Strategies that Succeed

Stories from the SAGE Project

7. Shaping New Roles and Responsibilities in Ghana

Ghana's commitment to the education of the girl child has been demonstrated by the recent appointment of a Minister of State for Basic, Secondary and Girl Child Education and the establishment of the Girls' Education Unit (GEU) within the Ministry of Education in 1997. In an effort to ensure that the same importance was given to girls' education locally as it was nationally, the GEU created Regional and District Girls' Education Officer positions (RGEO and DGEO) in the 10 regions and 110 districts of Ghana. Despite the overwhelming logistical and geographical challenges to setting up a system with nationwide coverage, the GEU pressed on, recognizing the critical importance

Numerous education officials have been trained in the use of the Handbook, utilizing it to guide communications directed at the district level about issues in girls' education, develop action plans, conduct community mobilization activities, and assess barriers to girls' participation at the school and classroom level.

The authors of the R/DGEO Handbook.

Academy for Educational Development ■ 1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW ■ Washington, DC 20009-5721
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Writing and rewriting the R/DGEO Handbook.

of having widespread direct support for girls' education at local as well as national levels. To strengthen the capacity of the newly-appointed R/DGEOs in implementing change for girls' education, the Strategies for Advancing Girls Education (SAGE) project facilitated and supported the production of a Resource Handbook for the Girls' Education Officers.

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 develop multisectoral partnerships in support of girls' education. SAGE Ghana has been addressing inequities in educational access, retention, and completion for girls by implementing a three-level girls' education strategy in Ghana, including system, school, and community level interventions.

Recent years have seen increases in girls' educational participation in Ghana due to the focus and commitment of the government. Yet statistics illustrate that the job is not yet complete. Of children 6 –11 years of age 84.4% of males and 81.6% of females are in school, showing a gender gap of 3%. The gap widens to 7 % in the case of children aged 12 to 15. Fewer girls transition into junior secondary school while gender differences prevail at the regional level. Also while generally in urban and rural coastal areas participation is higher, the attendance rate of both boys and girls tends to be lower in rural savannah areas (Girls' Education Unit 2001).

The Role of RGEOs and DGEOs

The job description of R/DGEOs is to actively promote girls' education, serve as a link to communities, develop awareness, monitor relevant education data, and take positive action within the District or Region to raise girls' enrolment, retention, and achievement in school. However, despite this potentially powerful role, it was observed that the Girls' Education Officers were not yet implementing their role to its full capacity. One of the constraints they faced was a lack of detailed clarity on how to translate their responsibilities into practical, feasible, and effective activities within the context they work.

To address this critical need, SAGE Ghana, through consultation with GEU officers, facilitated the production of a handbook to build on the wealth of the experiences of the R/DGEOs. To begin, SAGE consultants designed the format of the Handbook in conjunction with the Director of the GEU. They decided upon five chapters, organized around the levels at which the R/DGEOs work: actions at the district level, the school level, and the

teacher/classroom level, and mobilization of the community to increase girls' enrolment and girls' retention.

End-users were involved in a participatory workshop to develop the Handbook. The workshop, held in October 2001, was attended by nine RGEOs, sixteen DGEOs, three Regional Science, Technology, and Mathematics Education Officers (RSTMEOs), four WITEDOs (Women in Technology Education Officer) and one DSTMEO (District Science, Technology, and Mathematics Education Officer). During this workshop, the participants were divided into five working groups corresponding to the chapters outlined above. They were provided with articles, reference books, and resources which would be of specific use in the development of each chapter. Some groups had more resources available to them than others. Participants also drew extensively from their individual experiences which ultimately enriched the overall writing process.

The development of each chapter was an iterative process. When a chapter was completed, it would be presented to the entire group for critique and discussion.

Writing workshop participants meet in a working group to plan the drafting of a chapter of the R/DGEO Handbook.

The review of each chapter by the group was an important step in the ownership of the manual by the entire group. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the content remained relevant and reflected the collective experience of the R/DGEOs, as well as being relevant to the whole country. The idea behind this approach is that the participants would create a document written in their own language, making it comprehensible to them. It would directly reflect how the R/DGEOs view their job and help them clarify how they might use procedures and techniques to achieve their objectives.

Once the Handbook was complete, the next stage was to have it validated by a broader audience. Participants returned to their home areas and held workshops with headteachers, circuit supervisors, and other DGEOs. The leaders of the workshops used the same approach as in the first workshop; they divided the participants into groups to review each chapter. The regional validation workshops contributed to a sense of ownership of the final Handbook. SAGE took the remarks, comments, and suggestions made at the validation workshops and modified the final draft of the Handbook based on the input of this audience.

In November 2001, an additional workshop took place to finalize the Handbook and to develop a training manual for use in introducing the Handbook at a national level. This was

also done in a participatory manner, in which those who attended the workshop designed the training manual. It was edited by the Director of the GEU and the SAGE Ghana team.

To date, numerous R/DGEOs, circuit supervisors, headteachers, and other education officials have been trained in the use of the R/DGEO Handbook. They are utilizing the Handbook to guide communications directed at the district level about issues in girls' education, to develop action plans, conduct community mobilization activities for increasing girls' enrolment and retention, and to assess barriers to girls' participation at the school and classroom level.

In Nkodwo, R/DGEOs worked closely with the chiefs, the SMCs, the PTAs, headteachers and teachers, and other community influentials and facilitated the creation of a Community Action Plan. As a result of this Community Action Plan three new latrines have been built, parents are supervising the homework of their children with a special attention to their daughters, and they are requiring that chores at home are more equitably distributed between boys and girls.

At the outset of the initial workshop, it was apparent that the R/DGEOs were under utilized as a resource. The development of the manual proved to be a unique opportunity for them to revisit their job description, delineate major activities and ultimately adopt a rational and more responsive breakdown of roles and responsibilities. The validation workshop increased their confidence levels as R/DGEOs were called upon to play key facilitator roles during the vetting of the handbook by their colleagues. Designed as an evolving document, with updates and changes to be incorporated into the document as it is used, the handbook will remain relevant to R/GEOS as they continue to serve as a reference point for education officials supporting girls' education at all levels.

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Contributors: Dr. Beatrice Okyere, Selasie Agamah, Esenam Asempa, and Nora Kruk
Written by Debra Schumann
Edited by Giselle Mitton

For further information, contact
May Rihani or Giselle Mitton
Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20009
www.aed.org

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