



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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

Poverty and social vulnerability increase the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS for individuals, and HIV/AIDS itself can perpetuate a cycle of poverty. But the effects of the disease reach beyond the individuals infected, increasing economic vulnerability and heightening exposure to health risks for their children and households as well. This can be especially true for girls, who face even higher levels of vulnerability. Traditional economic strengthening (ES) programs, such as microfinance and workforce training, effectively target the economically-active general population, but they do not adequately serve 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 stability and promote better health outcomes.

Since the earliest days of the HIV epidemic, FHI 360 has worked with populations affected by HIV/AIDS on a range of interventions related to prevention, care, treatment and counseling. More recently, with the support of USAID and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), FHI 360 has been expanding the scope and impact of such programs to include initiatives that support the economic well-being of the most vulnerable populations.

## Introducing ASPIRES

Under the Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation & Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES) project, FHI 360 has assembled a consortium of leading organizations and experts to assist USAID and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in improving the livelihoods and economic security of vulnerable populations. The project supports evidence-based, gender-sensitive programming and learning to strengthen the economic capacities of vulnerable individuals, families and OVC affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as key populations at risk of acquiring HIV. To

### Project Snapshot

ASPIRES supports evidence-based, gender-sensitive programming and learning to improve the economic security of highly vulnerable individuals, families, and OVC infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as key populations at high risk of acquiring HIV.

*Award amount:*  
\$20 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 and implementation science to expand the evidence base and promote innovation.
- Building the capacity of national stakeholders to implement evidence-based programming as well as to evaluate programs.
- Coordinating with other donors and global partners.
- Integrating an explicit gender perspective in our research, tools, policy and standards recommendations, and technical assistance.



## ASPIRES Project Examples

### Mozambique

The USAID/Mozambique Integrated Health Office has requested ASPIRES's assistance to design and implement an independent external review and assess its ES portfolio. Results will be delivered to the USAID Mozambique mission to help inform future programming, in coordination with additional TA to be provided under the ASPIRES project. The review also will assess conditions for possible USAID support for future SP programming in Mozambique. Building on those findings, ASPIRES will provide formal training on SP to select staff at the country's Ministry of Women and Social Action (MMAS)/National Institute of Social Action (INAS).

### Côte D'Ivoire

A recent inquiry into Côte D'Ivoire's USAID-funded ES portfolio pointed towards a lack of available interventions for families struggling economically, but not totally destitute – potentially the largest group of intended beneficiaries. USAID proposes to validate these initial findings through an ES vulnerability assessment to help the mission to ensure that ES activities are designed to appropriately target intended beneficiaries. ASPIRES will develop and apply best practices in vulnerability assessment to:

1. segment the target population and characterize its poverty levels, vulnerability, and economic needs in select regions; and
2. validate a household-level targeting tool that will enable USAID-funded programs to select appropriate households for its various ES programs going forward.

Promising evidence has emerged that mobilization and ES activities aimed at female sex workers can decrease HIV/AIDS vulnerability. USAID/PEPFAR Côte d'Ivoire proposes to contribute to the global knowledge base in this area through a pilot project under ASPIRES. The project will enact a selection of ES interventions for this population that may include pilot savings, money management, credit, and other microfinance activities, and then evaluate those activities rigorously to inform future programming.

## 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
- World Vision

achieve this, ASPIRES provides technical assistance and research to scale up high-quality interventions in ES such as improved access to savings and other financial services, training in money management, and support for the acquisition and use of income-generating workforce and entrepreneurship skills, as well as in social protection (SP) through interventions such as cash transfers.

## 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 \$20 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.

## Additional Resources through a Consortium of Partners

FHI 360 is the lead agency in a consortium of 20 organizations that will carry out ASPIRES activities, drawing on immense depth and breadth of experience in related ES initiatives and other work with vulnerable populations. See box above for complete list of partners.

### 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](mailto: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](http://www.microlinks.org/field-support)

This product is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of FHI 360 and do not reflect the views of USAID or the US Government.

## CONTACT US

Michael Ferguson, PhD  
Project Director  
FHI 360  
E | [mferguson@fhi360.org](mailto:mferguson@fhi360.org)

Colette Peck  
AOR | Office of HIV/AIDS  
USAID  
E | [cpeck@usaid.gov](mailto:cpeck@usaid.gov)

Jason Wolfe  
Technical Advisor  
Office of HIV/AIDS | USAID  
E | [jwolfe@usaid.gov](mailto:jwolfe@usaid.gov)