

Girls Empowered



The right to education is fundamental to the attainment and exercise of all human rights. From global movements such as Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to community-level declarations regarding equitable and free education, real and positive change is opening up educational opportunities previously not available to many of today's children and youth.

An estimated sixty-six million children around the world are out of school; approximately 35 million of those are girls¹.

Investing in girls' education is a fundamental and key contributor to wider success in development, yet millions of girls face systemic challenges when it comes to accessing educational opportunities.

CARE is making large strides in addressing these challenges so that all children, especially girls, have an opportunity to education. With 65 years of education programming, CARE has a rich foundation of holistic approaches that seek to increase educational attainment, improve educational quality, enhance gender equality, and promote empowerment. Through these approaches, implemented both inside and outside of classrooms, CARE and local partners are challenging inequitable gender norms in communities, opening educational opportunities to children who never envisioned them, and empowering some of the most marginalized girls across the world. These approaches focus on change at three levels: individual agency, working with communities, and creating an enabling environment for change.

Many of these advances have been made possible through a longitudinal global initiative, the Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI). Since 2003, PCTFI has worked in ten

countries across the globe to reach traditionally marginalized communities with innovative, multi-sectoral approaches to providing equitable quality education.

Effecting Girls' Agency

Through a rigorous, action-research approach, the underlying causes of girls' marginalization have been identified and used to inform ethno-relative and context-specific programming. Among these, the most salient causes across contexts emerged as: girls' disproportionately higher workloads as compared to boys of similar ages, and girls' lower social status at all levels of society.

CARE's approach to education, implemented through PCTFI, aims at achieving positive impacts at all three levels. At an individual level, efforts to support girls' education and empowerment have brought about substantial change in a short period of time. Girls, who several years ago would have been called shy and reticent, now express their opinions in public. Awareness and respect for girls' rights has increased, and girls are beginning to exercise those rights.

In Honduras, girls and boys together are taking action within their communities to identify systemic problems, bring them to the attention of the community, and address them publicly.

Adolescent girls in Tanzania have formed group and are building leadership skills by leading mentor activities with younger girls in their communities. Empowerment activities in these groups have resulted in girls' increased ability to overcome barriers to education, such as early marriage.

Youth in Cambodia, who were once project participants and benefitted from enhanced and more relevant bilingual education, are now training to be teachers in the same schools they once attended.

Building Supportive Communities

Supportive relationship and communities are essential for sustainable girls' empowerment. Through PCTFI initiatives, increased attention and importance for equitable and quality education have empowered communities to transform momentum gained through previously non-formal educational opportunities into a stronger formal schooling system, benefitting boys and girls in rural Mali.

Communities in Ghana have taken ownership over girl-led mentorship programs, insisting and ensuring they continue through community-based efforts.

Teachers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, and local administrative officials in Burundi are all promoting and providing supportive spaces, structures and policies so that orphans and vulnerable children in their communities can reach their educational potential.

Gender equal changes on the importance of girls' education have been led by community members themselves in Bangladesh; individuals who once thought girls' education was fundamentally and theologically wrong are now advocates, ensuring more girls are enrolled and attending school on a regular basis.

Teachers in India are employing more child-centered and gender-responsive methodologies. As a result, more children, girls and boys, are enrolled and actively engaged in primary education.

In Mozambique, student peer educators have provided a forum for students to take action against issues preventing girls' access to education.

Enacting an Enabling Environment

CARE's experiences strengthen the knowledge that, for change to be systematic, it must be achieved in cooperation with others. Working through partnerships, coalitions, and using advocacy strategies help ensure long-term gendered change. Experiences and evidence generated through the work across PCTFI initiatives have influenced positive policy adoption in various contexts.

In Malawi, PCTFI is influencing countrywide discussions on the role of community support to girls' education, particularly the transition into secondary school.

Ongoing work to leverage individual and community-level developments can and will continue to influence international discourse, as well as the work done through various coalitions and networks. The dynamic ways in which girls and their communities have come together to create and support equitable and quality education, and support girls' empowerment are the beginnings of endless possibilities. The world's future will largely be shaped by today's girls and tomorrow's women.



The Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative was created through a generous gift to CARE by Patsy Collins to implement sustainable programs that improve the education of girls and young women in developing countries.

To get involved or learn more, please e-mail: basicandgirlseducation@care.org or visit: www.care.org