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THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

ASPIRES

ASPIRES: Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation & Research in Economic Strengthening

Poverty and social vulnerability tend to create a negative feedback loop for the people they affect. For example, they increase the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS for individuals, and HIV/AIDS itself can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and increase an individual's social vulnerability. Poverty, social isolation, and HIV infection are vulnerability factors that can have far-reaching consequences, increasing health and wellbeing risks for households and communities. Where they compromise children's wellbeing, such vulnerability factors can have negative consequences over lifetimes. Girls are disproportionately vulnerable in most societies, and the links between maternal health and child outcomes mean that follow-on effects of this heightened vulnerability can be generational. Traditional economic strengthening (ES) programs, such as microfinance and workforce training, effectively target the economically-active general population, but they do not adequately consider the distinct needs of vulnerable children and other highly at-risk populations at the household level. What is needed are specialized interventions to strengthen household economic security and promote better outcomes for these populations.

Introducing ASPIRES

With the support of PEPFAR and USAID's Office of HIV/AIDS (OHA) and Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), FHI 360 has assembled a consortium of leading organizations and experts to address the needs of vulnerable populations, especially children, under the Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation & Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES) project. The primary goal of the project is to support gender-sensitive programming, research, and learning to improve the economic security of highly vulnerable individuals, families, and children. Critical target populations for ASPIRES are those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, key

Project Snapshot

ASPIRES supports gender-sensitive programming, research, and learning to improve the economic security of highly vulnerable individuals, families, and children.

Award amount:
\$40 million

Main Technical Areas:
Research and Technical Assistance

The ASPIRES Approach

- Using current evidence and state-of-the-art approaches to promote scalable, high-quality programming.
- Carrying out research science to expand the evidence base and promote innovation.
- Building the capacity of national stakeholders to implement evidence-based programming as well as to monitor and evaluate programs.
- Coordinating with other donors, local and national governments, and global partners.
- Integrating an explicit gender perspective in research, tools, policy and standards recommendations, and technical assistance.



Côte d'Ivoire

In Côte d'Ivoire, ASPIRES developed an original vulnerability assessment methodology and executed a large-scale survey of USAID priority areas in early 2015, which will be used by USAID for programs targeting families affected by or at risk of HIV/AIDS.

ASPIRES also employed an innovative combination of ethnography and Financial Diaries to delve deeply into the financial management strategies of female sex workers (FSWs) in Abidjan. The findings will be employed in developing a pilot ES intervention for the FSW population.

South Africa

ASPIRES is engaged in a 4-year, \$10 million program to improve the long-term economic security and HIV prevention knowledge and skills of at-risk youth in South Africa. ASPIRES is offering integrated ES and HIV Prevention Education assistance to five South African PEPFAR partners with programs for Orphans and Vulnerable Children and Youth (OVYC) and their caregivers. These efforts will be complemented by a rigorous evaluation research program to build the evidence base around the efficacy of such interventions.

The South Africa program comprises three components:

- **Technical Assistance:** ASPIRES partner Save the Children USA will support the local partners with training in ES interventions including financial capabilities training, employability and entrepreneurship training, and support to students in grades 11 & 12 to pursue tertiary education.
- **HIV Prevention Education:** ASPIRES is working with local experts to update an existing HIV prevention curriculum (Vhutshilo 2) and implement a Training of Trainers program for the new curriculum with the five partners.
- **Research:** ASPIRES will implement a full factorial randomized controlled trial (RCT), with both qualitative and quantitative components, to evaluate the effectiveness of integrated ES and HIV prevention education programming on health and economic outcomes for at-risk youth.

Project Partners

- ACDI/VOCA
- Action for Enterprise
- CARE
- Catholic Relief Services
- DAI
- Development and Training Services Inc.
- Economic Policy Research Institute
- Freedom from Hunger
- Human Sciences Research Council
- Innovations for Poverty Action
- Integral Science Institute
- International Rescue Committee
- Living Goods
- Mennonite Economic Development Associates
- Microfinance Opportunities
- Save the Children
- The SEEP Network
- The William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan
- World Council of Credit Unions
- WorldVision

populations at high risk of acquiring HIV, and households where children have been or are at risk of becoming separated from family care.

ASPIRES focuses on efficient provision of technical assistance (TA) to scale up high-quality interventions in the areas of consumption support, money management, and income promotion. The project also focuses on design and implementation of rigorous research to evaluate programs and inform a new understanding of best practices in ES.

A Strong Foundation of Experience

ASPIRES builds on FHI 360's experience in managing complex USAID-funded initiatives using ES to enhance the financial well-being of vulnerable households. ASPIRES is funded through a \$40 million, 5-year Associate Award under the Financial Integration, Economic Leveraging, Broad Based Dissemination and Support Leader with Associates (FIELD-Support LWA). Through the FIELD-Support LWA, FHI 360 has managed more than 20 Associate Awards with a total value of over \$300 million, including the Supporting Transformation by Reducing Insecurity and Vulnerability with Economic Strengthening (STRIVE) Program and the Livelihood and Food Security Technical Assistance (LIFT) Program.

Opportunities with ASPIRES

ASPIRES provides technical assistance to US government agencies and their implementing partners to advance household economic strengthening programs for vulnerable populations. As a flexible global mechanism, ASPIRES can rapidly engage its consortium of experts in research and technical assistance. For more information, please contact Project Director Michael Ferguson (mferguson@fhi360.org).

ASPIRES is an Associate Award under the FIELD-Support LWA, a cooperative agreement between USAID's Office of HIV/AIDS and FHI 360 and its consortium of development partners. Learn more at: www.microlinks.org/field-support

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