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From Talk Shows to Teacher Training: Using Media to Improve Girls' Education in Three African Countries

As we consider our roles in reaching the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world continues to be rocked by numerous economic, social and political uncertainties. Since the invention of the motion picture, media has been a powerful force in shaping and changing mindsets, shifting social norms and beliefs, informing, and educating.

Educating a girl has been identified as a key lever in reaching the SDGs and eliminating global poverty, increasing lifetime earnings, improving health, and even mitigating climate change. While recent gains in girls' primary school enrollment show progress, in many countries, girls' education persistently lags behind their male peers due to economic, social and cultural factors.

As an international NGO, Discovery Learning Alliance uses the power of media to transform education and improve lives in the developing world. In Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, we have used this powerful tool to positively impact learning, community health, and promote positive social norms and behaviors.

In 2014, we began a partnership with the UK DFID's Girls' Education Challenge to improve retention, enrollment, attendance and learning among girls in 1500 schools in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria and more broadly, to shift the social norms and public dialogue around girls' education.

For teachers, we provide intensive professional development that includes gender responsive pedagogy. We also produce short videos to reinforce these methods.

For learners, we provide relevant video content on subjects like malaria, mathematics and Mars and then map it to the local curricula. Neuroscience and neuro-education demonstrate what we intuitively know: visuals are vital for learning and retention.

For each country, we created "Discovery +", engaging and entertaining TV programs with studio interviews, youth reporting, and musical guests. Using this platform, we subtly introduce messages and stories about girls' education and gender equality, and find opportunities to showcase non-traditional role models, demonstrating the value of girls' education to those who otherwise would be disinterested.

The reach and impact of "Discovery +" has exceeded our expectations. After just four episodes, changes in attitudes and behaviors were observed. Fathers began asking their daughters what they wanted to be when they grew up, and some began supporting their wives in going back to school. One father shared "before watching the program, I never used to care about my daughter." Viewers discussed how watching the show *specifically* changed their attitudes and behaviors towards girls' education.

"Discovery +" aired on free-to-air networks across each country and was a hit in Ghana, the #3 non-live show in Kenya, and broadcast on Nigeria's two largest networks...reaching over 250 million viewers (and counting).

This is just one example of leveraging media to improve education and address social and cultural issues. As we look into an uncertain future, what are the barriers to more fully utilizing media to effectively meet the SDGs? What more can we do to use the power of media to transform individuals and communities?