



10-Year Impact Evaluation Finds Lasting Results for Girls' Education

Between 2005 and 2012, Plan International USA's Burkina Response to Improve Girls' Chances to Succeed (BRIGHT) program improved the educational outcomes of more than 27,000 children in Burkina Faso. The program focused on 132 rural villages in the 10 provinces of the country where girls' enrollment rates were lowest. BRIGHT constructed primary schools, mobilized communities to support girls' education, and lowered barriers to girls' education outside the classroom through Plan's holistic approach.

These girl-friendly interventions were sustained by government and community investments and include: preschools where students are able to take their younger siblings, sources where students can collect water to take home, gender-segregated latrines, take-home rations for girls with a better-than-90 percent attendance rate, capacity building of Ministry officials, and more female teachers. Prior evaluations found that BRIGHT had raised girls' primary school enrollment by 20 percent and improved Math and French test scores for both girls and boys.

Now, four years after project close-out, a new rigorous, independent impact evaluation has found impressive lasting effects. Schools previously part of the BRIGHT program continued to be more accessible, have better infrastructure and resources, employ more teachers, provide more grade levels, and sustain girl-friendly characteristics when compared to schools in unselected villages. Child marriage is also six percent lower in BRIGHT villages, translating to more than 1,500 early marriages prevented.

The BRIGHT program was financed by \$25 million from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) with field support from USAID. The program was implemented by a consortium led by Plan, along with partner organizations Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Tin Tua, and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).



Rigorous Evaluation Design

The new 10-year impact evaluation by Mathematica Policy Research was commissioned by the MCC. The evaluation uses baseline data from 2005 to compare the 10-year impact of BRIGHT on program vs. non-program villages with otherwise similar demographics. Additional data includes household surveys (11,523 households), math assessments (31,419 children), French assessments (31,450 children), and schools surveys (332 primary schools and 103 secondary schools).

Girl-Friendly Approach

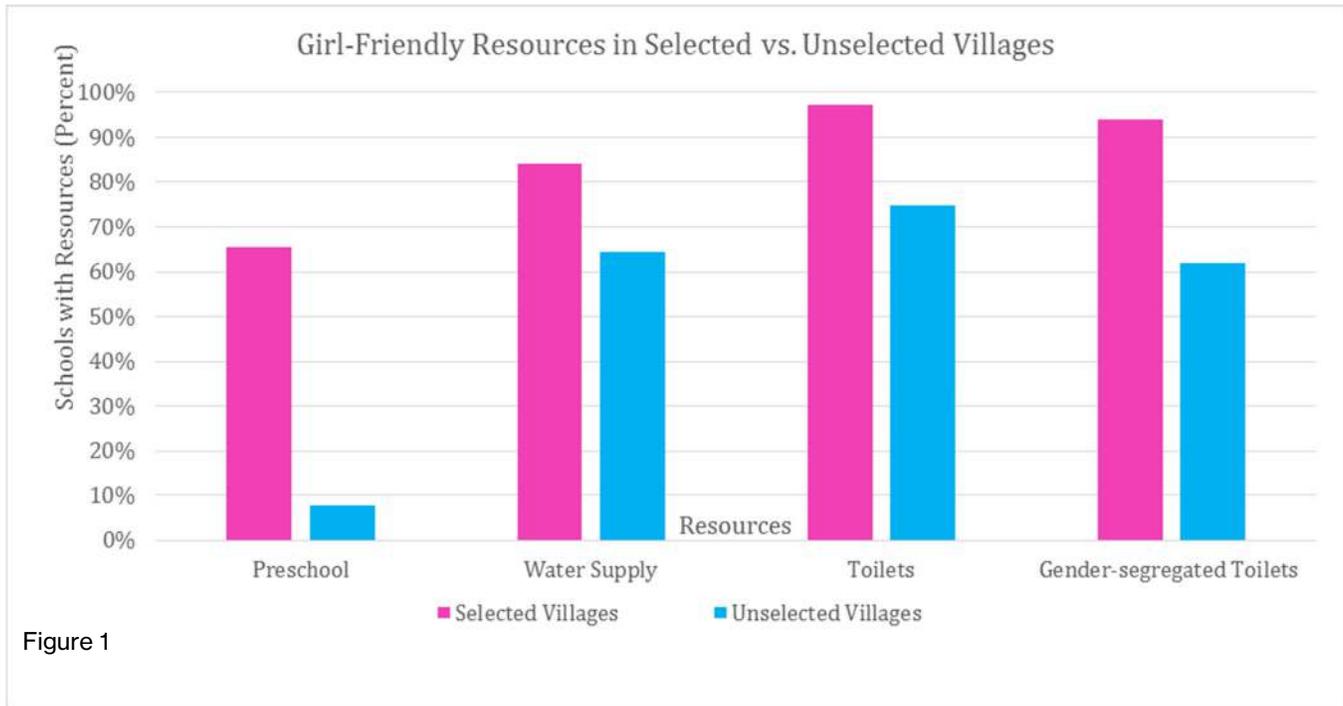


Figure 1

The sustained use of girl-friendly characteristics within the BRIGHT schools contributed to the higher rates of enrollment and the higher test scores for girls; young women experienced greater increases in enrollment than boys (5.4 percent), in addition to higher test scores (0.08 standard deviations). The 10-year impact evaluation has demonstrated the lasting value of these girl-friendly characteristics, which contribute to gender equality.

The use of gender sensitivity training, though, has decreased significantly in comparison to unselected villages; the impact evaluation found that both selected and unselected villages utilize the same amount of gender sensitivity training.

Enrollment Improvements Sustained

Selected Villages	Unselected Villages
99.6% of villages have a school	91.5% of villages have a school
5.95 usable classrooms per school	3.82 usable classrooms per school
5.08 teacher accommodations per school	1.44 teacher accommodations per school
6.7 teachers per school	4.67 teachers per school
29.76 students per teacher	38 students per teacher

Figure 2

Partly as a result of the factors listed in Figure 2, after 10 years self-reported enrollment rates continue to be higher in selected villages versus unselected villages, despite the fact that more than 90 percent of unselected villages now have schools as well. Enrollment rates for ages 13 to 19 were the most sustained as a result of being exposed to all complementary interventions since primary school. BRIGHT schools were more effective at enrolling students, starting students at the correct age, and keeping them in school for longer periods of time.

Test Score Improvements Sustained

Students ages 13 to 19 experienced the most sustained effects of the BRIGHT program, with test scores 0.31 standard deviations higher than students in unselected villages. As was the case with enrollment rates, students in this age group were exposed to all complementary interventions since primary school.

The program has proven to be successful with new beneficiaries as well. First-grade students in selected villages scored 7.7 percentage points higher on math tests than those in unselected villages. Students in first grade have just begun to receive the complementary interventions of the BRIGHT program and are already performing at higher rates than those in unselected villages.

Math scores for students in first through fifth grades in selected villages were, on average, almost five percentage points higher than those in unselected villages. Likewise, French scores of students in selected villages were also five percentage points higher than those in unselected villages. It is noteworthy that these differences are seen among students who enrolled in the BRIGHT schools after the program ended in 2012.

Child Marriages Prevented

One benefit of the impact evaluation is the ability to examine the effects of the BRIGHT program as cohort members entered adulthood. The BRIGHT program was especially successful at preventing girls from ending their education early in order to get



married or to enter the work force; with almost one in two girls getting married in Burkina Faso before adulthood, this impact is crucial.

For young women between the ages of 13 and 22, there was a considerable decline in both the likelihood of marriage and paid employment. Since the beginning of the BRIGHT program in 2005, approximately 1,540 girls have been saved from child marriage and 1,414 did not enter the workforce prematurely.

Some Benefits Have Faded

In contrast to both the three- and seven-year evaluations, the 10-year evaluation found the BRIGHT program had no effect on the prevalence of child labor within the household. The lack of impact is most likely due to changing views on child domestic labor in Burkina Faso. Unselected villages have now also experienced a welcome reduction in such practices.

The reduced magnitude of impacts over time is also seen when comparing estimated impacts on enrollment for children of the same age range. Specifically, the impact of the program on likelihood of school enrollment among 6- to 12-year-olds was 18.5 percentage points in 2008, 15 percentage points in 2012, and 5.2 percentage points in 2015. The consultants note that the “reduction in the impacts of BRIGHT on enrollment and test scores over time is partly explained by the improvements that have been taking place in the unselected villages.”

Evaluator’s Conclusion

“Altogether, the estimated impacts suggest that a school construction program that provides access to and improves the quality of schools for children in rural Burkina Faso can have lasting impacts on a generation of children in the country. However, it appears that the complete package of complementary interventions that accompanied school construction was vital if the impacts on the children in the targeted communities were to be sustained at a higher level. In addition, maintaining the girl-friendly characteristics of the primary schools is an important factor for the program to continue to yield larger positive impacts on girls.”

About Plan International USA

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