns about their safety and reputation.



Involving parents in the program to enhance their understanding of the training content and purpose, and allowing parents to visit job sites and audit training classes, has been a very successful practice

adopted by IYF's *Youth:Work Jordan* (YWJ) program. Such activities were shown to help parents overcome some of their concerns about their daughters' reputations and safety. This kind of education and outreach was also beneficial in India and Pakistan as part of IYF's *Tsunami Reconstruction Initiative* (TRI) program. That program

educated parents about the benefits of self-employment for males and females, in particular, which had a large impact on helping men and women be supported as they started micro-enterprises and employment in an economy in great need of new job growth.

Although males usually face fewer challenges in gaining support to attend trainings and obtain jobs, IYF found that in Jordan, many disadvantaged males often face significant pressure to wait for jobs or careers that are considered prestigious, even when those career aspirations are unrealistic based on the labor market realities or the youth's qualifications. These societal pressures commonly prevent males who may not have a university degree or who did not complete high school from taking entry-level positions in semi-skilled occupations or in a factory setting. As a result, employers end up hiring foreign labor for semi-skilled or factory jobs that are more willing to take these types of positions.

In response to this challenge, YWJ’s career counseling and guidance portions of their intervention includes efforts to talk to males and their families about prospective employment opportunities locally and nationally, as well as their expectations and perceptions of jobs, as a way to improve their collective understanding of the prerequisites for desired jobs, availability of jobs, and advantages of the jobs available. These efforts have been helpful in changing families’ decision-making and the “culture of shame” that prevents so many young men from accepting available decent jobs.

2) Working with the private sector helps companies incorporate changes that better support women in the workforce

A large challenge of reaching gender equality in the workforce is having support from public and private sector employers to make it a priority and follow through on policies to create safe and equal opportunity-based systems.

YWJ addresses this challenge by working with companies that will eventually hire youth trained through the program. As one of the main challenges in Jordan is women’s access to safe employment, YWJ has been working with employers to make factories or work spaces more attractive to young females and their families. This has included creating sex-segregated work spaces and provision of transportation to and from worksites. In addition to these initiatives, YWJ advocates for employers to fulfill their legal obligation to provide daycare on site. Many employers were not aware of their obligation to offer such assistance and have since complied with the law, resulting in better working conditions for young mothers. Overall, employers are reacting well to calls for these changes and looking for ways to accommodate young women’s needs in order to reduce employee turnover

rates and maintain gender balance in their workforce. One children’s clothing factory allowed women the flexibility to work from home in order to keep them on staff.

3) Self-employment is an attractive and successful employment option for young women

In many countries where IYF is implementing programs, high unemployment and depressed economies result in a lack of traditional employment opportunities. In these contexts, self-employment is an especially viable vehicle for job creation. It is also an attractive employment model for young women as it often allows them greater flexibility in their working schedule and location. Business training and investment can quite easily help young women create or increase profit from work and services they already do such as caring for children and cooking. This effort proved successful under the **Tsunami Reconstruction Initiative (TRI)** where special emphasis was placed on empowering young women with skills training and micro-credit support to help bridge existing gender divides.

Promoting self-employment for women is also considered a best practice, as in a number of contexts women have proven to repay loans, save money, and invest in their children’s education at a higher rate than men. Through gaining access to credit in the TRI program, women’s roles in society began to shift. In targeted communities in India, for example, young women who prior to the tsunami concentrated their efforts largely on caring for children and domestic duties emerged as successful entrepreneurs. These women were particularly effective at creating and sustaining self-help groups where credit and savings were pooled.

Below, participants in the Obra program in Latin American and the Caribbean acquire technical and vocational skills while others (right) display the results of a culinary skills class.



4) Life skills training offers opportunities to address gender, reproductive health, and self-image, leading to changes in young people's life choices

Life skills training programs conducted as part of employment programming have been shown to be beneficial for both males and females. Such training, for example, builds confidence and improves self-image among both young men and young women, which is helpful in expanding their perceived life choices and re-engaging them in the community and workforce.

Given its benefits for both males and females, life skills training should be offered to both sexes. The content of the trainings, however, may need to be tailored to address gender differences and local gender issues. IYF conducts life skills classes around the world in both mixed and single-sex settings depending on the subject matter and cultural context.

Another advantage of incorporating life skills training into both male and female employability programs is that gender can be addressed directly by discussing gender roles, bias, equality, gender-based violence, and reproductive health. IYF has found that reproductive health lessons are especially critical as a way of empowering women to make informed choices on the timing of marriage and motherhood, thus also improving their prospects for better livelihood opportunities. At the same time, such lessons increase young males' sense of responsibility and their understanding of the impact of their choices on women. Depending on the context, specific gender-related topics may need to be included in a life skills program. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, reproductive health education and bride kidnapping prevention were added to the life skills curriculum based on a national assessment that raised these issues as critical to young Kyrgyz women's ability to pursue their educations.

"Through this kind of training, women can be empowered to achieve their goals and rights, thus helping them lead a happier and more fulfilling life." — *Suman, life skills student, Skills for Youth program, India*

Finally, life skills training has proven to be important to improving self-awareness, communication, planning, and conflict-resolution skills—all key skills when it comes to changing men's and women's definition of goals for their future, while also providing the essential skills to positively change their roles in society and in the workforce. Males and females who enter the program with low

self-esteem and histories of underachievement are able to go on to leadership roles in their communities, self-employment, and quality jobs.

Conclusions

Traditional gender roles and gender specific expectations held by youth, their families, society, and employers significantly influence young people's

ability to reach their full potential—impacting their wellbeing and economic security—as well as their families', for years to come.

Inequities inherent in local customs, laws and access to resources also contribute to disparities between men and women in terms of being able to pursue livelihood opportunities. Although issues of gender and gender inequality are often complicated, livelihood programs must address them to make important inroads into closing gender gaps and improving young people's life and employment prospects. To ensure the greatest likelihood for success, programs should examine and incorporate gender considerations, including males and females different needs, throughout the entire program cycle.

Based on IYF's experience, life skills and technical courses can significantly change young people's self-esteem, economic prospects, and outlook. However, creating greater gender equality throughout society—and significantly impacting the direction of young people's lives—will take the collective efforts of parents, the community, governments and the private sector. ■

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For more information on the *Youth:Work* program, see www.iyfnet.org/youth-work or contact Angie Venza at a.venza@iyfnet.org.