

**How BUSINESS AND
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
CAN PROMOTE**



EDUCATION

Girls'

Project Design No. 2

IMPROVING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

WHY INVEST IN GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Investments in education yield results that extend well beyond the walls of classrooms. Education promotes a country's social and economic development. Through formal schooling, children acquire skills that are fundamental to their success throughout life — educated children become life-long learners, are able to acquire new skills, solve problems and make informed decisions, join the workforce, and become productive members of society.

Education is important for all children, but the education of girls has a particularly strong impact on a country's development. Investments in girls' education result in increased household, industrial, and agricultural productivity, improved family health and nutrition, decreased maternal mortality, decreased birth rates, and increased education of succeeding generations. Despite these benefits, girls are far less likely than boys to participate in education. Many barriers limit girls' access to education, including cultural beliefs that place a greater value on educating boys over girls, the economic need for girls to remain at home to work or take care of other family members, limited access to quality schools, and uncertainty about how male classmates or teachers will treat girls.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO INVEST IN EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE?

Initiatives to overcome the barriers to girls' education include efforts to recruit female teachers, create scholarship programs for girls, and raise public awareness about the importance of girls' education. Some of the barriers to girls' education are related to school infrastructure and the condition of classrooms, the accessibility and security of schools, lack of access to water, availability of electricity, and the availability of

resources that support teaching and learning. The physical environment of schools can promote — or limit — girls' participation in education. Investments in school infrastructure are critically needed to increase the number of girls who enter and stay in school.

Private enterprises and community organizations are in a unique position to improve school conditions by bringing valuable skills, technical knowledge, and leadership to infrastructure projects. While some may argue that investing in education infrastructure is not as important as focusing on other components of education reform, the availability of safe, clean, and secure schools is one of the first steps toward attracting more girls to school and improving completion rates. Improved school conditions are something that businesses are in a position to assist. Moreover, investments in education infrastructure benefit all children, not just girls.

HOW DOES IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Eliminating infrastructure barriers (e.g., a lack of security surrounding schools, poor-quality classrooms, poor health and sanitation conditions, lack of access to clean water, lack of electricity, unsafe roads leading to school, and limited access to schools) can increase girls' participation in education and improve their experiences at school.

Security of schools

All children deserve to be safe at school, but issues of security are especially relevant to girls. Parents hesitate to send their daughters to schools that are unsafe and vulnerable to intruders, located in remote or even dangerous areas, with unsafe roads or paths leading to the school. Poor conditions — such as unsafe grounds and the absence of perimeter walls — contribute to girls' lack of security. Making schools safer benefits children and teachers by encouraging parents to send their daughters to schools, providing a sense of security to girls at school, and supporting the safety of female teachers who serve as important mentors for young girls.

Classroom conditions

Dark, cold, dirty, or crowded classrooms limit children's educational experiences. In too many schools, girls find themselves in overcrowded classrooms, tucked into back corners, or seated on the floor or far from the teacher, thus making it difficult for them to learn. Improving classroom conditions can result in positive educational outcomes for all children. A clean, stable wall means teachers can post children's work and other materials. Bright, spacious classrooms create a supportive and encouraging atmosphere for teaching and learning. Proper chairs and benches mean not having to sit on a cold, damp floor, and secure storage areas allow teachers to safeguard against theft of books and other instructional materials. A classroom's physical condition can be just as important as the teaching and learning that occurs within its walls.

Health and sanitation

Improving the health and sanitation of schools enhances children's opportunities to learn. Without clean,

running water, the risk of diseases and other hazards is high. Schools that lack facilities to prepare food cannot feed children who come to class without breakfast and who are expected to sit in class much of the day. A lack of clean latrines discourages girls from coming to school and jeopardizes their health. As an illustration, girls who have begun to menstruate want and need the privacy of toilets. When girls stay out of school for several days each month, they soon fall behind and eventually drop out. A commitment to children's well being will increase girls' — and boys' — participation in education.

Accessible schools and available resources

In many rural areas, schools are inaccessible, particularly for girls traveling alone, because of a lack of roads or because the distance between home and school is too far. Even when a school is within reach, critical resources that support the school and its activities may not be. For example, a lack of safe housing can discourage female teachers, who serve as role models for young girls, from accepting positions in rural areas. A lack of electricity creates dark classrooms with improper light for reading and lack of access to radio broadcasts intended to support classroom instruction. Even when schools are well equipped, girls may not be able to attend because the lack of access to water near their homes requires them to spend extra time with household chores. When well water or running water is available nearby, girls need not travel far to fetch water. The availability of clean drinking water also frees time for girls because it reduces illness among family members, thus requiring less time to care for the sick. The improvement of infrastructure supports girls' education as well as local development.

HOW CAN YOUR BUSINESS ORGANIZATION IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF LOCAL SCHOOLS?

There are many ways — requiring varying levels of time or financial commitment — through which you can improve education infrastructure. For example, you can provide materials to:

- repair or build classrooms to alleviate crowding conditions;
- repair or build boundary walls and fences to make schools safer for girls and ease parents' concerns about sending their daughters to school;
- repair or build housing for teachers — especially female teachers — in areas where accommodations are scarce and teachers need an incentive to live and work in the village;
- repair or build clean and accessible latrines;
- repair or build storage rooms where schools can store textbooks and other instructional materials safely;
- repair or build a road or bridge to allow girls to reach a school in less time or more safely;
- repair or wire the school for electricity to help light classrooms and improve its access to radio broadcasts;

- repair or construct an area that has access to clean, running water so that a school can prepare and serve meals to children;
- repair or build benches and tables; and
- repair or dig wells to provide access to clean water.

Contributions to infrastructure are important and surely desirable in many communities. Better infrastructure almost always improves learning experiences, but your contributions to education need not be limited to repair or construction. You can also support girls' education through donations or financial contributions by:

- providing a transformer for the school to help provide electricity;
- donating goods or services from your company;
- donating food for family nights and academic celebrations in support of girls;
- purchasing educational supplies, toys, and games to support classroom materials;
- providing teachers with much-needed materials such as blackboards, paper, and writing materials;
- providing schools with books that present positive role models for girls;
- establishing or contributing to a scholarship fund;
- establishing or contributing to an award program for outstanding teachers who encourage girls' success in school; and
- providing incentives for students' attendance and scholarship, particularly for girls.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Projects to improve infrastructure will vary depending on a community's needs and wishes, but some general guidelines may be useful in undertaking such a project. An estimated timeline for a project might be as short as four to six months, although larger projects will require more time.

Step 1 (one to two months): Work in partnership with the local community to choose the type and nature of the project. Organizations that decide to invest in improving education facilities should work in partnership with the local community. A community that sees a school improvement project as someone else's agenda is not likely to make significant contributions. If members of the community do not accept the high priority of the project, their contribution and long-term commitment are not likely to endure. To gain a

community's assistance, hold a series of meetings to determine what projects it would like to support. Maintaining a partnership approach throughout the course of the project contributes to its success.

Step 2 (two weeks): Prepare a work plan and budget. Once the community has decided what project it would like to support, a work plan and budget should be developed. The work plan should outline who will manage the project, what the key activities or phases of the project will be, who will be responsible for each of these activities, and what dates will be targeted for completing each key activity.

The budget will depend on the nature of the project chosen, but the illustrative budget, found below, suggests that important contributions to a school's infrastructure can be inexpensive.

Step 3 (one week): Launch the project with fanfare and publicity. Making the first day of work a noteworthy event gives a boost to you, recognizes those who have committed to work on the project, and reminds the community of the project's importance.

Step 4 (ongoing after the project begins): Monitor progress. Monitoring the project enables staff to identify and solve problems on an ongoing basis, ensures accountability, and keeps the community aware of progress.

Step 5 (one week): Celebrate the project's completion. Once the classroom has been repaired, the road built, or latrines finished, project directors should celebrate with a formal ceremony and recognition of the people contributing to the project. Bringing parents and children together to commemorate the project is a reminder of how important the school is, builds a sense of community, and encourages additional efforts to improve education facilities.

Step 6 (one month): Plan for maintenance. Planning should continue once the project is finished — infrastructure usually requires ongoing maintenance. Work with the community to address questions like these: Who will check regularly to see what repairs are needed? Who will be responsible for repairs? Who will supply the needed resources, including labor?

Illustrative Budget for Construction of Latrines and Wells

Category	Estimated cost in US\$
Raw materials (e.g., sand and gravel)	325
Bricks, concrete, and wiring	1,163
Toilets (4), plumbing, and septic tank	488
Doors and windows	550
Paint	215
Transport of materials	150
TOTAL	2,891

Note: This sample budget is from a school construction project in Morocco. No costs are included for labor because community members supplied the labor.

Suggested Time Line

Activity	Time
Step 1: Choose the project	1 to 2 months
Step 2: Prepare work plan and budget	2 weeks
Step 3: Launch the project	1 week
Step 4: Monitor progress	Ongoing
Step 5: Celebrate completion	1 week
Step 6: Plan for maintenance	1 month

SUMMARY

Investments in school-related infrastructure can make a tremendous difference in girls' lives by providing a supportive environment in which they are safe, healthy, comfortable, and able to learn. Improving classroom conditions, making schools more accessible and secure, and increasing access to schools supports the education not only of girls, but that of all children.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, contact your ministry or department of education for a list of schools and organizations working in education in your region.

This paper is one of a series of project designs on activities to promote girls' education. The series includes:

1. *Enhancing Girls' Education through Community Schools*
2. *Improving the Physical Environment in Support of Girls' Education*
3. *Investments That Yield High Returns: Scholarships for Girls*
4. *Using Incentives to Promote Girls' Education*
5. *Using Mentoring to Promote Girls' Education*
6. *Using Special Programs as a Strategy to Educate Out-of-School Girls*
7. *Using Girls' Clubs to Promote Girls' Education.*

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