

A large-scale community intervention to change gender perceptions in rural Ethiopia

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Statement of relevance

- The paper reports on a multi-faceted community-wide intervention to change gender perceptions and encourage support for girls' education to improve their school attendance and performance. The intervention was implemented in 123 primary schools in rural Ethiopia, where traditional gender beliefs are still strong. Since girls are stereotyped as home-makers and boys as producers and leaders, parents invest more in boys' education, and girls often miss out on educational opportunities.
- Multiple interventions involving various stakeholders were implemented to address girls' barriers to education and to enhance equality in gender perceptions.
- There are many girls in many parts of the world that may experience the same situation in their communities. A similar intervention can be implemented in any community where girls experience low status because of cultural beliefs – although it would depend on the motivation and commitment of the project leaders.



Barriers to education that girls experience

- **Traditional cultural beliefs:** Parents do not regard education for girls as important. Girls are seen as home-makers and have to perform household chores that interfere with school attendance and school work. Boys are perceived as producers and leaders and get opportunities to study.
- **Girls lack sanitary supplies during menstruation.** They rather stay home during menstruation than be teased and mocked at school.
- **Lack of role models for girls:** Very few women in their community had high levels of education or are in paid jobs.
- **Girls have low self-esteem:** Community attitudes negatively influence girls' self-esteem, sense of worth and future aspirations
- **Teachers' attitudes:** Teachers do not use gender-sensitive teaching methods. They regarded boys as clever and give them more attention in class.

Interventions

- **Community mobilising meetings** to make people aware of the implications of gender inequality and to contribute to intervention plans to address the problem. Parents were asked to decrease girls' household chores so that girls could go to school and study.
- **Interventions in schools:**
 - Education officials, school directors and teachers were motivated to address the barriers to girls' education.
 - All teachers received training in gender-sensitive and participative teaching methods and to avoid gender stereotyping.
 - Female teachers were trained to present the following interventions:
 - Counselling and self-esteem development for girls
 - Parent training for mothers to support girls' education
 - Talks by local female role models to inspire girls
- **Interventions for girls:**
 - Washable sanitary pads, a sanitary room and separate toilet facilities for boys and girls
 - Group counselling about reproductive health, personal care and life skills.
 - Girls most at risk of dropping out of school or failing received additional tutorial classes.



Main findings

- Girls could attend school even during menstruation. They started to participate in classes and their school performance increased.
- Girl's self-esteem scores and educational aspirations increased.
- Many parents decreased house hold chores for girls and supported them in their school work.
- Teachers implemented gender-sensitive teaching that helped girls to participate in classes.
- Teachers' gender attitudes and gender role perception changed positively.
- There were change in community perceptions of the value of girls' education and evidence of increased equality in gender perceptions.



Why did it work?

- The intervention addressed the **real issues** girls experienced – increased motivation to participate.
- **Many people** in the community participated on various levels.
- **Many kinds of interventions** were implemented over a **three-year period** – to increase the effect and sustainability.
- The intervention was implemented within **existing systems** such as educational structures and communities – taking the culture into account and changing the community itself.
- Education officials and teachers were **trained and empowered** to implement various aspects of the intervention.
- There was a competent and enthusiastic **project team** that inspired stakeholders to participate and could hold the project together.