

Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program: Educate a girl, transform a society

*There is no tool for
development more effective
than the education of girls.*

— Kofi Annan, former United
Nations Secretary-General



When Amina Salumu of Tanzania lost her parents, she also lost her dream of getting an education. “I had to move in with different relatives, hoping that I would get one who could take care of me and cover my school expenses,” she recalled through tears. “I did not see any future ahead of me.”

With help from FHI 360's Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP), Amina now is a proud graduate of Somangila Secondary School in Dar es Salaam. “Now I can see a bright future before me,” she beamed.

Educating and empowering girls and women improves the lives of individuals, families and communities. When girls and women are educated, they have more employment opportunities and families have higher household incomes. Women with an education tend to have smaller, healthier families, and the communities where they live experience reductions in infant mortality. However, girls in developing countries face a web of obstacles to completing their education, ranging from a lack of resources to early marriage.¹

AGSP provided an integrated holistic solution to support the education of vulnerable girls, particularly girls in rural communities, including those who had been orphaned, came from economically disadvantaged households or were affected by HIV/AIDS. Working through local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and communities, the program provided full scholarship packages that covered all fees, uniforms, school bags, books and slates, pens and pencils, personal hygiene products, shoes and socks, wrap skirts and, in some cases, food and boarding. AGSP also helped local NGOs and communities promote girls' education and connected the girls with female mentors.

From 2004 through 2011, the program provided more than 210,000 scholarships to more than 70,000 girls in 2,800 communities in 15 African countries that have been challenged by conflict within or across their borders: Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. In two of these countries, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, studies showed that girls funded by AGSP were more likely to complete primary or secondary school, and in Uganda, some of its graduates continue to serve as mentors.

About FHI 360: FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. Our staff includes experts in health, education, nutrition, environment, economic development, civil society, gender equality, youth, research, technology, communication and social marketing — creating a unique mix of capabilities to address today's interrelated development challenges. FHI 360 serves more than 60 countries and all U.S. states and territories.



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AGSP integrated several FHI 360 practice areas — gender, education, civil society and HIV/AIDS — to address the multifaceted barriers that girls faced. The program's comprehensive approach helped identify challenges and create long-term solutions for educating girls.

Gender

Social norms and girls' unique needs are often key barriers to girls' education. In some communities, families keep girls out of school so they can work or care for a sick relative. Some male teachers have female students do chores instead of learn. A lack of feminine hygiene products also can discourage some girls from going to school. AGSP provided sanitary products as part of the scholarship packages and encouraged families and communities to send girls to school. The program also developed a gender-sensitive peer counseling curriculum that enabled girls, boys and teachers to have open dialogue about adolescent health, self-esteem and involvement in civil society.

Education

Beyond scholarship packages, AGSP provided educational materials, helped girls get tutors and trained 1,400 mentors from the community to counsel the girls. Mentors sometimes intervened at the household level, asking the parents to give the girls a break from chores so they can study or persuading parents to allow girls to stay in school rather than get married at a young age.

Civil society

AGSP worked with local NGOs, communities and parents to create an environment supportive of girls' education. Communities helped select the scholarship recipients and held public events touting education. In Chad, mothers formed groups and went door to door to persuade families to send their girls to school. The mothers managed school fees, raised money for school repairs and helped hire teachers. Some of the mothers in the groups have become village leaders, enhancing the stature of women in those communities.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS in particular impedes girls' enrollment and retention of girls in school. Girls are more likely to be infected and more likely to be affected when others get sick. They are often forced to drop out of school to become caregivers or to work to help support the family. AGSP provided HIV/AIDS education and awareness to help prevent HIV infection, so girls could stay on track with their education.

Looking ahead

AGSP leaves behind a wealth of lessons, insights and resources to help its partners sustain their progress in girls' education and equip others to develop similar programs. The program developed an online database, Fieldlink East and Central Africa, that allowed partners access to information on all scholarships awarded, biographical data of the scholars, tracking data, and qualitative data on mentoring and community participation. AGSP also developed the *Tool Kit for Girls' Scholarship Programming and Related Enhancement Activities: Ideas, Instruments and Inspirations* and the *Girls Mentoring Resource Guides Series*.

Moreover, the program leaves a legacy of potential change agents like Amina, who has a heart for helping people and a dream of becoming a lawyer. "I know I can reach my dream," she said.

¹Herz B, Sperling GB. What works in girls' education: evidence and policies from the developing world. New York: Council on Foreign Relations; 2004.