



Girls in Conservation

Interim Report for Together Women Rise

February 2025

Grantee Name: Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund

Report Date: February 15, 2025

Project Title: Girls in Conservation

Grant Amount: \$50,000

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PROGRAM UPDATES

Launched in 2023, Fossey Fund’s Girls in Conservation program is tackling education inequalities and promoting careers in conservation. Our Girls in Conservation program supports aspiring female students from communities near Volcanoes National Park by teaching life skills and practical conservation lessons. The program aims to boost school attendance for girls, educational success, and career opportunities, particularly in conservation, while enhancing the capacity of local teachers and mentors to guide young girls.

The Girls in Conservation Program is conducted annually and carried out over six phases. With Together Women Rise’s generous grant, we were able to launch a second cohort of students in 2024, and we are now making plans in 2025 to select a third cohort. Highlights of key activities with grant support are listed below.

1) Training of Trainers: We initially started with 5 schools adjacent to Volcanoes National Park, training teachers on the Girls in Conservation curriculum covering conservation principles, life skills, and careers in conservation. For Cohort 2, we increased to 8 schools, and expect to include 10 schools in 2025 for Cohort 3.

2) *Lesson Delivery*: Over a three month period, during allotted club time at schools, teachers work with a group of girls at each school. A pre- and post- test is implemented before and after the lesson delivery to measure students' knowledge gain. Top students from each school were selected to participate in the subsequent phases of the project. We started with 199 students participating in this activities and expect to reach nearly 600 this year.

3) *Mentorship Training & Shadow Day*: Mentors from a mix of professional sectors, including healthcare, hospitality, tourism, and nonprofit, are selected and trained to be effective mentors. Mentors and ~50 mentees were matched based on their mutual interests and career goals of the mentees. Mentees visited the mentor at their place of work to glean insight into their job duties and responsibilities.

4) *Presentations to Peers*: Following the mentorship training and shadow day, students participated in workshops at the Fossey Fund's Ellen Campus and gave presentations sharing their learnings with their peers, mentors, parents, Fossey Fund staff, and local government officials.

5) *Scholarship Awards*: Each year, depending on funding and qualifications, a small number of students are then elected to receive a Fossey Fund scholarship to finish their secondary education at a private boarding school, where graduation rates and scores consistently outperform local public schools. The scholarship covers all three years of schooling, plus living expenses, with the goal that all graduates pursue conservation-related careers. To date, we are supporting 36 students in private boarding schools (16 from Cohort 1 and 20 in Cohort 2).

PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

The first cohort of Fossey Fund scholarship recipients began attending boarding schools in September 2023. At the end of the first year, 88% of girls in Cohort 1 were continuing their studies at the boarding schools, and the majority of girls were scoring the U.S.-grade equivalent of 3.0 or higher. We continue to assess the impact of our program, although many of metrics include lagging indicators. (See chart below.) We anticipate meeting our graduation goals with future cohorts as we apply lessons learned from the first year running the program.

If it wasn't for the Fossey Fund, my child would have dropped out of school because of financial problems. I would like to tell other parents to continue supporting their children, especially girls, and avoid leaving them out.

- Eliada Twasabyimana, Parent of student in
Cohort 1

I am very happy to be in this program as that will allow me to finish secondary school. I will work hard and make you proud.

- Cynthia Namahirwe, Cohort 1

Goals As Proposed in 2023	Actual for Cohort 1 (2023-2024)	Actual for Cohort 2 (2024-2025)
# of schools	5	8
# of Girls Participating	199	425
# of mentors	13	48
-60% of girls in each of the 5 schools attend a minimum of 7 out of 9 GIC program lessons delivered during the school's club activities in the time-frame of 3 months. This will be measured by attendance at each lesson.	TBD	TBD
75% of girls increase their knowledge score, measured by pre and post tests before and after lesson delivery.	TBD	TBD
80% of girls complete an application for Phase 3: Mentorship 50 girls are selected for the Mentorship Program .	TBD	TBD
100% of mentors and mentees complete their Shadow Day.	100%	100%
80% of mentors and mentees stay in touch after Shadow Day.	NA	NA
90% of female mentors are willing to serve as a mentor again and/or recruit other female mentors.	100%	100%
# of scholarships awarded (~10)	16	20
90% of scholarship awardees complete their secondary school education	88%	TBD
100% of scholarship awardees are involved in conservation activities at their school	Lagging Indicator	

PROJECT MODIFICATIONS

We had originally planned to purchase computers to give to each of the scholarship winners to bring to their schools. We learned, however, that most of the students did have sufficient digital literacy skills to enable them to maintain and operate the computers. Accordingly, rather than purchase computers directly, we are now providing two workshops annually for the scholarship recipients to build the foundational computer skills and digital literacy needed to support their long-term academic and professional success.

PERSONNEL UPDATES

As the program has grown, our staffing needs also have increased. Nadia Niyonizeye has been promoted as Girls in Conservation Program Coordinator and will be devoting more than 80% of her time to this project starting this year. Hliary Hilsabeck continues to oversee all of our Rwanda Community Engagement Programs as Senior Program Manager. We anticipate hiring additional support staff later this year.

CHALLENGES

We are especially pleased that we have encountered no significant challenges to the timeline. The program was designed around Rwanda's annual academic calendar, and we have been able to follow that planning model throughout. At this time, we do not anticipate future obstacles or challenges.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The Fossey Fund closed out FY2024 meeting our budget, raising \$8.3M. Our audited financial report will be available by the end of February. At this time, a freeze in federal funding will not impact our work. A report on the use of grant funds is attached.