

Through Their Eyes, In Their Voices

តាមរយៈក្រសែភ្នែក និងតាមរយៈសម្លេងរបស់ពួកគេ

A travers leurs yeux, dans leur voix

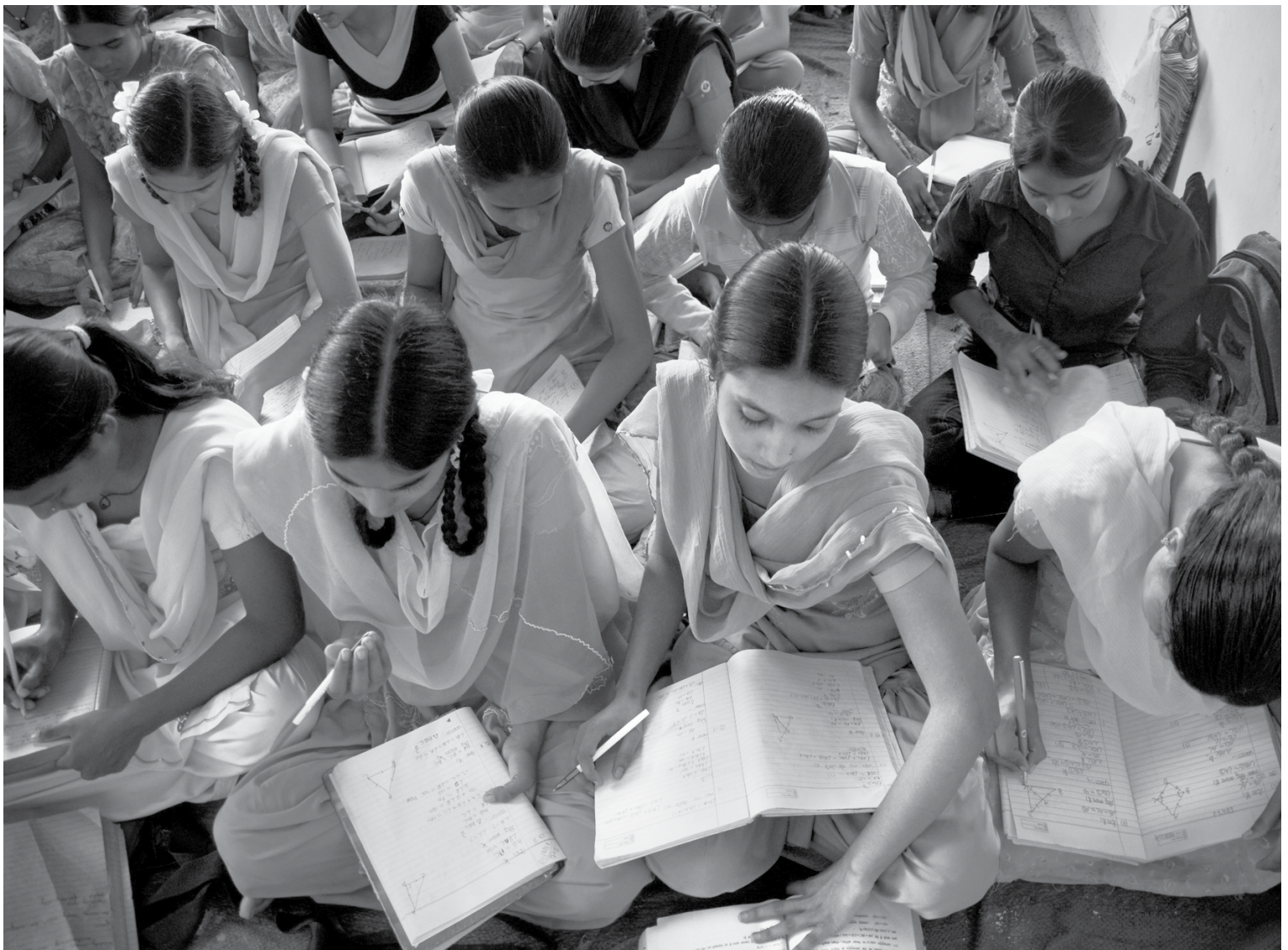
በግይድቸው ውስጣቸው

उनकी आँखों से, उनकी आवाज़ में

من خلال عيونهم، وأصواتهم

Young women in five
countries share their
experiences navigating
tertiary education

September 2011



© Paulette Waltz



Authoring Organizations



Room to Read

Room to Read seeks to transform the lives of millions of children in the developing world by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Working in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations, and governments, Room to Read develops literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and ensure girls have the skills and support needed to complete their secondary education. For more information, please visit www.roomtoread.org.

 @RoomtoRead

 /RoomtoRead



FHI 360

FHI 360 is a global development organization with a rigorous, evidence-based approach. Our professional staff includes experts in health, nutrition, education, economic development, civil society, environment, and research. FHI 360 operates from 60 offices with 4,400 staff in the U.S. and around the world. Our commitment to partnerships at every level and our multidisciplinary approach enable us to have lasting impact on the individuals, communities and countries we serve—improving lives for millions. For more information, please visit www.fhi.org.

 @FHI360

 /FHI360



Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole (ANFE)

Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole (ANFE) is a nonprofit, community-based program in Mauritania, West Africa aiming to keep girls in school. ANFE focuses on improving the prospects for the future of girls who lack the opportunity or resources to receive a quality education. For more information, please visit www.girlstoschool.org.

 @GirlstoSchool

 /GirlstoSchool

This study was made possible by The MasterCard Foundation



The MasterCard Foundation

The MasterCard Foundation advances microfinance and youth learning to promote financial inclusion and prosperity. Through collaboration with committed partners in 45 countries, The MasterCard Foundation is helping people living in poverty to access opportunities to learn and prosper.

An independent, private foundation based in Toronto, Canada, The MasterCard Foundation was established through the generosity of MasterCard Worldwide at the time of the company's initial public offering in 2006. For more information, please visit www.mastercardfdn.org.

 @MCFoundation

 Blog: www.mastercardfdn.org/blog

Table of Contents

2	Letter from The MasterCard Foundation	52	Ethiopia
3	Letter from Room to Read	54	The educational landscape
4	Letter from FHI 360	56	Overcoming challenges: Family distrust
5	Letter from Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole (ANFE)	60	Achieving success: Defying tradition
6	Executive Summary	64	In their voices: Advice to young Ethiopian women
9	Part One: Overview	66	India
10	Introduction	68	The educational landscape
14	Discussion	70	Overcoming challenges: Only one skirt
24	Conclusion	74	Achieving success: Maternal motivation
26	Part Two: Country Case Studies	77	In their voices: Advice to young Indian women
28	Cambodia	78	Mauritania
30	The educational landscape	80	The educational landscape
32	Overcoming challenges: Trading a cow for a laptop	82	Overcoming challenges: Without a birth certificate
36	Achieving success: A voice in the community	86	Achieving success: Becoming a volunteer teacher
39	In their voices: Advice to young Cambodian women	89	In their voices: Advice to young Mauritanian women
40	Democratic Republic of Congo	90	Part Three
42	The educational landscape	92	Appendix I: Methodology
44	Overcoming challenges: From family shame to family solidarity	96	Appendix II: Engaging youth in the research process
48	Achieving success: Sitting at the table	99	Researcher Credits
51	In their voices: Advice to young Congolese women	101	Acknowledgments
		102	Endnotes

Acronyms

AED: Academy for Educational Development (acquired by FHI 360)

ANFE: Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole

AGSP: Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

FHI 360: Family Health International 360 (acquired AED)

GEP: Girls' Education Program

GER: Gross Enrollment Ratio

GPI: Gender Parity Index

HDI: Human Development Index

HIV/AIDS: Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

KAPE: Kampuchean Action for Primary Education

MoE: Ministry of Education

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

PPP: Purchasing Power Parity

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

USAID: United States Agency for International Development



**The MasterCard
Foundation**

For many young people in developing countries, opportunity is the missing link between poverty and prosperity. To address this gap at The MasterCard Foundation, we seek out partnerships with organizations that are committed to creating opportunities for young people—who are listening to youth and helping them achieve their ambitions. That is why we chose to partner with Room to Read, FHI 360 and *Amenons Nos Filles à l'Ecole* (ANFE) on this inspiring project to identify successful strategies for transitioning from secondary to tertiary education.

Through a partnership that was formed at the Clinton Global Initiative, Room to Read, FHI 360 and ANFE undertook a six-month collaborative study to investigate what life and educational factors contribute to the success of girls accessing and participating in tertiary education. With a focus on economically disadvantaged post-secondary students in Africa and Asia, they listened to and documented the stories of 160 female university students in five countries.

The young women interviewed for this study share important lessons to help guide future girls' education programming. The cases weaved throughout this report give space and voice to their experiences, their fears, their struggles, their successes and their dreams. Lessons from these young women—role models who have built their own pathways beyond the constraints of poverty—are powerful reminders of the transformational capacity of youth. Their recommendations have the potential to create greater awareness about the importance of educational opportunities and the value of gender equity in education.

The MasterCard Foundation is proud to champion this effort and hopes that the findings of the study will inspire organizations around the world to support girls in their pursuit of educational opportunities.



Reeta Roy
President and CEO
The MasterCard
Foundation



A friend once asked me a simple question: If you could provide every child with just one thing that could change their life, what would it be? The answer came to me immediately—an educated mother. I smiled as I thought of the hours my mother and I spent reading books together. I continue to cherish the way she encouraged me to finish my homework, aim for a good university and eventually pursue a graduate degree. Much of my success in life can be traced to the fact that I won the lottery of life and was born to educated parents.

Around the world, millions of women and girls do not have that same lottery ticket. Many do not even complete education past primary school due to such factors as gender bias, safety concerns, early marriage, pregnancy and financial considerations.

Under the most challenging conditions, though, there are young women charting new territory and taking the bold step of seeking out tertiary education. This move can be especially difficult in developing countries, where a girl graduating secondary school in 2011 is more likely to be the very first female in her family to reach tertiary education. The stakes are high. If she succeeds, she can serve as a critical role model for younger girls—helping to break glass ceilings and transform the very nature of a woman's role in her society.

With generous support from The MasterCard Foundation, Room to Read is excited to partner with FHI 360 and *Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole* (ANFE) to understand the life and educational factors influencing a young woman's ability to succeed in tertiary education. Together, we are pleased to present this collaborative research compendium highlighting case studies of girls from Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India and Mauritania. The young women featured in this report have achieved success through a combination of personal characteristics like determination and courage, family support and other assistance from government, non-governmental organizations, teachers and community members. Their achievements demonstrate the transformative power of holistic interventions that engage multiple stakeholders.

Room to Read established the Girls' Education program in 2001 to educate and empower girls. Today, the program supports more than 10,000 girls in eight countries to complete secondary school with the life skills necessary to make informed decisions. Room to Read is excited to integrate insights gained from this study to improve the quality of life skills education and mentoring we provide at the secondary school level.

It is also our hope that this study will inform and engage the international community around strategies to support young women in achieving their goals of tertiary education. Collectively, with this knowledge in hand, we can take action to change the future through ensuring quality education for all.

Together, we can change the world, one community, one school and one girl at a time.



John Wood
Founder and Co-Chair of
the Board
Room to Read

The Center for Gender Equity (CGE) of FHI 360 champions girls' access to primary and secondary education. As we have grown with our beneficiaries and watched them achieve remarkable successes despite their challenging circumstances, we have become increasingly aware of the dearth of resources and support available to help these girls capitalize on their education—either by pursuing higher education, or by entering the workforce. We became determined to learn more about how girls, from poverty-stricken backgrounds, succeed their education at the university level despite all obstacles. We needed to learn so our organization can understand in an in-depth way the specific obstacles girls face and how they overcome them. We recognized that this learning will allow our organization to design projects that are fully responsive to the needs of the girls and that will assist girls in continuing their education at the tertiary level.

This valuable and enlightening study, in partnership with Room to Read and *Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole* that is funded by The MasterCard Foundation, delves into the lives and stories of exceptional young women who have reached the university level. As you will read, they did so largely without help or support from—in many cases—their families, communities, professors, governments or organizations. We endeavor to identify and replicate the keys to their success, so that the ground-breaking work organizations have performed to secure girls' access to the foundational levels of education can be extended to the highest levels of knowledge.

Society changes over time when educated girls become mothers and establish increasingly healthy familial environments conducive to intellectual, economic, medical and social betterment. Women can transform societies rapidly when equipped with the advanced education necessary to fill leadership positions within their communities and countries.

Our first-hand knowledge of the extraordinary strength, commitment and perseverance that these young women possess inspires us to give them a voice and to express their recommendations to organizations, governments and societies to help girls reach the tertiary level. In addition to meeting some of the young women whom we interviewed, you will get a snapshot of the state of education—general and tertiary—in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia. The more we understand about these women and the societies in which they live, the more we can present helpful and effective tools for them to succeed.



M. Rihani

May Rihani
*Senior Vice-President
and Director*

Global Learning Group
and Center for Gender
Equity
FHI 360



Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole (ANFE) addresses gender gaps in education, poverty, discrimination and gender inequality in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. ANFE reaches out to marginalized girls and their families in Nouakchott, the capital city. ANFE's signature programs include girls' education, women's microfinance and business development and community empowerment.

This study, in partnership with Room to Read and FHI 360 and made possible through generous funding from The MasterCard Foundation and supported by the Clinton Global Initiative, provides an opportunity to learn about success factors and challenges facing young university women from vulnerable family backgrounds in Mauritania. Throughout this year, ANFE has seen the importance and the complexity of reducing the gap that exists between females' and males' education at the university level. This study reflects on gender disparities and challenges at the university level and highlights factors needed to help young women succeed. Additional interaction is needed among all stakeholders in the educational, social, cultural, traditional, gender and community sectors and above all else, the sensitization and involvement of parents in the relevant issues.

This study has enabled ANFE to gain better insight into future strategies for its programs. Personally, working on this study project was a very powerful experience for me, opening my eyes to the needs and challenges that university women face in my own country. Listening to the women tell their stories, crying with them, laughing with them and deeply connecting with them.

Now that this study is complete, ANFE plans to investigate higher education and act to drive greater effectiveness to support girls and young women at the university level.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Coumba Dieng".

Coumba Dieng
*Founder and Chief
Executive Officer
Amenons Nos Filles a
l'Ecole*

Executive Summary

Through a partnership formed at the Clinton Global Initiative and with support from The MasterCard Foundation, Room to Read, FHI 360 and *Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole (ANFE)* undertook a six-month collaborative research study to investigate the social and educational factors that contribute to the success of girls attending university. With a focus on socioeconomically disadvantaged students in Africa and Asia, this study documents the stories of 160 female university students in five countries.

In many parts of the world, it is uncommon for girls to study past primary school. If young women somehow manage to beat the odds and graduate from secondary school, most are still expected to marry, help with household chores or supplement family income. Therefore, accessing and participating in university education is an incredible new opportunity for many young women and their families and they must navigate the challenges of their aspirations within their communities and cultures. Identifying the factors that lead to young women's success in reaching university and overcoming the challenges they face while attending university provides critical information for organizations that hope to enable and improve girls' access to and completion of higher education.

This study aimed to understand the opportunities pursued by young women in their transition from secondary school to successes in tertiary education. It examined behaviors, attitudes and support systems that contribute to girls' successes in order to understand which factors can be strengthened through programming. The study asks two main research questions:

- What challenges do economically disadvantaged young women face when attempting to pursue tertiary education?
- What success factors—support systems and resources—help young women meet these challenges?

This study also engaged a small group of young women, themselves current university students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, as research assistants to help shape the research design and engage directly with the study participants. Employing young women who share similar demographic profiles with the study participants to conduct the research enriched the understanding of the contexts and experiences of tertiary education for both researchers and participants. Enlisting young women as researchers in this study also empowered them to think about themselves in new ways, as active participants in efforts to improve the chances of university success for socioeconomically disadvantaged young women like themselves.

With young women as both researchers and participants, this study **unfolds through their eyes** and **amplifies their voices**. The perspectives and ideas elaborated in this study—what the young women see and what they say—are critical for informing and strengthening programs that promote young women's long-term access to education. Although the stories themselves are unique and extraordinary, many of the challenges described and success strategies employed could be common to young people around the world. The young women interviewed and many others like them, are role models for future generations of young women; they are courageous risk takers who have overcome myriad obstacles to achieve unparalleled educational success within their families and communities.

Challenges

The challenges associated with transitioning from secondary to tertiary education are common around the world. However, cultural factors such as family and community pressure, expectations for daughters and the unprecedented position of young women as role models for younger females in their societies, make these transitions especially difficult and important in developing countries. The young women from the countries included in this study have faced many of the following challenges:

Family expectations and ties

- > Addressing parents' desires for daughters to marry
- > Assisting with household chores and providing supplemental income
- > Caring for sick parents and helping siblings attend school

Financial needs

- > Finding money for tuition and rent
- > Paying for other regular costs, such as study group fees, medical costs, hygiene products or limited social activities

Pre-university challenges

- > Finishing secondary school
- > Seeking guidance about tertiary education
- > Successfully completing the application process

Adjusting to university life

- > Developing strong personal relationships with young women from different backgrounds
- > Adapting to the rigor of university academic study (such as finding time and space to study while also managing work and domestic priorities)
- > Making living arrangements (such as finding roommates, hostels and transportation) and navigating new urban centers
- > Addressing personal safety issues (such as theft, road accidents and predatory males)

Success factors

Despite differences in people, politics, economic systems and educational structures across the five countries included in this study, there are common themes among the stories of these courageous young women who have “broken the mold” to participate in higher education. The most consistent theme—and one to celebrate—is determination. The young women interviewed for this study are highly motivated individuals determined to persist and succeed regardless of the challenges they face. These remarkable young women overcame multiple challenges primarily because of three broad factors—personal attributes, family support and support from other sources:

Personal attributes

- > **Determination** to succeed and achieve personal education goals
- > **Goal-oriented nature** with clear visions of aspirations
- > **Courage** in the face of difficult challenges

Family support

- > **Emotional strength**, particularly from parents who want their daughters to have better lives than they have had
- > **Financial help**, which sometimes involves substantial household sacrifices

Community, NGO and government support

- > **Neighbors**, including advice from current university students and village elders
- > **Teachers**, including advice from secondary school and university advisors
- > **Religious faith and support**, including expressions of personal faith (such as attending services and singing in choirs)
- > **NGOs**, including tuition and fee support and assistance with university applications
- > **Government**, including admission preferences for disadvantaged girls from rural areas

Not all these young women have all these success factors on their sides, but each one of them has a unique combination of these factors that has helped them to succeed.

Advice to young women

The young women interviewed for this study are positive role models for future cohorts of aspiring university students. This report shares their recommendations for future scholars. This advice focuses on strategies for young women to develop themselves both academically and personally, to be strong enough to persevere in spite of the challenges facing them. Here are some of the lessons articulated by the study participants:

- > **Be determined:** Be serious, patient and committed to one's educational goals.
- > **Be goal-oriented:** Have a clear career goal that is remembered and reinforced through positive activities; never lose hope, banish fear of failure and stay confident.
- > **Gain skills:** Study English, take computer courses and browse the Internet to learn about the world outside their communities.
- > **Know the system:** Research university majors to pursue; ask questions about fees, logistics, housing, applications and other challenges of university life.
- > **Study well:** Aspire to learn more complex academic topics, particularly the gateway topics that prepare students for university success.
- > **Find funding:** Seek different sources of funding to participate in university education, including government, community and private sources.
- > **Be an individual:** Stick to one's core values; avoid being pressured by others who do not have one's best interests at heart.



© FHI 360

Josephine takes notes during a university lecture (see Democratic Republic of Congo Chapter in Part Two).

Moving forward

Room to Read, FHI 360 and ANFE are committed to seeing through young women's eyes and listening to their voices, to inform future programming. The findings in this study can be used to:

- Increase awareness of the challenges of university education among socioeconomically disadvantaged girls and their families, allowing them to better prepare themselves for university opportunities in the future.
- Improve the quality of life skills education, mentoring and other support systems in secondary school, increasing the likelihood of success for socioeconomically disadvantaged young women attending university.
- Consider ways in which international organizations can support young women in their university aspirations and experiences.

This study has allowed successful young women from five countries to have their voices and perspectives heard and broadcast to the global community. This is just the start of a much larger conversation—a conversation that must be pursued and encouraged by all organizations committed to gender equality in education and in all aspects of life.



© Borin Srey

Sokhim smiles proudly during a visit to the university library (see the Cambodia Chapter in Part Two).

PART ONE

Overview

Introduction

Discussion

Conclusion

Part One introduces the study, discusses the results of this effort and concludes with a description of challenges, success factors and ways to move forward, based on the findings of this research.

Introduction

Hawai, born in rural Cambodia to landless farmers, is the eldest of eight siblings and the first in her family to graduate from high school and attend university. A decade ago, when Hawai was in elementary school, 106 million children worldwide were out of school. This number is now down to 67 million.¹ In 2010, girls comprised 54 percent of children who did not attend school, a decrease from 58 percent in 1999.² As governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities and families increase their support for girls' education, economically disadvantaged girls like Hawai are performing heroic feats to beat the odds.

With financial and material support from an NGO, Hawai graduated from secondary school and now attends a prestigious university in Cambodia. Aided by a scholarship, her parents' support and her own determination, she lives away from her family with

several roommates in Phnom Penh and is studying for a bachelor's degree in environmental resource management. Even with a generous scholarship for university, Hawai struggles financially when she needs medical treatment, must pay to use the Internet for research or pay a colleague to type an assignment. Hawai's story reflects the challenges and successes of young women around the world who pursue tertiary education.

This report highlights the stories of young women from five countries who are meeting these challenges directly. It draws on their common experiences to guide an understanding of tertiary studies from the perspective of economically disadvantaged females.

Young women and tertiary education

In some places around the world, families and communities would rather educate their sons than their daughters. Pressures to stay at home include an "increase in domestic work, heightened parental resistance to girls' activities outside the homes and heightened discomfort with male-dominated atmospheres."³ In some countries, more than half of all girls under 18 are married.⁴ The prospect of exploring post-secondary options is a new life opportunity for many young women; this is novel territory for them.

The trend toward higher education promotes increased independence and self-awareness, but also requires life skills preparation to facilitate a smooth transition from secondary school. During the transition process, young women negotiate their aspirations within their communities, cultures and

TEXT BOX 1.

Key terms

Primary school education

The first years of formal education, typically grades 1-5.

Secondary school education

Education after primary school, typically grades 6-12; sometimes called high school.

Tertiary education

Education after secondary or high school, including certificate or diploma courses, vocational training, college or university; sometimes called higher education.

University

Tertiary education for bachelor's, master's or doctorate degrees. Bachelor's degree courses are usually three or four years.

Post-secondary transition

Pathways and life decisions that young women negotiate after completing secondary school.

Girls

For the purpose of this study, this term broadly refers to females who are of the age to attend primary and secondary school.

Young women

For the purpose of this study, this term refers to females in transition after secondary school, usually 15-24 years old.

institutions. They often face cultural and societal pressures to follow other paths that can restrict their participation in tertiary education, employment and public life.

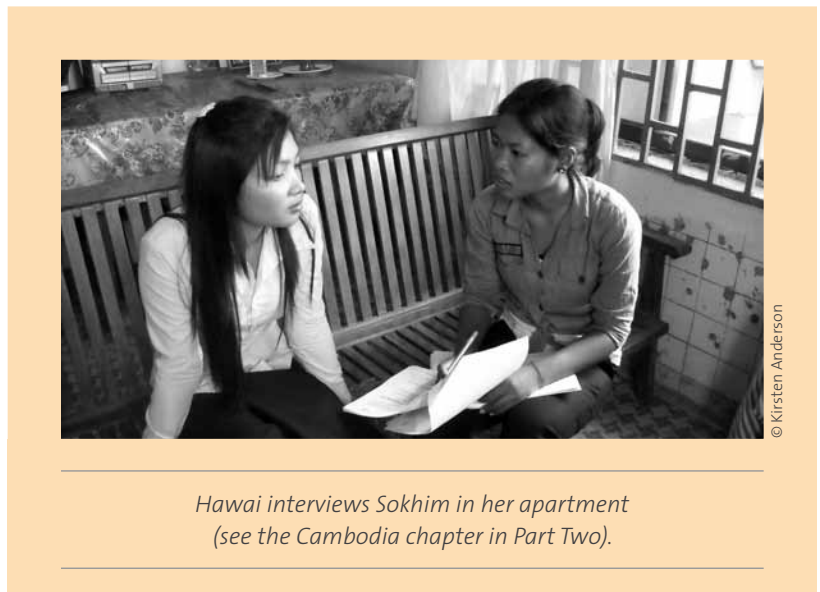
For young women from rural, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, accessing and succeeding in tertiary education can be particularly complex. In moving to urban or semi-urban areas for university or college, young women must adapt to new physical and academic environments, transportation systems and ways of obtaining food, medicine and other essential services. These young women often need to find part-time employment to pay their monthly living expenses, such as basic clothing, food and the social activities that are a part of college life. Lastly, they must be more conscious of issues related to personal health, safety and security as a result of being on their own, far from family networks.

Thus, the skills needed to navigate the transition from secondary school (when families expect their daughters to marry, help in the household, or supplement parents' income) to tertiary education (when young women must live in new places, develop new academic and social skills and transform their families' expectations) are multi-dimensional: Young women must succeed on multiple fronts to accomplish their educational goals.

Young women who successfully navigate the transition to tertiary education provide role models for "positive deviance." This term refers to "certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviors and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers, while having access to the same resources and facing similar or worse challenges."⁵ Communities and organizations can use the stories of these young women to discover successful behaviors and strategies that young women have used and that can be promoted and adopted by others.

Research methodology

Despite the historical challenges that many rural, economically disadvantaged young women face in their pursuit of university education, more are pursuing university dreams each year. How do they do it? How have they overcome obstacles? This study examines these questions in detail. The answers provide lessons for girls who are still in primary and secondary school, that can guide them toward



longer-term goals. Similarly, identifying the factors that lead to young women's success in reaching university provides critical information for organizations that implement programs in support of girls' education. Such information is key in helping organizations such as Room to Read, FHI 360 and ANFE to refine approaches to activities such as academic tutoring, life skills education and mentoring to increase post-secondary educational opportunities.

Research questions

To inform these issues, this study asks two main research questions:

- What challenges do economically disadvantaged young women face when attempting to pursue tertiary education?
- What success factors—support systems and resources—help young women meet these challenges?

Study participants

To answer these questions, researchers from Room to Read, FHI 360 and ANFE conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 160 young female university students in Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India and Mauritania (see Text Box 2 for country-specific

information). Although these stories may not be statistically representative of the experiences of other young women across Asia and Africa, they provide a small yet important window into some of the common issues that many women face. The study participants are:

- First generation high school graduates or university students
- Secondary school or university scholarship recipients, or working to self-fund their studies
- From economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Enrolled in and attending campus-based university courses

These young women were selected for this study with the help of local universities and non-governmental organizations in each country. The research approach used particular care in explaining the purpose of the study to participants and obtaining their written permission to tell their stories and share their photos. Names have been changed when requested by the young women themselves to protect their identities. For more information about the study methodology, see Appendix II.

Engaging young women in the research process

This study also engaged a smaller group of young women, themselves current university students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as research assistants to help shape the research design and engage directly with the study participants (see Appendix II for research assistants' biographies). Responsibilities included coordinating and conducting interviews as well as submitting notes after each interview on the key themes or stories that emerged. Research assistants contributed actively to the overall content of the study. In addition, in interview debriefing meetings, research assistants provided astute cultural interpretations of comments from study participants. Employing young women who share similar demographic profiles with the study participants to conduct the research enriched the understanding of the contexts and experiences of tertiary education for both researchers and participants. Enlisting young women as researchers in this study also empowered them to think about themselves in new ways, as active participants in efforts to improve the chances of university success for economically disadvantaged young women like themselves.

With young women as both researchers and participants, this study unfolds through their eyes and amplifies their voices. Their perspectives and their ideas—what they see and what they say—are critical for informing and strengthening programs that aim to promote young women's long-term access to education.

Through their eyes:

Each country chapter highlights two case studies that reflect the themes and cultural context of the country.

In their voices:

Young women's stories are woven throughout the text to complement the findings.

Country education background

The five countries selected for this study are Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, India and Mauritania. These five relatively low-income countries exemplify the geographical diversity in Africa and Asia, regions where FHI 360, ANFE and Room to Read have worked to support girls' education. India is one of the most populated countries in the world, while Mauritania's population could easily fit into one large Indian city. These countries have distinctly different economic and education systems. The Human Development Index (HDI) ranks indicate extremely difficult economic situations in all of these countries compared to most others in the world (see Table 1).

In all these countries, school life expectancy and literacy rates are lower for females than for males and tertiary enrollment is less than one percent of the population. The Gender Parity Index for enrollment decreases from primary to secondary to tertiary education and is below 0.40 in three of the countries, indicating that males far outnumber females at the tertiary level.

TABLE 1.

Country education statistics⁶

INDICATORS	CAMBODIA	DRC	ETHIOPIA	INDIA	MAURITANIA
POPULATION (MILLIONS)	14.8	66.0	82.8	1,155.3	3.3
GDP PER CAPITA (PPP), INTERNATIONAL \$	1,915	319	934	3,296	1,929
HDI RANK (AMONG 169 COUNTRIES)	124	168	157	119	136
COMPULSORY EDUCATION (AGE GROUP)	6 to 14	6 to 15	7 to 12	6 to 14	6 to 16
SCHOOL LIFE EXPECTANCY					
Male	10.4	9.0	9.0	10.8	8.0
Female	9.2	6.5	7.5	9.8	7.9
ADULT LITERACY RATE (AGE 15 AND OLDER)					
Male	85%	78%	50%	75%	64%
Female	71%	56%	23%	51%	50%
PUBLIC SPENDING ON EDUCATION (% OF GDP)	2.1%	11%	5.5%	3.1%	2.9%
GPI OF ENROLLMENT					
Primary	0.94	0.83	0.89	0.97	1.08
Secondary	0.82	0.55	0.72	0.86	0.89
Tertiary	0.54	0.35	0.31	0.70	0.36
TERTIARY ENROLLMENT					
Total	122,633	237,836	264,822	14,862,962	12,519
% female	34.4%	25.9%	23.8%	39.1%	28.2%
Number of tertiary education institutions	89	380	106	26,455	11

Adult literacy rate: the percentage of adults who can read and write in their local language.

Compulsory education: the period of schooling required for all citizens.

GDP (Gross Domestic Product): the market value of all goods and services produced in a year.

GDP per capita: the GDP divided by the country population.

GPI (Gender Parity Index): the relative access to education of males and females; a GPI of 0.500 indicates that females have only 50 percent of the access that males do.

HDI (Human Development Index): a measure of life expectancy, literacy and education.

PPP (Purchasing Power Parity): adjusts prices across countries to equalize purchasing power for the same basket of goods.

Public spending on education (% of GDP): the percentage of GDP spent on education.

School life expectancy: the number of years of school from primary to tertiary that an average citizen completes.

Discussion

During secondary school, Hawai was an active peer leader and educator, talking to other students about traffic safety and public health. At the time of publication, Hawai emailed the research team to share another accomplishment: She had been elected class leader. After only one semester, she was recognized among her peers and elected to a position of responsibility and respect.

Similar to the case studies presented in the country chapters (see Part Two), Hawai's story reaffirmed the power of human determination and courage. She had overcome overwhelming challenges and hardships, including poverty and hunger. Hawai and the young women whose voices are shared in this report have become positive role models. This study introduces young women who have prevailed over cultural gender-based bias, dealt with physical and sexual violence and stood up to longstanding community views about women's roles. With limited financial support from immediate or distant family members and through their own hard work, the young women in this study have been able to pursue their studies and dreams (see Text Box 3 for a list of case studies and Table 2 for the characteristics of the student participants). They

are individuals whose behaviors and strategies have enabled them to find successful solutions to their challenges. This report travels from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to Nouakchott, Mauritania, to understand how young women from disadvantaged backgrounds have overcome significant challenges to access and succeed at university, developing into positive role models for their communities.

Despite great variations in geography, language and culture, the experiences of young university women across the five countries included in this study were similar in terms of the challenges faced and factors required for success in pursuing tertiary education. Across all five countries, the young women successfully navigated pre-university challenges such as graduating from secondary school and gaining knowledge about university application procedures. They all overcame financial need, often through scholarships, employment and in some cases, entrepreneurship. Though they found adjusting to university life to be difficult, they managed to face this challenge and adjust to the academic rigor required for success. In most countries, participants also had trouble balancing family ties with school obligations and struggled to find time and space to study and learn. A common theme that emerged in discussions with the young women from Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the disturbing sense that in addition to the many other challenges they had faced, the expectation of sexual favors sometimes played a role in obtaining good grades.

In all five countries, the participants demonstrated exceptional determination to study and were highly focused on achieving their goals. In the DRC, many of the young women interviewed had become entrepreneurs to fund their studies and noted that obligations to family and others helped drive them to succeed. In Cambodia, participants were able to gain employment to help fund their education, while in the DRC and Ethiopia, young

TEXT BOX 3.

Case studies (see Part Two).

Cambodia p. 29

Sopheun: Trading a cow for a laptop
Sokhim: A voice in her community

The DRC p. 41

Elodie: From family shame to family solidarity
Naomi: Sitting at the table

Ethiopia p. 53

Yewbdar: Family distrust
Netsanet: Defying tradition

India p. 67

Manorama: Only one skirt
Meera: Maternal motivation

Mauritania p. 79

Mariem: Without a birth certificate
Khadijetou: Becoming a volunteer teacher

TABLE 2.

Characteristics of student participants					
ITEM	COUNTRY				
	Cambodia	DRC	Ethiopia	India	Mauritania
Number of participants	29	33	33	25	40
Age range (years)	17-24	20-38	19-24	18-22	18-28
Public schooling (primary and secondary)	29 (100%)	29 (88%)	33 (100%)	17 (68%)	34 (85%)
First generation high school graduates	29 (100%)	13 (39%)	18 (54%)	19 (76%)	28 (70%)
First generation university admission	29 (100%)	22 (67%)	21 (63%)	25 (100%)	39 (98%)
First and only member of family to graduate high school and attend university	21 (72%)	7 (21%)	18 (54%)	7 (28%)	21 (53%)
Secondary school scholarship recipients	19 (66%)	0 (0%)	5 (15%)	20 (80%)	2 (5%)
Received university scholarship	26 (90%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (76%)	12 (30%)
Received financial support from their families	18 (62%)	32 (96%)	4 (12%)	18 (72%)	38 (95%)
Were currently employed (part-time or full-time)	8 (27%)	33 (100%)	4 (12%)	8 (32%)	2 (5%)
Married	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (9%)	0 (0%)	8 (20%)
Children	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	5 (13%)

women indicated that their religious faith was a key to their success.

In all countries, support from peers, teachers, communities and non-governmental organizations had been necessary for the young women to pursue their goals and achieve success in their tertiary studies. This support included:

- Financial assistance, the most common and most needed type of outside help
- Material support, such as school supplies and uniforms
- Guidance, such as tutoring, mentoring or help with university application procedures
- Emotional support
- Peer support, such as study groups or sharing food in the dormitories

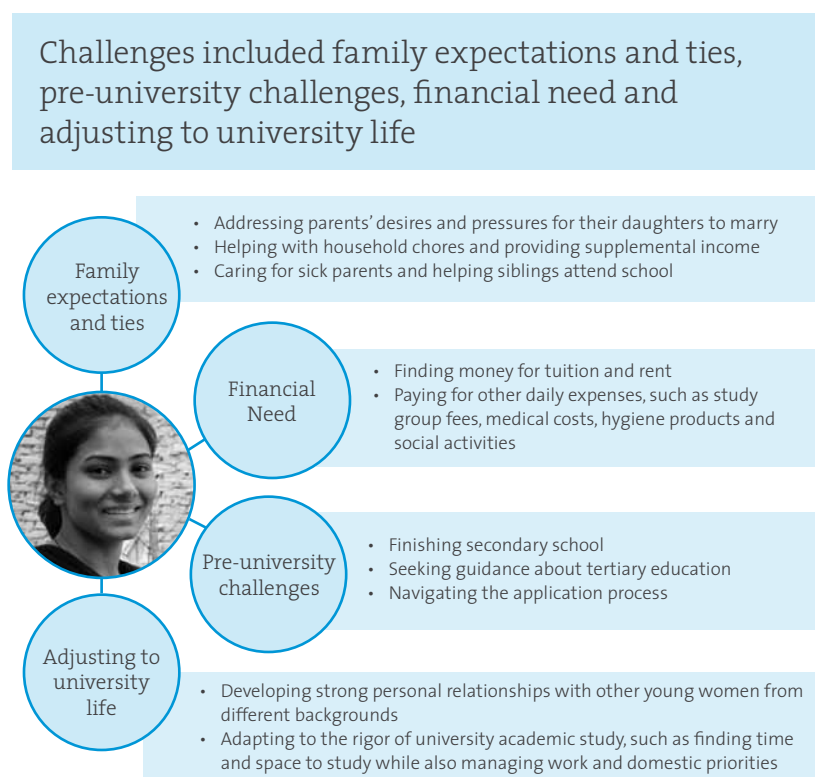
While family members did not always support the dreams of these young women to continue on to tertiary education, in many cases some family members did provide financial and emotional support. When parents did not support their daughters' studies, other family members or friends were often important factors in encouraging the study participants to continue on to higher education.

Challenges

The participants in this study were purposely selected from economically disadvantaged families. Many of them came from traditional communities,

so it was no surprise that family expectations and financial need stood out as central challenges to accessing and participating in tertiary education and cut across the many other obstacles that the participants encountered. The primary challenges faced by the study participants are described below in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1.



DISCUSSION

While many of the challenges were thematically similar across all five countries, the details presented in the case studies also describe the unique cultural characteristics of each situation.

Family expectations and ties

While some participants reported that their families had supported their decision to attend university, familial financial obligations and the pressure to marry were recurrent obstacles across all five study countries.

Several young women recalled that they felt pressure to help provide income to support their families. In Cambodia, 45 percent of the study participants felt pressure to provide for their families. **Sopheun** was sending US\$5 of her salary home each month to help pay for her brother's education. In the DRC, **Elodie** was expected to provide for her family when she graduates from university even though they did not always support her education. In India, **Manorama** still felt obligated to support her family financially, even after she was pressured to marry.

The pressure to marry instead of attend school was strong for many of the study participants. Among the Indian women, 24 percent felt pressured by their families to marry after they graduated from secondary school, even while they were considering pursuing university. In the DRC, nearly all participants said their parents were happy that they were attending university, but expected them to marry once they had graduated. In Ethiopia, **Netstant** was promised for an arranged marriage before she was even born and was married at the age of 11. Two other young Ethiopian women ran away from home to escape pressure from their families to marry. In Mauritania, **Fatimettou's** family tried to marry her to a 45-year-old man in return for a US\$500 dowry, forcing her to run away to avoid this fate. In contrast, participants from Cambodia did not report any pressure to marry, either while in secondary school or as an alternative to pursuing university studies.

Financial need

Almost all the young women interviewed cited financial challenges in finishing secondary school and most also noted challenges in paying for expenses associated with university studies. Many participants faced unanticipated costs associated

with tertiary studies or living on their own, such as clothing, personal hygiene and toiletry products, medical expenses, household items, English classes, Internet cafes and extra study materials. In India and Cambodia, the majority of the study participants (76 percent and 90 percent, respectively) had received scholarships for higher education, but most of these scholarships failed to cover living expenses or unexpected costs. **Sokhim** in Cambodia and **Khadijetou** in Mauritania struggled to pay for the English and French language classes needed to help them in their studies and in achieving their career goals.

Tertiary education is free in both Ethiopia and Mauritania. While several participants were receiving scholarships or government loans to cover tuition, room and board, they still struggled to cover other expenses because they had not expected to need money while enrolled in government-financed universities. Consequently, many study participants from Ethiopia still had financial trouble and faced difficulties buying basic necessities and paying for education-related costs such as photocopies and other required class materials. In Ethiopia, it was difficult for young women to find self or part-time employment opportunities to help fund their educational expenses.

In contrast, none of the young women in the DRC had received financial support from the national government, NGOs or private organizations, nor were they aware of any scholarships or organizations that provided assistance to university students. To overcome this financial challenge, all of the DRC study participants had become entrepreneurs and were earning their own incomes. Both **Naomi** and **Elodie** created small businesses on their university campus, selling food, cosmetics and clothing to other students. Participants also reported receiving some financial assistance from distant relatives, while others used money that their parents had borrowed. However, expenses often exceeded resources and many reported that they continually worried about money and were sometimes required to do without food. To help with their financial situation, a few of the young women admitted they had resorted to commercial sex work to help pay for school expenses.

Pre-university challenges

Many of the participants faced difficulties when applying to universities, including locating accurate

and comprehensive guidance about university procedures and funding opportunities. In India, nearly half the study participants experienced difficulties obtaining information and guidance while applying to university. As many of the study participants in Cambodia were of the first generation in their families to attend university, parents and relatives were often unable to assist them with this unfamiliar process. Participants in India and the DRC reported that the actual application processes had been easy to navigate. These same young women, however, reported having a lack of information about college and no knowledge of how to use computers and the Internet to conduct appropriate research.

For Ethiopian women, the greatest educational challenges occurred in secondary school, not university. Secondary schools had high costs, particularly when villages were far from schools, as there were no government-sponsored dormitories for them to live in. The challenging 10th grade exam determined who went to university and who was instead forced to accept work as laborers. Students who passed the 10th grade exam earned excellent chances of being admitted to university, as the number who passed was determined by the spaces available, with the government covering most of their educational expenses. Many young women reported that they had no hope of attending university until they saw their scores on the 10th grade exam. Though many of them faced social pressures to marry or work to help support their families while they were in primary or secondary school, their parents had also supported their decisions to attend university. Perhaps foregoing short-term financial gains (dowry for marriage or wages for immediate labor) for the long-term gains of attending school was only considered cost-effective if young women were able to attend university. Given that the failure rate for the 10th grade exam was high, especially in rural areas, many families did not see the economic benefit of their daughters attending school for 10 years when they could be either working or married. After passing the 10th grade exam, though, there was a chance for true economic gain if their daughters were able to successfully complete university.

Adjusting to university life

In addition to articulating the challenges faced in obtaining family support, enrolling in university



© FHI 360

Josephine reads in the library (see DRC Chapter in Part Two).

and securing financial support, the young women also identified difficulties in adjusting to university life. Chief among these were making new friends, struggling with the language of instruction, learning new technologies, maintaining personal safety, finding accommodation and transportation and balancing the need to work with time to study.

Personal relationships

For most of the young women interviewed, attending university also required social adjustments. Far from their families and the rural communities they knew, young women in India, Cambodia, the DRC and Ethiopia reported that they were intimidated by wealthier classmates and concerned about standing out because they were poor or from rural areas. Some young women in India added that they had weak communication skills and low self-confidence; they were afraid of interviews, talking to classmates, participating in competitions and speaking in English.

Academic study

Students in India, Cambodia and Mauritania indicated difficulties at university that had stemmed from low-quality primary and secondary schooling. In Mauritania, for example, some students faced linguistic challenges resulting from not having learned French, the language of instruction at university, during primary and secondary school. **Khadijetou** found studying in Arabic at university

DISCUSSION

to be very limiting. Many of the courses she preferred to take were only offered in French, but she did not understand French well enough to study in that language. Some participants in India and Cambodia wished for better English skills because many of the available classes were taught only in English and textbooks were written in English.

The young women interviewed discovered that they needed to adjust to unfamiliar technologies, specifically computers and the Internet. University courses in many countries required students to conduct research on the Internet and to submit typed assignments. In Cambodia, **Sopheun's** parents traded a cow for her laptop, so she could complete her assignments and manage her business. In India, **Manorama's** father recognized his daughter's need for a computer and bought her a laptop, for which he continued to make payments.

Accommodation

Finding and securing safe accommodation, especially when moving to a major metropolis and capital city such as Kinshasa or Phnom Penh, was almost always difficult. Participants in Cambodia and the DRC found this move to be especially hard. One third of the study participants said that dorm life was nearly impossible because there were frequent disagreements among the occupants, as well as theft, overcrowding and strife, because some of the young women living in the dorms would not share food. Due to financial constraints, most young women could not afford the normal dormitory arrangement of two students per dorm room and several reported having shared a dorm room with more than two occupants. In Cambodia, young women such as **Sokhim** found the dormitory rooms to be cramped and lines for the bathroom, especially in the mornings, to be extremely inconvenient. In India and Mauritania most young women lived at home or with extended family members.

Time and space to study

For many participants who worked while attending school full-time, balancing work and class demands was an enormous issue. With full class schedules in addition to employment, 28 percent of the young women in India reported difficulties finding time and space to study. In Mauritania, 95 percent of the young women interviewed felt that finding time to study was also a major challenge. As both women and students, they had designated domestic roles in their family homes that competed with

their ability to concentrate on school. Chores such as cooking, cleaning, collecting water, procuring food, washing clothes and taking care of younger siblings often interfered with classroom punctuality and the ability to study in the evenings. One respondent reported how difficult it was to study at home while also being responsible for cooking meals, completing housework and awaking early each morning to prepare breakfast and begin a very long, tiring day.

University facilities

Study participants in Mauritania reported difficulties at their university due to extremely overcrowded classrooms. Designed to seat 50-70 students, these classrooms were instead often required to accommodate 100-200 students, while classrooms built for 200 students would often have from 500-1,000 students in a single class. Because university infrastructure had not kept up with enrollment and demand, the participants described cramped, claustrophobic classrooms, with students sitting outside, on window sills and even on the floor. This level of overcrowding made it extremely difficult for teachers to instruct and for students to learn. Each of the participants also reported a lack of teachers, as well as a shortage of essential teaching materials and equipment, such as computers. In the DRC, the young women interviewed suggested that services such as support groups and counseling services for rural women should be available on campus, especially because the cost of joining social clubs or even study groups was prohibitively expensive.

Personal safety

Difficulties arising from traveling long distances alone and being young women unprepared for life at university resulted in concerns by the study participants for their own personal safety.

In Cambodia, 35 percent of the participants worried about traveling alone and safety in city traffic. Most DRC participants had never visited the city of Kinshasa before they started their university education. Many of them held negative expectations about city and university life and worried that it would be difficult to talk to professors and their assistants, particularly after hearing that some might demand sexual favors or money in exchange for good grades. Similarly in Ethiopia and India, the young women said that sexual harassment

FIGURE 2.



was a major concern for them. Two participants in Mauritania admitted to having felt depressed and mentioned thoughts of suicide. Five participants told of being raped, but none of them had reported the rapes to authorities.

Success factors

Despite differences in the people, politics, economic systems and educational structures across the five countries included in this study, the stories of young women who have “broken the mold” to participate in higher education experienced resounding common themes. The most consistent theme—and one to celebrate—is determination. This ceaseless determination to end the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families, combined with a goal-oriented nature and personal courage, were attributes shared among all of the study participants. The participants in this study were highly motivated individuals, determined to succeed because they knew it would make their futures brighter than their pasts. These remarkable young women overcame multiple challenges primarily because of three factors: personal attributes, family support and community support, including that from NGOs and their governments (see Figure 2).

While many of the success factors are the same across all five countries, the details presented in the case studies describe many other unique cultural situations.

Personal attributes

The study participants were all highly motivated, determined and goal-oriented. These personal attributes were a common denominator of this study. Young women were selected who had succeeded in achieving their goals of tertiary education, which for this group of disadvantaged young women could not merely occur passively. It happened only because they made it happen, evidenced by the majority of participants across all five countries who were of the first generation in their families to attend university (see Table 2). These brave young women charted new territory, for themselves and for future generations of disadvantaged young women like them.

Determination

As a direct result of growing up in poverty and watching their families struggle, the majority of the participants were determined to succeed and create better futures both for themselves and their families. For students such as **Meera** in India, growing up in poverty was the principal motivation to study. Meera had seen her family, especially her mother, suffer and was determined to change her own future. To do so would require hard work and a higher education. Similarly, determination and a sense of purpose described how young women in the DRC succeeded in the face of numerous obstacles. Even though they lacked access to financial resources such as scholarships, they vowed to succeed no matter what it took. The participants reported that there were no jobs on campus or in Kinshasa for university students, so they relied on their own entrepreneurial initiatives to earn income. While some participants in other countries had to work to support their studies, all of the DRC participants were forced to support themselves financially in addition to studying.

Goal orientation

Another key attribute that many of these young women possessed was their ability to formulate and focus on achievable future goals. In Cambodia, young women talked about dream careers in teaching, accounting, development and medicine. While some of these dreams had changed over time, they also talked about being self-reliant, supporting their families, owning homes and donating to girls’ education programs. In Cambodia, **Sopheun** was an aspiring entrepreneur and already the co-owner of a small computer and English school. With her

DISCUSSION

goal in mind, she had a fixed sense of purpose and was able to remain focused. In Ethiopia, the study participants said that they had received a boost of confidence when they scored well enough on the 10th grade exams to attend college. Passing the exams affirmed that they could dream big and pursue university as a future goal. Almost every participant discussed the importance of working toward clearly defined goals; and approximately half of the respondents emphasized the importance of problem-solving to circumvent obstacles, rather than modifying their goals in response to these obstacles.

Courage

Many participants were the first in their families and often in their communities, to have left home to pursue a university education. Not only were they charting new territory by enrolling in university, but they were also often moving to unknown cities, making new friends and finding jobs and housing on their own. Tackling these tasks required a keen sense of independence. The desire to live different lives than their parents drove many of the young women forward despite the obstacles they faced in accomplishing these tasks. While many of the study participants had support from at least one family member, several young women in Ethiopia reported having disobeyed their families' wishes by choosing to pursue education, moving away from both family and community support

networks. **Yewbdar** did not have her family's support. Her family thought that she was pretending to be a student to cover up a secret job so that she would not have to send money back home. She had to balance her academic success and happiness at university with the emotional pain of her family's rejection. The young women in Ethiopia cited their courage as an inspiration for developing the best techniques and strategies to thrive in their new environments, resulting in both new experiences and personal transformations.

Family support

Family support included both emotional encouragement to continue studying beyond secondary school and the financial help that was needed to pay the costs of furthering their education.

Family support was often identified as one of the most remarkable and noteworthy success factors that enabled many if not most of the students to study at university. Though it appeared in different forms for different individuals, family support was almost always a critical ingredient for success. Family support included at least one encouraging voice—a mother, sibling, relative, religious leader or even a community member.

In Cambodia, while 28 percent of the young women reported feeling hostility, anger and resentment from their families, relatives or community members, all of the young women interviewed had the emotional support of at least someone in their family, a parent or extended family member such as an aunt, uncle, cousin or grandparent. Similarly, in the DRC, although many young women were discouraged from attending university, there was always someone, either their mother, uncle, aunt, cousin, brother or sister, who provided a voice of encouragement. Having at least one voice motivating them to continue was enough to keep them going. In India, 68 percent of the participants reported receiving support from both family members, while 20 percent received support from at least one of their parents.

Some young women received both financial and emotional support, while other families were only able to offer encouragement, including creating a space at home for studying, not burdening their daughters with household chores and providing them with necessary study materials. In Mauritania, even though financial support from families was



© Mant Balmiki

Meera reflects in a courtyard (see India Chapter in Part Two).

limited, the young women interviewed reported that the emotional support of their parents and relatives helped them deal with difficult situations and maintain the courage to continue in school. In fact, several young women reported that their families had moved to Nouakchott with them so that they could attend university. Their families knew it would be impossible for their daughters to go by themselves and wanted to ensure they had every chance to succeed. The participants gave examples of other types of financial support as well. They noted that their families had sold gold necklaces, taken out loans, or in the case of **Sopheun** from Cambodia, had even sold a cow to help her buy a laptop. In contrast, family support was not highlighted as a theme by the young women from Ethiopia.

Community, NGO and government support

Help from community members, NGOs and the government was available in many forms: financial assistance, material support, guidance and even emotional support. Informally, support may have come from a teacher, neighbor, or a friend. More formal types of support included scholarships, workshops and mentoring.

Community neighbors

Some participants reported that their communities had begun to view them as role models for achieving academic and personal success. For **Netsanet** in Ethiopia and many of the other young women interviewed, there was some resistance from their families when they announced their intention to study at university. However, Netsanet's community played a key role in helping to convince her father to provide financial support. Additionally in Ethiopia, when asked about treatment by community members on trips home, the young women responded that non-university educated peers in the village viewed them as "wise," "brave" and "respected." This unexpected approval and recognition as leaders raised their self-confidence, providing encouragement for them to stay in university and work even harder after seeing themselves as role models for their communities.

Peers and friends

Before enrolling in university, many participants spoke of older peers who had come home for vacations and inspired them with stories of university life, gave advice about how to select a major and

provided assistance in applying for college. While at university, often far from their families, the support of friends, dormitory mates and older students became increasingly important.

For some young women it was an encounter with a university student or graduate that had encouraged them to apply to university. The influence of these role models on younger students was substantial. **Yewbdar** in Ethiopia remembered that as a young girl, she respected and looked up to university students, especially their knowledge and ability to work with the community and introduce new ideas into the community, inspiring her to pursue this dream for herself.

Once at university in Ethiopia, a few young women reported that seniors were available and willing to mentor freshmen. In India, several participants cited the support of their older peers at secondary school or university as providing help with adjustment issues, career advancement and studying. In the DRC, while participants received almost no material, academic or emotional support from NGOs or the government, they identified peers as an important source of support at university.

Teachers and mentors

Trusted individuals, such as teachers, also provided guidance and emotional support to participants. In India, for example, approximately 84 percent of the young women interviewed reported influential and guiding teachers as a reinforcing support factor. For most participants, this was a teacher who provided encouragement, helped with career counseling or taught them well. In the DRC, some recounted that secondary school teachers instilled in them the belief that, "A secondary school diploma will not get you anywhere; you need to go to university to get a good job in this country." Mentors were also a common force in providing help and assistance to the young women. In India, some participants found mentors in their schools and others found mentors through NGO programs.

Religious faith

In both the DRC and Ethiopia, nearly all participants identified the church and their religious faith as a great source of inspiration and strength. Being part of a religious community was important and most young women in the DRC reported that they attended church every Sunday or even every day. Participants also reported that they relied on God to guide them, provide for them and give them

DISCUSSION

strength. When the young women had to make difficult decisions, such as whether to even attend university, they prayed for guidance. For young women lacking moral support from family or facing outright resistance from parents, the refuge of the church and moral support from religious figures helped them to persevere. However, this was not a theme in the other countries included in this study.

NGOs

The role that non-governmental organizations played in tertiary education varied widely across the five countries. In Cambodia, almost all (90 percent) of the study participants were receiving tertiary education scholarships from NGOs

or their universities. Consequently, many of the young women interviewed credited NGOs for providing the support they needed throughout secondary school as well as their transitions to university. Twenty-four percent of the young women credited KAPE and Room to Read for assistance and mentoring during the university application process. Room to Read does not offer tertiary level scholarships but helped identify available funding for need-based applicants. Financial assistance was necessary both for navigating pre-university challenges and for studying at the tertiary level. Similarly, in India, 80 percent of the young women had received scholarships for their tertiary education, contributing greatly to their success. No known non-governmental organizations working

TABLE 3.

Advice to young women from young women in all countries	
Be determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be serious, patient and devoted to your education. • Be conscious of the reasons for studying.
Be goal-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a career goal before applying to university. • Never lose hope and be confident.
Gain skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study English privately. • Take a computer course, with a focus on Microsoft applications and browsing the Internet.
Know the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research possible majors and know what classes are needed now to help plan ahead. • Ask questions about fees, location, housing, scholarships, courses, degree types and application documents.
Study well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study hard to gain a scholarship to university and a better job after graduation. • Work in groups and attend tutorial classes for additional support.
Find funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn money to build independence and confidence. • Scholarship recipients are models for others, so act accordingly.
Be an individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stick to one's individual values. • Do not be influenced by friends or family members. Study a major of interest, not one that pleases others.
Be aware (DRC and Ethiopia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid corruption and dishonesty. • Be careful when interacting with male peers and professors. • Do not date professors to obtain better grades. • Do not engage in sexual relationships; focus on studies.

in Mauritania provided support for tertiary education, despite the overwhelming needs of the young women living there.

Government

A few of the participants in Mauritania reported that, in addition to family emotional and financial support, access to financial resources such as the government scholarships were critical elements for their success at university. Similarly, the Ethiopian government provided tuition as well as room and board for full-time students, helping to ease the financial burden of tertiary education.

Advice to young women

The young women interviewed for this study shared their words of wisdom for the next generation of university scholars. Their advice focused on young women developing themselves academically and personally to be strong enough to persist in their goals of tertiary education. In addition to recommending that their peers be determined and goal-oriented, they also offered other suggestions (see Table 3). In the DRC and Ethiopia, the participants provided additional advice for their peers regarding interactions with male authority figures.

Family and external support systems

In addition to the advice they had for their peers, the young women also had several recommendations for family and external support systems to improve access to and participation in tertiary education (see Text Box 4) they recognized that girls' education is a community responsibility and were eager to help other young women reach their dreams. Generally they requested that NGOs and governments expand their reach of support and continue to support girls and young women.

Through their eyes, in their voices—and in their art

During the interviews in India, the research team asked the young women to think of words associated with the term “education.” Without hesitation, they listed ambition, power, gainful employment, pathway to success, fulfillment of dreams and future saver, offering an essential perspective for encouraging positive deviance and guiding young women on their path to success. The team also asked the young women to draw their ideas about education and its importance in their life. Education was seen as the first step toward their

TEXT BOX 4.

Advice to NGOs, governments, and other institutions

Financial assistance

Increase scholarship opportunities and make them all-inclusive to provide for tuition as well as daily expenses.

Guidance

Provide additional mentoring support in the form of career counseling, academic and moral support; implement life skills, vocational training and university preparation workshops; provide gender-focused workshops for parents and educators.

Infrastructure

Invest in both the physical infrastructure and the human resources at tertiary education institutions; increase resources available on campus such as libraries, computer labs, science labs, sports facilities and career counseling.

Standards

Ensure and monitor academic standards and also ensure gender and ethnic equality policies are in place and being practiced.

IMAGE 1.

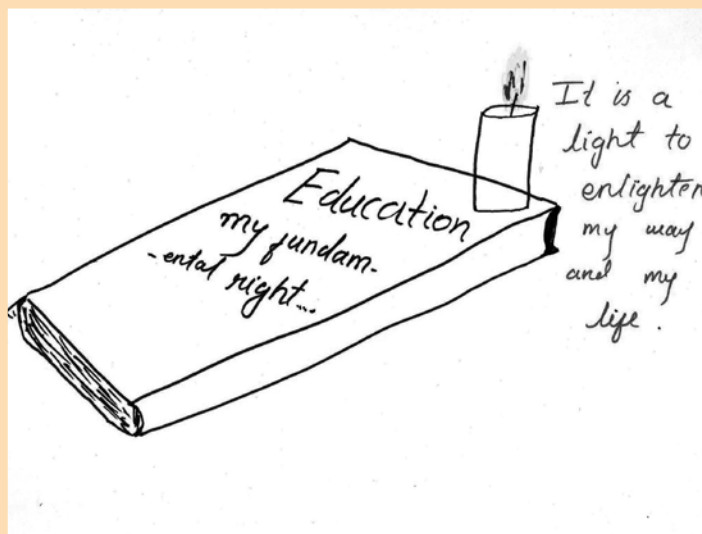


Illustration drawn by a participant in India.

goals and associated with the status of heaven or a temple—a holy place of reverence. One young woman simply drew a picture of a book and a candle and wrote, “Education, my fundamental right...It is a light to enlighten my way and my life.” (see Image 1).

Conclusion

Hawai had always dreamed of becoming a writer and story-teller. As part of the youth engagement approach in Cambodia, the research assistants, including Hwai, were given digital cameras and asked to photograph what is most important to them, describing why they chose to capture specific images. Hwai was thrilled about this assignment. With her post-secondary transition in mind, she focused her photography on aspects of her life that had changed since she moved from her family's home in the countryside to university in Phnom Penh. She reflected:

“Many years ago I had similar problems like the other girls, but I was able to overcome them. When I was a child I didn't have any friends at all and didn't know how to learn. It was very difficult. Others said that they didn't want to talk to me because I was from a poor family. So I thought I wasn't good and that I didn't have any value. But in 7th grade I worked hard and became an outstanding student. I got a lot of awards and finally finished high school and now I am continuing my studies at a university. I think I have changed a lot. I used to think my story was very difficult, but I learned that many other girls have difficult stories too. I am not alone. Now I think I can help other girls who are in the same situation as I was. I hope when I finish I will do this kind of work. I want to help other girls. I will never give up.”

Similar to Hwai, other young women also expressed their appreciation for participating in this study as research assistants or participants. They were excited that people elsewhere in the world would hear their stories through their eyes and

in their voices. Not only did focus groups provide an opportunity for these young women to come together and share their experiences, it also provided them the opportunity to network with one another. Hwai wrote her first resume with the help of the research team and was looking for a part-time job while she continued her studies. In Mauritania, the study inspired participants to discuss how to encourage female students to stay in school as well as think about volunteer opportunities to help support girls' education. Khadijetou became an Arabic teacher at ANFE as a result of her participation. She taught Arabic in exchange for receiving lessons in French, the language of some of the academic courses she was most interested in taking. After initially struggling to find participants for the study, the research team in Mauritania was surprised during the last two days of the study when nearly 100 young women from the university approached them, said that this was the first time such a study had been conducted, expressed their happiness and interest and told the research team they were encouraged to know that someone was listening to them.

After listening to 160 young women share their challenges and their stories of success, Room to Read, FHI 360 and ANFE are even more inspired in their missions to support girls' education. We will continue to **engage the positive voices** (see Text Box 5) of the girls and young women who we serve more actively to reflect on organizational practices, future research and future programming and encourage other organizations to do the same.

TEXT BOX 5.

Positive voice engagement

Positive

Seek out the positive role models in the community.

Voice

Find ways to give young women a voice.

Engagement

Involve young women in designing and implementing activities that impact them.

Further dialogue to foster success

We also encourage further dialogue to consider ways in which individual organizations and the broader international community can foster the success of economically disadvantaged young women in tertiary education. Specifically,

How can organizations, governments and individuals:

- **Build the capacity of girls and young women** to foster personal attributes that encourage successful pathways and better prepare them to navigate key life decisions?
- **Engage with families and parents** to foster emotional encouragement as well as provide the time and space to study and give financial support to lessen the financial burden of education?
- **Advocate for and improve tertiary education access and support systems** around the world to better support the needs of young women from disadvantaged communities including facilitating financial access through scholarship programs, loans or employment opportunities?

With these questions in mind, each of the organizations that participated in this research have identified their own next steps for supporting girls' educational dreams and goals. These include:

- **Increasing awareness of the challenges of university education** among socioeconomically disadvantaged girls and their families by offering support to better prepare young women for university opportunities in the future.
- **Improving the quality of life skills education, mentoring and other support systems** in secondary school, thereby increasing the likelihood of success for socioeconomically disadvantaged young women attending university.
- **Considering ways to work with other international organizations to support young women** in their university aspirations and experiences.

Other action items include the following:

Room to Read

This study makes an important contribution to Room to Read's goal of helping girls complete secondary school with the skills necessary to negotiate key life decisions. Knowledge about the resources on which young, economically disadvantaged women have drawn to succeed in university will be shared with current scholars in life skills education, mentoring and academic support activities.

University planning guides will be created based on the findings included in this report and will be shared with girls, families, teachers and other school staff to create greater awareness of the potential challenges. Most importantly, this research will be used to bring awareness of the future educational opportunities that are possible for girls everywhere. The hope is that the stories from this study will not only inspire younger girls and their families to broaden their aspirations but also to provide concrete guidance about how to increase the likelihood of achieving educational success.

FHI 360

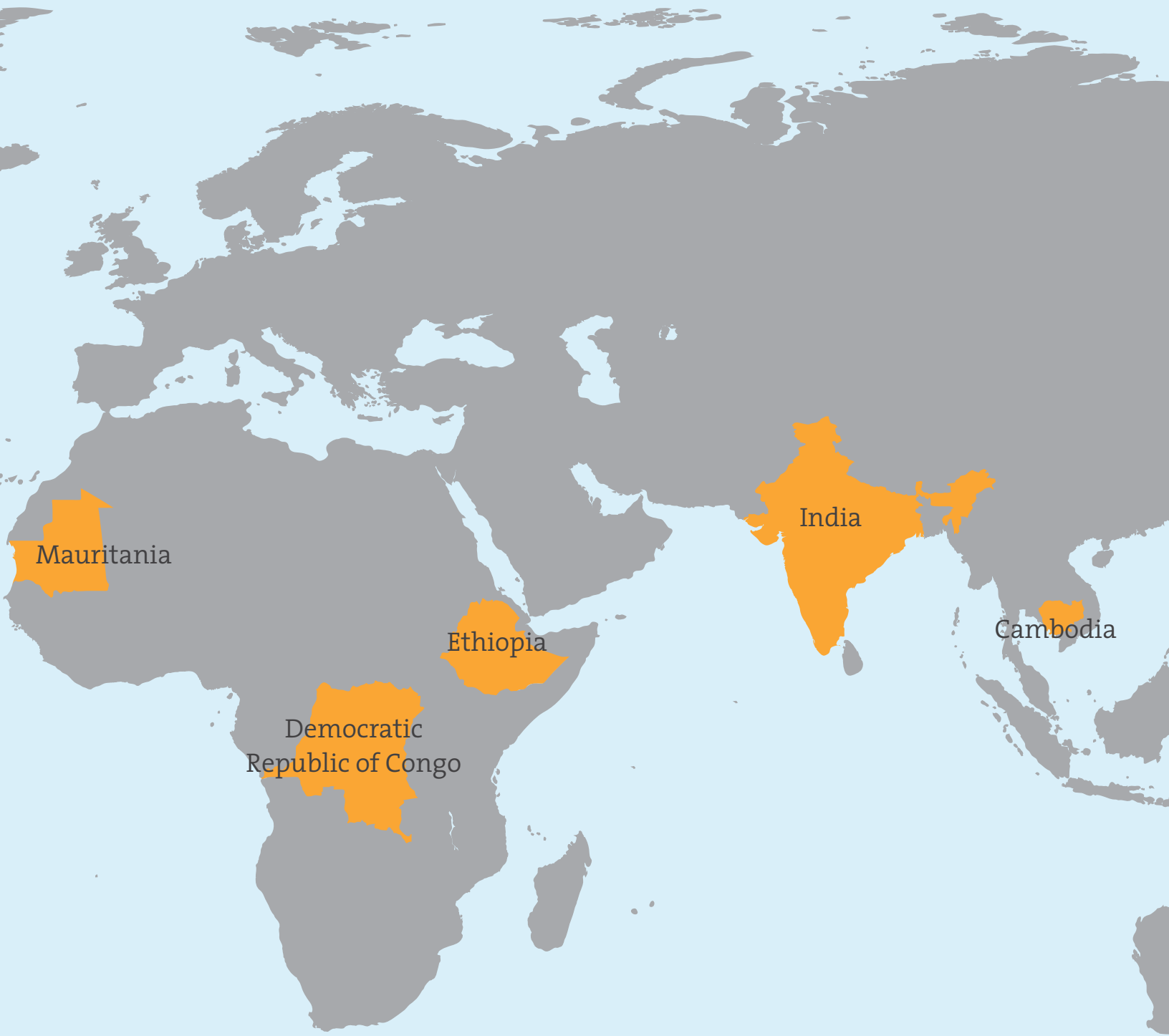
While FHI 360 continues to review the situations in DRC and Ethiopia, this study has influenced the priorities of the Center for Gender Equity (CGE). The staff continues to look for opportunities for funding and preparing vulnerable young women for tertiary education. CGE plans to use this study to affirm to donors the need to support young women aspiring to reach tertiary education and to show that despite the obstacles, young women are succeeding. This study will equip CGE to seek additional funding and implement more projects in tertiary education.

ANFE

The data collected and personal stories shared in this study have helped ANFE better understand the landscape at the university level in Mauritania. ANFE realized that, although resources at the University of Nouakchott are limited and students have difficulties with basic services, such as transportation, meals on campus, overcrowded classrooms and sexism within the university setting, there is a great need to work with families to support their daughters in higher education. ANFE staff are confident that these insights will lead to programs that better support students preparing for university, transitions into university and support at the university level.

A much larger conversation

This study has enabled successful young women from five countries to have their voices and perspectives heard and broadcast to the global community. This is just the start of a much larger conversation—a conversation that must be pursued and encouraged by all organizations committed to gender equality in education and in all aspects of life.



PART TWO

Country Case Studies

Cambodia p.30

Democratic
Republic of Congo p.42

Ethiopia p.54

India p.68

Mauritania p.80

Part Two presents the country case studies, which highlight the challenges and successes of young women from five countries—Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India and Mauritania—as they navigate tertiary education.



© Borin Srey

The Cambodian research team interviews study participants about their experiences in university.



Cambodia

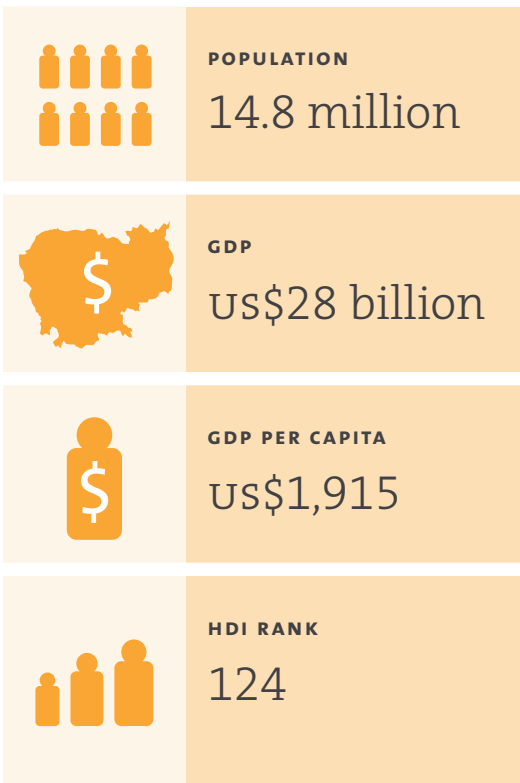
កម្ពុជា
៨១១

Room to Read

Cambodia, nestled between Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and the Gulf of Thailand, is home to 15 million people, 78 percent of whom live in rural communities. After the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975, educated citizens were systematically murdered; those who survived fled the country. By 1978, an entire generation of educated role models had been lost.

As Cambodia continues to recover from decades of war, isolation and genocide, poverty remains one of its main barriers to education.⁷ Approximately 68 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day.⁸ Faced with poverty, many parents rely on their children to earn money for the family and children often leave school early as a result. Forty-five percent of Cambodian children aged 5-14 years work for money.⁹ For girls who navigate the initial challenges and graduate from secondary school, financial and family barriers often persist and the pressure to start earning an income and marry is even stronger. While the average age of marriage is 22.5 years for women, traditionally, they are expected to wed between the ages of 16 and 20.¹⁰ A higher level of education is believed to limit a young woman's marriage prospects.

This country study describes the educational landscape in Cambodia, presents the research findings from discussions with 29 participants and introduces the stories of two positive role models, **Sopheun** and **Sokhim**, young Cambodian women who have persevered despite myriad challenges and are currently succeeding in their university education.

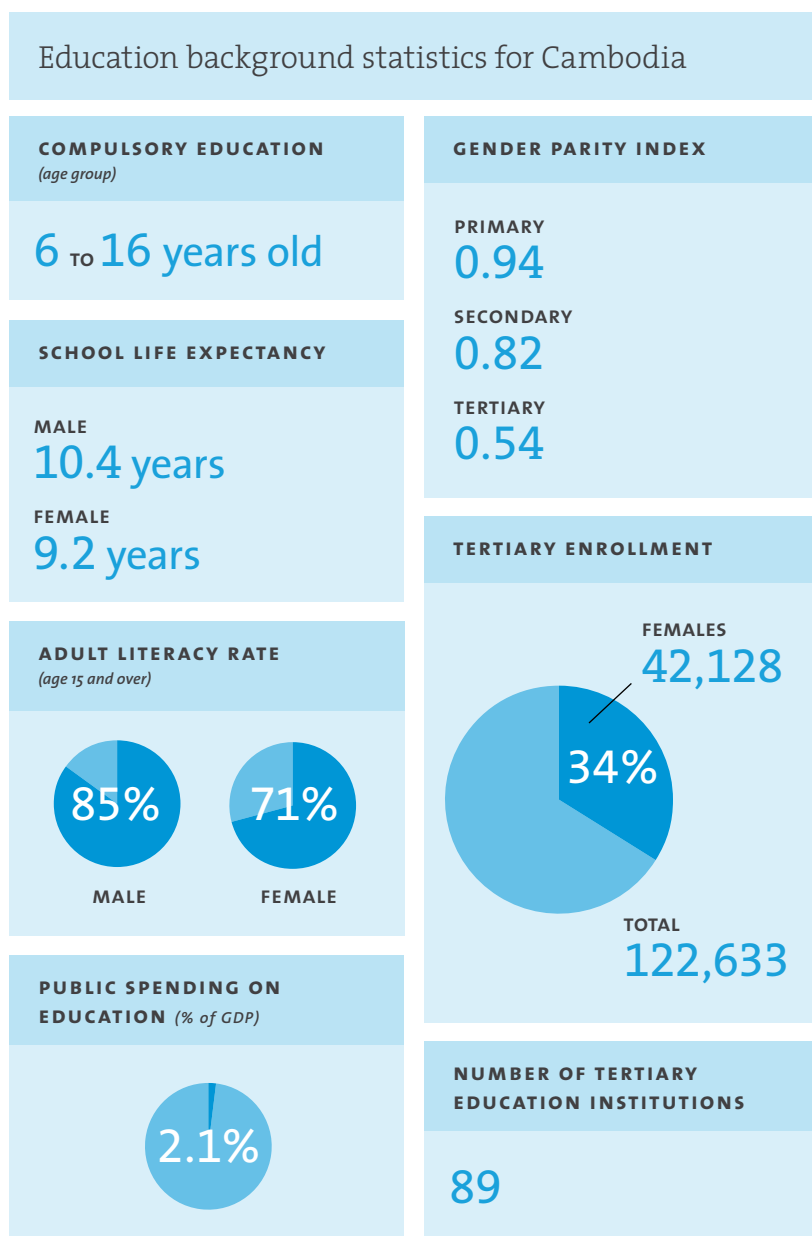


See endnote 6 for data sources.

The educational landscape

More than half of Cambodia's population is under the age of 18 and the need for access to quality education exists throughout the country.¹¹ Great strides have been made to improve Cambodia's educational system in recent years and enrollment rates and gender parity are improving for both primary and secondary school. While the gender gap is narrowing, many girls stop attending school after completing 6th grade because higher grade schools are often located far away.

FIGURE 3.



See endnote 6 for data sources.

Average school life expectancy for girls is 9.2 years, which suggests that many students transition to secondary school but drop out before graduating (see Figure 3). This is also evidenced in the Gender Parity Index's dramatic decrease in enrollment from primary to tertiary education. The adult literacy rate for women is 71 percent compared to 85 percent for men, further reflecting gender disparity.

Tertiary education

The last decade has seen tremendous growth in higher education, especially in the private sector. In 2008 Cambodia had 34 public and 55 private colleges and universities, or 89 institutes of higher education.¹² Enrollment increased from 9,000 in 1998 to 125,000 in 2008.¹³ However, institutes of higher education can accommodate only one in three students who graduate from secondary school and only two percent of Cambodia's GDP is allocated to education.¹⁴ Expansive growth and lack of financial resources have resulted in a system without quality educators and sufficient materials to provide the training that students need to succeed. Recent estimates indicate that 34 percent or approximately 42,100 of the students enrolled in tertiary education are women (see Figure 3), but only five percent of all Cambodian young women go to university.¹⁵ It is estimated that the average cost per year of university education is US\$175-1000.

Study participants

The 29 participants in this study were from two provinces, Kampong Cham (a rural province that is a two-hour drive from Phnom Penh) and Kandal (outer Phnom Penh). In total, the participants attended nine universities and one teacher training institute. Forty-five percent were studying business

or finance-related majors and 17 percent were pursuing education (see Text Box 6 for a list of majors). All study participants attended public primary and secondary school, but 66 percent had received scholarships to complete basic education as part of Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) programming (see Table 4) or Room to Read's Girls' Education Program (GEP).

Seventy-two percent were the first and only members of their families to graduate high school and enroll in university (see Table 4). Six study participants had older siblings who had attended university. Their parents' education levels ranged from none to 10th grade. Five mothers and six fathers were deceased. Their families had between one and nine children. None of the participants were married or had children.

Fifty-five percent of participants lived and studied in Kampong Cham province and 45 percent resided in Phnom Penh, though 31 percent left their homes in Kampong Cham province to study in Phnom Penh. Rural Kampong Cham and urban Phnom Penh are starkly different in terms of lifestyle and living expenses (see Table 5). With the higher cost of living and greater distances to university in Phnom Penh, young women in the city paid more in rent, spent more time commuting and were more likely to work than young women living and studying in Kampong Cham. None of the participants lived at home with immediate family; all lived in dormitories, rented rooms or with extended family.

While 90 percent of the participants had received university scholarships, 62 percent continued to receive financial support from their families and 27 percent worked to support themselves. Additionally, two of three young women not receiving scholarships worked part-time. The three young women who worked full-time received scholarships but no family financial support. They held various jobs such as cosmetic sales clerk, radio disc jockey, tutor, English teacher, accountant, security guard and office employee.

TEXT BOX 6.

Participants' areas of study

Accounting, Agricultural Science, Education, Environmental Studies, Finance, History, Khmer Literature, Marketing, Management, Mathematics, Medicine, Rural and Economic Development and Sociology

TABLE 4.

Student participants' backgrounds		
Number of participants	29	
Age range	17-24 years old	
Public schooling (primary and secondary)	29	100%
First generation high school graduates	29	100%
First generation university admission	29	100%
First and only member to graduate high school and attend university	21	72%
Received secondary school scholarship	19	66%
Receiving university scholarship	26	90%
Receiving financial support from family	18	62%
Currently Employed (part-time or full-time)	8	27%
Married	0	0%
Children	0	0%

TEXT BOX 7.

KAPE university scholarships



Starting in 2010, Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) extended its girls' education support to include a new university scholarship program in addition to its secondary school scholarship program. University scholarship opportunities are announced at schools, in communities and on the radio. Students complete applications, submit exam results and grades and write essays. They also need signatures from their community chief. Home visits are used to determine applicants' need. In the first year KAPE received more than 300 applicants for 66 scholarships. Currently this scholarship opportunity is available for universities in Kampong Cham province only, but the program may be extended to Phnom Penh universities in the coming year.

For more information about KAPE, please visit their website: www.kapekh.org

Overcoming challenges



Trading a cow for a laptop លក់គោដើម្បីទិញកុំព្យូទ័រទ័រយូរដៃ (ឡែបតុប)

Sopheun

24 years old

Phnom Penh

Sopheun finally graduated from high school at the age of 22. Needing to help at home, she did not start 1st grade until she was 11 years old

and began working during the 7th grade because her family could not afford her school fees. A natural entrepreneur, she rose early in the morning to purchase vegetables at the market and sell them for higher prices at another market. In 9th grade she dropped out of school for one year to sell vegetables full-time. She used this money to pay for her education and help her family. Already a self-made entrepreneur, Sopheun had dreams of owning a business one day and knew a university education would help her pursue this dream.









After completing high school, Sopheun moved to Phnom Penh to study and secured a 50 percent merit-based scholarship (US\$350 over four years) from a four-year institute that offered degrees in business management. After arriving in Phnom Penh, she found a part-time job as a teacher at a private school. A few months later, the school owner could not pay his employees and threatened to close the doors. Sopheun and her colleagues did not want to lose their jobs, so they pooled their financial resources and took over ownership of the school.

As the school's accountant, Sopheun needed a laptop to manage her business and complete her university assignments, but her income was not high enough to buy one. She hesitated before asking her parents for help. They had many financial demands, including sending her siblings to school, but she finally mustered the courage to ask. As farmers from a rural province, Sopheun's parents had never used a computer, but even without

understanding her need for one, they agreed to help. They sold a cow to buy a laptop for their daughter and were also able to contribute a motorbike to her educational endeavors.

As a co-owner of a private English and computer school, Sopheun is extremely busy. She studies during the day and works in the evenings. The school is still under the new leadership and Sopheun and her partners can barely pay their monthly expenses; they hope the school will start earning money soon. Sopheun's income covers her monthly expenses of US\$40 including rent, utilities, food and transportation. In addition to these expenses, she sends money home, including US\$5 a month for her brother's English lessons.

After a long day of studying and working, Sopheun travels by motorbike down narrow alleys, behind houses and finally walks through the neighbor's yard to reach her rented room. Sopheun and her

<h1>About Sopheun</h1>	
	LIVING SITUATION Rents a room with two roommates
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Entrepreneur
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial need • Adjusting to university • Time to study
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination • Family support • University support
	FAMILY Five siblings; parents are illiterate farmers
	MAJOR BA Accounting, 2nd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING 50 percent merit-based scholarship
	EMPLOYMENT Accountant and co-owner of a private computer and English school

two roommates share an apartment, a small concrete room, with a corrugated steel roof, one power outlet and one tube light. There is neither a fan nor a window. Sopheun and her roommates cook and sleep in this space. The only furniture in the room is Sopheun’s desk as she is the only roommate who attends school; the others work in garment factories. Sopheun’s entrepreneurial spirit and her parents’ support provide guidance and motivation, even as she struggles to pay her bills.

Challenges

Similar to many other young women in this study, **Sopheun** was the first in her family to finish high school. Personal determination, goal-orientation and access to financial opportunities have been essential for **Sopheun’s** success. Additionally, family support, both emotional and financial, has been an extra advantage in pursuing her dreams, but she also felt obligated to financially support her family. In addition to sending money to her family, she struggled financially and has had to adjust to her new life away from home. These struggles exemplify some of the challenges young Cambodian women face on the path to tertiary education.

Family ties

While many young women reported that their families supported their decision to attend university, in other cases familial obligations and a lack of family support were major obstacles for young women. Similar to **Sopheun**, forty-five percent of

the young women interviewed felt pressure to support their family. This support included caring for a sick parent, working in a factory to provide income or assisting with harvesting. For example, **Srey** dropped out of secondary school temporarily to care for her brother who had meningitis.

Twenty-eight percent of the young women reported hostility, anger and resentment from family, relatives, or community members for continuing their education. When **Samrat** asked for money to pay for English classes, her parents argued and her father asked her to drop out and work at a garment factory. She almost did.

Financial need

Many young women cited financial challenges to finishing secondary school. However, 83 percent received support from organizations to help them overcome those challenges. As an orphan, **Vannich** struggled financially but was able to succeed with the help of an NGO that offered financial support for her to attend and complete secondary school. She now attends university.

Almost all of the study participants (90 percent) were receiving scholarships for their universities or teacher training institutes. However, almost all cited challenges paying for tuition and living expenses. To provide a glimpse of these costs, **Hawai** and **Nita**, the study research assistants (see Appendix II for biographies), recorded their weekly expenses. As Table 5 shows, even a full-tuition scholarship does not cover all their expenses. In

TABLE 5.

Some differences between living in Kampong Cham and Phnom Penh		
	KAMPONG CHAM PROVINCE	PHNOM PENH
Housing	81% live in free dormitories 19% rent rooms	15% live in free dormitories/ rooms 85% rent rooms
Rent	US\$5-8 per month	US\$10-35 per month
Daily Commute	None – One hour	40 minutes – Four hours
Financial Support	100% receive scholarships	80% receive scholarships

addition to rent and food, these young women encountered expenses such as kitchen utensils, laundry soap, meals, snacks, bottled water, bicycle parking fees and printing fees at Internet cafes. Their weekly expenses ranged from US\$28-37.50.

Financial difficulties caused some young women to select universities that were not their top choices or as academically rigorous as they had hoped. **Srey** and her family could not afford a four-year university, so she opted for a government-funded two-year teacher training course (see Text Box 5). Similarly, **Sopheun** made the financial decision to attend an institute rather than a more expensive university.

Other students struggled because they could not afford the required class materials that they needed to purchase from professors in addition to books and school supplies. **Sokney** put it plainly, “If you don’t have enough money to buy them, you don’t buy them.”

Unethical practices

To mitigate their financial needs, some young women admitted to engaging in what they themselves acknowledged as dishonest activities. One young woman shyly admitted that she had raised the money for her first year’s tuition by taking entrance exams for other students. Other young women spoke of the need to pay unofficial fees to pass the entrance exams or receive university-based scholarships.

Navigating pre-university challenges

Many of the participants interviewed articulated the challenges they faced as they applied to universities. Several experienced difficulty locating accurate and comprehensive guidance about university education and funding opportunities. Many

rural secondary school students relied on schools, teachers, friends, radio, television and newspapers to provide them with information about university. **Vannich**, an orphan, depended on her friend and her friend’s uncle to help with the application process.

Ten percent of the participants had never considered university until a local NGO informed them about scholarship opportunities. For 20 percent of the women interviewed, enrolling in university was not even a possibility until they received confirmation of a scholarship from an NGO, the government or the university.

As the study participants were the first generation in their families to attend university, parents and relatives were often unable to assist them with this unfamiliar process. **Phally** explained that applying from the rural provinces was difficult because results were posted in Phnom Penh first, in provincial capitals several days later and were never posted in district towns. Her father traveled to the provincial capital to view the results, but the scholarship information confused him. Eager to know her results, **Phally** traveled to Phnom Penh on her own to learn if she had received the scholarship. She had!

Adjusting to university life

Adjusting socially

For many of the young women interviewed, attending university required social adjustments. Far from their families and rural communities, many young women interviewed sometimes found making friends to be intimidating, particularly with wealthier classmates. **Phalla** was scared that she would not be able to compete with her classmates and it was two months before she spoke with anyone. Similarly, another young woman, **Phally**, noted that most students at her university had motorbikes, whereas she rode a bicycle every day. She said, “I often feel lonely and I know I’m different from my peers, but I try to remain proud and ride my bicycle anyway.” Similarly, **Vannich** feels excluded from social opportunities. She had never seen her university canteen, where many students go to socialize between classes, because she had never been able to afford to eat there because lunch is expensive (US\$1.50).

English and computers

The young women interviewed found they needed to adjust academically as well. With many classes taught and textbooks written only in English, 35 percent wished for improved English skills.

Additionally, courses often required students to do research on the Internet and submit typed assignments. Twenty percent of the study participants wished they had better computer skills to type their own assignments and use the Internet. Many of the young women reported paying other students to help them conduct web-based research and type their assignments, an additional cost they had not anticipated.

Health and personal safety

Seventeen percent of the study participants worried about their own health. Being far from home, they relied on friends for care when they were sick. Any health expenses compounded their existing financial hardships.

Thirty-five percent of the young women also worried about their safety. Phnom Penh has a high crime rate and gang-related theft is a problem. For example, the roommate of one participant stole her ATM card and tuition money one night while she was sleeping. She feared reporting this to the police because her roommate was involved in a gang. Additionally, while none of young women interviewed had been personally threatened or attacked, they worried about traveling long distances by bicycle. Having come from rural villages, many young women described feeling nervous about city traffic due to road safety concerns and worried about traveling alone, especially at night.

Accommodation and transportation

Eighty-one percent of the young women interviewed in Kampong Cham province lived in free university dormitories on campus and did not have to commute. Dormitory blocks were crowded, housing approximately 30 young women each, with four to six students in each room. Two dormitory blocks of 60 young women shared two bathrooms, resulting in long lines, particularly in the morning. Several of the young women living in these dormitories complained that the common dormitory laundry meant that many clothes disappeared and were never returned.

Finding and securing accommodation in Phnom Penh was more difficult than in Kampong Cham because universities there do not offer free dormitories. While not a popular option, a few young women who moved to Phnom Penh tried staying with extended family. Initially, **Srey Pov** moved in with her cousin and his wife. However, in return for free room and board, Srey Pov had to sell clothes in their shop and do housework, without pay, which

limited her study time. Her relatives were frustrated that she could not help more and the situation turned sour. Srey Pov found work as a security guard and moved to a rental house with friends.

For most young women in Phnom Penh, a bicycle was essential for university, as the distance between campus and home can easily be 6 to 12 miles each way. Consequently, **Vannich** commuted three to four hours per day by bicycle through Phnom Penh traffic. Unfortunately, bicycles are a valuable commodity and in **Phally's** first few months in Phnom Penh she had two bicycles stolen from her shared apartment. This prompted her to move, but she was unable to buy another bicycle. Fortunately, a friend lent Phally a bicycle to use until she could afford to buy another one.

Time and space to study

During secondary school some young women found it difficult to study at home. Many of their families did not have electricity at home, so studying after dark was possible only by candlelight. This was **Hawai's** reality before moving to a shared apartment with electricity and indoor plumbing in Phnom Penh. At home, her six younger brothers and sisters still sat together and studied by candlelight. Many of the young women interviewed also encountered difficulties in finding time to study. Twenty-seven percent of the study participants found it difficult to balance work and class demands. With a full class schedule and a full-time job as a security guard, **Srey Pov** had little time to study. She thought her academic performance would have improved if she could have dedicated more time to her studies.

TABLE 6.

Weekly expenses in Phnom Penh (US\$)		
	HAWAI	NITA
Rent	\$11	\$5
Food	\$17	\$16
Transportation	\$3	\$2
Academic Expenses	\$3.5	\$5
Health	\$2.5	-
Misc.	\$0.5	-
Total Weekly	\$37.5	\$28

Achieving success



© Borin Srey

A voice in the community

សម្លេងនៅក្នុងសហគមន៍

Sokhim

19 years old

Kampong Cham Province

When Sokhim first heard the radio, she dreamed of being an announcer. Now, she sits in a sound booth, takes calls and hosts a quiz show for two hours a day, between studying

finance and banking. She was initially nervous about this position, “I didn’t know what to say, but I watched my colleagues and they taught me how to do it.”

Sokhim was the first in her family to graduate high school and attend university. Her brothers and sisters left school when her family could no longer pay the fees. Living in rural poverty, the family shared one bicycle, did not have indoor plumbing or electricity, retrieved water from a well and cooked with firewood. Fortunately Sokhim, the youngest in her family, received support from her older siblings and two NGOs: KAPE and Room to Read. KAPE provided fees and material support through the 11th grade and Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program provided financial and material support as well as a room in a hostel near her school in the 12th grade. The hostel allowed Sokhim to focus on studying for her exams instead of commuting 11 miles to school by bicycle.

After graduating from secondary school, Sokhim received a KAPE university scholarship. She receives a monthly stipend of US\$19. This is spent on her tuition, books and food. Even with a part-time job as a disk jockey, earning US\$30 per month and a scholarship, she struggles financially but is careful to manage her money. She explained, “My biggest challenge is financial. Sometimes when I have to pay for my extra English classes, I don’t have the

money to pay. I ask the English school if I can delay the payment until I get my salary.”

Provincial universities provide free dormitories, blocks of rooms where six young women share an open floor space, three clothing wardrobes and several small bookshelves. Bed mats are unrolled on the floor at night and a small fan circulates the air. For each block, housing approximately 60 young women, there are only two bathrooms. While Sokhim enjoyed living with friends, getting ready in the morning was difficult with the line for the bathroom. Sensitive to her situation, the radio station offered a free room—dusty, cobwebbed and cluttered with equipment, but quiet and private. Sokhim was thrilled to move into her own space, “If I get lonely I’ll sleep in the dormitory with my friends, but I can use this room for studying and bathing.”

Sokhim dreamed of becoming a singer or full-time disc jockey but knew this may not be realistic. Her backup plan was to work in a bank. She had two wishes—English classes and a laptop. For now, she has found her calling. For a few hours each day, she sits in the booth with her headset and, exuding elegance and confidence, she serves as a voice in her community.

<h1>About Sokhim</h1>	
	FAMILY Three siblings; mother is deceased; father is a retired farmer
	MAJOR BA Finance and Banking, 1st year
	EDUCATION FUNDING KAPE university scholarship
	EMPLOYMENT Part-time radio disc jockey
	LIVING SITUATION Dormitory with five roommates and a free study room
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Bank teller or famous singer
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial need • Family ties • Adjusting to university
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-oriented • NGO support • Employer support

Success factors

Similar to the other 28 young women interviewed, **Sokhim's** success can be attributed to her goal-oriented nature as well as the support she received from her community. Sokhim's community support came from two organizations: the university she attends and the radio station where she works. While she does not have financial support from her family, her sisters emotionally support her educational pursuits. The success factors that Sokhim and other study participants identified include her goal-oriented nature as well as support from family, NGOs and community.

Goal-oriented

Growing up in poverty and watching their families struggle, most of the young women interviewed were goal-oriented. They have dreamed of careers in teaching, accounting, development or medicine since childhood. While some of their dreams have changed, they talked of becoming self-reliant, supporting their families, owning a home and donating to girls' education programs in the future. These goals and dreams provided the motivation for managing daily challenges. For example, **Nita** had a long educational career ahead of her. She was two years into an eight-year medical degree but dreamed of returning to her hometown as a pediatrician. At the same time, **Phally** and **Sopheun** were both aspiring entrepreneurs who balanced part-time jobs in addition to their studies. They

had a fixed sense of purpose and had decided to create a different future for themselves and their families.

Family support

While 28 percent of the young women reported hostility, anger and resentment from family, relatives, or community members for continuing their education, the remaining young women received the support of their families. Some families provided both financial and emotional support while others were only able to offer words of encouragement.

Financial support

Both **Vannich** and **Sokhai** were orphaned at a young age and cared for by their extended families. Fortunately, both of their extended families offered some financial support and guidance as they navigated uncharted territory. Several families sold gold necklaces or took out loans and one even sold a cow to help these young women pay for their expenses. In the cases of **Srey** and **Phally**, their older brothers, also university students, gave them school supplies and offered advice. Phally's brother even bought her a refurbished laptop and bicycle.

Emotional support

All of the young women interviewed had the emotional support of someone in their family, a parent or extended family member such as an aunt, uncle, cousin or grandparent. Initially, **Sopheak's** father did not support her decision to apply to university. However, she explained to him that though studying agriculture would not result in her becoming a

farmer, she would still be able to find a job assisting farmers. **Sopheak's** father now says, "I have only one daughter; I don't want her to be a farmer like me. I want her to get an education. Whatever she wants to study, I will support her." **Phalla's** father brought her to Phnom Penh and helped her find a rental house before classes started. **Lang's** parents were often asked by the neighbors, "Why do you let her study? It doesn't seem useful." This did not deter them; they continued to encourage their daughter and always provided time and space for her to study.

Community, NGO and government support

Financial assistance

Financial assistance was necessary both to navigate pre-university challenges and to study at the tertiary level. Sixty-nine percent of the young women interviewed received assistance from Room to Read's Girls' Education Program or KAPE (see Table 4) to graduate from high school.

At the university level, almost all (90 percent) of the young women interviewed received partial or full scholarships to fund their university education or teacher training programs (see Table 4). Two students reported receiving more than one scholarship.

Guidance

NGOs and individuals provided crucial guidance to study participants as they navigated the transition to university. For example, 24 percent of the sample credited KAPE and Room to Read for assistance and mentoring during the university application process. Room to Read does not offer tertiary level scholarships but helped identify funding for need-based applicants (see Text Box 8.).

Trusted individuals also provided guidance and emotional support to the participants. **Sokhai's** teacher recommended that she apply for the special Nine + Two teaching certificate (see Text Box 8). The teacher purchased the application for Sokhai, an orphan, and ensured that she completed it. Similarly, **Srey's** friend helped her complete her university application after she made a mistake while trying to do it alone the first time.

Emotional support

Many of the young women interviewed credited NGOs, individuals and their communities for providing key emotional support throughout secondary school and their transitions to university. **Srey Pov** recounted the constant encouragement she received from Room to Read's staff, "Please study hard and you will get a good job to support yourself one day." When **Sopha's** mother fell ill, she dropped out of school to take care of her and earn money. She did not go to school for three months until a KAPE staff member visited her house and advised her to return. Sopha credited KAPE for bringing her back to school. With her mother's support, she continued studying accounting.

Lakena's neighbors previously asked why she was not working at a garment factory. In response, she explained her desire and need to study. After winning a university scholarship from KAPE, she gained the support of her community. Furthermore, young women who received this support often felt extra motivation to succeed because they did not want to disappoint benefactors. **Vannich** explained, "If girls get support, they should work hard and take advantage of the opportunity given to them." She said she felt a responsibility to make Room to Read proud of her accomplishments. Community support, whether from an individual or an organization, provided extra motivation to succeed.

TEXT BOX 8.

Scholarship opportunities

Merit government scholarships

Awarded by the government for top scores in 12th grade exams. These scholarships are for public government institutions.

Merit university scholarship

Students who do well in university entrance exams are eligible. At some institutions, students from rural disadvantaged backgrounds have preference.

KAPE university scholarship (see Text box 7)

KAPE, a Cambodian non-governmental organization, provides scholarships in Kampong Cham province, for tuition and monthly expenses of US\$20.

Room to Read facilitated scholarship

Room to Read does not offer university scholarships, but the Cambodia office has helped identify need-based funding for some of its graduates.

Teacher-training

Applicants who pass national entrance exams receive full tuition scholarships and housing.

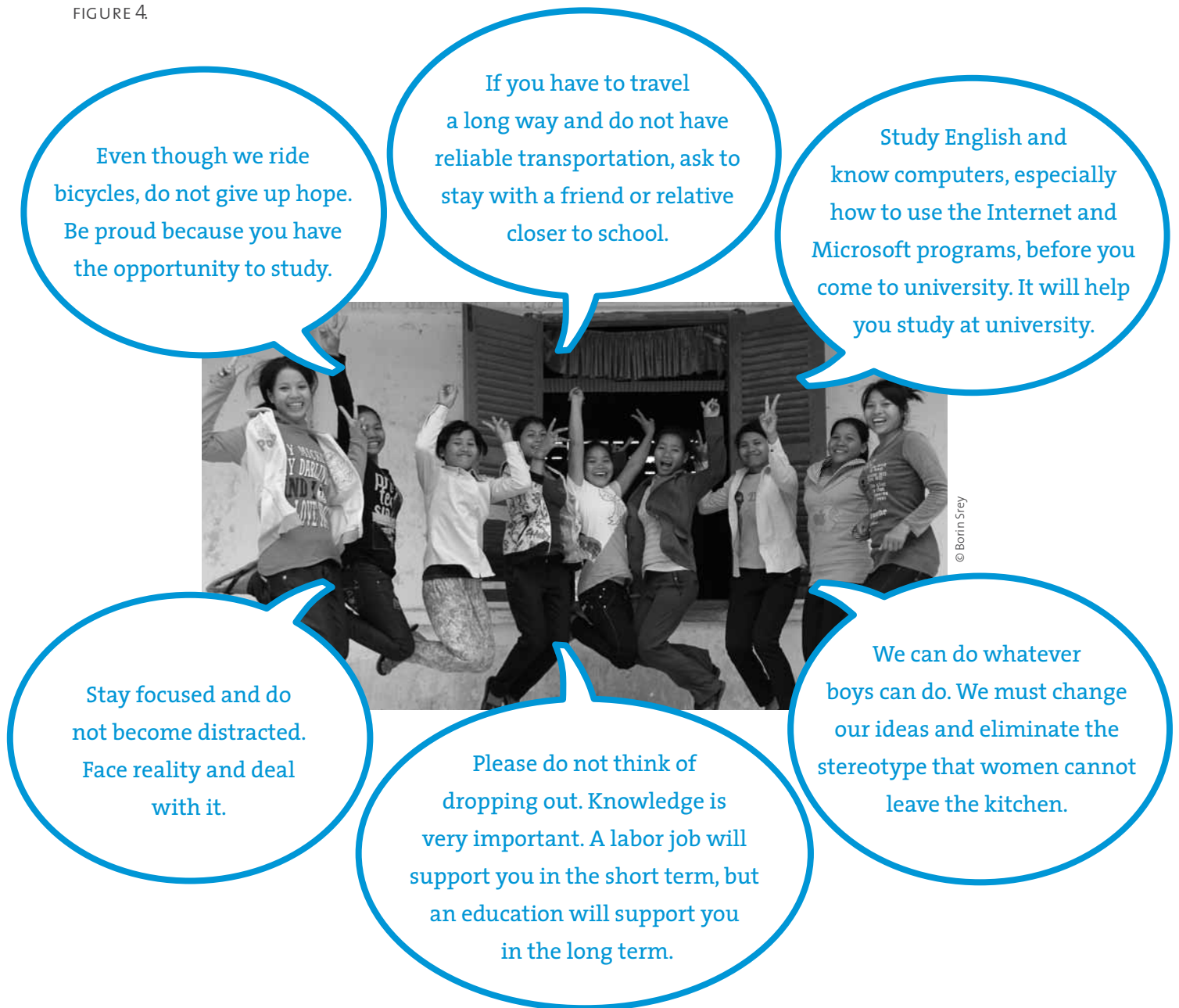
Nine + Two

Rural disadvantaged students have an opportunity to obtain their teacher training certification at the same time they are studying for their secondary school completion exams. Students start the training program in 9th grade, complete it in 11th grade and are qualified to teach in their rural communities before they have passed their 12th grade exams. The program provides tuition, room and board.

In their voices: Advice to young Cambodian women

The university scholars interviewed advised young women who will follow in their footsteps to prepare adequately, conduct sufficient background research and stay focused on their goals. Their recommendations are listed below in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4.





© FHI 360

A focus group discussion in the DRC.

Democratic Republic of Congo

La République démocratique du Congo

FHI 360

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in Central Africa, is almost entirely landlocked, sharing borders with nine nations. With a population of more than 66 million, more than 70 percent of the Congolese population lives below the poverty line.

Prolonged conflict and the HIV/AIDS epidemic have resulted in a humanitarian disaster in the DRC. As a result of the ongoing violent conflict that has plagued the DRC since 1998, an estimated 5.4 million people have died and more than 1.7 million have been internally displaced in Eastern Congo.¹⁶ The widespread HIV/AIDS epidemic has compounded the situation and an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 people are living with the disease. Since the 1990s, HIV has become increasingly feminized; young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years old have become a high risk group. While prevalence rates vary between urban (3.7-4.2 percent) and rural populations (4.6 percent), rates are twice as high for young women as they are for young men, and may be as high as 26 percent among women who have suffered from sexual violence in areas of armed conflict.¹⁷ As a result, the DRC faces enormous challenges to overcome severe poverty, insecurity and the lack of basic social services. Girls and young women are the most vulnerable in these situations.

Despite this conflict and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, there are glimpses of hope. Through the concerted efforts of donor agencies, local NGOs and personal initiatives, the Congolese have begun overcoming adverse circumstances. This chapter describes the educational landscape in the DRC, presents the research findings from discussions with 33 study participants and introduces two role models, **Elodie** and **Naomi**, young Congolese women who have succeeded in pursuing university studies despite difficult challenges.



POPULATION

66 million



GDP

US\$21 billion



GDP PER CAPITA

US\$319



HDI RANK

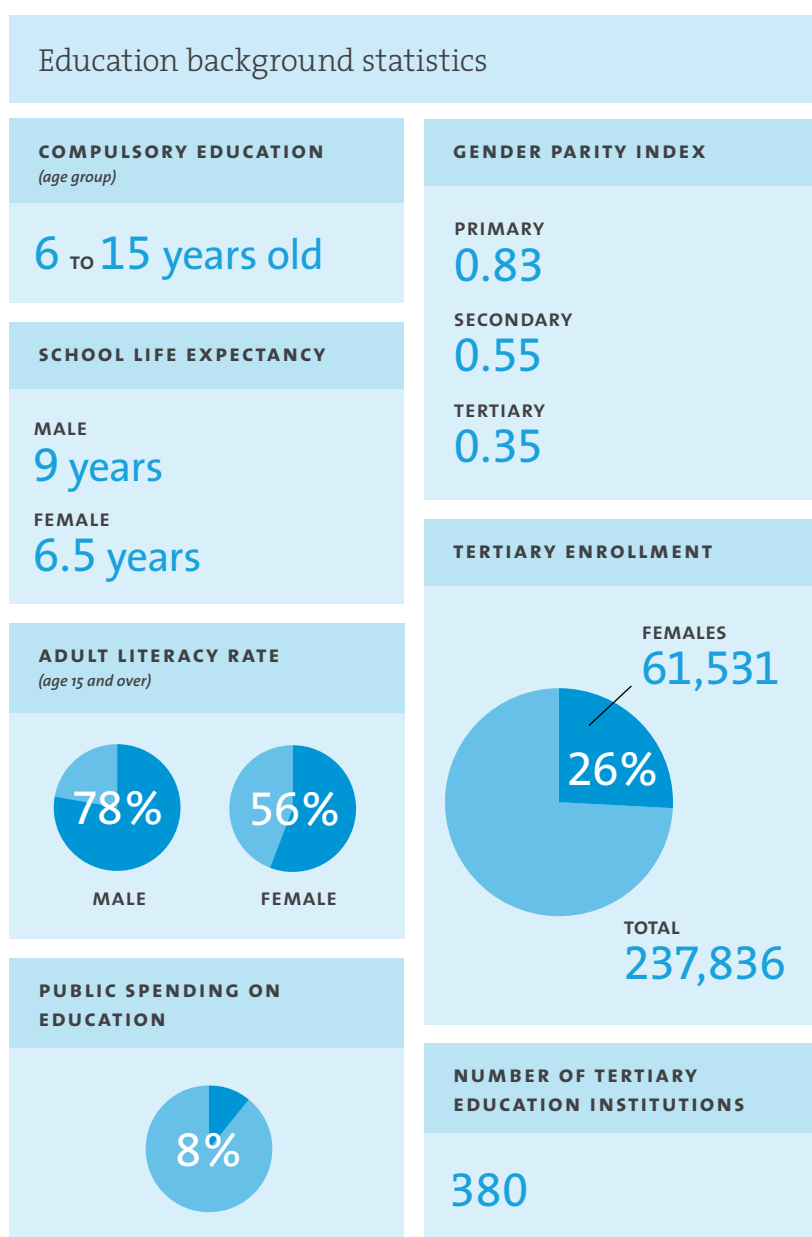
168

See endnote 6 for data sources.

The educational landscape

Rattled by more than a decade of civil war and economic decline, the DRC faces huge challenges in repairing its basic education system. Despite government adoption of a 15-year education plan in 1986, efforts to improve the education system were largely abandoned in the 1990s with the fall of the Mobutu regime and the outbreak of civil war. During these years of turmoil, the education system became nearly defunct. In 2001, the government allocated only five percent of the budget to education. Recent government and international community efforts resulted in increasing this allocation to 8 percent as of 2008 (see Figure 5).¹⁸

FIGURE 5.



Education has become increasingly costly for parents and offers no guarantee of employment. According to UNESCO, “The short-term use of children for paid labor provides a faster and less expensive means of achieving a social and economic standing previously gained through going to school, a place now seen as an annoying waste of time.”¹⁹ This is especially true in the diamond and gold mining areas as well as regions where farming is the primary source of income.²⁰

Average school life expectancy for girls is 6.5 years, suggesting that many students drop out after the primary education level (see Figure 5). The adult literacy rate for women is 56 percent and the Gender Parity Index for enrollment decreases dramatically from primary to tertiary education.

Tertiary education

Women represent only 26 percent of students who are enrolled in colleges and universities. The same financial challenges that prevent girls from achieving basic education also hinder many young women from pursuing tertiary education, which is expensive. Tuition alone is approximately US\$220 per year. With an average GDP of US\$310 per capita, affording the costs of higher education remains a distant dream for many. Recently, the Ministry of Higher Education further increased tuition and fees for other university services, which resulted in nationwide student demonstrations.²¹ There are 380 tertiary institutions, both government-sponsored and private, with more than 70 percent located in the capital city of Kinshasa.²²

Study participants

A total of 33 young women and 10 mothers participated in this study. The young women ranged in age from 20 to 38 and were all students at the University of Kinshasa (see Table 7). Most of them were from rural areas, some as far as 500 miles from the capital of Kinshasa. The mothers were all from Kinshasa, but their daughters were not study participants. Faculty and staff helped identify these research participants.

More than 60 percent of the young women in this study were the first in their families to attend university and many were the only family member to obtain a high school diploma (see Table 7). Most of them had attended public secondary school.

The number of siblings ranged from none to 12. Education among siblings also varied: one participant's 10 brothers and sisters all graduated from secondary school and another's nine siblings all dropped out. All the young women surveyed were single. One had two children. Almost half had lost their fathers.

While almost all (96 percent) received family financial support, most (82 percent) supplemented that through informal employment such as selling fruit, vegetables or clothes while attending university (see Table 7). Additionally, many participants said that they received money for tuition from distant relatives or non-family members, but still sold food or merchandise to cover living expenses. None had received scholarships to support their university studies. All except one participant lived in university dormitories. The young women's majors varied across disciplines (see Text Box 10); the most popular fields of study were medicine (24 percent) and nursing (15 percent).

Of the 10 mothers of university students surveyed, only two had attended some secondary school and the other eight had dropped out during primary school. No immediate family members of any of the participating mothers had attended university and only one brother in one woman's family had received a high school diploma. All ten women were widows.

TEXT BOX 9.

The University of Kinshasa

The University of Kinshasa, the largest and most prestigious university in the DRC, offers both a university track and a vocational track. There are approximately 50,000 students enrolled in both tracks. Eighty percent of those in the university track are male, while 85 percent enrolled at vocational courses are female.

TEXT BOX 10.

Participants' areas of study

Administrative science, Agronomy, Communication, Humanities, Laboratory sciences, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Nutrition, Pediatrics, Psychology, Science and Social sciences

TABLE 7.

Student participants' backgrounds

Number of participants	33	
Age range	20-38 years old	
Public schooling (primary and secondary)	29	88%
First generation high school graduates	13	39%*
First generation university admission	22	67%
First and only member to graduate high school and attend university	7	21%
Received secondary school scholarship	0	0%
Receiving university scholarship	0	0%
Receiving financial support from family	32	96%
Currently Employed (part-time or full-time)	33	100%
Married	0	0%
Children	1	3%

*Some participants included themselves in the count, while others did not.

Overcoming challenges



© FHI 360

From family shame to family solidarity

De la houte familiale à la solidarité familiale

Elodie

29 years old

Kinshasa

Elodie, similar to many other young women interviewed in the DRC, was inspired by nuns in her community to serve as a sister in church.

Unlike many of her peers, however, Elodie bore two children to a married man before she finished high school. When she became pregnant in her second year of high school her mother sent her to live with the baby's father and his wife.









Misfortune followed Elodie to her new home, where she endured mistreatment by the baby's father and his wife, illness, ridicule from the community and eventual abandonment by the father of her children.

Despite these difficult circumstances, Elodie's love of education helped her to persevere. Eventually, Elodie obtained her high school diploma at the age of 25 with the moral support and encouragement of her teachers and school officials. Her mother was humiliated because Elodie had brought shame on their family, but she supported Elodie after she had been evicted from her children's father's home.

After graduating from secondary school, Elodie left her village for Kinshasa and moved into a cousin's home. He gave her money to start a small business selling bread and omelets at the university dormitories. Elodie regularly talked to other young women, who spoke with great enthusiasm about their university experiences and inspiring professors. With their encouragement, she became determined to attend university herself.

Elodie decided to study nursing and arranged to pay her tuition (US\$220 per year) in installments, because she could not afford school otherwise. Additionally, she spends approximately US\$200 per year on school supplies and fees for study groups. Without financial support from her family, Elodie relies on determination and the income from her small business. Some students mock her because of her age, but the kinder classmates praise her courage. Despite her challenges, Elodie is independent and proud of all she has accomplished on her own, including academic success and financial independence, while caring for her two children. She aspires to be their role model and hopes they will follow in her footsteps and prioritize education.

Although Elodie's family and community applauded her achievements, once she completed her first year at university, Elodie largely forged her own path to success without the encouragement of most members of her extended family or community. Nonetheless, she and her family know that once she completes her studies, Elodie will support both her extended family and her children, because family solidarity is of paramount importance in Congolese society.

<h2>About Elodie</h2>	
	FAMILY Six siblings; father is deceased; mother does not work
	MAJOR BA Nursing, 2nd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING Self-funded
	EMPLOYMENT Food vendor
	LIVING SITUATION Rents a room
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Hospital nurse
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and community ties • Financial need • Navigating the transition
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courage • School support • Peer encouragement

Challenges

Similar to many other participants in this study, **Elodie** is a wonderful example of young Congolese women who have managed to prevail despite overwhelming challenges. Elodie’s story, becoming a single mom before graduating from secondary school, is unique among the DRC participants, but illustrates some of the possible challenges young women in the country may face, especially in conflict areas. Following is further description of the common challenges that Elodie and other socio-economically disadvantaged women in the study experienced in pursuing their university education. Examples include the lack of family or community support, struggling to meet educational and daily living expenses, navigating secondary school and adjusting to university life.

Family and community ties

Although family members encouraged many of the participants to complete their university studies, other young women’s families were not initially supportive. Four young women reported that not a single family member supported their education. Nearly all participants said their parents were happy that they were at university, but that they are expected to marry upon graduation. **Marie** said, “My family wanted me to get married instead of going to the university, mainly because of lack of finances.” Similarly, **Josephine’s** stepfather told her, “University is for boys. You, you need to get married.” About half the young women stated that they were mocked in their community for

attending secondary school instead of marrying. **Neti**, an orphan, stated, “I was pressed to marry in my fourth year of secondary school by my paternal aunts.” Determined to graduate, she stood firm and has yet to marry.

Several young women said they felt pressure from their families to help mitigate family poverty. They spoke of relieving their mothers’ burdens, helping sick relatives or sending siblings to school. One mother said, “I am waiting for the day that my daughter will graduate from the university and take care of her siblings. If my other children never get the opportunity to go to school, it will be her fault.” The daughter was not interviewed but this statement exemplifies family expectations and the pressure that is often placed on young women nonetheless. All except one participant said that they would like to graduate and find employment as soon as possible, so they can help their families financially. **Naomi’s** mother told her, “I don’t know if I’ll live much longer, so you have to take over the responsibility of caring for your brothers because I know that I can count on you.” Naomi replied, “My mother’s words annoy me, but also help me be more accountable for my studies and my behavior. My family expects me to care for my brothers and my community expects me to contribute to the development of our society.” Some women emphasized that this pressure pushes them to work harder.

Nine of the women expressed that they initially wanted to study medicine, but changed their minds because of the time and money required to become

doctors. Some said their parents discouraged them from studying medicine because of the time it would take until they began to earn an income.

Meeting financial need

Similar to Elodie's challenges, the main hardships for study participants were financial. All participants had expectations and fears about moving to Kinshasa and attending university and questioned how they would be able to pay tuition and living expenses. Several did not know how they would pay for plane tickets to Kinshasa, as most provinces in the DRC do not have adequate roads to the capital city and plane tickets are expensive. Many saved money by working, others received funds from distant relatives and some used money that their parents had borrowed.

None of the women in this study received financial support from the national government, NGOs or private organizations, nor were they aware of any scholarships or organizations that assist university students. The participants also noted that before joining university, they were unaware of additional costs, such as laboratory fees for most courses and other required supplementary materials. Other common extra expenses included transportation, dorm room rental, study group fees, school supplies and food. Some young women also noted that they have not been able to return to their villages or even call home since they started university due to lack of funds. Many participants reported that they frequently miss meals and go to class hungry.

To pay for these costs, all the young women sold food or merchandise while also attending university as full-time students. Their expenses, however, often exceeded their incomes and many reported that they constantly worried about money, saying "Everything at the university revolves around money." Eight women admitted that they had resorted to commercial sex work to cover school expenses. Their clients were married men, but they did not reveal how the arrangements were made, the amount they were paid, whether they were currently engaged in commercial sex work, or if they protected themselves from sexually transmitted disease (and if not, whether they had been tested for HIV).

Navigating pre-university challenges

Prior to entering university, many of the study participants struggled to finish secondary school. One third of the sample had lost one or both parents and worked to finance their education or had distant family members or church authorities who paid for school fees and school supplies. The greatest obstacles were paying for school fees, school materials, medical care, food, electricity or candles for studying at night, transportation to and from school and toiletries. **Masala** recalled, "I was always worried and sometimes I had ideas of leaving school when thinking about how I was going to pay school fees. My family was not supportive of my going to school and my mother even asked me to drop out. I suffered a lot in those days. I often arrived at school crying." In addition to educational supplies and fees, **Chantalle** suffered from malaria and needed medicine. Her mother, a single mom with six children, started selling manioc (cassava) to pay for these additional expenses.

Almost half of the participants said they had to wake up early to walk to their secondary school, often arriving hungry. **Masala** would leave her home at 4:00 am to reach school. One day she was attacked by a young boy, but fortunately someone heard her screams and chased him away.

All the young women reported that the application process was easy to navigate, but most consulted individuals who had attended university.²³ In contrast, **Vuvu** noted, "No one in my family helped me at all during the process. Instead, my father and stepmother wanted me to get married and even presented me with suitors who were not educated."

Adjusting to university life

After navigating family support, enrolling in university and securing financial support, the young women interviewed identified many worries about university life, including difficult coursework, the distance from their families, or failing grades that led to mockery in their villages for neither succeeding in school nor marrying when having previously been presented with the opportunity. Young women identified the primary challenges as adjusting socially, maintaining personal safety and finding accommodation and transportation.

Adjusting socially

Tension existed between young women who grew up in Kinshasa and those who came from rural areas. The participants from Kinshasa said that young women from rural areas did not speak French well, did not know how to dress, were timid and had inferiority complexes. Those from rural areas said that young women from Kinshasa were vain and overly confident. The participants from rural areas said they had been mocked by Kinshasa residents and are called “peasants.” Nonetheless, the young women did report softening and changing attitudes toward those they had considered different at the start of their university experiences. “My own culture has changed because I’ve encountered new cultures,” said **Naomi**.

Personal safety

Most of the young women who participated in the study had never visited Kinshasa before they started their university education. Many of them had negative expectations about the city and university life based on hearsay from friends or relatives. Many women worried that it would be difficult to talk to professors and their assistants, as they heard that some demand sexual favors or money for good grades. None of the participants admitted acquiescing to monetary or sexual demands from professors, although corruption in the form of overcharging students for supplementary materials as well as demanding money or sexual relations for grades was mentioned by many of them. For that reason, many young women do not approach certain professors for fear that they may be forced to offer bribes or worse. **Naomi** discussed her fears of interacting with professors, “I was afraid of being forced to offer a bribe in order to pass a class, or to have to go out with professors or teaching assistants to receive good marks. I was even afraid to go into the office of a professor for fear that he would turn his attention on me.”

This common phenomenon is called Chic-Choc-Chec (see Text Box 11). There are university policies against sexual harassment, but few women report these activities because they need the money or good grades, are unaware of policies and how to proceed or cannot pay fees for filing complaints.

Finding accommodation and transportation

One-third of study participants commented that dorm life was nearly impossible because there were disagreements among the occupants, theft,

overcrowding and strife because some young women did not share food. Due to financial constraints, most participants could not afford the normal dormitory arrangement of two students per dorm room and several reported having shared dorm rooms with more than two occupants to afford the rent. Under these circumstances, domestic life is a compromise, as they must decide who slept on the beds or on the floor and they often had to wait to use bathrooms and cooking facilities, which cut into study time.

TEXT BOX 11.

Chic Choc Chec

Chic: University males who are good-looking, well-dressed and charming towards young women from villages.

Choc: Anyone of authority at the university: professors, assistants or administrators.

Chec: The money that men use to ask young women for sexual relations, while the young women hope to marry them in return.



© FHI 360

A study participant stands outside her university in Kinshasa.

Achieving success



© FHI 360

Sitting at the table

Assis á la table

Naomi

25 years old

Kinshasa

Naomi grew up in Kasai province, where girls are required to eat on the floor instead of sitting at the table

and are often married by 6th grade. Her mother, an educated nurse, insisted that Naomi continue her education.

Naomi's paternal uncles wanted her to marry when she reached 6th grade; she was offered a dowry and was ridiculed by neighbors because she chose to study instead. But Naomi was proud to continue her studies despite the local stereotype that labeled educated, single girls as commercial sex workers. While many of her 6th grade classmates were leaving school to marry, Naomi found time to serve as a peer educator, raising awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention.









Naomi's mother's support of her secondary education abruptly ended when her sister's husband divorced her and demanded restitution of the dowry. Against the wishes of their mother who was concerned about finances and with the encouragement of her older sister who had studied at university, Naomi continued to set her sights on higher education. Naomi's relatives implored her to remain in the village, as a secondary degree was viewed as sufficient for a young woman of her socioeconomic background. They warned her that young women who left the village for university in Kinshasa were perceived as sex workers.

Naomi had many fears about university, especially of receiving unwanted attention from professors or young men and of simply being alone, which she had never experienced in her village. Despite her

fears and the discouragement of the people she knew, she recalled her mother saying when she was younger, "If you are afraid of the dark, you must approach the darkness. The more you make contact with the darkness, the more you advance."

Naomi was determined to finance her own education even though her relatives suggested that she marry so her husband would pay her school fees. To save money after secondary school, Naomi took a year off to work as a peer educator again, this time with the National Adolescent Health Program. Now enrolled in university, she finances her education by selling sausages, pancakes, cosmetics and clothing to other students. Her annual expenses are approximately US\$800, including tuition, an unfurnished shared dorm room, school supplies and study group fees. Her food and transportation expenses are additional. The experience of her sister, who was abandoned by her husband, haunts Naomi and she is determined to be financially independent.

Today Naomi is studying psychology with a focus on business management. She hopes to have a family and a successful career in human resources, perhaps as a supervisor of a company. She dreams of sitting at the table with her colleagues, both men and women, to build a stronger company.

About Naomi	
 FAMILY	Seven siblings; father is deceased; mother is a nurse
 MAJOR	BA Psychology, 4th year
 EDUCATION FUNDING	Self-funded
 EMPLOYMENT:	Vendor
 LIVING SITUATION	Dormitory with five roommates
 FUTURE ASPIRATIONS	Supervisor
 CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family ties • Pressure to marry • Financial need
 SUCCESS FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination • Entrepreneurship • Family support

Success factors

Similar to Naomi, the other 33 participants interviewed in the DRC have overcome challenges, are enrolled in university and serve as role models in their communities. Naomi's success can be attributed to her determination and entrepreneurial spirit as well as her family support, although it was not always present. Naomi's explanation of success summarizes participants' sentiments, "My biggest success at the university is my persistence, along with optimism despite difficulties. I say to myself, I will graduate with the help of God, hard work and preparation." Following is a further description of the common factors of success that Naomi and other study participants credited in helping them pursue their university education. Examples include determination, entrepreneurship, family support and community support including religious faith.

Determination

Determination, sense of purpose and grit describe how these young women were able to succeed in the face of numerous obstacles. Many young women interviewed say they could not stand still "with their arms crossed," and they must actively pursue their dreams and goals. When some of them received little encouragement to attend university, lacked knowledge of the realities of university life and were not aware of how to pay for their education, they decided that they would achieve success no matter what it took. A majority of the women say they are most proud of their

success at university as a result of their own hard work, intelligence, creativity and, many added, without falling into corrupt deeds.

Entrepreneurship

Similar to Elodie and Naomi, all the female participants from the DRC were proud of supporting themselves financially. Their activities included selling bread, sausage, yogurt, omelets, bananas, peanuts and peanut butter, oranges, sweet potatoes, smoked or grilled fish, clothing, cosmetics and jewelry. They sold food or merchandise on campus, in the dorms, lecture halls, or on the side of the street. In addition to funding their education and living expenses, their little businesses gave them a sense of independence, pride and "know how." Many said that there were no jobs on campus or in Kinshasa for university students, so they relied on their own entrepreneurial initiatives to earn money.

Family support

Although many people in the lives of these young women discouraged them from attending university, there was almost always someone, either their mother, uncle, aunt, cousin, brother or sister, who was the voice that encouraged them. For example, **Chantalle's** immediate family did not encourage her, but an uncle who studied at the university and his girlfriend encouraged Chantalle to apply. **Neti** found encouragement from an aunt, married very young, who said, "Marriage, you will certainly have that one day, but you need to study first."

Even though many young women could not afford to call their family members as often as they would like, or at all, they were still reassured by their families' encouragement to succeed. Those who did not have the strong support of family members spoke of encouragement from friends, classmates, or roommates.

All the young women first imagined they might go to university when someone they knew inspired them: a cousin, a teacher or a father who had since died. Almost everyone mentioned an educated figure who provided support when their hardships felt overwhelming.

Community, NGO and government support

While participants received almost no material, academic or emotional support from non-governmental organizations or the government, they identified peers as a source of support. Almost all the young women joined study groups in their first year. These sessions aided their academic performance and were enjoyed as a social outlet, yet almost all of those who initially began attending study groups decided to quit and study alone, primarily for financial reasons. Two-thirds of participants reported that dorm life was beneficial; their roommates provided friendship and shared food when one of them was without.

Additionally, some recounted secondary school teachers who instilled the belief that, "A secondary school diploma will not get you anywhere; you need to go to university to get a good job in this country."

In return, many participants discussed a sense of responsibility to help poor people other than their own families. Some mentioned opening an orphanage and many spoke of working for NGOs.

Religious faith

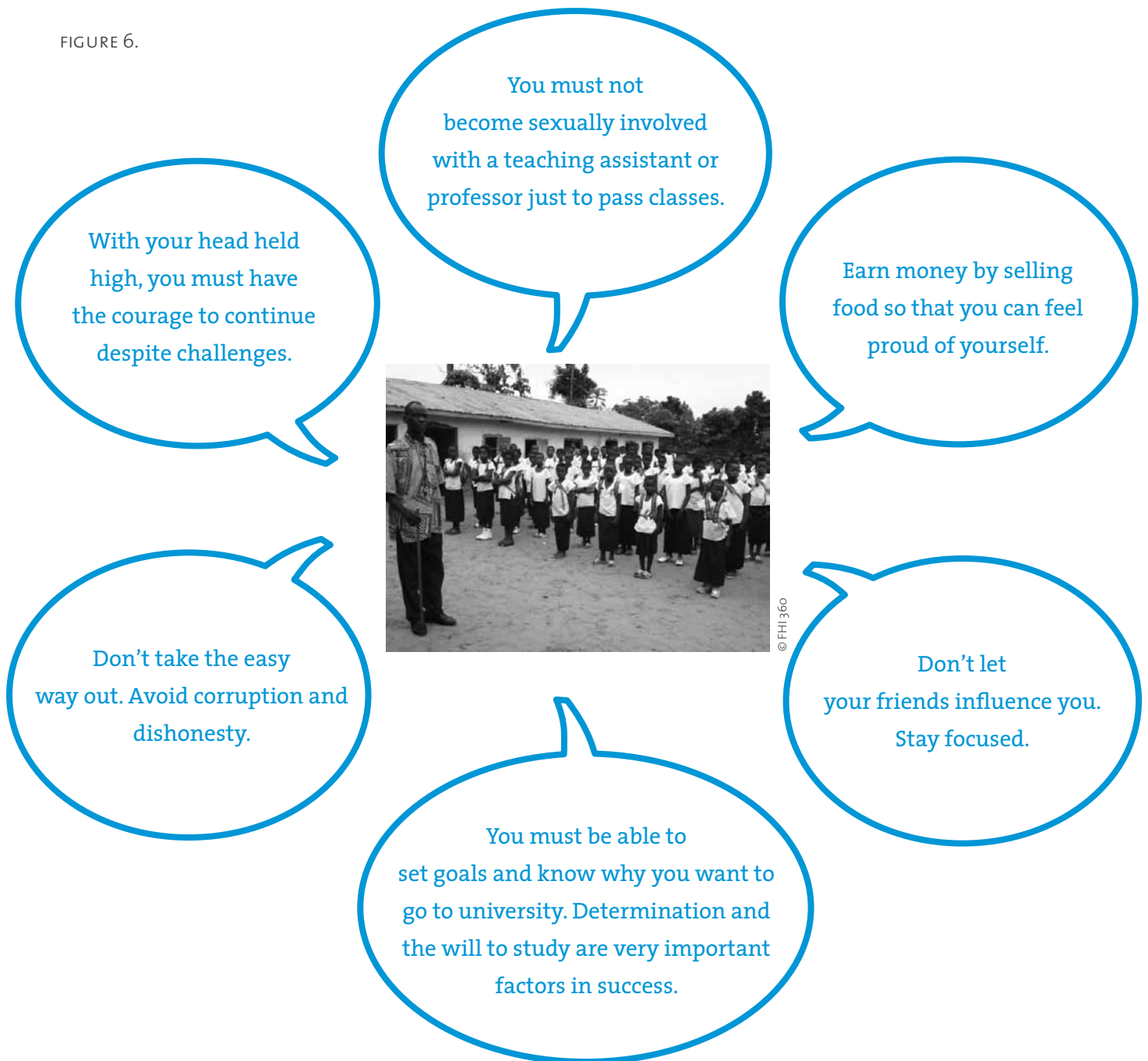
Being part of a religious community was important for many of the study participants. All of the DRC participants in this study were Christian, like the majority of the Congolese population. Most young women reported that they attend church every Sunday or even every day and many of them sing in church choirs. Participants reported that they rely on God for guidance and strength. When the young women have to make difficult decisions, such as enrolling in university, they pray for guidance. When they succeed, it is God's will and when their lives

are difficult, that is also God's will. The women are proud to have made their own way but also attribute this accomplishment to God. **Rose** explained, "I confide in God through prayer because humans and knowledge cannot give me all that I need."

In their voices: Advice to young Congolese women

The participants from the DRC, who are role models and future leaders, had important advice for their peers. Their central message was to be goal-oriented, serious and honest students. Specific suggestions are quoted below (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6.





© FHI 360

Yewbdar and Netsanet take notes during class.



Ethiopia

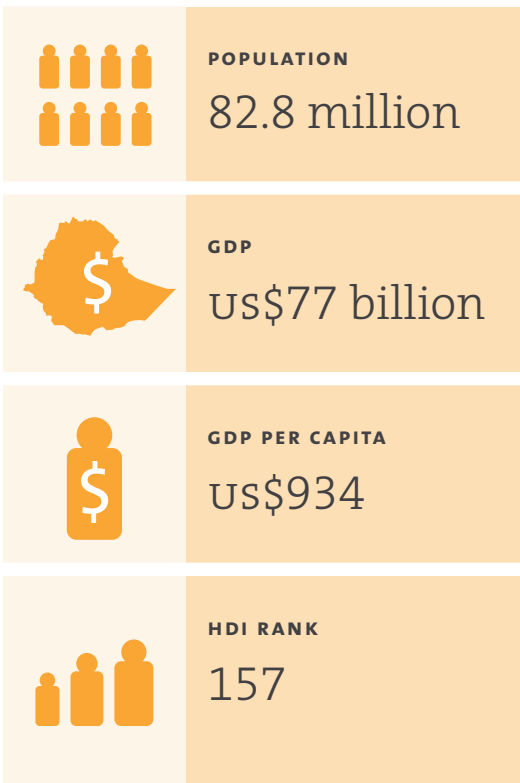
ኢትዮጵያ

FHI 360

Ethiopia, in Eastern Africa, is the oldest independent country in Africa.²⁴ Bordered by six countries, it has more than 82 million residents and is the most populous landlocked country in the world.²⁵ The capital, Addis Ababa, has more than 2.8 million people.²⁶ With a poverty-stricken economy, 85 percent of this diverse, multi-ethnic country is employed in agriculture and the country relies heavily on exports such as coffee.²⁷ The official language is Amharic.²⁸

More than 38 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Severely impacted by HIV/AIDS, Ethiopia has low life expectancy, high infant mortality and low growth rates; the median age is 16.8 years.²⁹ Much of the population lives in pastoralist communities that present unique educational challenges. Further pressure is being placed on education as rural populations become displaced by frequent droughts and food shortages, which disrupts community cohesion and educational opportunities, including female and overall student enrollment.

In spite of these challenges, there are rays of hope. This country study describes the educational landscape, presents the research findings based on discussions with the 33 study participants and introduces two role models, **Yewbdar** and **Netsanet**, young Ethiopian women who have successfully navigated challenges in pursuit of university studies.

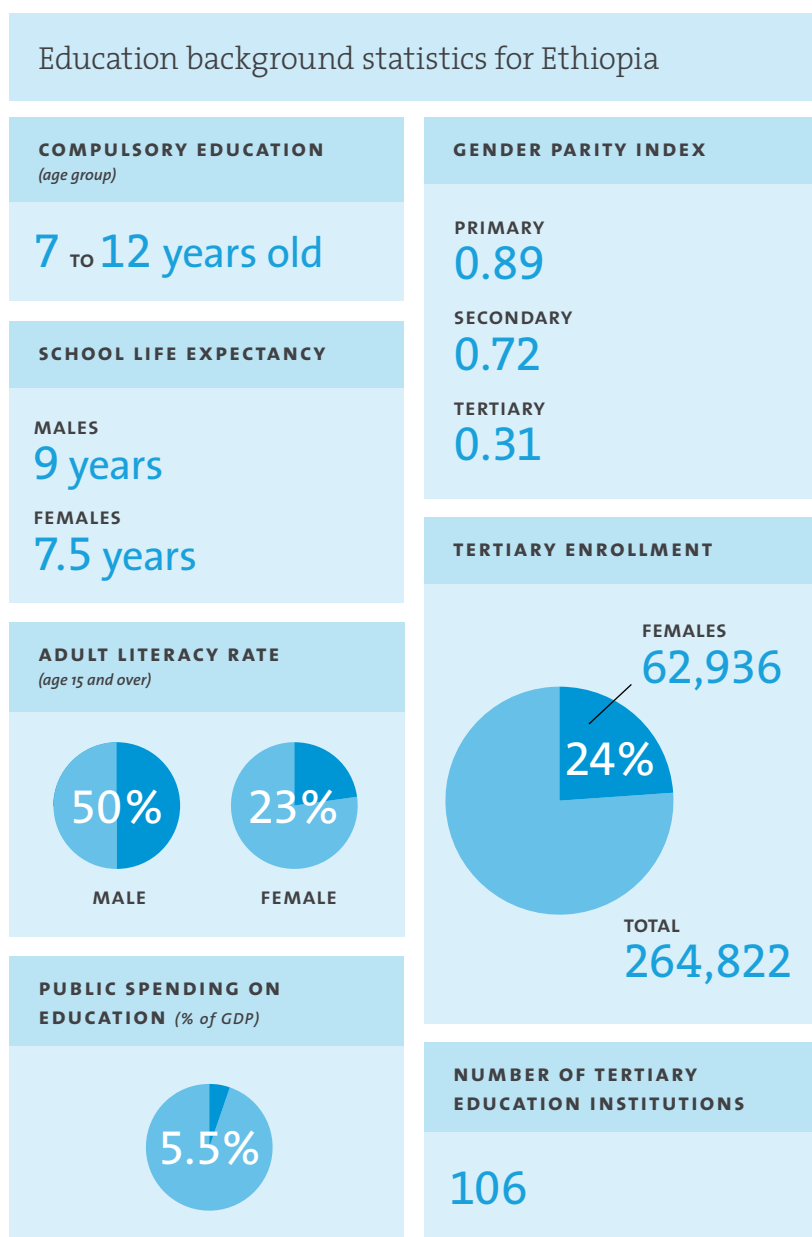


See endnote 6 for data sources.

The educational landscape

In the last decade, Ethiopia has prioritized expanding enrollment in primary education, which resulted in an increase in female enrollment. Today, more girls (42 percent) than boys (39 percent) now complete primary school.³⁰ However, the gender gap widens in favor of boys after critical exams in 8th and 10th grades, when girls disproportionately fail and drop out of school. This has led to a gap in gross secondary school enrollment, which is 37 percent for boys and only 24 percent for girls.³¹ Completion rates are even lower—only 2.5 percent of girls and 3.4 percent of boys in Ethiopia completed secondary school in 2005.³²

FIGURE 7.



The Ethiopian government increased investment in education as a share of GDP from 3.5 percent in 2000 to 5.5 percent in 2007,³³ which is higher than the 3.9 percent average for Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴ However, adult literacy rates, 50 percent for males and 23 percent for females, reflect gender disparity (see Figure 7).

Tertiary education

Despite the government's efforts to expand tertiary education, only four percent of Ethiopians enroll in universities.³⁵ In 2008, the total enrollment in undergraduate education was 264,822 students, of whom only 24 percent were women.

Tertiary education is free. The government provides tuition, food and health care for full-time students as well as lodging for students who meet need-based criteria. However, basic living expenses such as toiletries, transportation and other incidentals are not covered. Transportation costs are a serious impediment as exam scores and fields of study determine university placement and students may find themselves far from their home towns with little financial support. The 106 tertiary institutions are scattered across all 11 regions in Ethiopia.

Study participants

All 33 study participants were students at Addis Ababa University (see Text Box 13). Among these 33 young women, 30 were from outside of Addis Ababa, the greatest distance being 270 miles. Three of the respondents were supported by the USAID-funded Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program

See endnote 6 for data sources.

in secondary school and one respondent received a scholarship from an Ethiopian regional NGO named the Tigray Development Organization.³⁶ Additionally, the five mothers of university students (not study participants) who participated in the focus group discussion were from Addis Ababa; each had a daughter who attended university outside of Addis Ababa and their perspectives were used to complement the students' perspectives.

More than 63 percent were the first in their family to attend university and slightly fewer were the first in their families to graduate from secondary school (see Table 8). Participants' family sizes ranged from one to 10, but averaged 6 siblings. Most of the young women's families sent some of their children to school. At least half the women are orphans. All except a few had parents who were illiterate. Three of the participants were married, one was divorced and another had a child.

All except one of the participants lived in dormitories. Education, room and board are provided by the government through a student loan program, which requires university graduates to begin repaying 15 percent of their tuition and 100 percent of their room and board six months after graduation. The Ethiopian government extracts 10 percent of the students' salary from each paycheck to cover this amount. Most study participants did not work or engage in income-generating activities, not because they did not want to, but because opportunities were difficult to find. Only two women had part-time employment (one in the computer center and another as a tutor at the university) and two of the young women earned money by cleaning dormitory rooms or doing laundry. A handful received a few dollars every few months from their parents for necessities. However, most often went without soap, sanitary pads and other personal necessities.

All participants were pursuing bachelor's degrees. One-third of the young women were active in university clubs and others intended to join. Their majors varied across disciplines, but approximately 30 percent studied the social sciences (see Text box 12).

TEXT BOX 12.

Participants' areas of study

THEIR MAJORS INCLUDE

Amharic Folklore, Amharic Language, English Language, Geography, History, Information Science, Linguistics, Management, Oromo Language, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations, Psychology, Sports Education and Tigrinia Language

TABLE 8.

Student participants' backgrounds		
Number of participants	33	
Age Range	19-24 years old	
Public schooling (primary and secondary)	33	100%
First generation high school graduates	18	54%
First generation university admission	21	63%
First and only member to graduate high school and attend university	18	54%
Received secondary school scholarship	5	15%
Receiving university scholarship*	0	0%
Receiving financial support from their families	4	12%
Currently Employed (part-time or full-time)	4	12%
Married	3	9%
Children	1	3%

**While tuition, room and board are provided free of cost to university students, some organizations give material support in the form of school supplies and clothing (see Family Distrust case study) to offset the additional costs of education. Given that participants did not regard this as a scholarship, this statistic is therefore not cross-nationally comparable to similar statistics in other country case studies.*

TEXT BOX 13.

Addis Ababa University

Addis Ababa University, established in 1950, is the oldest and most prestigious tertiary institution in Ethiopia. The total number of enrolled students for 2010-2011 is 24,123, nearly one-third of whom are female. Only 9.6 percent of the professors are female. All university students have rooms in the dorms, except those who live in Addis Ababa. Rooms are randomly assigned to ensure that young women are not segregated by ethnicity.

Overcoming challenges



© FHI 360

Family distrust

የቤተሰብ ተርጉፍ

Yewbdar

22 years old

Addis Ababa

Yewbdar's parents were not willing to send her to school as a young girl. However, she and her friends desperately wished to attend school to understand the English taunts (“hyenas” and “dogs”) they received from the village children who did go to school. At eight years old, she decided to take charge of her education. She took 10 Birr (US\$0.60) from her parents to register at school. At first, she only wanted to learn English to understand the name-calling, but she then began to love the other subjects, too.








Though Yewbdar quickly emerged as the top student of her class, she still struggled fiercely with her parents over attending school as they did not understand the benefits of education. They wanted her to marry, a wish they began expressing when she was only eight years old. They insisted that she leave school but Yewbdar told them she would rather die than drop out. She remembered crying just to convince them to buy her one pen. Despite the lack of financial and moral support, she attained the marks required to take a scholarship qualifying exam and scored high enough to receive a scholarship to a private high school.

With that scholarship, Yewbdar wore shoes for the first time in her life and all of her material needs such as books, food, soap and clothing, were provided. A few years later she learned that she had been accepted into university but was more concerned than excited. Yewbdar did not have any money but managed to convince the school director to give

her a summer job for which she earned 800 Birr (US\$47) in total.

Her greatest challenge at university was lack of funds. In her first semester she spent all the money she had earned on copying materials for classes. Despite her status as a star student, Yewbdar thought she may be forced to drop out to earn money so she could continue her education. Instead, she joined the Young Women's Christian Association and began receiving basic financial, material and moral support.

Yewbdar struggled financially and socially to succeed at university. In addition, her family still did not believe that she was actually enrolled in college. They thought that she pretended to be a student to cover up a secret job in Addis Ababa so that she would not have to send money back to them. Her family's distrust negatively impacted her morale, especially because her friends' parents called often to offer moral or financial support.

<h1>About Yewbdar</h1>	
	LIVING SITUATION Dormitory
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Master's degree
	FAMILY Three siblings; father deceased; mother is illiterate farmer
	MAJOR BA Folklore, 2nd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING Government and partial scholarship
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family ties • Financial need • Pressure to marry
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courage • Determination • Organizational support

Nonetheless, Yewbdar balanced her academic success and happiness at the university with the pain of her family's rejection and her lack of financial resources. Yewbdar was no longer the young girl that was ridiculed for not going to school; she aimed to complete her bachelor's degree and continue on to pursue a master's degree. She hoped her education would help her become financially secure so she could support her brother's tertiary education.

Challenges

The family resistance that **Yewbdar** encountered, financial pressure she faced and the persistent pressures for her to marry were not uncommon for young women in Ethiopia. The 33 young participants in this study identified financial, familial and social pressures as obstacles in their pathway towards graduating from secondary school and pursuing higher education.

Family ties

Two young women mentioned that their families encouraged them to study only because of their birth order. **Nasria**, the youngest of seven, explained, "It isn't in our culture for all to study." Although her parents wanted to send all their children to school, they could only bear the economic burden of education when she reached school age and her siblings were all older.

Pressure to marry

The cultural pressure to marry instead of attend school was strong for many of the participants.

Tigist's account was common:

My parents wanted me to marry when I was 12 years old because they said they couldn't support me economically, but I refused. I didn't agree with my parents and I got five Birr (US\$0.30) from friends and went to the town where I attended secondary school. I was living with my relatives who were very poor and my friends and the community provided me with food.

Tadesse's parents supported her education initially. However, her mother suggested she marry in 4th grade after her father died. Instead of following her mother's wishes, similar to Tigist, she ran away and went to live with relatives in Addis Ababa. However, she ended up marrying a young man to escape her family's hold on her life.

Financial need

The study participants cited financial pressure as a major challenge at every level of education and at the university level in particular. The young women did not anticipate the costs for basic, necessary items, including toiletries, sanitary products, charges to photocopy class materials, medical expenses and costs for travel between their home villages and Addis Ababa.

Netsanet lamented, "Despite all of the challenges I've confronted, it's embarrassing that I don't even

have the resources to buy toiletries and feminine products. I think it's harder for girls—it may not sound like a big burden, but being female does create extra difficulties.” In addition to feminine products, every respondent mentioned the expensive photocopying requirements for classes. **Genet** described an upsetting experience in which a professor forced her to leave class because she had not copied a bulky set of materials, thus preventing her from participating or absorbing the material on which she would be tested. Medical expenses can also be a difficult challenge when they are not expected. **Tadesse** struggled to pay her medical bills when she was hospitalized for tuberculosis.

Many young women from hot, dry regions were surprised by Addis Ababa's cool and wet climate during most of the year. They did not have proper clothing and struggled to find warm clothes or did without. These costs were particularly burdensome because they did not expect to need money while enrolled in a government-financed university. Several participants reported that the lack of income-generating opportunities for young women who need funds could lead to commercial sex work.

Adjusting to university life

Adjusting socially

Many participants were concerned that they would stand out as being poor or be ridiculed because of their clothing. Fortunately, many of them realized that this was not important and they were rarely judged. **Selamawit** explained her reconciliation with her limited wardrobe, “I sometimes felt bad when other students had new clothes and I did not have another set of clothes. At times I was not able to wash what I was wearing and my spare dress was torn. But my friends advised me that I should not feel this and then I was okay with it.”

Academic concerns

The Ministry of Education has identified expanded university enrollment for young, vulnerable women from rural areas as a key priority and subsequently lowered the minimum entry scores for this group. However, the young women in the study explained that the government does not provide remedial education classes or extra academic support to ensure that they do not fall behind in class. This assistance provides support in the admission process but does not help them succeed post-enrollment.

Several of the young women are proud of “surviving here, even when many other girls have been dismissed,” but feel they need additional support, skills and resources to successfully complete their studies.

Personal safety

Many participants discussed the predatory nature of males, both professors and peers, at the university. They unanimously agreed that some boys use academic assistance, force and/or bribery to initiate sexual relationships with female students.

Tadesse stated:

When it comes to relationships with other students, my relationships with girls are fine, but boys try to change the relationship. Whenever you appear to be helpless or ask for their help they approach and act like they want to assist you and then they begin to ask for other things and push for sex. The same thing happens with teachers. There is no way to feel protected.

Several young women confirmed rumors that some male professors assigned their female students lower grades than they deserved and proposed that they raise their grades by consenting to sex.

All the women commented that to succeed in school, females had to be wary of males, both students and teachers. The young women strongly believed that engaging in sexual relationships, particularly those that were exploitative, would derail their hard work and lead them astray. Several participants expressed concern, mostly from personal experience, that male peers grew more aggressive and even violent if refused an opportunity to date or have sex. **Tadesse** pointed out, “Many girls need to know about relationships, especially with boys. It is better for girls to learn about these things while they're in high school because many girls are victims or HIV positive as a result; some of them get pregnant and get abortions. All these things happen because of lack of awareness.”

Discrimination

Although five young women mentioned a university gender office tasked with receiving complaints, they explained the office lacked power to take action on abuse, discrimination and harassment. One young woman explained, “The job of the administration is to keep the students calm; nobody is worried about the quality of the teaching or if we have problems with boys or professors. There is

a counselor in the university, but even if we report it to the counselor, she is in no position to report it to higher officials.”

Several young women complained of professors discriminating based on attractiveness or ethnic background. **Tadesse** noted, “Some teachers are not helpful: They are discriminatory. They give special support for those coming from cities. There was a rumor that the subjects taught here are difficult and that teachers assign grades based on ethnic backgrounds. I think that’s true. Girls from rural areas usually reject any sexual requests so teachers prey on city girls and favor them.”



© FHI 360

Netsanet and Yewbdar wash their hands after lunch.

Achieving success



© FHI 360

Defying tradition

ባህላዊ ልማድ ማስቀረቅ (ማስወገድ)

Netsanet

23 years old

Addis Ababa

Netsanet was married when she was 11 years old, a marriage that was arranged before she was born. Her mother suffered several miscarriages before she gave birth to Netsanet, so one day she went to church to pray. She met a man who promised to pray for her and offered additional support if she would allow his son to marry her first daughter. She consented and when Netsanet was born, her husband-to-be was already seven years old. They married when Netsanet was 11 and he was 18. Her father spent a lot of money for the marriage and her dowry, which led to resentment and his refusal to support her education. Netsanet lived in the village with her family while her husband attended school in town. Fearing that he would abandon her for an educated wife once he completed schooling, she decided to educate herself.

Netsanet's marriage only lasted one year. Even after her husband left her, she continued walking two hours each way to school. Netsanet could not imagine living the same life as her mother, who suffered in an unhappy marriage.








When Netsanet decided to attend university, her father felt that she was no longer his daughter because she had defied his wish for her to remain in the village. She sent village elders to convince him to contribute to her education, if only to support her transportation costs. Initially he refused, but the village community supported Netsanet and recognized the challenges she overcame to attend college. They persuaded her father that his daughter was succeeding in life and his family was the

luckiest in the village. Upon the community's insistence, Netsanet's father gave her 200 Birr (US\$ 12).

As a young girl already engaged to be married, Netsanet wanted to be a lawyer to advocate for women's rights. Once in university, her interest shifted to psychology. She hoped to open her own counseling center and assist women in abusive or unhealthy relationships. At the time of this study, she served as advisor to female students entering the university in which she informed them about procedures and provided warnings about relations with boys.

Her energy and determination to attend university was a result of the strength she developed when

About Netsanet

	LIVING SITUATION Dormitory
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Master's degree in psychology
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early marriage • Family ties • Financial need
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courageous • Goal-oriented • Community support
	FAMILY Seven siblings (none went to school), mother and father are illiterate farmers
	MAJOR BA Psychology, 2nd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING Government and self-funded

faced with great obstacles, particularly without basic moral support. She learned that success would come from her own efforts and resolve; and she became an inspiration to others by succeeding despite having defied her family. Her success story was even published in her province!

Success factors

Despite the socio-cultural pressures and financial difficulties Netsanet and other participants identified, they defiantly overcame these challenges and achieved success. Netsanet's success can be linked to her courage and goal-oriented nature as well as to the community support she received. Many of the young women interviewed stated that university was one of only two viable options that could change their lives. In addition to tertiary education, the other option was commercial sex work, which has serious health, safety and psychological risks. Thus, from their perspective, education was the only escape that provided an alternative to the cycle of poverty. As a testament to this belief, one study participant described education as "liberating." Though each young woman interviewed had a unique pathway to success and "liberation" through education, their themes were quite similar.

Courage

The majority of participants viewed education as powerful because it was the key to self-reliance and self-sufficiency. These young women displayed resolve and commitment to pursuing and

completing education, even if it meant disobeying family wishes and moving away from home and community support networks. The courage to live different lives than their parents drove many of the young women forward despite the obstacles they faced. Many respondents had witnessed or experienced abuse, abject poverty, abandonment and other traumatic events that motivated them to achieve self-dependence. However, navigating these traumatic events and tough challenges, not only took courage, but instilled in the young women a feeling that life is a solitary journey and, as **Nasira** said, "It's only me who can make a difference in my life."

On the other hand, this courageous attitude brought about new experiences. As a result many of the study participants reported transformations in social behavior and social skills after entering university. Alone at university, during their freshman years, the participants learned to modify their study habits, social behavior and cultural beliefs about unfamiliar ethnic groups. **Abate**, from the Amhara region, reflected, "I now believe that everyone is equal and people of different ethnic backgrounds have generally similar behaviors. Growing up, we had been afraid of different ethnic groups and I'm sure that they had rumors that we were savages, too." Although she grew up in a fully Christian village in which residents derided Islam, she bonded with Muslims upon arriving on campus and has completely altered her perception of Islam. When asked about their most significant changes since arriving at university, a majority of the young

women described an increased ability to interact with students from other backgrounds and talk openly about problems and pain with their diverse set of peers. The young women cited their courage and determination to succeed at university as an inspiration to develop the best techniques and strategies to thrive in their new environment.

Goal-oriented nature

All of the study participants felt a boost of confidence when they scored well enough on the 10th grade exams to attend college. Passing the exams affirmed that they could dream big and pursue university as a future goal.

Almost every survey participant discussed the importance of working toward defined goals. These young women were remarkably goal-oriented, have disciplined behavior and approximately half emphasized the importance of problem-solving to circumvent obstacles. For example, to meet financial challenges, one-fourth found jobs cleaning dormitories, washing other students' clothes or performing similar tasks around campus.

Family support

For **Netsanet** and many of the other young women interviewed, family support was not always present and many faced initial resistance from family and community members when they announced their intention to study at university. One young woman, whose family initially encouraged her to remain in the village instead of attending university, said that they have become her greatest supporters, "My family supports me morally; they encourage me with advice and say that I will continue until the end." However, many overcame challenges in pursuit of tertiary education without familial support. In comparison, **Netsanet's** community played a role in helping to influence her father to provide financial support.

Community, NGO and government support

In most cases community members' eventual acceptance of participants' decisions to attend university surprised the young women. Previously, they felt ostracized by their communities but followed their dreams anyway. However, most respondents reported that their communities began to view them as role models for achieving academic and

personal success, despite the challenges posed by their living conditions. This delayed reaction did not deter them from enrolling in university. When asked about treatment by community members on trips home, the young women responded that non-university educated peers in the village viewed them as "wise," "brave" and "respected." This unexpected approval and recognition as leaders raised their self-confidence. It encouraged them to stay in university and to work harder. They now see themselves as role models for their community.

Religious faith

Ethiopia's devout population is 69 percent Christian and 30 percent Muslim.³⁷ The overwhelming majority of young women in this study are Christian and nearly all listed the church as a great source of inspiration and endurance when faced with the tough conditions on the path to university. *Bayt a Christien*, Amharic for "church," was a common response when participants were asked to list the non-academic elements of their daily life. **Kimiya** explained, "We have to be very strong in our faith first. All things get better from the religion and our commitment to religion." **Addis** said, "It should be understood that learning is secondary. We have to focus on our religion as well. It is a basic and fundamental thing for every girl. It is not just about education, we have to know about our religion too." For young women lacking moral support from family, or facing outright resistance from parents, the refuge of the church and moral support of religious figures helped them to persevere.

Guidance and peer support

The young women surveyed received varying levels of information about university life, advice about how to select a major and assistance in applying to university. A handful of participants attended formal orientations at their secondary schools. However, for those whose school did not offer formal orientation sessions about the university application process, respondents spoke with university students who returned home to their villages during the summer. One woman spoke about the information she received from a friend:

I received information about what university is like from university students who came to my village during the vacation. Those students were telling me about the challenges—academic and social—at university. They explained some of the characteristics demonstrated by girls from cities

and said for us not to follow those examples, like having boyfriends or allowing sexual relations. Girls who do that forget their purposes.

Although most respondents reported receiving erroneous or exaggerated information regarding university life from older students, the influence of these role models on younger students was substantial. **Yewbdar** remembered that as a young girl, she respected and looked up to the university students because they were involved in community activities such as planting trees, teaching children during the summer and serving the local administration by organizing files. Yewbdar respected their knowledge and ability to work with the community, as well as their ability to introduce new ideas into the community.

For **Genet**, older peers who returned home for vacations inspired her with stories of social harmony among Ethiopia's 80 ethnic groups. University students also instructed her not to have a boyfriend and to avoid sexual relationships. Once at university, only a few young women found seniors that were available and willing to mentor freshmen.

One-quarter of those surveyed wished for more structured activities in which older and younger female students could interact.

When students are far from their families, the support of friends, dormitory mates and older students becomes increasingly important. Study participants relied on support from male friends in secondary school because males tended to do better academically and were more likely to pursue higher education. However, at university, almost all began to favor the company, support and advice of women, mainly due to the predatory experiences they had with university men.

Most cited informal dormitory discussions among peers about topics ranging from university events to teacher abuse to relationship advice as the most helpful and informative tool for young women, especially those from rural backgrounds unaccustomed to aggressive treatment from men.



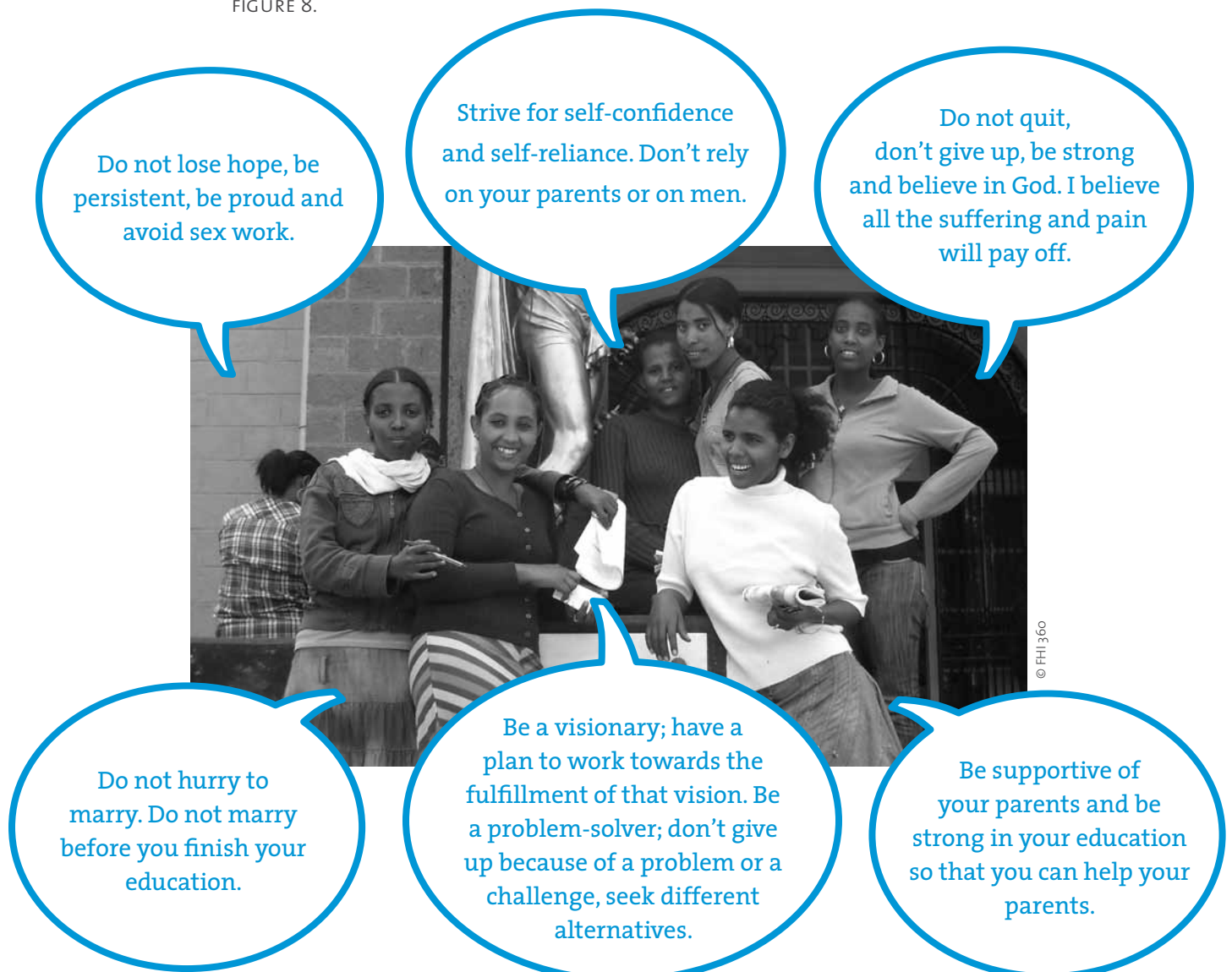
© FHI 360

Netsanet buys soap at the market.

In their voices: Advice to young Ethiopian women

When asked about the advice they would give to other young women applying to university, the vast majority of participants recommend postponing dating and sexual relationships and avoiding transactional sexual relationships or commercial sex work. They also advised young women to study in groups, take tutoring classes, manage their time carefully and be active in clubs on campus. They did not want female students to succumb to peer pressure and stressed that young women must be confident, motivated and determined, because success was about the ability to stay focused and in control of situations. Figure 8 has specific recommendations from the study participants.

FIGURE 8.





© FHI 360

Students read in their dorm room.



© Manit Balmiki

The lead researcher meets with Meera and her family in her home.



India

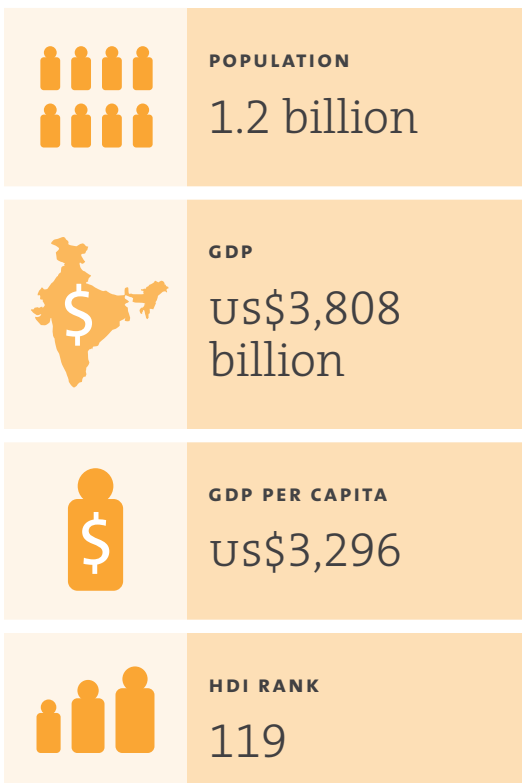
भारत

Room to Read

India, home to 1.2 billion people and one of the world’s fastest growing economies and largest democracies, is a diverse landscape of cultures, languages and geographies spread over a million square miles. However, with 37 percent of the population, or approximately 410 million people, living in poverty, India is home to one third of the world’s poorest people.³⁸

In the last decade, the government’s “Education for All” initiative has increased primary school enrollment, expanded school infrastructure, reduced out-of-school children, increased transition rates and narrowed the gender gap.³⁹ However, substantial gender disparities remain and are often emphasized by culture, caste structure and geography. Families that are socially and economically disadvantaged remove their girls from formal schools at the onset of puberty. Many girls are forced into early marriage, often becoming young mothers; and those who are not married take on household responsibilities⁴⁰ and do not have the opportunity to realize their full academic potential. Women have widely different educational experiences across India. In the southern state of Kerala, women have achieved nearly 90 percent literacy, whereas in the northern state of Bihar, this rate is only 31 percent. Ensuring education for all citizens in the second most populous nation in the world is an enormous challenge. Ensuring education for girls and young women is an even greater task.

This country study describes the educational landscape, presents research findings based on discussions with the 25 study participants and introduces two success stories, **Meera** and **Manorama**, young Indian women who have reached new heights and managed to pursue university studies.

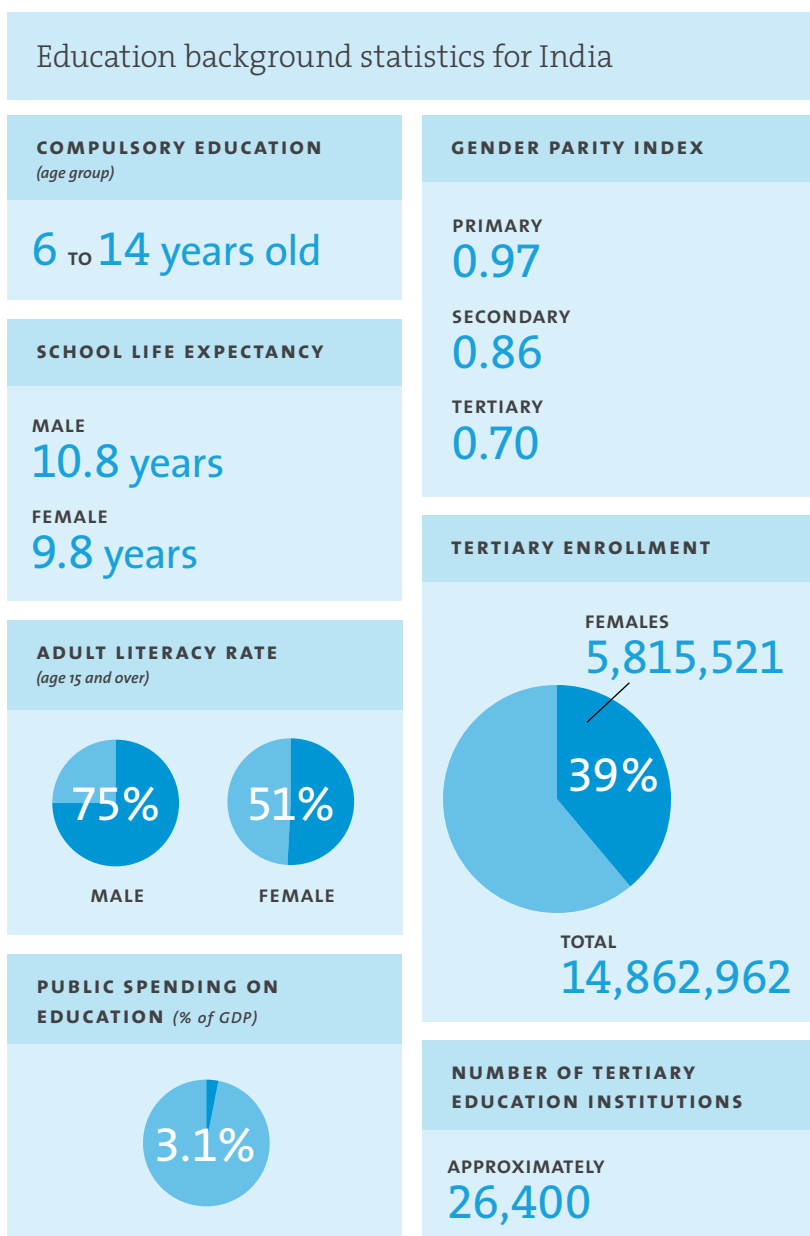


See endnote 6 for data sources.

The educational landscape

There are many challenges to overcome in India's educational system. Although schooling is free and compulsory from 6 to 14 years of age (see Figure 9), facilities are often inadequate and sometimes nonexistent.

FIGURE 9.



See endnote 6 for data sources.

Public sector spending on education is low; the government allocates only three percent of its budget to this vital sector. Enrollment drops by about half from primary school to secondary school,⁴¹ and according to UNICEF, 20 percent of children aged 6 to 14 years do not attend school.⁴² School life expectancy for females is approximately 9.8 years, indicating that girls drop out after transitioning to secondary school. While India has reached near gender parity in primary school enrollment, disparities continue at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Privately funded English-medium education and government-funded schools that teach in regional languages often reflect broader social divisions: urban and rural, wealthy and poor, high-caste and low-caste. Thus, language is linked with power, domination and social inequality.⁴³ At the university level, English is the medium of education for sciences and professional subjects.⁴⁴ For students who attend government-funded schools, learning English often becomes the students' burden; they must study this language on their own after completing a secondary education with weak or non-existent English instruction.⁴⁵ English, as a skill that facilitates economic opportunity, "remain[s] inaccessible to those who are disadvantaged because of their economic situation, their caste or both."⁴⁶

Tertiary education

India's tertiary education system is one of the largest in the world, with more than 14 million students, but only 39 percent of the students pursuing tertiary education are female. There is great gender disparity in literacy: 75 percent of adult males are literate, compared to only 51 percent of adult females (see Figure 9). The sheer size of the population and disparities across the Indian states mean that millions of young Indian women face the challenges of female access to tertiary education.

Study participants

Among the 25 young women interviewed for this study, the families of 10 were from Delhi, and the

other 15 young women and their families migrated to Delhi from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana and Kerala. Most parents moved to the city to search for better work, and to support their families in the villages. The participants were studying at three universities, three vocational training centers and two hospitals. Twenty-four percent were studying education-related fields and 20 percent were in medical fields including nursing and medical laboratory technology. Their areas of study are listed in Text Box 15.

All these young women are the first generation in their family to study at university (see Table 9). Six of the participants have one parent that has completed 12th grade, but none of their parents have studied beyond secondary school. The mothers of 11 young women are illiterate and never went to school. Thirteen participants have older siblings who pursued tertiary education. Family sizes ranged from no other children to nine siblings, and the average was three. All the young women interviewed are single and none have children.

Most participants (76 percent) received support from Udayan Care’s Shalini Fellowship (see Text Box 14). Udayan Shalini Fellowships support students in pursuit of professional or technical programs. This fellowship provides US\$400 per year for university expenses. Fellows who pursue other courses receive half that amount. One young woman was supported by the Roshni Academy, an NGO that trains and mentors girls from socioeconomically underprivileged communities.⁴⁷ Sixty-eight percent of participants received some financial support from their families; 20 percent did not receive NGO or scholarship support for tertiary education. Twenty-eight percent worked to help pay for their educational costs. Two young women received financial support from teachers, another took out a bank loan and one young woman supported herself without any additional financial assistance.

Only two young women lived in college hostels. For safety and cultural reasons, the remaining 23 young women lived with their families, four of which resided in rented houses. At the college hostel, the two paid monthly fees of US\$27-33 for meals and accommodation. The young women’s employment was typical of India’s cultural and social context; of the 25 young women, 18 did not work outside the home. Six ran part-time tutoring classes at their homes, a convenient and conventional option. One was a full-time insurance clerk, supporting her family along with her education.

TEXT BOX 14.

Udayan Care’s Shalini Fellowship



Udayan Care is an NGO based in Delhi, India. The Shalini Fellowship Program helps young women from underprivileged backgrounds to pursue an education and attain independence. The program

considers need and merit through its NAT system (Need, Ambition and Talent); annual family income must be less than US\$2231. Program duration is dependent on a fellow’s area of interest, but ranges from one to six years.

The Shalini Fellowship has supported 1810 girls since its inception in 2002. Currently, 1270 girls are receiving scholarships and mentoring support including motivational workshops, residential camps and job placement.

More information is available on the Udayan Care website: www.udayancare.org

TEXT BOX 15.

Participants’ areas of study

Arabic, Ayurvedic Medicine, Commerce, Elementary Education, English, Hindi, History, Midwifery, Medicine, Nursing, Physics and Technology

TABLE 9.

Student participants’ backgrounds

Number of participants	25	
Age Range	18-22 years old	
Public schooling (primary and secondary)	17	68%
First generation high school graduates	19	76%
First generation university admission	25	100%
First and only member to graduate high school and attend university	7	28%
Received secondary school scholarship	20	80%
Receiving university scholarship	19	76%
Receiving financial support from their families	18	72%
Currently Employed (part-time or full-time)	8	32%
Married	0	0%
Children	0	0%

Overcoming challenges



© Manjit Balmiki

Only one skirt

सरिफ़ एक स्कर्ट

Manorama

21 years old

Delhi

Manorama, who wore a single skirt from 1st to 5th grade, was often scolded by her teachers because as she grew taller, her skirt became shorter. Unable to continue paying the fees for an English-medium private education, in 6th grade, her mother forced her to withdraw and enroll in the local government Hindi-medium school instead. Before starting at her new school, she finally purchased a new skirt that she wore until she completed 12th grade.

Even with a new skirt, Manorama had difficulty adjusting to the government Hindi-medium school environment. Basic English was taught, which was a disappointment as she had been studying in English since 1st grade. This hampered her studies until her teacher eventually shifted her back to an English-medium course in 10th grade. With more than three years studying in Hindi, Manorama had lost out on improved performance and language growth, but she worked hard and remained one of the top students in her class.

Since she was a child, Manorama has wanted to be an engineer. She watched construction workers with yellow hard hats and wanted to be one of them, but her parents had other plans. They organized a visit to her father's village to meet a prospective groom. Manorama remembers:

I was in shock. Marriage was not an option. I had been continuously studying for engineering entrance exams. I had no other thought. I spoke to relatives and begged them to convince my parents otherwise. When nothing worked and I was forced to climb on the train to the village, I




still kept on studying for my entrance exams. The days spent in the village were the most painful. I didn't eat or drink, I just cried. I wanted to study, but there was so much chaos.

When Manorama met the boy, she did not speak a word or even look at him. She just stared at the floor and shed a tear. When Manorama's father saw his daughter's unwillingness, he called the marriage off and brought her back to the city. Today, Manorama is in the third year of her bachelor's degree in technology.

Manorama looked up to her father, who despite his heart problems, diabetes and high blood pressure, sat in front of a fire for 16 hours a day blowing glass to support his family. Seeing Manorama's determination to go to university, he bought her a laptop and was still paying installments for this purchase at the time this study was conducted.

Even though it was not culturally acceptable, Manorama did not want the burden of marriage. As the eldest, her parents wanted her to marry first so that her younger sisters could then be married, but Manorama took charge in her own way. She

About Manorama

	FAMILY Six siblings; mother is illiterate and a housewife; father is literate and a glass blower
	MAJOR BA Technology, 3rd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING Shalini Fellowship and family

	LIVING SITUATION Family
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Ph.D.
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial need• Pressure to marry• Language of instruction
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goal-oriented• Family support• NGO support

began looking for a job to begin post completion of her studies, so she would be able to support her aging parents and mentally challenged brother. She planned to eventually continue studying for her Ph.D. Manorama wanted to secure her own as well as her family's future. Sitting at a crossroads, she was sure of one thing—she did not want an easy job. Instead, Manorama hoped to be paid for her sweat and hard work; to ensure that she and her sisters would never have only one skirt to wear.

Challenges

As the eldest child, **Manorama** balanced the pressure to marry with the obligation and desire to support her family. Her journey to university highlighted many of the challenges that other young Indian women in this study faced, such as struggling with financial needs, lacking fluency in the language of instruction and the pressure to marry. Following is further description of common challenges that Manorama and her peers faced in pursuing university education.

Family ties

Twenty-four percent of the young women reported feeling pressured by their families to marry, especially after they graduated from secondary school and were considering pursuing university. Twenty percent of participants were from single parent families or families where only one parent supported their daughter's education. The pressure to marry was more intense when there was a single

parent at home. About a quarter of the young women reported that extended family and neighbors did not support girls' education and tried to convince their parents not to send their daughters to university. In **Veena's** words, "My parents would have been more supportive if I were a boy."

In addition to the pressure to marry, some young women worried about their ill parents at home for whom they could not provide care, and some young women's parents want control and dominance over their daughters' university or program of study.

Financial need

Even though 80 percent of these women had scholarships for higher education, they face financial challenges, such as the cost of travel, books, stationery and college events. For those at technical or private institutes or pursuing professional or vocational courses, scholarships barely covered program fees.

A participant said:

I wanted to study English, but that wasn't enough to get a good job. I needed a professional course, and wanted a diploma in office management. The scholarship funds, however, were not enough as they hardly covered the expenses of my bachelor's degree in English. A teacher came to my aid and sponsored my tuition and gave me money for travel in the Delhi Metro. He knew I couldn't have pursued a diploma without such support. I had no means.

Navigating pre-university challenges

Twelve percent faced health problems that hampered their secondary school studies. One young woman contracted chicken pox during her annual exams, could not prepare and became depressed at the prospect of failure. Ready to quit school if she failed, she passed with borderline marks and continued her education.

Nearly half of the study participants had difficulties obtaining information and guidance while applying to university. Though most of them found the process easy to navigate, they lacked information about college programs and did not know how to use computers or the Internet. As many were the first in their families to pursue tertiary education, there was often not a close relative that could provide appropriate guidance. **Kiran** reports:

After completing 12th grade, I wasted a year by not pursuing a program of my choice, because I didn't get any guidance. I wanted to study medicine but did not know the procedures and options. My brother could not help me because he is in engineering. I collected papers according to the information given in the newspaper but that didn't turn out to be enough. I had to run around a lot. I wish I knew how to use the computer and Internet; I could've done much better in getting correct information.

Adjusting to university

The new college environment was not an easy adjustment for many young women, especially those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who had low self-confidence.

Adjusting socially

Forty percent of the young women stated that they had poor communication skills and low self-confidence. Consequently, they reported being afraid to talk to males, appear for interviews, participate in competitions or speak English. **Kavita** explains:

Since I joined university, I was very conscious of my poor communication skills. In my second semester at the university, I had to give a presentation. My fear of having bad communication skills, and the resulting lack of confidence, made me forget all that I was supposed to say. I came back home without giving the presentation, which consequently affected my scores. I wish to

know how to speak well in English, because the audience was English-speaking.

Sapna had a similar situation. She found that preference is given to students who can speak in English and come from private schools, "The trend is to flaunt your new clothes everyday and be high-class. No one is concerned about students who have a low status. Even teachers discriminate."

For another 12 percent, coming from a less wealthy state or a small village made them feel less confident at university. These young women also faced challenges living in hostels with other women of different and varied backgrounds, particularly around "ragging," the Indian version of college "hazing." **Pankaj** explained that in her nursing program, "ragging" was the social norm. The older students required the underclassman to greet them in a particular fashion and be polite at all times. She explained, "They also make us stand in a row for two hours each night as they check our dress and accessories. They pass comments if we even look at the ground. We also have to fill buckets of water for them and deliver them on the fifth floor so they can take a bath without any effort."

Language of instruction

Sixty percent of the study participants studied in English at university, and 24 percent of all participants said they faced a change in language of instruction, from Hindi or Urdu to English. **Sana** was from a poor Muslim family. She did her entire schooling in Urdu, her first language and the language of instruction at the conservative Muslim school in her neighborhood. Sana dropped out of school after 10th grade when all her books were burned in a house fire. Two years later, she returned to school motivated and determined again. When she finally completed 12th grade, she could not find a teacher training program that was taught in Urdu. Sana struggled in her classes taught entirely in Hindi and was unable to perform well because of this challenge.

Security

Delhi has a high rate of crimes against women. Sixteen percent of the young women interviewed stated that security was a concern for them, and some explicitly reported experiencing "eve-teasing," or sexual harassment. This was a major concern when long-distance travel was required for educational trips or trainings in other parts of

the city, or if the young women commuted daily to distant colleges.

One young woman remembered an unfortunate day on the bus:

Once when I was travelling by bus, I had a man place his hand on my thigh. Another time, a man touched me inappropriately repeatedly. When I gained control and confirmed his intention in my mind, I started yelling. I also fought with the fellow passengers for not speaking up and protecting a girl.

Finding space to study

Twenty-eight percent of the young women reported difficulties finding space to study. This was especially true for young women living in joint families or with unsupportive family members. Alcoholism at home was also cited as a distraction.

Swati explained her situation:

I had problems because of my joint family. We have a small house, and each nuclear family has a single room for itself. There were always distractions, noise, and disturbance. Once there was a problem with my uncle's employers, who disconnected the electricity at the house. This was right before my 10th grade English exam. My mother kept on asking me to study and not bother, but I couldn't study in such a disturbing atmosphere.

One participant lived in a one-room house. Her mother had to turn off the fan when she cooked in the same room, making it difficult for the young woman to study in the heat. Additionally, her father drank alcohol at night. Recognizing she could not focus on her studies, her mother eventually sent her daughter to a hostel.



© Manit Balmiki

Manorama visits her father at his workshop.



© Saryu Dabra

Manorama meets with the research team for an open-air interview.

Achieving success



© Manjit Balmiki

Maternal motivation

मातृक अभिप्रेरणा

Meera

20 years old

Delhi

Meera's motivation and determination to study comes from her mother who has been HIV positive for 14 years—a disease she contracted from an abusive husband who intentionally infected her. Meera fought to save herself from her mother's fate and provide for the woman who sacrificed everything for her children.

As the only female child, Meera's studies were not deemed important; she was expected to care for the household while her parents worked. She tended to her sick father, cared for her mother when she was abused by her father and attended school only when she could find time. Meera explained, "Though my brother supported this idea, the rest of my family wanted me to complete my studies, work at home and get married. I tried to argue with them, saying that I managed to study and grow because of the help that I received from others. Now I want to give back and help others, too."

Meera's extended family also encouraged her mother to get Meera married and not waste their money and her education. Meera, however, told her family that she will file a lawsuit against the family if they coerce her into marriage. Meera admitted that she was scared but displaying her fear was not an option. She would rather run away than be forced into a marriage before she finishes her education.









Meera paid her fees and other expenses from the scholarship she received from Udayan Care's Shalini Fellowship Program, which provided US\$200 per year. Her family's financial support was minimal and the earnings from her part-time teaching position at an NGO orphanage were not consistent,

although she earned approximately US\$22-26 each month. She contributed some of her scholarship funds and personal earnings to household expenses. Focusing on education was an escape from the challenges at home and kept her motivated towards a brighter future. Her mother said proudly, "It is her hard work that has brought her this far."

Hindi literature is Meera's passion, but her older brother pressured her to study materials management, as he believed this would lead to a good job. Meera agreed with her brother's choice in order to postpone her marriage. Focusing on her education was an opportunity for Meera to carve out a new role for herself and ensure that her future would be much better than her past and different from her mother's life. Confident and determined, Meera wanted to learn self-defense to protect herself, "Being bold, showing strength is important. The trick is to become powerful. That is why I want to learn martial arts. Girls shouldn't be so weak as to fall with a slight touch."

Success factors

Meera grew up in poverty and had seen disease destroy her family, but she was determined to have a better future for herself. While she faced

<h2>About Meera</h2>	
	FAMILY Two siblings; father is deceased; mother is illiterate and a cleaner
	MAJOR BA Materials Management, 2nd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING Shalini Fellowship, family and self-funded
	EMPLOYMENT: Teacher at NGO-run orphanage
	LIVING SITUATION Family
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Master's in business administration
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family ties • Financial need • Adjusting to university
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination • NGO support • Family support

socioeconomic challenges, including the dominance of male family members and the pressure to marry, she was able to triumph over these challenges. Similar to the other young women interviewed in India, Meera was goal-oriented and had both familial and organizational support. Following is further description of the success factors that Meera and her peers identified as they pursued university education:

I want to continue my studies after undergrad. I want a master's degree of education and to become a teacher educator. I don't want to teach just 50 students. Instead, I want to teach 50 teachers, who will further teach 50 students each. One day, I want to become a teacher at my college.

Determination

Meera's mother was the principal motivator of her determination to study. In contrast, many of the study participants attributed their determination and confidence to their own academic accomplishment and extracurricular activities. Nearly half (48 percent) recounted an academic accomplishment such as placing first in their class, their school or the university entrance exams, or winning a teacher's approval in class. Additionally, nearly half (44 percent) participated in extra-curricular activities, including winning competitions, participating in poetry recitals and excelling in arts and crafts. These experiences bolstered self-confidence and further fueled their determination to succeed.

Family support

Though it appeared in different forms in different cases, family support was one of the most remarkable and noteworthy success factors. Sixty-eight percent of the study participants received support from both parents. This support was manifest in a variety of ways, including encouragement, creating a space at home for studying, not burdening daughters with household chores and providing them with necessary study materials. **Sayyada** and **Sumayya** reported that neighbors tried to discourage and sway their parents away from supporting their education, but their parents told them that education is the most valuable asset in life, "Our mother takes care of all the household chores, and asks us to concentrate on our studies. Both our parents struggled to pay for our education, but even if the school fees were late and we had to pay fines, they did it. She once sold her jewelry to pay for our school fees."

Kiran's family supported her desire to be a medical doctor and stopped pressuring her towards marriage. She said, "They have also started to share my dream of becoming a doctor one day." Many young women said they would not have been able to pursue tertiary education or see themselves as successful if they did not get family support.

For 20 percent of the study participants, a single parent was their sole source of family support. While most of the study participants had their mothers' support, some young women's fathers also supported their education. When the mother

was the supportive parent, it was generally the case that she wanted to save her daughter from the fate that the mother herself had suffered in life. With supportive fathers, the mothers usually could not envision the productive results of a higher education, and held traditional attitudes about early marriage or girls performing household chores rather than attending school.



© Manit Balmiki

Meera cooks at home.

Thirty-six percent of the participants had the support of their siblings. This support was stronger when an elder sibling had pursued tertiary education prior to the young women herself. However, one participant reported having immense support from her younger brother, who highly valued university education for his elder sister and always helped her create suitable conditions for studying at home.

Sixteen percent of the young women also reported receiving encouragement from an enlightened uncle, a helpful aunt or visionary grandparents.

Community, NGO and government support

Seventy-six percent of the young women interviewed received both mentoring and financial

support from organizations as well as support from teachers and peers.

Mentoring

Approximately 84 percent of the young women had influential and guiding teachers as a reinforcing support factor. For most of the participants, these were teachers who showed vision, provided encouragement, helped with career counseling or taught their subjects well.

Mentors were a common force in providing help and assistance to the young women, though some found mentors in their school or tuition teachers and not through formal mentoring. For Udayan Shalini Fellows, mentoring was a more formal process. **Sapna** explained that during a residential camp for Shalini Fellows, she communicated her problems and feelings with her mentor. Originally she had been unhappy with the university major she had chosen, but he helped her see the advantages and provided advice about how she could use her degree. Similarly, **Swati** noted, “This fellowship not only gives us financial support, but it also teaches us to be good human beings. Career counseling and mentoring support helps us to achieve success in life.”

For three participants, the support of considerate seniors—older peers at secondary school or university—also proved to be a positive factor. These slightly more experienced young women provided help with adjustment issues, studying and career advancement.

Financial support

For 80 percent of the young women, financial support came from scholarships for tertiary education. This study purposely selected young women who were associated with Udayan Care, (see Appendix I) and 95 percent of the scholarship support was provided by the Udayan Shalini Fellowship. This scholarship addressed their financial needs in pursuing higher education and thus contributed greatly to their success. Four young women also received financial assistance from teachers for academic fees or other expenditures such as educational trips.

In their voices: Advice to young Indian women

Many of the young Indian women interviewed for this study had advice for their peers. The central themes were to act with confidence, follow one's own dreams and values and do not fall victim to others' persuasion. A few specific suggestions are quoted below in Figure 10.

FIGURE 10.





© ANFE

Coumba and Diallo meet with university professors to discuss the study.



Mauritania

موريتانيا

Amenons Nos Filles a l'Ecole (ANFE)

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, mostly desert, lies at the geographical and cultural crossroads between the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa, south of Morocco and north of Senegal. Its vast landscape stretches across more than one million square kilometers. With a population of only 3.3 million, approximately 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.⁴⁸



See endnote 6 for data sources.

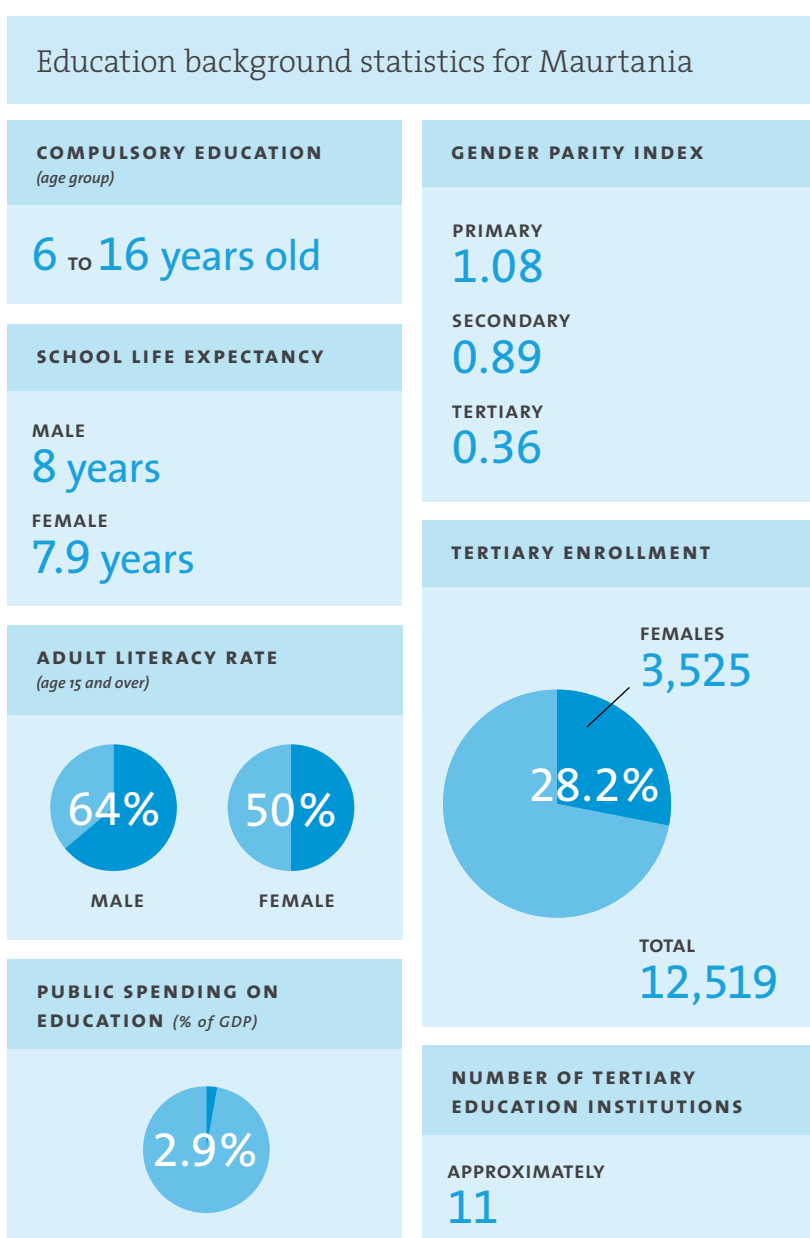
Even though many nomads and subsistence farmers were forced into the cities by droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, half the population still depends on agriculture and livestock for its livelihood. There is a high opportunity cost involved in sending girls to school, particularly for families that do not have domestic help or need additional assistance with their farms and livestock. Many parents feel that their daughters' time should be spent on household chores and supporting the family's financial needs. Girls are also expected to marry at an early age, bear children and move into their husbands' homes. If girls attend school, the chores must be delegated to another family member, or the girl must continue to complete her chores in addition to her schoolwork. The requirements for girls' household chores are generally not as stringent as for boys, as was recently confirmed by a UNICEF study that found a clear gender differential in household chores in Mauritania.⁴⁹ In addition to poverty, girls from rural areas face problems with transportation, making it challenging to continue with secondary school. In a desert country where the population density is approximately three inhabitants per square kilometer, distance can be a huge barrier both for girls and for parents who fear for their daughters' safety.

This country study describes the educational landscape, presents research findings based on discussions with 40 study participants and introduces two success stories, **Mariem** and **Khadijetou**, young Mauritanian women who are exemplary role models for both their peers and their communities.

The educational landscape

Mauritania’s commitment to promoting girls’ education is indicated by the dramatic increase in girls’ enrollment in primary education during the past decade. The gender gap has also narrowed considerably and gender parity has been surpassed in primary school, as now more girls than boys attend primary school. Despite this, only 23 percent of Mauritanian females enroll in secondary school.⁵⁰ Young women and girls face economic and social challenges due to the patriarchal structure of society and lack of resources for public schools.

FIGURE 11.



The Mauritanian education system is impoverished due to the lack of public spending on education (2.9 percent of GDP). This became evident following a study conducted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education that identified weaknesses in schools’ infrastructure and lack of teaching materials as key problems.⁵¹ For example, the public schools in Nouakchott’s poorest neighborhoods have 100-200 students in one classroom; there are too few desks available and many students must sit on the floor. The teachers are also frequently absent, do not have quality teaching materials and are paid low salaries without health benefits. Additionally, rural and low-quality urban schools usually teach primary grades in local languages and students emerge without any knowledge of French or Arabic. As a result, each subsequent level of school becomes more difficult for students who do not understand enough French or Arabic to pass the entrance exams for secondary school, let alone university.

Tertiary education

Enrollment in Mauritania’s public schools, including public universities, is free. Despite this, only 15 to 20 percent of students who take the entrance exams are able to pass and only 25 percent of those passing the exams are women.⁵² University classrooms are approximately 30 percent female, but only two percent of all young Mauritanian women study at university.⁵³ Young women from poorer backgrounds are even less likely to complete university degrees.

See endnote 6 for data sources.

Study participants

The research team coordinated with the University of Nouakchott (see Text Box 17) faculty and staff to identify 40 young women to participate in this study. Thirty-five students were from sub-Saharan black African ethnic groups and five were from the Moor ethnic group. It was more difficult to find Moor students who were willing to participate and able to obtain their parent's permission. Twenty-eight percent of the participants were studying sciences, 25 percent were studying law and 18 percent were studying social sciences. The students interviewed were enrolled in a wide range of departments and majors (see Text Box 16).

Fifty-three percent were the first in their family to both graduate from high school and attend university. The students and their families came from a mix of urban (25 percent), peri-urban (45 percent) and rural (30 percent) backgrounds. The average family size was 10 members and the household income ranged from US\$50-250 per month. Twenty percent of the young women interviewed were married and 13 percent had at least one child.

Only two participants (5 percent) had received secondary school scholarships but 12 participants (30 percent) were receiving government university scholarships of US\$40 per month to help cover additional living expenses. However, the majority of them (78 percent) lived with their families. The remaining 22 percent rented rooms. Excluding tuition fees, monthly expenses for students living on their own ranged from US\$110-215 (see Table 11). Due to the stigma that is associated with women working, only two young women reported working full time. However, the research team believes that many of the participants were probably engaged in some type of informal employment, not only to support themselves, but also to assist their families as well. Young women who work are usually discreet and they do not openly report their employment status.

TEXT BOX 16.

Participants' areas of study

Arabic, Arabic Literature, Biology, Economics, English, French Literature, Geography, Interpretation, Law, Medicine and Sociology

TEXT BOX 17.

The University of Nouakchott

The University of Nouakchott is Mauritania's only university, although there are at least six other schools of higher education in the capital city. The university has approximately 8,000 students with a 25 percent female tertiary enrollment rate as of 2008-2009, an increase of 13 percent since 1992. Classes are taught in French and Arabic; students with fluency in both languages can take full advantage of course offerings and academic resources.

Several strikes were held throughout the course of this study in which students demanded improved resources such as buses, a medical clinic and improved library supplies. These requests resonated with the participants as many of their concerns relate to transportation, computer access and academic resources.

TABLE 10.

Student participants' backgrounds		
Number of participants	40	
Age Range	18-28 years old	
Public Schooling (primary and secondary)	34	85%
First generation high school graduate	28	70%
First generation university admission	39	98%
First and only family member to graduate high school and attend university	21	53%
Received a secondary school scholarship	2	5%
Receiving a university scholarship	12	30%
Receiving financial support from their families	38	95%
Currently employed (part-time or full-time) *	2	5%
Married	8	20%
Children	5	13%

*This number may not be accurate; because, due to social and cultural norms, women may not have reported their employment status.

TABLE 11.

Estimated monthly expenses for university students in Nouakchott	
MONTHLY EXPENSES	US\$
Shared Housing	\$50-100
School supplies	\$10-15
Food and transportation	\$50-100
Total	\$110-215

Overcoming Challenges



© ANFE

Without a birth certificate

بدون شهادة ميلاد

Mariem

27 years old

Nouakchott

In 1989, a border dispute between the Senegalese and Mauritanian herdsmen over cattle led to violent attacks and a massive deportation of sub-Saharan Africans to Senegal. During this clash Mariem's family lost all their civil papers. As a result, Mariem did not have a birth certificate and could not take a national exam

in 2003-2004 that would allow her to continue secondary school. Mariem tried to obtain her birth certificate by visiting the local public records office numerous times over four months. She also asked for her father's help, but he refused. Instead, it was Mariem's uncle who, by spending considerable money and time at the public records office, eventually made it possible for Mariem to obtain her birth certificate and take her exams.

Mariem's father believed that girls' schooling was necessary only as a prerequisite for marriage. His narrow perspective reflects the opinions and beliefs of many Mauritanian men who, despite having completed higher education themselves, have no shame in limiting that option for women.

Mariem's mother, on the other hand, had always supported her daughters' educational ambitions and swore that her daughters would go to school to ensure they would not endure the hard life that she had suffered. But this battle was not easily won. Mariem's mother would enroll her in school and then several months later when her father returned from his travels, he would take her out of school. After this happened several times, her father threatened to divorce her mother if she kept

Mariem in school. Fortunately, their family and community intervened and eventually convinced Mariem's father to allow her to go to school. Although he finally agreed, he did not offer her any financial support because Mariem had acted without his approval. Without support from her father, Mariem's mother was forced to earn money selling cold drinks and ice to pay for her daughter's notebooks, pens, books and clothes.

In 2007, Mariem was in her final year of secondary school and determined to study at university. To register for the exam she needed an identification card. Once again, she needed her father's help. Initially he again refused, but Mariem's family and friends intervened and begged him to help his daughter. He finally agreed but required her to

About Mariem



FAMILY

Six siblings; mother is illiterate; father is a travel company executive



MAJOR

BA Geography, 3rd year



EDUCATION FUNDING

University is free, family



LIVING SITUATION

Family friends



FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

Master's in business administration



CHALLENGES

- Family ties
- Financial need
- Navigating pre-university



SUCCESS FACTORS

- Determination
- Goal-oriented
- Family support

do housework in the morning before school and studying at night.

Finally, with an identification card in hand, Mariem was able to take and pass the exam. She was the first child in her family to attend university. Her father eventually recognized her efforts and began supporting her financially with US\$60 per month. Though the university was free, her father's contribution plus \$US40 per month from her boyfriend helped cover other expenses, such as transportation and school supplies. Despite the many challenges in her life, Mariem's determination and love for learning persisted and her dreams of attending university were fulfilled. Because her parents lived in their local village, she stayed with relatives near the university, in the capital city.

Mariem was determined not to give up until she obtains her Ph.D. She has already rejected three marriage proposals and was consequently stigmatized by many in her family. She refused to marry because for Mariem, education was a metaphor for life and she felt that marriage would end her dream of becoming educated.

Challenges

Mariem's situation was an example of what many young Mauritanian women from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds faced—a lack of family support and financial resources. However, with the help of her extended family, community and a strong will to achieve, she graduated from

high school, postponed marriage and focused on her tertiary studies. Among the 40 young women interviewed, eight had come close to dropping out but, after participating in the study interviews and subsequent discussions, they were persuaded to stay in university. Following is a further description of the common challenges that Mariem and other socioeconomically disadvantaged women in the study experienced in pursuit of their university education, including the lack of family or community support, struggling to meet educational and daily living expenses, navigating secondary school and adjusting to university life.

Family ties

Mariem's story illustrates the pressures that families placed on young women to marry before they were ready. Among the students interviewed, 20 percent were married and 55 percent were engaged. Girls were usually raised to understand that marriage was the major priority in their lives. If a girl did not marry while she was young, she was seen as undesirable. Her family could be shamed and there was fear that the daughter would never marry. **Fatimettou's** family tried to marry her to a 45-year-old man because of the US\$500 dowry that was proposed. Based on tradition, she could not refuse her parents' decision. Ambitious and eager to continue her education, Fatimettou instead ran away and hid in the city. Eventually she found help from a local government agency in charge of women's issues. The agency spoke with her parents and told them not to force her to marry anyone and

they agreed to allow her to continue her education. One student reported that her mother actually left her father because he did not want their daughter to leave the house and go to school.

Financial need

Although tuition for university is free, students have to pay all other costs such as transportation, housing, food, books, printing expenses, clothing, school supplies, computer lab time and health care. Because of this, students have no choice but to live on meager budgets of US\$110-215 per month. **Fatimata** had been working to support her own education since she was in primary school, when she sold ice cream and cold drinks after school. After starting university she found herself in a desperate financial situation and was forced to drop out for several months. Similarly, **Naya** regularly missed classes because she was working to support herself and her family, a husband and a child. Her parents and even her neighbors pressured her to drop out because they felt that married women should not study. Even though she missed classes, Naya was extremely dedicated to her studies. She regularly walked up to two hours a day, spent the day at school and went without food, only to return home to a baby, waiting to be fed. **Guedie** relied on her father and uncle for money to cover her university transportation and food expenses. After a disagreement about her education, however, she stopped receiving any support from them and was looking for a part-time job to support herself.

Navigating pre-university challenges

Graduating from secondary school was a great accomplishment for the young women interviewed in Mauritania. Not only did they face family and financial challenges but 90 percent of the participants reported that distance to and from their secondary schools had also been a problem. Conquering this distance was necessary since there were no boarding schools. Thus parents generally made living arrangements for their daughters with family members or friends. **Aissata** had struggled academically in secondary school and needed to take private tutoring lessons, an additional expense her family could not afford. With the combination of financial stress and family pressure, Aissata was almost always on the verge of dropping out. Aissata failed the national exam twice, but finally passed on her third attempt.

Adjusting to university

Language of instruction

Many students indicated difficulties at university that stemmed from low-quality primary and secondary schools. For example, some students faced linguistic challenges as a result of not learning French or Arabic, the languages of instruction at university, during their primary and secondary schooling. **Khadijetou** said she found studying in only Arabic at university to be very limiting. Many of the courses she wanted to take were offered only in French, but she was not able to study in that language.

Personal safety

Five of the participants also spoke of having been raped, but none of them had reported the rapes to the authorities. Financially desperate, one young woman admitted to having accepted an offer of US\$5 to be a young man's girlfriend. Several months later she was pregnant and the father of her child would no longer speak to her. Looked down upon by her community and all alone, she reported that she had attempted suicide twice after becoming pregnant. In fact, two of the participants in this study spoke of feeling depressed and mentioned thoughts of suicide. Maintaining their health in the face of these dangers to their own personal safety was yet another challenge for the brave young women interviewed.

Discrimination

Sixty percent of the participants mentioned that stereotypes reinforcing traditional gender roles were common on their campuses as well as in the syllabi and textbooks. One young woman explained that these ideas and illustrations continually reinforced the idea that girls should stay at home and marry. These conventional representations of girls and young women made it difficult for female students to be taken seriously.

Finding time to study

Ninety-five percent of the young women interviewed felt that finding time to study was a major challenge. As both women and students, they had designated domestic roles that jeopardized their ability to concentrate on school. Household chores such as cooking, cleaning, collecting water, procuring food, washing clothes and taking care of younger siblings regularly interfered with classroom punctuality and the ability to study during the evenings. One respondent explained the

difficulties of studying at home when coupled with her responsibilities of preparing meals and doing housework. She spoke of having to wake up early each morning to help prepare breakfast. **Guedie** struggled to focus on her studies because she shared a bedroom with her six sisters who did not attend school and often disturbed her while she tried to study.

University facilities

Many of the participants also described difficulties related to overcrowded classrooms. Designed to seat 50-70 students, classrooms instead accommodated 100-200 students. Similarly, classrooms designed for 200 students, would frequently have 500-1000 students enrolled in a single class. Participants spoke of cramped, claustrophobic classrooms, with students sitting outside the classroom, on window sills or on the floor. This overcrowding made it extremely difficult for teachers to teach and for students to hear and learn during lessons.

Each of the participants also reported a lack of teachers, as well as a shortage of essential teaching materials. Sometimes there were not computers, not only for students but for teachers as well. Ten of the participants were currently writing their master's dissertations, yet none of them owned a computer. Consequently, they were forced to use Internet cafes and pay for typing services, additional costs that were difficult to afford.



© ANFE

Entrance to the University of Nouakchott.

Achieving success



© ANFE

Becoming a volunteer teacher

أصبح معلم متطوع

Khadijetou

22 years old

Nouakchott

Khadijetou is from a religious family and was the first in her family to attend university. Throughout her primary and secondary schooling, Khadijetou studied on the floor in a low-income school where

she learned Arabic, but not French.

In Mauritania, French is the language of commerce, while Arabic is the national language. French is primarily taught in high quality schools and is also the language most widely spoken by university students. Due to her persistence and dedication to learning, Khadijetou passed her entrance exam and received a US\$40 government scholarship each month. With this scholarship she pursued a major in economics but had to study in Arabic, which caused feelings of embarrassment in front of her girlfriends who were able to study economics in French. Not knowing French, she was unable to enroll in all of the classes she wanted to take. Socially, her lack of French skills was also challenging because most of the other students speak French and local television shows were produced in French. Khadijetou wanted to learn French, but she could not afford language training, which cost approximately US\$400 per month.

Despite her scholarship, Khadijetou still often fell short financially each month, which required her to manage her money very carefully. Cultural restrictions made it difficult, if not impossible, for her to live alone in the capital city of Nouakchott. As a result, she stayed with her aunt, who lived far from the university. While conscious of her budget, Khadijetou had no choice but to take the bus, at a cost of US\$15 per month and still had to walk two




hours per day just to reach university. She stayed at the university throughout the day to attend classes but could not afford to eat there. A restaurant lunch would have cost US\$1 and there was also no place for her to keep and heat a packed lunch, so she often went without food all day. Her family did not approve of her education and did not support her financially or emotionally because they believed that going to school was a sin and that it would lead her to hell. Careful not to overspend, she managed her US\$40 per month as carefully as she could, but often experienced difficulties with additional expenses such as basic school supplies.

Despite these challenging situations, she was dedicated to finishing university and helping other women gain access to education. After participating in this study, Khadijetou graciously offered to give Arabic lessons to ANFE's girls on a voluntary basis and, in exchange, ANFE offered to seek funds to help her pay for French lessons. In the future Khadijetou hopes to utilize her economics degree by working for an NGO to help young women like herself attend school and develop entrepreneurial skills.

Success factors

Most young Mauritanian women do not attend university in part because they did not have role

About Khadijetou

	FAMILY 10 siblings; mother is illiterate; father is an imam at a mosque
	MAJOR BA Economics, 2nd year
	EDUCATION FUNDING University is free, government scholarship

	LIVING SITUATION Extended family
	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS Social work
	CHALLENGES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family ties• Financial need• Language of instruction
	SUCCESS FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motivation• Government support• NGO support

models. Only two percent of Mauritanian women have attended university, making it difficult for young girls to imagine their futures at university.⁵⁴ **Khadijetou** was not only a role model for young Mauritanian women, but also for her new Arabic students at ANFE. Despite the language barrier, she was determined and willing to help other young women to help themselves. Khadijetou's success, similar to that of the other young women interviewed, was a result of her own personal motivation as well as support from the government and other organizations.

Personal attributes

All of the Mauritanian participants demonstrated tremendous motivation, determination and courage. Five of whom consistently ranked at the top of their class, a clear indication of strong willpower and sense of purpose. Nearly all of the students (98 percent) were the first in their families to both graduate from secondary school and attend university. However, their paths were far from easy and many like Khadijetou rebelled against social norms or went against their families' wishes to attend school. Initially, **Mariem** did not have financial support from her family, but was armed with determination and a strong desire to make her mother proud. With a young child and a lack of family support, **Fatimata** was determined to continue her university education and support herself; she also hoped to volunteer and work with disadvantaged young women in the future.

Family support

Family support was often identified as a key factor that enabled many of the participants to study at university. Although financial support was nearly always limited for most students, several of them reported that the emotional support of their parents and relatives helped them to deal with difficult situations and maintain the courage to continue going to school. **Mariem** decided not to give up until she had obtained a Ph.D. because her mother had suffered to keep her in school. Her mother's support had also given her the courage to reject unwanted marriage proposals.

Five students also mentioned that their families had moved with them to the capital city of Nouakchott so the young women could attend university. These parents recognized that it would be impossible for their daughters to go on their own and wanted to ensure that they had every chance to succeed in their studies.

Several of the respondents' parents took out loans or sold livestock to support their daughters' university expenses. One student recalled how her mother had cried pleading with her father to allow their daughter to attend university. Another participant, **Aissata**, had a father who was a teacher and a mother who was a computer scientist. Even though she had nine siblings, she had both of her parents' financial and moral support and remained at the top of her classes throughout her years at university.

Community, NGO and government support

Financial support

Some of the students reported that, in addition to their families' emotional and financial support, access to financial resources, such as government scholarships, were critical for their success at university. Support of this type was also essential to help cover other expenses, such as computer access, meals on campus and transportation fees.



© ANFE

A group of university students walk to class.

In their voices: Advice to young Mauritanian women

The participants from Mauritania, a new generation of role models for younger generations, recalled numerous difficulties they had experienced during their first years of university. Yet despite facing tremendous challenges, they managed to find the path to success and had advice to offer other young women who, like themselves, dream of going to university. Their central message was to conduct adequate research, to learn about available opportunities, ask peers for advice and act with confidence. Some of their more specific suggestions are quoted below (see Figure 12.).

FIGURE 12.





© Kirsten Anderson

The Cambodian research team conducts a focus group discussion in Kampong Cham.

PART THREE

Appendix I:
Methodology

Appendix II:
Engaging youth in the
research process

Researcher credits

Acknowledgments

Endnotes

Appendix I: Methodology

Research sample

Young women were identified to participate in the study based on eligibility criteria, which required that study participants were first generation high school graduates or university students, scholarship recipients, from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and enrolled in and attending campus-based university courses. The young women were selected using partner organizations or local universities and were personally invited to participate in the study by the local research team.

In India and Cambodia, Room to Read enlisted the help and support of two local NGOs, Udayan Care and KAPE, organizations that provide scholarships to disadvantaged young women attending university (see the India and Cambodia chapters for more information). Interested and available participants were invited to join an interview or focus group discussion in their respective location. The local research teams and participating Research Assistants also identified several non-scholarship recipients to participate in the study. In India and Cambodia, the Grameen Foundation's Progress Out of Poverty Index™⁵⁵ was used as a tool to narrow the range of the young women's socioeconomic circumstances as further verification of eligibility. This tool measures basic household conditions and calculates meaningful comparisons across the sample population within those countries. In India, many young women enrolled in tertiary education are engaged in distance learning, as families often discourage travel and living away from home. However, for the purpose of this study, only young women enrolled in campus-based programs were invited to participate.

In the case of DRC, Ethiopia and Mauritania, written announcements regarding the study were posted on university campuses. In DRC and Ethiopia, dormitory proctors met with residents, explained the study and confirmed the students' eligibility, all of which they communicated to the research team. After interested participants completed a participant background pre-screening to

assess the socioeconomic conditions, eligible study participants were selected. In Mauritania, faculty members assisted in the identification of eligible students. Engaging each university department before the start of participant selection ensured approval by the university and the faculty's involvement in the review of the interview guides. Additionally, as news of the study spread around campus, young women volunteered to participate.

In DRC and Ethiopia, dormitory proctors also identified mothers of eligible students who were originally from the capital city. Those mothers were then invited to participate in the study.

Research design

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted by the local research team including at least one research assistant. The locations selected for the interviews were relaxed atmospheres, intentionally chosen to encourage study participants to talk freely about their living and learning conditions. They were organized in quiet, private rooms of organization offices or on campuses. In the DRC, Ethiopia and Mauritania, a major concern of many of the students who were interviewed was privacy and very few participants authorized their photos to be shared publicly. To promote a relaxed atmosphere, interviews were conducted in a public restaurant in Mauritania. Each interview and focus group discussion lasted between two to four hours. For a comparison of the research teams and data collection strategies, see Table 12.

While research assistants led the interviews and focus group discussions, the lead researcher or research consultant also interjected probing questions and oversaw the overall research process. Interviews were primarily conducted in the local language of the country. This was the most challenging in Mauritania where several regional languages in addition to French and Arabic are commonly used. Please see Text Box 18 for a complete list of languages.

TABLE 12.

The research team and data collection strategy					
	CAMBODIA	DRC	ETHIOPIA	INDIA	MAURITANIA
Authoring Organization	Room to Read	FHI 360	FHI 360	Room to Read	ANFE
Recruitment Partners	Room to Read, KAPE	University of Kinshasa	Addis Ababa University	Room to Read, Udayan Care	University of Nouakchott
Participants - Young Women	29	33	33	25	40
Participants - Parents	NA	10	5	Case Studies Only	34
Total	29	43	38	25	74
	189				

To assist with note-taking, the interviews were also audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. All interviews in Cambodia, the DRC, Ethiopia and India were recorded both by a note-taker and an audio recorder. Interviews in Mauritania were recorded only by a note-taker.

The India research team also integrated word association activities and drawing at the end of each interview. The participants were asked to associate a list of words with descriptions to reflect on their perceptions and values. The words were spoken aloud, one by one, to each participant, and their responses were recorded. This technique helped the research team gather the young women's thoughts and ideas on topics that did not come forth during the interviews. Similarly, at the end of each interview, the participants were given stationery and asked to draw pictures of the most meaningful aspects of their lives. These free expression drawings were used to supplement the information obtained in the interviews, build on the data analysis and capture distinct expressions of relevance.

The research assistants in India and Cambodia submitted detailed field notes after each interview or focus group that captured their observations and interactions between the participants. The observation method assisted the research team in descriptive, inferential and evaluative interpretations.

Data collection tools

Interview and focus group discussion guides were developed in collaboration with all three research study partners. These guides provided a list of open-ended questions designed with the Critical Incident Technique⁵⁶ and Appreciative Inquiry⁵⁷ approach in mind. This guide provided the main structure to the interview process and was translated into local languages for each research team. The research guide is available on request from Room to Read.

TEXT BOX 18.

Languages used for this study

Cambodia

Khmer and English

DRC

French

Ethiopia

Amharic

India

Hindi and English

Mauritania

French, Arabic, Pulaar, Wolof, Sonike and Hassanya

In addition to the guides, each participant was asked to fill out a participant background form to gather basic background information related to the individual's family and educational life. These data were used to supplement the descriptive data and to develop respondent comparisons.

Informed consent

All participants' rights and identities were protected according to country and international human subject protection standards. All participants were assured that any written information or visual representation included in the study would be used only with their consent, consistent with the guidelines for their protection. This was read and signed at the start of the interview or focus group discussion. Agreeing participants signed and returned a copy of the form for our records. They kept one copy for their information. The informed consent is available from Room to Read upon request.

In Cambodia, participants were given a small token thank you gift at the end of each interview. This included two notebooks, a pen, a highlighter, three bars of soap and \$2 USD to cover their transportation to and from the interview. In India, participants received a notepad and pen and were reimbursed for public transportation to the interview venue. In the DRC and Ethiopia participants were reimbursed for their travel, US\$10 and US\$6 respectively. In Mauritania, participants were provided snacks and several received transportation and clothing. They were not told about these participation gifts prior to the completion of the interview.

Study limitations

Comparison groups

Given the decision to focus the study on young women who had persevered to succeed in university education as positive role models, disadvantaged young women who did not make it to university, drop outs and young men were not included in the study. This is an area for future research and would be useful in complementing this study to identify the similarities and differences in their circumstances, coping mechanisms and support systems.

Purposive sampling

In Ethiopia and in the DRC, the study took place with young women who only attended one university—the largest and most prestigious university in the capital cities. It is probable that challenges

are similar in other universities, especially since there were many similarities across countries. However, there may be nuances unique to young women who attend smaller universities, private universities or universities outside of capital cities. Similarly, in India there may be unique nuances for young women studying university via distance education courses. This is another area for future research and would complement this study.

In India, during data collection, the research team tried to use snowball or chain-referral sampling to recruit additional respondents. The research team regularly asked the respondents to refer classmates or friends who may be interested in participating in the study. However, the culture of status and the fear of being labeled “socioeconomically disadvantaged” often prevented young women from approaching friends to come forward to provide additional information.

University or organization-associated research teams were an asset in quickly moving the study forward and crucial to the success of this study. As a result it was relatively easy to locate, invite and secure the participation of the young women in the study. However, initially the research team in Mauritania found recruiting eligible students very difficult. Students were reluctant to be interviewed because culturally people in Mauritania are hesitant to share information about themselves or their families. Additionally, these young women had not been previously exposed to this type of study. As information about the study spread, more young women expressed interest and wanted to participate.

Researcher perspectives

The local research teams were university students (see Appendix II on Engaging youth) or employees of the same university or organization. While this helped move the study forward, it was also a limitation. Lead researchers observed that the local research team had a tendency to make assumptions about the participants' responses because they shared similar experiences. During the interviews in which lead researchers were present, lead researchers had to encourage the university research assistants to probe further. In reading the interview transcripts, there were instances in which all organizations recognized that further probing might have enriched the story and the study.

The gender dynamics of the interviewers may have limited the extent to which some young women were willing to reveal and share information. In the DRC and Ethiopia, both of the lead research consultants were male because no female researchers were identified during the search. Both researchers were professionals who demonstrated a sincere respect for all people, women and men alike; however, given the topic, this was a concern when interviewing young women about sensitive issues. In the DRC, all of the in-depth interviews were conducted by the female research assistants, but the focus group discussions and the interviews with mothers were conducted by the male research consultant. Given the sensitive information that the young women did discuss such as prostitution, sexual coercion and gender-based violence, it appears that the researchers exhibited excellent skills to foster a feeling of ease during the interviews. As a result, participants shared personal information, seemingly with comfort. In Ethiopia, many of the interviews were conducted jointly with the male research consultants and the female FHI 360 staff. It was only after the interviews, informally, that many of the young women discussed in great detail how pervasive sexual coercion and gender-based

violence was at the university. It may be that some participants did not feel comfortable discussing these issues in front of a male and an instructor at the same institution. There is a possibility that they feared repercussions in exposing to a male professor the disgraceful behavior of his male colleagues at the university.



© FHI 360

Researchers in the DRC prepare for the study.

Appendix II:

Engaging youth in the research process

The three partner research organizations recruited and trained young women who themselves were positive role models—first generation university scholars—to become research assistants. Engaging these young women who were similar in background to the study participants not only met research goals but also facilitated respondent recruitment and interviewing. Respondents were more likely to participate and share responses with a research assistant from a similar background.

We thank these remarkable young women who dedicated considerable time, energy and heart to this report, but also serve as role models for the next generation of university-bound young women in their countries. We share their biographies and some of their experiences and observations from the research process below.

Cambodia *Room to Read*



© Borin Srey

Hawaii, a first-year environmental studies major in Phnom Penh said, “I got to travel to new places in Phnom Penh and Kampong Cham and learn how to use a camera and take photographs. I also learned how to work as a team, ask questions, write interview summaries, observe the participants during the interview and prepare myself and the environment before the interview...It will be easier to find a job after I graduate...” Hawaii comes from a traditional Cambodian house made from palm tree wood with a metal roof and no toilet facility or power supply. Her family shares three bicycles. With the financial support of a private donor and the research stipend associated with this study, Hawaii will be able to complete her university

studies. After completing her bachelor’s degree, she hopes to work as an environmental educator for an NGO in the rural provinces of Cambodia.



© Borin Srey

Nita said, “I felt a great sense of responsibility in conducting interviews and taking photos, I especially liked taking photos...After meeting the others I realized

that there are many girls that have more difficult situations than me...This experience has taught me about different family environments and helped me reflect on my own.” Nita, a second year medical student in Phnom Penh, grew up with her parents and three siblings in a traditional Cambodian house built on stilts and constructed from plywood. They relied on firewood for cooking and on a well for water. Room to Read supported Nita’s school fees through secondary school. Nita supported herself through the first year of medical school by working. With the financial support of private donors and the research stipend from this study, she will be able to pay for several more years of medical school. Nita dreams of returning to her village as a practicing pediatrician.

Democratic Republic of Congo *FHI 360*



© FHI 360

Joelle believes, “Anything is possible for those who believe in themselves and are determined.” Joelle was determined to attend university, though her family en-

couraged her to marry. A humanities professor inspired her to continue her studies explaining that a university degree will help her to be competitive in the job market. Now she is in her fifth and final year of a psychology degree in Kinshasa.

Joelle supports herself by selling yogurt, sausage and other fast foods at the university. Joelle is full of hope for the future. She plans to work in human resources in a large organization and eventually marry someone who supports her independence. She also plans to support her half-siblings' education when she starts earning an income.



© FHI 360

Rachel thinks, "Poverty is not a syndrome but a state of mind." When she was in secondary school her father died, leaving behind two wives and eleven

children. Rachel is now 21 years old and in her third year of medical school in Kinshasa. Her mother has sold all of their cows to send Rachel to university. With no other source of income, Rachel works part-time for a photocopying business. She struggles to find enough money for daily needs, such as food and transportation from her mother's house to the university. Despite these challenges, she remains positive about the future for herself and others. She is vice-president of the management committee in charge of gender and HIV/AIDS prevention and an active member of her church in organizing women's entrepreneurship workshops.

Ethiopia

FHI 360

Beselam currently studies information technology in Addis Ababa. Her parents are both illiterate farmers and could not afford her education. They sent her to live with a wealthier relative in Addis Ababa to begin high school. However, she later decided to return to her hometown. She always wanted to become a musician or traditional dancer and she joined the Awi Zone Band during secondary school. After scoring well on the national college entrance examination, she gave up this dream to take up another dream—studying at university.

Hilwuna reflected, "The fact that our family went through several challenges has helped me to get rather stronger." When she was in first grade, her father was imprisoned for political reasons so her mother encountered severe financial challenges in supporting the family. Hilwuna attributes these challenges to be the source of her academic accomplishments. The Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship

Program supports her stationery materials, textbooks, mentoring and tutorial classes. Hilwuna is a second year student studying civil engineering in Addis Ababa.

India

Room to Read



© Saryu Dahra

Manorama enthusiastically proclaimed, "I kept learning from the beginning to the end, starting with the field of social development, moving on to

learning about professional research and ending with the exposure to data analysis. The research project feels like one of the biggest achievements of my life." Manorama recently completed the third year of her bachelor's of technology in electronics and communication in Haryana. Manorama is the first person in her family to go to university and is an inspiration to her younger sisters to complete schooling and pursue higher education. Manorama has been an Udayan Care Shalini Fellow since she was in 11th grade. After the completion of her bachelor's degree, Manorama wants to work for two to three years, save money for her further studies and eventually learn more about research and development. Alternatively, she hopes to work in aircraft maintenance at the Technical Department of the Indian Air Force.



© Saryu Dahra

Shweta said, "I learned about photography, about taking charge of situations, about conducting research and even about aspects of my own personality." She is completing a bachelor's

of science in physics in Delhi. Shweta is the first person in her family to attend university. She also works part-time tutoring students at home. Shweta wants to pursue a master's of science in physics and hopes to earn a doctorate degree to become a researcher.

Mauritania

ANFE

Aissata is 26 years old and the only member of her family to graduate from high school and attend university. She has chosen to study law with

aspirations of becoming a lawyer who defends impoverished and marginalized sectors of society.

Assiya is 26-year-old, second-year law student. She is the eldest girl in her family and has four sisters who attended primary school. She married before graduating. After her father's death, her mother remained the only supporter of the family, operating small businesses such as clothes-dying.

Djeynaba is 22 years old and is currently in her fourth year of law school. Djeynaba was forced to marry a cousin while in secondary school and gave birth to a small boy. Despite challenges, she succeeded in the secondary school national exam and was able to attend university.

Fatimata is 27 years old and a first-year law student. She has triumphed over many challenges including serving as her family's sole financial provider.

Fatimata is 25 years old and a fourth-year university student majoring in geography. Though her family is middle-class, she is the only child who had to the opportunity to enroll in school. With no financial support from her parents, Fatimata has sold ice cream and cold drinks since she was in primary school.

Guedie is 27 years old and a third-year geography student. She lives in a polygamous family with 14 children in a 3 bedroom house and shares a bedroom with six sisters. Guedie is the only member of her family to attend university, which she is able to

do through the support of her 70-year-old grandmother, who pays her tuition fees.

Jamila is 19 years old and in her first year of study in the field of Arabic literature. As she is from a remote, rural area, her parents sent her to the city to stay at her aunt's home, which is located in a slum far from the university.

Mariem, originally from Senegal, is 25 years old and is in her fourth year of studying sociology. Mariem is the only member of her family to attend university; her younger brother dropped out of school and returned to their village and her elder sister joined their mother in Senegal. Mariem's dream is to finish her university education, find a job and marry.

Naya is a third-year student majoring in sociology. Married with a child, Naya lives with her younger sister, who eventually dropped out of school to babysit for Naya. Naya receives a scholarship worth US\$40 a month.

Sokhna is a 28-year-old Senegalese woman married to a Mauritanian citizen and is in her second year studying English. Among her seven brothers and two sisters, she is the only member of her family who succeeded in passing the secondary school national exam.

Researcher credits

Research advisor

Dr. Cory Heyman

Cory serves as the chief program officer, supporting Room to Read's Habit of Reading portfolio (Reading Room, Local Language Publishing and School Room programs), the Girls' Education program and the Monitoring & Evaluation unit. Cory received his bachelor's and master's degrees in public policy from the University of California, Berkeley and has a doctorate in sociology from Johns Hopkins University.

Project managers

Kirsten Anderson

As the Girls' Education program fellow, Kirsten has coordinated and led two multi-country qualitative research studies focused on young women and their post-secondary transitions. Kirsten holds a bachelor's in anthropology from Grinnell College and a master's in TEFL/TESL from the University of Birmingham, UK.

Theresa Chen

Theresa is a global program officer with the Monitoring & Evaluation team at Room to Read. Theresa received her bachelor's degree in history from the University of California, Berkeley and her master's in public affairs from Indiana University, Bloomington.

Michael Wallace

Michael is Room to Read's global Monitoring & Evaluation director. Michael received his bachelor's degree in philosophy as well as his master's and doctorate in public policy from Harvard University.

Lead authors and researchers

Kirsten Anderson (Cambodia)

See project managers.

Bridget Lombardo (DRC)

Bridget was a program officer on the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP) for nearly three years at Academy for Educational Development (AED), now FHI 360. She coordinated AGSP activities in Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Tanzania. She holds a master's degree in experimental and social psychology and a minor in statistics from New Mexico State University.

Liza Baron (Ethiopia)

Liza worked for Academy for Educational Development's (AED) Center for Gender Equity (now FHI 360's Center for Gender Equity) for three years where she specialized in youth empowerment in the Middle East. Liza studied anthropology and Arabic at Washington University in St. Louis and went on to pursue a Fulbright scholarship in Morocco.

Julia Kirby (DRC and Ethiopia)

Julia has been a program officer with AED, now FHI 360, since February 2009. She received a bachelor's degree in religion and anthropology from Colorado College and a master's degree in international relations and religion from Boston University.

Saryu Dahra (India)

Saryu was a consultant for Room to Read India's Girls' Education program from July 2010 through June 2011. Saryu received her master's in social work from the University of Delhi.

Heather Arney (Mauritania)

Heather is co-founder and board president of Girls to School and the senior manager of International Programs at Water.org. In 2009, Girls to School was established to support ANFE's work. Heather has a bachelor's degree in business management from Wagner College and a master's in international affairs with a focus in international development and women's studies from Ohio University.

Coumba Dieng (Mauritania)

Coumba is the founder and CEO of ANFE. She began ANFE in the summer of 1998 in Nouakchott, Mauritania. Her goal for the project was simple—to get as many girls to school as possible. She has a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's in local development and decentralization.

Research consultants and assistants

Sokheng Bong (Cambodia)

Sokheng completed a bachelor's degree in psychology at Royal University of Phnom Penh in June 2011.

Chantha Chum (Cambodia)

Chantha graduated from the Royal University of Phnom Penh with a bachelor's degree in psychology in July 2010.

Roger Musumadi (DRC)

Roger has a bachelor's degree in organizational management and a master's of public health from the University of Kinshasa.

Wendmagegnehu Tuji Dugda (Ethiopia)

Wendmagegnehu is a doctoral candidate and instructor at Addis Ababa University. He received a bachelor's degree in pedagogical science and a master's in curriculum and instruction from Addis Ababa University.

Aissata (Mauritania)

Aissata has been working with ANFE for one year. She has a master's degree in sociology and local development.

Diallo (Mauritania)

Diallo is a teacher of English and works with girls' associations and educated young women's associations and cooperatives in both rural and urban areas.



© Saryu Dabra

Study participants in India reflect on their paths to tertiary education.

Acknowledgments

Many people and organizations contributed to this study and report. The research teams and report authors would like to offer a special thank you to the more than 160 young women who contributed their perspectives and stories to inform this report, which would not have been possible without the generous support of The MasterCard Foundation.

In addition, the research teams and report authors would like to acknowledge the staff at Room to Read, FHI 360 and ANFE who offered guidance and technical support throughout the entire process. Lastly, there were many individuals and organizations that assisted with innumerable tasks from editing and formatting to photography and coordination. We are grateful to all of you.

Sunisha Ahuja	Brittany Herbert	Kevin O'Neal
Diallo Alpha	Erin Hogan	Hamoudy Ould Hamady
Ann Anderson	Mary Hu	Sunita Patnaik
Charles Anderson	Varghese John	Joshua Patrick
Celine Anthony	Rachael Johnson	Om Phiran
Uzma Anzar	Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE)	Vandana Rajagopal
Manit Balmiki	Kall Kann	Mokhatar Ramadan
Jan-Marie Bannon	Mohammed Faheem Khan	May Rihani
Adam Clinton Baylor	Steve Kelling	Joshua Sargent
Cyndie Berg	Raksmei Khieu	Bahru Shikur
Nead Bunna	Heidi Kreiss	Ould Sidi Baba
Sushini Chand	Behzad Larry	Maureen Simunchembu
Jim Clark	Mohamed Lemine	Bhavana Singh
Peter Cooper	Shelley Levy	Coulibay Siradou
Stacey Dixson	Luntala	Chandara Soeurng
Melanie Doherty	Kristin McKennon	Tonin Souen
Rebecca Dorman	Mani Megali	Borin Srey
Johnny Dukoko	Melanie Doherty Design	Arumugam Sundaram
Wes Durrett	Mohamed Michael	Avik Swarnakar
Lisa Ellis	Joy Mischley	Reena Tete
Colle Gadio	Kiran Modi	Kristin Theiss
Erin Ganju	Katie Morton	Kabwika Tshakama
Djiby Gaye	Madhuri Mukherjee	The Udayan Care Shalini Fellowship
Giby Gaye	Geetha Murali	Aissata Wane
Sijo George	Bindiya Nagpal	Doudou Wane
Demissie Gudisa	Sanjay Negi	Khin Khin Wong
Latika Gupta	Hai Nguyen	John Wood
Rebecca Hankin	Wiseman Ngwata	
Thomas Henry		

Endnotes

- 1 UNESCO (2011). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011: The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2011-conflict>
- 2 United Nations (2010). The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics. New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- 3 Mensch, B.S., Bruce, J., and Greene, M.E. (1998). The Uncharted Passage: Girls' adolescence in the developing world. New York: The Population Council as cited in Levine, R. et al., op. cit., p. 23.
- 4 UNFPA (2005). Child Marriage Fact Sheet. Retrieved from http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm
- 5 Positive Deviance Initiative (2010). What is Positive Deviance? Retrieved from <http://www.positivedeviance.org>
- 6 Data Sources Include:
 - Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Education (2009). Education and Learning Institutions. Retrieved from <http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/English/MOE/Information/Pages/Education%20and%20Learninig%20Institutions.aspx>
 - Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development (2010). Report to the People on Education. New Delhi: Government of India. Retrieved from <http://www.education.nic.in/Report-english.pdf>
 - Human Development Reports (2011). International Human Development Indicators [Data file]. Available from <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/tables>
 - International Rescue Committee (2010, April 19). Primary Education for All: Out of Reach for Congo's Children? (Press Release). Retrieved from <http://www.rescue.org/news/primary-education-all-out-reach-congo%E2%80%99s-children-7381>
 - Kingdom of Cambodia, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (2008). Higher Education. http://www.moeys.gov.kh/Higher_Education.php
 - Southern Africa Regional Universities Association (2011). Democratic Republic of Congo. <http://www.sarua.org/?q=Congo>
 - UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011). Data Centre [Data file]. Available from <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/tableviewer/document.aspx?FileId=50>
 - UNESCO (2011). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011: The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2011-conflict>
 - United Nations Statistics Division (2011). Millennium Development Goals Indicators [Data file]. Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Metadata.aspx?IndicatorId=9>
 - The World Bank (2004). Project Appraisal on a Proposed Credit in the Amount of SDR 10.2 Million (US\$ 15 Million Equivalent to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania for a Higher Education Project (Report No: 28176-MAU). http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/07/15/000012009_20040715112139/Rendered/PDF/28176.pdf
 - The World Bank (2011). World Development Indicators [Data file]. Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>
- 7 (2009). Global Education: Cambodia. Retrieved from <http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/cache/offonce/pid/670>
- 8 Human Development Report 2009 (25 September 2009). 1 - Table L. Demographic Trends. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_Errata.pdf

- 9 UNICEF (2010). Cambodia Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cambodia_statistics.html
- 10 Fordham, G. (2003). Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health in Cambodia: Status, issues, policies, and programs. Washington, D.C.: POLICY Project, Futures Group International. Retrieved from http://www.policyproject.com/pubs/countryreports/ARH_Cambodia.pdf
- 11 United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2008). Cambodia: Background. Retrieved from <http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/cambodia.html>
- 12 The World Bank (2008). Country Summary – Cambodia. Retrieved from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATIONLP/Resources/Cambodia.pdf>
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 The World Bank (2011). Public spending on education, total (% of GDP). Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS/countries>
- 15 Ibid. The World Bank (2011). School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross). Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE>
- 16 International Rescue Committee (2011). IRC Study Shows Congo's Neglected Crisis Leaves 5.4 Million Dead.
Retrieved from <http://www.rescue.org/news/irc-study-shows-congos-neglected-crisis-leaves-54-million-dead-peace-deal-n-kivu-increased-aid--4331>
- UNHCR Country Operations Profile: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e45c366>
- 17 USAID (2010). HIV/AIDS: Democratic Republic of Congo. Retrieved from http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/africa/congo.html
- 18 International Rescue Committee (19 April 2010). Primary Education for All: Out of Reach for Congo's Children? (Press Release). Retrieved from <http://www.rescue.org/news/primary-education-all-out-reach-congo%E2%80%99s-children-7381>
- 19 Mumpasi, B. L. & Seraphin N. a P., (2003). Education Demand in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. pp. 9-10. Retrieved from <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/EdStats/ZARgmrapo3b.pdf>
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Marshall, J. (08 May 2011). DR CONGO: Inquiries into violence after fees hike. Retrieved from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20110507092506969>
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Application process includes a \$35 - \$50 registration fee, application, school records from 11th and 12th grades, a copy of the official State Exam (end of 12th grade) results, a certified letter from a doctor indicating physical well-being for attending university and a certified letter from the regional government attesting the applicant is of good moral character and recommended to attend university.
- 24 Central Intelligence Agency (n.d.). The World Factbook: Ethiopia. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 UNICEF (2008). Ethiopia Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_statistics.html
- 31 UNICEF (2008). The State of the World's Children 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/sowco8/report/report.php>
- 32 Education Policy and Data Center (n.d.) [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://epdc.org/searchdata/searchdata.aspx>
- 33 Trading Economics (2011). Public Spending on Education; Total (% of GDP) in Ethiopia. Retrieved from <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/ethiopia/public-spending-on-education-total-percent-of-gdp-wb-data.html>
- 34 The World Bank (2003). Higher Education Development for Ethiopia: Pursuing the Vision. Retrieved from http://www.usp.ac.fj/worldbank2009/frame/Documents/Publications_regional/Ethiopia-HigherEd_ESWo12004.pdf

ENDNOTES

- 35 The World Bank (2011) Ethiopia. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>
- 36 USAID (2010). Africa Education Initiative, Ambassadors Girls Scholarship Program. Retrieved from <http://aed-agsp.org>
- 37 The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2010). Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved from <http://features.pewforum.org/africa/country.php?c=69>
- 38 The World Bank (2010). India Country Overview September 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org.in/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/INDIAEXTN/o,,contentMDK:20195738~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:295584,00.html>
- 39 The World Bank (2011). FAQ's: India's Education for All Program. Retrieved from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/o,,contentMDK:21872336~menuPK:2643854~pagePK:64020865~piPK:149114~theSitePK:282386,00.html>
- 40 Ramachandran, V. (2003). "Gender Equality in Education in India." Prepared for UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4. Retrieved from <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/EdStats/INDgmrpap03d.pdf>
- 41 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010). Data Centre [Data file]. Available from <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/tableviewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143>
- 42 UNICEF (2008). India. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/india_background.html
- 43 Ramanathan, V. (2005). The English-Vernacular Divide: postcolonial language politics and practices. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- 44 Ibid. p. 34.
- 45 Sheorey, R. (2006). Learning and Teaching English in India. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications.
- 46 Ramanathan, V. (1999). "English is Here to Stay:" A Critical Look at Institutional and Educational Practices in India. TESOL Quarterly, 33 (2).
- 47 Maya (June 30,2010). Roshni Academy: Empowering and Transforming the Lives of Young Women [Web blog]. Retrieved from <http://blog.prathambooks.org/2010/06/roshni-academy-empowering-and.html>
- 48 The CIA World Factbook (2011). Mauritania. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mr.html>
- 49 UNICEF (n.d.). Girls' Secondary Education in Mauritania. New York, NY: School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/academics/concentrations/epd/UNICEFmauritania1.pdf>
- 50 UNICEF (2010). Mauritania Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mauritania_statistics.html#77
- 51 UNICEF (n.d.). Girls' Secondary Education in Mauritania. New York, NY: School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/academics/concentrations/epd/UNICEFmauritania1.pdf>
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010). School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross). [Data file] Available from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE>
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Grameen Foundation (2010). Progress out of Poverty Index. Retrieved from <http://progressoutofpoverty.org>
- 56 John C. Flanagan (1954). The Critical Incident Technique. Psychological Bulletin, 51(4). Retrieved from <http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/Readings/flanagan.pdf>
- 57 David, C. and Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life. Organizational Change and Development, 1, 129-169.



Room to Read

111 Sutter Street, 16th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104
United States

www.roomtoread.org



FHI360

2224 East NC Highway 54
Durham, NC 27713
United States

www.fhi.org



ANFE

Ksar A35
Nouakchott
BP: 7805
Mauritania

www.girlstoschool.org



The MasterCard Foundation

2 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 301
Toronto, ON
M4T 2T5
Canada

www.mastercardfdn.org
