

Policy Brief: Building Resilience in the Girl Child through Gender-Complementary Approaches

Focusing on Africa and Developing Jurisdictions – A Case for Integrated Boy Child Engagement

Prepared for: Policymakers, Gender Development Partners, and Donor Agencies

Reference Framework: Inspired by the work of Hindu Asha Foundation and other resilience-focused models

Executive Summary

Efforts to raise a resilient girl child have been at the center of global and regional development goals. In Africa and other developing societies, programs aimed at empowering girls are achieving significant progress. However, emerging evidence suggests that **resilience in girls is unsustainable without engaging the boy child**. This policy brief advocates for **gender-complementary programming**—where boys and girls are equipped together to foster mutual respect, shared responsibility, and long-term resilience.

Donors and policymakers must realign empowerment strategies to include both genders. A siloed approach risks reinforcing gender tensions and undermines societal progress. Complementarity—not competition—is key.

Background and Rationale

Promoting resilience in children has gained traction as a tool for addressing adversity, conflict, poverty, and inequality. Resilience, defined as “ordinary magic” by Ann S. Masten (1999), is the capacity to

thrive despite hardship. In Africa, the girl child faces layered vulnerabilities: early marriage, school dropout, abuse, and underrepresentation in decision-making.

Organizations like the **Hindu Asha Foundation** have made commendable strides in advocating for the girl child, particularly in challenging socio-religious contexts. However, when such advocacy excludes the boy child, it may lead to social imbalance. As boys remain disengaged, a gap forms—breeding misunderstanding, resentment, or passivity.

A recent study from Ghana found no significant gender difference in academic resilience and well-being but emphasized that **resilience is shaped by both structural and social gender norms** (Amoadu et al., 2024). Similarly, a youth survey by Educatius (2023) revealed that **boys often show higher resistance to negative thoughts**, suggesting that *failing to support boys means ignoring key allies in gender equity work.*

Key Policy Argument: Resilience Requires Complementarity

A resilient girl child **cannot thrive in isolation**. For her to succeed sustainably:

- She must **understand and respect the role of the boy child**;
- She must be **equipped to coexist, lead with empathy, and navigate male-dominated spaces**;
- The boy child must **recognize the challenges girls face**, and be trained to **support, not dominate**.

“Society is supposed to complement each other. For a girl child to be resilient, she must understand the role of the boy child...and vice versa... So that they can be resilient together in the society and uphold a better, empowered, understanding, and evolving society.” — [Author’s Argument]

Without this gender-aligned framework, we risk producing isolated empowerment: **strong girls in fragile societies**.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Donors

1. Gender-Complementary Program Design

All resilience and empowerment programs targeting girls should include a **boy child engagement component**—education, dialogue, mentorship, emotional development.

2. Curriculum Reform

Support ministries of education to incorporate modules on:

- Gender complementarity;
- Emotional intelligence and inter-gender respect;
- Shared responsibilities in families, schools, and public life.

3. Community Sensitization Campaigns

Invest in community-level awareness programs that highlight the **mutual roles** of boys and girls in breaking cycles of poverty, abuse, and inequality.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation Metrics

Include gender-complementarity indicators in M&E frameworks. Track not just outcomes for girls, but also changes in **male attitudes, gender cooperation, and shared leadership outcomes**.

5. Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations

Encourage joint efforts between civil society, schools, religious leaders, and government agencies to foster **inter-gender dialogues** and **peer-support systems**.

Conclusion

Raising a resilient girl child must go beyond female-focused programming. True resilience comes when **boys and girls are empowered together**, understanding their shared roles and responsibilities in building a more equitable society. Policymakers and donors hold the power to shift the paradigm—from isolated gender empowerment to **inclusive societal transformation**.

Select References

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About the Author

Rehemah Namujehe Mujoma is a Ugandan legal practitioner, gender justice advocate with over 15 years of multidisciplinary experience spanning law, governance, policy development, and grassroots empowerment. She holds a Master of Arts in Diplomatic Studies from the University of Leicester and a Certificate in Political Education & Leadership Development. Drawing from her academic training in diplomacy and international law, she critically engages with structural inequalities and the policy frameworks that shape them.

Her work focuses on legal and social transformation, with a strong emphasis on gender balance, youth inclusion, and institutional accountability in Africa and other Global South contexts. Rehemah's advocacy interrogates dominant narratives of empowerment, especially where global agendas overlook the interdependence between the girl child and the boy child in sustainable development. Her writing is informed by lived experience, field-based insight, and a commitment to building resilient, inclusive societies through evidence-based, values-driven policy dialogue.



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