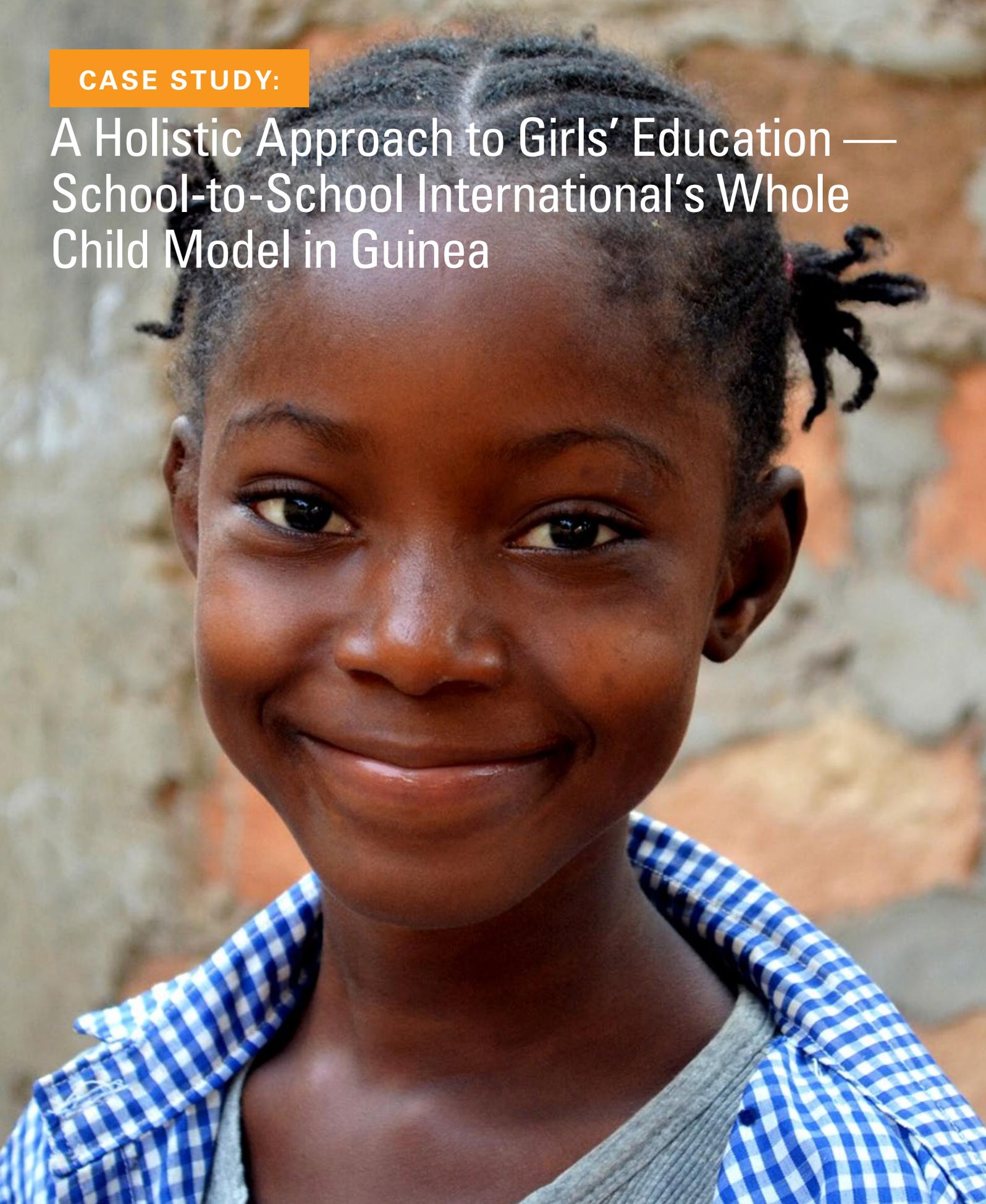


CASE STUDY:

A Holistic Approach to Girls' Education — School-to-School International's Whole Child Model in Guinea



By Mark Lynd, Karla Giuliano Sarr, Hetal Thukral, Mamounan Kpokomou, Alimatou Koulibaly,
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KEY FINDINGS:

- Before and after surveys showed that girls enrolled in the Whole Child Model girls' scholarship program scored significantly higher in reading and math than other students in the program.
- Enrollment in the girls' scholarship program was also associated with improved diet and social status for girls, and more frequent contact between parents and schools.
- Following training in the importance of girls' education, parents reportedly became more involved in their girls' education and, in some instances, reduced household demands on their girls.
- Following training on the importance of girls' education, principals and parents reported that schools increasingly promoted leadership opportunities for all students in their schools, including girls.
- Most girls participating in the Whole Child Model were unable to name any professional roles for women outside of ones they saw in their everyday lives — for example, teachers, doctors, and principals — while boys were able to imagine a range of possibilities, even being president of the country. This suggests that in spite of project interventions, girls still have a limited view of their own prospects as professionals.

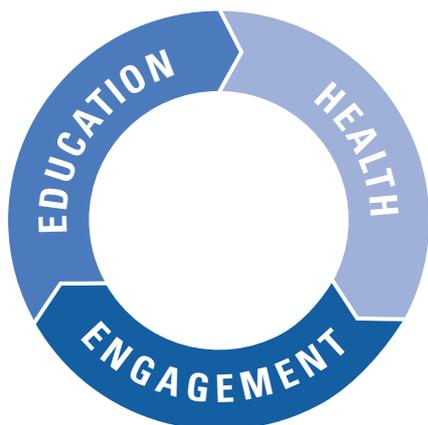
Introduction

Although the links between girls' education and improved quality of life and economic growth are well-known, school-age girls in Guinea continue to face conditions that limit school success. In addition to the systemic impediments that all children face, such as shortages of qualified teachers, resources, and materials, girls are also affected by several cultural factors that affect their access to education. These include girls' household duties, the practice of early marriage, and fears of unplanned pregnancies, as well as beliefs about the roles of women and girls that can affect how their families support their educations. As a result, many female students leave school before completing the primary school cycle. Specifically, less than half of school-age girls in Guinea regularly participate in primary school (47.7 percent) and only 25.9 percent enroll in secondary school, compared to 54.9 percent of boys enrolled in primary school and 40.5 percent in secondary school (UNICEF 2013).

The Girls' Education Program (GEP) is a program implemented by School-to-School International (STS), a non-governmental organization that seeks to address barriers to girls' education through the GEP and, more broadly, through its integrated model of support called the Whole Child Model. The Whole Child Model addresses three areas of support simultaneously— education, health, and engagement— so that children can enjoy quality education in a healthy environment with supportive and engaged communities.



FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM OF WHOLE CHILD MODEL



This report provides an overview of a case study examining how the GEP supported girls by improving education, health, and engagement while addressing factors that hindered girls' success in school. The study focused on three domains in girls' lives: 1) the learning environment at school, 2) the home environment, and 3) perceptions of the role of women and girls in Guinean society. This report highlights important results and challenges, as well as lessons for good practice.

Intervention

The goal of the Whole Child Model is to promote academic success, especially in reading and math, and to ensure that all children complete primary school in order to become productive members of their communities. The GEP is designed to achieve these aims while ensuring that girls have the same access to educational opportunities as boys, and to provide not only academic support but to build girls' sense of agency and empowerment as well. During the 2014-2015 school year, STS implemented the following activities as part of its GEP:

- **Teacher training in reading strategies:** Emphasis on the communicative approach;
- **Teacher training in math strategies:** Strategies for active and game-based math teaching and learning;

- **Health training for teachers:** Focus on hygiene, food safety, environmental sanitation, and HIV/AIDS;
- **Parents' training on supportive strategies at home and at school:** Focus on how to best support students at home, such as how to help with homework and instill good study habits, in order to promote school attendance, retention, and success;
- **Time-on-Task training for school principals:** Tracking teacher attendance and use of time in the classroom;
- **Gender workshop for school principals, teachers, students, and community members:** Exploration of notions of sex and gender as well as discussions of cultural obstacles that may hinder girls' access and success at school;
- **Classroom equity training for teachers:** Focusing on stereotypes, beliefs, and attitudes that discourage and hinder girls' development and well-being at school;
- **Scholarship program:** Provision of a sack of rice per month to 30 families of the most at-risk girls between Grades 2 and 5 for an entire school year— enough to feed the average Guinean family for a month. The majority of the girls (17 of 30) were in Grade 5. Scholarship selection was a collaborative process with the community, targeting at-risk girls who regularly attended school; and



- **Remedial education afterschool program:** An informal class meeting on Saturdays for both girls and boys using experiential learning methods. Scholarship recipients had priority, followed by students (boys and girls) in grades 4-6 in need of remedial assistance, up to 30 students per school.

The case study focused on the implementation of these activities in 20 schools in the Boké and Kindia provinces of coastal Guinea.

FIGURE 2: GUINEA ADMINISTRATIVE MAP



(United Nations Department of Field Support 2013)

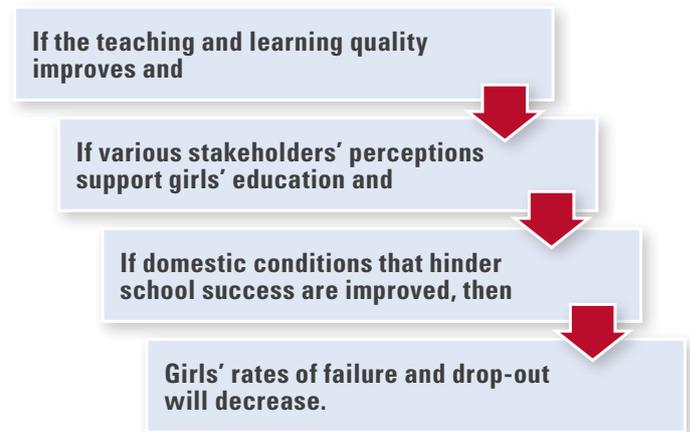
All were public schools in rural areas. Most faced a number of resource constraints, including teachers with limited professional training and content knowledge, few learning materials, dilapidated school infrastructure, poverty, limited support for study at home, and, in most cases, illiterate parents.

Since STS started working in Guinea in 2002, it has conducted a variety of research highlighting the challenges faced by Guinea’s school children in terms of educational quality, health, and girls’ education issues. To remedy some of these issues, STS has implemented its Whole Child Model. The case study sought to understand the extent to which this model has helped, especially in the case of girls. The research questions for the study were as follows:

- How do Whole Child Model interventions contribute to an environment supportive of girls’ success and retention at the primary school level?
- How do Whole Child Model interventions respond to factors that impede girls’ success and retention at the primary school level?

These questions are based on a theory of change that assumes that girls’ educational outcomes will improve if changes can be made in teaching and learning, perceptions of girls’ education, and girls domestic conditions. This theory can be summarized as follows:

FIGURE 3: GIRLS’ EDUCATION PROJECT THEORY OF CHANGE



Methodology

The case study utilized a mixed method approach in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used at the same time or in sequence in order to enhance inquiry results (Creswell 2003). The quantitative component of the study was a quasi-experimental design implemented in the 10 schools participating in the GEP. Participants were selected randomly for Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA), student interviews, and teacher interviews (when there was more than one per grade), while the remaining were selected purposively. The tools for this part of the study consisted of an EGRA and EGMA; interview schedules for school principals, teachers who participated in teacher trainings, students, and parents; and structured observations of the school yard. All were used during both the baseline study (March 3-11, 2014) and endline study (July 6-14, 2015). The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods in order to compare change over time between treatment and comparison schools.

The qualitative part of the study was conducted in a subset of three of the treatment schools for a more in-depth examination of participants’ experiences and perspectives. Purposive sampling was used to select the three schools, including the two schools near the capital Conakry (for convenience) and a third more distant school in the Boké region of Guinea in order to capture diverse perspectives. Methods included structured schoolyard observations; structured interviews

with school principals, scholarship recipients, and teachers; and semi-structured focus group discussions with girls, boys, teachers, and community members. Data collection took place toward the end of the intervention, between June 11 and July 13. Researchers primarily used local languages (Soussou and Pulaar) supported by French where necessary in order to promote the richest discussions possible. Data were transcribed and translated into French for analysis.

Results

Results from this study show how the Whole Child Model and the GEP were associated with girls' success in school and perceptions about their education.

Learning conditions at school:

- **Improved skills development for teachers:** Several teachers spoke favorably about the program's professional development activities and their use of new reading and math strategies. One teacher noted:

“ I found the STS modules much easier than the ones I used previously. The STS modules are complete and ready to use “off the shelf,” where all I have to do is follow the STS procedures and ask the questions and I find the students actively participating more compared to what I did before. ”

Teacher, Tassera, Focus Group

- **Mixed achievement results:** Results in reading and math were mixed. From baseline to endline, students in comparison schools showed greater gains than students in treatment schools on most reading and math tasks, though gains were not statistically significant. Girls receiving scholarships, however, saw greater gains than non-recipients in both reading (10 percent gain) and math (3 percent gain), and the gains were significant.
- **Health trainings were well-received and produced positive results:** Many study participants indicated that they appreciated health trainings, with some identifying practices they had learned such as covering food and hand washing techniques. Observations of students' health and hygiene practices in schools showed greater improvements in treatment schools.



- **Additional leadership development opportunities for students:** When asked whether their schools provided leadership opportunities to students (for example, as leaders of groups in class), the increase in principals saying “yes” at endline was 22 percent— significantly more than the increase found in comparison schools. Similar increases for teachers and parents were also identified. While the Whole Child Model teacher and parent trainings on gender, equity, and support did not specifically target girls' leadership, one principal stated:

“ Speaking of class leaders, it is often subject to a vote. For example, if the raising of the flag is done by a girl in the morning, it's a boy who serves as the master of ceremonies. If it's a boy who raises the flag, it's a girl who serves as the master of ceremonies. ”

Conditions at home:

- **Equitable sharing of chores and increased academic support in the home:** Following equity training, some parents reported having a better understanding of the need to reduce girls' burden of work at home. As one parent stated:

“ Before the training, my wife would leave the boys alone but make the girls do housework. But now, the boys wash dishes, the girls wash dishes. The boys sweep the house, the girls sweep the house. There have been a lot of changes at home. Right now, we take studies seriously at home. I always ask them what they have done at school even though I'm illiterate. ”

Man, Wonkifong, Focus Group

- **Positive effects of the scholarship program:** Without a doubt, the scholarship program has had a positive impact on many of the girls who have been selected to receive the bag of rice provided by the GEP on a monthly basis. Benefits include girls and their families eating better, girls' increased motivation towards schoolwork, and as noted above, better reading and math outcomes for scholarship recipients. These girls also spoke of having a new identity and improved social status as breadwinners within their families and communities. A powerful quote provides further illustration:

“ My grandmother said that I was going to leave school. The day that I started fourth grade I began to get the bag of rice. She said that I wasn't going to leave school because I started to get the bag of rice. ”

Scholarship recipient

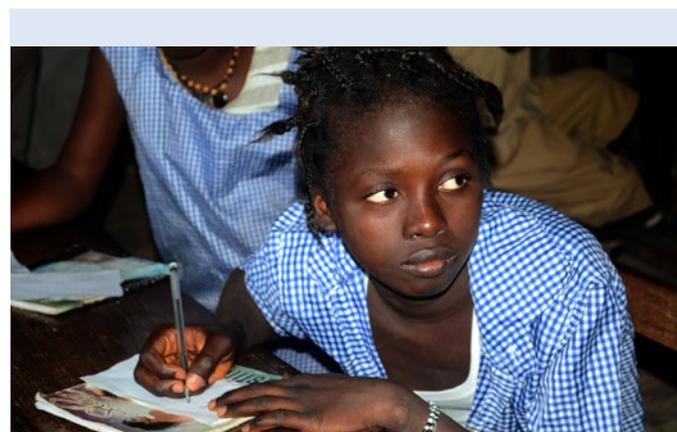


An additional unexpected benefit of the scholarship is the enhanced engagement of parents with scholarship recipients' schools, as family members are required to collect the bag of rice each month from the school grounds. One recipient noted, for example, that this has resulted in her father being in regular contact with the school principal.

Perceptions of girls' roles:

Parents' understanding of the value of girls' education remained modest. However, at the project endline parents of students in experimental schools said that school would lead to job possibilities that would in turn result in the provision of better care for aging parents, and that school could improve girls' moral character and hygiene practices.

In spite of improved perceptions of girls and their roles in the family, this study also found that most girls failed to un-



derstand the range of future possibilities open to them. For example, when asked what they might be when they grew up, less than half of scholarship recipients could even name a future profession. Some did not even respond to the question. Of those who did, the professions they identified were ones they saw in their everyday lives: teacher, school principal, doctor, tailor, midwife. Similarly, professional aspirations voiced by the majority of non-scholarship girls we spoke with remained limited to societal norms. Boys' responses, on the other hand, were much more diverse, as were those of parents, who identified a number of local women who had gone on to assume important roles in larger Guinean society. So even though the scholarship program appears to have elevated the status of some girls in their families and communities, and even though parents and boys know that children can pursue greater possibilities, somehow this message is not reaching the girls.

Sustainability, efficiency, and scalability

The Whole Child Model has continued to build on local programs and models. This close relationship with and reliance on local partners has led to slow but increasing sustainability and ability to scale up throughout Guinea and elsewhere. Additionally, the Whole Child Model's multiple components lend themselves to adaptation to other contexts. At \$81,000 for annual program costs or \$22 per student, implementation by the Government of Guinea would represent an 18 percent increase on spending per student. STS provided the majority of the funding for the Whole Child Model and the GEP out of its research and development funds and individual donors contributed the funding for scholarships (\$14,761). STS's growing results have led to more and more inquiries from outside funding agencies.

Challenges

It is important to note that the implementation of the Whole Child Model and GEP was severely affected by the Ebola

crisis in Guinea. First, because of the crisis, the school year started late – in January rather than the customary October opening – thus reducing the intervention time to 6 months. As a result, some components were reduced, others eliminated altogether. Also as a result of the Ebola crisis, some communities suspected outsiders of carrying the virus to their communities, so international STS staff were unable to visit project schools during this period. Moreover, a number of Ebola-focused interventions such as hand-washing campaigns (implemented by UNICEF) may have contaminated some results of the Whole Child Model, which includes a sanitation component. Finally, presidential elections were held during the same period, further disrupting an already unusual school year.

Lessons learned

The study provides a number of lessons for implementing Girls' Education Programs in contexts such as Guinea.

Lessons learned include the following:

1. Continue and expand the girls' scholarship

program: Several positive results emerged from the study indicating the beneficial nature of the scholarship program for recipients. Positive effects at school may include improved reading and math performance, improved social status at home, and improved diets for girls and their families.

2. Continue providing health training: Health and sanitation training was frequently cited as a favorite component of the Whole Child Program, and this training was associated with increased practice of sanitation (protecting food) and hygiene (hand washing). These results suggest health and sanitation training should be extended to other schools in order to improve the con-



ditions of learning for all children. However, the effect of this training on girls' retention and success is unclear.

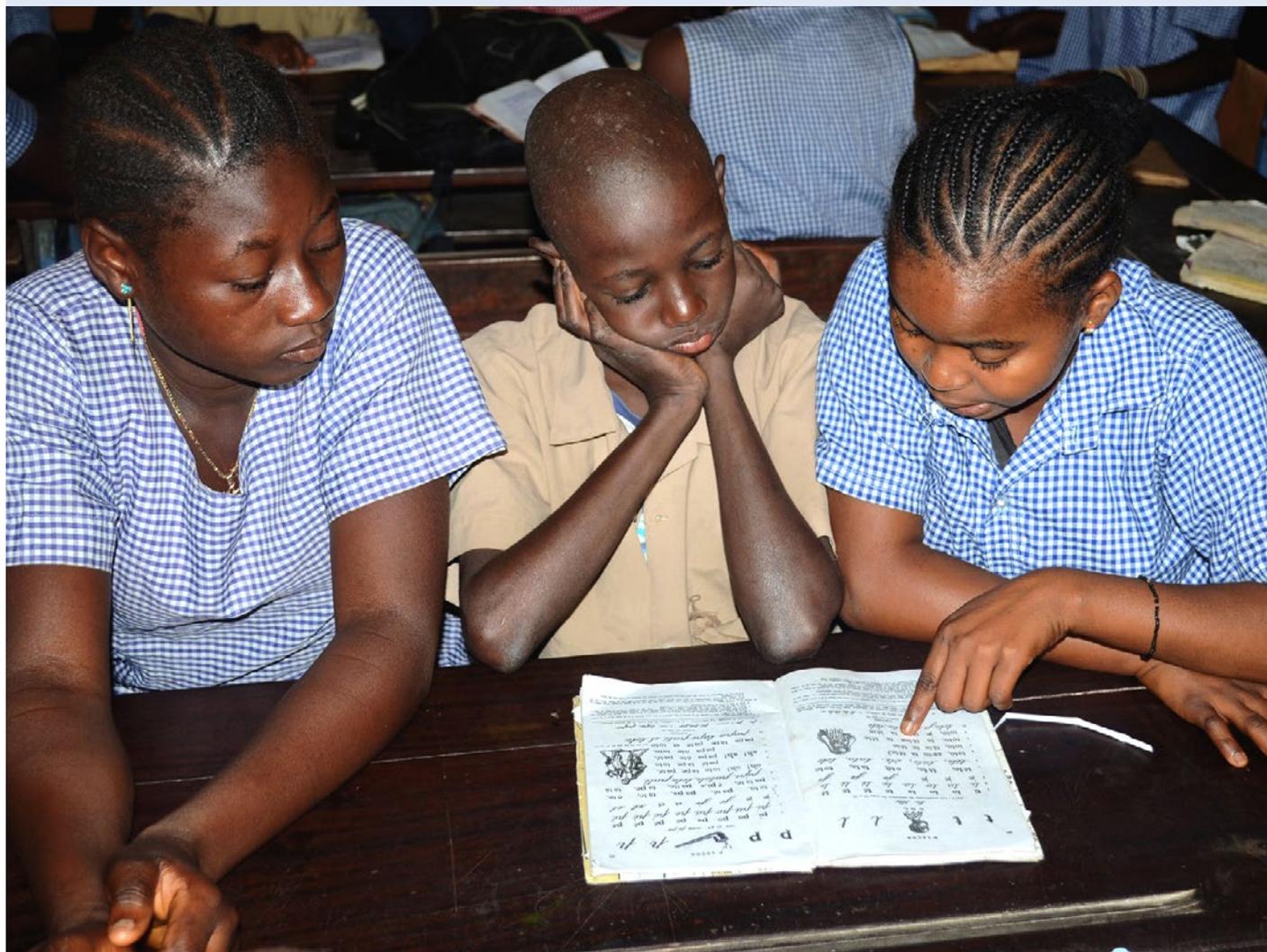
3. Strengthen teacher training: The variable results found on the EGRA and EGMA assessments in this study, coupled with the limited time available to provide school-based support, suggest that teachers could benefit from additional support to achieve greater learning gains. Similarly, marginal changes in students' sense of agency suggest the need for additional teacher training in this area.

4. Continue providing sensitivity training for parents: In the communities studied, early marriage was found to be a major obstacle to girls' schooling. At the same time, this study found instances where parents increasingly appreciated the importance of girls' schooling and, in some cases, were making changes at home to assist in their daughter's education (such as a more equitable distribution of chores at home). These changes suggest that the sensitivity training provided through the Whole Child Model may have played a role in changing parents' views, and that such training should be continued.

5. Involve older family members: Results from this study suggest that the Whole Child Model should continue to involve various family members in its programming in order to strengthen their support for and commitment to girls' schooling, including girls' mothers, fathers, grandparents, and guardians. Beyond these relationships, results indicate the importance of older brothers and sisters to girls' school success as well as the roles they may play in discouraging their younger sisters in their studies. With this in mind, the Whole Child Model should also seek to involve older brothers and sisters in support of girls' education.

6. Train boys as allies: Discussions with boys revealed that boys play dual roles as antagonists and supporters of their sisters, female classmates, friends, and neigh-





bors. For example, one way that boys supported girls' education was by organizing tutoring sessions for their younger sisters. Such activities demonstrate boys' potential as allies in promoting girls' education—a role that should be reinforced in future girls' education programming.

7. Address the needs of the most vulnerable children, both girls and boys: Several boys indicated feeling jealous of the attention that girls received. And in contexts such as those in the study, where schools are under-resourced and many families are extremely poor, many children, both girls and boys, are vulnerable and need support. For both ethical and practical reasons, project inputs such as scholarships should be designed to address the most needy children, both girls and boys.

8. Include girls' role model activities: The difficulties encountered by the girls in this study in identifying future professions or examples of positive female role models outside of their immediate experience suggest the need to introduce girls to positive role models from a variety of backgrounds. Schools can also support this effort by posting positive images, such as posters, of professional women in the classroom, and communities can organize events in which girls and women

from a variety of backgrounds are asked to present or share their knowledge and skills.

9. Advocate for local languages as the medium of instruction: Efforts to include local languages as the medium of instruction during program implementation were met by resistance from the Ministry of Education. Similarly, students participating in the study shared negative experiences of being punished for their use of local languages in the classroom. Yet research has consistently demonstrated the importance of using local languages as the medium of instruction, especially in the early grades. Local language instruction should therefore be promoted with the Ministry of Education for the benefit of both boys and girls.

10. Continue to investigate barriers to girls' access to education: This study found numerous barriers to girls' access to education—in some cases even when policies exist to protect girls' access. For example, pregnant girls frequently refrain from returning to school after childbirth, even though policies stipulate that they can return to school. Barriers such as these should be investigated and partners should be sensitized to supportive policies and opportunities to improve girls' prospects of attending and succeeding in school. ■

Acknowledgments

School-to-School International is honored to be working with a dedicated staff and partners in Guinea. The Whole Child Model would not be possible without the drive and dedication of the children in our partner schools, their teachers, staff and community. This research would not have been possible without support from the United Nations Girl's Education Initiative, along with technical support and feedback on the case study from Overseas Development Institute. The girl's education activities

(along with other activities in School-to-School's Whole Child Model) were implemented with funding and support from the ALCOA Foundation. The foundation's drive and dedication to improving education in Guinea has been and continues to be commendable. As we continue to support improving education opportunities for children everywhere, we are inspired by the girls and boys in our partner schools in Guinea, who demonstrate to us every day that perseverance and hard work – as a community –bring us closer to our goals. ■

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Big Yellow Taxi was responsible for art direction and design.
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