With the primary school in Uganda being free, it is no surprise that the enrollment is above 90%. Things, however, change as the students move to higher levels - secondary school enrollment is at around 20% of whom only a quarter finish it and about 5% enroll in the tertiary education.

To facilitate students’ transition to tertiary education, BRAC combined anti-poverty and human capital accumulation interventions. In partnership with MasterCard Foundation, BRAC Uganda launched the Scholars programme in 2013 to support more than 5,000 students from 2013 to 2017. About 70% of students were admitted in their senior first year after passing the primary leaving examination (PLE) exam and financed for six years. The remainder was financed for two years as they entered senior fifth year after passing the Uganda certificate of education (UCE) exam.

Students were selected by the committee, composed of education experts from the Ministry of Education and high-profile education stakeholders. After an interview at district, the applicants were ranked based on the poverty scoreboard and the final exams score. Successful candidates were guaranteed admission to one of the top 100 secondary schools. In two years households received support packages worth approximately USD 6,735, including full tuition coverage with accommodation and uniforms, learning materials, a monthly stipend and a teacher mentor. The monthly stipend of UGX 50,000 (approximately USD 66) was paid quarterly on a savings account of a typically female guardian. Students were also given a leadership training twice a year.

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Research

A Multifaceted Education Program for the Poor and Talented (Lerva, Ferris and Fornasari, 2021, Kampala: IERC and IIES, Stockholm University)

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Method

A randomised controlled trial (RCT) method enrolled 2,328 respondents from the shortlisted programme applicants in the intake rounds of 2014 and 2015. A total of 1,325 students were tracked at the follow up survey and split into a treatment (676) and a control arm. An intention-to-treat (ITT) method was used to assess children’s educational outcomes, households’ assets, food security and the psychological well-being of mothers.
The Scholars programme had a significant positive impact on students’ test scores and enrollment. They scored better on the national UCE exam by **0.36 standard deviations** (SD), relative to the control group, which was larger than in most other education programmes. Scholarship winners had higher enrollment in secondary school by **9.6 percentage points** (pp) - 87% of control applicants were enrolled in secondary schools compared to 97% of treatment applicants. To that, 95% of treatment applicants were attending higher-quality boarding school compared to 70% of control applicants, which was **25 pp** more. Since the students were yet to finish their secondary education at the time of this study, the effects on enrollment in tertiary education still to be commented.

The cash and in-kind support package provided by the programme significantly boosted households’ food and non-food expenditures. Monthly expenditures of the households were higher by **USD 3** and spending on food by **USD 9**, compared to the control means. Their dietary diversity improved by 0.16 SD with an increased number of meals by 0.09 SD, relative to the control mean. They were 45% more likely to consume red meat. Overall impact on nutrition was a **0.15 SD increase** of the control group. The households’ savings, durables and land ownership increased by **USD 22**, **USD 109** and **USD 1,209** respectively, compared to the control mean. The leadership workshops might have also affected households’ preferences about livestock composition which was more business-oriented. Treatment households invested **USD 18** more in small animals like goats, pigs or sheep and **USD 8** more in chickens than the control ones.

These aggregate improvements were beneficial for other household members; in particular, psychological well-being of mothers went up by **0.33 SD**. Their depression was slashed by 0.25 SD while life satisfaction and happiness burgeoned by 0.29 SD and **0.33 SD** respectively, relative to the control means. Older siblings also benefited the intervention with **14pp more** being able to attend private secondary schools as their parents could afford **USD 207** higher fees, relative to the control means. No effects were observed on child labour which was initially low at 3%.

**Way Forward**

The Scholars programme had large positive effects on enrollment and the test scores of the students and it even created aggregate benefits for the households. Results after two years have positioned it as a potential strategy to improving future prospects and wellbeing of both the students and their family members, especially women. Overall, this findings are in line with other anti-poverty interventions that provide a similar monetary value to recipients. Its benefits, however, did not seem to be equally distributed among household members; in particular, among younger siblings. To better understand the necessity and contribution of each programme components to the final outcomes, randomising individual components could be explored by future evaluations.