



## GIL TOP POLICY LESSONS ON INCREASING WOMEN'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Young women in Africa are less likely to be employed than young men, as a result of gaps in access to resources such as skills, time, and capital, and due to underlying social norms. Adolescence is a particularly critical time to intervene, as teenage pregnancy or dropping out of school can have severe impacts on future employment and earnings with significant consequences on their lives.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO IMPROVE YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES?

- Youth unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan Africa are double those of adult unemployment, and unemployment rates for women are higher than rates faced by men<sup>1</sup>. The large majority of women who are employed work in vulnerable employment.
- The differences in the constraints facing young women stem from differential access to key resources which enable employment, as well as (and related to) underlying norms and institutions that govern men's and women's economic and household roles.
- The employment of young women can improve development directly through economic growth and productivity, and indirectly via increased agency and lower fertility.

<sup>1</sup> Chakravarty, Shubha; Das, Smita; Vaillant, Julia. 2017. *Gender and Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa : A Review of Constraints and Effective Interventions*. Policy Research Working Paper; No. 8245. World Bank, Washington, DC.

### GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close gender gaps in earnings, productivity, assets, and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 60 impact evaluations in more than 20 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations, and the private sector to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The Lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.



## WHAT WORKS TO EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION?

### INCREASING EFFICIENCY IN THE JOB SEARCH

- Nearly 1 in 5 unemployed young women in sub-Saharan Africa say that they cannot pursue their preferred career paths because the entry requirements exceed their education and training<sup>2</sup>.
- Job search is a largely self-regulated process, subject to behavioral biases that lead to sub-optimal search and employment outcomes.

### POLICY IN ACTION: TESTING AN INNOVATIVE TOOL TO INCREASE JOB SEARCH EFFICIENCY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Drawing on lessons from behavioral science, GIL designed, implemented, and tested an action-planning tool to promote greater job search intensity. Existing studies show that search intensity depends on job seekers' biases in beliefs about returns to search efforts, their level of impatience, their locus of control, as well as their self-confidence and willpower. Within

this context, we evaluated the impact of an action planning intervention in tandem with job counseling, on the efficiency and effectiveness of search among unemployed youth in South Africa. We find that action planning helps unemployed youths follow through on their job search intentions and adopt a more efficient and effective search strategy. Participants who completed a detailed job search plan increased the number of job applications submitted, but not the time spent searching. Greater search efficiency and effectiveness translates to sizeable improvements in employment outcomes. Participants in the action planning group receive more job offers and have a greater likelihood of employment.<sup>3</sup>

### DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY

- Job training programs offer a potential opportunity to reduce occupational segregation by shifting norms about the appropriate sectors for men and women to work in.
- Additionally, job training can increase aspirations among women who lack the confidence to see themselves as successful.

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund. 2018. *GirlForce: Skills, Education and Training for Girls Now*, ILO and UNICEF, Geneva and New York.

<sup>3</sup> Abel, Simon Martin; Burger, Rulof Petrus; Carranza, Eliana; Piraino, Patrizio. 2017. "Bridging the intention-behavior gap? the effect of plan-making prompts on job search and employment." Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 8181; Impact Evaluation series. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.



#### POLICY IN ACTION: HELPING YOUNG WOMEN TO CHALLENGE THEIR UNCONSCIOUS BIASES IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, a World Bank project provided an information and communications technology (ICT) training to women university graduates, and GIL found impressive impacts: participants were 26 percent more likely to work in the ICT sector after the training. This suggests the potential for trainings to support the development of emerging sectors and employment in these sectors despite an initial lack of sector relevant skills.

Interestingly, the program's impact was strongest for women who initially held implicit biases against associating women with professional attributes. These women were more likely to switch into the ICT sector after the program than initially unbiased women. This seems to indicate that even without explicitly encouraging participants to defy social norms, training programs can help individuals overcome self-defeating biases.<sup>4</sup>



#### EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

- For girls, adolescence is the critical time to intervene.

During adolescence, they face increased risks of contracting HIV/STI, or of having an unintended pregnancy, which can limit future earnings.

- However, adolescent girls face specific barriers to labor market entry, including smaller networks and limited access to information, domestic work burden, and concurrent labor market and fertility decisions.
- Interventions targeting adolescent girls must take into account the unique constraints that they face.

#### POLICY IN ACTION: SCALING EVIDENCE TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ACROSS TWO CONTINENTS<sup>5</sup>

In Uganda, GIL worked with BRAC to document the impacts of a vocational and life skills training program through 'safe space' clubs for adolescent girls. Findings showed that the clubs raised the likelihood of girls engaging in income-generating activities by 72% and decreased teen pregnancy by 26%. At a cost of under \$100 US per girl per year, the program not only worked but was also cost-effective.

<sup>4</sup> Croke, Kevin, Markus Goldstein and Alaka Holla, 2018. *Can Job Training Decrease Women's Self-Defeating Biases? Experimental Evidence from Nigeria*. World Bank Other Operational Studies 30495, Washington, DC: World Bank.

<sup>5</sup> Bandiera, Oriana, Niklas Buehren, Robin Burgess, Markus Goldstein, Selim Gulesci, Imran Rasul, Munshi Sulaiman. 2017. *Women's Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa*. American Economic Journal: Applied Economics



In Liberia, GIL found that the Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (EPAG) program, which provided six months of classroom-based technical and life skills training, followed by six months of follow-up support, led to a 50% increase in employment among trainees. This evidence helped shape two projects that will reach 900,000 girls and women across India and six countries in Sub-Saharan Africa over five years: the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Regional Project (SWEDD) and the India Tejaswini Socioeconomic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls & Young Women project.



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