



Strategies that Succeed

Stories from the SAGE Project

1. The SAGE Story: It's About Girls Moving Forward

Strategies for Advancing Girls' Education (SAGE) is a project of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Bureau of Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade/Office of Women in Development (EGAT/WID).¹ The project's aim has been to mobilize broad-based, multisectoral constituencies to improve the educational participation of girls. Five countries participated in SAGE: Guinea, Mali, Ghana, El Salvador and the Congo. The project started in March 1999 and ended in July 2002. During this time SAGE mobilized local partners and provided them with capacity-building technical services to support girls' education. SAGE also convened national and international conferences and conducted research studies to inform and

¹ EGAT/WID was formally the Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support and Research /Office of Women in Development (G/WID).



Celebrating National Girls' Education Day in Guinea.

These success stories illustrate a variety of ways the multisectoral approach to advancing girls' education can be implemented—in terms of differing local rationales, partners, activities, results, and efforts to promote sustainability.

document the contributions of “nontraditional” partners in supporting girls' education. These nine stories illustrate the experiences and successes in using this approach. Much of the evidence comes from project documents and a lessons-learned conference held in Elmina, Ghana in May 2002.

The nine success stories illustrate a variety of ways the approach can be implemented in terms of differing local rationales, partners, activities, results, and efforts to promote sustainability. The stories suggest specific lessons about implementation and present specific interventions about multisectoral strategies as



Salvadoran schoolgirl pondering the future.

tools in improving the conditions for girls' education.

There were two main innovative aspects to USAID's original model: 1) the call to involve nontraditional sectors (business, media, and religious) in addressing issues related to girls' education, and 2) the commitment of funds primarily to mobilizing sector partners rather than implementing specific project activities. Under SAGE, the two traditional sectors (government and private-voluntary and nongovernmental organizations [PVO/NGOs]) were included with the nontraditional partners to achieve more sustainable results. From the start, therefore, a significant lesson learned under SAGE was the importance of linking these five sectors

to form a productive and enduring environment in which to address girls' issues.

SAGE has contributed insight into how multisectoral strategies can most effectively be used to serve girls' education.

Specifically, more is now known about how each sector can be approached, and about their potentialities and limitations in terms of supporting girls' education. In mobilizing partners to address complex issues, SAGE has shown the importance of establishing groups that broadly represent national and local stakeholders, while at the same time creating smaller working groups that act effectively to execute their decisions. Partners are more likely to become engaged if they share the common vision of girls' participation and feel that their involvement promotes the declared interests of their group. Once engaged they need to be linked productively to others in order to coordinate activities and build on the special strengths each contributes.

SAGE confirms that multisectoral approaches are more likely to positively affect girls' education if certain conditions exist: dynamic leadership at all levels, mutual respect of partners one, shared responsibilities, local resolution of problems, solutions that fit local conditions and values, good communication, and that flexible strategies that adapt to new understandings and opportunities.

To prove effective as implementing agencies, multiple sectors and levels need to be linked horizontally and vertically to ensure coordination, coverage and impact. SAGE demonstrated that entry into ongoing relationships could happen at almost any point (e.g. national, regional, or local) that was convenient in terms of mobilizing partners and maximizing results. Pitfalls to avoid were too much reliance on outsiders to solve problems, not involving the public sector sufficiently to sustain school level initiatives, duplication of effort that wastes resources or gaps that flaw the reform. Positive influences on any part of the system have the potential to affect the whole, while remaining constraints can similarly act to reduce overall results.

An important aim of a multisectoral approach is to create an environment where progress can be sustained. This is more likely to happen when norms encourage girls' participation, activities are built on structures that continue to exist after the project terminates (see Ghana's success story regarding the RGEOs and DGEOs handbook and Guinea's FONSEF success story) and when capacity-building investments are sustained by tools, training modules, and trained individuals that can continue to build needed skills. The tools are more likely to prove useful if they have been developed locally and are perceived as useful by those who created them. Institutionalized routines for meetings, reporting, monitoring and reflecting also help sustain effective networks over time.

During SAGE mobilization initiatives, local people identified activities they believed would promote girls' education. While most of these activities are not new, they gain credibility because local people identified them and invested in them as ways of increasing girls' participation. They included: mobilizing community members and

groups to solve problems, establishing new norms of participation with support from religious leaders and the media (see El Salvador's success story about the media's engagement), encouraging active female role models through the involvement of women in community organizations and providing them leadership training (see Mali's success story on women leadership training), creating role model calendars, training in gender-sensitivity, learning to develop and implement action plans, building classrooms and latrines, establishing mentoring groups and clubs, and providing relevant life skills content in school programs. New to most of the countries, on the other hand, was fundraising to support girls' education and exploring the possibilities of income-generating activities to reduce the burden of school costs to parents. A number of innovative ideas were also implemented for communicating messages about the importance of girls' education through the media and other means.

SAGE experience suggests that a multisectoral model is a valid tool in addressing girls' participation issues,



Explaining the importance of educating all girls.

particularly where the barriers to girls' education are complex and touch upon many sectors. When applied effectively, multisectoral approaches can both leverage current activities toward greater action and more immediate impact, and create the long-term "enabling" environment that can sustain progress. Such a comprehensive approach is, of course, demanding. Mobilizing multiple sectors, finding the resources to support their activities, and developing coordination mechanisms take time and effort. This use of human and financial resources must be weighed against the potential of different options. If problems can be

solved in a simpler way by focusing on one or two sectors then this should be the approach of choice. The advantage of mobilizing multisectoral partners is the increased range of issues that can be addressed. The disadvantage is that the more sectors involved the more substantial the energies required to mobilize them.

Future multisectoral approaches can profit from SAGE experience. This experience suggests that a number of issues are important:

- Developing an initial understanding of the main constraints on girls' education in order to know the sectors that may prove most effective in addressing them,
- Focusing on (and measuring) progress in indicators of girls' education to ensure that activities assumed to achieve those goals are effective,
- Conducting limited and inexpensive formative experiments (as Guinea did when it compared two "treatments" levels of support) to inform decision-making,

- Providing relevant and proportional technical assistance that also develops the skills of appropriate application,
- Keeping progress matrices to know where gaps need to be filled and which partners have been selected to cover the gaps. It is important that no gap remains unaddressed even when it is difficult.
- Issues related to girls' continuation, dropout, completion and performance cannot be fully resolved (no matter what the level of multisectoral effort) until public sector partners address these program quality issues more effectively.

Overall SAGE countries showed clear evidence that their multisectoral strategies produced 1) greater overall consciousness of girls' issues, 2) more and varied actors working on behalf of girls' education; and 3) more constraints on girls' participation being

addressed in project areas. The countries modeled participatory processes that increased the capacity of local civil society organizations to solve these and other development problems. Their insistence on inclusive practices gave women and girls more decision-making power over their own lives, thus encouraging changes that may prove even more significant over time.

The bottom line from SAGE experience is that multiple sectors can be mobilized to act on behalf of girls' education, that they can overcome many of the constraints that prevent girls' participation, and that they can do so while relying mainly on their own resources. This SAGE evidence provides a strong mandate for using multisectoral approaches to address many of the complex issues of girls' education.

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