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CLASS OF 2023

A Scholarship Campaign to Support Women in Teaching

code | Promoting every child's right to read

ANNUAL REPORT - Class of 2023 Scholarship Initiative

Respectfully prepared for CODE supporters

May 31st, 2021

Dear CODE supporters,

It has been an undeniably challenging year, so we sincerely hope that this letter finds you and your families safe and in good spirits.

At CODE, this past year has tested our resilience and ability to adapt to a rapidly shifting environment. It has reinforced the value of our local partnerships, which have allowed us to continue delivering programs despite a moratorium on international travel. It has, also, made us incredibly grateful for the unwavering commitment of our many supporters, like you.

What has inspired me most over the past year has been witnessing firsthand the determination of our scholarship participants. Despite the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic – ranging from economic hardship to serious concerns for personal and family health – these incredible women have persevered and 99% have passed their first year of teachers' college.

This is an achievement that we truly wish to celebrate with you, as your support in raising funds for this pilot initiative has helped to enable this early success – thank you!

In the following pages you will find a brief narrative and financial update reflecting both on the considerable progress made, but also on the inevitable "bumps in the road" that are characteristic of any international development work. We are also delighted to share with you some personal reflections from our scholarship participants.

As a matter of interest, I was recently interviewed for a podcast about the *Class of 2023* scholarship initiative. The podcast is available on CODE's website at www.code.ngo/podcasts

Once again, thanks to you for your continued interest in the fundamental human right of literacy and education, and for the confidence you place in CODE and our work in helping to address these challenges in Sierra Leone.

Sincerely,



Dr. Johanna Kuyvenhoven
CODE Reading Specialist and Sierra Leone Country Lead

Cover photo credit: CODE/Stephen Douglas, 2020



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

An innovative pilot initiative to empower women in teaching

Nothing impacts children's learning more than the quality of teaching. In Sierra Leone, a country that has been ravaged by civil war and Ebola, a lot of hope is being placed in the education system. Yet, less than half of primary school teachers have any formal teaching qualifications. We are helping change that by offering scholarships to motivated young women who aspire to positively impact children's lives as teachers.

The *Class of 2023* scholarship initiative supports an urgent, and oftentimes overlooked, need to increase the number of young women pursuing careers in education. In Sierra Leone, only 29% of primary school teachers are women.

In a country that in recent years has declared a state of emergency over rape and sexual assault, the presence of women teachers in schools is tremendously important in creating safe environments, promoting gender equality, and providing mentorship to girl students. The lack of qualified women teachers negatively impacts learning outcomes for all children – but especially for girls.

Recognizing the important role that qualified women teachers play in improving retention and learning outcomes, particularly for girls, CODE introduced, as part of its *Transforming Girls' Education Program*, a scholarship initiative for young women. This is the first of its kind for CODE and a rare opportunity in Sierra Leone.

The aim is to empower women who have, to date, been working informally as unqualified, volunteer teachers in rural schools. These women have already demonstrated a deep commitment to the field of education, but due to a variety of poverty-related barriers have been unable to obtain their formal teaching qualifications.

Through the program, 100 women, 25 each from Western Rural, Port Loko, Karene and Bonthe Districts are participating in distance learning over three years to attain their Ministry-approved Teaching Certificate (TC) that will qualify them to teach at the pre- and primary school levels. The cost of each participant is approximately \$1,825 CAD, for the whole three years. This includes tuition, books and learning materials, exam fees, a stipend, attendance at an annual conference, coaching and more.

The 100 participants went through a rigorous selection process involving written applications, in-person interviews and mandatory success in college entrance exams. 25 participants were chosen from four different districts in which CODE works and enrolled in Freetown Teachers' College, Njala University, and Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (Makeni and Port Loko campuses.)

With the attainment of teaching certificates, these women will teach in rural districts where there is a shortage of qualified teachers. They will also serve as mentors and role models to girls in order to improve gender equity in classrooms and beyond.



PROGRESS REPORT

An update on key program milestones

It was not long after beginning their first year of teachers' college in January 2020 that the global COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on every aspect of life including the already under-developed education system in Sierra Leone.

Even though the participants were enrolled in distance learning programs, the teachers' colleges were not equipped to conduct all of their business remotely - so inevitable delays were experienced particularly relating to college administration. Additionally, the primary schools in which participants were teaching on a voluntary basis to gain practical experience were also closed. So, while their studies did not cease due to the pandemic, they did slow down and the first academic year was extended until December, 2020.

The first semester presented many challenges (described below), but nonetheless 98 out of 100 women persevered. They completed their course work and wrote their exams with additional support from CODE, including provision of supplementary learning materials; coaching in preparing for their exams; the creation of informal (socially distanced) study groups; and much needed moral and technical support provided diligently by our Scholarships Coordinator in Freetown. Unfortunately, two women left the program after the first semester due to personal circumstances. Those spots were filled with new students, who have quickly caught up to the rest.

As a matter of interest, over the course of the year, participants took courses in 13 subjects ranging from local languages (Krio, Mende and Themne) and vocational studies (e.g. agriculture and home economics) to community development studies, science, literacy and numeracy. The content of the modules in each semester were the stepping-stone to the content covered in the next.

By the end of December, all participants had written their semester 2 exams. Seven scholarship recipients were required to rewrite their exams due to unsatisfactory marks on their first attempts, and all but one passed. And with that, our group of aspiring teachers concluded their first year of the program. We are delighted to report that 99 of our 100 scholarship participants have successfully passed the first year of teachers' college!

Below is the high-level milestones table. Despite the disruption of COVID-19, we're pleased to inform you that we're well on track with our plans.



| High-Level Milestones | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Scholarship Coordinator Hired (based in Freetown) | August, 2019 | ✓ |
| Scholarship Recruitment (Advertising) | September - October, 2019 | ✓ |
| Candidate Selection Process | November, 2019 | ✓ |
| First Year of Program Begins | January, 2020 | ✓ |
| First Year of Teachers' College and Mentorship Completed | December, 2020 | ✓ |
| Scholarship Knowledge Exchange Conference | June, 2021 | |
| Second Year of Teachers' College and Mentorship Completed* | Fall 2021 | |
| Scholarship Knowledge Exchange Conference | Spring 2022 | |
| Third Year of Teachers' College and Mentorship Completed* | Fall 2022 | |
| Certification - Graduation* | Late 2022/ Early 2023 | |
| Tracer Study #1 (monitoring and evaluation) | 6 months past certification | |
| Tracer Study #2 (monitoring and evaluation) | 1 year past certification | |

Challenges and opportunities

Over the course of the first year of the program, several challenges arose. Some, due to external factors beyond our control (i.e. global pandemic) but others as a result of this being a pilot initiative. Below we share two of our key challenges alongside our plans for “course correction.”

- Colleges failed to deliver course modules to participants as agreed.**

Only Freetown Teachers' College (FTC) delivered course modules to students as agreed upon. The remainder of the colleges made late deliveries or no deliveries at all. This was in part attributable to the lock-down measures that significantly impeded the administrative functioning of the colleges. To prevent further delays, CODE intervened to secure modules directly from the Distance Education parent body in Sierra Leone (FTC), and took on responsibility of printing and distributing the learning materials to beneficiaries. With the lock-downs now passed, all teachers' colleges have already distributed modules for year 2 of the program.
- Finding a sufficient number of qualified female teachers to be mentors.**

The plan was that participants would meet with their mentors at least twice per semester for professional coaching, exploration of gender-responsive pedagogical approaches, and help with navigating the college experience. Only 12% of the participants were able to secure regular interactions with a female mentor due to the dearth of qualified female educators. As such, in the coming year, the mentorship activity will be replaced with "teacher learning circles" (TLC) at each college whereby the participants will meet in small groups at least monthly with a designated coach to discuss issues of common concern and receive extra support. The benefits of these TLCs will be many, including:

 - Practicing challenging teaching strategies with help from coaches
 - Getting help planning lessons and preparing for exams
 - Finding strength and joy in teaching in the company of colleagues
 - Translating ordinary classroom experiences into important lessons



Working in a country like Sierra Leone is inherently challenging – that’s why we’re there. From washed-out roads to frequent power outages and cumbersome bureaucracy, there isn’t a day that goes by without its fair share of trials and tribulations. We meet them with a smile, a creative mind, and a spirit of dogged persistence. And once the dust settles, we always find that an amazing amount of good work has been achieved. In this case, at the end of a challenging year, we’re able to celebrate that a determined group of young women are moving on to their second year of teachers' college.

Key performance indicators, monitoring and reporting

Recognizing that this is a pilot initiative for CODE, we have established the following key performance indicators and targets to demonstrate a realistic ambition against which we will track our impact. After the first year, our attrition (N.2) and failure rate (N.1) puts us comfortably above the 95% retention target.

| Key Performance Indicators | Target |
|--|----------|
| Retention of scholarship participants by year | min. 95% |
| Percentage of participants certified at the end of the 3-year program | min. 85% |
| Percentage of participants who transition into paid teaching jobs within 6 months and within 1 year of being certified | n/a |

Over the course of the past year, CODE’s Scholarship Coordinator (based in Freetown) undertook quarterly monitoring trips in March, July, October and February. Between in-person monitoring visits, the participants were encouraged to communicate with the Scholarship Coordinator by phone on any matters of urgency.

From an administrative perspective, at the completion of every semester, host colleges forwarded transcripts to CODE. Assignments, attendance records for in-person sessions, test and examination results, and for some course areas practical work make up the assessment package for each course. Tests and examinations were written in person and designed in the form of essays, multiple choice questions and demonstration of practical application where relevant.

From a program management and implementation perspective, CODE Scholarship Coordinator continues to oversee the day-to-day program implementation with additional support provided by our local partner organization TALLE. The Scholarship Coordinator reports directly to CODE Sierra Leone's Country Lead, Dr. Johanna Kuyvenhoven. Technical backstopping, as well as monitoring and evaluation support is provided by CODE's head office in Ottawa.



SCHOLARSHIP PARTICIPANT VOICES

Reflecting on the many benefits of the scholarship initiative



Zainab

"The scholarship has impacted my life greatly. I never thought that I would get the opportunity to further my education after the death of my mother. I rushed into marriage and I am now a widow with three kids to care for, the scholarship has not only impacted my life positively but has also provided my children with a stable future."



Alimatu

"Aunty Ruby (Scholarship Coordinator), has been a source of support and encouragement towards my studies. She checks on my wellbeing knowing that I get ill easily, she keeps us on track by checking with lecturers to ensure that we attend classes, she also encourages us to do our best".





Mahawa

"I am very excited because I am one step closer to become a certified teacher. Being the first university graduate in my family will be an honour and an inspiration to my siblings. I am also excited because when I am certified I will be able to support my younger siblings and help my community by conducting classes on Fridays for the children in my community with no cost attached."



Theresa

"Through my current studies, I have developed the ability to break down lesson notes into parts. I am doing better at using language that is understandable by children. I have adopted a singing method to teach language, sounds and writing. During math lessons, I used small sticks and stones for addition and subtraction. I also use songs and stories to help children with math problems"

Photo credit: CODE/Ruby Boston Griffith, 2021



BUILDING CHAMPIONS OF GIRLS' RIGHTS

Scholarship participants developing their skills as agents of change

In addition to doing our small part to address the astounding lack of female teachers in Sierra Leonean classrooms, we also wish to help participants hone their skills and knowledge to become active advocates for girls' rights at schools and in their communities. As part of the participant selection process, we assessed the candidates' motivation to do just that. We are delighted by their level of commitment to this work.

The need is great for vocal and influential champions of girls' rights. Sexual assault, harassment and rape are prevalent in Sierra Leone, including at schools, which creates an additional barrier to girls' school attendance and success. Yet, keeping girls in school and supporting their advancement is critical in reducing child marriage and early child-bearing, improving health and well-being and increasing prospects for future employment.

A UNESCO study in 2018 found that female teachers have an important role to play in mentoring female students, promoting gender equality and providing a safer learning environment. The study concludes that increasing female teacher recruitment could be one of the most effective interventions to increase gender equality in primary education.

Through the *Class of 2023* scholarship initiative, we are working to equip our participants to be knowledgeable and inspiring role models to female students. We are doing so by routinely including this subject matter in one-on-one monitoring visits with the Scholarships Coordinator. Additionally, written materials and training manuals related to gender, sexual and reproductive health rights, gender-based violence and puberty are made available to all participants and will be discussed in their "teacher learning circles."

Two annual knowledge exchange conferences will also be organized over the course of this program, the first is slated for June, 2021. These conferences will include content on gender responsive pedagogy, inclusive teaching, gender bias free teaching strategies, guidance counselling and much more. Guest speakers will be women of a high caliber, who will surely inspire and serve as role models for our scholarship participants.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Key milestones for the second year of the scholarship program

All scholarship participants began their second year of teachers' college in February and March, 2021. The academic school year (which has been accelerated due to COVID-19) is presently scheduled to end with exams written in late summer so that the third year of the program can commence in September, 2021. We look forward to reporting back to you at the conclusion of the second year.



"In the long run, a girl with a book is a greater threat to extremism than a drone overhead."

Nicholas Kristof
Columnist, New York Times



Caption: (L) Scholarship participants receiving their learning modules. (R) Mariama, scholarship participant with her students.
Photo credit: CODE/Johanna Kuyvenhoven, 2021



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