



Strategies that Succeed

Stories from the SAGE Project

5. Leadership Training in Mali Triggers Positive Changes in Attitude

In Dogobala, a community outside of the capital of Mali, school statistics reflect a pronounced gender imbalance. Of the 81 new students who entered grade one in 1995, only 33 were girls, and of these 33, only 18 reached grade 6 by year 2000. Six dropped out, 4 transferred, and 5 repeated lower grades. The local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) keeps track of these statistics, but up until now there have been very few female voices on the PTA to offer reasons why girls' enrolment is so low and suggest actions to take to



Participants at the Dogobala leadership workshop in a work session.

address this issue. In Mali, the SAGE project is working with communities such as Dogobala to provide leadership training for female PTA members and increase their participation.

Implemented by the Academy for Educational Development, SAGE has been working in five countries (Guinea, Mali, Ghana, El Salvador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) to

The most significant moment of the training came when a male participant became very moved, having realized that girls often fail at school not because they are “too lazy” or “too stupid,” but because of the many constraints imposed on them by society. This gentleman was particularly prejudiced against women at the outset.



Female participants of the Dogobala leadership workshop in a role-playing exercise.

develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. Since March of 1999, SAGE Mali has addressed inequities in educational access, retention, and achievement for girls by undertaking the following activities:

1. A curriculum revision to include life skills from a gender perspective
2. Leadership training for female Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members
3. Girls' mentoring and life skills program
4. Girl-friendly classroom practices
5. Development of community action plans for girls' education

SAGE Mali conducted a study in 11 communities in an attempt to understand

the type of roles women play in community school PTAs. Women's traditional roles in society can affect the quality of a women's role as a PTA member, or even the possibility of her becoming a member. When examining women's attitudes, SAGE found that non-participation by women is seen as a sign of respect towards men ("in public, women don't speak in the presence of men unless invited to.") Where women's status is extremely low, women often cannot undertake activities or make decisions without their father's or husband accord. Other barriers to women's participation in PTAs are a lack of such skills as literacy, knowledge of public speaking, and assertiveness. Without effective leadership skills, women are less likely

to articulate the problems facing girls in school and help formulate appropriate solutions.

Leadership Training in Dogobala

Located in a semi-urban area, Dogobala is a community where the population represents many socioeconomic categories (farmers, civil servants, members of parliament, mayors, traders, and more). The

Dogobala community school has been receiving technical assistance from the Malian Association for the Promotion of Young People (AMPJ), a national NGO affiliated with World Education, an American private voluntary organization (PVO) operating in Mali.

SAGE Mali conducted a leadership training in Dogobala over a four-day period. The purpose of the training, which was attended by 23 people (of which 11 were women), was to discern barriers to women's participation in the PTAs and barriers to girls' education. Even though this training was directed at women members of the PTA, several community organizations and interest groups were represented: women's

organizations, religious organizations, teachers, school children and young unemployed graduates. It was deemed essential to sensitize a cross representation of the entire community —both men and women—to the change in women's roles needed for their equal participation in the PTAs.

SAGE utilized the experiential approach to enable participants to come face to face with long-held misconceptions about women, particularly their perceived inferiority to men. The goal of the training was:

- To determine the existing level of awareness of the population regarding gender issues;
- To assess obstacles to girls' education in the community; and
- To bring about attitude/behavior change within the population.

The first activity consisted of a race between groups of men and women. In each group, one man had his legs tied, one carried a load on his head, and one held a bag. Men and women noted that in real life situations, the person who had his legs tied and with a load on his head was like many women: the

load on the head are their domestic chores, and the tied legs represent the need to care for their children and all the other problems linked to her low status in society.

Participants concluded that a woman's ability to assume leadership roles in her community is constrained by the following:

- Women's low status
- The burden of household chores
- The absence of family planning

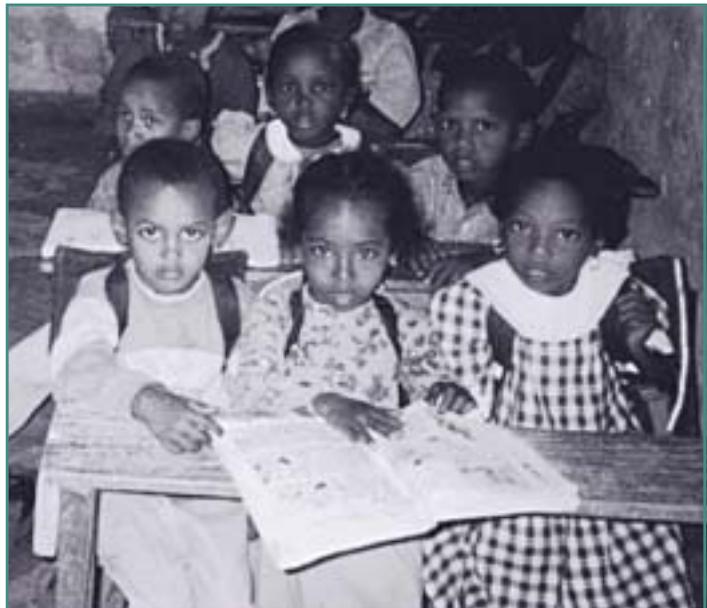
The second activity focused on barriers to girls' education. According to the male participants, girls do not

complete school because they are not intelligent enough or do not make an effort to succeed. To prove them wrong, SAGE then asked the women present to stand. And then, one by one they asked that:

- Those who had no schooling, to sit
- Those who had not reached sixth, to sit
- Those who had not studied beyond sixth, to sit
- Those who had not studied beyond ninth grade, to sit

And so forth, until the higher education level was reached.

Every woman was asked to say why she had not reached



Despite many obstacles, these very young girls managed to enroll in school.

the next level. Some of the reasons given were that they had to help care for siblings, or that their parents removed them from school either for marriage, or because they could not afford to pay school fees.

Discussions during this training were often intense and at times very emotional. The most significant moment of the training came when one male participant became very moved, having realized that girls often fail at school not because they are “too lazy” or “too stupid” to study, but because of the many constraints imposed on them by society. This gentleman was particularly prejudiced against women at the outset of the workshop. This about-face is an indication of the usefulness of such a training which took into account the participants’ receptivity to change in the early preliminary stages.

Final Note

The participants at the workshop became aware of the obstacles to girls’ and women’s leadership and the barriers to girls’ education in their community. By triggering positive attitudinal change around gender roles at the community level, SAGE has laid the ground-

work for women to become actively involved in the resolution of persistent constraints to girls’ education. Women are better prepared for taking leadership roles on the PTAs and men are aware of the persistent obstacles to women’s leadership.

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