

# Who are you calling *vulnerable*?

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How girls in Sierra Leone are using a scholarship program  
to overcome their circumstances and shape their own future.

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**ONE GIRL**

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**One Girl research reports:** are written and shared so that we can celebrate our successes, acknowledge our challenges, contribute to public debate and invite feedback on development practices.

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**About One Girl:** One Girl is an Australian not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting the millions of girls without access to education in two of the worst places in the world to be born a girl: Uganda and Sierra Leone. One Girl raises funds and awareness through campaigns like Do It In A Dress to provide thousands of girls and young women with access to education. Since 2009, One Girl has reached more than 33,000 women and girls. Working with well-established local organisations, One Girl delivers high-quality education programs.

**Cover photo:** One Girl scholar in her classroom, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Photo: Olivia Ackland/One Girl.

# 1 Executive summary

When you think of a child receiving a scholarship, what comes to mind?

Is it the athlete who can run 100 metres in less than 12 seconds? The gifted musician who practiced the piano every day for years until they could play Bach perfectly? The young genius who can solve NASA-level equations at the drop of a hat?

Or is it someone like 14-year-old Fatu\* from Freetown, Sierra Leone?

Fatu has no real special skills; no athletic abilities beyond kicking a soccer ball around with her siblings. She's whip-smart, yes, but not exactly what you'd call a genius.

But this year, Fatu received a scholarship from One Girl. And like those other kids, she is going to achieve great things in life because of it.

## 'Breaking down barriers

We know this about Fatu because research proves that when a girl gets an education, something extraordinary happens: her life, her community and her world changes.

Economies grow; poverty shrinks. Families are happier; communities thrive. An educated woman has fewer children, is more likely to contribute to decisions that affect her life, will earn twice as much as an uneducated woman, and will be less at risk of physical and sexual violence.

But for too long, the potential of girls has been squashed. Poverty, early marriage, teen pregnancy, violence, illness, disability and household responsibilities being seen as the priority are all barriers that have prevented girls from completing school.

\* Name changed to protect identity.

“When 130 million girls are unable to become engineers or journalists or CEOs because education is out of their reach, our world misses out on trillions of dollars that could strengthen the global economy, public health and stability.”

– Malala Yousafzai, Malala Fund co-founder and Nobel laureate.

### All they need is an opportunity

That’s why One Girl’s Scholarships Program is so extraordinary. We find girls who are being held back by those barriers and we give her the tools she needs to smash them down.

We supply her with the material things like books, a bag, uniforms and a solar lamp to study at night. Her family and community supply her with emotional support, advice, encouragement and guidance through our Education and Women’s Committees and Fambul Toks (family talks).

But she does the rest herself. This ain’t no hand out — it’s simply opening a door that was previously closed and making sure it doesn’t hit her on the way through.

### Is it working?

Recently we conducted an evaluation to determine just how effective our program is. We selected 147 participants (made up of One Girl scholars, family members, school administrators, committee members and One Girl staff) from school sites that represented the diversity of our program participants.

Using a mix of focus group discussions, arts-based activities and one-on-one interviews, we asked them to answer a series of questions that would help us determine what we were doing right, where we can improve and how the program is having an impact on the rest of the community. What we found was incredible:

Girls will thrive if given the opportunity: Nearly all participants from the evaluation said the only thing holding girls back was the lack of opportunity. And the proof is in the pudding:

**1 One Girl scholar graduation rates** (compared with national average: 16%)

<b>2017</b>	88.2%
<b>2016</b>	96.9%
<b>2015</b>	83.3%
<b>2014</b>	100%

**2 They are paying it forward:** Most of the girls we interviewed are sharing the knowledge they’ve gained from the program with their family members, their friends and their community. They want others to benefit as they have.

**3 The barriers to education are real — but the program is helping girls to tear them down:** By learning about sexual and reproductive health and being

empowered to make decisions, girls are rejecting early pregnancy and traditional practices such as early marriage in favour of pursuing their education and a prosperous career.

**4 The program is making girls more confident:** Many girls said they were too afraid to speak up in class prior to becoming involved with the program. Now they have the tools and confidence to know that what they have to say matters.

**5 Their communities are feeling the ripple effects:** There has been a major shift in the way girls’ education is perceived in all of the communities we work with. Many have reported that people from their communities are hosting study groups for girls, taking an active interest in their progress and pooling their money together to pay for even more girls to stay in school.

Girls aren’t “vulnerable” or hopeless. They have the determination, intelligence and strength to change their own circumstances. One Girl’s Scholarship Program is simply giving them an opportunity to unlock their potential.



One Girl scholars work through their lessons in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Photo: Olivia Ackland/One Girl.

## 2

## Introduction

Guess what happens when a girl in Sierra Leone is educated.

Go on, guess! It's actually incredible.

Are you guessing? Ok fine, we'll just tell you.

She'll be paid 10–20% extra for every year of secondary school she completes once she gets a job. That means wages for women overall will improve. That means more people with more money, meaning her country's economy will grow.

If she chooses to have children, she will have less. That means the children she DOES have will be healthier and have a better chance at being educated themselves in future. That means the generational cycle of poverty will be broken.

She will be less at risk of human trafficking and abuse. She will be more likely to be educated on sexual and reproductive health and rights. That means she will be safer, healthier, more confident and empowered to have a say in decisions that affect her life.<sup>1</sup>

Pretty incredible, right? Girls in Sierra Leone have all of this potential and yet, for too long, their potential has been squashed.

It doesn't have to be this way. Sierra Leone's 2007 Child Act says that all children, including girls, have the right to education.<sup>2</sup> But in reality, only one in four girls attend secondary school.<sup>3</sup> This could be due to a number of different barriers including poverty, early marriage and pregnancy, violence, illness, disability, low family and community aspirations for education, and household responsibilities being seen as the priority.<sup>4</sup>

One Girl is an Australian-based INGO committed to supporting girls in Sierra Leone and Uganda to tear down these barriers and shape their own future. These are two of the most difficult places in the world to be born a girl; that's why our flagship Scholarships Program in Sierra Leone is designed to support girls who would otherwise be excluded from school to complete their secondary education and become their country's future leaders.

The purpose of this report is to reflect on the achievements and learnings of this program, as well as provide food for thought to help One Girl and our partner communities envision a bright future where the potential of girls is celebrated and utilised.

<sup>1</sup> Sperling, G. B., & Winthrop, R. (2016). *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence for the World's Best Investment*. Brookings Institute Press. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What-Works-in-Girls-Educationlowres.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Right to Education Project. (2016). *Right to Education country fact sheet: Sierra Leone*. Retrieved from [http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/RTE\\_country\\_factsheet\\_Sierra\\_Leone\\_January\\_2016\\_0.pdf](http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/RTE_country_factsheet_Sierra_Leone_January_2016_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UNGEI. (n.d.). *Sierra Leone: Key Indicators*. Retrieved from <http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/sierraleone.html>

<sup>4</sup> HEART. (2015). *Evidence on girls' secondary education*.

*An educated girl will make twice as much money as a girl who is not.*



An educated girl will make twice as much money as a girl who is not.<sup>5</sup>

## 3

## The big picture

The Government of Sierra Leone is deeply committed to ensuring every child in their country is educated — after all, it's in everyone's best interest for the next generation to have the tools to thrive and prosper. But access to and completion of high-quality education is still a challenge for many Sierra Leonean children, especially girls.

Before we dive into the who's and the why's and the what-are-we-gonna-do-about-it's, we must first look at the structure of their current education system, the changes that have been proposed, and the underlying reasons girls seem to be drawing the short straw when it comes to attendance and completion rates.

<sup>5</sup> Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen & Onagoruwa. (2018)

## The current system

Sierra Leone currently operates on a 6-3-4 education system — primary school is six years; junior secondary school (JSS) is three; and senior secondary school (SSS) is four.

The Education Act 2004 says that education is free and compulsory for primary school and JSS. But in practice, primary and junior secondary schools often charge fees for admission, tuition, uniforms, materials, and other expenses. Many families cannot afford this, which is one of the key reasons why 19% of girls aged 6 to 11 in Sierra Leone aren't attending school.

The stats get worse at the SSS level, where fees were allowed by law up until September 2018 and attendance isn't required or guaranteed.<sup>6</sup> The gender gap widens as well, with data from 2010 showing that 33% of girls aged 12 to 17 were out of school, compared to 26% of boys.<sup>7</sup>

## Changing models

In April 2018, Sierra Leonean citizens elected a new president, Julius Maada Bio. Upon taking office, Maada Bio announced that “free education will be introduced effective September 2018 for all primary and secondary schools to improve access to quality education.”<sup>8</sup>

This is an incredible step in the right direction and has the potential to drastically change how school is provided to the children of Sierra Leone. We also understand that in the 2018–2019 academic year, the Government of Sierra Leone will eliminate the fourth year of SSS, shifting the formal school system to a 6-3-3 model. Reducing the length of time in school could have a huge impact on completion rates and enrolment in higher education.

## But why are girls so underrepresented in schools?

While there have been improvements in the number of girls getting an education in Sierra Leone, they are still attending secondary school at rates far lower than boys. Sadly, issues such as poverty, early marriage and pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence and deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and perceptions means girls are more likely to drop out of school — or be forced to withdraw.

These issues were made even worse during the Ebola outbreak, which swept through West Africa in 2014 and killed nearly 4,000 people in Sierra Leone.<sup>9</sup> Many girls lost their parents or guardians during the epidemic and either became the primary carers of their siblings or were unable to afford education without their parent's income. Additionally, more than 18,000 girls became pregnant during the outbreak,<sup>10</sup> with some evidence suggesting that the 10-month school closure caused more girls to get into the workforce and were therefore more exposed to sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup> To make matters worse, the Government of Sierra Leone introduced a law during the outbreak that says visibly pregnant girls cannot attend school — and this law is still in place today.<sup>12</sup>

6 Right to Education Project. (2016). Right to Education country fact sheet: Sierra Leone. Retrieved from [http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/RTE\\_country\\_factsheet\\_Sierra\\_Leone\\_January\\_2016\\_0.pdf](http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/RTE_country_factsheet_Sierra_Leone_January_2016_0.pdf)

7 FHI360. (2014). Sierra Leone national education profile. Retrieved from [https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC\\_NEP\\_Sierra\\_Leone.pdf](https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC_NEP_Sierra_Leone.pdf)

8 Daily Nation. (2018). Sierra Leone President Maada Bio announces free education for kids. Retrieved from <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Sierra-Leone-new-president-announces-free-education-/1066-4555904-145512h/index.html>

9 World Health Organization. (2018). Ebola Situation Report: 16 March 2018. Retrieved from [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/204629/ebolasitrep\\_16Mar2016\\_eng.pdf?sequence="](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/204629/ebolasitrep_16Mar2016_eng.pdf?sequence=)



An educated girl is six times less likely to be married as a child.<sup>13</sup>

## Don't call me a "vulnerable girl"

It is interesting to note that talking about the issues that affect girls in countries like Sierra Leone has had somewhat of an unintended side-effect. The narrative of the “vulnerable girl” — that is, a helpless victim — has kept girls in the dark and meant they haven't been empowered to take control over their own futures.

A relic of colonialism and aid work in West Africa over decades, the concept of the “vulnerable girl” parallels Mohanty's critique of the “Third World Woman,” who “leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “Third World” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)”<sup>14</sup>

This representation of marginalised Sierra Leonean girls stands in contrast to One Girl's vision and our intentions for working with girls. We will explore the consequences of this narrative and our solutions to overcome it later in this report.

10 United Nations Population Fund. (2017). Recovering from the Ebola Virus Disease: Rapid assessment of pregnant adolescent girls in Sierra Leone. Retrieved from [http://sierraleone.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Rapid Assessment of Pregnant Adolescent Girls.pdf](http://sierraleone.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Rapid%20Assessment%20of%20Pregnant%20Adolescent%20Girls.pdf)

11 Denney, L., Gordon, R., & Ibrahim, A. (2015). Teenage pregnancy after Ebola in Sierra Leone: Mapping responses, gaps and ongoing challenges Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict. Retrieved from [www.securelivelihoods.org](http://www.securelivelihoods.org)

12 Human Rights Watch. (2018). Leave no girl behind in Africa: Discrimination in education against pregnant girls and adolescent mothers. Retrieved from [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/au0618\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/au0618_web.pdf)

13 Levine, Lloyd, Greene & Grown. (2009)

14 Chandra Talpade Mohanty. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.jesusradicals.com/uploads/2/6/3/8/26388433/mohanty-chandra-feminism-without-borders-decolonizing-theory-practicing-solidarity.pdf>

## Bintu\*, 20

Bintu is 20 years old and after not being in school for nearly four years, has become a One Girl Scholar and has been studying back at school for more than three years now.

“My mum is alive but my dad is dead. My dad died when I was 15. He was helping but we are too many to take care of. I have four brothers, four sisters.

“I was going to school at first because my aunt was paying my fees ... Later my aunt said she could no longer pay for me because she has no money. So I stopped going to school.

“I was not feeling OK, I was not feeling good because I wanted to become a great person. Even my dad wanted me to become a great person. He wanted me to become a doctor.

“I was at home one day and One Girl, two people, came around my house they said we are looking for children ... who are not going to school ... So my aunt said, she told the people that she could no longer pay for my fees because she doesn't have money and my dad has passed away.

“I was very, very happy about it ... they told me I don't need to worry anymore I will go back to school!

**“When I met One Girl I thought, ‘Oh, my dreams are coming to pass’. I know that by going to school and studying hard I can become that great person.**

“School is important because it helps each and every one in order for us to be able to achieve our dreams ... If I stay in school I know that I'll become a great person, I know that I will help my colleagues or even my family my little siblings. I'll help other people who are vulnerable and who cannot pay their school fees for themselves, if I am educated, if I have a job I'll be able to help them as well.

“When I put on my uniform in the morning I look so happy ... Sometimes when I walk around my community so many people look at me and say, ‘Oh, you are good!’

“Going back to school has changed my life completely. Completely!”

— Bintu, Sierra Leone



## What's the One Girl Scholarship program?

We know that to stop the cycle of girls being unable to finish school, they have to be supported with everything they need to succeed. So, in 2011, we launched our Scholarships Program, which does just that.

We don't just provide girls with material things like books, bags, uniforms, shoes and school fees — we also give them emotional support, encouragement and help with any challenges they are facing at home, at school or in their community. Once a girl becomes a One Girl scholar, we support her right up until she graduates secondary school.

Working in 35 schools in three districts of Sierra Leone, the Scholarship Program supports up to 300 girls at a time. So far, we have reached 427 girls.

### Scholarships, *not* sponsorships

The great thing about our program is that, unlike sponsorship programs — which present a number of ethical and logistical challenges for the sponsored child, the sponsor and the organisation who runs the program — a scholarship simply opens up pathways for students who would otherwise not have the opportunity to attend school. In fact, one of the key targets of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for improving education by 2020 is to “substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries”.<sup>15</sup> Don't worry UN, we're all over it.

### How do we decide who gets a scholarship?

Each year, we work with community members, One Girl Education and Women's Committees — who oversee the implementation of the project in their respective communities, as well as provide ongoing support to the girls — and school administrators to select girls who meet the Scholarships Program's criteria.

Eligible girls are generally aged between 13 to 18 (with some exceptions — we didn't want the young women who were forced to leave school early during the Ebola crisis to miss out!) and be living in circumstances that prevent her from attending school. This includes girls who have dropped out because of financial, caregiving, or social constraints; girls who reside in slum communities; and girls who have experienced sexual violence or are sex workers.

15 United Nations. (2018). Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 4, Quality Education. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

Once a shortlist has been selected, we conduct a thorough investigation into each girl's situation by visiting her at home and interviewing her, her family and members of her community who know her. Using this method, we are able to reach the girls who are most in need of the scholarship and who would otherwise be missing out on schooling.



An educated girl will be 10% more likely to make decisions in her household.<sup>16</sup>

**The paper stuff:** One Girl pays the annual tuition and exam fees for all girls, as well as the admission fee for all newly enrolled girls. We also pay about 50% of the cost for extra classes on the weekends and holidays, which are offered by teachers to supplement classroom teaching for students who are struggling to keep up.

**All the bits and bobs:** We provide every girl in the program with school uniforms, shoes, text and exercise books, some funds to cover the cost of lunch, school supplies, solar-powered lamps, and anything else they need to study.

**Heaps of love and guidance:** All of our scholars are enrolled in our Business Brains program, which provides the girls with training in financial literacy, basic bookkeeping and business management, as well as life skills, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights and leadership. And to make sure her family and community is on board, we've launched Community Dialogue Meetings and Fambul Toks (Family Talks) for the girls, their families and people in their community to discuss issues related to girls' education and to provide feedback on the program.

**No reason to stay home:** Studies have shown when girls in Sierra Leone have their periods, they can mean they lose significant amounts of school each year. This is because they are left with no other option than to use unhygienic scraps of material as a pad, which can result in rashes, smells and embarrassing accidents. Oh hell no! All our One Girl scholars receive a regular supply of sanitary pads, as well as education about menstrual hygiene through our LaunchPad Program, which is run by female leaders in their community.

<sup>16</sup> Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen & Onagoruwa. (2018)



## How do we know we're making a difference?

In 2018, we commissioned an evaluation that would help us to measure our impact on the local communities and determine whether the program is effective in breaking down some of the barriers experienced by the girls. It was also a great opportunity to engage the girls, teachers, families and community members we work with, and encourage them to contribute their own ideas for the future of the program.

### The details

We selected seven school sites that represented the diversity of our program participants based on factors such as location, how long the program had been active, the number of scholars, and their school completion rates.

Using a mix of focus group discussions, arts-based activities and one-on-one interviews, we asked 147 participants — comprising scholars from seven schools, their principals and school administrators, members of their families and communities, One Girl staff, staff from partner organisations, and former program alumni — to help us answer the following questions:

1. How does One Girl build on the strengths of girls, families, and communities?
2. Is the Scholarships Program implemented effectively and efficiently?
3. What outcomes have been observed that were influenced by the program?
4. To what extent is the Scholarships Program socially and financially sustainable?

Arts-based activities included a photography project (see case study), group murals and body mapping — which involved tracing a group members' body and decorating the outline to figuratively answer a research question — to help us understand scholars' perceptions of the program, the challenges they face and their hopes for the future.



## How *I* see it

The PhotoVoice project gave girls an opportunity to express their point of view by taking photos to illustrate their answer to the question:

**“What does the One Girl Scholarships Program mean to me?”**

They then chose their best photo and prepared a presentation about what the photo represented to their teachers, parents, and guardians. Here is a sample of the photos and explanations presented on the day:

### The sky is my limit, *by Tenneh\**



“The sky means to me that before I was in the dark and now I am in the light, bright as the sun.”

\* Name changed to protect identity.

### Palm tree, *by Aminata\**



“I am flourishing like this tree. This tree is flourishing, and now I am always flourishing. I am flourishing by trying my best, to forward my education.”

### I am proud, *by Georgieta\**



“One Girl makes me to be proud around my friends and filled with knowledge like this water tank.”

\* Names changed to protect identity.

## Boats, by *Fatmata\**



“I am like the man, sitting in the boat. And One Girl is the engine, which is moving the boat while I am sitting comfortably, which brought me to [back to school].”

## One Girl I can be, by *Mariatu\**



“I want to be like One Girl and take innocent children from the street and help them to not be dropouts. Education is so important to me, because with education you will be able to achieve.”

\* Names changed to protect identity.

## 6 What did we find out?

Something we already knew — these girls are smart, they are strong, and they’ve got big ideas; yet without the program, they wouldn’t have had the opportunity to prove how incredible they really are.

One of the greatest outcomes of this evaluation was the lack of any nasty surprises — not to toot our own horn, but we know we’ve got a great thing going here. Now we have the evidence to back up what we already thought!

### 1. Girls will thrive if given the opportunity

Participants in the evaluation overwhelmingly agreed that the material and financial support provided by the program was key to succeeding in school. They also said having the support and encouragement of their family and community was equally as important.

Interestingly, very few mentioned personal characteristics (such as perseverance, intelligence and studiousness) as being an important asset for a girl to complete school. What we can take from this is that girls — and the people that surround them — believe their only limitation comes from the opportunities offered to them. As one school administrator explained, “[the girls] are intelligent. If given the opportunity, they can do really well.”

**The proof is in the pudding — 88.2% of One Girl scholars graduated in 2017; 96.9% in 2016, 83.3% in 2015 and 100% in 2014. This is compared to the 16% national average.**

Furthermore, 87.3% of our scholars passed their exams in 2017 and 90.3% passed in 2016. Many of the girls have achieved other academic accolades such as becoming Head Girl at their school and getting their photo on the wall outside the Principal’s office as one of the highest scorers on their exams.

It’s very clear that these girls have big dreams and the program is giving them hope that they will come true. During the PhotoVoice program, the girls were asked to introduce themselves by selecting a magazine clipping that represented something about

themselves. One scholar picked a clipping of the word “hope” and explained, “I had lost hope in my destiny, because I had no-one to support me in school. But with the help of One Girl, I have now got hope. I hope to be the First Lady of Sierra Leone. Dream big!”

## 2. They are paying it forward

The evaluation highlighted the many different ways that girls are going above and beyond to “pay forward” what they have gained from the program. One scholar said she talks to her friends about the importance of education and encourages them to stay in school; another teaches her friends about using sanitary pads and maintaining personal hygiene. Several girls also mentioned that they now tutor their siblings and other children in their community in school subjects, and many said that they have helped to teach their family and community members to read.

During the PhotoVoice project, a girl showed a magazine clipping of umbrellas and explained how education will help her to help her family: “In rain or shine, I will go to school. Then, I will become an umbrella for my family and protect them from the rain.”



An educated girl is up to 40% more likely to volunteer, give to charity and support a stranger.<sup>17</sup>

## 3. The barriers to education are real — but the program is helping girls to tear them down

Participants from all groups said that poverty was among the biggest barriers to a girl getting an education. That’s why the financial and material support from the program is deemed so important amongst participants. One scholar in the PhotoVoice group summarised it nicely by selecting a photo of shoes and explaining, “I need shoes to go to school... [Now that I have shoes,] I get educated.” For a girl in Sierra Leone, a pair of shoes can make all the difference.

Teenage pregnancy was the second most cited barrier to girls’ education, with early marriage close behind. These barriers are also influenced by poverty, as often

<sup>17</sup> Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen & Onagoruwa. (2018)

when parents can’t afford to provide for their children, particularly girls, marriage or motherhood is considered a better option than schooling. A positive aspect of the scholarships, as mentioned by participants, was how the program brought family and community members on board to discuss these issues and debunk the misconceptions surrounding the best pathways for girls at our Community Dialogue Meetings and Fambul Toks (Family Talks).

The distance it takes to walk to school and some of the teachers’ attitudes towards the girls (including reports of harsh attitudes, lack of support and even sexual bribery) were also listed as barriers. Several scholars explained that the monitoring, advice, and encouragement provided by the Scholarships Program, as well as the LaunchPad program — which provides girls with sanitary pads and menstrual hygiene management knowledge — helps them to navigate these challenges. However, the issues surrounding distance continues to be a barrier that we do not currently address.

## 4. The program is making girls more confident

All participants, and scholars in particular, focused on changes in girls’ confidence, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. One girl explained, “I used to fear that I would be asked a question [by the teacher], so I always sat at the back of the class. But with One Girl giving me a [solar lamp], I was able to study hard and then I had the confidence to sit in the front and even answer questions because I knew I had the right answer.”

Others expressed that their improved confidence has helped them to speak up in Fambul Toks, within their community, or in social settings with friends. One school administrator confirmed this, explaining that he has seen scholars in his school participate more actively in chapel service and the Literary and Debate Society. Another mentioned that some scholars are more likely to take the initiative in their community to speak to and welcome guests.

Scholars report this change is due to having the proper uniform and school supplies, which makes them feel appropriately dressed and not out of place. One scholar elaborates, “When I did not have the supplies, I used to be ashamed and did not go to school regularly, nor participate in class. But now when I go to school, I stand in the front of the devotion line.”<sup>18</sup> Another scholar explained that participating in the Business Brains training has given her skills in maths, literacy and communication, which she is using to help other students.

## 5. Their communities are feeling the ripple effects

All participants reported that the One Girl communities are overwhelmingly supportive of the girls and there has even been a shift in attitudes within families and the wider community. Some girls reported that their parents now call upon them to make decisions, and they are sometimes even asked to represent their community, as they are viewed as role models. One girl explained that the community has greater respect for her family and

<sup>18</sup> A devotion line is the line formed at the beginning of the school day, where students sing, say prayers, and the principal gives announcements.

no longer takes advantage of them. A school administrator agreed, explaining that “The families gain respect [from others in their communities] because they have someone in their family who is going to school.”

While there were a few negative reactions reported (some scholars said their friends and family members were jealous about the scholarship and asked why there isn’t a “One Boy”) the fact that the program is driven by communities has meant there is now a greater appreciation for education in general, especially for girls who would previously have missed out. Communities have been pooling money (even when they have very little) for other girls to stay in school, organising independent study groups and conducting their own home visits with One Girl scholars to see how they are going.

One girl explained, “My grandmother wanted me to get married, but with One Girl sending me to school, that has closed the marriage conversation in my family. They have seen the importance of education.” One school administrator said that the program has caused parents and guardians to develop a strong interest in their girl’s education, stating: “Most of the guardians come to school. They also want to be part of the process! They want to call you every day to say thanks. They are grateful!”

### Vulnerability: a self-fulfilling prophecy?

A major take-away from the evaluation was that nearly all participants had difficulty identifying the strengths and assets of girls in the program; however, they could quite easily list the challenges and deficits they face.

Quite frequently, participants referred to scholars as “vulnerable,” listing barriers such as poverty, teenage marriage and pregnancy, violence and discrimination, and negative pressures from their peers, family, school and community as reason why they didn’t attend or complete school.

The main issue with this is that the girls, their families and the people around them aren’t acknowledging their own strength, intelligence and perseverance in the face of adversity. Whether intentionally or subconsciously, they seem to have conformed to the expectations about their own vulnerability. One Girl is determined to squash that narrative and ensure the girls and communities we work with feel empowered to determine their own futures.



## Mama Asuma\* (right), One Girl graduate

“Before One Girl I was feeling so discouraged. I thought I’d never be able to go back to school, but now I am a graduate.”

“I did very well in my end of school exams.”

“I am studying human resource management [at university]. I have been there for two years. I am starting to write my dissertation.”

“I want to work hard so that One Girl are proud of me.”

“I pray they can help the other girls too, they have finished high school but they are not able to go to university.”

— Mama Asuma

\* Name changed to protect identity.



While the overall feedback from the evaluation tells us that the program is kicking butt and making a huge difference to the lives of the girls we work with, as well as their families and their communities — we're giant nerds at heart and will always go the extra mile to impress the teacher. That's why we've put together a list of action points that will help us make the Scholarships Program even better in the future.

### 1. Collaborate *more*

We love a good yarn and so do the people we work with! That's why we're going to make sure we have even more conversations with our communities, Education and Women's Committees and teachers about how the program should look moving forward. We're not above criticism and who better to tell us where we're going astray than the people who are putting the program to use every day? That's why we're currently in the process of starting an Adolescent Girl Advisory Board and creating a revised plan for collecting and reacting to feedback using the Community Dialogue Meetings and Fambul Toks.

### 2. Continue to *support community initiatives*

Given the only real negative consequence of the program was jealousy from other students and family members, we want to find more ways to support activities that benefit the whole school and broader community. That's why we're building on the altruistic behaviour shown by the girls to "pay forward" what they've gained from the program through an all-girls (not just One Girl scholars) mentorship program. We're also increasing the reach of our LaunchPad in-schools program, so no other girls are at risk of missing out on school every month. Bloody oath!

### 3. Challenge the language around "*vulnerable girls*"

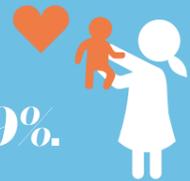
It was pretty devastating to realise that participants were struggling to identify girls' strengths and instead focused solely on their vulnerabilities. In keeping with One Girl's inclusive and positive approach, we're going to set the example and make sure our

selection criteria and other materials are emphasising girls' strengths and avoiding the damaging rhetoric of "vulnerable girls".

### 4. Tweak aspects of the program *to be more effective*

There were some suggestions for modifications to the existing program, such as a smoother transition for coming off the program for girls once they complete their schooling. We are working with our local partners on how to improve the career development and support for girls in their final years of schooling. While we already do this as part of our Business Brains program, we are revising how to increase this in senior school years and to ensure the girls have a clear trajectory beyond high school. Our mentorship program will be launched shortly, which will help the girls to address career pathways and connects them with positive role models within their communities.

Universal secondary education will *reduce* child mortality by 49%.



Universal secondary education will reduce child mortality by 49%.<sup>19</sup>



Girls have the potential. They have the drive. They have the love and support of their families and communities, who want to see them thrive and excel.

They aren't vulnerable or hopeless. All they need is for that door to be opened and for it not to hit them on the way through. What the evaluation has taught us is that One Girl's Scholarships Program is delivering on its promise to support girls right up until they graduate secondary school — and we're making sure they are set up for success for the rest of their lives.

But more than that, the program is having a very real impact on the way girls are perceived in their communities. The barriers that kept their potential untapped and wasted are being smashed to pieces — **and the girls are holding the hammer.**

<sup>19</sup> Sperling, Winthrop & Kwauk. (2016)

Back cover photo: Olivia Ackland/OneGirl



WORK WHILE IT IS DAY FOR THE NIGHT  
COMMEETH WHEN NO MAN SHALL WORK  
JOHN. 9:4

MRCMB OR S.L JORDAN  
RABBI

J.T.N  
B.B.D  
MAY 2015

ON TOP LET

ONE GIRL