

PROJECT  
DESCRIPTION  
No. 2

A grayscale illustration of a diverse group of children of various ethnicities and ages, looking towards the right.

# Girls' EDUCATION

## IMPROVING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

### Why invest in girls' education?

**Education of all children is important.** Education, especially primary schooling, contributes to economic growth, social development, and democracy. While the education of all children is important, investing in the education of girls yields high economic and social returns. Increases in female literacy and schooling have been linked to development gains in both maternal and child health as well as agricultural production.

**Despite enormous gains, girls' enrollment rates still lag behind boys.** In many countries, girls' attendance in schools is much lower than for boys because of family needs and resources, facilities available for girls at schools, treatment of females in the classroom by teachers and male classmates, and cultural beliefs about the appropriateness of educating women. Many countries have engaged in comprehensive changes in their educational systems to expand access, improve instructional quality, and increase efficiency. The programs have laid the groundwork for increased educational participation of all children, but they usually have not been sufficient to reduce gender disparities between girls and boys. The fact that many of the impediments to girls' enrollment and persistence in school are specific to girls but not to boys requires a concerted effort to increase educational opportunities for girls as a development imperative.

### Why invest in infrastructure to support girls' education?

Initiatives to overcome the barriers to girls' education include recruitment of female teachers, creation of scholarship programs for girls, and social mobilization about the importance of girls' education. Some of the barriers to girls' education are related to school infrastructure — the condition of classrooms, the accessibility and security of schools, lack of latrines, and the availability of

resources that support teaching and learning. The physical environment of schools can promote or limit girls' participation in education. Investment in school infrastructure is 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 secure, safe, and clean schools is one of the first steps toward attracting more girls to school and keeping them in school longer. This is something that businesses have the ability to influence. Because business leaders determine human-resource requirements for the future, they are likely to be interested in investing in girls' education. Educating girls increases productivity and increases the educational attainment of succeeding generations. This in turn provides the private sector with a better-qualified, more fruitful workforce and a larger consumer base. Moreover, investment in education infrastructure benefits 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, 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, remote, or even dangerous. 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. Lack of clean latrines discourages girls from coming to school and jeopardizes their health. As an illustration, girls who have begun to menstruate want private toilets. 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, the lack of safe housing can discourage female teachers, who serve as role models for young girls, from teaching at a rural school. A lack of electricity can make it difficult to light classrooms or to access radio broadcasts intended for classrooms. Even when schools are well equipped, girls may not be able to attend because 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.

## **Sample infrastructure improvement projects**

Local businesses, school committees, parents' groups, religious communities, and other groups of stakeholders in the community school can help improve a school's physical environment. Infrastructure improvement is one of many important strategies for attracting more girls to school and keeping them in school. Infrastructure development has a greater impact on girls' education when coupled with such other activities as increased parent involvement, scholarship programs, and broadened community support.

Many communities have improved their schools' physical environment to benefit all children — boys as well as girls. Also, it is often not the community but the national government or donors that have built the classrooms, latrines, roads, and so on. These cases are instructive nevertheless because they show what has been done, what has contributed to success, and what errors have been made from which others can learn. The illustrations offered below are only a few of many instances in which an improved school infrastructure has resulted in more girls in school.

**Morocco** With help from the World Bank, the Government of Morocco has formulated a strategy for increasing girls' net enrollment in rural areas from 34 percent in 1996 to 55 percent by 2000-01. The strategy includes, first, to improve the infrastructure and living conditions of rural communities; second, to shorten the distance between schools and homes by building more schools; and, third, to build parents' awareness of and support for the value of educating their daughters (and sons). To improve infrastructure, the government plans to increase access to clean drinking water and sewage facilities in the community.

In another program, several Moroccan communities have expressed interest in improving the facilities of local primary schools so that more girls will attend. In the provinces of Sidi Kacem, Al Hoceima, and Essaouira, school communities are building boundary walls, latrines, water wells or reservoirs, and canteens. In each

province, the participating communities have identified an organization to manage the project and to contract on its behalf with a funding agency. In some cases, the organizations are parent-teacher associations (PTAs). The Girls' and Women's Education Activity is helping the communities seek funding from international agencies (Canadian, Japanese, and others). Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been identified to supervise the projects.

### ***Kenya***

In Kenya, a survey of schools in the rural districts of Kwale, Nakuru, Kisumu, and Meru revealed that about half the first-grade students missed school due to illness (Nkinyangi and Van der Vynckt 1995). The same study showed that the illnesses of these children might have started at school due to poor infrastructure and unsanitary conditions. Classrooms in poorly constructed "temporary" buildings are usually the worst. These are allocated to lower grades where classes are the most crowded and failure rates the highest. The study indicated that less than a quarter of the schools sampled had ready access to a water supply. In many schools, latrines were unusable, either filthy or unsafe due to collapsing walls or slippery floors. The number of latrines was inadequate: an average of 47 girls (and sometimes as many as 280) used a single latrine. As part of a broad effort to improve the health of school children, the government encouraged schools to repair classrooms and build and maintain an adequate number of clean latrines. Ways were proposed to solve problems of light and ventilation that account for poor visibility, eyestrain, headaches, and discomfort, and suggested improving acoustics, so that children would be less distracted by noise.

### ***Pakistan***

For over a decade, the Government of Pakistan, with the help of international funding agencies and NGOs, has helped communities improve schools so that more girls will attend. In the country's poorest province, Balochistan, parents were not willing to send their daughters to government schools. Parents wanted a school with a solid structure, a boundary wall, a water pump, and a latrine in working order. In addition, they wanted teachers to be present and punctual and refrain from beating children and from taking bribes from parents (World Bank 1996). The provincial government created a 14-step process for the community to follow for opening and maintaining a community school for girls. The process included the recruitment and training of teachers (usually young women from the community), the development of support for the school in the community, and assistance to the community in the construction of school buildings. An NGO was then established to sustain and to continue mobilizing the community around the success of the community school.

### ***Laos***

In Laos, as in other East Asian countries, communities have a long tradition of supporting schools, including donations of time, materials, and labor. Buddhist temples are often the center of community support and thus the natural local of community schools. In rural areas, where communities are more cohesive and closely tied to the temple, support is stronger. The strong support for schools has a positive effect on the development of infrastructure. For example, a rural village in Vientiane Province was able to construct two primary schools within two years by working through the local community association to engage their commitment and mobilize their resources (Bray 1996). Community members contributed free labor

that reduced the buildings' cost by about half. The community also built a perimeter fence, benches, and desks. The chairman of the community association oversaw the work. Villagers worked in four groups, each providing labor on a different day. Each household was required to send a strong worker, who was required to report on time. The chairman kept careful records of workers. Each of 53 households was also asked to give money for materials. In a few cases, where the households were too poor to contribute cash, they were asked to provide extra labor.

## **Designing and implementing an infrastructure improvement project**

Construction projects vary greatly depending on the physical environment, the social context, and the resources available. Although it is difficult to provide specific instructions about how to launch and complete a construction project, here are some guidelines for designing and implementing a construction project and keeping it on track.

### **Key questions**

- Which communities will benefit from the infrastructure project?
- What infrastructure project does the community desire?
- How will support for the infrastructure project be built in the communities?
- Who will implement the infrastructure project?
- Who will monitor the project's progress?
- How will the project's benefits be sustained?
- How much time will the project take to implement?
- How much will the project cost?

These questions are in no specific order. In fact, many questions can and should be answered simultaneously.

## **What type of infrastructure improvement project does the community desire?**

The importance of the community's involvement in decisions about what infrastructure project to undertake cannot be overemphasized. An organization interested in implementing a project should hold a series of meetings with community groups to determine the barriers and then what project(s) the community is interested in undertaking to eliminate these barriers. Participatory decision-making, which outsiders use to facilitate community decisions, might help to ensure that the community makes a sound decision. Or, leaders within the community can inspire others to engage in

problem solving and agree together what they think is most important to do. Members of the community need to assess the feasibility of potential projects. The community must determine if they have the skills, labor, materials, and financing necessary. If the community lacks any of these elements, they might enlist the support of local businesses to provide materials or an NGO to provide the skills necessary to implement the project.

Communities often elect to undertake infrastructure projects because the need is so visible. While most parents and other community members never see the inside of their daughters' classrooms, everyone can see the school's exterior, and most recognize the critical importance of sturdy walls and roofs, secure and clean latrines, boundary walls or fences, and housing for teachers.

Communities also choose to improve school infrastructure because they know they have the skills to do so. Community groups may feel that, as lay people, they are ill equipped to improve instruction, or even school management, but they often have among them the skills to build new structures or repair decaying ones. In regional projects in Ethiopia and in Tanzania, for example, where school committees were given resources to help improve their schools however they chose, nearly all began with construction projects. Villagers and those living in larger communities are accustomed to working together to construct shelter and other structures, so building classrooms or other school facilities is not an extraordinary endeavour.

Improving education for girls requires the collaboration of all sectors of society. Some improvements fall more naturally to the public sector. Others can be accomplished by the community with support from the private sector. School committees, community organizations, private businesses, religious groups, and others that want to help make schools more attractive to girls have a wide range of options in this area. Among the most popular infrastructure improvement projects for communities to undertake in support of their schools are constructing and repairing classrooms; building latrines, canteens, walls, and fences; and digging wells.

## **Types of infrastructure improvements**

### **Classrooms**

Improving classroom infrastructure is critical. Most governments have standard specifications for classroom blocks, and their construction is straightforward. Sometimes the government or a private group will contribute manufactured materials such as tin roofs. Where there are enough teachers to take on additional classes, adding new classrooms can ease the strain of crowded classrooms.

Sometimes, though classroom space may be sufficient, the rooms are in such disrepair that they must be rebuilt. Other times, minor repairs, cleaning, painting or perhaps new doors or windows are all that are required. Such minor repairs can turn an insecure classroom into one that can be locked or a damp and dirty classroom into one that is more attractive and healthier.

## Assessing the Need for Repairs in Classrooms

The Government of Kenya and UNESCO have suggested how those interested in improving the physical condition of classrooms can assess what needs improvement (Nkinyangi and Van der Vynckt 1995).

**Lighting is critical.** A classroom that is poorly lit (too dark, too bright, or sharp contrasts in light) can cause eyestrain and make paying attention to the teacher and to learning materials difficult. Visually divide the classroom into ten areas: the front of the room, where the teacher generally has a desk and uses the chalkboard, plus the larger part of the classroom (where pupils sit), divided into nine sections (like a tic-tac-toe game board). For each section, determine the following:

- Is the section poorly lit (on a dark day as well as a bright day)?
- Are there variations in lighting (sharp contrasts, shadows, glare)?
- Do windows let in too much light?

**Chalkboards are the main teaching aid in many rural schools.** The visibility of what is written on the chalkboard is of utmost importance to pupils.

- Is the chalkboard large enough for the teacher's needs?
- Is it easily legible from different sections of the classroom? Where is it not legible?
- Does it reflect a glare under any lighting conditions? Where?

**Air movement and temperature** in the classroom affect pupils' comfort; if they are too cold or hot, they are easily distracted.

- Is the classroom too breezy?
- Is it too stuffy and warm?
- Is it cold, chilly, or damp?

**Other distractions come from unwanted noise.** The nature of the problem must be identified.

- Do disturbing noises come from neighboring classrooms?
- Do disturbing noises come from the school courtyard or beyond the school?
- Are there rattles or constant noises within the classroom?

**Other defects in the classroom** may be more obvious, but someone needs to identify and report them:

- Are any windows or doors unable to be closed tightly and opened properly?
- Does the roof leak?
- Do the walls have cracks, missing concrete, or spaces where insects can penetrate?

## **Sanitary Facilities**

Sanitary facilities can make a big difference to girls. Parents and others can build adequate latrines out of local materials, placing them a strategic distance from school buildings and using simple technologies to maximize the likelihood they will remain clean. While it may be more difficult to provide clean water, sometimes one or two wells can be dug easily and outfitted for children's and teachers' use. If the school provides snacks or meals — or has the determination to do so — a protected space with easily cleaned surfaces and access to clean water can be constructed for meal preparation or serving.

## **Boundary Walls and Fences**

Boundary walls make schools safer for girls and ease parents' concerns about sending their daughters to school. In Muslim areas, boundary walls are almost a necessity if the school wants to accommodate girls. In other areas, where the school is not safe from intruders, girls and their parents benefit from the security of walls. In some cases, the school principal and teachers are better able to take responsibility for students when walls surround their school.

## **Teachers' housing**

Housing for teachers, especially female teachers, is essential in rural areas where housing is scarce and teachers need an incentive to live and work far from their own homes. Female teachers serve as role models for girls, yet it is often difficult for women, single or married, to teach in remote schools. Safe and comfortable housing often makes it possible to attract and keep female teachers.

## **Storage space**

Storage rooms and lockable cupboards allow schools to store textbooks and other instructional and administrative materials when the school is closed. Textbooks are expensive, and the school that loses them from theft may not get more books for years. Such facilities are among the easiest to construct.

## **Roads and Electricity**

Roads require considerable labor and equipment to build. If a road or bridge will allow the girls in one or more villages to reach a school in less time or more safely, however, it will be worth the effort. Roads have other purposes in addition to commuting to school, so community groups may have additional incentives to help build them.

Electrification of schools and villages makes a large difference in children's ability to study and learn. When a home has electricity, children can read after dark — perhaps the only time available. When a school has electricity, lighted classrooms help students see the chalkboard, the teacher, even their own deskwork on a dark day. In addition, electrified villages have better access to radio broadcasts. Even in remote parts of poor countries, radios bring information, education, and awareness of the larger world to which the school curriculum is connected. If bringing electricity to the school community is possible, the benefits will far outweigh the costs.

## Why is community support for an infrastructure improvement project important?

**Unless the community accepts ownership for the project, the community will not contribute.**

While it may seem easy to get a community to agree to help improve a school's physical environment, the agreement may lead nowhere. A community that views school improvement as someone else's agenda is not likely to contribute anything significant. This is probably the most important lesson from experience. A school improvement project in Ghana, supported by the central government and a large international lending agency, failed to get community members to contribute to school-building projects. The problem seemed to be that improving school buildings was the government's and funding agency's agenda, but not the community's. The countryside of East Africa is dotted with school foundations, pillars, roofs, and missing walls, evidence of failed projects imposed without community participation.

**Unless the community believes in the high priority of the project, the community's contribution is not likely to endure.** Some people may do what is asked, particularly when the community leaders have the authority to make requests. Although community members may help raise walls or clean classrooms, their effort is unlikely to continue until the project is completed. Some will simply ignore the expectation that they are to make bricks or to complete other tasks necessary for the project's completion.

More often than not, however, parents show interest and commitment to working together to support their children's school. The challenge is to help them decide what is most important to them. In some instances, the community may not see infrastructure as something it wants to address, it may prefer to help supply textbooks or something other than improve the physical environment. The community should have a broad range of choices in what it undertakes, including the choice to do nothing.

**Unless the community recognizes its accomplishments, motivation and support for future projects will be minimal.** As the infrastructure project develops, take time to celebrate the community's accomplishments. Launch the project with fanfare. The first day of work should be a noteworthy event. Everyone in the school community and others outside who are engaged in the project should be aware that the activity is being launched. This gives a boost to those who have committed to work on the project and enhances motivation and support. The event reminds the community of the project's importance and, more generally, of education and the school.

When the latrines have been built, the classrooms repaired, or the walls constructed, the community should, once again, call people together to celebrate. This is another reminder of the school's importance and will enhance the community's future support of the school.

## How will the infrastructure project be implemented?

Once the community has made a decision about what project or projects it intends to implement, a work plan and budget must 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 have responsibilities in each of these activities, and what dates will be targeted for completing each key activity.

If the community is seeking outside funding or other assistance, it must find someone with the experi-

ence needed to write a persuasive proposal and locate likely donors. In this case, the community will have to identify an organized group, possibly an NGO, that can assume legal responsibility for managing the resources given to the project and, possibly, also sign a contract with the funding agency. If a local business is funding the project, the business and a local NGO, working with the community, should determine the management structure of the project.

## How will the progress of the infrastructure project be monitored?

The group of community members, a committee, or an association that implements the project must be accountable to the broader community and to any other stakeholders in the project. The community or stakeholder groups must monitor the project's progress regularly and make its managers accountable for the resources they are using. When work slows, the monitors must bring this to the attention of the community and other stakeholders and convince them to help overcome barriers.

## How will the benefits of the infrastructure project be sustained?

Like any concrete step forward, improved school infrastructure can soon crumble unless the initial effort is maintained. Physical facilities, like school management practices, teaching methods, and communication systems, require maintenance. Three factors influence the maintenance of school facilities.

**Maintenance plan.** Newly built and repaired facilities are more likely to be maintained if a maintenance plan is established at the start, a clearly identified person or group is held accountable for maintenance, and the resources required for maintenance are budgeted.

**Ownership.** Facilities are more likely to be maintained if those made responsible for maintenance feel that they "own" the facility through participation.

**Realistic expectations.** An NGO, association or business that facilitates the community's decision about what project to implement must help the community be realistic about what it can do. Failing to make progress because the initial goal is too ambitious has two undesirable results: the needed improvements do not happen, and the group that attempted them feels discouraged and unlikely to try something again.

If the community has identified a meaningful project, if it has been well managed, and if the community believes it "owns" the results, keeping the project well maintained will be easier. In addition, the community may want to proceed to the next project, whether it is construction or something else to improve the education of its children.

# How much time will an infrastructure improvement project take to implement?

The amount of time it will take to implement an infrastructure project depends on the nature and size of the project and the community resources available. An estimated time line 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):** Choose the project. Work in partnership with the community to determine the type and nature of the project.

**Step 2 (two weeks):** Prepare a work plan and budget. 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.

**Step 3 (one week):** Launch the project with fanfare. 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. Bringing parents and children together to commemorate the project is a reminder of how important the schools is, builds a sense of community, and encourages additional efforts to improve education facilities.

**Step 6 (one month):** Plan for maintenance. Infrastructure usually requires ongoing maintenance. Work with the community to address questions like: Who will check regularly to see what repairs are needed? Who will be responsible for repairs? Who will supply the needed resources, including labor?

**Suggested Time Line for an Infrastructure Project**

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

## How much will an infrastructure project cost?

The costs of supporting an infrastructure project will depend on the type of infrastructure project undertaken and nature and size of the target population or beneficiaries chosen.

This sample budget comes from a school construction project in the province of Sidi Kacem in Morocco. The U.S. Agency for International Development's Girls' and Women's Education Activity supported the project's development. The Association of Dar Echammakh was responsible for managing the project. The budget for a latrine block, water tower, and well is based on an average for three schools. Labor costs are not included because the community supplied labor at no cost. Costs are indicated in U. S. dollars.

## 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 not only the education of girls, but that of all children.

Sample Budget for Latrines, Well, and Water Tower at Three Schools

Materials	Quantity	Unit cost	Total cost
Rocks	3sq. meters	\$15.00	\$45.00
Bricks			
15 cm	1,000	\$.40	\$ 400.00
6 cm	620	\$.30	\$186.00
<b>Sub total</b>	1,620		\$586.00
Sand	12 cubic mts.	\$16.00	\$192.00
Gravel	8 cubic mts.	\$11.00	\$88.00
Cement	62 sacks	\$4.50	\$279.00
Reinforced concrete	129 units		\$288.70
Wiring	9 meters	\$1.00	\$9.00
Toilets and plumbing			
Toilet seats	4 units	\$29.00	\$116.00
Large sing	2 units	\$72.00	\$144.00
Faucets	8 units	\$6.00	\$48.00
Piping, tubing	100 meters	\$.60	\$60.00
<b>Sub total</b>			\$368.00
Doors/windows			
Wooden doors	6 units	\$80.00	\$480.00
Windows	2 units	\$20.00	\$40.00
Window bars	2 units	\$15.00	\$30.00
<b>Sub total</b>			\$550.00
Paint	3	\$70.00	\$210.00
Stain	3	\$1.50	\$4.50
<b>Sub total</b>	6		\$214.50
Septic tank	1 unit		\$120.00
Transport of materials: miscellaneous			\$150.00
Total unit (latrine block, water tower)			\$2,890.20
<b>Total</b>	3 units		\$8,670.60

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