



GBCHealth

GBCHealth and Facebook promote girls' education in the Sahel during the COVID-19 pandemic

GBCHealth partnered with **Facebook** to amplify the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD)'s awareness campaign entitled: **#StrongerTogether: My Empowerment, My Future. Even in times of crisis!**

The SWEDD initiative, led by the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in partnership with the World Bank and the West African Health Organization (WAHO), aims to trigger the demographic dividend and reduce gender inequalities in the Sahel region by empowering the large group of young people, especially women & girls, who could become a tremendous force to create a better world if given the necessary resources and opportunities.

By GBCHealth & Facebook

BACKGROUND

In the Western Sahel region, which spans from Senegal eastward to Sudan, child marriage is common; in fact, the region has some of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Nearly 12 million girls were affected by school closures due to COVID-19, and girls are less likely to return to school as compared to boys following an absence. Due to COVID-19 containment measures and school closures, girls in the Sahel are even more at risk of being relegated to housework or subjected to early marriage.

The #StrongerTogether campaign was first launched in June 2020 as a regional response against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on interventions supporting the empowerment of girls, adolescents and women in SWEDD countries. The campaign encompassed social and behavior change communication on reproductive health, family planning, gender-based violence, keeping girls in school, menstrual hygiene and access to water, sanitation and hygiene.

THE CAMPAIGN

The digital campaign promoted the uninterrupted education of girls, highlighting the importance of access to distance learning during the COVID-19 health crisis. It also highlighted the risk of exacerbation of girls' and adolescent girls' vulnerabilities and the importance of promoting equal access to distance learning for boys and girls, and disseminated information about the assistance that UNFPA provides to girls impacted by the pandemic. The campaign ran in seven Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal).

The Facebook team provided campaign setup support and administered an on-platform survey to test the effectiveness of their content in driving campaign objectives.

RESULTS

The digital campaign ran from December 18th, 2020 to January 5th, 2021, reaching over **5.6 million** people

and generating over **1.6 million** post engagements. To measure the effectiveness of content, we performed a post-campaign survey comparing users exposed to the ads (treatment) and those who were not exposed (control).

We asked, "How do you think we can protect the future success of girls during the COVID-19 pandemic?" Women who saw the ads were +2.6 percentage points more likely to submit the desired response "Give them access to distance learning". This result was statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

When asked, "Do you think that girls should be given the same opportunity as boys to access safe distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?", women who saw the ads were +1.7 percentage points more likely to submit the desired response "Yes, both boys and girls should be given access" (80% confidence level). However, we did not observe a statistically significant lift for men in the treatment group for either of these questions. Additionally, when asked, "How important do you think it is for girls to continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic?", we did not observe a statistically significant shift in attitudes for this question for men or women, although results were directionally positive.



Campaign results highlighting where exposure to the ads caused a lift (Treatment vs Control)

Objective	Men	Women
Promoting girls' access to distance learning	No significant lift	+2.6*
Giving girls the same opportunity as boys	No significant lift	+1.7^
Importance of girls continuing education during COVID-19	No significant lift	No significant lift

*Statistically significant at the 90% confidence level - 90% and above is considered a reliable result

^Statistically significant at the 80% confidence level

Overall, the results of the campaign survey revealed that the ads worked better for women, especially for promoting the importance of distance learning to protect the future success of girls.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has compromised access to education of a significant number of adolescents and young girls in their pursuit of education,” said **Justin Koffi, Regional Coordinator for the SWEDD project at UNFPA**. “The SWEDD project’s response to the pandemic combined with country interventions aimed at keeping girls in school enabled over 158,000 adolescent girls and young women to benefit from interventions related to schooling in 2020, thereby limiting the pandemic’s negative fallout in the project zone.”

“Facebook’s insights helped demonstrate the potential impact that targeted social media messaging can have on the attitudes of people who have the power to change girls’ lives,” said **Lesley-Anne Long, President & CEO, GBCHealth**. “The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities; by supporting distance learning and the eventual return to in-person learning, the SWEDD project provides an opportunity to help support girls’ education and unlock their economic potential to ensure more promising opportunities in the future.”



LOOKING FORWARD

As more people gain access to the internet, there is immense potential to leverage platforms like Facebook to promote gender empowerment. Although shifting knowledge and attitudes is a challenge, the results of the campaign survey suggest that digital campaigns can be effective in raising awareness. Further, the gender-disaggregated results of the campaign highlight the opportunity to develop content that resonates with men in the region to bring them into the fold as advocates. Especially during a pandemic that forces

people to stay at home, the ability to reach people through Facebook’s platform can be a vital tool in overcoming barriers to communication and reaching the most vulnerable.



UNFPA-SWEDD BACKGROUND

GBCHealth’s ongoing partnership with UNFPA WCARO aims to encourage smart health system strengthening, investments in reproductive health, women’s empowerment, basic literacy, financial education, entrepreneurship and to support the demographic dividend. The partnership focuses on building multi-sector partnerships to address, scale and amplify key focus areas within the SWEDD project, which aims to accelerate the demographic transition, to spur the demographic dividend, and to reduce gender inequality in the Sahel region.

GBCHEALTH BACKGROUND

GBCHealth serves as a hub for business engagement on the world’s most pressing health challenges. It has a strong track record of catalyzing private sector investments and partnerships, designing platforms to build knowledge and multi-stakeholder collaboration, and creating tools to support companies’ ability to improve health and wellness in the workplace, in communities and collectively at a national, regional or global level.

