

# ENDING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN CLASSROOMS THROUGH PLAY-BASED CURRICULUM IN BANGLADESH, INDIA AND NIGER

Key Achievements from Phase 1  
(2022-2023)



## CONTEXT

Gender stereotypes constrict children's aspirations and narrow their worldview from an early age. They may lead to harmful social norms, gender-based violence, gender discrimination, and inequalities. However, with the right education from an early age, we can challenge these stereotypes, change perceptions and ensure that children can access better life outcomes, free from gendered limitations.

Since 2022, the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) has been implementing the multi-country programme 'Ending Gender Stereotypes in Classrooms through Play-Based Curriculum'. The programme aims to help adolescent girls, boys and children of all diversity understand, question and reject gender stereotypes. Engaging an activity-based curricula and pedagogy to end gender stereotypes in schools, it seeks to build evidence and momentum to institutionalize play and reflection. This initiative aligns with UNGEI's long-term vision of establishing a clear pathway for using education to help children grow into equal, just, and non-violent citizens.

In 2022-2023, together with our partners, we reached 9,368 (50% girls) students from early elementary to grade 10, in 60 schools in Bangladesh, India and Niger. We are now scaling up the programme in each of these countries, building on the successes of the pilot initiatives.

## BANGLADESH

From October 2022 to August 2023, UN Women Bangladesh, in collaboration with the JAAGO Foundation Trust and UNGEI, helped students recognize and challenge discriminatory gender norms, using interactive classroom discussions, role-reversal games, and other play-based activities. After these sessions, students showed greater acceptance of positive gender norms, meaningful connections with their peers, and motivation to become allies to girls. Student-led activities in the programme enabled conversations with parents, teachers, and school management committee (SMC) members, expanding its intergenerational impact.

**"As a girl, I heard that I did not need to focus on studying, Marriage and household chores were my path. That society believed I did not need education or work. Marriage meant my husband would handle everything. Now I know that girls can be independent and have equal rights. I've learned to pursue my dreams and goals."**

Grade 8 student

## Outreach

The pilot programme reached 2,406 secondary school students (44% girls), 2,381 parents (74% women), 158 teachers (50% women), and 55 (35% women) SMC members from five secondary schools in Dhaka city.

## Impact

The surveys (baseline in January and endline in June 2023) demonstrate significant increase in the students' understanding and rejection of gender stereotypes (Figure 1). Both girls and boys showed marked improvement (almost three-fold) in identifying stereotypes and recognizing their harmful impact (two-fold among girls and three-fold among boys). Twice the number of girls and four times the number of boys emerged from the programme believing that it is possible to alter gender norms. In the endline survey, 100% of girls and boys acknowledged the impact of stereotypes on all genders, underscoring an encouraging shift in the understanding and perception of gender stereotypes.



**Increased understanding of gender stereotypes:** Endline surveys recorded a three-fold increase in the ability of both girls (62 percentage points (pp)) and boys (61-pp) to recognize gender stereotypes in textbooks and media sources. Separating gender stereotypes from commonly accepted behaviours is an essential step towards reducing them.



**Recognition of harmful effects of gender stereotypes:** Twice the number of girls (52-pp) and thrice the number of boys (60-pp) believed that gender stereotypes are harmful.

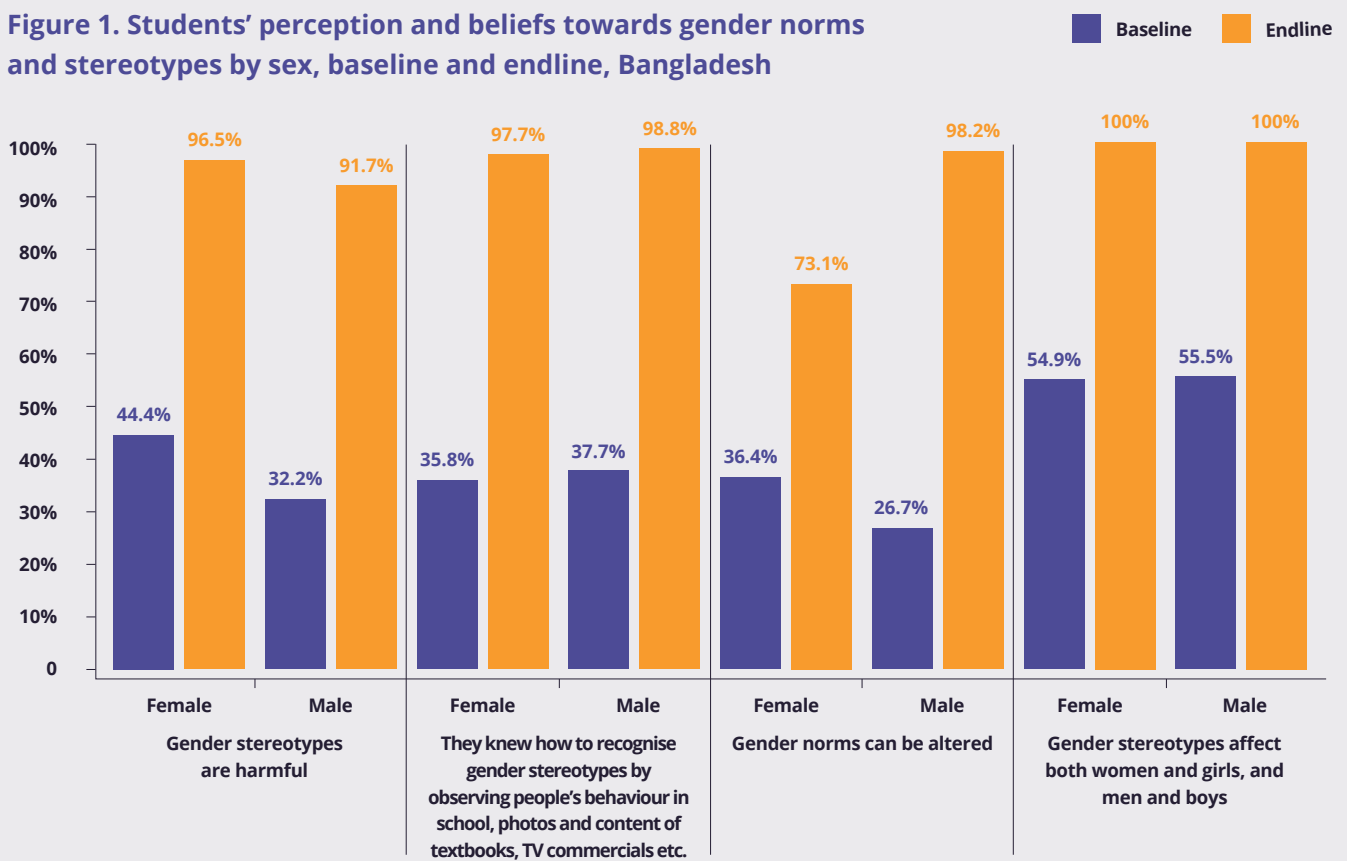


**Belief in transforming norms:** From baseline to endline, the number of students who believed gender norms can be altered doubled for girls and increased four times for boys.



**Universal acceptance of the impact of gender stereotypes:** In the endline survey, all students (100%) agreed that gender stereotypes impact both women and men, up from only around 50% at baseline.

**Figure 1. Students' perception and beliefs towards gender norms and stereotypes by sex, baseline and endline, Bangladesh**



The programme also enhanced students' ability (47-pp increase overall) and confidence (42 pp for girls and 24 pp for boys) to challenge gender stereotypes. These results demonstrate the programme's success in transforming students' attitudes and beliefs towards gender norms and stereotypes, fostering confidence and knowledge among students in Bangladesh to challenge long-held beliefs.

## INDIA

UNICEF India, in collaboration with Pratham Books, Committee of Resource Organization (CORO) India, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), Zilla Parishad, District Institute for Education & Training, and UNGEI, implemented the programme for grades 3 to 10 in 50 schools in Osmanabad, Maharashtra, from November 2022 to June 2023.

"I love washing dishes and tidying up rooms, but my mother would scold me, calling those tasks 'girly.' After reading these stories, I felt more confident and spoke to her. I told her about popular stories that show girls and boys doing all kinds of work. At school too we witnessed this change. Before, it was only girls who would volunteer to clean and sweep the classroom. But now, we boys also step up. Likewise, when it comes to lifting benches and chairs, girls also lend a hand to help us."

A 9-year boy student

## Outreach

**Grades 3 to 5:** Pratham Books' Story Weaver<sup>1</sup> implemented the 'Open Books, Open Doors, Open Minds: Gender Transformation through Storybooks Programme' in 20 schools. Students engaged with storybooks free from gender-stereotypical roles, followed by games. Weekly sessions covered themes like identity, gender roles, and aspirations, reaching 1,231 students (48% girls).

**Grades 6 to 8:** CORO India's fictional documentary series 'Meena Raju Manch' used storytelling, slogans, games, competitions and theatre, to discuss gender and health, personality development, and education. Weekly sessions in 40 schools reached 2,482 students (49% girls).

**Grades 9 to 10:** SSP, with support from MAVA, delivered the Janeevesah<sup>2</sup> module in 10 schools. These comprised weekly sessions that incorporated games, play-based activities, role plays and stories, followed by discussions on self-awareness, gender, adolescence, and sexual exploitation and abuse, reaching 1,249 students (40% girls).

**Teachers' capacity strengthening:** MAVA organized film festivals to sensitize 193 teachers (25% women) from 50 schools through short films and discussions on gender roles and biases.

## Empowering the School Management Committees (SMCs) and communities:

CORO India worked with 615 SMC members (35% women) from 50 schools. Gender fairs in 48 villages engaged 9,082 participants (46% women) with games, processions, competitions, dramas and games.

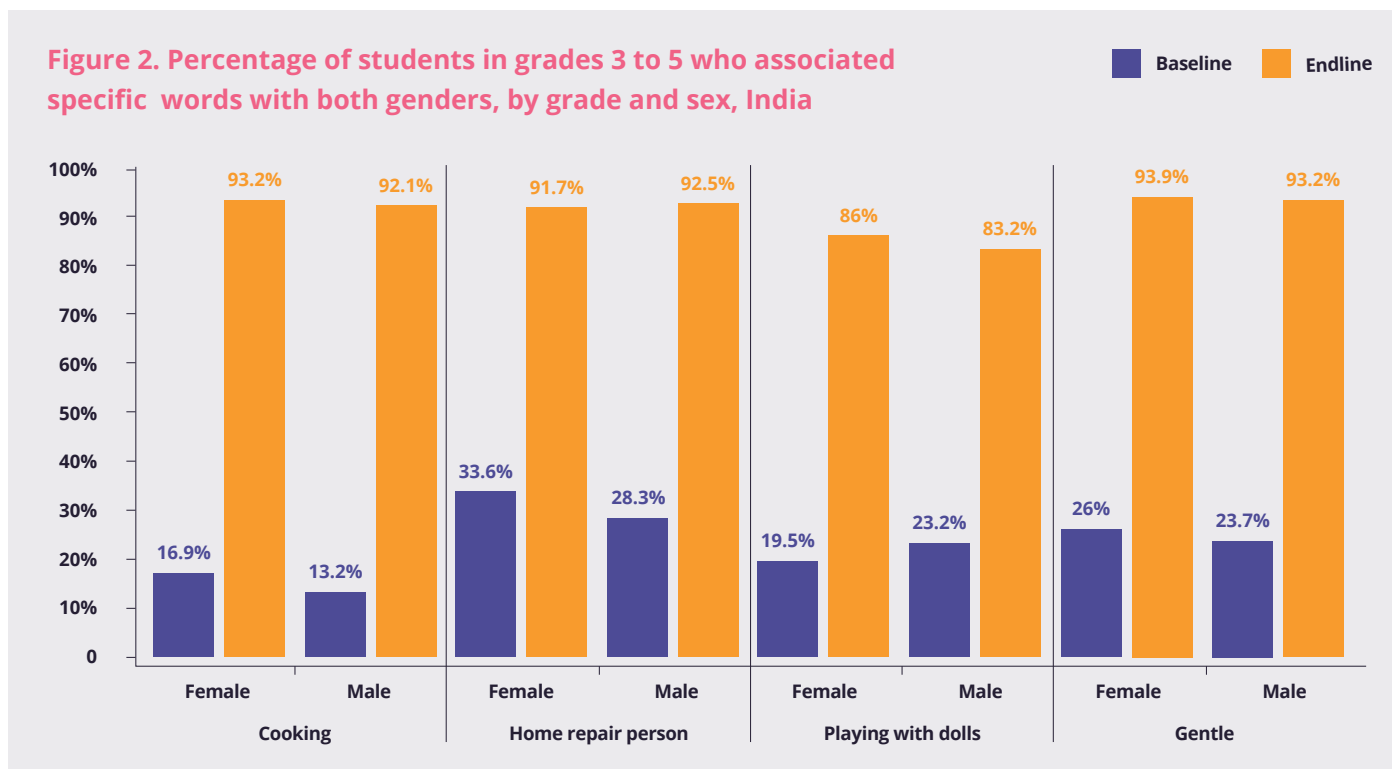
**Surveys and findings:** Baseline and endline surveys in January and June 2023 (Figure 2) revealed substantial improvements in attitudes and beliefs towards gender norms. The data reveals a significant improvement among children in grades 3 to 5 in their perception of specific words typically associated with gendered roles or traits, showing a trend towards gender neutrality, inclusivity and equality.

- **Cooking as a shared role:** Almost 80-pp more girls and boys recognized 'cooking' as a skill belonging to all genders. This shift can contribute to gender-equitable division of domestic labor and household tasks, which are often an impediment to girls' education.
- **Breaking stereotypes around gentleness:** Around 70-pp more girls and boys associated the word 'gentle' with all genders, suggesting a broad rejection of traditional gender stereotypes and the potential for greater acceptance of positive masculinity traits.

1 **StoryWeaver** is an award-winning open platform offering thousands of free children's storybooks in hundreds of languages. (<https://storyweaver.org.in/en/>).

2 Meaning 'With Awareness'. A list of the existing modules on which the 'Janeevesah' module was based are as follows: a) Deepshikha module by YASHADA, b) A Training Module for Men by TATHAPI Trust and FAQs for Boys and Men by MAVA addressing Gender, Sexuality, Violence and Health, and c) Tarang - A Life Skill Training Handbook for Adolescents.

- **Expanding views on home repair:** 58-pp more girls and 64-pp more boys reflected a progressive shift in attitude, by viewing 'home repair person' as a role for all genders.
- **Redefining play:** The association of 'playing with dolls' as an activity for all genders saw a 67-pp increase among girls and 60-pp among boys, signaling a challenge to ideas of gendered play.



## Shifts in teachers' attitudes:



**Evolving attitudes toward gender roles in the home:** At endline, all women teachers (100%) and 10-pp more men teachers rejected the notion that a woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook. This marks progress on challenging traditional gender roles commonly attributed to women and girls, often limiting their choice.



**Views on autonomy over career decisions:** While 6-pp more women teachers agreed that men should not control their partners' career choices, endline survey showed that 19-pp fewer men teachers agreed with this statement. A plausible factor contributing to this decline could be fear among men regarding a perceived loss of control. Sustained efforts are needed to reshape entrenched beliefs and communicate that gender equality is not a zero-sum game where women gain at the expense of men. Rather, gender equality benefits everyone.



**Changing perspectives on women's employment:** At endline, 24-pp more women teachers and only 5-pp more men teachers rejected the idea that women should forgo employment if their husbands are financially supportive points. Whilst there is growing acknowledgement of women's right to work, the modest increase among men points to the need for further work in this area.



**Persistent gaps in encouraging higher education for girls:** Disagreement with the statement that sons deserve more encouragement to pursue college than daughters increased significantly among women teachers, while progress among men teachers remains limited. This highlights that deeply rooted stereotypes require targeted gender transformative interventions to close the gap.

## NIGER

From May 2023 to March 2024, Plan International Niger and UNICEF implemented the programme for students of grades 1 to 6 in four primary schools and one middle school in Niamey. The interventions included play and activity-based interactive sessions with students, and capacity-strengthening training for teachers who, in turn, delivered sessions in the classrooms.

**“Before this project, I was hesitant to involve boys and girls in the activities at the same time. But now, I am very motivated to assign the same tasks to girls and boys. There is no more discrimination, girls and boys play together.”**

A schoolteacher from a school in Niamey

## Outreach

The programme reached 2,000 students (66% girls), and 40 teachers (85% women).

## Surveys and findings

Baseline and endline surveys in June 2023 and March 2024 (**Figure 3**) show moderate yet promising shifts, while also indicating the need for



**Slight improvement in peer support:** The proportion of students feeling supported, included, and encouraged by their peers rose modestly, driven by a 5-pp increase among girls, although fewer boys felt supported. This decline suggests a need to explore and address the factors affecting boys' sense of support and inclusion in the peer environment. A universal sense of peer support means the absence of discrimination, stigmatization, bullying, and other negative behaviors, which are often rooted in gender-stereotyped perceptions and actions.



**Increased comfort with boys at school:** At endline, 9-pp more girls felt comfortable with boys at school, although the figure for boys' comfort levels with other boys remained largely unchanged. As a result of the programme, girls may have become more confident in interacting with boys, while boys might feel less certain about their roles within the evolving dynamic.



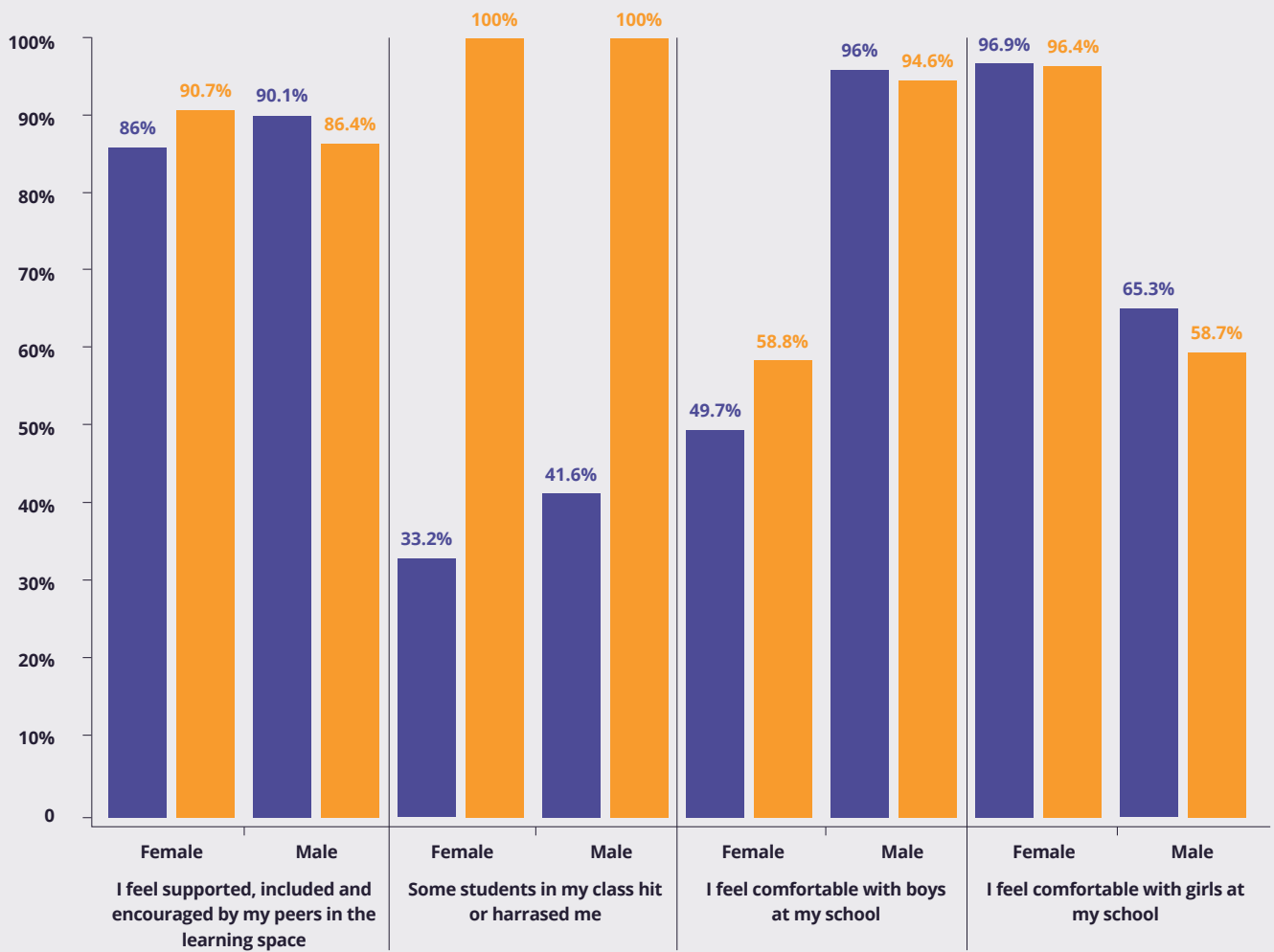
**Decline in comfort with girls at school:** 6-pp fewer boys reported feeling comfortable with girls at schools, while girls reported a marginal decrease. A decline in comfort with girls at school following exposure to this programme could indicate unintended consequences or areas requiring further exploration. This change may suggest that the intervention challenged pre-existing norms or behaviors, leading to temporary discomfort or resistance as students adjust to new ideas about gender roles and interactions. Other plausible factors could be that greater emphasis on gender issues might have unintentionally heightened boys' awareness of differences, leading to hesitancy in interacting with girls. It is also possible that boys might fear being judged for their behavior or feel unsure about how to engage with girls under new social frameworks.



**Heightened awareness leading to higher reporting of harassment:** Reports of hitting or harassment by peers surged from 36% in the baseline survey to 100% in the endline survey, for both girls (from 33%) and boys (from 42%). This sharp rise is likely due to improved awareness and understanding of harassment, enabling students to report such incidents.

**Figure 3. Percentage of student with specific perceptions towards support and encouragement and various gender norms dimensions, by sex, Niger**

■ Baseline ■ Endline





## PARTNER COALITION FOR ENDING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN SCHOOLS

The Partner Coalition for Ending Gender Stereotypes in Schools (the Coalition) is led by UNGEI and Teenage Network Nigeria, and has 35 members working across gender equality, education, gender-based violence, masculinities, comprehensive sexuality education and child protection. The Coalition aims to develop a learning agenda for evidence and insights on programmes on gender stereotypes, and build global momentum on this topic.

The Coalition produced the [Learning Brief : Ending Gender Stereotypes in Schools: Good practices, experiences and lessons learned](#) consisting of 11 cases with emerging evidence, good practices and lessons learned from programmes, and research focusing on ending gender stereotypes through education, gender-responsive pedagogy and/or play-based curriculum. Other key resources include a programmatic results framework and an accompanying measurement tool to support programming, advocacy, and resource mobilization in this field.

The Partner Coalition also launched the '[Real Brave Change](#)' global campaign to stories about the harmful impact of gender stereotypes around the world, and the solutions to help tackle them.

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## CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The programme evidence shows that it is possible to shift knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of students and teachers towards gender stereotypes. It is possible with the right type of education, and even with limited time and resources.

While some evidence gaps remain, the first phase of the programme across the three countries provides critical lessons. Although changes in knowledge and attitudes can be achieved quickly, behavioural change takes longer and requires further evidence. Also, shifting deeply entrenched gender norms and power relations require sustained, longer-term efforts with targeted interventions.

Based on the learnings from the first phase, UNGEI and partners are scaling up the programme in India, Niger and Pakistan in 2024, with generous funding from Echidna Giving. We are using a common results framework in all three countries to generate comparable results, including behaviour change among students, teachers, and parents, for broader global and regional advocacy.

We are fully committed to eliminating harmful gender stereotypes and norms. Our goal is to reach a minimum of 40,000 children and 875 teachers across 163 schools in three years.

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