

Project Brief:

Girls Project

In September 2016, Mali Rising launched a new project focused on recruiting more girls to our schools and helping those girls succeed in school. The project launched with a three-year, three-village pilot project. With lessons learned in the pilot, we will expand this work into our other partner villages in the future.

Our goals are to 1) increase girl recruitment and retention so that our schools are home to an even balance of boys and girls and 2) provide girls with opportunities to build life skills such as study habits, leadership abilities, and more to help them succeed in school and in life.

Background

While Mali has made strides in improving girls' enrollment in primary school (primary school attendance for girls: 55 percent), there is a steep drop in secondary school attendance for girls (23 percent).¹

Research shows enrollment numbers for girls are even worse in rural villages such as those where Mali Rising schools are located. The decrease in enrollment for girls is a serious problem for the future of individual girls, as well as for their villages and for the entire country.

Girls who receive an education benefit from that experience very directly, as do their children. Girls with education have their first children later, and are less likely to die in childbirth when they do have children. After birth, educated women are better able to provide children with a healthy upbringing. Why? Because educated mothers are more likely to understand nutrition, to practice apply basic hygiene, to recognize signs of illness, and to seek help early if there are problems.

But it isn't just the girls and their children who benefit from secondary education. A well-known African proverb summarizes this idea very well: "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. If you educate a girl, you educate a community." For example, a World Bank study showed that increasing the share of women with a secondary education by 1 percent increased a country's annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percent. Another study found that educating girls and reducing educational inequality promotes democracy.

¹ For comparison purposes according to UNICEF 60 percent of boys and 55 percent of girls attend primary school. However, only 36 percent of boys and 23 percent of girls attend secondary school in Mali.

Seventeen of Mali Rising's nineteen schools are middle schools, and these schools reflect the national trends for lower enrollment of girls. During the 15/16 school year Mali Rising's overall gender ratio was 57 percent boys to 43 percent girls. Generally speaking there were more girls enrolled in early grades (i.e., 7th grade) and their numbers drop in the later grades (i.e., 9th grade). In two schools girls actually outnumbered boys.

Our discussions with parents and village leaders show that the core challenges to keeping girls in school include: the cost of school fees (and an associated prioritization of paying boys' school fees before girls' fees), early marriage and/or early pregnancy, and the use of girls for chores at home. Research also suggests that girls face challenges with basic problems such as menstrual management and a lack of skills in areas such as leadership development and self-advocacy. Additionally, research shows that teachers and school directors may not have the skills to help girls learn and to avoid gender violence, which may limit girls' success or contribute to their dropping out of school altogether.

The question of how to keep girls in school has been studied and successful, proven strategies for helping girls stay in school and succeed exist. Proven strategies include: parental education and engagement, teacher training, help with menstruation management, incentives (e.g., assistance with school fees for girls, etc.), improving instruction quality, girls' "soft-skill" development, and others. While no one strategy works in every situation, the key in all strategies is support from the local community and parents.

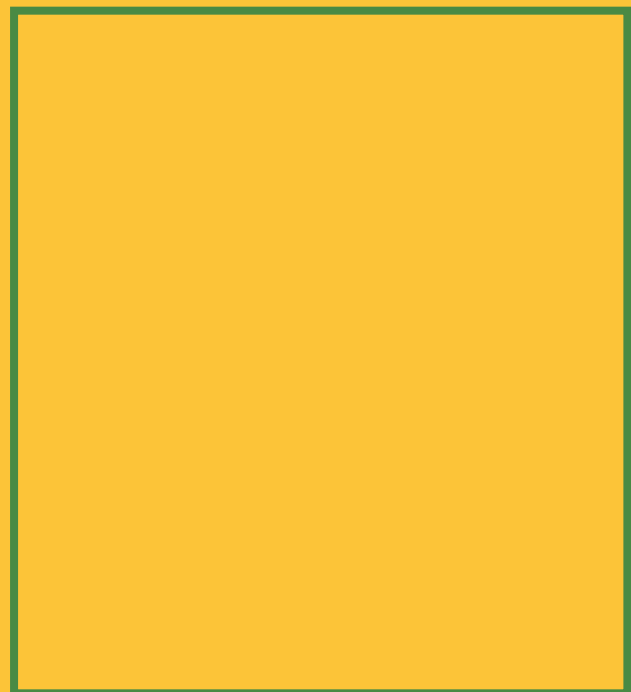
Mali Rising will pilot the Girls Project in 3 of our current 20 partner villages. Piloting the Project will allow us to test strategies in a variety of settings so we can adjust our approaches as

MAKING IT REAL: SIRANTOU'S STORY

What does this mean in reality? It means that girls face huge challenges when it comes to education. As an example, one of our newest schools is in the very rural village of Kolimba. When the school opened, 68 boys enrolled, but only 15 girls enrolled.

We interviewed one 18-year-old girl, Sirantou, about the opening of the new school. Sirantou explained that when she reached 7th grade there was no middle school available in the village. Without other options, she was married and now is not allowed to attend school due to home obligations.

Our school came too late for Sirantou, but not for the girls now growing up in Kolimba ...if we can reach out to those girls and their families.



needed before investing in the larger group of villages. In all, our work in the three pilot villages will serve approximately 150-200 girls.

Pilot villages were selected to be representative of a variety of situations at our schools so that we learn a range of lessons relevant for future expansion of the program (i.e., we did not just pick the “easy” villages). The villages include a range in terms of: school size, current gender balance, school leadership, school age, and location. Discussions were held in each village to ensure the community was supportive of the project and its goals.

We will pursue seven inter-related objectives in the pilot villages:

Objective 1: Build and sustain meaningful relationships with women’s committees, official leaders, and opinion leaders in each village.

Mali Rising has already begun to build the relationships necessary to ensure village engagement in the Girls Project through in village meetings and discussions. However, constant investment in this work is necessary to ensure the work can ultimately be led by the village. We will use the existing village “committee” structures to target our outreach to relevant women’s committees, along with the leadership committees and the school committees. In addition, we are identifying a small handful of influence leaders on the question of girls education in each villages who can sway others’ opinions.



Objective 2: Help primary school girls – and particularly graduating 6th grade girls – bridge to middle school education (7th-9th grade).

One of our key success measures is to improve recruitment of girls into our schools. The main focus of this work is to help girls make the leap from primary school to middle school, primarily through targeted outreach to girls and their families as they complete 6th grade at primary schools in our partner villages and an offer to subsidize girls’ school fees during the pilot period. In addition, we will conduct general outreach to primary schools in the villages and hamlets surrounding our partner villages to make sure those “feeder” school students are connected with the opportunity for middle school. Girls will be offered a school free subsidy if the met attendance goals during the school year.

Objective 3: Help 7th and 8th graders return each year through 9th grade graduation.

Retaining girls who start middle school is critical to improving the futures of our girls. For each additional year of secondary education, studies show girls in Sub-Saharan Africa earn 10-20 percent more over the course of their lives. Primary obstacles to keeping girls in our schools include the inability to pay school fees (and a preference for paying school fees for boys rather than girls), early marriage or pregnancy, and the need for help at home with chores. Strategies for helping our girls stay in school include: school fee subsidies, individual meetings with parents and girls, community discussions about girls' education, and more.

Objective 4: Using girl-led peer groups, facilitate soft-skill development (e.g., leadership , study skills, menstrual management , etc.) for middle school girls to help them stay in school and benefit.

Establishing a safe forum for the girls to grow and learn from each other is critical to reaching our retention measures, but also to seeing real results for the girls' futures. Successful models such as CAMFED and AGE Africa underline the importance of helping girls learn so-called "soft-skills" such as leadership development and study skills in order to provide the basis for a better future. For example, AGE Africa found that 91 percent of the girls in their peer groups delayed marriage and pregnancy until after their 18th birthday and 90 percent finished secondary school. Regular peer groups modeled on these successful efforts will provide our girls with the support they need to grow and the specific skills they need to thrive both in the classroom and in later life. Issues to be addressed include gender rights, gender violence, leadership skills, menstrual management, sex education, study skills, future education or job paths, and more.

Objective 5: Partner with our teachers and school directors (principals) to provide a safe, equitable learning environment.

Mali Rising is already investing in building our teachers' classroom skills through training, peer networks, and other support. For the Girls Project, we will focus on ensuring that all of our trainings include targeted training on gender issues and on gender violence and that teacher peer groups share ideas on strategies. We will also add a specific session for school directors to share their strategies for better recruitment, retention, and results for girls - allowing schools with better track records to spread their success to schools that are struggling.

Objective 6: Provide inspiration for girls to go on to additional traditional or vocational education.

Seeing successful girls in action inspires girls and parents alike. Mali Rising will leverage our existing scholarship project to target select scholarships to girls from the pilot villages, providing a small but real inspiration for doing well in school. In addition, we will share stories of girls from pilot villages who have previously gone on to education that allowed them to improve their own quality of life and to give back to their families and village.

Objective 7: Engage parents and others in girls' education and incorporate their input to build a better project.

Our work in this project starts (Objective 1) and ends (Objective 7) with input from the villages, parents, and the girls. Under this objective, we will celebrate the Girls Project in each village annually and provide a chance for everyone in the village to help us improve the Project for the coming years.

The overall goal of our Girls Project is to improve quality of life for girls in Mali Rising's partner villages by providing access to a high quality education and the life skills to apply their education in ways that help them, their families, their villages, and their country.

Over the three years of our pilot project, our goals are as follows:

1) Recruitment: Increase girl enrollment to within 10 percentage points of boy enrollment in each pilot school by October 2018 (for example, a successful pilot might be 52 percent boys versus 48 percent girls).

2) Retention: For first class of girls in pilot schools, increase 9th grade girls' graduation rate to 70 percent in each pilot school. (i.e., of the girls who enroll in 7th grade in October 2016, 70 percent will graduate in June 2019.)

3) Results: Of the graduating class of girls in June 2019, 100 percent of those who participated in peer Girls Groups report positive life skills and empowerment results and 25 percent plan to pursue continuing education.

To learn more or to donate in support of the Girls Project, visit www.malirisingfdn.org.

