

Public-Private Partnership for Community Empowerment and Sustainability: Exploring Save the Children's 'School Me' Project in West Africa

Authors : Gae Hee Song

Abstract : This paper aims to address the evolution of public-private partnerships for mainstreaming an evaluation approach in the community-based education project. It examines the distinctive features of Save the Children's School Me project in terms of empowerment evaluation principles introduced by David M. Fetterman, especially community ownership, capacity building, and organizational learning. School Me is a Save the Children Korea funded-project, having been implemented in Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone since 2016. The objective of this project is to reduce gender-based disparities in school completion and learning outcomes by creating an empowering learning environment for girls and boys. Both quasi-experimental and experimental methods for impact evaluation have been used to explore changes in learning outcomes, gender attitudes, and learning environments. To locate School Me in the public-private partnership framework for community empowerment and sustainability, the data have been collected from School Me progress/final reports, baseline, and endline reports, fieldwork observations, inter-rater reliability of baseline and endline data collected from a total of 75 schools in Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. The findings of this study show that School Me project has a significant evaluation component, including qualitative exploratory research, participatory monitoring, and impact evaluation. It strongly encourages key actors, girls, boys, parents, teachers, community leaders, and local education authorities, to participate in the collection and interpretation of data. For example, 45 community volunteers collected baseline data in Cote d'Ivoire; on the other hand, three local government officers and fourteen enumerators participated in the follow-up data collection of Sierra Leone. Not only does this public-private partnership improve local government and community members' knowledge and skills of monitoring and evaluation, but the evaluative findings also help them find their own problems and solutions with a strong sense of community ownership. Such community empowerment enables Save the Children country offices and member offices to gain invaluable experiences and lessons learned. As a result, empowerment evaluation leads to community-oriented governance and the sustainability of the School Me project.

Keywords : community empowerment, Cote d'Ivoire, empowerment evaluation, public-private partnership, save the children, school me, Sierra Leone, sustainability

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