

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

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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 thus providing disincentives to a return to violence and conflict.

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 PATHWAYS microenterprise (ME) program is a 20 hour cross-sector ME training course, containing key learning areas relevant for retail, manufacturing and service businesses. The curriculum, *MicroEnterprise Fundamentals*TM, was developed by Making Cents International and features custom adaptations for ARC PATHWAYS with culturally relevant training techniques for illiterate youth like role plays, illustrated visuals, simulations, group work and facilitated discussions. Topics taught include fundamental business skills such as communication skills, basic math skills and budgeting, marketing, accounting and planning.

Once a PATHWAYS client successfully completes business skills training, they are 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. And, as of year 2 of the program,

PATHWAYS participants are also able to access general literacy training at no additional cost - an element added after clients showed high demand for such assistance. Graduates of the PATHWAYS program with successful start-up businesses are then referred to local micro-finance institutions, increasing their access to financial services and business growth potential.

One of PATHWAYS main objectives was to develop a scaleable, conflict-oriented, life-skills training program to reach 5000 at-risk youth to deter them from returning to violence. A cadre of 250 local youth facilitators was selected by ARC to maximize the number of youth impacted by the training component of the PATHWAYS program - a technique made possible by the methodology of the Making Cents curriculum model. To ensure the youth facilitators are well equipped to offer quality and appropriate cross-sector ME training, provision of *MicroEnterprise Fundamentals*TM curriculum material is accompanied by a rigorous Making Cents 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. Once trained, the youth facilitators deliver trainings in two-person teams (to help ensure the quality of their training and increase their confidence), each charged with reaching 40 youths over a six month period. In addition to increasing program scope and sustainability, this delivery method brings a youth perspective to identifying business opportunities and enables the program to focus on developing the enterprise skills truly relevant to the participants.

A Knowledge-Attitudes-Perceptions (KAP) study, administered at conclusion of the first year of the PATHWAYS 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:

- the program is youth driven, which helps to ensure relevancy;
- High and clear expectations were set for both youth facilitators 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 on PATHWAYS visit www.arc.org



For more information on Making Cents International visit www.makingcents.com