



INVESTING FOR IMPACT



Save the Children®

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY
AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT



“Placing gender equality at the heart of our work for women and girls and making investments to end discrimination will have a resounding impact on the lives of children and families that we serve. We are putting it at the top of our agenda!”

— Carolyn Miles, Save the Children’s President & CEO

Invitation to Invest in Gender Equality and Girls' Empowerment

For nearly 100 years, Save the Children has been a passionate advocate for the rights of girls and boys. With a long history of advocacy, programming and policies that respond to complex problems across the globe, Save the Children recognizes that promoting gender equality and empowering girls is essential if we are to deliver on our strategy and meet our ambition to reach every last child, including the most marginalized.

Despite remarkable progress, gender inequality and disempowerment still persist, and are a root cause of many barriers to sustainable development around the world, critically impacting children's ability to survive, learn and live a life free from violence. Women and girls—all around the world—confront disproportionate barriers and systemic discrimination that can last a lifetime and limit equitable access to education, protection, healthcare and employment. The consequences of gender inequality and disempowerment are devastating:

- Of the 58 million out-of-school children at primary school age, more than half are girls.¹
- Globally, around 1 in 3 women will experience physical and/or sexual violence.²
- Every year, 15 million girls are married as children.³ Approximately 250 million women and 33 million men alive today were married before age 15.⁴
- Worldwide, 2.5 million girls under age 16 give birth each year – before their bodies are ready. This endangers their health and the health of their babies.⁵

Save the Children believes that these issues need to be directly tackled to ensure our vision for a world where all girls and boys are safe from harm, where they are equally heard, valued and cared for, and where they have equitable access and time to devote to education, to work, to rest and to play. An investment in gender equality and girls' empowerment yields tremendous results – not only in the individual lives of women, girls, men and boys, but for the future we all share.

OUR VISION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Save the Children envisions a world where both girls and boys are safe from harm, where they are equally heard, valued, and cared for, and where they have equal access and time to devote to education, to work, to rest, and to play. We strive for a world in which both girls and boys are healthy and nourished, growing up in safe and nurturing environments, and supported equally by male and female caregivers and mentors. Our vision is for girls and boys to support one another in playing an active and equal role in creating positive and sustainable change in their communities, their countries and across the globe.



Photo: Talitha Brauer

Why Gender Equality and Girls' Empowerment?

Gender equality, which refers to girls, boys, women, men and people with diverse identities having equal rights, status and opportunities – is key to addressing these challenges. Gender inequality is rooted in discriminatory social norms and attitudes that are deeply entrenched and closely intertwined with cultural, historical and religious factors. Gender inequalities also intersect with other factors contributing to marginalization, including age, race, socio-economic class, gender identity, geography, health status and disability.

Empowerment is about the ability to make life choices.⁶ It is the process of change through which girls can make decisions, be equipped with knowledge and skills, voice their aspirations and achieve what they want for their lives. Save the Children's work to promote gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment involves fostering supportive home and family environments; promoting engaging, inclusive educational opportunities; improving access to livelihoods, social services and health services; and investing in institutional policies and frameworks.

Save the Children believes that it is critical to directly address discrimination and unequal treatment and to promote gender equality in order to ensure that no harm comes to children, and to advance our vision for a world where every child attains their equal right to survival, protection, development and participation.

Together, gender equality and girls' empowerment are critical to Save the Children's efforts to protect children, give them a healthy start and provide them with the chance to learn.

There is an urgent need for action to address gender inequality and girls' disempowerment. The consequences of not investing are serious – resulting in an early end to childhood, violence, increased disparities in access to education and health services and poor resilience, as well as lost potential. At Save the Children, we believe that by promoting gender equality and empowering girls, we will ensure that all children are equally able to claim their rights so that they can survive and thrive, learn and develop, and be safe and protected.

Research shows that investing in gender equality and girls' empowerment is one of the most effective ways to improve a myriad of development outcomes and accelerate economic growth.⁷ Evidence suggests that investing in gender equality creates ripple effects. Healthy, educated girls, over the course of their lives, will contribute to greater economic growth, higher agricultural productivity, lower rates of infant and maternal mortality, greater control of family planning and better-educated families.⁸



GLOBAL GOALS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The United Nations global agenda to end poverty by 2030 includes Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – to empower all women and girls and achieve gender equality.

Gender equality will also accelerate progress on other global Sustainable Development Goals. For example, SDG 3 on health and well-being will not be achieved without ensuring girls at risk for HIV, sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancy are protected. Women account for 40% of today's global labor force, so eliminating discriminatory barriers against women in certain occupations could increase labor productivity by 25% in some countries and help achieve SDG 8 (economic growth.) Ensuring communities have access to clean water (SDG 1) will mean that girls won't have to spend their days fetching water from long distances instead of attending school.



Addressing Gender Inequality at Different Life Stages

Analyzing gender inequality across life stages highlights opportunities to intervene to transform lives at strategic points: early childhood, childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

As this diagram highlights, gender inequalities tend to worsen as girls become older, increasing in severity and number from birth to old age.



During **infancy**, social and cultural barriers including gender roles, son preference and strict rules around women's decision-making may prevent women from being able to access health services. During this stage, it is critical to ensure that women have access to health services, support with household tasks, and appropriate nutrition.



Early childhood is a highly strategic time period for engaging with young girls and boys about gender equality. From the way school curricula is designed, to the way teachers talk and engage with children and their caregivers, to how household tasks are distributed to young children, messages about how girls and boys should

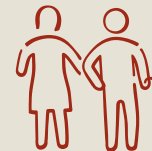
behave are always being communicated to children in pre-primary education, shaping how they view themselves and others. During this age, it is critical that children receive care from both caregivers of both genders – not just mothers – and that chores are equitably distributed between girls and boys rather than solely being seen as the responsibility of girls.



During **childhood**, children continue to internalize messages about gender roles through the messages they receive at school and even the way family chores are divided. During childhood, as gender roles become solidified, there may be greater risk of gender-based violence and child marriage. Children may also witness violence between their parents/caregivers in the home, resulting in trauma and potentially perpetuating cycles of violence when they grow older. Investing in activities that enhance child protection and ensure the prevention of gender-based violence as well as the provision of services for child survivors of violence is therefore important. During this age, caregivers of both genders also need to be involved in care and encouragement of education. It is critical that a strong educational foundation is built, and that education is viewed as important for both girls and boys. This includes ensuring girls and boys can travel safely to school, without fear of violence.



GENDER ISSUES ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE: ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES



INFANCY	EARLY CHILDHOOD	CHILDHOOD	ADOLESCENCE	REPRODUCTIVE AGE	OLD AGE
Prioritization of boys' nutrition	Only mother provides care	Only mother provides care	Poor prioritization of schooling	Low access to economic opportunities	Low access to economic opportunities
Only mother provides care	Chores for girls	Chores for girls	Gender-based violence (including female genital cutting)	Low decision-making	Low decision-making
Low access to health services	Messages about gender in pre-primary education	Messages about gender in primary education	Child marriage	HIV/AIDS risk	Prioritization of nutrition for males
Infanticide	Witnessing violence in the home	Poor prioritization of schooling	Early pregnancy	Gender-based violence (including female genital cutting)	No support with household chores
		Gender-based violence (including female genital cutting)	Chores for girls	Polygamy	Gender-based violence (including female genital cutting)
		Child marriage	HIV/AIDS risk	Insufficient partner involvement during pregnancy	Low access to health services
		Witnessing violence in the home	Low access to health services	Prioritization of nutrition for males	
			Witnessing violence in the home	No support with household tasks	
				Low access to health services	
				Low prioritization of education	

“Childhood is a critical, formative time for all children, girls and boys. It is a time when children are learning about their world and their roles within it, and girls and boys are assigned different roles and responsibilities within society based on their sex at birth...” *Save the Children Gender Toolkit, 2014*

CHILD MARRIAGE: QUICK STATISTICS

- More than 20,000 girls are married illegally every day — below the minimum age permitted by national law in many countries due to legal loopholes. That's about 7.5 million girls every year.¹
- By the time a girl reaches age 15, there is a 1 in 9 chance she will be married.²
- The leading cause of death among adolescent girls is complications during pregnancy and childbirth.³
- Around 5% to 33% of girls ages 15 to 24 who drop out of school do so because of child marriage or early pregnancy.⁴
- In 18 of the 20 countries with the highest early marriage prevalence, girls with no education were six times more likely to marry than girls with a secondary education.⁵

¹ Save the Children & World Bank (2017) *Ending Child Marriage: Child Marriage Laws and their Limitations*.

² UNFPA (2012) *Marrying Too Young*.

³ WHO (2016) *Global Health Estimates 2015: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000–2015*.

⁴ World Bank (2017). *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report*.

⁵ International Center for Research on Women (2006) *Too Young to Wed: Education & Action Toward Ending Child Marriage*.



Among this age group, the consequences of gender discrimination are compounded by other factors of vulnerability. For example, in developing nations, more than 90 percent of children with disabilities do not attend school and in humanitarian contexts, girls with disabilities are more likely to be out of school than boys.⁹

The complex, interlocking issues that girls and boys experience during this period demonstrate that childhood is an important moment for intervention. Addressing gender inequalities during childhood can help lay important foundations, impacting children's ability to survive, learn and live a life free from violence during later periods of life.



Adolescence is increasingly being recognized as an important point for intervention - a window of opportunity. Ongoing advances in the field of neuroscience indicate that the brain is biologically most prepared for learning, including social and emotional learning, during adolescence. Adolescence is an important period for socialization, where there is acute sensitivity to social norms and peer influences, including those around gender.¹⁰ Interventions during this time

period enable young women and men to challenge gender norms and exercise personal agency.¹¹

Adolescent girls and boys often fall through the cracks within their communities during this time of transition into adulthood. During adolescence, schooling may not be prioritized as gender roles become more emphasized. Adolescent girls may be asked to complete more chores than their male siblings, affecting their ability to study and regularly attend school. They may face higher risk of gender-based violence and exploitation compared to when they were children. They may struggle to cope with changes in their bodies including managing their menstruation. Their low position in the household and the broader society may be reinforced by the idea that adolescence is the time for them to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers.

Child marriage (when marriage occurs under the age of 18) is also a risk for girls and boys during adolescence. For girls, the consequences of child marriage are often far greater than for boys. Child marriage limits girls' chances of staying in school or creating support networks, increases vulnerability to emotional, physical and sexual violence, and limits their decision-making power. Child marriage can have devastating consequences on a girl's **health**. Child brides are more likely to describe their first sexual experience as forced.



“Ultimately, Save the Children believes that the rigid socialization of boys and girls limits their ability to reach their full potential and inhibits the full realization of their rights as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments.”

Save the Children Gender Toolkit, 2014



THE EVIDENCE AROUND THE POSITIVE RIPPLE EFFECTS OF EDUCATING GIRLS IS EXTENSIVE

- When 10 percent more girls go to school, a nation's GDP increases by around 3 percent.¹
- Providing all girls with a primary education in low- and middle-income countries could reduce child malnutrition by 1.7 million people.²
- Of the estimated 8.2 million fewer deaths of children under age 5 between 1970 and 2009, half of child deaths prevented can be correlated to the global increase in more years of schooling among women of reproductive age.³
- Developing nations can gain or lose up to \$21 billion, depending on the extent to which they invest in the education, well-being and independence of 10-year-old girls.⁴

1. USAID (2011) 'Why Invest in Women?' Available online: <https://www.usaid.gov/infographics/50th/why-invest-in-women>

2. UNESCO (2013) *Education Transforms Lives*.

3. Gakidou, E., et al. (2010) 'Increased Educational Attainment and Its Effect on Child Mortality in 175 Countries Between 1970 and 2009: A Systematic Analysis', *The Lancet*, vol. 376, no. 9745: pp. 959–974.

4. UNFPA (2016) *The State of the World Population 2016*.



IF WOMEN PARTICIPATED IN
THE ECONOMY AS MUCH AS MEN,
IN 2025 AN ADDITIONAL
\$28 TRILLION
WOULD BE
ADDED TO
THE ANNUAL
GLOBAL GDP.¹⁷



They face higher risks of death in childbirth and are particularly vulnerable to pregnancy-related injuries such as obstetric fistula. The risks for their newborn babies are also significant. Child marriage can be both a cause and consequence of interrupted **education**, often influenced by the low perceived value of girls. There is a strong link between child marriage, high education dropout rates, and low educational attainment. Child marriage is commonly abusive with accompanying forced sexual initiation and marital sex.¹² Girls ages 15 to 19 are more likely to experience violence from an intimate partner than their peers who marry later in life.¹³



Adulthood also represents an important point where investment makes a difference, especially because of how decisions, capacities and skills of adults impact children. During adulthood, women are more likely to have fewer economic and educational opportunities compared to men and less decision-making power in the household – these are all challenges Save the Children recognizes and works to address.

Governments that prioritize spending on improving girls' nutrition and women's health services also stand to gain substantial economic benefits when women are able to be a productive part of the economy. Investments in maternal, newborn and child health services have a \$20 return for every dollar spent due to improved health and productivity.¹⁴ We know that gender inequality in labor markets, education, and health slow the eradication of hunger and poverty. In fact, according to the United Nations, Sub-Saharan Africa alone loses \$95 billion per year due to gender inequality.¹⁵ Gender-based violence costs the global economy approximately \$8 trillion, a staggering figure.¹⁶

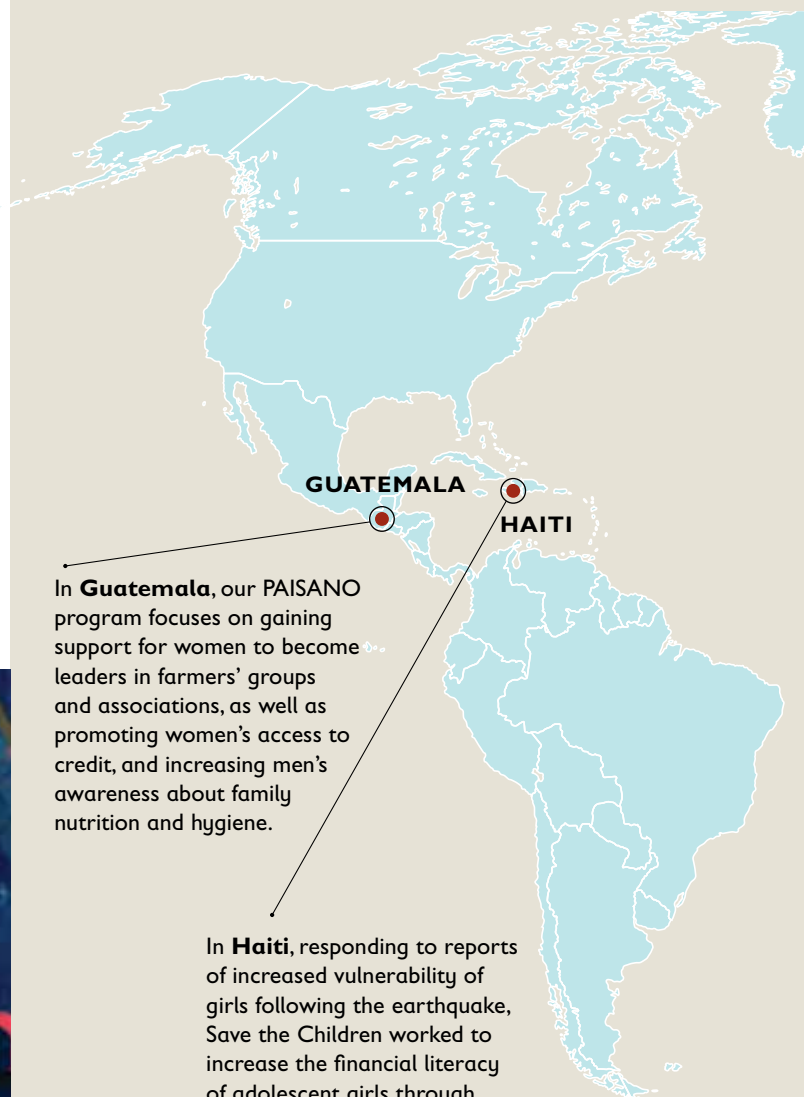
Our Global Response

Save the Children's areas of work – maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition, reproductive health, education, child protection, child poverty and child rights governance – are influenced by gender inequality, making it essential for Save the Children to directly promote gender equality and girls' empowerment. Gender inequality forms barriers to achieving outcomes in each sector; therefore tackling it directly is essential to amplifying the impact of our programs.

We are proud of our new global Gender Equality Policy that states that a focus on gender equality is essential to closing inequality gaps and ensuring that we reach every last child, including the most marginalized. We do this by aligning our organizational culture, programming, partnerships, research and advocacy efforts to advance our work to create a more equal world in which all children have the chance to survive, learn and live a life free from violence.

We know that in order to achieve our vision, we need an ambitious, life-changing plan for gender-equality. At Save the Children, we believe that gender equality is both essential goal on its own and is vital to accelerating our work across all the sectors in which we work. This means that we consider how gender barriers affect our work across all programs: health, education, economic empowerment. Promoting gender equality can also be the explicit focus of some of our programs that are designed to specifically tackle gender norms, address negative expressions of masculinity, prevent gender-based violence and empower women and girls.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERING GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD



In **Guatemala**, our PAISANO program focuses on gaining support for women to become leaders in farmers' groups and associations, as well as promoting women's access to credit, and increasing men's awareness about family nutrition and hygiene.

In **Haiti**, responding to reports of increased vulnerability of girls following the earthquake, Save the Children worked to increase the financial literacy of adolescent girls through trained mentors. The program has increased the self-confidence of girls, improved their ability to manage their money and enhanced their negotiation skills.



In **Egypt**, our Ishraq program provides safe spaces for girls who have dropped out of school to learn, socialize and develop life skills. The program resulted in changes among boys: decreases in acceptance of violence against girls, greater support for girls' mobility and schooling, and agreement that girls should make their own decisions about marriage.

Save the Children is responding to child marriage among Syrian refugees in **Jordan**, referring cases to specialized agencies for targeted support. Alongside other agencies, in Jordan, we have launched Amani, a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of child marriage.¹⁸

In **Nepal**, Save the Children works with adolescent girls and young women as well as men and boys to address gender-based violence. The project empowers women and girls with knowledge and skills, supports group organizing to collectively fight this deep rooted issue and provides economic empowerment opportunities for those most at risk. Survivors of gender-based violence are provided a compassionate, appropriate response with specially trained para-social workers. Meaningful engagement with the government at all levels, creates an enabling environment to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in a more sustainable manner.

Save the Children's Kishoree Kontha (Adolescent Girls' Voices) program in **Bangladesh** supports girls age 10-19 through safe spaces, where they discuss health, marriage and financial literacy. Positive impacts include new skills and knowledge, increased self-confidence and reports that girls feel more respected in their households and communities.¹⁹

In **Laos**, Save the Children responds to child protection and violence including commercial sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and rape, through working with the government to train local officials on how to respond to survivors, strengthening referral processes and raising community awareness.

In **Somaliland**, Save the Children supports community-based structures such as Child Welfare Committees and Women's Lobby groups so they can prevent and respond to child marriage. We also help the government enforce legal measures against child marriage, and helped develop of a Code of Conduct and a certification and registration system for traditional marriage ceremony providers.

In **Tanzania**, children's councils have been a powerful way for girls to voice their opinions about issues. A number of council seats are reserved for the most excluded groups, like girls, helping to ensure their perspectives are heard.

In **Malawi**, our DREAMS program has enabled young women to improve financial literacy, developing skills to run successful businesses and achieve success in the workplace. DREAMS has helped young women increase their self-confidence.

In **Zimbabwe**, Save the Children helps girls fulfill girls' right to education in healthy and protective school environments, combining interventions in economic empowerment, water and sanitation, and protection.



OUR APPROACH

Program for Gender Equality: We will amplify our efforts to innovate and develop high-impact programs that identify and transform the root causes of gender inequalities and promote the empowerment of women and girls.

Partner for Gender Equality: We will continue to collaborate with other organizations that share our vision for gender equality. These partnerships with public and private donors will leverage new skills and knowledge in new ways — and help us reach many more children, achieving results at scale.

Advocate for Gender Equality:

Our advocacy strategy is focused on promoting gender equitable laws and policies at the national and local level, including:

- **Fair Financing** – Improving domestic resource mobilization, particularly through progressive and gender-sensitive taxation, and translating it into equitable budgeting and spending.
- **Equal Treatment** – Eliminating discriminatory laws, norms and policies and building enabling environments for change; and
- **Accountability** – Ensuring that governance is inclusive, transparent and accountable to all girls.

Organize for Gender Equality: And finally, we must ensure that our own organization reflects our principles and that our culture empowers and rewards women and men fully and equitably. Doing so is a task of substantial magnitude given the scope and depth of Save the Children. We have created and are advancing a new Gender Equality Strategy — the first step to integrating gender equality into how we think, plan and operate as a global organization.



Photo: Ray-ginald Louissaint Jr.

Our programmatic strategy is driven by five main imperatives: enable empowerment, promote caregiving and positive masculinities, prioritize gender analysis, foster enabling environments and eliminate gender-based violence. These areas of focus ensure that girls and women are empowered to make decisions, that boys and men are challenged on their mindsets, that programs are informed by detailed analysis on gender

inequality, that structures and systems that oppress are transformed, and that societies are free from gender-based violence. Our work is informed by the “socio-ecological framework” that increases agency at an individual level, engages with inequitable relationships, grapples with harmful community norms and challenges oppressive structures at the societal level.

CASE STUDY

ENGINE in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, Save the Children is responding to the gendered dimensions of poor nutrition through ENGINE – Empowering New Generations with Improved Nutrition and Economic Opportunities. In Ethiopia, inequitable gender roles and power imbalances between women and men in marital relationships restrict women from accessing sufficient nutrition. Women are not involved in decision-making of household income. Through ENGINE, community members from the most vulnerable households participate in community conversations where they discussed ways to improve nutrition, including through challenging gender roles and unequal family relationships. These community conversations triggered improvements in marital relationships, enabling women to have greater access to food

and income in the household. Male role models were selected to advocate for more equitable allocation of resources in the household. ENGINE resulted in men taking action so that their wives could eat more, reduce their workloads in the home and have appropriate supplements during pregnancy. Relationships between husbands and wives also improved through ENGINE: 41% of men and 29% of women reported positive changes in relationships with their spouses after ENGINE. Men have become more supportive, providing their wives with more time to eat and rest, especially during pregnancy or breast-feeding.

Save the Children (2016) *Addressing Gender-Related Barriers to Better Nutritional Behaviors*, ENGINE Technical Brief 5; Save the Children (2016) *Engaging Communities through Enhanced Community Conversations*, ENGINE Technical Brief 8.

“They are committed to each other. The husband consults his wife and the wife consults her husband. The husband says, please Ete Birtukan, let me talk a little and by turn she also says, Aya Mulat, please let me talk.” (Grandmother Amhara)





Photo: Save the Children

CASE STUDY

REAL Fathers in Uganda

In Uganda, Save the Children implemented the Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative, which is a 12-session father mentoring program designed to address violence in the home. Through REAL Fathers, fathers were exposed to non-violent methods of discipline and conflict resolution, and communication skills to encourage “positive parenting” and better interaction with children and to decrease violence between husbands and wives. Fathers were invited to critically reflect on their roles as parents and were encouraged to be more involved in parenting of their young children, which is often seen as a task women

are solely responsible for. Each father received dedicated support from a mentor who facilitated individual sessions on fatherhood, couple’s communication and parenting. REAL resulted in decreased use of physical punishment against children, reduced violence towards the wife, and increases in positive parenting, improving interaction between fathers and children.

Institute for Reproductive Health (2017) *REAL Fathers Initiative*; Ashburn, K. et al (2016) ‘Evaluation of the Responsible, Engaged, and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative on Physical Child Punishment and Intimate Partner Violence in Northern Uganda’, *Prevention Science*, vol. 18, no. 7, pp. 854-864.

CASE STUDY


CHOICES in Nepal

Save the Children's CHOICES curriculum in Nepal engages young adolescent girls and boys through children's clubs, facilitating discussions around ideas of respect, fairness and their aspirations for the future. In Nepal, gender inequality and inequitable gender roles are at the core of child marriage, domestic violence and restricted opportunities for girls. This curriculum was significant in enabling boys and girls rethink traditional gender roles through critical thinking exercises that encourage them to examine gender biases. The program has resulted in considerable success. For example, fewer CHOICES participants felt it was acceptable for a man to hit his wife if she disagreed with him. More participants felt their future daughters should have the same opportunities to attend school or work

outside of the home as their sons. More boys decided to help their sisters with chores and advocated with parents for sisters to attend school and against child marriage.

Save the Children also developed content to target parents of these adolescents on their own attitudes and beliefs, to shift thinking on two main issues: keeping girls in school and stopping violence in the home. The CHOICES curriculum has been adapted for other countries including Bolivia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Malawi and Zambia.

Save the Children (2017) *Choices,Voices, Promises. Creating Gender Equality for Very Young Adolescents by Shifting Norms*; Institute for Reproductive Health (2011) *Utilizing Participatory Data Collection Methods to Evaluate Programs for Very Young Adolescents:An Evaluation of Save the Children's Choices Curriculum in Siraha, Nepal.*



“People laugh at a man who cooks food in their home. But from the day we have taken CHOICES classes, our brothers have started helping us [with chores] and we help them too. We will teach the same to our friends in our village so they can help as well.”

CHOICES Participant

Conclusion: Invest in Gender Equality Now

Tearing down the deeply entrenched, complex barriers that stand in the way of gender equality and girls' ability to succeed will require enormous resources, effort and resolve, but the benefits are exponential.

Save the Children's long history of advocacy, policies and programming to achieve gender equality and empower girls has shown that shifting the balance of power and transforming discriminatory norms and practices is possible. The challenge now is to build on the progress that has been made to accelerate change. To do this, we will need to bring all sectors of society on this journey – girls and boys, mothers and fathers, teachers and community leaders, government officials and the private sector. By working together, we can realize a future where the world's most vulnerable and excluded people are empowered to thrive – leading to a better future for us all.

Endnotes

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⁸ Ibid.

⁹ UNICEF (2014) *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: South Asia Regional Study*;

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INVESTING FOR IMPACT



Save the Children®

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In the United States and around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

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