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# Economic Strengthening for Female Sex Workers and Other Key Populations

Female sex workers (FSWs), like other key populations at risk for HIV, face social marginalization that can result in economic hardship. Many FSWs enter into sex work due to limited opportunities to make ends meet for themselves and their families, and research shows that economic pressure increases the likelihood of FSWs to engage in risky sex. While most interventions for FSWs focus on traditional clinical and behavioral approaches to HIV prevention, economic strengthening (ES) interventions can be used to address one of the root causes of HIV risk among FSWs.

## Our Experience

In 2014, ASPIRES implemented an innovative research study to build the evidence on how ES can contribute to reducing FSWs' vulnerability to HIV. The research employed a combination of ethnography and financial diaries—where data collectors work with participants to record all of their financial transactions—to gain a detailed understanding of the financial lives and needs of FSWs in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, including their attitudes towards potential ES programs. This study was the first of its kind to look at this population.

Based on findings from this research, ASPIRES developed and piloted a novel ES program featuring life skills, entrepreneurship, and financial capabilities training for 100 FSWs in Abidjan. A qualitative evaluation of the program found that it was not only both feasible and acceptable, but received high praise from participants and demonstrated promising indicators of potential behavior change.

## What We Offer

ASPIRES is available to adapt and scale up the existing pilot curriculum in other contexts for FSWs as well as other Key Populations. We also provide formative research to better understand the needs of these and other vulnerable populations.

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*“Today, I can save my money and then I can think positively, I do not panic face my problems. I can invest and save. I invested in other things aside from the sex profession thanks to training.”*

—ASPIRES FSW Pilot Participant

## Contact Us

To learn more about how ASPIRES's expertise in ES for FSWs can benefit your programs, contact Mike Ferguson, ASPIRES Project Director (mferguson@fhi360.org) or our AOR, Colette Peck (cpeck@usaid.gov). You also can check out ASPIRES's learning resources at: <http://bit.ly/1rwRue3>.