Girls Advancement Programs

Wezesha Vijana
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Africa is the world’s second fastest growing economic region. Savvy global investors are rushing to invest in this potential, and thought leaders worldwide recognize the importance of education in unleashing this massive economic opportunity.

Women and girls are key to this bright future, since they represent half the potential workforce and more than half the consumer base. Yet despite many gains that have been made globally on gender equality, women’s access to economically productive activity still lags behind men, especially in the most marginalized communities. Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are more likely to become wives and mothers in their teens than to finish high school. By 2020, we will reverse this trend for over 100,000 girls.

We published this ebook not just to bring awareness to the challenges around girls’ advancement in East Africa, but to share the unique solutions Asante Africa Foundation is implementing to address them. Our Girls’ Advancement Program is changing this dynamic by eliminating the barriers that keep girls from attending and excelling in school, and giving them the tools they need to become confident, self-sufficient women.

We are proud of how these programs are impacting East African girls and their communities, and with your help we will continue to empower Africa’s girls to play a leadership role in her peaceful and prosperous future.

Erna Grasz
CEO
Asante Africa Foundation
The challenges for African girls

Numerous studies have shown that girls’ education is one of the most cost-effective strategies for promoting development and economic growth. It is clear that educated mothers tend to have healthier, better nourished babies, and their children are more likely to attend school. Women and girls who earn income invest 90% of it in their families & communities (vs. 30-40% for men), thus helping break the vicious cycle of poverty.

Undeniably, there is a need for educated girls and women. So what are the factors that currently get in the way of girls receiving the education they need?

- **Girls are more at risk of dropping out of school than boys**
  Though the primary school enrollment rate of rural Kenyan and Tanzanian girls equals that of boys, they are not as likely to complete grade 7 or advance to secondary school. In Tanzania, for example, less than 1% of girls will complete a full secondary school education. Despite this statistic, only 2% of international aid specifically supports keeping girls in school.

- **Girls are more likely to encounter sexual violence**
  150 million girls worldwide are victims of sexual violence every year.

- **Cultural traditions around early marriage, the value of education and (in some areas) female genital cutting**
  38% of girls in the developing world marry before age 18, and approximately 14 million girls ages 15-19 give birth in these countries each year. The sad reality is that a high percentage of them die during childbirth.

- **Girls lack information about their maturing bodies**
  Their low confidence in managing their menstrual cycles at school and a lack of safe and sanitary places to do so leads to irregular class attendance, detrimental to their academic success.

Once they are out of school, girls lack the know-how to build financial autonomy that would enable them to make and act on informed decisions about their long-term health and prosperity. At a young age most are locked into the cycle of poverty in which they were born and remain dependent on the pockets and mercy of the men in their lives.
Closing the Gap & Elevating Girls’ Success

Asante Africa Foundation is unique in our ability to adapt to the vast array of challenges faced by the diverse rural communities we serve. Our programs inherit their versatility from in-country staff and leadership comprised entirely of native East Africans.

The issues girls face vary with context. Our decision makers and implementers on the ground in each community are sensitive to those specifics and facilitate growth and support as needed by every participant and her unique circumstances. A well-connected and mutually supportive infrastructure allows the global team to draw from the resources and expertise across the organization.

Our Girls’ Advancement Program began as discreet projects. Over time the proven components have been woven into a holistic program tackling the diverse challenges young girls and women face. The young mentors who participated in the initial pilot training program coined the name “Wezesha Vijana,” which means “empowering ourselves” in Swahili.

To download the image, visit: Asanteafrica.org/Girls
Understanding relevant cultural, social, and health factors is critical to addressing girls’ education and the “keeping girls in school” gap. Asante Africa Foundation collaborated with parents, local leaders and other organizations with empirically proven models in the education, financial and health sectors, to develop a community-based program that changes this dynamic by:

- assisting schools in providing safe and healthy spaces for girls
- educating girls in sexual maturation, reproductive health and children’s rights
- building peer support networks such as girl-led school clubs
- mobilizing young women as community mentors and role models
- fostering greater communication between parents and their daughters
- creating a culture of knowledge sharing and paying it forward

The program links the development of three complementary assets: Health Assets, Financial Assets and Social Assets.

The Importance of Health Assets

Safe space to discuss puberty and reproductive health, which is taboo in many African cultures, particularly in rural communities

“"I can know more about puberty & menstruation. I will go and teach my sister [and] my small neighbor...”

Provide information girls need to confidently manage menses, stay in school, and focus on their studies

Access to reproductive health leads to smaller, thriving families
The Importance of Financial Assets

Girls and women with financial literacy, saving habits and confidence:

- Develop financial and personal independence
- Greater financial autonomy leads to safer sexual behaviors
- Experience fewer incidents of theft, harassment, and sexual violence

Participating girls created savings accounts

“If women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women are free from violence, their families will flourish. If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish. And when families flourish, communities and nations will flourish.”

- Hilary Clinton
The Importance of Social Assets
When strong social networks include peer support and local role models:

- creating a support system of open communication within the family
- health benefits of delayed marriage and childbearing
- the importance of building and managing financial resources
- the value of continued education and career prospects

Family support for education is enhanced, along with parental engagement in their daughters’ education and vision for their potential.

Parent-Daughter Meetings
Program information is provided and parents’ concerns are addressed. Limiting beliefs and cultural practices are discussed:

- creating a support system of open communication within the family
- health benefits of delayed marriage and childbearing
- the importance of building and managing financial resources
- the value of continued education and career prospects

Improved learning outcomes
Increased confidence to refuse sexual advances
Improved attendance
Increased confidence in managing menses at school
How We Measure Results

We consistently measure the impact of our programs, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Increased graduation rates, test scores, changes in knowledge and self-confidence tell part of our story. The qualitative component - the sense of solidarity felt by our students or the ability to communicate more effectively with parents about sensitive topics - tells the rest.

We also measure the success of our programs by the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries. Many of the indirect beneficiaries are a result of participants’ knowledge sharing and “pay it forward” activities. In addition to multiplying the impact of our work, this enables youth to become leaders and change agents in their communities.

**Key Performance Indicators to Evaluate Long-term Success:**

- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- Increased rates of transition from primary to secondary school and increased graduation rates
- Increased regular school attendance because they have adequate girl friendly facilities
- Increased knowledge of sexual maturation, reproductive health, and human rights
- Girls’ confidence in ability or intention to refuse unwanted sexual advances
- Decreased rate of drop-out due to pregnancy
- Girls establish long-term financial goal with increased confidence and regularity in saving
- Creation of girl-led community groups and entrepreneurial efforts
- Increased comfort and openness in discussing sensitive topics with adults and peers
- Girls feel more supported by and supportive of other girls through peer support networks
Outcomes since inception
Since the program began, we have directly impacted over 4,900 girls, parents and teachers. The girls have shared their knowledge with nearly 25,000 additional people in their families and communities.

- 75% of participating girls created long-term financial goals
- 75% of participating adolescent girls report increased confidence and savings
- 80% of participating girls report greater self-esteem
- 60% of girls have confidence to refuse unwanted sexual advances
- 70% of participating girls feel supported by, and in return, support other girls
- 50% increase in girls’ enrollment and attendance in schools where programs have been introduced
- 100% high school graduation rate among female Asante Africa Foundation scholarship students

Peer support groups and girls’ leadership clubs, which will serve to continue group activities and knowledge sharing, were effectively formed in 13 schools and actively planned in the rest.

A majority of school communities engaged parents in support of healthy communication with their daughters.

This scaling approach empowered those individuals, in turn, to share their knowledge with almost 10,000 other peers and adults.

Perhaps the most potent aspect of our initiatives is the sense of solidarity felt by our students, who leave with the motivation to galvanize their communities and foster the next wave of change agents. Participation in our Girls’ Advancement Program transforms a vulnerable young girl into a role model, a role our students have embraced and cultivated with inspiring vigor. Every success grows our impact. It’s time to take this unique program to new heights.

By 2020, this program will impact 100,000 girls.

2014 Impact & Results
In 2014 alone, with a budget of under $100,000 US, 30 local female peer mentors first learned, and then facilitated workshops on, financial literacy and savings, puberty, and sexual and reproductive health directly to nearly 1,900 girls in 29 schools across 18 communities in Kenya and Tanzania.

- Extra-curricular learning sessions were held weekly on topics such as HIV/AIDS, the risk of teenage pregnancy, finances and saving and how to maintain healthy personal relationships.
“At a club meeting girls told me about something that happened with a classmate. A girl came to school with ‘a bad smell’. When girls asked her she admitted her mother took her for a back alley abortion. They reported this to the headmistress and she was admitted to hospital. Girls are really learning about reproductive health and how to stand up for each other.”

–Mary Kwena, Kenya Program Associate

“It has had impact on girls’ school attendance. Previously girls who messed their clothes due to menstruation could miss school for the following week to avoid being laughed at. This has drastically reduced and girls have increased self-esteem to face such situations; a girl will go home and get back to school in the afternoon.”

- Tanzania Headmaster at elementary school

Wezesha Vijana was featured as a promising best practice in UNESCO’s publication, *Puberty Education & Menstrual Hygiene Management* (Click image to download)
How You Can Help

Provide the tools girls need to manage their body’s changing needs and stay in school
Provide personal hygiene and undergarments for a year: $25.00
Provide 1 uniform with shoes and undergarments: $30.00
Provide learning materials and curriculum for the year: $250.00

Give a girl the scholarship needed to fund her education
Send one girl to Elementary School or High School on scholarship: $1,000 per year
Every year, you’ll get a letter from your student, along with a picture and progress report.

Empower more girls by helping us bring Wezesha Vijana to more communities

- **Fund a School (approximately 50 girls): $5,000**
  By funding a school’s participation in the life changing Wezesha Vijana curriculum, you will empower 50 girls to impact 250 more amongst their peers, families and communities.

- **Fund a cluster of 10 Schools :$20,000**
  Provide an eagerly waiting school cluster with the opportunity to participate in Wezesha Vijana through their local schools. This gift will empower 500 girls to have a tremendous impact on 2,500 more amongst their peers, families and communities.

- **Fund a school district (40 Schools): $100,000**
  Create an even bigger ripple, empowering 2,000 girls across an entire district. The ripple effect is enormous as our girls find their voice and share their knowledge with over 10,000 others across their region.

Provide girls with additional leadership & entrepreneurship skill-building
Send 35 Girls to attend the Leadership & Entrepreneurship Incubator: $10,000
This life changing intensive workshop brings youth together with their peers across borders to develop life and leaderships skills that will enable them to become successful employees, entrepreneurs and global citizens. These 35 girls will leave as mentors who empower and spread leadership to at least 1,500 of their peers, families and neighbors. With the tools to break the cycle of poverty they will create brighter futures for themselves and their countries.

Other Ways to Create Your own impact
- Host or Attend an Event
- Social Media - Follow the exciting progress and share us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, for upcoming Events.
- Volunteer - Asante Africa Foundation is always seeking new volunteers. Check our website for volunteer opportunities.
Asante Africa Foundation believes in the power of knowledge as the catalyst that will empower the next generation of youth to be change agents. We provide youth in deeply rural areas of East Africa with access to high quality education and the tools to apply their knowledge beyond the classroom, creating opportunities to transform Africa and the world. Asante Africa Foundation is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization with global headquarters in the U.S.A. To learn more or to make a tax-deductible donation, please visit us at www.asanteafrica.org or email info@asanteafrica.org.

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