



Empowering Women and Girls

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Around the world, women and girls play essential roles in economic growth, through income generation, investment in health and education, and community development. Yet they face pervasive barriers to full participation in society—including social restrictions, abuse, trafficking, and reduced access to education, resources, employment, and services. These inequalities often begin early in life. For example, families may focus their investments in male children, at the expense of girls' health and development. Adolescent girls, deprived of income-earning opportunities, may engage in risky behaviors in search of economic support for themselves or for their families. Although the needs of women and girls vary greatly by region and context, they represent half of humanity. If we can unleash their potential, we can enhance the welfare of the world.

Our Work

CEGA is committed to improving women's and girls' empowerment, by designing and rigorously testing strate-

gies to enhance opportunity and protect against health risks, especially HIV/AIDS. Although many organizations have programs that address gender, our multi-sectorial approach combining elements of development economics, public health, and other social sciences is unique. In addition, our commitment to rigorous evaluations ensures that the policies and global learning derived from our work are evidence-based. Our operating principle is to design programs and determine whether they work, under what circumstances, and for whom.

For example, in **Malawi** our researchers are evaluating a World Bank program that provides schoolgirls with a small cash incentive (\$5-\$15 per month) to stay in school. Remarkably, they find that the approach not only improves school attendance, but also reduces the need to engage in transactional sex with wealthier older men (who are more likely to be HIV positive). While conventional HIV prevention strategies have focused on changing social norms, this study demonstrates the power of economic approaches.



The Center of Evaluation for Global Action (CEGA) is the University of California's premiere center for research on global development. Our faculty affiliates use two powerful techniques—rigorous evaluation and economic analysis—to measure the impacts of large-scale social and economic development projects. The Center integrates business and economic approaches with expertise in agriculture, public health, education, and the environment. As a result, we have produced some of the most influential and policy relevant studies in recent years, including cash incentives for women's empowerment, low-cost water technology for rural communities, and early childhood health interventions for improved adult economic outcomes.

Another project provides **Kenyan** women with savings accounts, and finds that they are better able to protect their money against theft and appropriation by husbands and other family members. In addition, by placing money in the control of women, the program increases investment in small businesses by 45 percent and raises household spending on food by 10 to 20 percent.

CEGA is also working in **Zimbabwe** to improve the health and welfare of adolescent girls and women. The long-running SHAZ! Project—Shaping the Health of Adolescents in Zimbabwe—was designed to reduce the risk of HIV infection among adolescent girls by providing vocational training, microcredit, and life skills education. Although a randomized evaluation found no impact on HIV, it nevertheless demonstrated promising economic and behavioral outcomes. A modified approach (for HIV-positive girls) is now in development. More recently, CEGA researchers have established a partnership with the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation to rigorously evaluate the scale-up of programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. These interventions are intended to help HIV-positive mothers access care for themselves and their children.

Opportunities for Partnerships

Women’s empowerment plays an important role across all sectors of development. Both governments and NGOs have recognized this, and funding has increased for gender-focused programs. However, few programs integrate careful evaluation into their operations and fewer still incorporate economic development with health. Almost no programs invest in women researchers abroad to develop their talents and capacity. As a result, we miss opportunities to generate evidence and advance the field.



CEGA’s early studies have demonstrated the promise of rigorous research to transform women’s lives. Now, we are launching the **“Empowering Women and Girls” Research Initiative** to support the evaluation of projects that focus on the unique social and economic barriers faced by women and girls. We welcome your contributions to:

- **Provide support for evaluation** of strategies for empowerment, to ensure that scarce resources are invested where they are likely to have impact;
- **Advance the development of methodologies** to accurately measure the outcomes of gender-focused programs—particularly where self-reported data are unreliable (as in reports of sexual behavior);
- **Improve the application of evidence** by governments and NGO through targeted communications, so that social programs actually promote the welfare of women and girls;
- **Attract new researchers** into the area of women’s empowerment, particularly scientists interested in an integrated approach that combines economics with public health and other areas of expertise.

Another essential component of our program is investment in women scholars in other countries. CEGA faculty have built a global network of researchers dedicated to supporting the next generation of women scholars. We invite you to leverage this network and **invest in the education and mentoring of women researchers**, particularly those in developing countries. This will ensure that women’s priorities influence development programming.

Contact

For more information about our work, visit <http://cega.berkeley.edu> or contact:

Temina Madon, PhD
CEGA Executive Director
tmadon@berkeley.edu

Professor Edward Miguel
CEGA Faculty Director
emiguel@econ.berkeley.edu

Read more about this initiative at: <http://cega.berkeley.edu/initiatives/women/>