

ALiGN

**Advancing Learning and
Innovation on Gender Norms**



Education and gender norm change

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1. Introduction and key concepts

Education is a powerful driver of gender equality because it empowers individuals and enables them to challenge discriminatory gender norms – the informal, often implicit, rules of masculinity and femininity that most people follow.

How does education 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.

Gender norms exert a strong influence both on children's access to education and their educational experience. For girls, these norms often become stronger during adolescence, when the need to protect their own (and their family's) reputation often limits their mobility and their contact with boys outside the family.

Gender norms and stereotypes often reinforce one another in education. The norm that girls should defer to boys feeds a stereotypical view that girls are less capable academically, while expectations that their home-making role is more important than their future in the labour market can lead teachers to prioritise the boys in their classes. Three other widely used concepts relate to education and changing gender norms: capability development, agency and empowerment.

Capability development means, according to [Nussbaum \(2003\)](#), expanding the range of things people can be and do – an expansion that typically occurs during our education when we learn new knowledge and skills and change our aspirations.

Agency is our capacity to act in ways we have chosen, and is often seen as a key capability for a fulfilling and productive life (see, for example, [Ross et al., 2011](#)). Education develops agency through its impact on aspirations, skills and self-confidence.

Empowerment (the most widely used of the three terms) is the process of gaining greater control over decisions that affect our lives. This is often underpinned by both the development of capabilities and a shift in the power relations associated with (in this case) changing gender norms.

This thematic guide brings together the evidence on this issue to unpack the concepts around gender norm change and educational processes, highlighting:

- Gender norms and educational access
- Gender norms and educational achievement

- Education as a driver of gender norm change
- Case studies
- Useful resources: toolkits and further reading.

While this guide focuses on formal education, it does include information on informal education in relation to girls clubs. The guide sets out the links between education, empowerment and gender norm change, as shown in this interactive diagram, which explores standard, accelerated and interrupted routes to gender norm change.

2. Gender norms and access to education

Gender inequalities, sustained in part by discriminatory norms, undermine children's access to education and their learning experiences, according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report *Gender Review 2018* (see also the World Bank's World Development Report 2018, *Learning to Realize Education's Promise*). Most of the literature focuses on the impact on girls, but there is growing recognition that gender norms can also disadvantage boys in education, as noted by [Barker et al. \(2012\)](#).

Recent data on trends in gender disparities in education and the role of gender norms in these disparities are captured in UNESCO's [Global Education Monitoring reports](#). The data confirm that gender disparities in educational enrolment and outcomes vary markedly by region, socioeconomic group and age/ school stage. In many contexts, the poorest girls have education outcomes that lag behind those of their better-off peers. Here, we outline ways in which discriminatory gender norms affect educational enrolment and outcomes, highlighting key resources.

- **Norms on the value of education for girls and boys**

Where families cannot afford to educate all their children, boys are often prioritised. A boy is seen as more likely to be able to get good jobs and support his parents in later life, while a girl is more often perceived as a future home-maker in her husband's family, rather than supporting her own family. Such perceptions often shape family decisions about children's education in low-income contexts.

There is evidence that, as a result of economic pressures and demographic change, norms are beginning to change. As noted by [Kabeer \(2012\)](#) in the case of Bangladesh, it is becoming acceptable for parents to accept support in their old age from adult sons as well as daughters, who were formerly 'lost' to their husband's families. Where norms are relaxing, or where economic opportunities for educated women mean that girls' education is perceived as a good investment (see [Jensen, 2010](#)), there is some qualitative evidence that parents are making education decisions more on the basis of the potential of their individual children rather than simply their gender. Stipends or other cash transfers that reduce the costs of school attendance have also shifted perceptions of the relative costs and benefits associated with educating boys and girls, according to research by [Jones et al. \(2014\)](#) on early marriage in Hmong communities in Viet Nam.

- **Norms around family reputation**

In societies where a girl's reputation, or that of her family, depends on her modest behaviour and virginity until marriage, schooling – with its public mobility and unsupervised contact with adolescent boys – can represent a significant risk to that reputation. Where levels of adolescent pregnancy are high, parents may have valid concerns about girls who attend school having sexual relationships with boys, or being sexually exploited by teachers or other school staff, as noted by [UNESCO's 2015 policy paper](#) on this issue.

- **Norms around marriage costs**

Specific perceptions of the impact of education on the marriage 'market' can skew beliefs on the level of education for girls. For example, the research by [Jones et al. \(2014\)](#) in Viet Nam found that many parents and young people believed that junior secondary education was optimal; providing enough knowledge and competencies for a healthy and productive life without raising girls' expectations so high that they might rebel against a traditional farming lifestyles and prevailing gender relations within marriage. There is also a body of evidence that education can increase dowry costs and bride price ([Amin and Huq, 2008](#); [Ashraf et al., 2014](#)), and that this affects perceptions of the relative value of investing in girls' education or deciding upon marriage. Higher dowry costs reduce the incentive to invest in education, while higher bride prices can make education look like a better investment or can encourage parents to 'cash in' after girls have reached a certain threshold.

- **Norms around gender divisions of labour**

Gender divisions of labour often burden girls with more domestic work and more tasks that interfere with their schooling, on girls, impeding their regular attendance at school and their learning, as this undermines their ability to do homework. [Qualitative studies on Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda](#) from the Overseas Development Institute ([Jones et al., Ghimire and Samuels, Watson et al.](#), all 2015) highlight the detrimental effects of girls' domestic workloads – effects confirmed by [UNICEF's 2016 report synthesising quantitative data on these workloads](#). Norms of masculinity that emphasise the role of men as breadwinners – combined with opportunities for adolescent boys to obtain manual labouring work – can put pressure on boys to drop out of school. This explains, in part, the recent gender disparities in favour of girls in parts of Latin America, the Caribbean and East Asia, as seen in the most recent UNESCO [Global Education Monitoring Report](#), and shown in some studies from other regions, including [Jyotsna et al. \(2012\)](#).

Intersecting discriminatory norms affecting education

Gender norms do not operate in isolation – they are part of a web of other norms, beliefs and practices and are strongly influenced by the socio-economic context. Parents' decisions about which children to educate, and children's experiences in schools, reflect not only gender norms but also stereotypes and norms about different groups of children. For example:

- **Children from ethnic minorities**

Stereotypes about marginalised groups, their behaviour and their capacity to learn are often gendered, as well as reflecting prejudices about those groups. As research by [Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian \(2008\)](#) shows, children from marginalised castes in India, often face discrimination and mistreatment, as do children from marginalised ethnic groups across many countries. Poverty and other practical constraints (such as classes in a language that is not their own) can also stop children from particular ethnic and linguistic groups accessing or doing well in school (see [Marcus et al., 2017](#)).

- **Children with disabilities**

Children with disabilities face complex gendered perceptions of their capacities to learn, as well as negative perceptions of the value of their education. Girls with disabilities

(particularly learning disabilities) are more likely to be excluded from schools than boys in most contexts. This reflects both gender norms and specific concerns around managing disabilities and perceptions of vulnerability. Valid fears about a girl's safety can be heightened if she has physical disabilities and would struggle to repel or escape an attack, or a girl with hearing difficulties who may not hear an attacker's approach, as noted by [Lord et al. \(2016\)](#). Conversely, in some contexts, girls with disabilities are seen as less likely to marry and to have greater need of an education to support themselves ([Jones et al., 2018](#)).

The lack of focus on creating inclusive schooling also has gender dimensions. While all children need clean, safe toilets at school, children with physical disabilities may need adaptations such as handles or rails, while girls with disabilities may need particular support with menstruation management. Recent reports have documented the absence of reliable, gender disaggregated data on the education of children with disabilities and more studies are exploring gendered experiences of disability and their impact on education, including the *Still left behind* report by Leonard Cheshire Disability and UNICEF, [Wapling \(2016\)](#) and the analysis by [Jones et al. \(2018\)](#) on adolescents with disabilities.

3. Gender norms and educational achievement

Schools often reflect, replicate and reinforce the discriminatory gender norms found in wider society. Here, we outline how norms can undermine educational outcomes.

- **Stereotypes around the relative abilities of girls and boys**

[Levtov \(2013\)](#) and [Kagestan et al. \(2016\)](#) summarise studies on how education reinforces discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes across a range of country contexts 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.

Discriminatory norms and stereotypes that affect learning and education outcomes are common and often reflect perceptions of girls' competence (particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and are linked to norms about 'suitable' subjects for girls to study or pursue as a future career. In some schools, gender norms see girls channelled towards technical subjects seen as useful for their future role (such as domestic science) and as unsuitable for (and rejected by) boys. Often, boys are steered towards the subjects that may lead to more lucrative careers in later life. UNESCO's 2017 report, [Cracking the Code](#), provides useful insights into girls and STEM subjects.

Recent 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 STEM achievement in some regions. But boys still have better overall outcomes than girls in mathematics, physics and computing, as well as greater participation in these subjects. Qualitative evidence shows the strength of these gendered stereotypes among teachers and students alike. For example, see [Masinire \(2015\)](#) (subscription required) on school vocational and technical education in Zimbabwe, and [Dunne \(2007\)](#) on factors and processes related to gender inequality in Botswana and Ghana.

- **Norms around gender-segregated education**

Some studies suggest that boys' schools may reinforce hypermasculinity (exaggerated male stereotypical behaviour) but there is little comparative evidence. There is also conflicting evidence on whether girls' schools challenge stereotypes about girls' capabilities or reinforce conventional norms, as noted by [Unterhalter et al. \(2014\)](#). In both cases, the extent to which they challenge or reinforce discrimination reflects the school's ethos and its commitment to gender equality, rather than whether boys and girls are educated together.

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

There is a pervasive stereotype that girls are less well suited to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and, therefore, less competent in these subjects than boys. This can hamper girls' interest and achievement in STEM and reinforce the behaviour of girls and boys during STEM classes, with girls reluctant to ask or answer questions and boys monopolising equipment and resources. Some studies show girls being discouraged from STEM subjects, which are seen as harder than others, particularly if subjects are not taught in a way that reflects real world issues.

Girls who have more self-efficacy and confidence in STEM subjects are more likely to reject such stereotypes, with self-efficacy improving both STEM education outcomes and increasing aspirations for STEM-related careers.

Globally, there are signs of a narrowing of the gender gap in STEM-related learning outcomes, but significant regional variations remain. Where data are available in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, the gender gap in mathematics achievement in secondary education favours 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 this may reflect the high proportion of single-sex schools in the region, which may limit the impact of negative stereotypes.

A range of initiatives (mostly small scale and/or time-bound) are underway to interest girls in computing and technology, often in girl-only environments with female mentors. UNESCO's [Cracking the Code](#) and [Gardner et al. \(2018\)](#) provide examples. Though these initiatives look promising, their impacts have not been synthesised. Where all schools are underfunded and most boys also lack STEM opportunities, offering similar initiatives to boys (in parallel, rather than in mixed groups) could prevent resentment and backlash.

Sources: [UNESCO \(2017\) Cracking the Code](#)

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

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 analysis based on the International Men and Gender Equality Survey ([IMAGES](#)) in India, Rwanda, Brazil, Chile, Croatia and Mexico, and of analyses of education, women's work and decision-making power in [Bangladesh, India and Pakistan](#) by [Barker et al. \(2012\)](#). Qualitative evidence from India sets the threshold a little lower. [Arnot et al. \(2012\)](#), looking at Ghana and India, suggest that girls need at least five years of education to expand their self-confidence and change the way in which 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.

4. Education and norm change

ALiGN' interactive diagram shows stylised routes to 1) change in a 'standard' school, 2) in a school that accelerates change by paying specific attention to promoting gender equality, and 3) in one where the positive potential of education to promote norm change is disrupted.

Few studies examine the impact of girls' education on changes in community level norms specifically, but a significant body of evidence records shifts in knowledge, self-confidence, attitudes and practices – the building blocks of norm change. Examples include the World Bank's *On Norms and Agency* by Muñoz Boudet et al. (2013), which draws on primary research in 20 countries to highlight education as a key driver of shifting gender norms (or of norms becoming less strict). Studies focused on particular issues (such as UNICEF's 2013 *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview*) also highlight how education contributes to changing norms and practices. There is also a growing body of evidence about the ways in which schooling can become more gender-sensitive and play a greater role in promoting gender equality, which we summarise here.

How does education lead to change in gender norms?

A growing body of evidence suggests that the following are key mechanisms:

- **Developing self-confidence and communication skills**

The self-confidence to challenge discriminatory norms and practices and overcome setbacks, and the communication skills to speak out and share your views are two building blocks for norm change. According to Kautz et al. (2014) they are also increasingly seen as vital for economic well-being and effective participation in society. Marcus and Page (2016) discuss evidence on how education can enhance 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 and other skills. Studies from Tanzania by Willemsen and Dejaeghere (2015) and Posti-Ahokas and Hanna (2013) explore girls' views about how education has contributed to their self-efficacy, enabling them to be confident, resourceful and knowledgeable individuals who can handle setbacks.

If more girls enter the labour market and other public spheres with greater self-confidence and stronger communication skills they may create their own virtuous cycle, challenging stereotypes about the relative competence of men and women, as well as pervasive views on gender roles. However, few studies explore these processes in detail; the links remain theoretical or are backed up by only a handful of in-depth qualitative studies rather than a significant body of evidence.

- **Exposure to new ideas about gender within schools**

One obvious route for change is exposure to new information and ideas that challenge established gender norms. A significant body of literature explores the effects of sexuality education 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 are driven largely by new information (often in science classes on health or biology or through education on personal and social relationships) rather than education that questions discriminatory ideas and norms explicitly. ODI's qualitative research among the Hmong ethnic minority in northern Viet Nam confirms this: young people reported that health information they learnt in school changed their ideas about the ideal age of marriage (Jones et al., 2014).

'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) summarises attempts to integrate material on gender equality more widely across 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). However, the impact on gender attitudes and norms among young people has not yet been evaluated.

- **Co-education**

Qualitative evidence suggests that social interaction between boys and girls and co-education can lead young people to challenge gender stereotypes. For example, Alice Evans's 2014 qualitative study in Kitwe, Zambia, found that co-education had led children to reject stereotypes of boys and men as being more intelligent. This reflected boys' experience over time of seeing girls in their classes who mastered their subjects more quickly than some of their male peers. Co-education also reduced the extent to which boys and girls saw each other exclusively in sexualised terms – a change carried forward into their working lives. Girls from co-educational high schools reported that they learned to stand up for themselves and to deal with male-dominated workplaces.

Similarly, a study by Arnot et al. (2012) found new patterns of communication and gender relations being established at co-educational schools in northern Ghana. At junior high-school level, relationships between boys and girls were mostly platonic and academic, with students helping each other with assignments and class work based on academic ability rather than gender, though these relationships became more sexualised after puberty.

There has been much debate about the relative benefits of mixed-sex and single-sex schooling for girls' self-confidence and empowerment, and learning outcomes for both girls and boys. Yet the evidence is conflicting. The 2014 study by Unterhalter et al. on interventions to promote gender equality found no clear evidence to support single-sex

schooling, as quantitative studies often fail to take the elite or selective nature of many single-sex schools into account. [Levtov's 2013 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**

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 how this contributes to shifts in gender norms, although [Marcus and Page \(2016\)](#) summarise evidence on the impact of mentors, counsellors and classroom assistants, such as the Learner Guides supported by the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed). Most evidence outlined the impact on girls' academic achievement; only one study ([Dejaeghere et al., 2015](#)) highlighted the impact of a school counsellor as a role model.

- **Normalisation of school attendance**

Large numbers of girls attending school and moving around in this public space can help to shift norms on female mobility, the acceptability of education, and gender equality more broadly. Alongside communications from government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the importance of girls' education (a common approach in many countries), this can start to shift norms so that girls' education is seen as valuable and a responsible course of action for parents. [Schuler's 2007 qualitative study](#) in rural Bangladesh shows the power of change among reference groups of girls' fathers in driving norm change on girls' education. Other factors included stipends to reduce the financial costs of girls' education to families.

- **Changing community-level perceptions of girls and young women**

The value attached to education by the wider community affect the perceptions of girls and young women who have attended school. [Lloyd and Young \(2009\)](#) found that girls who attend school are often seen by other community members as knowledgeable and more worthy of respect. Studying northern Ghana and India, [Arnot et al. \(2012\)](#) suggest a shift in perceptions of young women who have attended school among their partners/ spouses and in-laws. This, in turn, contributes to subtle changes, such as more joint activities between husbands and wives, and (in India) slightly less control over young wives by mothers in-law. Women who had been to secondary school, in particular, were also more able to influence household decisions.

Gaining such respect is particularly important for girls from poor backgrounds, ethnic minorities and other marginalised and disadvantaged groups, not just in improving gender relations but also enabling them to chart their life course on more equal terms (see [Crivello, 2009](#) and [Schuler, 2007](#)).

Maximising the potential of education to change gender norms

Schools with an explicit commitment to gender equality can accelerate changes in gender norms by instituting new, gender-egalitarian practices. These include the following:

- **Changing the school environment**

A growing body of literature highlights the importance of a gender-equitable school environment for gender norm change, as highlighted by [Marcus and Page \(2016\)](#). As well as gender-equitable curriculum content, teachers' practices within the classroom and the wider organisation of the school can foster principles of gender equality that, in turn, challenge assumptions about the 'naturalness' of gender roles.

[Levtov's 2014 overview](#) of the impact of initiatives to promote gender-equitable values and practices among teachers ('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, undertaken a major training programme on 'gender-responsive pedagogy' for two decades. A study of its impact concluded that it has helped 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. Institutionalising gender-responsive teaching requires a long-term commitment to challenge both teachers' own gender stereotypes and norms among teachers about effective teaching methods, as [Nabbuye's 2018 study of Uganda](#) demonstrates.

- **A strong gender focus in curricula**

Efforts to promote more equitable gender norms have moved from their community base to mainstream education, sometimes as part of personal, health, social and relationships education, and sometimes as stand-alone initiatives delivered by external facilitators working with schools. The best-known is the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) programme (see case study in next section), which started in India and has now spread to Bangladesh, the Philippines and Viet Nam, among other countries.

Studies by [Erin Murphy-Graham](#) suggest that gender equality education is far more effective when embedded in a broader education programme that helps people develop critical thinking and citizenship, as well as mastering knowledge and core academic skills. [Murphy-Graham's 2009 study](#) found that participants in the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) approach to education (see case study in next section) had used their learning to negotiate more gender-equitable practices at home, and had the skills to turn aspirations into reality, challenging norms about appropriate occupations for women.

- **Addressing gender bias in textbooks**

Gender bias in school textbooks and educational materials is under-researched; as [Blumberg \(2008\) explains](#), this problem is understandably seen as less urgent than enabling millions of out-of-school children to go to school or improving the quality of their schooling. However, Blumberg's detailed analysis shows how gender stereotypes in textbooks can help to cement discriminatory gender norms, and discusses efforts to revise learning materials to promote gender equality. The [2004 study by Mensch et al.](#) (subscription required) on education and gender norm change among Egyptian adolescents reaches similar conclusions.

- **Tackling sexual and gender-based violence in schools**

Sexual and gender-based violence in schools is increasingly recognised as a deterrent to enrolment, a major cause of school drop out and a negative influence on educational outcomes, particularly for girls but also for boys. Such violence in and around schools reflects and reinforces wider norms about the acceptability of sexual harassment, around heterosexuality as normative, and about consent and power in gendered and sexual relationships. Work by [Parkes et al.](#) at the Institute of Education at University College London, supported by UNGEI, has developed a useful [conceptual framework](#) for understanding different dimensions of this issue. It has brought together data on the scale of the problem, and provides pointers about how to eliminate gender-based violence, including homophobic violence, in and around schools.

- **Girls' clubs and gender equality clubs in schools**

Extra-curricular activities, such as [girls' only or mixed-sex clubs](#) promoting gender equality, can challenge discriminatory norms and practices, and sometimes norms related to powerful taboos. Typically school-based, these clubs have multiple objectives: to enhance girls' self-confidence and communication skills, to educate them about gender equality and their legal rights and, in some cases, to improve their educational outcomes through study support. Contributing to transforming gender norms is generally an indirect objective. However, there is quantitative evidence of the impact of such clubs on attitudes to gender equality, which may indicate changing norms, as in the [Taaron Ki Toli and GEMS programmes in India](#). According to the study by [Jones et al. \(2015\) on Ethiopia](#), there is also qualitative evidence of girls (and boys) learning new information and changing attitudes to gender equality as a result of participating in school clubs. This is borne out by other studies from the Overseas Development Institute ([ODI](#)) by [Bantebya et al. \(2015\) on Uganda](#) and [Jones et al. \(2015\) on Viet Nam](#).

“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)

For more, see ALIGN's [guide on girls' clubs](#), and [Marcus et al. \(2017\)](#) on the impact of girls' clubs and life skills programmes.

- **Transforming masculinities through education**

There is a strong association between education, particularly secondary education, and changing masculinities. [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 may be more conducive to building the critical thinking associated with justice-based reasoning and more gender-equitable attitudes.
- Boys who reach secondary school generally have more interaction with girls as equals in the classroom over longer periods. The enforcement of rules and collective

solutions to problems may contribute to a greater awareness and practical experience of social justice, spilling over into notions of gender equality.

- Secondary school teachers often have higher levels of education themselves, making it more likely that they will promote and support gender equality.

The impact of schooling on masculinities may vary. For example, none of the men in the [Promundo and ICRW study of Men Who Care](#) identified their education as a key factor in their adoption of non-traditional gender roles – in this case, professional caring roles or providing 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 boys and men have become increasingly recognised as potential change agents, there have been more attempts to promote gender-equitable masculinities through formal and informal education. Look out for ALiGN's guide on masculinities and gender norms in 2019.

- **The risks of 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).

Policy question: Does gender equitable education improve learning outcomes?

The rigorous review of school environments and girls' learning and empowerment by [Marcus and Page \(2016\)](#) brings together evidence on this question. While there are few comparative studies with control groups, evaluations of projects that promote gender-egalitarian learning environments suggest that they help to 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 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 greater engagement in learning among girls and boys.

Sources: [Marcus and Page \(2016\)](#); [Mascarenhas \(2012\)](#); [Para-Mallam \(2012\)](#); [Camfed website](#).

5. Case studies

Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS): India and Viet Nam

Since being piloted in 45 schools in Mumbai with 12–14-year-olds over two years, GEMS has been implemented and evaluated in Jharkhand, Bihar and Maharashtra states in India and in Viet Nam. In Mumbai, one group of participants was exposed to an awareness-raising campaign alone. The other group also received 24 classes on gender equality and preventing gender-based violence. In Jharkhand, students received the classes and a workbook to continue their learning at home, and were exposed to a community awareness campaign.

In Mumbai, the proportion of students believing girls should be at least 18 (the legal age) before marriage reached nearly 100% (though baseline figures were not reported). Among those receiving group lessons and an awareness campaign, the proportion of girls believing they should delay marriage until the age of 21 increased from 15% to 22%. Students involved in classes and an awareness-raising campaign were 2.4 times more likely to oppose violence than those in the control group, falling to 1.5 times for those who took part in the awareness-raising campaign alone.

In Jharkhand, the GEMS curriculum had a positive impact on around 3,000 students in 20 schools, with a large proportion moving from the 'low' category for gender equality attitudes to the medium and high categories. Similar results were seen in Danang, Viet Nam, where students aged 11 to 12 in 10 schools moved from medium to high commitment to gender equality. In both India and Viet Nam, student attitudes in other schools did not change significantly.

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

The Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT): Latin America

The Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) or Tutorial Learning System is a formal, co-educational secondary education programme (grades 7–12) in rural and peri-urban areas of several countries in Latin America. It helps students take charge of their own intellectual and spiritual growth and contribute to building better communities.

One distinguishing feature is the integration of the principle of gender equality into the curriculum, encouraging critical thinking and dialogue on cultural norms. The textbooks use a bird metaphor to portray men and women as two wings that must have equal strength if the bird is to fly – imagery retained by students and teachers during the programme and beyond. Discussions on gender allow students to question their assumptions and recognise inequalities in their own lives and communities. SAT students also take on productive projects such as raising chickens, developing practical skills they can use in their daily lives.

SAT has been recognised as a 'revolutionary' approach to secondary education in rural areas because it is relevant to the context in which students live. By combining high-quality academic content and opportunities to apply their learning in practice, students become empowered to take action that can improve their lives and their communities. One new feature of the programme in Honduras, for example, involves lessons that challenge students to identify the causes of child

marriage and early pregnancy and design a community-level campaign to challenge social norms on these issues.

The SAT programme was designed in the 1970s by the Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (FUNDAEC), a Colombian NGO. It now operates in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras, and as a non-formal education programme Kenya, Uganda and Zambia. A study by [Kwauk and Perlman Robinson \(2016\)](#) for the Brookings Institution found that its slow, incremental and demand-led expansion was crucial for its successful scale-up, helping to ensure its quality.

The Taaron Ki Toli programme: India

Designed and implemented by global human rights organization, [Breakthrough](#), Taaron ki Toli (TKT) (Gang of Stars) is a gender equity programme. Launched in 2014. TKT began by operating in 150 schools with around 18,000 adolescent girls and boys in four districts of Haryana, providing a safe platform for adolescents to take part in decisions that affect their lives. The programme started with a tri-party agreement between implementation partner Breakthrough, [J-PAL South Asia](#) (the research partner), and the Government of Haryana's Department of Education. The pilot programme, backed by a rigorous evaluation, was designed from the outset to be scaled up across Haryana.

Each school was guided by a teacher coordinator ('Druv Tara' - guiding star), who worked with Breakthrough facilitators to create enabling environments. Together the Druv Taras and Breakthrough facilitators helped to halt child marriage, ensure continued education for girls, prevent sexual harassment and create spaces for adolescents to assert themselves within their schools and communities.

Evaluation of the programme by J-PAL revealed its positive impacts on participants' attitudes towards girls' education, with an increase of positive attitudes of four-percentage points. Programme participants also reported more gender-equitable behaviour such as increased interaction with the opposite sex. Breakthrough scaled up the programme across the five Indian states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi as well as Haryana, reaching over 600,000 adolescent girls and boys. See our [page on Taaron Ki Toli](#) for more information.

6. Useful resources

Toolkits

Tools to promote change in school systems

- UNICEF's 2011 guidance, [Promoting Gender Equality through UNICEF-Supported Programming in Basic Education](#), shows how to incorporate gender issues in education programme design, focusing on the support girls need to access education and the barriers that prevent them doing so.
- CIDA's 2006 [Tip Sheet on Gender Equality in Education](#), covers policy, education statistics, teacher training and curriculum development, identifying questions to ask and actions to improve gender responsiveness and education outcomes for girls.
- UNESCO's 2009 [Promoting Gender Equality in Education](#) provides resources to raise awareness of gender and activities for school environments with exercises to build gender-responsive educational management, including how to develop gender-responsive budgeting.

Tools to support gender-equitable approaches in the classroom

- IREX's [Creating Supportive Learning Environments for Girls and Boys: A Guide for Educators](#) describes how to ensure 'gender friendly' classrooms and teaching materials, using a workbook format to help teachers create their own action plan and monitor change.
- Alongside other FAWE resources, FAWE's 2005 [Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher's Handbook](#) describes how to implement its gender responsive pedagogy model. Teachers are helped to understand the specific needs of boys and girls as they learn, and the skills required to be gender-responsive in the classroom.
- Promundo's [Portal for Gender Equality in Schools \(PEGE\)](#) has teaching resources for lessons on gender equality. Teachers have accessible manuals for Programmes H and M (flagship community based informal education programmes on gender-sensitive masculinities).

Tools based on proven initiatives

- Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania ([TEGINT](#)): tools to promote gender equality and girls' rights with teachers, school management, community members and policy-makers, as well as girls and boys, provide insights into how different actors can work together to achieve change.
- The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) has produced resources based on the Gender Equity Movement in Schools ([GEMS](#)) programme, including a [training manual for facilitators](#) and a campaign guide setting out activities to reach young people and community members, including campaigns to tackle gender and violence in schools.
- The [Population Council's It's All One Curriculum](#) presents a unified approach to gender, health and sexuality education, while the Council's broader work with adolescent girls has generated other toolkits on programme design, including on Girl-Centered Programme Design, [Building Girls' Protective Assets](#), and [Girls' Leadership and Mentoring](#).
- [Connect with Respect](#) is a resource from Plan International focused on how teachers and school management can prevent gender-based violence in schools. Other resources on this

issue include [My Safety, My Wellbeing](#) (a curriculum developed by the International Rescue Committee), and insights from ActionAid's [Stop Violence Against Girls in School](#) project.

- Useful resources from [Girl Effect](#) include the *Girl Consultation Toolkit* and the *Insights Toolkit*.

Further reading

- While there is strong evidence for the social impact and transformative effects of education for girls, the processes by which education contributes to empowerment and norm change have received much less attention.

Social impacts of girls' education

- While a vast body of literature draws on large-scale statistical evidence to highlight the positive social impacts of girls' education, the pathways to norm change are not discussed in any depth. Good overviews include [Sperling and Winthrop \(2015\)](#), [King and Winthrop \(2015\)](#), UNESCO's 2013 infographics on 'Education Transforms Lives', and [Chaaban and Cunningham's 2011](#) analysis of the economic gains of investing in girls' education.

Education and empowerment

- Studies focus 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, 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 these patterns can be complicated by factors such as family structures. Studies of women's empowerment processes with a long historical view highlight the rising proportion of girls in school and greater economic opportunities for women with secondary education as key drivers of [gender norm change](#) (see also [here](#)).

Education and norm change

- Some literature explores the impact of education on gender norms using statistical data to illuminate the role of education and of other factors in attitude and norm change. Examples include the World Bank's 2013 [On Norms and Agency](#), which draws on primary research in 20 countries to highlight education as a key driver of shifting gender norms. [Kabeer's 2012 analysis](#) of evidence on the forces underpinning women's economic empowerment also emphasises education, as does [Seguino's 2007 analysis](#) of data from the World Values Survey. Studies on particular issues (such as [UNICEF's 2013 Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview](#)) illustrate education's power to change gender norms and practices.

About the author - Rachel Marcus

Rachel is a social development researcher and practitioner who focuses on social equality, particularly related to gender, childhood, adolescence and youth. In recent years she has led research on gender and school environments, girls' clubs, working with boys to promote gender-sensitive masculinities, and gender-sensitive youth livelihood programmes.