Girls Empowering Girls through Mentoring

Around the world, UNICEF and its partners are capitalizing on an untapped resource to promote girls’ education: girls.

Innovative girl-to-girl mentoring programmes engage girls to play an active part in achieving gender equality in education. In these programmes, older girls are matched with younger girls in need of support to stay in school and succeed in their education.

Big sisters are a big thing in Madagascar Six year-old Samera at the Marogisa School on the Eastern Coast Madagascar is a great example. Samera’s first grade teacher observed that she was having a very difficult time adjusting to school, suffering from extreme emotional stress as well as untreated chiggers infecting her feet.

The school principal suggested Samera be paired with a mentor, encouraged by what he had learned in a Girl-to-Girl Strategy (GGS) training provided by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education. Juliana, a fourth grade student, was identified as a good match to be Samera’s “big sister.” As part of her role, Juliana accompanies Samera to and from school. The two girls play together during recess and Juliana also helps Samera learn to read and write, as they live in the same village.

“I am more enthusiastic to go to school now,” Samera says. Both the school principal and first grade teacher at Marogisa have noticed a positive difference in Samera – she is more confident and her school performance has improved.

Catching up on Schoolwork through Homework groups in Nepal, Yemen and Mozambique Other girl-to-girl interventions include UNICEF Nepal’s homework groups, where adolescent girls help each other to do homework in subjects that students have difficulty with. These groups are also a chance for girls to catch up on schoolwork they’ve missed due to household duties or other reasons – with one another’s support, the girls avoid having to drop out of school because they’ve fallen behind.

In Yemen, 17-year old Saeeda Salam volunteered as a Young Facilitator for UNICEF’s ‘Getting Ready for School Program.’ Saeeda herself started school late due to poverty, and at 17 was only completing grade seven.
“I joined the programme to help young children prepare for school,” said Saeeda. “I enjoy being part of this programme, because I learn how to deal with younger children.

As a Young Facilitator, she held classes to prepare young girls and boys for school, providing an opportunity for early learning and helping to break the cycle of exclusion and late enrolment for her young peers.

Such girl-to-girl programmes also help to challenge perceptions of girls’ limited capabilities by proving that they are in fact agents for change and contributors to their community. Just ask 14 year-old Amina Gulama Katamo, leader of the UNICEF-supported “Os Bradas” school club in Mozambique.

“They [other girls in school] will ask me about anything! One could say that I am like an older sister to them even though sometimes am younger. The questions range from anything about school assignments and cooking to very personal matters and the things we discuss in the club… It’s a very big responsibility to be a Brada.”

These approaches allow for tailored support to marginalized young girls, provided by those who most closely understand the issues that they themselves face. Furthermore, the mentor can act as an older sister, whom younger girls can look up to and confide in more readily than a parent or teacher.

Harnessing the strength of girls in the fight for their right to quality education is an innovative approach that holds great promise not only in promoting education, but also in positively transforming attitudes about girls’ capabilities.

**Related links:**

- [http://www.unicef.org/education/index_58144.html](http://www.unicef.org/education/index_58144.html)
- [http://www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org)