Across the developing world, studies show that women’s participation in community initiatives can have long-lasting benefits for women and children. Women who are empowered to take action, whether through programmes led by governments, non-governmental organizations or those driven by the community, often have a positive influence on the lives of other women.

Bangladesh. One example is the Food for Education (FFE) programme in Bangladesh, which focused on female-headed households. Lessons learned from the FFE programme, which ran from 1993 to 2002, were applied in a follow-up project by the World Bank. About 40 per cent of the 5.2 million students enrolled in schools with FFE received food grains, primarily wheat. The programme successfully increased primary school enrolment, promoted school attendance and reduced drop-out rates. While boys’ school enrolment increased by nearly 30 per cent, the increase for girls was even more remarkable, at over 40 per cent. In addition, there is some evidence that the programme also reduced drop-out rates. While boys’ school enrolment increased by nearly 30 per cent, the increase for girls was even more remarkable, at over 40 per cent. In addition, there is some evidence that the programme also increased school attendance and reduced drop-out rates.

Indonesia. Non-governmental organizations are actively involved in the campaign for women’s rights in Indonesia. Since 1986, the Centre for the Development of Women’s Resources has been a leader in the movement to end violence against women. The centre trains community-based groups on women’s issues, including survival strategies and skills for building support networks to cope with violence against women. The groups are then equipped with modules to conduct succession training until the information reaches village level.

Women play a crucial role in the school’s success, organizing the programme and encouraging mothers, many of whom rarely participate in social events outside of the household. Providing a safe and supportive environment in which disabled children and their parents can learn and socialize, the programme caters to the emotional and practical needs of families.

Another strategy for increasing men’s support for gender equality involves policies that aim to redistribute benefits to men and women more equitably. Evidence from the ’Nordic experiment’ illustrates how this works. In Scandinavian countries, a combination of government and non-government initiatives contributed to a dramatic increase in the availability of paternity leave for men. In Sweden, for instance, fathers now assume responsibility for 45 per cent of childcare responsibilities, thanks in large part to the growing popularity of paternal leave.

Challenging gender stereotypes and changing attitudes

Advocacy initiatives designed to educate men and women on the benefits of gender equality and joint decision-making can help nurture a more cooperative relationship between men and women. Evidence shows that fathers are more likely to stop abusive treatment towards mothers if they have been exposed to information on how gender-based violence adversely affects their children.

Research and data on the situation of women and girls

There is broad recognition of the impact that discrimination has on the lives of women. But an overwhelming lack of sex-disaggregated statistics often results in scant or weak quantitative research on the issues that affect women and, in turn, children. This report has shown that there is sufficient data and research on women and girls to outline where their rights are violated and illustrate the negative impacts these violations can have on children. Nonetheless, much more needs to be known about many of the most important aspects of women’s lives and the impact discrimination has on those around them. Research and data are sorely lacking in several key areas listed below.

- Maternal mortality: While 111 countries produced data based on registration systems and other surveys, for 62 countries no recent national data were available and estimates therefore had to be based on models.

Women’s participation in community-based initiatives across the developing world

Across the developing world, studies show that women’s participation in community initiatives can have long-lasting benefits for women and children. Women who are empowered to take action, whether through programmes led by governments, non-governmental organizations or those driven by the community, often have a positive influence on the lives of other women.

Guatemala. Families with working mothers in need of childcare were the focus of Programa de Hogares Comunitarios, in Guatemala. Under this government-sponsored initiative, a group of parents was given the opportunity to designate a woman from their community as their childcare provider. The success of the programme, which began in 1991, was reinforced by the positive outcomes for the children, who consumed, on average, 20 per cent more energy, proteins and iron and 50 per cent more vitamin A than children in the control group. Programme evaluations also revealed that mothers involved were more likely to receive work-related social and medical benefits than other non-participating working mothers.

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See References, page 88.