



THE “GIRL EFFECT” IS ALSO ABOUT BOYS AND MEN

It's no secret that we're passionate advocates of the “girl effect” - the positive social and economic change brought about when girls have the opportunity to participate.

We wholeheartedly believe in the ripple effect that investments in adolescent girls have on everyone around them, and we believe that girls have the power to completely reverse intergenerational cycles of poverty.

However, we've found that our exclusive investment in girls (and women) invariably raises an obvious question: what about boys? It's a good question, and we want to be clear about the answer: The girl effect is about boys. It's about everyone.

The girl effect is about breaking the cycle of poverty and building a sustainable economy. That can't possibly happen if 50% of our population in poverty is left out of the conversation, if they aren't seen as a key to the solution.

In our work, it didn't take long to realize that on the flip side of the equation, there is the equally critical role for boys and men.

Girls will tell you: changing my life requires changing his mind. Men and boys - in roles as varied as peers, fathers, teachers, or friends - are often the gatekeepers who uphold barriers or opportunities for girls. The choices men and boys make often determine a girl's ability to avoid the trapdoors of early marriage, school drop-out, or teen pregnancy, to name a few. With his support, she can avoid these traps and progress over time from home to primary school to secondary school to a productive future.

What men and boys believe about their own roles and the roles of girls has the power to impact not only the future of girls, but the future of humanity. The greatest change for girls comes when the men and boys around them show themselves to be leaders. These men and boys are heroes for girls. We need their behavior to become the norm.

Attitudes can shift and harmful norms can change over time - sometimes rapidly - if there is a logical, important reason for them to. And with such changes, girls and women - as well as boys and men - can enjoy new opportunities to realize their potential. So how do we do this? First, we have to get men and boys at the table and involved in creating solutions.

There are many wonderful organizations working with boys and men. Individually, they have the chance to create transformative change in their communities. Collectively, they have the power to change the world for the better, but only if they remember that both sides of the equation have a part to play.