

# Nudges to Improve Parental Engagement and Gender Disparity in Remote Education During COVID-19 in Ghana



Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, remote learning has been introduced in Ghana to ensure children continue learning while schools are closed. Equitable access to education is difficult to maintain during remote learning, and may increase inequalities by child gender and household backgrounds. To address this challenge, researchers have partnered with IPA and Movva Technologies to evaluate the impact of a text-message-based behavioral change intervention on improving parental engagement in educational activities, parental beliefs about returns to education, as well as improvements in children's learning, enrollment, attendance and gender parity in education.

## Policy Issue

The effectiveness of remote learning amongst both girls and boys is partially based on parents' access to information and knowledge about remote learning platforms, distribution of housework amongst members of the family, and perceptions about girls' education. Gender disparity in schooling exists in the form of lower perceived returns to education and higher opportunity cost for girls' education. Moreover, prevailing gender-biased social norms and aspirations dictate greater involvement of girls in housekeeping and care work, which is likely to increase during school closures.

Based on previous evidence on large economic shocks, girls are often disproportionately affected in accessing education as compared to boys during these periods.<sup>1,2</sup> This disparity increases by age, with older girls at a higher risk of drop-out due to increased share of household work or the possibility of early marriage, pregnancy, and co-habitation.

Low-cost interventions such as text-message-based timely, actionable information to poor and relatively less educated parents can improve parental engagement and child educational outcomes.<sup>3</sup> However, the impact of such interventions in the context of a global pandemic in a low-resource setting, where stressors are more acute than in non-emergency circumstances, is unknown. This evaluation aims to



### RESEARCHERS

Sharon Wolf, Elisabetta Aurino, Isaac Osei-akoto

### COUNTRY

Ghana

### PARTNERS

Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF), Movva

### PROGRAM AREA

Education

### TOPICS

Education Quality, Incentives, Information & Communications Technology (ICT), School Attendance, Women & Girls

### TIMELINE

2020-2021

provide evidence on how parent- and child-focused behavioral nudges focused on parental engagement impact learning, parental beliefs about returns to education, gender equity, and educational outcomes. It will provide some of the first evidence on to what extent messages focused on gender-parity, and with differing duration of exposure, affect these outcomes.

## Evaluation Context

Ghana's Ministry of Education started a remote-learning program through radio, television and internet-based platforms to continue access to learning for children after the closure of schools since March 2020. The need for accessible low-cost, gender-sensitive solutions to minimize disruptions in learning is especially urgent in the relatively less disadvantaged northern Ghana. The evaluation is taking place among households with compulsory school-aged children (ages 5-15 years) from the Northern, Savannah, North East, Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana. These are amongst the poorest regions in Ghana; they are rural and the most educationally deprived and parents' involvement in children's education is generally low.<sup>4</sup>

The Parental Nudges Project (PNP) is a household-level intervention designed by Movva Technologies to improve school-aged children's learning outcomes during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the program, parents and other primary caregivers will receive text messages in simple English with behavioral nudges targeting children's learning across grades and ages for in-school and remote learning. The goal of the messages is to bring parents closer to their children's school life by prompting parents to engage with their children on topics such as school, future plans and sharing how they overcame similar challenges at their age. Further, messages for some households will promote gender-equitable outcomes in education and broader development.

The content will be adapted as the Ghanaian government updates its plans to reopen schools (currently expected in January 2021), and aligned with the Ministry of Education's remote-learning, back-to-school, and gender equality campaigns.

## Details of the Intervention

Researchers are partnering with IPA and Movva Technologies to evaluate the impact of the program on parental engagement in educational activities, parental beliefs about returns to education, gender equality as well as improvements in children's learning, enrollment, attendance, and gender parity in education.

Households will be randomly assigned to one of five groups:

1. **Standard messages:** Caregivers will receive messages encouraging involvement with children's learning, their child's social-emotional development, academic aspirations and engagement in remote learning activities during the school closures and into the summer (3 months);
2. **Messages with a "gender-parity boost":** Caregivers of both boys and girls will receive messages to parents, in which some of the nudges include content promoting girls' education and addressing some common stereotypes around gender roles during the school closures and into the

summer (3 months);

3. **Standard messages of longer duration:** Caregivers will receive the same messages as group one but the program (6 months, into the first term of the next academic year).
4. **Messages with a “gender-parity boost” of longer duration:** Caregivers of both boys and girls will receive messages to parents, in which some of the nudges include content promoting girls’ education and addressing some common stereotypes around gender roles during the school closures (6 months, into the first term of the next academic year).
5. **Comparison group:** No messages during the study period.

At the parent/primary caregiver level, the research team will measure parents’ engagement in their child’s remote learning, parents’ educational aspirations and expectations for their children, child schooling outcomes including enrollment and attendance reporting as well as a measure for the prevalence of gender norms. At the child level, the research team will measure enrollment and attendance, learning (literacy and numeracy), and developmental outcomes. These outcomes will be measured through a combination of phone and direct assessments for children in two age groups: 5-9 years and 10-15 years.

## Results and Policy Lessons

Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> Duryea, Lam, and Levison. “Effects of Economic Shocks on Children's Employment and Schooling in Brazil”, 188–214

<sup>2</sup> Eloundou-Enyegue and Davanzo “Economic downturns and schooling inequality, Cameroon, 1987-95” 2, 183-197

<sup>3</sup> Bergman and Chan, “Leveraging Parents through Low-Cost Technology: The Impact of High-Frequency Information on Student Achievement.”

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/AIR\\_UNICEF\\_Ghana\\_CD\\_Report\\_revised\\_final.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/AIR_UNICEF_Ghana_CD_Report_revised_final.pdf).

Duryea, Suzanne, Lam, David, & Levison, Deborah. “Effects of Economic Shocks on Children's Employment and Schooling in Brazil.” *Journal of development economics*, 84, no.1 (2007), 188–214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2006.11.004>

Eloundou-Enyegue Parfait & Davanzo, Julie. “Economic downturns and Schooling Inequality, Cameroon, 1987-95” *Population Studies*, 57, no.2 (2003): 183- 197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472032000097092>

Bergman, Peter and Chan, Eric. “Leveraging Parents through Low-Cost Technology: The Impact of High-Frequency Information on Student Achievement.” *Journal of Human Resources* (2019). Advance online publication. <http://www.columbia.edu/~psb2101/ParentRCT.pdf>

York, Ben, Loeb, Susanna & Doss, Chris. “One Step at a Time: The Effects of an Early Literacy Messaging Program for Parents of Preschoolers.”(2017) [https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/One%20Step%20CEPA%20Working%20Paper%206%201%](https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/One%20Step%20CEPA%20Working%20Paper%206%201%20)

[2017.pdf](#)