



SUCCESS STORY

Learning by Doing

USAID workforce programs transform a woman's work and life in Liberia



Photo: DAI

USAID-trained mechanic Josephine Mendoza (center) and staff who run the generators, the only source of electricity for a rural Liberian hospital.

“When you are a mechanic you can make it on your own; a mechanic can live anywhere and get work. I get more than money out of this; I get something for myself,” said Josephine Mendoza, a Liberian who received her job training through USAID programs.

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Josephine Mendoza, jumped at the chance to learn auto mechanics on one of USAID's first post-war apprenticeship programs in 2005. Mendoza had been a refugee in neighboring Ivory Coast where she had seen women working in construction and as mechanics. Only one other woman joined Mendoza; the rest chose more traditional activities with less income-earning potential.

After the six-month apprenticeship, she successfully passed the Agricultural and Industrial Training Bureau trade test and went to work at the garage where she had apprenticed in Monrovia, Liberia's capital.

A single mother of two, Mendoza enlisted the support of her extended family to watch her children in the evenings so that she could attend high school at night. In 2008, Mendoza qualified for a new USAID private sector internship program. She was assigned to intern with a Liberian-owned contractor in heavy-duty mechanics.

After completing the internship, a company that had a round-the-clock service contract at a large public hospital in Liberia hired Mendoza as a mechanic. She was quickly promoted to site supervisor.

In 2009, Mendoza is in the 11th grade. In late 2008, her elder son, 11, died from an undiagnosed illness. She left school but never stopped working. Now 37, she remains determined in her plan to return to school and go on to become a mechanical engineer. Her dream is to enter the University of Liberia's School of Engineering. She wants to teach other women to be mechanics and says, "There are many things women can do instead of all doing the same thing."

Mendoza is passionate and practical about her work. She has a soft, warm demeanor. Only the muscles bulging in her arms from carrying 5-gallon fuel buckets hint at the force of her will and her unconventional trade. Mendoza says of her unique job, "When you are a mechanic you can make it on your own; a mechanic can live anywhere and get work. I get more than money out of this; I get something for myself."

Mendoza is optimistic about her future and her country: "I see a woman is president of the country; a woman is mayor of Monrovia. Women are taking power and that gives other women like me courage."

Since inception in 2005, USAID Liberia's apprenticeship program has trained more than 3,750 people. More than two-thirds of the graduating apprentices found work. Since 2007, USAID Liberia's Private Sector Intern program has sponsored 470 interns and involved more than 40 enterprises and organizations.