EDUCATING TODAY FOR GENERATIONS OF TOMORROW

Stories From The Ambassadors’ Girls’ Scholarship Program
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The Ambassadors’ Girls’ Scholarship Program was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development from October 2004 through September 2011 as part of the U.S. Africa Education Initiative (AEI). World Education, Inc. implemented AGSP in 13 countries in West Africa. This storybook was developed by World Education and partner SageFox to highlight some of the stories of the scholars, mentors, communities, and NGOs touched by this important program.

This publication was not supported with USAID funds nor does it necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. government.
I have had the honor and pleasure of being World Education’s Director for the Ambassadors’ Girls’ Scholarship Program (AGSP) for almost six of its seven years. In my view there is no development program more important or sustainable for the long-term than educating girls—and boys. On the face of it, AGSP looked like a program that simply provided 188,106 scholarships to 60,860 girls and, since 2007, to an additional 12,522 boys. But AGSP was much more than that.

In addition to helping disadvantaged children go to—and remain in—school by paying any school fees, providing uniforms, book bags, and other necessary supplies, World Education also developed programs for local mentors, men, but especially women, who girls can look up to. Working primarily through local community-based organizations to implement AGSP on the ground, we also built the capacity of our partners so they now have stronger management systems and are also better equipped to work with their respective communities. Finally, communities have been actively engaged in our work from the initial program launch, to the selection of disadvantaged girls and boys who needed our support, distribution of supplies, even monitoring students’ academic performance and daily attendance. AGSP also included sensitization and awareness raising activities which extend beyond AGSP students and parents, and have educated the wider communities on the importance of education, health, and other relevant life skills.

AGSP was very generously funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Africa Education Initiative. During the life of AGSP, from 2004-2011, we have seen the program expand from twelve countries (see page 7) to include Cape Verde and move from a girls-only program to include boys in 2007. Initially designed to enable girls to finish primary school, AGSP provided support for secondary education in a few countries including the Gambia, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Cape Verde, among others. Furthermore, building on AGSP, in 2007, World Education’s work expanded with support from singer Angélique Kidjo’s Batonga Foundation, to provide more scholarships for secondary school girls. We also have had the honor of hosting First Lady Laura Bush and other dignitaries at several AGSP schools.

To the children of Africa—in particular the girls—I salute you. The challenges you face are immense. I hope that AGSP’s efforts live on in you and in the communities where you live so that the next generation of girls does not have the uphill battles you have faced to attend school. I hope that all communities across Africa one day will see the value in educating its girls. AGSP helped start that process.

In gratitude,

Kadiatou Coulibaly
Building on extensive experience in girls’ education and women’s empowerment and the ability to mobilize grassroots initiatives, World Education implemented a comprehensive scholarship program from 2004-2011 in 13 West African countries, including: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Over the seven-year period, AGSP’s most notable accomplishments included:

- Supporting more than 73,000 girls and boys to enroll and remain in school.
- Involving community leaders to support girls education. Leaders were also trained to protect vulnerable children from parental abuse such as child trafficking and child marriage, and were sensitized to the importance of reproductive health and HIV awareness and prevention.
- Empowering parents, especially mothers, to participate in their children’s schooling, including monitoring daily attendance and supervision of after-school study sessions.
- Sensitizing communities to the value of basic education, especially for girls, and increased participation in extra-curricular AGSP-organized activities.

The following stories represent just a fraction of the positive impact that AGSP’s collaborative efforts made on hundreds of lives. The program’s ability to rally entire communities around their schools helped vulnerable children enroll and stay in school.

*While Mauritania dropped out of the program in 2009 due to political unrest, Cape Verde joined in 2010.
At the heart of AGSP were the scholars themselves. Children—boys and girls who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, orphaned, or affected by HIV and AIDS—were chosen from among their peers as the most in need of support to enroll and remain in school.

The ultimate goal of AGSP was to increase the likelihood that these children will finish school, and in turn, create successful futures for themselves, their families, and their communities.

AGSP scholars received in-kind support in the form of school fees, text books, and other materials needed for classroom work. Many children also received specialized items to help them succeed in school, such as wheelchairs for the disabled or transport (bicycles) for those who lived far from the nearest school.

While girls account for more than half of the 30 million children in Africa who do not attend school, AGSP extended support to boys in 2007. The goal was to include 7,000 disadvantaged boys in the program. World Education and its NGO partners surpassed that number, and provided scholarships to more than 9,000 needy boys in the first year alone.

In the 13 countries where World Education implemented AGSP, 188,106 scholarships were given to boys and girls over the seven-year period. These are a few of their stories.
THE COURAGE TO SUCCEED

Prior to AGSP, the success rate for girls progressing in school in Timbuktu was between 40-44%. Now it is between 69-73%.

When Kadidia Ibrahim became pregnant at age 14, she believed it would prevent her from continuing her studies at her school in Timbuktu. However, when a field agent from the local NGO Malian Association for Survival in the Sahel (AMSS) told her stories of girls walking four kilometers to school even after they deliver their babies.

Ten years ago, school would not have been an option for Kadidia. Northern Mali customs favored sending boys to school rather than girls, who are expected to help at home until they marry, often at a young age. Socio-cultural constraints have historically been a significant obstacle; their value as domestic helpers is prioritized over their education. World Education, however, found a way to preserve cultural integrity while promoting education for all children. AMSS, the AGSP NGO partner implementing activities in the area, works closely with local communities to develop solutions to issues faced. One of the most successful tools AMSS has helped create is a network of mothers’ organizations (AMEs). With financial backing and guidance from AGSP, AMSS has been able to establish 33 AMEs in the Timbuktu region. The AMEs help girls organize in such a way that they take care of their household chores in groups, rotating between families, thus completing them quickly and still allowing time for their studies. AMEs also help set up “home study groups,” where after the chores are finished, girls gather to do their homework under the watchful eyes of the mother of the house where they did the chores.

Kadidia has been able to continue her education and improve her grades even after giving birth to her child.

"Now I am able to go to school regularly and participate in after-school study groups." - Kadidia

The AMEs improve girls’ access to education, retention rates, and academic success with follow-up and close monitoring. AMSS trains the groups in good governance, financial management, effective advocacy strategies, income-generating activities, and HIV prevention, according to the specific needs of their community. The AMEs also help promote sex education, and encourage pregnant girls to help at home until they marry, often at a young age. Socio-cultural constraints have historically been a significant obstacle; their value as domestic helpers is prioritized over their education. World Education, however, found a way to preserve cultural integrity while promoting education for all children. World Education, however, found a way to preserve cultural integrity while promoting education for all children. World Education, however, found a way to preserve cultural integrity while promoting education for all children.

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Additionally, after learning about Kadidia’s pregnancy, a field worker from AMSS came to visit her regularly, offering support and encouragement. A teacher trained by AMSS and the AMEs went to Kadidia’s home on the days when she was discouraged and missed school. “He always told me, ‘You are courageous; don’t abandon school just because of your pregnancy.’ He reminded me that I am still young and that I can succeed at school,” says Kadidia.

Prior to AGSP, the success rate for girls progressing in school in Timbuktu was between 40-44%. Now it is between 69-73%. With the support Kadidia received, her grades have improved, and her teachers are impressed with her commitment and dedication to her education. Kadidia has been able to continue her education and improve her grades even after giving birth to her child.

The AMEs formalized traditional women’s groups—which exist in virtually every village in Mali—and strengthened the role of these organizations by working with mothers, often the most influential people in keeping girls in school. These well-respected groups usually focus on small income-generating projects, but since AGSP came into the region, they have begun promoting literacy and women’s participation in the public domain.

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The AMEs improve girls’ access to education, retention rates, and academic success with follow-up and close monitoring. AMSS trains the groups in good governance, financial management, effective advocacy strategies, income-generating activities, and HIV prevention, according to the specific needs of their community. The mothers use what they learn from these trainings to influence their communities. In addition to monitoring girls’ schoolwork and house work, AMEs sensitize families to the importance of school, promote sex education, and encourage pregnant girls and young mothers to continue going to school.

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Zénabou walked briskly to school, waving and calling out greetings to women sweeping their yards and doing their morning chores. Transfixed for a moment by the motion of one woman’s broom sweeping across the yard, she recalled her mornings, just one month earlier, when she was not on her way to school. Instead, she was sweeping the floor of a stranger in Benin, miles away from home. Practically overnight, Zénabou had gone from being a student in Togo to a child laborer. Zénabou blinked her eyes and regained her senses. A group of her friends called to her from down the road. She skipped and ran ahead to join them, adjusting the straps of her backpack as she went.

Zénabou was a victim of child trafficking, a common plight for thousands of unsuspecting children sent to work in far-away towns and cities to support their families back home. Unable to help their families in their own villages, children across Togo become vulnerable to traffickers who promise greater opportunities for school and work. Parents who consent are often unaware of the exploitation in store. A few children who leave come home with goods such as a new bike, further fueling misconceptions, but most return home empty-handed and traumatized. Many never come back at all.

AGSP provided 13,021 scholarships to 8,940 girls and 4,081 boys in Togo.

When a Beninese woman came to Zénabou’s village looking for a domestic helper, she negotiated with her family for her services. Zénabou had no choice but to leave school and go, despite her wish to continue her studies.

Dedicated to the overall welfare of its scholars, AGSP and the Association for the Integral Development of Women and Girls (ADIFF) collaborated in an effort to return the 15-year-old former scholar to her home village. When she returned, AGSP helped Zénabou resume her life, providing additional funds for her to repeat a year at school and get a private tutor so that she could catch up. By providing the fees, uniforms, and other school-related items, AGSP alleviates the financial burden on families of sending their children to school. “The incidence of child trafficking has been reduced because the AGSP families are not as poor as before,” says one local pastor, expressing her gratitude to the program.

AGSP scholarships alone are not enough to combat the problem of trafficking. When AGSP first arrived in Togo in 2005, they held sensitization meetings to raise public awareness about trafficking. Presenters from ADIFF organized meetings to provide information and stimulate public dialogue about the issue of child trafficking, its associated dangers, and its overall effect on the community. Other issues addressed in these meetings include the importance of girls’ education, the rights and needs of children, the responsibility of parents, early marriage and pregnancy, and HIV prevention.

Recognizing the urgency of responding to child trafficking, a special monitoring committee was also formed. The monitoring committee in Zénabou’s village conducted meetings about possible interventions for Zénabou. The committee was then able to save Zénabou from her perilous situation. Having helped Zénabou return to her village and her studies, the community takes great pride in setting the precedence for combating child trafficking. Zénabou was fortunate that AGSP and ADIFF were able to arrange for her safe return. Since then, AGSP has been recognized in Togolese communities as a successful and effective partner for preventing child trafficking and helping keep children in school.
Alfred happily studies for his classes now that he is enrolled in school.

The windows of the classroom were the perfect height—standing on the ground outside, Alfred’s chin just barely touched the windowsill. He lingered near the edges of the window, trying to catch a glimpse of his peers and learn something himself. Alfred wasn’t enrolled in school, but he spent a lot of his time hanging around the local school in Patebana, Sierra Leone. Eventually, the head teacher noticed Alfred’s constant presence on the school grounds, and was impressed by his eagerness. He also noted that Alfred was one of the few albinos in the area. Historically, in many rural areas of Sierra Leone, albinos have been the targets of discrimination and mockery.

The head teacher decided to find out why Alfred wasn’t enrolled in school. During a trip to his home, the teacher learned that Alfred was orphaned at the age of five and was living with his uncle and aunts. Alfred’s uncle provided for him as best as he could, but accepted the idea that albinos couldn’t be useful in society and decided not to send Alfred to school. After the head teacher’s intervention, the uncle gave his blessing for Alfred to pursue his academic endeavors, though he was unable to give him much money to go to school. While the head teacher permitted him to attend school without a uniform, Alfred still lacked the full support that he needed. Education was becoming more and more expensive from one grade to the next. Luckily, when AGSP began offering scholarships to boys in the area, Alfred was among the first selected.

Alfred was thrilled to have the support of AGSP, but he continued to have some problems in the classroom. Due to poor eyesight associated with albinism, Alfred was often called “blind boy.” He also had trouble seeing what was written on the blackboard. In addition, because his home didn’t have electricity, it was difficult for Alfred to study at night. CEFORD, the local NGO in charge of AGSP in the area, helped Alfred get a pair of reading glasses as part of his individualized scholarship package, and a lamp and fuel so he could continue studying into the evening. Alfred’s uncle says that the lamp and fuel supplied by AGSP has also helped the other children in their household.

Before Alfred’s involvement with AGSP, he was often the victim of teasing and exclusion from his peers. “The community despised me, mocked me, and called me all sorts of names, like poor white man… I was nothing but an outcast,” says Alfred. As a result of his academic excellence and newfound confidence, Alfred is no longer shunned by his community. In fact, he has gained the admiration of his peers and is now seen as a role model. He has learned to speak English so well that he often leads the morning prayers at school assemblies. “Wonders shall never end! Imagine this boy who was shy, filthy, not punctual, and lacked confidence and can now perform excellently in school and appears very neat and is, above all, very punctual,” says one of Alfred’s teachers. “Oh, may God bless the American people for this AGSP project!”

The head teacher, who has since become an official AGSP mentor, continues to visit Alfred’s family on a regular basis, to ensure steady communication between his home and academic life. Alfred’s uncle, who had once been uninterested in his nephew’s integration into society, says that he is very proud of Alfred’s academic performance, boasting that he is now among the top five pupils in his class. “I have seen and feel proud about the rapid improvement of Alfred in his school performance.” Alfred is also proud of himself. “My family, friends at school, and the entire village recognize me as a part of them,” he says. “This is because AGSP has increased self-confidence in me and my performance in school is admirable, and I am determined to pursue higher education in spite of all odds.”
Mistura wasn’t doing well in school. She wasn’t failing, but her grades were average. She presented herself as best she could and tried not to stand out. This was an accomplishment given her living situation. Mistura was attending school by day and sleeping with her mother in a nearby bus shelter at night. This existence made it nearly impossible for Mistura to study after school, and she didn’t have any textbooks. In addition, her mother had been struggling with drug addiction for years, and had been kicked out of the family home. Each day, Mistura and her mother left the bus stop at sunrise to prevent anyone they knew from seeing where they slept.

One fateful morning, the head teacher of St. Mary’s Convent School passed the shelter and recognized Mistura. Sympathetic to the predicament that Mistura and her mother were in, the teacher brought them to the offices of the Federation of African Women Educationalists—Nigeria (FAWE). AGSP had just begun working in the area, and partnered with FAWE as the local AGSP implementer.

In the initial phase of AGSP, FAWE helped to create a scholar selection committee, which was made up of members of the community like the head teacher. After recognizing that she was living in the bus station, the head teacher wanted to see if Mistura could get a scholarship to support her education and relieve her mother of some of her financial burdens so they could get off the street.

Given her vulnerability and potential, Mistura was immediately selected as one of the first children in her area to receive an AGSP scholarship. With this support, she received all the school supplies that she needed: textbooks, notebooks, a hearty mid-day meal, and access to after-school tutoring sessions. FAWE understood the complexities of street life and knew that keeping Mistura off the streets and helping her to be successful at school meant investing in both her and her mother. In cooperation with the staff of St. Mary’s, accommodations were made for them to stay in one of the extra rooms at the school. Once there, Mistura’s mother received counseling and care to get her on the road to recovery. By the time Mistura got to Primary School/Basic 3, her mother had improved tremendously. When she moved up to Primary/Basic 4, her mother was sober enough to live with Mistura outside the church.

In the years since AGSP took on Mistura as a beneficiary, she has transformed. A model student, Mistura attends classes regularly and has performed above and beyond her fellow scholars. Each year, outstanding AGSP scholars are recognized at an Awards of Excellence ceremony. The best of the scholars are honored for their incredible work in the face of often very daunting circumstances. Surrounded by her fellow AGSP scholars, teachers, and, of course, her mother, Mistura was honored twice: for regular, punctual attendance and for outstanding academic performance—Mistura had again placed first in her class in her school exams.

AGSP awarded nearly 13,400 scholarships throughout Nigeria.
Through AGSP, World Education successfully recruited and trained more than 2,000 mentors to assist scholars.

A key element of World Education’s support to AGSP scholars was the mentorship program. Mentors were selected from the local community or from AGSP-supported NGOs to serve as role models, give advice, and be a sounding board for scholars. The program also selected high-achieving scholars to be peer mentors in schools. Mentors were given information on and trained in such areas as:

- Communicating with scholars
- Understanding and impact of gender
- Girls’ and women’s rights
- Leadership
- Empowering girls
- Techniques for mentoring
- Importance of educating girls

Mentors ensured that scholars attended their classes, provided academic help, and discussed crucial issues in the students’ lives, such as relationships, health (including preventing unwanted pregnancies, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections), stress, self-esteem, peer pressure, abuse, goal-setting, and opportunities for the future.

AGSP supported mentors throughout the seven-year program, and gave refresher trainings to ensure that they were fully-prepared to be a beneficial resource for scholars.
Felicia Azure Agana comes from a female-headed household that barely scrapes by on subsistence farming in the Bongo District of the Upper East region of Ghana. Her father passed away when she was very young, and she now lives with her mother and younger brother. Although she is enrolled in school, she often has to miss class to help her family in the millet fields. Youth from rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa often face such challenges every day.

As early as primary school, Felicia was faced with the harsh reality that her family’s precarious financial situation would sometimes disrupt her schooling. In 6th grade, she was unable to purchase necessary items for school and a wealthy boy from class offered to help, buying her a uniform and books. Felicia was very grateful because his generosity allowed her to continue attending school. Shortly afterwards, however, he proposed to her and Felicia accepted, because she felt that she had no other option. He began to demand sex from her and Felicia did not know what to do.

Around this time, the local NGO Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC) announced that it would be managing AGSP to sponsor needy girls in her area. Felicia immediately applied to the program and was selected to receive a scholarship. Soon after, she broke off her relationship with the boy. Felicia says that he has not forgiven her, but she is adamant that she is happy and relieved to have had an escape from the relationship. “I have been saved,” she says, smiling. “I am grateful to AGSP and to ISODEC.”

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The assistance that Felicia received from AGSP encouraged her to keep working hard. She also benefited from the moral support of AGSP’s mentoring programs. As Felicia’s academic performance improved, so did her self-esteem. People in her community began to look to her as a role model, and when she progressed to high school, she was made an AGSP peer mentor.

ISODEC members saw first hand just how much the scholars value the mentoring program. They appreciate the exchange of ideas, which helps them develop strategies to identify and tackle challenges to their progress and success. In collaboration with other peer mentors and resource people from the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAP) and Ghana Education Services (GES), Felicia has held discussion sessions with mentees on relationships, reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, and HIV and AIDS stigmatization. One of the most important lessons the mentees feel they have learned from Felicia is that a person living with HIV is a friend who should be cared for and supported, not cast out. Another crucial aspect of the peer mentoring program is that it helps the scholars improve their interpersonal communication skills. They report that they now feel much more confident, comfortable, and capable discussing social issues with their parents, guardians, and other adults.

Through scholarships and mentoring programs, AGSP gives students like Felicia and her mentees a better chance at reaching their full potential. Now at the top of her 12th grade class and studying for her final exams, Felicia is clearly a strong young woman, and, having overcome so many obstacles to her education, an endless source of inspiration for other girls. Felicia has even managed to win over the chief of the village, who was skeptical about the importance of girls’ education. Once he saw the results of educating girls in his community, the chief bestowed upon Felicia the honorable title of “Role Model Girl”—a title she is proud to carry.

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A CHANGE IN ROUTINE

Before AGSP, Ekie Guahn’s daily routine was exhausting. She woke up every morning at 5 a.m., cleaned her family’s compound, and prepared a large pot of bulgur wheat for her grandparents, herself, and the seven other children living in their small house in Paynesville, Liberia. As the eldest child, she supervised her siblings while they drew water from a nearby well. She washed herself, and then filled a bundle with plastic sachets of drinking water, which she sold all day to passers-by at a nearby traffic intersection. After returning home, Ekie prepared another meal for her family and helped them crush rocks into gravel to sell.

One day, when Ekie was on her way home, she met Elizabeth Newton, an AGSP mentor on the lookout for potential scholarship beneficiaries. Ekie told Elizabeth her story and filled out an application. When she followed up with a visit to Ekie’s home, Elizabeth discovered that Ekie’s mother had died during the civil war and that the whereabouts of her father were unknown. With the only source of income for her family being the gravel that her grandparents produced from crushing large rocks—which was not enough to feed their large family—Ekie hadn’t been to school for four years. That all changed when she met Elizabeth and was selected as an AGSP scholar.

“Auntie Elizabeth changed my life by helping me to get the scholarship and to convince my grandparents that I can still make it in life if I am educated,” says Ekie. “Without AGSP, I would have been married by now with children or have used my body to make money.”

With the support of AGSP, Ekie received two uniforms, shoes, and other school supplies, and is now enrolled in school. While Ekie is very appreciative of the material assistance AGSP provided, she is even more grateful for the support she receives from Elizabeth through the AGSP mentoring activities. According to Ekie, her AGSP mentor made her realize that going to school is not just about learning how to read and write. “Auntie Elizabeth advises me to be serious with my studies and to believe in myself so that I can succeed,” says Ekie. “She visits me and the other scholars at home and in school. She advises me not to follow boys, and helped me understand what HIV is, how one can be infected, and how to prevent infection.”

In addition to this support, AGSP benefits Ekie’s family as well. “Auntie Elizabeth and her daughters assist me with my studies at home,” says Ekie. “My younger brother and sisters who are out of school also benefit from what she taught me.” Ekie teaches the alphabet and basic mathematics skills to her younger siblings, and gives them guidance and information about the issues she learns about in Elizabeth’s mentoring sessions. In addition, Elizabeth’s visits to Ekie’s home enhance the value of everything that Ekie shares with her family members.

“MY MENTOR CHANGED MY LIFE BY HELPING ME GET THE SCHOLARSHIP AND CONVINCE MY GRANDPARENTS THAT I CAN STILL MAKE IT IN LIFE IF I AM EDUCATED.”

There are 21 AGSP-trained mentors in Liberia. These volunteers are mostly women, and include social workers, religious leaders, lawyers, nurses, lecturers, and city leaders, among others.

Ekie with her grandmother.
Troubled by the low literacy rates and early sexual debut of girls in Segwembe, Sierra Leone, Suzie Jajua was determined to make a difference. A respected teacher with many years of experience, Suzie was the first community member to volunteer as a mentor through AGSP. She hoped to encourage girls to take a genuine interest in their education. She has done that, and more.

Through AGSP, World Education provided all of its implementing NGO partners with training-of-trainers workshops, using the USAID-developed Girls Mentoring Resource Guide. In turn, the NGOs then trained mentors to develop their capacity to better support AGSP scholars.

As a mentor, Suzie brings AGSP scholarship recipients together for group mentoring sessions, regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds. Under her leadership, the girls discuss important issues related to relationships, communication, and goals, as well as health topics such as HIV and STD prevention. These meetings have created a strong community of support for the girls. The AGSP scholars say that their connections encourage them to look out for one another and excel in school. The community Suzie helped to create through the AGSP mentoring program is central to keeping the students motivated and inspired.

Suzie lives in the same neighborhood as many of the girls she mentors, and routinely visits them in their homes. She believes that it is important to ensure that the home lives of the students support their educational goals. Because many of the girls live with guardians rather than birth parents, Suzie teaches the girls good communication skills to reduce potential stress in these relationships. Suzie also acts as a mediator, helping the girls’ families understand the importance of decreasing their household chores so that they have more time to focus on their studies.

Additionally, Suzie educates her mentees on aspects of women’s health they might not learn otherwise. This information, often regarded as taboo, is essential for girls to make healthy choices. There is an army barracks not far from the center of town and the men there are a looming threat to the girls. Suzie’s knowledge and guidance helps the girls to advocate and stand up for themselves.

The girls also learn responsibility. One of Suzie’s girls says that with Suzie’s advice, she has been able to take proper care of all the items provided to her through AGSP, such as her textbooks, uniforms, and bags for school. This student listens keenly to talks on HIV and AIDS and feels comfortable sharing her knowledge about the disease and how to prevent it. Furthermore, she appreciates the value of education and has become one of the leading scholars in her school.

Suzie’s participation with AGSP—and that of the 115 other mentors like her throughout Sierra Leone—has made the program more effective throughout the community. As testament to their success, the Federation of African Women Educationalists of Sierra Leone cites a decrease in the rate of child pregnancy, early marriage, and fistula problems (which is often the outcome of early childbirth).
While the greater community is integral to the success of AGSP, their involvement goes well beyond the program. Community members also participate in sensitization and awareness-raising activities to educate the wider community on the importance of education, health, and other life skills.

World Education made it a priority to involve community members from all AGSP program locations. The full extent of a community—from individual members to women’s groups—was sought in the development and implementation of AGSP.

From the initial scholarship recipient selection, community members participated in how AGSP functioned, which lead to assistance with procurement and distribution of scholarship materials, mentor selection, and identifying special needs scholars may have. In fact, it was members of the community who pressed for the inclusion of boys as AGSP scholars. Communities’ willingness to get involved in the educational success of their children is attributed to a genuine commitment to their children’s wellbeing and their understanding of the importance of education.
The residents of Nikki village in northeast Benin face many problems. The community has experienced an increased number of undesired and at-risk pregnancies, medical complications from abortions, rising divorce rates, poor student grades, and emerging complaints from parents about their children’s behavior. In response to these challenges, the people of Nikki decided to organize a festival to encourage parents and residents to take a more active role in the lives and successes of their children.

In May 2009, with support from AGSP, the Nikki Family Festival brought the citizens of Nikki together to discuss the ongoing problems in their community and develop potential solutions to address them. Participants from the village assembled early in the morning on the day of the festival. Following welcoming speeches and sketches delivered by school children—including AGSP scholars—the mood of the participants was upbeat. Under a hot midday sun, special guest speaker Dr. Cyriaque stood to speak. Highly regarded for his expertise and service as the chief doctor at Nikki Regional Hospital, he began his speech with data gathered from recent hospital admissions.

"In the last three years, of all the cases of dangerous abortions due to complications, like perforated uterus, 86% were school girls," he said. The crowd grew very quiet. "And between 65-70% of those patients who were treated for risky pregnancies were, again, female students simply too young to be carrying children of their own."

The statistics were sobering, and the message was clear: School attendance alone is not sufficient to keep girls from experiencing unwanted pregnancy and its associated risks. Over four consecutive days, more than 3,000 participants including parents, students, journalists, and professionals watched documentary films, attended lectures, and participated in group discussions about the greatest threats to the welfare of Nikki’s youth: Uninformed decision-making, risky behavior, and parental indifference toward school success. The major themes of the festival were HIV prevention, unwanted pregnancies, quality education, child behavior, and the timing of marriage.

The Nikki Family Festival was a tremendous success. Participants young and old expressed their appreciation for its timeliness and inspirational impact. Many of those who attended took away important lessons with plans to incorporate them into their daily lives.

"The two documentary films shown during the festival truly made me discover things that will make me want to abstain from unprotected sexual activities," said 16-year-old Zakari Baké Doué, a student at Nikki Middle School. The statistics that Dr. Cyriaque cited during his speech were mentioned repeatedly by participants as the most impactful information. As a result of this data, and the activities and resources at the festival, the residents of Nikki are committed to doing everything they can to maintain the momentum generated during the event.

"The statistics provided by Dr. Cyriaque on pregnancies and risky abortions had me thinking really hard," said Fatiou Dossou, the principal of Tchikandou School. "I took notes and intend to use them to raise awareness among my students and their parents."

Since 2004, AGSP has been active throughout Benin, providing 9,029 scholarships to primary school girls and boys in areas where financial hardship is most pronounced.

"The Nikki Family Festival—supported by AGSP—brought more than 3,000 people together to discuss issues affecting the community."

"I took notes and intend to use them to raise awareness among my students and their parents."
As the bicycle parade pedaled past, onlookers stopped to stare, their eyes temporarily fixed on the parade of cheerful children whizzing past them. "Where are you going?" they called out in wonder. "To Gayéri!" the children replied. "We are going to take our CEP exams!"

Students from the Bandikidini Primary School, on their way to their exams in Gayéri, the capital of the Komandjari Province in Burkina Faso, twelve miles from their village, were a sight to see. They were riding the new bicycles provided to them through AGSP. Transportation has long been a barrier to children attending school and accessing testing centers. When AGSP first started at this school in the village of Bandikidini, there were only 53 students. Now, due to AGSP’s efforts, enrollment is at an all-time high of 127. However, students still face the crucial problem of getting to exam sites. While the government has made efforts to transport them from their villages to the central exam locations, there is rarely enough transportation for all the students.

In Bandikidini, the responsibility of transporting students to the testing centers falls on the community. Means of transportation are limited, as are available supervisors to travel with the students. The Certificat d’études primaires (CEP) exam (end of primary school exam) is held during the growing season, normally around the time when there is enough rain to start planting the fields. As the majority of families in the area are subsistence farmers, it is very difficult to leave their fields, even for something as important as exams.

In response, AGSP made it a point to include bicycles as part of this area’s scholarship package. By 2010 they had given out 817 bicycles to scholars, which have been beneficial in many situations, whether for a student to get to a crucial exam or to ride across town to a classmate’s house for an extra study session. AGSP bicycles have facilitated easier access to education for scholars, and for those who live far away, access to a bicycle means that they have more time to sleep and study. AGSP’s funds are limited and cannot provide a bicycle to every needy child. However, by the time they reached Gayéri, almost every AGSP bicycle was carrying two students, half of whom were not AGSP scholars.

The biggest celebration of all came when the results of the CEP exams were announced. Ninety percent of the AGSP scholars in the bicycle parade had succeeded—the greatest proof of how the support that AGSP scholars receive goes well beyond the basic scholarship package.
Strong partnerships were critical in laying the foundation for sustainability and behavior change. Community-based organizations enabled World Education to implement AGSP and promote girls’ education in all program countries.

In every country where AGSP was implemented, the program relied on partnerships with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to succeed. In most AGSP countries, World Education provided ongoing support, training, and technical assistance to selected local partner NGOs on proposal writing and budgeting, programmatic and financial management and reporting, program monitoring, communication, mentoring initiatives, collecting and entering data onto the interactive program database, and outreach. With these enhanced skills, local NGOs served as the primary implementers of AGSP in their communities, and assisted World Education with virtually every programmatic activity, including:

- Scholar selection
- Scholar needs assessments, in conjunction with communities
- Scholarship distribution
- Material selection, procurement, and distribution with contributions from the school and community
- Ensuring mentors monitor scholars’ and teachers’ school attendance
- Serving alongside mentors as conflict mitigation agents between scholars and their parents/guardians
- Ensuring that mentors intercede to alleviate girls’ workload at home to allow them to do their homework
- Monitoring scholar achievements
- Implementing community participation and mentoring activities
In Mauritania, AGSP funded 22 girls’ mentoring centers (GMCs) that have touched the lives of more than 5,000 girls. The GMCs target girls transitioning from middle to high school—a time when many drop out—and gives them the support they need to succeed. The activities and classes at the centers vary depending on local resources, and include computers, environmental education, arts and crafts, yoga, sports, study and life skills, health and HIV, and apprenticeships. From time to time, exchange visits are arranged, giving the girls an opportunity to share their experiences with girls in other areas. Penda Diamo Diallo is one of the girls in Mauritania who has benefitted from the GMCs. Penda began attending courses at the GMC in Sélibaby in 2005, and says that they encouraged her to get her high school diploma and boosted her self-esteem.

“THE GIRLS’ MENTORING CENTER ACTIVITIES GREATLY CONTRIBUTED TO MY DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS MY PERSONAL GROWTH.” -PENDA

The GMCs—which are managed by Peace Corps volunteers—provide girls with a space specifically for them. According to Maylen Rufles, a Peace Corps volunteer who oversaw activities at the Nouadhibou GMC, the centers are a “place where girls can come and feel more comfortable than they may feel at school… there are long-lasting friendships established at GMCs.” It means a lot to the girls that they have the opportunity to participate in the activities at the GMC and that they feel at home there. As Dame Ba, a Peace Corps staff member, says, “Generally, in our families here in Mauritania, the girls have a lot less liberty to move about outside school hours. They are expected to have some sort of permission from their family before going out… the fact that a girl like Penda has approval from her family to participate in the GMC activities but also to travel when there are related activities going on should not be understated, such permission is not easy to come by.” As the reputation of the GMCs has grown, parents have become more accepting.

One of the most important lessons that the girls learn at the GMCs is an understanding of the connection between their studies and their lives. The GMC helped Penda to understand how improving her academic performance can expand her opportunities. “These different activities greatly contributed to my development as well as my cultural and spiritual growth,” says Penda. As evidence of this, in the areas GMC worked, rates of girls’ enrollment and attendance at middle schools increased, and the number of early marriages has decreased.

GMCs offer something valuable for everyone who participates, regardless of individual circumstances. Peace Corps volunteer Rufles recalls a lesson that she led on gender equality in the workforce. At the beginning of the lesson, several girls vehemently claimed that there were distinct and mutually exclusive careers for men and women. At the end of the session, the same girls were exclaiming things like, “Even men can braid hair; they just have to learn how to do it!” and “I want to be a pilot!” Rufles says, “I think they were inspired to succeed in their lives and open up a whole world of possibilities that they had not considered before… It is my hope that a lot of the girls discovered their own importance in the construction of their society and thus increased their self-esteem.”
The Ambassadors’ Girls’ Scholarship Program is successful because of World Education’s ongoing commitment to ensuring the program’s sustainability by building the capacity of its partner NGOs. NGOs implementing AGSP in the field are provided with the support necessary for effective implementation, including the provision of basic material goods. Though support varies according to the specific needs of each NGO, most have received training in administrative management, program organization, financial management, databases, and mentoring. Most have also had evaluation and monitoring visits from consultants from AGSP, World Education, and partner SageFox.

Bi-monthly meetings are one form of support that has been particularly effective in helping the NGOs that AGSP works with in Togo, including PAHCS, ADIFF, and SIRAIB. These meetings are facilitated by AGSP Country Consultant, Mr. Aboukerim Albarka, and are scheduled at the beginning of the year to coincide with bi-monthly financial reports. During these meetings, the three NGOs share general information and reflect on current practices, including data entry and use of FieldLink (the online database for AGSP), scholarship disbursement, the management of outstanding balances, communication issues, community participation, and collaboration with state services and other NGOs operating in the same zones. The meetings focus on actual practices in relation to the NGOs’ established workplans, and include an evaluation of the discrepancies noted and problems that have arisen. Solutions and reasons for the gaps are discussed and recommendations are made.

Priscilla Djondo, a PAHCS employee, says that these meetings have made her realize that work is more efficient and has greater impact when long-term goals are established first, and when people collaborate.

Attisso Kodjo, the director of PAHCS, and Djondo have participated in AGSP trainings across West Africa. Attisso says that they are valuable opportunities to network with other NGOs in the region. Sharing his own experiences with the other NGOs has also helped him to gain greater confidence in his dynamic role in community development on local, national, and international levels.

Attisso says that the regular evaluation and monitoring visits made to the NGOs are a crucial aspect of AGSP.

In addition, Attisso feels that his involvement with AGSP has been positive for him both professionally and personally. Due to his parents’ financial situation, he wasn’t able to continue his studies as far as he wanted, and had to enter into the workforce before finishing school. Attisso is thankful, therefore, for the valuable training AGSP provided.

Attisso and Djondo are confident that AGSP is helping Togo’s youth emerge as a confident and responsible generation. “It is one thing to give a scholarship to a child...it is another thing to build the bodies, hearts, and spirits of the children so that they will be citizens of tomorrow, full of initiative and good character.”

They serve to encourage and motivate Attisso and his staff. He says that this support “reinforces notions about the advantages of good governance, democracy, and transparent management,” which he sees as the foundation of AGSP. The recommendations that come out of these evaluations motivate NGOs to adapt their programs to better serve their communities.

Through the capacity building trainings organized by AGSP, Attisso, Djondo, and the rest of the dedicated staff at PAHCS feel more confident than ever about their ability to contribute to the development of their nation.

“Thanks to AGSP, I am closer to the communities and I am more able to understand their difficulties.”

– Priscilla Djondo
World Education would like to thank the many community-based and nongovernmental organizations that it partnered with to facilitate scholarship distribution and program implementation. Our work on AGSP would not have been a success without their dedication and constant support.

**Benin**
- Actions Communautaires pour le Développement Durable (ACDD)
- Groupe d’Action pour la Justice et l’Égalité Sociale (GAJES)

**Burkina Faso**
- Association Tin Tua
- Forum of African Women Educationalists/Burkina Faso (FAWE/Burkina Faso)

**Cape Verde**
- Organização das Mulheres de Cabo Verde (OMCV)

**The Gambia**
- Forum of African Women Educationalists/Gambia (FAWE/Gambia)

**Ghana**
- The Ark Foundation (ARK)
- Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC)
- Red Cross Eastern Region, Ghana
- School for Life (SFL)

**Guinea**
- Association Guinéenne pour l’Environnement et le Développement (ADEG)
- Association pour la Promotion des Filles en Guinée (APROFEG)
- Association Sauvons les Enfants Déshérités (ASED)
- Club des Amis du Monde (CAM)
- Volontaires Guinéens pour le Développement (VGD)
- Zalikwélé Animateurs Communautaires (ZALI-AC)

**Liberia**
- Children Assistance Program (CAP)
- Development Education Network-Liberia (DEN-L)

**Mali**
- Aide à l’Enfant du Désert et du Sahel (AEDS)
- Association Malienne pour la Survie au Sahel (AMISS)
- Sahel Etudes Actions pour le Développement (SEAD)

**Mauritania**
- Peace Corps Mauritania
- Girls’ Education and Empowerment Program

**Nigeria**
- Basic Education Association, Kano (BEA)
- Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
- Forum for African Women Educationalists Nigeria, Lagos (FAWE/N)

**Senegal**
- Action Group, Benin City (IRRRAG)
- Rural Women and Youth Development, Sokoto (RWYD)
- Youth Care, Calabar
- Youth Resource Development Education and Leadership Centre for Africa, Enugu (YORDEL)

**Sierra Leone**
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
- Christian Extension Services (CES)
- Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD)
- Forum of African Women Educationalists/Sierra Leone (FAWE/SL)

**Togo**
- Association pour le Développement Intégral de la Femme et la Jeune Fille (ADIFF)
- Programme d'Aide Humanitaire aux Cas Sociaux (PAHCS)
- Structure Institutionnelle de Recherche Action et d’Appui aux Initiatives de Base (SIRAIB)

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**AGSP Partners**
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