



# Final Evaluation of Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women (EMPOWER) in Zambia

## SUMMARY

In 2017 the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), in close collaboration with the [Bureau of International Labor Affairs](#) (ILAB), contracted Mathematica to evaluate the effect of the Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women Project, (EMPOWER). EMPOWER aimed to reduce child labor in Eastern Province, Zambia by addressing skills gaps that constrain adolescent girls' and women's work and livelihood opportunities and facilitating pathways to employment that aligned with participants' improved skills. Specifically, EMPOWER offered 2,500 adolescent girls aged 15-17 and 1,500 women in 20 communities (1) a six-month training course with weekly sessions that included separate modules on life skills and technical/vocational skills (the latter of which primarily focused on training in chicken or goat rearing); (2) the opportunity to join business groups (focused on selling chickens or goats) with other participants; and (3) six months of follow-up services to support business groups and access to employment.

Mathematica's evaluation of EMPOWER used quantitative pre-post and descriptive analyses to measure changes in the outcomes for adolescent girls and women and qualitative analysis to contextualize findings. The evaluation's primary objectives were to determine whether EMPOWER increased participants' skill levels and, in turn, increased adolescent girls' access to acceptable work and adolescent girls' and women's involvement in self-employment and paid work.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation also measured changes to other outcomes sought by EMPOWER such as increased awareness of child labor and increased access to business and financial networks. Our pre-post analyses relied on pre-project data collected as part of the evaluation's monitoring and evaluation plan (baseline, January-March 2019) and post-project data commissioned by Mathematica one year after participants completed project activities (endline, March-July 2021) collected either shortly after the adolescent girls and women completed project activities (interim, April to September 2020) and/or one year after they completed project activities (endline, March-July 2021) or similar (See Page 6 in the full report).

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the annual process to determine the Department's research priorities for the upcoming year. It contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform [International Labor Issues](#) programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Participation was a substantial challenge for EMPOWER.** Approximately 60 percent of adolescent girls and 71 percent of women completed life skills module and only 44 percent of adolescent girls and 56 percent of women completed the technical/vocational skills module. With this level of exposure, it



# Final Evaluation of Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women (EMPOWER) in Zambia

is possible many participants were not able to build the full set of skills fostered by EMPOWER. Also, the project's high time requirements were reported to be a major challenge to participation.

- **We found little or mixed evidence of changes to adolescent girls' and women's skill levels, though literacy and numeracy were an important exception.** The project improved basic number recognition skills but not higher-level arithmetic skills. Specifically, the share of adolescent girls who could read a full sentence increased by 12 percentage points and the share that recognize four-digit numbers (the highest level of number recognition) rose by 13 percentage points.
- According to EMPOWER's results framework, increased skills were a precondition for participants to improve work and employment outcomes. **We were unable to measure changes in these outcomes due to missing data and other measurement challenges.**
- **A small share of participants, mostly women, reported having participated in business and financial networks at endline.** At endline, 9 percent of adolescent girls and 17 percent of women reported they had participated in a business network in the last three months; and 16 percent of adolescent girls and 37 percent of women reported they had participated in a financial network. (We assume that adolescent girls and women had no participation at baseline, so these numbers indicate change from zero).
- Acceptable work is only conceptually relevant for working age youth (ages 13+ in Zambia), yet most adolescent girls reached adulthood over the course of the project. **Increasing access to acceptable work may have not been an appropriate outcome for EMPOWER as improvements in this outcome would have been short lived.**

[SEE FULL STUDY](#)

**TIMEFRAME:** 2017-2021  
**SUBMITTED BY:** Mathematica  
**DATE PREPARED:** March 2022

**PARTNER AGENCY:** Bureau for International Affairs (ILAB)  
**SPONSOR:** Chief Evaluation Office  
**CEO CONTACT:** [Yancey.Christina.L@dol.gov](mailto:Yancey.Christina.L@dol.gov)

*The Department of Labor's (DOL) Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) sponsors independent evaluations and research, primarily conducted by external, third-party contractors in accordance with the [Department of Labor Evaluation Policy](#). CEO's [research development process](#) includes extensive technical review at the design, data collection and analysis stage, including: external contractor review and OMB review and approval of data collection methods and instruments per the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), Institutional Review Board (IRB) review to ensure studies adhere to the highest ethical standards, review by academic*



# Final Evaluation of Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women (EMPOWER) in Zambia

*peers (e.g., Technical Working Groups), and inputs from relevant DOL agency and program officials and CEO technical staff. Final reports undergo an additional independent expert technical review and a review for Section 508 compliance prior to publication. The resulting reports represent findings from this independent research and do not represent DOL positions or policies.*