

Session 3: Barriers to Girls' Education



OBJECTIVE	By the end of the session, participants will be able list common barriers to girls' education with a focus on the school and classroom
SUGGESTED TIME	20 minutes
MATERIALS	Chart paper, tape, markers, exercise books, pens, Handout 4

1. **Introduction:** Explain to the participants that in every country in the world there are barriers to education that affect access and participation. Clearly identifying barriers can better enable us to come up with solutions.
2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Explain that there are many barriers to girls' education and these will be addressed in more depth in the Community Workshops. Add that many people think of barriers as those things that block students from entering school to begin with. However, once inside the school and classroom girls' exclusion can be promoted in a manner that limits their access, participation and success in education. In order to transform our school and classrooms to ensure that they are child friendly (boy friendly and girl friendly) we need to first acknowledge the way in which school infrastructure, policy, administration, curriculum and teachers may create barriers. Allow participants to work in pairs for 5-10 minutes. Once they have had time to think in pairs, generate a list of barriers with the participants as a whole group. Distribute **handout 4** and read with the participants



Remind participants that as we consider ways to address these barriers boys will also benefit; that girl friendly classrooms are child friendly classrooms. Note that we also need to think about out-of-school children and we need to tackle other barriers that may not be discussed here today, but those will be addressed in the Community Workshops. Explain that the next session will focus on developing their ability to analyze curriculum content with a focus on the messages that we convey to both girls and boys through biased curriculum and the way in which students might be either empowered or limited by these messages.



Barriers to Education – School and Classroom Based

- **School fees and other costs:** Is “free” education really free? Poverty can be a greater barrier to girls’ education than boys’.
- **Socio-Cultural Attitudes:** This refers to cultural or religious beliefs, lack of knowledge on benefits of education, negative attitudes on the value of girls’ education, different social and academic expectations for girls and boys.
- **Humiliation:** Being humiliated repeatedly by either peers or teachers for not performing well academically, or for other reasons, can result in lack of focus and attention during class and even drop-out.
- **Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. When surveyed, many girls indicate that they sometimes feel unsafe in their communities and schools, and often feel pressured or harassed to engage in “romantic relationships”.⁴
- **Physical or Verbal Aggression:** Just as humiliation can deter learning, physical and verbal aggression, either from other students or from teachers, can affect a student’s concentration and result in drop-out. This is particularly true when physical or verbal aggression escalates to “bullying”. (This refers to unwanted aggressive behavior that is repeated over time)
- **School Infrastructure:** Building structures, water and sanitation (including lack of latrines, lack of separate latrines for boys and girls or incomplete/ insecure latrines), overcrowding, lack of furniture.
- **Gender Biased Curriculum:** Curriculum that is based on the experience and success of men and boys, depicts male and female characters in stereotypic ways, and presents content in a manner that may be more accessible to boys, can limit a girls’ ability to benefit from education.
- **Lack of role models/mentors:** This refers to role models in the curriculum as well as role models and mentors in the day-to-day lives of girls and boys. Curriculum tends to present more role models for boys such as success stories in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). In addition, research has shown that girls have fewer opportunities, compared with boys, to meet same-sex friends, make new friends, and interact with mentors.⁵
- **Lack of female teachers:** This is particularly relevant to female placements in rural schools, female presence in the areas of mathematics and science instruction, and the general availability of female teachers for girls to identify with, and confide in, for guidance and support. The presence of female teachers can result in safer school environments for girls.

⁴Lambert M., Perrino E., Barreras E. (2012). Understanding the barriers to female education in Ghana. Blue Kitabu Research Institute, University of southern CA

⁵ Austrian, Karen. (2012). Girls’ Leadership and Mentoring The Population Council Inc. New York. N.Y. USA

- **Lack of access to equipment and TLMs:** This is particularly relevant to girls' participation in mathematics and science, where boys may be given more opportunities to work with equipment and materials.
- **Teaching Methodologies:** Use of traditional rote learning is not conducive to engaging all students and girls in particular will benefit from varied methodologies that bring their experience and prior knowledge into the lesson.
- **School Policy:** School based policies set the tone and influence the school environment. Biased policies or the lack of important policies can disadvantage one gender over the other.
- **Division of Labor and Roles:** Remember, access goes beyond entering the school gate or the classroom door. If the roles and chores assigned to girls and boys result in unequal access to time in class, unequal access to after school tutorials or unequal access to leadership roles, then access and participation in school is not equitable.