

Rachel Almeida

Georgetown University & International Student House, Washington, D.C.

Girls Leading the Way: Building Peace through Entrepreneurship

Koudougou, Burkina Faso

Background

The objective of this pilot project is to promote the financial inclusion of adolescent girls in a region at risk of being destabilized by conflict. To do so, we must consider the local and regional security context in addition to cultural barriers to women's economic participation. Many financial inclusion programs focus solely on business training and increasing access to financial products. However, recent evidence suggests that such programs sometimes fail to achieve their primary objectives due to social constraints unaccounted for during program design. More recently, major organizations such as the World Bank Gender Innovation Lab, USAID, and CGAP have been working on ways to implement social norms or socioemotional education into business training curriculum to generate more sustainable outcomes.¹ This project will do this by combining an entrepreneurship incubator framework with socioemotional skills-building to empower adolescent girls to become future changemakers within their communities. This idea was born out of a discussion with local university women who highlighted the need to reach girls at an age when they are beginning to think of their future and provide alternatives to early marriage and dropping out of school. Given the current security risks in Burkina Faso, this is an opportune moment to strengthen community resilience by incorporating a more targeted approach to entrepreneurial training for adolescent girls and strengthen the role they play as agents of peace and stability. It becomes increasingly important to recognize that adolescent girls have a powerful role to play when they are given the opportunity to dream of a better future for themselves, a future where they are able to financially support themselves and expand the choices available to them.

Project Outline

If awarded the Davis Projects for Peace Prize, the funding will be used for a first of its kind two-week entrepreneurship camp for 30 vulnerable adolescent girls in Koudougou, including girls from an orphanage founded by the Zodo Foundation and girls who are survivors of gender-based violence. The project will provide a curriculum designed to empower the girls to create innovative businesses to address peace and resiliency in their own communities. The project will help raise awareness of how entrepreneurship can be a tool to protect against the impact on the community if the conflict were to move further south. The curriculum will include modules that teach innovative techniques to seeing problems as business opportunities. Through organization of focus groups and workshops, the modules will be adapted to incorporate identified needs to strengthen social cohesion and mitigate against future threats to peace. The project will include workshops on business development and financial literacy, a training on how to manage a savings group, seminars on socioemotional skills and relevant trades, and a business pitch competition to award funding for the top three ideas that promote peace and community resilience. Furthermore, activities will include targeted discussions to promote ethnic and religious tolerance and encourage women and girls to engage in peace dialogues in their communities.

Regional Support

This project will be further supported by local organizations that have a strong presence and established trust among women and girls in Koudougou: the Zodo Foundation² and Her Rising Association. Zodo is a Swiss foundation which supports two orphanages, three village schools, a health center, an apprenticeship program, and a food security program. Her Rising Association implements an annual entrepreneurship incubator program, supports two savings groups, raises financial support to help women start their businesses, and oversees a growing national women's group. Her Rising Association was started by Rachel Almeida in partnership with three local university students and has received funding from the U.S. Department of State. Furthermore, Her Rising Association has a good relationship with representatives from the U.S. Embassy to Burkina Faso and the English Language Fellows Program at Georgetown University, who have committed to providing assistance for the activities of the project. The Zodo Foundation will provide guidance on selection of participants and speakers. Her Rising Association will provide volunteer trainers with experience in entrepreneurship to assist in the implementation of the curriculum and be available to mentor the girls on a long-term basis. Two

additional local women's groups will also assist in leading the seminars and serve as mentors. The combined expertise of both organizations and the support of community leaders will ensure that every aspect of the project takes into account cultural norms and the local economic context. Working in close collaboration with local partners will help provide an environment that prioritizes the girls' learning outcomes while also forging meaningful long-term networks among the girls and their mentors.

Project Activities

- Conduct workshops within the incubator framework to lead participants through the process of business development as a tool to create more resilient and peaceful communities
- Development of "safe-space" groups to encourage strong networks of women and girls, specifically designed to foster mentoring relationships between adolescent girls and locally established and respected women role models
- Teach and support a village savings group model to help mitigate against income shocks due to interruption of economic activities (such as conflict or climate-related interruptions)
- Conduct a business pitch competition with external judges to fund the top three most innovative business ideas that address a social need related to peace-building
- Conduct seminars on issues relevant to women in Burkina Faso including health, all forms of gender-based violence, women's rights, gender equality in the workforce, and the importance of women's participation in the peace dialogue and promotion of multi-ethnic unity
- Conduct skills trainings on activities such as soap making, animal husbandry, technology, communication, photography, shea harvesting, and how to utilize mobile money platforms

Outcomes

Short-term goals:

- Increase girls' understanding of their basic human rights, including what constitutes gender-based violence and what forms of support are available to them
- Equip participants with the tools to start their own business
- Support the launch of new businesses developed during project activities
- Support the creation of savings groups among women and girls

- Foster sustainable relationships between vulnerable adolescent girls and women entrepreneurs
- Provide girls with skills that will help them make more informed choices about their future
- Promote the long-term success of women-led businesses in Koudougou
- Encourage better financial habits such as savings and participation in the formal financial sector to help decrease the impact of factors of vulnerability, instability, and insecurity

Indicators of success

Indicators of success will encompass participatory assessments and monitoring by conducting surveys, community needs assessments and measuring the progress and economic impact of businesses launched. Surveys will be conducted before and after to measure understanding of women's roles in the promotion of peace as well as perceptions of financial stability before and after intervention.

Sustainability

Because this pilot project is the first of its kind in Koudougou, the commitment of the supporting organizations will be vital to its success. If this pilot is successful, Her Rising Association and Zoodo Foundation will provide ongoing support by integrating it into their existing programs, therefore building capacity of local stakeholders will be an important aspect of the project. Community stakeholders, including women's groups, the University of Norbert Zongo, and the U.S. Embassy-funded 'American Corner' are invested in the project and will provide support in the form of meeting spaces and promotion of activities after the pilot is completed. The project will be reassessed and updated after the pilot and can be adapted to fit different time frames and address different audiences. If the project is successful, additional iterations of the program can be implemented in different cities across Burkina Faso, creating opportunities for women and girls to forge their own paths toward a brighter future.