

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIP1 to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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Girls' Scholarships

Although there is global recognition of the need to improve girls' access to and retention in school, girls continue to face many obstacles to receiving an education.

Barriers can include religious and cultural norms regarding the value or role of women in society. For example, many times girls face education systems that use teaching techniques and curricula that are not always well suited to their learning needs. Furthermore, families often assign daughters a heavy burden of household responsibilities, resulting in a reluctance to enroll them in school. If girls are enrolled in school, often times families set limits on the time their daughters can dedicate to coursework. An absence of nearby schools can lead to fears for girls' physical safety, while schools without female teachers present the greater risk of sexual abuse or early pregnancy. Another significant barrier is poverty; poor families too often do not have the luxury of sending all their children to school. When faced with difficult choices, parents are generally more likely to send their sons than their daughters to school. To redress this disparity, many donors and governments have instituted incentive programs to increase girls' enrollment and persistence in school. This edition of the *EQ Review* focuses on a specific type of incentive: girls' scholarships.

Incentive programs are designed to help families meet the costs of schooling, which can be both direct and indirect. Direct educational costs include tuition fees, exam fees, uniforms, shoes, school books and supplies, and miscellaneous charges such as Parent Teacher Association dues and school-based activity fees. Indirect costs are primarily the opportunity costs of the foregone income or labor of a child, which many poor families cannot afford. Incentives can take many forms:

- Scholarships;
- Conditional cash transfers;
- Food (provision of cooking oil for family use or school snack);
- Allowances for uniforms; and
- Free housing in dormitories.

Scholarship programs have been identified as the quickest and most direct way of increasing school enrollment. Defined as gifts of money or other aid to help students continue their studies, scholarship programs have used a variety of approaches. Many countries have awarded scholarships to increase girls' entry into primary school. In Cambodia, cash transfers to parents of girls in their last year of primary school were made to help female students make the transition to secondary school and complete the lower secondary cycle. Other scholarship packages may include payment of school fees and the provision of a uniform, shoes, book bag and supplies. The package provided to girls under the USAID-funded Ambassador Girls' Scholarship Program goes beyond fees and schools supplies to include access to individual female mentors and HIV/AIDS prevention education.

The results of girls' scholarships as a strategy for increasing girls' attendance have been mixed. Fortunately, however, assessments of scholarship programs have identified both potential pitfalls and lessons learned that can be applied to future programs. The following factors can limit the effectiveness of a scholarship program: poor targeting of scholarship recipients; lack of clear criteria and processes for selecting the neediest children; lack of publicity about the program (that can limit the transparency of the selection process and the changes in community attitudes toward educating girls); insufficient size of the scholarship package; untimely distribution of the scholarship; and limited monitoring and follow-up.

Inside This Issue:

- 2 Expanded Girls' Scholarships Extended in 15 African Countries
- 3 Opportunity to Bridge Gap in Egypt
- 4 Haiti Scholarship Program

Program implementers and evaluators over the years have distilled several key factors in the successful administration of girls' scholarship programs:

- Clear identification of eligibility criteria for recipients and careful targeting to ensure those most in need receive the assistance;
- Clear expectations and accountability of recipient performance to maintain the scholarship;
- Transparent selection processes with the active participation of the local community;
- Direct, transparent transfer of cash portions of scholarships to recipients;
- Inclusion of a critical mass of other child-friendly interventions to boost girls' participation;
- Guaranteed funding for at least one cohort to complete the primary school cycle; and
- Low administrative costs.

The greatest word of caution is that a scholarship program is by no means the educational "silver bullet." A scholarship program can only achieve its goals if the quality of the education offered is good enough to persuade parents to shoulder whatever costs may still remain, whether they are direct or indirect. Incentive programs such as girls' scholarships must be part of a larger strategic approach to make education relevant, affordable and effective.

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Expanded Girls' Education Scholarships in 15 African Countries

Kofi Annan said, "To educate girls is to reduce poverty. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls." However, despite the recognition by the Secretary General of the UN of the crucial importance of girls' education, the latest UN statistics indicate that out of the 42 million children in sub-Saharan Africa who are not enrolled in school, 60 percent are girls. Even though this educational gap between girls and boys is smaller than what it used to be, it is still a significant one.

The USAID-funded Ambassadors Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP), a key component of the President's Africa Education Initiative, has distributed more than 180,000 scholarships over the past two years to primary and secondary school girls in 40 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Over 550,000 scholarships will be awarded before the program ends in 2010. Scholarship packages vary depending on need, but they may include school fees, books, uniforms, and other school-related expenses. They are designed to alleviate the economic burden and the opportunity costs of disadvantaged parents and communities.

In addition to the scholarships, the program is taking a broader approach to girls' education. The different components of AGSP seek to address the constraints to girls' education and aim at finding solutions to the economic, social, and educational barriers facing girls' schooling. The community participation dimension tries to increase the access and retention of girls' in schools; the mentoring activities intend to improve the quality of learning; and the HIV/AIDS component seeks to inform in a very practical way the students and their communities about the realities of HIV and AIDS. As a result of its interlinked components, AGSP addresses several of the key issues of girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa, including safety concerns related to sending girls to distant schools, communities' gender biases toward boys' education, and the persistent threat of HIV/AIDS to girls' and boys' futures.

To accomplish the program objective of increasing the number of girls in school and finishing their respective cycles, AGSP is working with more than 100 local organizations committed to girls' education in the 40 countries to implement this integrated program. Local partners are paying special attention to selecting the most disadvantaged girls in each school, such as orphans. They are also working closely with the mentors to ensure that the girls who are receiving the scholarships have enough time to study and do their homework, and have safe environments where they can discuss issues pertinent to their daily lives such as: study skills, health, HIV/AIDS, self-confidence, self-esteem, peer pressure, the link between education and the labor force, and other relevant topics.

The Ambassadors Girls Scholarship Program is managed by Sharon Mangin-Nwankwo and Charles Feezel of USAID Africa Bureau's Education Division team snwankwo@usaid.gov, and cfeezel@usaid.gov.



An Ambassadors Girls' Scholarship recipient leads a class discussion.

Opportunity to Bridge Gaps in Egypt

Up until the 1952 Revolution fewer than 50 percent of all primary school-age children in Egypt attended school. The Revolution dramatically expanded educational opportunities, as the revolutionaries pledged to provide free education for all citizens and abolish all fees for public schools. In the years following the decree overall enrollments more than doubled. Since 1976 primary school enrollments have continued to grow at an average of 4.1 percent annually, and intermediate school (grades seven through nine) enrollments at an average of 6.9 percent annually.

As of 1990, however, a new phenomenon began to emerge, whereby in some areas as many as 50 percent of children enrolled in school did not regularly attend classes. There were significant regional differences in the primary school enrollment rate. In urban areas, nearly 90 percent of the school-age children attended classes, whereas in some rural areas of Upper Egypt, only 50 percent attended.

Enrollment rates for girls continued to be significantly lower than for boys in spite of the fact that first school for girls was established in Egypt in 1873. In 1985-86, for example, only 45 percent of all primary students were girls. Girls' primary school enrollment was lowest in Upper Egypt, where less than 30 percent of all students were girls. Girls also dropped out of primary school more frequently than boys. About 66 percent of the boys beginning primary school completed the primary cycle while only 57 percent of the girls completed all six grades. Girls accounted for about 41 percent of total intermediate school enrollment and 39 percent of secondary school enrollment.

In the early 1990s a number of different organizations like Caritas and USAID-supported Save the Children began to tackle the issues of lower girls' enrollment rates, lower attendance and higher drop out rates. One of the largest examples of the programs that tackled the issue of girls' education was organized by the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) and Save the Children. Through collaboration with local non-governmental organizations, the project provided 20,879 scholarships from 1994-2004 which included the payment of school fees and in most cases it also included school supplies (bags, school uniforms and books).

The USAID funded Education Reform Program (ERP) Egypt Girls' Scholarship Program (GS) strategy is focused on providing girls an opportunity to obtain a high quality education not only by empowering communities and civil society organizations to participate more in the education of their children, but to enable communities to encourage, value, and raise awareness of the educational needs of their children, and to demand high quality education services.

The GS strategy is 3-pronged: (1) It focuses on addressing economic and non-economic constraints that impede getting and keeping girls in schools; (2) It focuses on empowering community organizations, namely CDAs (Community Development Associations) and BOTs (Boards of Trustees) to plan and manage GS services; and (3) It focuses on empowering CDAs to use a variety of ways to fund GS activities, both during ERP implementation and after ERP closes.

Focus groups with organizations that implemented scholarship programs in Egypt taught ERP that paying for school fees and books is not the only obstacle girls' participation in education. Some major impediments include poor quality of education, high student density in the classrooms, teacher behavior in classrooms, cultural norms, and distance to school.

While traditional scholarship programs tend to focus on economic constraints only, the ERP GS program attempts to address economic, social, and educational constraints. Some of the features that enable the ERP GS program to do this include:

- CDAs set up community scholarship committees with representation from community leaders, the CDA and members from the BOTs from each school in the community.
- Together, committee members assess who is not in school and who are the at-risk students in school. The committee is also interested in enabling students to continue their education from primary to preparatory to secondary school.
- CDA members that participate on scholarship committees identify in-community issues and needs that will help bring out-of-school girls into school (transportation, awareness raising and peer pressure, community schools, etc.).
- The Scholarship Committee then takes responsibility to monitor the attendance and performance of scholarship recipients.

GS activities are currently being planned, managed, implemented and evaluated by over 50 local CDAs and Scholarship Committees in seven different governorates of Egypt. Each of the CDAs has undertaken a PRA (Participatory Rapid Assessment) at the beginning of the process to assess educational needs of the girls in their community.

Over the past year the CDAs in each of the governorates have put together a plan to measure their future capacity to support to girls, taking into account the areas and schools that the CDAs can cover. Many of the CDAs have already begun to mobilize local resources and are setting up accounts that will generate interest to cover their future scholarship expenses. They are beginning to see their commitment to girls as individuals with special needs and that these needs will continue to exist beyond the duration of ERP.

For more information about EQUIP ERP Egypt, contact Bob Davidson at rdavidson@usaid.gov.

Haiti Scholarship Program

The USAID-funded Haiti Scholarship Program began two years ago as an activity to finance the education of disadvantaged children traumatized by political violence. The scholarship program has disbursed scholarship money benefiting 15,460 students in 228 schools in five Haitian cities. This is achieved by strengthening the capacity of the Haitian non-governmental organization implementing the project, Le Fonds de Parrainage National (FPN), which has many years of experience administering scholarship programs in Haiti. FPN has a home-grown scholarship administration model which EQUIP1 is helping to refine by improving its quality and increasing its accountability.

In 2005, the Scholarship Program was extended to provide additional funding for scholarships and related activities to benefit children victimized by storms and flooding which hit Haiti in 2004, including Tropical Storm Jeanne, which killed over three thousand people and left many more homeless. Activities related to this part of the program include the provision of yearly tuition fees for students in storm affected areas, summer camp for students who missed school due to the storm, Interactive Radio Instruction courses in math, Creole, and life skills, stipends for teachers to buy clothing, classroom improvement grants, and the provision of classroom supplies.

In Haiti, private schools constitute 90% of all primary schools. Thus the program works primarily with private schools. Although students are the ultimate beneficiaries of scholarship programs, EQUIP1/Haiti has refined FPN's strategy, which ensures educational opportunities by targeting the school as a whole. The rationale behind this strategy is that the quality of education is equally as important as access to education. The project selects the participating schools by using a rating system that measures teacher education, training, years of experience, student-teacher ratio, administrative capacity, and school infrastructure. Only schools that score above a minimum number of points are eligible to participate in the project.

To encourage the selected schools to retain disadvantaged children, the project provides the scholarship beneficiaries with school supplies and after-school tutoring, the participating schools with teaching materials (chalk, library books, dictionaries, maps, etc.), and schools with payments to defray administrative costs. Grants for infrastructure improvement projects are disbursed only when schools are collaborating with PTAs.

To emphasize quality, the project annually tests both scholarship recipients and a sample number of non-scholarship students. The test results determine how much financial support each school will receive. The better the children do, the more money schools and teachers receive. By tying student achievement to financial support, the project encourages school administrators and teachers to improve learning outcomes and educational quality. Currently, FPN implements this model in approximately 228 schools, 80% private and 20% public.

One lesson learned and resulting refinement to the program addressed the teacher compensation scheme. It had distributed unequal teacher payments within schools (due to the uneven distribution of scholarship recipients among the teachers), which was causing tension. To remedy the situation, the program chose to divide each school's total teacher compensation allotment equally among all teachers in the school.

Since improving the quality of education for scholarship recipients is a key goal of the program, the independent testing plan is used as a strategy to build teacher and school administrator accountability for recipients' educational outcomes. Moreover, by testing recipient and non-recipient students within schools, the program helps ensure that teachers focus equally on the education of all students within their class and do not pay undue attention to the scholarship recipients to the detriment of non-recipients.

Student testing is conducted by FPN under EQUIP1, using tests that are based on the national curriculum. In the first year of the program, FPN tested students in grades 2, 4, and 6. Results showed that students in grades 4 and 6 performed much better than those in grade 2, suggesting that students who manage to progress past the first three critical years of primary education are likely to continue to perform well. During the second round of testing for the 2005-2006 school year, it was therefore decided that students in the critical primary grades 1-3 should be tested.

Lastly, under EQUIP1 FPN will for the first time address the issue of school access which, with primary school enrollment rates at approximately 60%, is a major issue in Haiti. For the 2006/2007 school year FPN will identify 200 out-of-school youth and integrate them into the scholarship program after an intensive remedial class. These new students will be tested and their performance compared to traditional recipients and non-recipients.

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Haitian girls benefit from FPN administered scholarships.