

GENDER EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM THE SIHELI PROJECT IN NORTHERN GHANA



ASSOCIATES FOR CHANGE

DECEMBER 2025

Acknowledgements

AfC is grateful to the GPEKIX and IDRC Canada for the funding without which implementing SIHELI and conducting related research to address education and learning challenges may not have been possible. The guidance and expertise of Prof. Godfrey Ejuu, the SIHELI project lead, has been of great importance to the research team. We appreciate significant support provided by the Ghana education service at both national and district levels. All efforts by the field research and data analysis team, and stakeholders including parents, and community members who spent considerable time to provide important insights on key thematic areas.

Suggested citation:

Casely-Hayford, L., Amaniampong, E.-M., Eyison, Y.G., Aboyella, D.A. & Kanyagui M. (2025). *Gender Equity in Early Childhood Care and Development: Insights from the SIHELI Project in Northern Ghana*: Associates for Change, Accra, Ghana.

Executive Summary

This qualitative study examined the complex gender dynamics influencing parental involvement in early childhood care and development within rural communities in Northern Ghana, as part of the Scaling Inclusive Home-Based Early Learning Initiative (SIHEL) project. Through focus group discussions with 42 parents across five communities, the research explores how deeply rooted social norms shape the roles of men and women in childcare and early education. The findings reveal a clear separation in the socialization of boys and girls from an early age, with distinct expectations around household labour, play, and access to education. Boys are often prioritized for schooling and given tools like bicycles, while girls' education is frequently interrupted for domestic or farm work, reinforcing long term gender inequalities.

Men's involvement in childcare remains largely confined to the roles of provider, protector, and disciplinarian, while direct, nurturing care such as bathing, feeding, or playing with young children is socially stigmatised and seen as a sign of weakness. This creates significant barriers to fathers' participation, compounded by cultural traditions, fear of community ridicule, interpersonal tensions in polygynous households, and the practical demands of farming livelihoods. Despite these challenges, the study identifies meaningful pathways to change. Women often employ respectful communication and reciprocal support to encourage their husbands' involvement, while community-based programmes like SIHEL's learning centers offer a legitimate and valued space for men to engage as teachers and cultural custodians.

The SIHEL centers have shown promising impacts not only on children's learning and cultural knowledge but also on shifting parental attitudes toward education and gender roles. By framing early learning as an act of cultural preservation, the initiative creates opportunities for men to participate in nurturing activities without losing social standing. The report concludes with actionable policy recommendations, emphasising the need for intentional design of male inclusive activities, community dialogue to reshape norms, support for women as change agents, and the use of cultural heritage as a powerful entry point for engaging fathers. These insights offer valuable guidance for creating more equitable, sustainable, and effective early childhood development and education programmes in similar contexts worldwide.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Executive Summary	1
Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction.....	3
1.2 Scaling Inclusive Home-based Early Learning Initiative (SIHELI)	3
1.3 Purpose of the study	4
2. Methodological Approaches.....	4
3. Findings.....	7
3.1 The Social Construction of Gender	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.1.1 Gendered Division of Labour in the Home and Farm	7
3.1.2 Gendered Play and Skill Development	8
3.1.3 Differential Access to Education and Resources	9
3.2 Men's Roles in Childcare: Norms, Realities, and Tensions.....	10
3.2.1 The Prescribed Provider Role.....	10
3.2.2 The "Forbidden" Territory: Acts Perceived as Weakness	10
3.2.3 Evolving Practices: Signs of Change and Resistance	11
3.3 Barriers to Men's Participation in Childcare	11
3.3.1 Socio-Cultural and Historical Barriers	11
3.3.2 Interpersonal and Relational Barriers.....	12
3.3.3 Structural and Economic Barriers	12
3.4 Enablers and Pathways to Increased Participation	13
3.4.1 Strategies Women Use to Encourage Men	13
3.4.2 Community-Based and Programmatic Approaches	13
3.5 The Impact of the SIHELI Home-Based Learning Centers	14
3.5.1 On Children's Learning and Development	14
3.5.2 On Parents' Attitudes and Knowledge.....	14
3.5.3 On Community Dynamics and Gender Relations.....	15
4.0 KEY EVIDENCE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	16
4.1 Key Evidence	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2 Policy Implications.....	17
REFERENCES.....	17
APPENDICES	20
Appendix A: Participant Characteristics.....	20
Appendix B: Interview Guide	22

1. Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is a critical foundation for lifelong learning, health, and well-being. Global evidence has shown that the period from birth to eight years old is a time of critical brain development, where the quality of a child's environment, relationships, and experiences profoundly shapes their cognitive, social, and emotional future (Leisman et al., 2025; Yoon et al., 2021). Parental involvement, particularly in the early years, is widely recognized as one of the most significant predictors of a child's developmental and educational outcomes (Bago et al., 2020; Jeong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). In many contexts, however, childcare and early education remain largely the responsibility of mothers, with fathers and male caregivers playing a more peripheral role due to entrenched social and cultural norms (Alsager et al., 2024).

In Ghana, as in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, early learning initiatives are increasingly seen as vital for breaking cycles of poverty and inequality (Magnuson & Duncan, 2016). While access to pre-primary education is expanding, many children in rural and underserved communities lack formal ECCD opportunities (Bago et al., 2020). To bridge this gap, community-based and home-based learning models have emerged as effective, culturally resonant strategies (Chowdhury & Alzarrad, 2025). These models, however, operate within existing community structures and social hierarchies, often mirroring and reinforcing prevailing gender dynamics. Understanding these dynamics is, therefore, not ancillary but central to designing effective, equitable, and sustainable ECCD programmes. This is particularly salient in the context of Northern Ghana, where patrilineal and agrarian societies maintain strong, culturally prescribed gender roles. Within these communities, the gendered division of labour is explicit, with the domestic sphere including the daily intimate care of young children, firmly defined as “women's work” (Kpoh et al., 2026; Owoo & Lambon-Quayefio, 2021).

Men's roles are traditionally circumscribed to those of provider, protector, and disciplinarian, which can create a social and emotional distance from the nurturing aspects of childcare (Osborne & Ahinkorah, 2024; Saaka et al., 2023). These norms are reinforced through proverbs, social sanctions like teasing and labelling, and intergenerational teachings (Osborne & Ahinkorah, 2024). This results in a dual burden for women and limits opportunities for father-child bonding, which is a key component of holistic ECCD (Kpoh et al., 2026). Furthermore, these norms are instilled from childhood, as boys and girls are socialized into separate worlds through differentiated chores, play, and access to resources like education, with girls' schooling often deprioritised for domestic or farm labour such as shea nut picking (Frimpong et al., 2025). Investigating the specific mechanisms of these norms is a necessary step toward promoting more equitable parental involvement that can enhance early learning outcomes for all children.

1.2 Scaling Inclusive Home-based Early Learning Initiative (SIHEL)

SIHEL is a participatory action research project that operates directly in five rural and indigenous communities in the Nanton district of Ghana. With a community-driven and home-based approach, the SIHEL project is designed and implemented to improve access to and ensure the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood education by establishing. Five learning centres were established in each community under the care and supervision of parents whose 3-6-year-old children are enrolled at the learning centres. These parents leverage indigenous, cultural and traditional resources-folklores, storytelling, songs, dance, games and play activities-to teach the children practical, social

and life skills they consider relevant for the development of the children and contextually important for their context. The SIHELI model's emphasis on inclusion is not only at the child level but also addresses the inclusion of male caregivers (i.e., fathers) in the learning and care activities of their children. The aim is to encourage inclusive care for children considering the significant benefits associated with father's active participation in early childcare. Besides, the model practically provides a safe space where early learning and care is used as a gender-transformative approach to parenting and foster early childhood development. This contributes to shifting pre-existing, restrictive gender norms that define childcare as exclusively women's work.

Parents culture-based pedagogies are complemented with numeracy and literacy lessons informed by the centre-based approach to early childhood care, education and development. Owing to the difficulties in finding early childhood education trained teachers for these communities, the numeracy and literacy components of the model is handled by trained volunteer facilitators who have extensive years of experience teaching literacy and numeracy among 8-15-year-old children. Through this, the model provides a blended approach to early learning and childhood development, addressing the potential weaknesses in using either a home-based or a centre-based approach.

1.3 Purpose of the study

In line with ensuring the inclusion of fathers in early learning and care at the centres, this study explores gender-based childcare dynamics, the roles fathers perform concerning childcare, and the underlying sociocultural and normative mechanisms that shape men's attitude towards childcare across the five communities. This provides a nuanced and practise-based insights on how to facilitate the inclusion of men in early childcare; and helps to move beyond assumptions to understand the specific beliefs, practices, barriers, and potential enablers that shape how men and women in these communities perceive and enact their roles as parents and educators of young children.

Specifically, the study explored (i) differential socialisation and treatment of boys and girls within the household and community; (ii) roles men play in childcare including community and socially sanctioned or disapproval concerning childcare roles; (iii) the role of parents and grandparents in shaping the boys concerning childcare responsibilities; (iv) roles of cultural practices, family upbringing, and interpersonal relationships as barriers to men's participate in childcare; (v) strategies women use to encourage and facilitate greater participation of men in childcare and early learning activities; and (vi) how participation in the SIHELI learning centres shape parents' attitude towards education and indigenous knowledge, and the perceived pathways to increase male engagement in these centres.

2. Methodological Approaches

Study setting and design. The study was conducted across five communities-Chahiyili, Gushei, Kparigulanyili and Zaali-in the Nanton area, a rural and indigenous-dominated setting in the northern region of Ghana. These are rural, deprived communities, largely occupied by the indigenes of the Dagomba tribe, with presence of other ethnic groups such as the Fulbes and the Kokombas. With crop farming (e.g., shea butter, maize, millet) and animal rearing (e.g., goats, sheep, cattle, goats, guinea fowl) as major occupations. As a reflection of the broader socioeconomic conditions in the

northern regions of Ghana, these rural communities have witnessed deeper deprivation and poverty that limits effective childcare including access to healthcare and education. As a district in the northern region, besides the harsh climate conditions, the developmental choices governments make causes poor infrastructure, higher poverty and food security issues in rural households in these areas. Consequently, development programmes are predominantly undertaken by non-governmental organisations and international development agencies (Anaman & Shaibu, 2024).

Although women contribute to the household economy in these communities, prevailing patriarchy norms has limited their ability to contribute to decisions that affects the socioeconomic conditions of the household including childcare and education. Like most patriarchy Ghanaian societies, while the communities and their culture hold men in superior high status including the micro-household, they are at the fringes and nearly absent in participating in and performing roles associated with early childcare. Women in consistently remain the primary caregivers of children in the early years, performing numerous roles-food preparation and feeding, hygiene training, psychosocial stimulation, safety and care during illness (Adusei et al., 2024; Evans & Jakiela, 2025; Saaka et al., 2022) as well as preparing the child for school, if the child is schooling.

Considering these underlying issues and initial empirical evidence¹ that suggest minimal role of men in childcare, a follow-up qualitative study was conducted to explore and gain deeper understanding of childcare issues across the five communities. The multisite case study design was used to allow within-community and between-communities understanding of gender equity issues in childcare and men's role in childcare across the five communities. Thus, the inherent comparative nature of multisite design allowed in-depth insights on the similarities and differences across communities as well as the uniqueness of each community in terms of gender issues concerning childcare (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Study participants. We purposively selected the five (5) rural communities because of the presence of learning centres established as part of the SIHELI project. Forty-two parents comprising both fathers and mothers were purposively selected from the chosen communities. A gender representative research team initially visited each community to seek permission from the community leaders. Following these visits, the leaders of the Centre Management Committees (CMCs) in the communities were informed of the purpose of the study and consulted as gatekeepers to facilitate the identification of parents whose children are enrolled at the learning centres. To ensure practical and theoretical importance to this study, the selection procedure was guided by the inclusion criteria of being a male or female parent/guardian whose child is enrolled at the learning centre, who has lived in the community for at least 2 years, and willing to participate in the study. These criteria were used to screen eligible adults involved in the learning centre activities since there are some community members who are non-parent facilitators and provided an opportunity to access first-hand perspectives of parents concerning childcare practices as well as how the SIHELI model is contributing to and shaping childcare outcomes and parents' involvement. This approach also ensured participants were gender-represented and diverse to reduce biases and provide holistic perspective, offering diverse and comparable social and cultural insights and nuances on childcare practices unique to their households and communities. Verbal consents were obtained from each parent to

¹ See baseline study brief

confirm their voluntary inclusion and participation in the study. In seeking their permission, the potential risks and benefits of participating in this study were clearly explained to each parent in the local Dagbani language. Parents who agreed were encouraged to come together and decide the location and time for their focus group interviews, ensuring convenience and their comfort since most at the time of the study were actively engaged in their farming and other economic activities. The research team obtained ethics approval from the Ghana Health Service Ethics Review Committee.

Participants' characteristics. There were 42 participants in total and their characteristics-sex, age, education, duration of residence (years in community), economic activity, and number of children including male and female children-were explored in this study (see Table 1 & Table 2). Twenty-four (57%) of the participants were males and 18 (43%) of them were females. The average age of participants was approximately 41 years, with the youngest and oldest being 23 years and 65 years respectively. Residentially, participants had lived in their respective communities for 3 to 65 years, with an average of 41-year residential period. Also, the majority of the participants had no formal education (74%). Three of them had secondary level education (7%). This proportion comprised four participants with junior secondary education and three participants with senior secondary education. The others were technical/vocational (2%) and primary (7%) level graduates. This less educational qualifications reflected in the types of participants' economic activities. All participants were engaged in farming. Yet, some engaged in trading (3, %), processing (i.e., shea butter and rice) (3, %), and 2.4% of them did block moulding, carpentry, and volunteer teaching for an informal education model (SfL)², respectively in addition to farming. The pattern of economic activities suggests that farming predominates participants' economic activities in these communities, consistent with existing data on economic activities in northern Ghana (Bawa, 2019; Salifu & Salifu, 2024). This may have implications for household economic situations, childcare and how children are socialised economically in across the communities. Since children are crucial farmhands in the northern Ghana³. Additional data exploring the number of dependents showed that participants had at most 15, ranging from 1 to 15 children. The number of dependents range from 1 to 15 children (average 6 children) and were gender diverse. The traditional sex (i.e., male and female) established in this study is important since it underpins numerous socialisation efforts by parents. Gender norms deeply embedded in cultural and societal expectations in Ghana, mostly shape children's daily functioning within households (i.e., performance of chores), development and access to education, including northern Ghana (Nartey et al., 2023).

Data collection. In-depth focus group interviews were conducted with 42 purposively selected parents. Parents in this study were (i) community members with children aged 3-6 years old who are enrolled at the home-based learning centres established in their communities, (ii) able to fluently speak the local Dagbani language since parents were not fluent in the English language, and (iii) willingness to participate in the focus group discussion. Ten focus group interviews were conducted with parents. Particularly, two separate focus group interviews were conducted for men and women in each of the communities in October 2025. Parents collectively decided the location and

² SfL is the acronym for School for Life, a lead civil society organisation (CSO) that offer relevant quality basic education to out-of-school children in deprived and hard-to-reach communities in Ghana. Mostly in the northern parts of Ghana.

³ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). (2021). GHANA 2021 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS GENERAL REPORT VOLUME 3E. https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021 PHC General Report Vol 3E_Economic Activity.pdf

time preferred for their interviews. The focus group interviews, which averaged 60 minutes, were conducted with the help of discussion guide. The guide included questions that explored details on community-related and specific practices and understanding concerning gender equity, men's roles in childcare, and how forebears (parents or grandparents), women and cultural practices shape men's roles in childcare in the communities. Parents were also asked about their perspectives and experiences on how women make it difficult for men to participate in childcare, and the approaches women use to encourage men's participation in childcare in their communities. Furthermore, parents were asked about pedagogical practices that can be used to encourage men to participate in childcare in the established home-based centres. All the focus group interviews were conducted in the local Dagbani language and audio recorded.

Analytical procedure. The focus group interviews were audio recorded with participants' approval and subsequently, translated, and transcribed ad verbatim from the Dagbani local language into English. Each transcript was screened to ensure that information that is identifiable and traceable to participants or places mentioned were replaced with pseudonyms. The reflexive thematic analysis process was used to search for information that answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Byrne, 2022). In the beginning phase, two researchers conducted an independent line-by-line reading of the transcriptions multiple times to become familiar with the data and the content. This step was repeated to identify and develop initial codes that emerges from the participants' narratives. Since independent coding was done, these initial codes were reviewed during a team meeting to resolve coding discrepancies. The resulting codes were written down, refined and afterward merged with each other considering codes that conveyed similar perspectives and insights, into potential themes. The themes were organised under the research questions and refined to ensure clarity and internal heterogeneity, such that the two themes communicated different and bit the same information. Themes that communicated similar ideas were collapses into each other. Considering the exploratory nature of this research, codes that had fewer responses were revisited and some considered for the study. Within- and across-community similarities and differences were considered in the analysis (Jenkins et al., 2018). The data were managed and coded with the Dedoose Desktop (v. 10.0.59) programme.

3. Findings

This section presents the key findings from the study. The findings are presented thematically to explore the construction of gender roles from childhood, the specific expectations and limitations placed on men regarding childcare, the significant barriers enforcing these norms, and the identified strategies that can encourage more equitable participation.

3.1 Gender-based socialisation and training in the early years

Children are socialised in three main domains: household labour, play-based activities, occupational skills development, and education access and resources. These areas are used as overarching themes to describe how children's socioeconomic roles and learning are designed along traditional gender ideologies.

Gendered household labour. The research revealed that boys and girls in their early years, are guided into separate household work domains. Work activities in the home and

farm are determined based on a child's sex. Families and their communities actively cultivate and reinforce this separation through a clear understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl, providing normative guidelines that shape the paths of children into adulthood. Parents as reflected in the voice of CM002, described a strong, shared understanding that certain jobs are only for women and others only for men. He stated this as,

"...in our Dagbani culture, for instance, household chores are meant for girls or females and are not part of male work." (CM002, male).

ZF039, a parent in one of the communities clarified the gender-specific household work roles:

"...In terms of work, boys follow their fathers to the farm, and the girls stay at home with their mothers to assist them with household chores like fetching water, washing utensils. We don't allow the boys to fetch water or sweep because it's like a disgrace to them. For the girls when they grow up to the time they can cook, we make them cook." (ZF039, female)

The emphasis on 'disgrace' used in the response above proves how it is considered a social deviation if a boy child is found doing work inside the home. In some practical situations, some participants suggested that the natural division of household chores is problematic, citing examples. Parents, ZF039 and ZF040, provide a natural instance to illustrate this,

...Instances where the mother didn't give birth to a female child, it means that she will be doing everything by herself. (ZF040, female)

...There are some parents who do not have a female child, so their male children play both boys and girls role and when they do that their colleagues laugh at them especially when the boys are going to harvest groundnuts. (ZF039, female)

This means that in such situations, parents and families under workload pressure in their homes may have to bend these normative rules to suit their unique situation.

Consistent with these adjustments, some communities possessed normative beliefs that encouraged a spillover of these roles. Children irrespective of their sex perform different chores without reference to gender,

"For example, the norm is that its female children who wash bowls, so if you see a male child washing bowls it means he has been forced to do that. We have a norm that female children wash bowls while the male children sweep outside the compound..." (GM008, male).

"Even when it comes to weeding the farm, both boys and girls weed. So, we teach all of them the same things just that when they are still very young, they don't pick up faster but as soon as they grow, they're able to do many things." (KF024, female)

Yet in these same communities, male children who decide to conform to these normative household roles are met with communal sanctions that include ridiculing, as illustrated in the response of a male parent below,

"...but even if a male child decides to wash bowls for the mother when the colleagues see they tease him, that your mother has call you to come and wash bowls, how can a man wash bowls." (GM008).

These community sanctions exist to ensure that children stick to the rules and learn their correct roles. Sometimes, these rules are bent when families are under pressure.

Gendered play activities. Play activities are also assigned and engaged in based on children's sex. Parents reported that boys and girls naturally play different games, which

in fact are taught to them. Girls' games often involve singing, clapping, and role-playing domestic scenes, while boys' games are more physical and involve building or competition. A female participant listed the common games, saying,

"Yes, the boys have their own play like bolli (football) and the girls also have theirs. The girls play 'Kasheli'(Ampe), 'Taafa', 'Luwa' and the boys play 'Katahi', Bolli (football)." (KF021, Female).

Yes, we have seen that. The girls were once sitting here and playing 'kasheli' and also doing 'salingbarigbari' and the boys fetched water and were mixing mud to build a room. They even built it up to a certain level whilst the girls were just playing. The room they are building tells us that it is the work of boys and the girls playing 'kasheli' and 'salingbarigbari' are also for girls.

What they learnt ... what they were doing... to me, they wanted to learn masonry in future. You know people have been engaging those who do bricks work and they travel to places to do the construction work. So, if the parent of the child is observant, and enrolls him in masonry as an apprentice to learn the profession, then he will grow up to benefit from it. (CF006, female)

Occupational skills development. This segregation continues to persist when learning a trade or skill. Certain jobs are considered completely inappropriate for one gender. For example, hairdressing is seen as only for women. A male participant was very clear about this, stating,

"like hairdressing that is for females. So a male will not agree to learn hairdressing because it's meant for females. So for instance, in our community if we see a male trying to do hairdressing or trying to braid hair we dislike the person or we hate the person because that is not male work." (CM003, Male).

On the other hand, jobs like masonry or mechanics are for men. People sometimes explain this by saying men are stronger, but the rule is very strong even if a woman is capable. The study also found that some parents are starting to think differently. A female participant noted that parents could choose to send a girl to learn mechanics if they wanted to, showing that the old rules are not always set in stone. However, these examples are still rare, and most children follow the traditional path set out for their gender through the play they are encouraged to join and the skills they are told they can learn.

Differential access to education and resources. One of the most notable findings is that boys and girls often do not have the same access to schooling and family resources. In many families, when there is a choice to be made, boys' education is prioritised over girls'. This happens especially during busy farming seasons. A male participant described a common situation, saying,

"It happens during shea nut picking or groundnut harvesting. I have seen a situation where a girl is asked to stop school and go for shea nut picking or groundnut harvesting while the boy is asked to go to school." (CM002, Male).

The family needs labour, and the girl's schooling is often sacrificed because her work at home or on the farm is seen as more immediately important. Beyond time for school, the distribution of materials is also unequal. Boys are more likely to be given tools like bicycles to help them get to school. A male participant observed this, saying,

"in my household it is not there but I have seen some parents buy bicycle for the male child leaving the female child. Therefore, I see it to be discriminatory." (KM019, Male).

Sometimes, this is explained by saying girls are not interested in riding bicycles, but the effect is that boys receive more support for their education.

Inside the home, favouritism can also appear in small but meaningful ways. A female participant gave an interesting example from her own household, explaining,

"Again, when a man returns from town and buys something for the girls leaving the boys, is it a good thing? Is there fairness? It's happening right in my house... you can just wake up and see the bones of fried meat littered in the yard and you and your son will not even be aware he brought something home." (CF006, Female).

These actions teach children about their value and place in the family. Together, these practices mean that from a young age, girls may receive less investment in their future and less recognition of their worth compared to their brothers.

3.2 The roles men perform in childcare

The study identified a very clear and narrow definition of what a father should do. Men are praised for being providers but are often discouraged from doing the day-to-day, hands-on work of raising children. This creates a conflict for men who wish to be more involved fathers.

The prescribed provider role. The accepted and respected role for a man is to be the provider and protector of the family. This is seen as his primary duty. Participants described this role in three main parts. First, providing material needs, as one man said, *"as a man concerning childcare, it is a responsibility on the man to feed the children."* (KM020, Male). This means securing food, paying school fees, and providing clothing. Health and security also emerged as an important role that fathers need to perform. Participants described that this includes seeking traditional herbs and making sure the family is safe, especially at night. This is clarified by a participant,

"like CM004 has said, it is you man who has to wake up and check on the children and their mother to ensure that they are all well. If any of them is unwell then you look for medicine or treatment for them." (CM002, Male).

Third, fathers are required to provide moral training and social guidance to children. Fathers teach children how to behave, respect elders, and understand family relationships. This role is about shaping the child's character and preparing them for the world. One participant shared,

"It's the role of the man to start taking care of the child since pregnancy. You take care of the woman and the unborn baby until she delivers. When the child starts to grow up, it's the role of the man to start training him in good ways of life so he can fit well in the society." (ZM036, Male).

All these duties are outward-focused and are about resources, protection, and instruction, not direct care.

Direct childcare is perceived as weakness. In contrast to the provider role, any direct, nurturing care work is strongly discouraged for men. Acts like bathing children, cooking for them, or washing clothes are labelled as "women's work." If a man does these things, he faces serious mockery from the community. A female participant from one community said, *"As for me since I step my foot in to this community I have never seen a man bathing his children except only one particular man and it was because his wife has travelled... some of the community people used to say he's a loose man." (GF015, Female).*

Men who help their wives in these ways are called names. They are labelled as weak or henpecked. One man described the constant teasing, saying, *"When a man fetch water for house, it is considered as weakness. And you will be teased at in the community that you are the one that*

fetch water for your wife... So you have to just stop because if you don't stop, it will over you." (CM001, Male). This social pressure is very effective at stopping men from participating.

The reason for this goes deeper than just teasing. There is a fear that acting like a caregiver will ruin a man's status and future chances. A male participant recounted a lesson from his father:

"He told me that a man holds a baby but do not back a baby, so if a man backs a baby, that is at the height of weakness. That could prevent a prince from getting a chieftaincy title or prevents you from getting an additional woman." (KM018, Male).

Therefore, avoiding childcare is not just about avoiding gossip; it is seen as essential for maintaining a man's honour and his position in the community.

Evolving practices, change and resistance. Despite these strong pressures, the research found some evidence of change. Some men are choosing to ignore the gossip and help their families. They are redefining what it means to be a strong man. One male participant described cooking for his children when his wives were busy on the farm. When someone called him weak for it, he argued back. He explained his reasoning:

"I told him that when hunger gets you, you could not pretend to be okay not to talk of a child. I did that for the children not the women." (MM028, Male). For him, providing care was a necessary part of providing for his family's wellbeing.

Others point out that times are changing. The same participant used a Dagbani proverb to make this point:

"Dagombas have their saying the ('zaamani sooga zaamani baa ngbaru') meaning every era and their way of life. If you want to hold onto some of the things that our grandfathers and fathers use to hold, you cannot live in this current dispensation." (MM028, Male).

Younger generations, especially those with more education or exposure to different ways of life, are beginning to question the old rules. They are starting to believe that being a good father includes both providing and nurturing, even if some people in the community still disapprove. This shows a quiet but important shift in attitudes among some men.

3.3 Barriers to Men's Participation in Childcare

Many factors work together to prevent men from being more involved in childcare. These barriers come from culture, from family relationships, and from practical everyday life.

Socio-cultural and historical barriers. The biggest barriers are rooted in tradition and what people have learned from their parents. A common theme was that men today behave like their fathers and grandfathers. A female participant explained,

"the thing is, most of the men learn from their parents and growing up most of the fathers were not supporting their wives so because of that they don't also support." (ZF039, Female).

This cycle is kept going because older relatives often tell men not to help. A woman described how a grandmother might complain,

"if care is not taken you the mother will turn his son into a woman because if she want to do anything she tells your son to do, is your son a girl to be doing these things. So, most of the grandparents are the cause of the men not contributing to childcare." (GF013, Female).

There are also old beliefs that keep fathers at a distance. One belief is that showing too much love to a child can attract evil spirits or jealousy from others. A male participant shared a traditional saying:

"the Dagombas have their verse that, 'biyuribegu nayala bikonli' meaning, the most loved child is a lost child. That is why they use not to allow children to get closer to them." (CM001, Male).

To protect their children, fathers would avoid being too close or affectionate. This historical practice made emotional distance seem normal.

Many parents also talked about certain acts being "Kavini" or forbidden for men. Interestingly, some women argued this is not a real cultural rule but an excuse. A female participant stated,

"As for us we do not have any cultural practices in this community that stop men from participating in childcare in this community. But the men saying 'Kavini' (forbidden) and its just something they like saying but its not a cultural thing." (GF015, Female).

Whether it is a deep tradition or a convenient excuse, the idea that some care work is forbidden for men remains a powerful idea that stops them from participating.

Interpersonal and relational barriers. Problems within families also create barriers. In families with more than one wife, men often fear causing jealousy. If a man helps one wife with childcare, the other wife may feel he loves her less. A male participant explained this dilemma:

"for instance if I have two wives and maybe I am free today and it is time for cooking then I take the child from the mother for the mother to cook and they following day is the turn of the other woman if I am not able to take the child for her to cook or I have gone to the farm she will ask you that the other day you took the rival child and it is her turn and you did not support her. She will take it that you do not love her." (CM002, Male).

To avoid this conflict, many men decide not to help any of their wives. Men also worry that if they start helping, their wives will begin to expect it always and may even stop respecting them. A male participant shared this concern:

"In the olden days, our grandparents didn't support women in child care because as soon as you start, the woman thinks it is an obligation on you and it becomes an issue when you don't do it at some point." (ZM038, Male).

Furthermore, if a man feels his wife or children are disobedient, he may use his withdrawal from childcare as a punishment. One man said clearly, *"If a woman isn't obedient to me, I won't take care of your children."* (ZM036, Male). This shows that for some men, involvement in childcare is conditional on their authority being recognised, not an unconditional parental responsibility.

Structural and economic barriers. The daily realities of life also make it difficult for men to be more involved. Most men in the study location are farmers, and farming is hard work that takes up most of the daylight hours. A male participant simply stated, *"Time constraints due to demanding farming activities."* (CM003, Male). This is a major structural barrier; when a man spends all day on the farm, he has little time or energy left for bathing children or helping in the kitchen.

Poverty also plays a big role. When a family is struggling to find enough food, all energy goes into survival. A male participant linked poverty directly to the problem, saying,

"we do not have such cultural practices but even if they were to be there then it will be poverty because you will want to support or participate more in childcare but due lack of resources you are not able to do that." (MM026, Male).

The stress of poverty makes it harder to focus on changing deeply held habits about who does what work in the home. The man's role as the provider of food becomes so overwhelming that there is little room to think about also being a hands-on caregiver.

3.4 Enablers and Pathways to Increased Participation

The study also identified key strategies and conditions that can encourage men to participate more in childcare. These approaches often work within the existing social system to create gradual change.

Strategies women use to encourage men. Women have developed subtle and respectful ways to encourage their husbands to help more. The most important strategy mentioned by both men and women is showing respect and obedience. Women who listen to their husbands and create a peaceful home are more likely to receive help. A male participant explained,

"if the woman listens to you and also take every word of yours it will encourage you to participate in child care and it is mandatory on you the man to also listen to the woman and accept her decision because one person doesn't raise a child it takes two to raise a child." (GM011, Male).

Men feel valued and in charge, which makes them more willing to share responsibility. Another effective strategy is for women to help men with their own work. This creates a fair exchange. A male participant gave an example:

"if I ask my wife to wash my clothes and I collect the child and she agrees to wash, the woman has respected me or this time is time for spraying of crops, if I ask her to fetch water for me to go and spray and she does that, it will encourage me to participate more in childcare." (CM001, Male).

When a man feels supported in his own duties, he is more likely to support his wife in hers. Women also focus on keeping a happy and peaceful home. They discuss problems quietly in private and try to avoid arguments. A male participant appreciated this approach, saying,

"For instance, if a woman wants to talk to you to have your listening ear they will have to speak in low tone. In addition, what they see is on the right course the man cannot refuse that. Again, when a woman wants to talk to you about issues that will make the family progress, they do it in the room and not outside." (MM026, Male).

This respectful communication builds a partnership where men feel comfortable contributing more to childcare.

Community-based and programmatic approaches. Beyond the family, community actions and programmes like the SIHELI centres can promote change. The learning centres themselves are important because they make childcare and education a public, community activity. This gives men a respectable reason to be involved. In one community, a male participant proudly reported high male participation, showing it is possible when the activity is valued by the group. Within such programmes, men encouraging each other is vital. Participants spoke about the need for regular meetings and reminders. One man suggested,

"We need to periodically meet all the male parent teachers. During this meeting, we will praise and thank them for their efforts and give them motivating words to keep being patient to support our children." (ZM034, Male).

Support from peers can protect men from the criticism of others outside the group. Finally, using positive examples is an effective tool. When other men see fathers who are involved and respected, it challenges the idea that caregiving is weak. A participant suggested,

"we monitor and also encourage and motivate the parent teachers who always come and also encourage the others and remind ourselves to always come out to teach and also set examples of role models... Everyone will want their children to be like them. I think it will help to increase more participation." (CM001, Male).

By celebrating men who are good providers and good nurturers, the community can slowly expand its definition of a good father.

3.5 Impact of the SIHELI Home-Based Learning Centers

The SIHELI Learning Centers were introduced not only as educational spaces for young children but also as community hubs. The research findings indicate that these centers have generated ripple effects that extend beyond children's academic skills, influencing parental mindsets, revitalizing cultural knowledge, and creating a novel context in which community gender norms can be observed and, in some cases, gently challenged.

Children's Learning and Development. Parents reported noticeable and positive changes in their children's abilities and behaviors since the introduction of the centers. The most frequently observed improvements were in basic knowledge, practical skills, and social conduct. Parents described children who were more engaged in learning activities at home. A male participant shared his observations, stating,

"We have seen many changes in our children, and they now know many things they didn't know before. Right now, when you find a group of children gathered, you will find them practicing some of the things we teach them in the center." (ZM035, Male).

This practice of learned material outside formal center time was seen as a strong indicator of genuine learning. While the focus on indigenous culture has led to a significant revival of interest and knowledge among the children. Songs, dances, games, and stories that were fading from memory are now being actively learned and performed by the younger generation. A female participant expressed her happiness about this development, noting,

"Now the children do not roam like they used to do. These days the young ladies don't know some of the traditions like the 'simpa' dance so we are happy that this center is here for us to teach the young ones our customs and traditions." (KF024, Female).

This cultural transmission is filling a gap that parents felt existed, ensuring that important elements of their heritage are not lost. The centers have successfully turned cultural education into a dynamic, living practice rather than a subject of distant memory.

Parents' attitudes and knowledge. The impact of the centers on the parent volunteers has been profound, reshaping their views on education, teaching, and their own cultural heritage. Many parents described a significant shift in their attitudes towards

the value of education and the patience it requires. A male participant explained how his perspective changed, saying,

"I have learned that the teachers in the school have or should have patience to be able to take care of the children because at times you come today center and when the Children Act in a way if not you are extra patient, you will be annoy and then you take a look at what the teachers are doing or handling them in the schools and it will encourage you to be more patient. Therefore, it has changed my lifestyle." (CM002, Male).

This newfound appreciation for the pedagogical process has made parents more sympathetic and supportive partners in their children's learning journey. Also, the act of teaching has compelled parents to reconnect with and revitalise their own indigenous knowledge. To teach the children, parents had to recall, practice, and sometimes research traditions they themselves had forgotten. A male participant described this process of rediscovery:

"It has helped us learn and was revise most of our forgotten does is and games. Like the day you came we dance bamaya, kanbogwaa, Jara, kuryayurya and storytelling has reminded us of and increase our remembrance of our culture and lifestyle. Therefore, some of these cultural dances and plays were forgotten and because of this programme, they are coming back to light." (GM009, Male).

Another participant emotionally shared how he had to relearn storytelling, a skill he had once mastered but had allowed to fade:

"I used to be a great storyteller and people used to take me to their places... However, I forgot many of those stories because I wasn't practicing them again. When we realized that we could use storytelling to teach our children... I'm relearning some of them." (ZM036, Male).

This has created a powerful cycle where teaching children educates the parents, making the center a site of intergenerational knowledge recovery.

The experience has also spurred a greater general interest in their children's education. Witnessing their children's progress firsthand has motivated parents to become more involved. A female participant linked this directly to her own life experiences, stating,

"The center have made us to develop love for education especially enrolling our children to school. We wish we also had the chance to attend school, the cheating is too much, and we pray that the children learn and learn very well. When you are in the market, they cheat us because we are not educated." (ZF039, Female).

This connection between the children's potential and the parents' past limitations has fueled a powerful desire to support educational advancement.

Community dynamics and gender relations. The introduction of the SIHELI centers has inserted a new social space into the community, one that has a complex and varied relationship with existing gender norms. A clear finding is that levels of male participation in the centers are not uniform. In some communities, attracting and retaining male volunteers remains a significant challenge, with reports of very few or even no male parents actively teaching. However, one community stood out as a notable exception. A male participant from this community stated with pride,

"As you mentioned that the male parent teachers are not attending the center as compared to the women, it is rather the reverse in our community. Here, we attend the center more than the women. It might be the case of other communities but in this community, we have duly followed all the agreements we had before the start of the center, and we have never missed our turns to attend the center to teach." (ZM037, Male).

This demonstrates that high male engagement is achievable and suggests that community-specific factors, such as local leadership or pre-existing social agreements, play a critical role.

The center itself is emerging as a potential catalyst for re-negotiating gender norms around childcare. By framing parental involvement as teaching and cultural preservation, it provides a socially legitimate and respected avenue for men to engage closely with children. This reframes the activity from domestic work (which is stigmatized for men) to community leadership and education (which are valued). The center becomes a sanctioned space where the provider role (ensuring children's education) merges with the nurturer role (directly teaching and bonding). External monitoring was noted as a factor that reinforced this positive behavior, as shared by a female participant:

"Honestly, when they started the teaching and it got to sometime, it's like they were becoming reluctant but since Mr. Nash and Co started coming to the community for monitoring, the men started becoming active again at the center." (ZF042, Female).

The presence of outside officials validates the importance of the center's work, including male participation within it. Thus, while not directly confronting traditional norms, the SIHEL center creates an alternative context with its own set of values and expectations. Within this space, men who participate are not seen as "weak" for being with children; they are seen as responsible teachers and cultural custodians. This subtle shift in perception is significant. It offers a model where father-child bonding and shared responsibility for early learning can grow under the protective and respected banner of community development and cultural education, potentially influencing norms beyond the center's walls over time.

4. Key evidence

This study explored the complex gender dynamics surrounding childcare and early learning in communities participating in the SIHEL project. The findings reveal a deeply embedded social system where gender roles are constructed from early childhood and strictly enforced through community norms. Boys and girls are socialised into separate worlds through differentiated chores, play, and access to education, with girls' schooling often deprioritised for domestic or economic labour. Men's roles in childcare are narrowly prescribed to that of provider and disciplinarian, while direct, nurturing care work is stigmatised and labelled as a sign of weakness, attracting social sanctions like teasing and mockery.

Key barriers to men's greater involvement are multifaceted. They include powerful socio-cultural norms passed down intergenerationally, the fear of provoking jealousy in polygynous households, concerns that helpfulness will lead to wifely disrespect, and the structural constraints of demanding farm work and poverty. However, the research also identified clear pathways for change. Women employ strategies of respect, reciprocal support, and peaceful communication to encourage their husbands. Community-based approaches, particularly the SIHEL centers, provide a legitimate space for men to engage as teachers, thereby reframing nurturing activity. Peer support among men and the showcasing of positive role models were also highlighted as critical enablers.

The SIHEL centers demonstrates a positive impact, stimulating indigenous knowledge among children and parents, reshaping parental attitudes towards education and patience, and increasing community investment in early learning. Notably, the centers

function as a novel social arena where traditional gender norms can be gently contested, offering a model where father-child bonding is sanctioned under the banner of cultural preservation and community development.

5. Policy Implications

ECCD programmes must intentionally design activities to engage men as nurturers, not just providers. The consistent finding that men's nurturing roles are stigmatised means that generic calls for parental involvement will likely only engage mothers. ECCD programmes must consciously create activities that legitimise and require father-child interaction. This could include designing specific father-child learning sessions at the centers, featuring men in nurturing roles in communication materials, and training facilitators to actively invite and support male participation in all aspects of the programme, including playful and care-based activities.

Community sensitisation must address the root social norms, not just the symptoms. Barriers are rooted in deep-seated beliefs about masculinity, fear of gossip, and intergenerational teachings. Awareness campaigns should therefore move beyond simply stating "men should help." They should engage communities in dialogues that deconstruct the link between caregiving and weakness, using respected local figures and positive deviants from within the community as role models. Discussions should tackle proverbs and beliefs like the fear of the "evil eye" or the concept of *Kavini* (forbidden) openly, allowing communities to reinterpret them in a modern context.

Women's agency as change agents within households must be recognised and supported. The strategies women already use, such as respectful communication and reciprocal support, are effective. Community-based sensitisation programmes can reinforce this by incorporating modules on positive communication and shared decision-making into community meetings or parenting education sessions. Supporting women's economic empowerment is also crucial, as the study links male fear of disrespect to shifts in economic dynamics.

Cultural heritage is a powerful and underutilised entry point for engaging men in ECCD. The success of the SIHELI model in revitalising indigenous knowledge points to a significant opportunity. Framing early learning and parental involvement as acts of cultural preservation and transmission is highly motivating for men. Policy and programme design should leverage this by making cultural education a central, celebrated pillar of ECCD initiatives, explicitly positioning fathers as key custodians and teachers of this heritage.

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks must disaggregate participation by gender and measure norm change. To assess progress toward gender-equitable ECCD, it is insufficient to measure overall parental participation. Monitoring must track the number and consistency of male versus female volunteers and participants. Furthermore, indicators should attempt to measure shifts in social norms, such as changes in community attitudes towards men performing care work, which can be captured through periodic qualitative feedback and surveys.

References

Adusei, K., Manful, E., Ofori-Dua, K., & Yeboah, E. H. (2024). Fathers' motivations and expectations from participating in early child care: A study in Ghanaian

- Municipality. *Family Relations*, 73(3), 1840-1859.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.13003>
- Alsager, A., McCann, J. K., Bhojani, A., Joachim, D., Joseph, J., Gibbs, A., Kabati, M., & Jeong, J. (2024). "Good fathers": Community perceptions of idealized fatherhood and reported fathering behaviors in Mwanza, Tanzania. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 4(7), e0002587. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0002587>
- Anaman, K. A., & Shaibu, A.-F. (2024). Development of regional input-output tables for Northern Ghana: An analysis using location quotient methods. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2340429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2340429>
- Bago, J.-L., Ouédraogo, M., Akakpo, K., Lompo, M. L., Souratié, W. D. M., & Ouédraogo, E. (2020). Early Childhood Education and Child Development: New Evidence from Ghana. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, 104620. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104620>
- Bawa, A. (2019). Agriculture and Food Security in Northern Ghana. *Asian Journal of Agricultural Extension, Economics & Sociology*, 31(2). <https://ideas.repec.org//a/ags/ajaees/357574.html>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2016). (Mis)conceptualising themes, thematic analysis, and other problems with Fugard and Potts' (2015) sample-size tool for thematic analysis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19(6), 739-743. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1195588>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1391-1412. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Chowdhury, S., & Alzarrad, A. (2025). Advancing Community-Based Education: Strategies, Challenges, and Future Directions for Scaling Impact in Higher Education. *Trends in Higher Education*, 4(2), 21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/higheredu4020021>
- Evans, D. K., & Jakiela, P. (2025). The Role of Fathers in Promoting Early Childhood Development in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Review of the Evidence. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 40(2), 211-228. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkae009>
- Frimpong, J. A., Codjoe, S. N. A., Abu, M., Ayisi-Addo, A. K., & Atujona, E. (2025). "We carry too many burdens": Lived experiences of girls' schooling in Ghana, a critical look at barriers, gender norms, and institutional perspectives. In Review. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-7712315/v1>
- Jenkins, E. K., A, S., Rj, H.-S., & J, O. (2018). A Guide to Multisite Qualitative Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(12). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318786703>
- Jeong, J., Franchett, E. E., Ramos De Oliveira, C. V., Rehmani, K., & Yousafzai, A. K. (2021). Parenting interventions to promote early child development in the first three years of life: A global systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS Medicine*, 18(5), e1003602. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003602>
- Kpoh, C., Bakuri Suara, S., Akua Koblaji, F., Ayeebo, J. A., Likida Tiimob, G., Bello Dambazau, Z., Danquah, C. B., Gbene, J., Kehinde Adegoke, A., Bankole Oluyomi, W., Anye Atanga, L., & Amarachi Ngwu, F. (2026). Socio-Cultural Determinants of Fathers' Involvement in Child Health and Nutrition in Northern Ghana: A Mixed-Methods Study. *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope*, 07(01), 174-186. <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2026.v07i01.06359>

- Leisman, G., Alfasi, R., & D'Angiulli, A. (2025). Emotional Brain Development: Neurobiological Indicators from Fetus Through Toddlerhood. *Brain Sciences*, 15(8), 846. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci15080846>
- Magnuson K. & Duncan G. J. (2016). Can Early Childhood Interventions Decrease Inequality of Economic Opportunity? *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(2), 123. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2016.2.2.05>
- Nartey, P., Bahar, O. S., & Nabunya, P. (2023). A Review of the Cultural Gender Norms Contributing to Gender Inequality in Ghana: An Ecological Systems Perspective. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(7), 14. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11086636/>
- Osborne, A., & Ahinkorah, B. O. (2024). The paternal influence on early childhood development in Africa: Implications for child and adolescent mental health. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 18(1), 156. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-024-00847-4>
- Owoo, N. S., & Lambon-Quayefio, M. P. (2021). Mixed methods exploration of Ghanaian women's domestic work, childcare and effects on their mental health. *PLOS ONE*, 16(2), e0245059. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245059>
- Saaka, M., Awini, S., Kizito, F., & Hoeschle-Zeledon, I. (2022). Fathers' level of involvement in childcare activities and its association with the diet quality of children in Northern Ghana. *Public Health Nutrition*, 26(4), 771-778. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980022002142>
- Saaka, M., Awini, S., Kizito, F., & Hoeschle-Zeledon, I. (2023). Fathers' level of involvement in childcare activities and its association with the diet quality of children in Northern Ghana. *Public Health Nutrition*, 26(4), 771-778. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980022002142>
- Salifu, G. A.-N., & Salifu, Z. (2024). The political economy of income diversification and food security in Northern Ghana. *Cogent Food & Agriculture*, 10(1), 2325205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311932.2024.2325205>
- Yoon, S., Kim, M., Yang, J., Lee, J. Y., Latelle, A., Wang, J., Zhang, Y., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. (2021). Patterns of Father Involvement and Child Development among Families with Low Income. *Children*, 8(12), 1164. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children8121164>
- Zhang, L., Ssewanyana, D., Martin, M.-C., Lye, S., Moran, G., Abubakar, A., Marfo, K., Marangu, J., Proulx, K., & Malti, T. (2021). Supporting Child Development Through Parenting Interventions in Low- to Middle-Income Countries: An Updated Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, 671988. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.671988>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Characteristics

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Participant ID	Sex	Age (in years)	Education	Years in community	Economic activity	Number of children	Number of male children	Number of female children
CM001	Male	45	No formal education	30	Farming	12	4	8
CM002	Male	35	Primary education	30	Farming	5	2	3
CM003	Male	38	No formal education	38	Farming	8	5	3
CM004	Male	25	No formal education	25	Farming	2	1	1
CF005	Female	45	No formal education	30	Farming	7	3	4
CF006	Female	41	No formal education	28	Farming	5	1	4
CF007	Female	30	No formal education	10	Farming	3	1	2
GM008	Male	52	No formal education	52	Farming	10	6	4
GM009	Male	41	Technical/vocational	41	Farming	6	3	3
GM010	Male	56	No formal education	56	Farming	15	9	6
GM011	Male	42	No formal education	42	Farming	3	1	2
GF012	Female	35	Primary education	29	Trading (food stuff)	5	2	3
GF013	Female	37	No formal education	17	Trading (food stuff)	6	5	1
GF014	Female	23	No formal education	8	Farming	3	3	0
GF015	Female	26	No formal education	20	Farming	7	6	1
KM016	Male	52	No formal education	48	Farming	6	5	1
KM017	Male	56	No formal education	56	Farming, block moulding	9	5	4
KM018	Male	51	No formal education	51	Farming	9	5	4
KM019	Male	34	Senior secondary	8	Farming, carpentry	1	0	1
KM020	Male	62	No formal education	62	Farming	4	3	1
KF021	Female	55	No formal education	33	Farming, shea butter processing	6	3	3

KF022	Female	30	No formal education	15	Farming, rice processing	7	4	3
KF023	Female	56	No formal education	39	Farming, rice processing	8	3	5
KF024	Female	50	No formal education	30	Farming, petty trade	6	2	4

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 2. Participant characteristics (continued)

ID	Sex	Age (in years)	Education	Years in community	Economic activity	Number of children	Number of male children	Number of female children
MM025	Male	25	Junior secondary	15	Farming	3	2	1
MM026	Male	65	No formal education	65	Farming	15	6	9
MM027	Male	33	Secondary education	23	Farming	1	1	0
MM028	Male	40	No formal education	40	Farming	5	2	3
MM029	Male	40	No formal education	40	Farming	6	2	4
MM030	Male	25	Junior secondary	25	Farming	5	3	2
MF031	Female	25	Junior secondary	4	Farming	2	0	2
MF032	Female	45	No formal education	30	Farming, petty trade	5	3	2
MF033	Female	24	Primary education	23	Farming	2	0	2
ZM034	Male	37	No formal education	37	Farming	6		
ZM035	Male	54	No formal education	54	Farming	8	5	3

ZM036	Male	57	No formal education	57	Farming	7	3	4
ZM037	Male	48	No formal education	48	Farming	6	5	1
ZM038	Male	38	Secondary education	20	Farming	3	3	0
ZF039	Female	30	No formal education	26	Petty trade	4	0	4
ZF040	Female	25	Junior secondary	3	Volunteer teacher & farming	1	0	1
ZF041	Female	35	No formal education	20	Farming	6	3	3
ZF042	Female	50	No formal education	25	Farming, petty trade	5	2	3

Source: Field data, 2025

Appendix B: Interview Guide

SIHELI GENDER EQUITY ISSUES

INTSRUMENT 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (PARENTS)

Dear Participants, this study is about home based early learning for young children. It will take about 60 minutes. Your role is simply to answer questions that you feel are easy for you. Do you agree to participate in the study?

Yes, I agree		No,		(If this option is picked, thank the participant and let him or her go.
--------------	--	-----	--	---

SECTION 1: DISTRICT/COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Participant IDs: _____

Community: _____

District: _____

Region: _____

Name of interviewer: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Time of Interview started: _____

Time of Interview ended: _____

SECTION 2: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant Name	Gender (M/F)	Age	Highest level of Education	Number of years in this community	Religion	Main Language spoken	Main Economic Activity Type	Total Number of Children	Male and Female	Number of children (3-6 years)	Male and female

SECTION 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about a time you saw a boy and a girl treated differently at home, in the farm, or in the community. What happened? How did people react? Did anyone say it was fair or unfair?
2. When you watch children playing or helping their parents (boys and girls) do you notice they are given different jobs or told to act differently? Can you tell me about a child you've seen growing up who learned something special because they were a boy or a girl? What did they learn, and why do you think that was so?
3. What roles do men play in childcare in your community?
4. What roles are men playing in childcare that some people in the same community feel unhappy with?
5. How are males trained by their parents to support childcare?
6. How are parents and grandparents of men contributing to men not participating in childcare in your community?
7. Which cultural practices in your community stop men from participating in childcare in their own homes?
8. How do women or mothers in your community make it difficult for men to participate in childcare in your community?
9. Which approaches do women use to encourage men to participate in childcare in your community?
10. What pedagogy practices should be employed in the home-based learning centres that will make more men come and participate more in childcare?
11. Number of parents currently supporting in the learning centre: Male _____ Female _____ Total _____
12. How has your decision to volunteer to teach or play with the children at the centre shaped your attitude towards education?
Probes:
 - a. How has it shaped your interest in your child's education?

- b. How has your decision to teach the children affect your indigenous knowledge? (explore for other impacts)

For more information, please contact:

Associates for Change
Box AN 7726, Accra-North, Accra
Telephone: +233 (0) 302 245612/613
Website: www.associatesforchange.org
Email: afcghana@yahoo.com; info@associatesforchange.org