Education and gender norm change

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Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful drivers of gender equality because it can empower individuals and enable them to challenge discriminatory gender norms – the informal, often implicit rules of masculinity and femininity, which people mostly abide by.

How does education actually change gender norms? It creates a potentially virtuous cycle, whereby education leads to changes in gender norms, and these changed norms contribute to improved learning outcomes. But this process is not automatic; prevailing gender norms and gender discriminatory practices in schools and in wider society can undermine the potential of education to bring about changes. In this thematic guide, we signpost resources that bring together evidence on these issues.

This curated area:

- unpacks some of the concepts surrounding gender norm change and educational processes
- guides the reader through evidence on:
- discriminatory gender norms that limit access to education and educational achievement
- the role of education in changing gender norms
- aspects of education that reinforce discriminatory gender norms
- education and gender-egalitarian masculinities
- highlights interesting examples of initiatives aiming to support gender norm change through education
- highlights key resources for supporting and monitoring gender norm change through education.

The resources summarised in this curated area focus primarily on experiences in formal education systems.

Evidence on informal education for adolescents and gender norm change is discussed in the curated area on girls' clubs and life skills programmes, and in the forthcoming area on boys and masculinities.

ALIGN focuses on gender norms – the informal, often implicit, rules of masculinity and femininity, which people mostly abide by.

Gender norms reflect and shape the values that people and societies hold around gender equality and about particular practices (such as child marriage). While most people accept these norms implicitly, others accept them reluctantly or actively contest them. Gender norms influence and are influenced by collective and individual beliefs or attitudes and common practices. They can be upheld by perceived rewards for compliance and by sanctions for non-compliance. They also influence gender stereotypes – generalisations about the characteristics of people of different genders and social groups. Gender norms can contribute to and reinforce unequal power relations. For example, in many communities, women and girls are expected to defer to boys and men and not voice their views or participate in decision-making.

Gender norms can exert a significant influence both on children's access to education and their educational experience. For girls, these norms often become even more significant during adolescence – a life stage in which the need to protect their own (and their family's) good reputation often leads to restrictions on their mobility and their contact with boys outside the family.

In schools and community-based informal education, gender norms and stereotypes often reinforce one another. For example, a norm that girls should generally defer to boys can feed a stereotype that girls are less capable academically, while expectations that girls' home-making role is ultimately more important than their future in the labour market can lead teachers to consider boys' education as more important and give more attention to boys.

There are three other widely used concepts in relation to education and changing gender norms: empowerment, agency and capability development. Capability development refers to expanding the range of things people can be and do – a process that typically occurs in education through learning new knowledge and skills and changing one's aspirations. Agency is usually understood as people's capacity to act in ways that they have chosen or influenced, and is often considered one of a key set of capabilities necessary to lead a fulfilling and productive life. Education is often central to the development of agency through its impact on aspirations, skills and self-confidence. Empowerment (the most widely used of the three terms) is broadly understood as a process of gaining greater control over decisions that affect one's life. This is typically underpinned by both the development of capabilities and a shift in the power relations associated with (in this case) changing gender norms.

Gender norms affecting education

Gender inequalities, sustained in part by discriminatory norms, have a critical, negative impact on children's access to education and their learning experiences (see also here). The majority of literature focuses on the impacts on girls, but there is growing recognition that gender norms also contribute to boys' disadvantage in education. Recent data on trends in gender disparities in education and the role of gender norms in these patterns are summarised in UNESCO Global Education Monitoring reports. Gender disparities in educational enrolment and outcomes vary notably by region, socioeconomic group and age/ school stage. In many contexts, these studies show that the education outcomes of the poorest girls are worse than their better-off peers. Here, we very briefly outline some of the ways that discriminatory gender norms affect educational enrolment and outcomes, highlighting key resources.

Norms around the relative value of girls' and boys' education

Where families cannot afford to fully educate all their children, boys have often been prioritised. This is because their families perceive them as more likely to be able to get good jobs and support their parents in later life, while girls' futures have more often been perceived as home-makers in their marital families rather than supporting their families of origin. These perceptions continue to affect family decisions about children's education in low-income contexts.

There is some evidence that, as a result of economic pressures and demographic change, norms are beginning to change so that it is acceptable for parents to accept old age support both from adult sons and daughters, who were formerly 'lost' to their marital families. Where norms are relaxing in this manner, or where economic opportunities for educated women mean that girls' education is perceived as a good investment, there is some qualitative evidence of parents making education decisions more on the basis of individual children's aptitude and potential than simply on their gender. Stipends or other cash transfers that reduce the costs of school attendance have also shifted perceptions of the relative costs and potential gains associated with educating boys and girls.

Norms around marriageability and reputation

In societies where a girl's reputation, or that of her family, depends on modest and chaste behaviour and on virginity until marriage, schooling – and the associated mobility in public and unsupervised contact with adolescent boys – can represent a significant risk to that reputation. Where levels of adolescent pregnancy are high, concerns about girls attending school can represent parents' well-justified fears of their daughters engaging in sexual relationships with peers, or being sexually exploited by teachers or other school staff.

Norms related to marriage and dowry costs

In some cultural contexts there are specific, nuanced perceptions of the impact of different levels of education on the marriage 'market', and associated beliefs on what is the optimal level of education for girls. For example, ODI research in Hmong communities in rural Viet Nam found that many parents and young people believed that junior secondary education was optimal; it provided enough knowledge and competencies to be able to live a healthy and productive life, but tended not to raise girls' expectations so high that they were unwilling to accept traditional farming lifestyles and prevailing gender relations within marriage. There is also a body of evidence on how education can affect demands for dowry and bride price, and how this affects perceptions of the relative value of investing in girls' education or deciding upon marriage.

Norms around gender divisions of labour

Gender divisions of labour that assign a greater domestic workload to girls are widely recognised as impeding girls' regular attendance at school and their learning, as it undermines their ability to do

homework. Click here and here for links to qualitative studies highlighting the detrimental effects of girls' domestic workloads, and here for synthesised quantitative data on girls' domestic work burdens. Norms of masculinity that emphasise the breadwinner role – combined with opportunities for adolescent boys to obtain manual labouring work – can lead to pressure on boys to drop out of school. This also partly explains the recent gender disparities in favour of girls in some parts of Latin America, the Caribbean and East Asia, also evidenced in some studies from other regions.

Discriminatory norms and practices within education

Because schools reflect gender norms in wider society, discriminatory norms and practices are frequently replicated in schools, unless there is a strong gender-egalitarian ethos and teachers are sensitised to gender equality and how to combat it. Here, we signpost evidence on some of the ways in which discriminatory gender norms are manifested in schools and undermine educational outcomes.

Gender discriminatory practices and stereotypes about girls' and boys' abilities

Levtov (2013) and Kagestan et al. (2016) provide a good overview of studies that document how education reinforces discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes across a range of country contexts. These norms and stereotypes are reinforced through teaching practices (such as responding more readily to boys or asking boys more questions) and through school and classroom organisation, such as gendered assignment of chores – such as asking girls to clean and boys to chop wood.

Some studies suggest that boys' schools are at particular risk of reinforcing hypermasculinity (exaggerated male stereotypical behaviour) but there is little comparative evidence. There is also conflicting evidence on how far girls' schools are likely to challenge stereotypes concerning girls' achievement and capabilities, and how far they reinforce conventional norms about femininity. In both cases, the extent to which discriminatory norms are reinforced or challenged is likely to reflect the school's ethos and its commitment to gender equality, rather than simply reflecting whether boys and girls are educated together.

Within schools, and reinforced by wider society, discriminatory norms and stereotypes affect learning and education outcomes. These stereotypes often concern girls' overall competence or their competence in specific subjects (usually mathematics, scientific or technical subjects) and are linked to norms about what are 'suitable' subjects for girls to study or suitable sectors/industries for women to work in. In some schools, gender-stereotyped expectations can see girls channelled into studying technical subjects perceived to be useful for their future role (such as domestic science) – subjects that may also be perceived as unsuitable for and thus rejected by boys.

The latest data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) show some narrowing of gender inequalities in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) achievement, with patterns specific to particular regions. But boys still have better overall outcomes than girls in mathematics, physics and computing, as well as greater participation in the latter subjects. Qualitative evidence shows the strength of these gendered stereotypes among teachers and students alike. For example, see Masinire's study (subscription required) of school vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe, and Dunne's study of factors and processes related to gender inequality in Ghana and Botswana.

Gender stereotypes and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education

In many countries, regions and contexts, there is a pervasive stereotype that girls are fundamentally less well-suited to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and thus less competent in these subjects than boys. This is not a norm in the sense of a set of informal rules of behaviour, but more a set of beliefs that influence behaviour. These stereotypes can negatively affect girls' interest, engagement and achievement in STEM and reinforce boys' and girls' behaviour patterns in these subjects (e.g. with girls venturing fewer comments or answers to questions and boys monopolising equipment and resources).

Girls who assimilate these stereotypes often have lower levels of self-efficacy and confidence in their ability than boys; conversely, girls with high levels of self-efficacy in STEM subjects are much more likely to reject such stereotypes. Self-efficacy affects both STEM education outcomes and aspirations for STEM careers. Some in-depth studies show girls being discouraged from STEM subjects, which are perceived to be harder than others, particularly if subjects are not taught in an applied manner with clear linkages to real world issues.

Globally, there is a positive trend in terms of closing the gender gap in STEM-related learning outcomes, but significant regional variations remain. For example, where data are available in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, the gender gap in mathematics achievement in secondary education is largely in favour of boys, with less marked differences in sciences. In contrast, in the Arab states, girls perform better than boys in maths and science subjects in primary and secondary education. UNESCO suggests that this may reflect the high proportion of single-sex schools in the region, which may go some way to limiting the impacts of negative stereotypes.

These clear gender gaps in STEM engagement and learning outcomes have led to a range of initiatives (mostly small scale and/or time-bound) to interest girls in computing and technology, often in girl-only environments with female mentors. UNESCO's Cracking the Code, and the private sector and gender norm change guide, give some examples. Though these initiatives appear promising, their impacts have not been synthesised. As with other girl-focused activities, in environments where schools are underfunded and most boys also lack development opportunities, ensuring that similar opportunities are available to boys (in parallel, rather than necessarily in mixed groups) may help prevent resentment and backlash.

Sources: UNESCO (2017) Cracking the Code

Intersecting discriminatory norms

Gender norms do not operate in a vacuum – they are tied into a web of other norms, beliefs and practices and strongly influenced by the socio-economic context. Parents' decisions about which of their children to educate, and children's experiences in schools, reflect not only gender norms but also prevailing stereotypes and norms about the characteristics and capacities of different groups of children. For example, children from marginalised castes in India often face discrimination and mistreatment, as do children from marginalised ethnic groups across a wide range of contexts; stereotypes about these groups, their behaviour and their capacities to learn are often gendered. Poverty and other practical constraints (such as the curriculum being taught in the main language) can prevent children from marginalised ethnic and linguistic groups accessing or doing well in school.

Children with disabilities also face complex gendered perceptions of their capacities to learn, as well as negative perceptions of the value of educating them. Girls with disabilities (particularly learning disabilities) are more likely to be excluded from schools than boys in most contexts. These processes of exclusion reflect both prevailing gender norms and specific challenges around managing disabilities and perceptions of vulnerability. For example, fears about girls' safety can be heightened in the case of girls with physical disabilities (who might face additional challenges in repelling or fleeing an attack) or girls with hearing difficulties (who may not hear an assailant approach). Conversely, in some contexts, girls with disabilities are perceived to be less likely to marry and so to have greater need of education in order to be self-supporting.

The general lack of attention to making schooling inclusive also has gender dimensions. For example, while all children need clean, safe toilets at school, toilets may need adaptions such as handles or rails to enable children with physical disabilities to use them; and girls with disabilities may need particular support with menstruation management. Several recent reports have documented the absence of reliable, gender-disaggregated data on the education of children with disabilities. In recent years, more studies have started to explore gendered experiences of disability and its impact on education (see also here).

Key bodies of literature

Although explicit attention to education and gender norm change is relatively recent, there are several bodies of literature that have framed related issues a little differently (for example, in terms of social impacts of education or education and empowerment). Here, we highlight some key sources before outlining studies that delve into the processes of gender norm change in more depth.

Social impacts of girls' education

A huge and long-standing body of literature based on large-scale statistical evidence highlights the social impacts of girls' education, such as demographic change, health improvements, economic growth and reduced poverty. These impacts often reflect changes in gender norms and wider social norms as well as individual and collective empowerment arising from education, but the pathways to change are not discussed in any depth. Good overviews include Sperling and Winthrop (2015), King and Winthrop (2015), UNESCO's (2013) set of infographics 'Education Transforms Lives', and Chaaban and Cunningham's (2011) analysis of the economic gains from investing in girls' education.

Education and empowerment

A second set of studies focuses on the relationship between education and various dimensions of empowerment, such as developing self-confidence and skills. Key conceptual sources include Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2015) and Stromquist (2006). Marcus and Page (2016) synthesise evidence on the empowering impacts of girls' education, focusing on self-confidence, labour market impacts, and voice, while Sperling and Winthrop (2015) highlight evidence on the impact of girls' education on voice and agency and political engagement. Analysis of demographic and health survey (DHS) data from the mid-2000s shows how – within the overall trend of education contributing to women's empowerment – these patterns are nuanced and can be complicated by factors such as family structures. Studies of women's empowerment processes that take a long historical view highlight the rise in the proportion of girls attending school and the growth in economic opportunities for women with secondary education as key drivers of change in gender norms (see also here).

Part of this literature explores the impacts of education on attitudes and norms about aspects of gender equality. It makes substantial use of statistical data, both primary and secondary, to illuminate the role of education and of other factors in attitude and norm change. Good examples include the World Bank's On Norms and Agency, which draws on primary research in 20 countries. It highlights education as a key driver of shifting gender norms (or of norms becoming less strict), as does Kabeer's (2012) analysis of evidence on the key forces underpinning women's economic empowerment, and Seguino's (2007) analysis of data from the World Values Survey. Studies focused on particular issues (such as UNICEF's FGM/C: A Statistical Analysis) also highlight how education contributes to changing norms and practices.

While there is strong evidence for the transformative effects of education, there is no automatic link between education, individual empowerment and social transformation. Across many contexts, norm-based barriers continue to constrain women's economic participation, mobility and decision-making power. The processes by which education contributes to empowerment and norm change have received much less attention. The next section highlights some of the mainly qualitative studies that have explored these routes and processes.

Insights: Are there thresholds for the impacts of education on gender norms?

In answer to this question, the emerging consensus from the literature is 'yes'. Attending at least some years of secondary education seems to have a critical effect on gender norm change. This is the conclusion of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in India, Rwanda, Brazil, Chile, Croatia and Mexico, while analyses of education, women's work and decision-making power in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh reached similar conclusions. Qualitative evidence from India sets the threshold a little lower. Arnot et al.'s (2012) study for example, suggests that around five years of education is the minimum for changes in self-confidence and changes in how young married women are treated by their husbands and in-laws. Apart from IMAGES, few studies from other parts of the world have explored this issue.

Education and norm change processes

This interactive diagram shows stylised routes to change in a 'standard' school, in a school that accelerates change by paying specific attention to promoting gender equality, and in one where the positive potential of education to promote norm change is disrupted.

The 'standard' route to gender norm change

Development of self-confidence and communication skills

These are the vital building blocks of norm change – self-confidence to challenge inequitable norms and practices and to believe that one can overcome setbacks, and communication skills that allow one to speak out and share one's ideas with others. These skills are also increasingly recognised as vital for economic well-being and effective participation in society. Marcus and Page (2016) bring together evidence on the ways that education can contribute to increased self-esteem and resilience among adolescent girls. There are surprisingly few retrospective studies with women looking back on how their education has (or has not) helped them develop these skills (or gain formal academic skills). Two studies from Tanzania explore girls' views about how education has contributed to their self-efficacy, enabling them to be confident, resourceful and knowledgeable individuals (see also here) who can handle challenges and setbacks.

A growing number of girls entering the labour market and other public spheres (such as governance) with enhanced self-confidence and stronger communication skills may create its own virtuous cycle, challenging stereotypes about the relative competence of men and women, and undermining taken-for-granted views of gender roles. However, few studies explore the detail of how these processes occur; linkages remain theoretical or backed up by a few in-depth qualitative studies rather than by a significant body of evidence.

Exposure to new ideas about gender through curricula and school practices

One of the most obvious routes for change is exposure to new information and ideas that challenge established gender norms. In the mainstream school curricula in many countries, this new information comes largely through science classes and is related to health and biology topics, or through personal, social and relationships education. A significant body of literature has explored the effects of sexuality education both on young people's factual knowledge and their ideas about gender equality.

UNESCO's (2015) review of Comprehensive Sexuality Education found that 'issues of gender and rights are almost consistently absent or inadequately covered through current curricula across all regions'. It appears that – in mainstream school curricula – shifts in young people's thinking on gender norms and practices comes largely from new information rather than material that explicitly questions discriminatory ideas and norms. ODI's qualitative research among the Hmong ethnic minority in northern Viet Nam backs this up: young people reported that health information they had learnt in school changed their ideas about the ideal age of marriage:

My wife is 21. I think that if I married a younger girl with an underdeveloped body, my baby would be malnourished, unable to grow and slow to develop. I learnt it when I was in school. (Young man in focus group discussion)

If she gets married at the age of 20, she will not be as poor and she will give birth more comfortably. (24-year-old mother)

Levtov (2014) provides an overview of attempts to integrate material on gender equality more widely in school curricula – in social studies, personal, health and social education, and within other subjects (e.g. as a topic for argument or debate in language classes). The impact of these initiatives on gender attitudes and norms among young people has so far not been evaluated.

Go to the section 'Accelerated routes to gender norm change' for a discussion of a systemic approach to integrating gender equality into curricula and the impact of experimental short courses.

Exposure to stereotype-defying role models and peers

Qualitative evidence suggests that social interaction between boys and girls and being educated together can lead young people to challenge previously taken-for-granted gender stereotypes. For example, Alice Evans's qualitative study in Kitwe, Zambia, found that coeducation education had led children to reject stereotypes of boys and men as being more intelligent. In part, this reflected boys' experience – over an extended period of time – of seeing girls in their classes who excelled and mastered the material they were learning quicker than some of their male peers. Co-education also significantly reduced the extent to which boys and girls saw each other exclusively in sexualised terms – a change which they carried forward into their working lives. Girls attending co-educational high schools also reported that they learnt to stand up for themselves and to deal with male-dominated workplaces. Similarly, Arnot et al.'s study in India and Ghana found that in northern Ghana, new patterns of communication and gender relations were being established at co-educational schools. At junior high school level, relationships between boys and girls were mostly platonic and academic, with students assisting each other with assignments and class work based on academic ability rather than gender, though their relationships became more sexualised after puberty.

There has been much debate about the relative benefits of mixed-sex and single-sex schooling for various education outcomes, including girls' self-confidence and empowerment, and girls' and boys' learning outcomes. Yet the evidence is conflicting. Unterhalter et al.'s (2014) review of interventions to promote gender equality found no clear evidence supporting single-sex schooling, as quantitative studies have often failed to take the elite or selective nature of many single-sex schools into account. Levtov's analysis of the literature suggests that teacher attitudes and active commitment to gender equality matter more than whether students are educated in single-sex or mixed-sex groups.

Role models – such as teachers, classroom assistants, mentors, counsellors and visiting speakers – can also raise girls' aspirations by demonstrating that educated women can work in a variety of careers. Similarly, male teachers who display gender-equitable attitudes can be powerful role models to boys. Surprisingly few studies have examined in depth how role models can change children's aspirations and contribute to shifts in gender norms. Marcus and Page's review summarises evidence on the impact of mentors, counsellors and classroom assistants, such as the Learner Guides supported by the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed). The majority of recorded impacts were on girls' academic achievement; only one study highlighted the impact of a school counsellor as a role model.

Normalisation of school attendance

Large numbers of girls attending school and thus moving around public space (i.e. girls' education becoming a 'descriptive norm') can contribute to shifts in norms on female mobility, the acceptability of education, and gender equality more broadly. Together with communications from government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about the importance of girls' education, a common approach in many countries, this can start to shift norms so that girls' education is perceived as valuable and the responsible course of action for parents. Schuler's (2007) qualitative study in rural Bangladesh illustrates this combination of factors and shows the power of change among the 'reference groups' of girls' fathers in driving norm change on girls' education. (Other key factors included stipends that reduced the financial costs of girls' education to families.)

Changing community-level perceptions of girls and young women

The values that the wider community attaches to education affect perceptions of girls and young women who have attended school. In many contexts, as Lloyd and Young (2009) found, girls who attend school

are perceived by other community members as knowledgeable and more worthy of respect. Arnot et al.'s study (2012) in northern Ghana and India suggests that having attended school also subtly shifted perceptions of young women among their partners/ spouses and in-laws. This in turn contributed to subtle changes in practices, such as more joint activities between husbands and wives, and (in India) mothers-in-law exerting slightly less control over young wives. Women who had been to school, particularly secondary school, were also more able to influence decision-making in their households.

For girls from poor backgrounds, marginalised ethnic groups or other groups that experience discrimination or disadvantage, gaining this respect from others can be important, not just in terms of improving gender relations but also enabling those girls to negotiate a life trajectory on more equal terms (see Crivello, 2009 and Schuler, 2007).

While none of these studies specifically examined the impact of girls' education on changes in community-level norms, all of them recorded shifts in knowledge, self-confidence, attitudes and practices – the building blocks of norm change.

The accelerated route to gender norm change

Although school experience can be empowering and promote norm change in some ways, schools, teachers and students often reinforce existing norms through their policies and practices. Any given school, or individual teachers, are likely to reinforce some discriminatory norms but challenge others, for example, combating stereotypes about girls' and boys' abilities but at the same time, perhaps disproportionately asking girls to clean or serve visitors and boys to do heavier work, such as shifting furniture or carrying wood or water. The overall effect will depend on the balance of these emancipatory and discriminatory forces and how receptive individuals are to new ideas and practices. Schools with an explicit commitment to gender equality build on the transformative elements of 'standard' educational practice but also go further, instigating new, gender-egalitarian practices.

School environments

A growing body of literature highlights the importance of a gender-equitable school environment to promote gender norm change. As well as gender-equitable curriculum content, teachers' practices within the classroom and the wider organisation of the school can both contribute to fostering principles of gender equality, which, in turn, challenge assumptions about the 'naturalness' of gender roles. This literature is summarised here.

Levtov's (2014) overview of the impact of initiatives to promote gender-equitable values and practices among teachers (an approach increasingly termed 'gender-responsive' education) finds that they have generally improved learning outcomes and helped to promote more gender-equitable attitudes among students. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has, for the past two decades, undertaken a major training programme on 'gender-responsive pedagogy'. An evaluation of its impact concluded that it has been effective in helping teachers treat boys and girls more equally: they call on girls and boys to answer questions, challenge all learners more, and set up group work so that girls and boys learn from one another.

Curricula with strong gender focus

In recent years, efforts to promote more equitable gender norms have moved from their community base to mainstream education. These are sometimes part of personal, health, social and relationships education, and sometimes stand-alone initiatives delivered by external facilitators in partnership with schools. See Featured Resources for insights from evaluations of these initiatives. The best-known of these is the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) programme (see box), which started in India and has now spread to Bangladesh, Viet Nam and the Philippines, among other countries.

Erin Murphy-Graham's studies suggest that gender equality education is likely to be far more effective when embedded in a broader education programme that helps people develop critical thinking skills and to develop as citizens, as well as mastering knowledge and core academic skills. Murphy-Graham found that participants in the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) approach to education (see box) had applied their learning to try to negotiate more gender-equitable practices in their home lives, and had the skills to turn aspirations into reality, challenging norms about appropriate occupations for women.

Programme spotlight: Gender Equity Movement in Schools

GEMS was first piloted in 45 schools in Mumbai with 12–14-year-olds over two years. It has subsequently been implemented and evaluated in Jharkhand and Viet Nam, and in Bihar and Maharashtra states in India. In Mumbai, one group of participants were exposed to an awareness-raising campaign only; the other group also received 24 classes focused on gender equality and preventing gender-based violence. When the project was scaled up in Jharkhand, the classes were combined with a community awareness campaign for all participants. Students also received interactive workbooks to take home and follow up learning from the classes.

In Mumbai, the evaluation found that the proportion of students believing girls should be at least 18 (the legal age) at the time of marriage increased, reaching nearly 100% at endline (though baseline figures were not reported). For those receiving a combined intervention (group lessons and a school campaign), the proportion of girls believing they should delay marriage until the age of 21 increased from 15% to 22%. Students who were involved in both group-based education and an awareness-raising campaign were 2.4 times more likely to oppose violence than those in the control group; those who took part in the awareness-raising campaign only were 1.5 times more likely to do so than the control group.

In Jharkhand, the GEMS curriculum was used in 20 schools with around 3,000 students. Participation had a clear positive impact on students' attitudes towards gender equality, with a significant increase in the proportion of participants considered to have moved from the 'low' gender equality attitudes category to the medium and high categories. In Danang, Viet Nam, GEMS was piloted in 10 schools with 11–12-year-olds and has been similarly successful in helping students move from medium to high commitment to gender equality. In both cases, students' attitudes in comparison schools changed significantly less.

Sources: Achyut et al. (2011); Achyut et al. (2016) and Verma et al. (2016)

Programme spotlight: The Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial

The Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) or Tutorial Learning System is a formal, co-educational lower and upper secondary education programme (grades 7–12) that operates in rural and peri-urban areas of several countries in Latin America. It aims to help students develop capabilities that enable them to take charge of their own intellectual and spiritual growth and, at the same time, to contribute to building better communities. A distinguishing feature of SAT is that the principle of gender equality is integrated into the curriculum, which encourages students to engage in critical thinking and dialogue to examine cultural norms. The textbooks use the metaphor of a bird to explain the idea that men and women are like two wings of a bird, and if the wings are not equally strong the bird will not be able to fly. This strong imagery stays with students and teachers during the programme and beyond. Discussing gender throughout the programme allows SAT students to question their assumptions and recognise instances of inequality in their own lives and communities.

Alongside the programme's classroom-based academic content, SAT students take on other productive projects such as raising chickens, which allow them to develop practical skills they can apply in their daily lives. One reason why SAT has been recognised as a 'revolutionary' approach to secondary education in rural areas is because of its relevancy to the context in which students live. By combining high-quality academic content and the opportunity to apply their learning in practice, students become empowered to take action that can improve their lives and their communities. For example, a new feature of the programme in Honduras involves lessons that challenge students to identify the underlying causes of child marriage and early pregnancy, and to design a community-level campaign that will challenge social norms around these issues.

The SAT programme was designed in the early 1970s by a Colombian NGO, the Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (FUNDAEC). It now operates in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras, and as a non-formal education programme Kenya, Zambia and Uganda. A recent study by the Brookings Institution found that SAT's successful scale-up was partly due to it being expanded in a slow and incremental way, and its demand-driven pace, which helped ensure the quality of the programme.

School girls' clubs and gender equality clubs

Extra-curricular activities, such as girls' only or mixed-sex clubs promoting gender equality, can also help challenge discriminatory norms and practices, and sometimes norms related to powerful taboos. Typically school-based, these clubs combine multiple objectives: to enhance girls' self-confidence and communication skills, to educate members on aspects of gender equality and their legal rights, and, in some cases, to improve educational outcomes through study support. Contributing to change in discriminatory gender norms is generally an oblique rather than a direct objective, and likely to arise through the impacts of girls' clubs on the building blocks of norm change.

However, there is qualitative evidence of girls (and boys) learning new information and changing attitudes to gender equality as a result of participating in school clubs as ODI studies in Uganda and Vietnam found.

> *"The school-based activities give us information about how we should not be ashamed of menstruation and should not let it stop us from going to school; we should not get married early because this will stop short our education; and that we should share household chores so that we both have time to study."*
>
> *(14-year-old girl from a Straight Talk Foundation club, Uganda, see Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2015)*

For more on this, read the ALIGN girls' clubs curation, and access a recent review by Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) of the impact of girls' clubs and life skills programmes, also available in Featured Resources below.

Backlash. Efforts to promote gender equality frequently lead to backlash. There appears to be limited evidence of backlash related to the promotion of gender equality in school settings (there is more evidence concerning informal education).

Insight: Does gender equitable education improve learning outcomes?

Marcus and Page's rigorous review of school environments and girls' learning and empowerment brings together evidence which provides insights to the answer to this question. There are few comparative studies with control groups; however, evaluations of projects that promote more gender-egalitarian learning environments suggest that they can help improve learning outcomes for girls and boys alike. Evaluations of Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT), Camfed's Learner Guide programme in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and Plan's Building Skills for Life programme all found evidence of improved exam pass rates in participating schools. Qualitative evidence of the gender-responsive pedagogy approach pioneered by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) also shows increased engagement in learning among girls and boys.

Sources: Marcus and Page (2016); Mascarenhas (2012); Para-Mallam (2012); Camfed website; Wanjana and Njuguna (2015)

Education, masculinities and gender norm change

There is a strong association between education, particularly secondary education, and changing masculinities. This section brings together some of the references to education and changing masculinities highlighted in the previous section as well as some additional material. Barker et al. (2012) suggest key ways in which secondary education contributes to more equitable gender norms:

- Secondary class sizes are usually smaller, which reduces teacher stress and is probably more conducive to building the critical thinking skills associated with justice-based reasoning and more gender-equitable attitudes.
- Boys who reach secondary school generally have longer periods of interaction with girls as equals in the classroom over longer periods. The enforcement of rules and collective solutions to problems probably also contributes to a greater awareness and practical experience of social justice and fairness, which spills over into notions of gender equality.
- Secondary school teachers often have higher levels of education themselves, which makes it more likely that they will promote and support gender equality.

The impact of schooling may vary from issue to issue. For example, none of the men in the Promundo and ICRW study of Men Who Care identified their education as a key factor in them taking up non-traditional gender roles – in this case, professional caring roles or doing most of the care for their own children. This contrasts with the findings on general attitudes to gender equality, and on issues such as gender-based violence, son preference and child marriage.

As the role of boys and men as potential change agents has been increasingly recognised, there have been more attempts to promote gender-equitable masculinities through formal and informal education. A review (in progress) by the Overseas Development Institute is examining the impact of programmes that aim to promote gender equality and gender-egalitarian masculinities among adolescent boys through the school curriculum, through school-based clubs and through informal community-based education programmes.

Toolkits

Tools to promote change in school systems

International agencies and donor governments have developed a number of toolkits that give guidance on how gender equality and more gender-equitable attitudes can be incorporated into school systems and school management. Examples include the following.

- UNICEF - Promoting Gender Equality through UNICEF-Supported Programming in Basic Education. Provides guidance on how to incorporate gender issues in education programme design, focusing on identifying what support girls need to access education and the barriers that prevent them doing so.
- CIDA. Tip Sheet on Gender Equality in Education. Covers policy, education statistics, teacher training and curriculum development, identifying a series of questions to ask and actions to take to improve gender responsiveness and education outcomes for girls.
- UNESCO. Promoting Gender Equality in Education. Provides resources for raising awareness of gender and activities designed for use in a school environment. Contains exercises to build gender-responsive educational management, including how to go about gender-responsive budgeting in education.

Tools to support more gender-equitable approaches in the classroom

- IREX – Creating Supportive Learning Environments for Girls and Boys: A Guide for Educators. This resource describes how to create a 'gender friendly' classroom and how to ensure that teaching materials are 'gender friendly'. It uses a workbook format, enabling teachers to create their own action plan and monitor change.
- FAWE – Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher's Handbook. This, and other resources from FAWE, describe how to implement its gender responsive pedagogy model. The resources help teachers understand the specific needs of boys and girls as they learn, and the skills required to be gender responsive in the classroom.
- Promundo: The Portal for Gender Equality in Schools (PEGE) has resources for teachers to use in lessons discussing gender equality. Manuals for Programmes H and M (its flagship community based informal education programmes on gender-sensitive masculinities) are designed to be accessible for teachers to use.

There are also a wide range of resources based on the experience of individual programmes – for example, programmes designed to change gender norms in education, programmes that build on insights from sexual and reproductive health interventions, and programmes tackling violence against girls in school environments. Some good resources include:

- Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT): An extensive set of tools for promoting gender equality and girls' rights with teachers, school management, community members, policy-makers, and girls and boys themselves. These tools give insights into how different actors can work together to achieve change.
- Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS). The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) has developed a range of resources based on this programme, including a training manual for facilitators and a campaign guide. It has guidance on the types of activities that can be used to reach out to young people and community members, including campaigns to tackle gender and violence in schools.
- Population Council: Has produced many resources on health, gender and life skills programmes. The It's All One Curriculum presents a unified approach to gender, health and sexuality education. The organisation's broader experience of working with adolescent girls has led it to produce other toolkits

on programme design, including on Girl-Centered Program Design, Building Girls' Protective Assets, and Girls' Leadership and Mentoring.

- Connect with Respect: This resource from Plan International focuses on how teachers and school management can prevent gender-based violence in schools. Other resources include My Safety, My Wellbeing, a curriculum developed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and insights from ActionAid's Stop Violence Against Girls in School project. These provide guidance and exercises that teachers can use to raise awareness of violence and give girls the tools they need to resist violence.
- Resources from Girl Effect such as the '*Girl Consultation Toolkit*' and the '*Insights Toolkit*'.