VOICES OF HOPE:
ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND BOYS CONTRIBUTING TO INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CHANGE TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN COLOMBIA
Voices of hope: Adolescent girls and boys contributing to individual and collective change to advance gender equality in Cartagena, Colombia

Colombia Country Report by Jean Casey with Feyi Rodway
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This report is part of ‘Voices of hope’, a series of studies designed to identify opportunities to change the norms that limit girls’ freedoms and rights: see https://plan-international.org/voices-of-hope for more details.
# Contents

Section 1: Background, methodology and ethics ................................................................. 6
  1.1 Background and rationale ......................................................................................... 6
  1.2 Research questions ................................................................................................. 7
  1.3 Conceptual framing ................................................................................................. 7
  1.4 Methodology ........................................................................................................... 9
    1.4.1 Research location and sample ........................................................................... 10
    1.4.2 Characteristics and identities of girls and boys ................................................ 10
    1.4.3 Semi-structured interviews ............................................................................. 11
    1.4.4 Creative and reflective workshops ................................................................... 11
    1.4.5 Research task teams ....................................................................................... 12
    1.4.6 Data collection, processing and analysis ......................................................... 12
  1.5 Ethics ....................................................................................................................... 13
    1.5.1 Child protection ............................................................................................... 13
    1.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality ......................................................................... 13
    1.5.3 Informed consent ............................................................................................ 13

Section 2: Setting the scene: understanding gender inequality, discrimination, social norms and sanctions as experienced by adolescent girls and boys ......................................................... 15
  2.1 Intersectionality of economic hardship, violence and gender norms .................. 15
    2.1.1 Poverty intersects with gender norms, education and gang violence ............ 15
    2.1.2 Gender-based violence .................................................................................. 16
  2.2 Adolescent girls’ experiences and perspectives of gender inequalities .............. 17
    2.2.1 Individual ....................................................................................................... 17
    2.2.2 Family ............................................................................................................ 18
    2.2.3 School .......................................................................................................... 18
    2.2.4 Community ................................................................................................... 19
  2.3 Adolescent boys’ perspectives and experiences of gender inequalities ............. 19
    2.3.1 Individual ....................................................................................................... 19
    2.3.2 Family ............................................................................................................ 19
    2.3.3 School .......................................................................................................... 20
    2.3.4 Community ................................................................................................... 21
  2.5 Dominant beliefs underpinning gender norms ..................................................... 21
  2.6 How norms are maintained: applying sanctions among peers and in the community. 22
  2.7 Social media and bullying: how girls monitor and sanction each other .......... 23

Section 3: Key findings: shifting discriminatory norms: possibilities, consequences and pathways to change ......................................................................................................................... 24
3.1 Adolescents’ perspective on the possibilities of shifting discriminatory norms ..........24
3.2 Exploring the experiences of norms through vignettes .................................................24
  3.2.1 Vignette Scenario 1: gender and social norms in the household .....................25
  3.2.2 Vignette Scenario 2: power relations in sexual relationships ......................29
3.3 What is the potential for change? .................................................................................31
Spotlight on girls’ perceptions: addressing violence against women and girls in the communities .................................................................34
Section 4: Key findings: understanding the pathways to change: adolescent girls’ and boys’ experiences of positive actions to promote gender equality and social change ..........37
  4.1 Girls’ empowerment and individual actions for change ........................................37
    4.1.1 Developing self-esteem .........................................................................................37
    4.1.2 Self-confidence and assertiveness: speaking up, changing attitudes and resisting norms ..............................................................38
    4.1.3 Becoming a role model: advising and supporting peers ...........................................39
  4.2 Boys as supporters of gender equality and boys’ individual actions for change .......40
    4.2.1 Attitudinal shifts towards support and solidarity .................................................40
    4.2.2 Boys’ actions in solidarity with girls ..................................................................40
    4.2.3 Being a role model: supporting positive attitudinal shifts among peers ..................41
  4.3 Building solidarity: girls and boys transforming power relations .........................42
    4.3.1 The power of the collective: challenging and transforming unequal power relations ..........................................................43
    4.3.2 Working in mixed groups: benefits and challenges .............................................43
  4.4 The power of a new generation: shifting from individual to collective consciousness 44
  4.5 Collective actions to promote gender equality .........................................................47
    4.5.1 Engaging their families and communities ................................................................47
    4.5.2 Ensuring legal change and implementation of existing laws ................................48
    4.5.3 Initiatives for advancing gender equality and social change: popular education and social communication ........................................48
  4.6 Building support for change: gaining allies and building support ............................49
    4.6.1 Parents and families .............................................................................................49
    4.6.2 Local governance .................................................................................................50
    4.6.3 Institutions and their role as duty bearers .............................................................50
    4.6.4 Non-governmental organisations ........................................................................51
    4.6.5 Role models .........................................................................................................51
Section 5: Discussion of key findings: what works to promote gender equality? ........52
  5.1 Girls should engage and negotiate from a position of power ..................................52
  5.2 Build powerful networks of peer groups and mentors .............................................53
5.3 Work together: the critical importance of intergenerational gender dialogues........53
5.4 Bring parents along: intergenerational shifts and deeply embedded gender norms ...54
5.5 Address structural discrimination: ensuring an enabling environment for social change
....................................................................................................................................................55
5.6 Next Steps ..................................................................................................................................55
Section 1: Background, methodology and ethics

1.1 Background and rationale

This qualitative study was designed to identify opportunities for changing norms that limit girls’ freedoms and rights. Its aim was, in particular, to uncover enabling factors and conditions that can positively contribute to improving the lives of girls in low- and middle-income countries through both individual and collective change. To this purpose, the research looked at the cases of adolescent girls and boys living in five communities in Colombia. The adolescents were selected on the basis of their participation in Plan International’s Champions of Change gender equality programme, presented in Box 1. Their participation in the project was integral to the research study; it allowed for in-depth exploration of social change from the perspective of adolescents who are actively engaged in advancing gender equality in their communities. Three areas of interest emerged from the data: 1) the intersecting vulnerabilities that these girls and boys experienced; 2) their understanding and experiences of how positive change happens and how harmful gender norms are dispelled; and 3) the change makers that influence social norms, promote gender equality and act as positive enablers of change for girls.

Box 1: Champions of Change

“Champions of Change” is a curriculum-based programme for adolescent girls and boys, implemented by Plan in 18 countries. The programme aims to create a youth-led social movement that challenges social norms and gains society-wide support for gender equality and girls’ rights. The study’s sample is made up of active participants in the Champions of Change programmes in Colombia and Uganda: the results from Colombia are presented in this report.

Champions of Change proposes a “gender synchronised” approach – it supports young people to actively examine and reflect on how rigid gender norms and power imbalances are present in their own lives. It does so through gender dialogues, which allow for the creation of safe spaces in which girls and boys can interact and can learn to develop critical thinking on issues that affect them. The programme uses a series of “hooks” to retain participants, creating connections with the different interests of girls and boys (e.g. sports, arts, music), and uses the hooks as community outreach activities.

Champions of Change has developed a unique metaphor to help explain the journeys of change that girls and boys embark upon with the programme. These journeys encompass the process needed for challenging rigid gender norms and the structures that prevent gender equality.

Girls’ Journey of Change: Girls begin their journey by increasing their sense of self-worth. Once they join a group of girls, they begin to appreciate the strength in unity. They begin to recognise gender inequality and how it affects their own lives. They visualise equality, and what they can do to promote it. They identify supporters and invite others to join them on their journey to equality. Celebration of every small step is a key part of this journey.

Boys’ Journey of Change: Boys begin their journey by preparing to embark on a process of self-reflection. They begin to recognise themselves as a part of gender inequality, and to recognise their own privileges and costs. They can then visualise gender equality, recognise others who value equality, and make their own commitment to change. They begin to

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1 Plan International (no date) ‘Internal Champions of Change Briefing Note’
eliminate sexism from their life, and to invite others to do the same. Together, they take steps to promote gender equality, and to celebrate change.

The expected results of the programme are that girls and boys adopt attitudes, behaviours and practices consistent with gender equality and support the empowerment of girls and women. Moreover, it is expected that they are able to lead initiatives which promote gender justice and the transformation of unequal power relations. The programme aims to build an enabling environment among families, communities and state institutions for gender justice and girls’ rights.

Plan International Colombia was the first to implement the programme by including both adolescent girls and boys, completing all the modules. The adolescents who took part in this research study, both girls and boys, began the programme in May 2016. They had participated in the programme for one year when the research got underway, by which time they had completed modules 1, 2 and were half way through module 3. The modules are as follows:

Girls’ Module 1: Being assertive
Girls’ Module 2: Being gender aware
Girls’ Module 3: Being body confident

Boys’ Module 1: Sharing solidarity
Boy’s Module 2: Being a gender transformative young man
Boys’ Module 3: Being responsible regarding sexuality.

Champions of Change uses football as a tool to promote gender equality between adolescent girls and boys. It serves as a mechanism to integrate the strategic themes of the modules by getting girls and boys to play the sport together as a mixed group, in effect learning theoretical aspects of gender equality through practice. The goal is to use football as a vehicle for teaching adolescent girls and boys about gender norms, preventing gender-based violence and power relations, and the power of collective work.

The adolescents engaged in Champions of Change were therefore ideally positioned to respond to the research questions, to explore gender discrimination, power relations and the social and gender norms that underpin them, and to draw out their perceptions and experiences of how to bring about positive change to advance gender equality.

1.2 Research questions

The overarching objective of the study was to identify pathways and enabling factors that positively influence social change in relation to gender inequality at the individual and collective levels. Research questions were:

1) How do adolescent girls and boys describe how positive change happens in attempting to tackle gender discrimination?

2) What do participants identify as positive enablers of change – i.e. factors and conditions – that would allow girls to access and realise rights that are often denied to them (for example, to complete school, report instances of sexual abuse and domestic violence, work with community leaders to influence gender norms)?

3) Who are the “change makers” who can influence social norms for a more gender equal society?

4) What role do other social factors (such as ethnicity, marital status, economic status, gender, level of education status, age) play in fostering or hindering social change?

1.3 Conceptual framing
In order to answer these questions, the research applied a conceptual framing, presenting the experiences, perceptions and opinions of girls and boys in relation to specific dimensions in their lives. It used Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model to analyse how these dimensions act either to restrict or advance their rights. This broader child rights framing helps to articulate girls’ and boys’ differing senses of agency and their opportunities for participation in family life and in their communities. It also frames how the study outlines potential pathways towards change, detailing the main challenges for promoting change from the perspectives of adolescent girls and boys.

Applying an additional lens on the life course lens allow the lived experiences of girls and boys to be understood better in the context of various turning points and critical events. This enables an examination of how the expectations of others shift as young people enter adolescence and an analysis of how age-related dynamics influence power relations.

The study’s design was built from an analysis of empowerment theory, seeking to explore who has access to power, who is able to utilise their power and whom they may have power (or influence) over. It draws from the work of Kabeer and of Cornwall, considering four inter-related components to develop an understanding of how girls and boys potentially exercise choice and influence social change:

- resources: including access as well as future claims, to material, human and social resources (the pre-conditions);
- agency: including decision making, negotiation, manipulation (the process);
- achievements: including wellbeing outcomes, both material and human (the outcomes);
- relationships, including power within (girls’ and boys’ internal power and capacity), and power to (their relationships with others), as well as the power dynamics within groups.

The research also uses social norms analysis to present how power is promoted, protected and reinforced. It presents detailed case studies of girls’ and boys’ experiences, demonstrating how they, others and the world around them shape their beliefs, and how social norms either protect or erode their rights. Often forgotten in the study of what motivates people’s behaviour, social norms analysis is in fact critical for understanding the power relations at play and the dynamic nature of gender discrimination and stereotyping.

Social norms, the unwritten rules regulating behaviour in a group, are one of the most studied motivators of human actions. Many theories exist around what social norms are and how they influence behaviour, including the frequently cited work by Cialdini et al. Cialdini

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2 These dimensions are the individual, the family/household/peers and the community.
(1990) defines social norms as people’s beliefs about what others do (descriptive norms) and what others approve and disapprove of (injunctive norms). Norms are separated from individual attitudes: for example, a person might want to do one thing, but instead does another to accommodate what they believe to be expected from them. The power of social expectations and the drive “to belong” can be so strong that people follow norms even where these contradict their personal beliefs and attitudes.\(^9\)

Social norms can be both harmful and protective, and can act both to drive and prevent change. Therefore, using social norms as a point of analysis for efforts to understand how change happens is critical. It can help with investigating who are the change makers and what are the positive enablers of change for girls. There is now a growing interest in social norms as they are recognised as important factors that maintain unequal gender relations and constrain efforts to promote gender equality.\(^10\) There is a particular need to understand better how social norms develop at critical stages in the life course, such as during adolescence.

Gender norms are those social norms that are specifically related to gender difference. They stem from a society’s ideals of what it means to be a woman or a man. Connected to this are the gender roles that define what is considered appropriate behaviour for men and women, and largely define what attributes men and women should have and display in a given situation. As such, gender roles are norms that women and men comply with in their private and public lives.\(^11\) A common gender norm, for example, is that women and girls will and should do the majority of domestic work. Gender norms therefore differ from shared expectations or informal rules in that they relate to the behaviour of one sex. Gender norms often contribute to inequalities in power relations and in access and control of resources that in turn can often limit girls’ opportunities and negatively impact their wellbeing.\(^12\)

Overall, the research is framed using an intersectional analysis approach, an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to people’s unique experiences.\(^13\) This approach helps us to understand how gender is compounded or exacerbated by other factors, and how these factors relate to each other.

### 1.4 Methodology

The qualitative methodology generates in-depth data on the complex lived experiences and changing realities of girls and boys. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate to capture people’s experiences and shared understandings and cultural meanings.\(^14\) These insights helped elicit a deeper understanding of social relations and social norms within households and communities.


\(^12\) ODI (2015) Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide. London: Overseas Development Institute


Qualitative tools included a semi-structured interview to explore experiences and perceptions of adolescent girls and boys; and a participative analytical workshop to explore individual and collective experiences of how positive change happens and who are the change makers and enablers.

All qualitative data from the workshops was recorded in notation format, collated and presented in a workshop memorandum. A voice recorder was used during the workshops for quality assurance of the note taker. All qualitative data from the interviews was recorded in verbatim format and a recorder was used for transcription. Quality control measures included daily debriefing sessions with the research team.

1.4.1 Research location and sample

The study was conducted in Cartagena, Colombia and four communities in Uganda. Colombia was selected for this research project as Plan International runs extensive Champions of Change programmes in the country. Colombia was one of the first countries to participate in the programme. Uganda was a more recent addition, but is in the process of implementing an extensive programme as part of this initiative. The focus of this report is the results from Colombia.

The selection included criteria that the participants in this research must have participated in a girls’ empowerment initiative such as Champions of Change. Research participants were able to respond to the research questions around gender equality and child rights because they had gained the ability to analyse discriminatory gender and social norms through the Champions of Change programme. In order to explore and respond to the research questions, a certain level of exposure to gender equality and child rights concepts and the ability to analyse discriminatory gender and social norms was required; the adolescents engaged in the Champions of Change programme fulfilled these criteria. In addition, participants were sampled to capture experiences of intersectionality and intersecting vulnerabilities. The sample features adolescents from urban and rural areas (with a 1:2 ratio), ethnic minorities, girls/boys in or out of school, young mothers/young fathers, married girls/boys, migrant girls/boys and adolescent girls and boys living in poor and disadvantaged families. The age criteria set for the adolescent girls and boys participating in the study in Colombia was between the ages of 14 and 16, aligning with the ages of the adolescent girls and boys participating in the Champions of Change programme. Selection of participants was guided by these criteria and by the availability of adolescents to participate on the dates of data collection. Given the small scale and qualitative nature of the research, a purposive sampling approach was applied. In total, 139 adolescent girls and boys in Cartagena, Colombia took part in the study.

1.4.2 Characteristics and identities of girls and boys

The age group of adolescent girls and boys who participated in this research ranged from 14 to 16, with the majority aged 14. All adolescents were currently engaged in the Champions of Change programme and currently in education. None of the adolescent girls identified as married or living with a boyfriend or partner, nor were there any cases of girls being pregnant or mothers. Similarly none of the adolescent boys identified as fathers, married or living with a girlfriend or partner. At the beginning of interviews, adolescents were asked to reflect on their ethnicity and to self-identify as Mestizo, Afro Colombian or Indigenous. This screening was applied to allow for an analysis of the intersectionality of discriminations. However, it is important to note that both girls and boys across all communities found it difficult to self-identify when it came to ethnicity or cultural identity, and many only self-identified as an adolescent girl or boy. This presented a limitation in data analysis as few examples of experiences relational to ethnic identity emerged from the respondents.
1.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The individual interviews were conducted using open questions. This allowed the research assistants to dig deeper into the perceptions and personal experiences of the respondents, to identify both factors and relationships that influenced their journey of change, and to capture their ideas and personal reflections. The interview was designed around the study’s main research questions, and explored how girls and boys experience gender discrimination, their ideas for solutions to the challenges they face in their communities and finally how they understood the possibilities of change, both as agents of change themselves, and the power of others. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, before translation into English.

1.4.4 Creative and reflective workshops

To allow for a deeper understanding of gender inequality and discrimination, seven workshops were conducted in each country, four with adolescent girls and three with adolescent boys. These workshops were guided by participatory action research principles. These centre on inclusive strategies for gathering information that involve the people directly affected by an issue in learning about or addressing that issue, and then linking that learning with identifying potential opportunities for addressing the issue or taking action.

The workshops were designed to explore participants’ individual and collective journeys of change. They also aimed to understand experiences of how positive change happens and how harmful gender norms can be dispelled, exploring specific attitudes and behaviours that can either be supportive or harmful for advancing gender equality. Finally, the workshops aimed to identify positive enablers and influencers that could positively contribute to social change and advance gender equality.

The two-to-three hour participatory workshops with adolescent girls were designed around three activities, including: an introductory exercise to engage participants in reflections on processes of individual change journeys; a focus group discussion on collective action and the Champions of Change programme; and a group exercise in the form of a vignette to explore social norms.

The same methods were used to undertake three creative and reflective workshops with adolescent boys to explore the perspectives of adolescent boys who live in similar conditions and environments as the adolescent girls who took part in the research.

All workshop sessions were recorded and a note taker transcribed the sessions. All drawings were photographed and kept in the country office.

Box 2: Exploring social norms in the workshops

To understand social norms, the research looked at what participants believed others did and approved of. To complete this understanding, data was collected on participants’ behaviour (what they did) and on personal attitudes (what they found was good or bad), following recent advancement in social norms diagnosis and measurement. A vignette tool was adapted to unpack the social norms that are influencing girls’ and boys’ capabilities and opportunities and to explore how social change happens. Scenarios that were familiar to girls and boys allowed the adolescents to explore gender and social norms and to map out the process of influence and change. The vignette scenarios included various questions to generate information on different areas:

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16 Care (2009) The power to lead: a leadership model for adolescent girls. London: Care International
1. Questions that explore attitudes towards gender norms and gender discriminatory practices to gather information on where and how social norms are operating in a community and how social norms can be changed through individual and collective behaviour.

2. Questions that explore the consequences of not following a social practice to provide information on an individual’s reference group\(^{17}\) and the inherent social norms. Reference groups show who matters for the choices of an individual and how the individual perceives the expectations from peers.\(^{18}\)

### 1.4.5 Research task teams

Research task teams were set up in each country to strengthen the participatory action approach of the research. These comprised of Plan International gender and protection advisers, and programme and research advisers from each country where the field research took place. The research task team advised on the content of the interview guide, and the creative and reflective workshops. Their experience was invaluable to the research process, helping to strengthen the research project and generate more powerful and meaningful results.

Guided by a commitment to improving opportunities for young people in each country, the team identified experienced young female and male researchers. All were experienced in social research methods and in research into either youth or gender issues.

The research assistants were given two days of training on research methods, gender and protection issues, the research project and applying the tools. The research assistants were responsible for conducting the interviews and supporting the creative and reflective workshops. The lead researcher and research task team members co-facilitated the creative and reflective workshops. The research assistants and the research task team also participated in a collective analysis workshop where initial findings and observations were developed and discussed.

### 1.4.6 Data collection, processing and analysis

Fieldwork was conducted over three weeks in May 2017. Gender and programme advisers from Plan International Colombia country office identified characteristics and locations of target respondents. The country office then contacted local offices from these areas and asked the programme coordinators to work with the community volunteers to mobilise adolescent girls and boys who fit the criteria.

With consent from parents and from the girls and boys themselves, they were invited to participate in the research. Adolescent girls and boys who wished to participate in the research were given the date, location and time when the data collection would begin and presented themselves to the research team at the appointed time.

A total of 139 adolescent girls and boys took part in the research activities. Respondents came from the communities of Nelson Mandela, Villanueva, Sincerin, Clemencia and Arjona in Cartagena. At each research location in Colombia, the adolescent girls and boys either

\(^{17}\) In social norms theory a reference group is a group that individuals refer to when evaluating their own qualities, circumstances, attitudes, values and behaviours (Thompson, William; Joseph Hickey (2005). Society in Focus. Boston, MA: Pearson).

took part in the research workshops (57 girls; 37 boys), or in an in-depth semi-structured interview (23 girls and 17 boys).

All semi-structured interviews were recorded. The data were then transcribed verbatim before translation. All workshops were also recorded, both electronically and by a note taker. A workshop report was then developed by its facilitator/note taker, and collated in a Word-formatted memo document. All qualitative data was translated into English. Qualitative data was analysed using the Nvivo software. The research team performed data quality checks and co-designed a code list by which the data was inputted, coded and analysed.

In line with the participatory and inclusive approach to the research, a collective analysis workshop session was held in Colombia with the research assistants and the research task team. This was an important process to gain an in-depth understanding of the findings from the perspective of the research assistants and research task team. During the workshop, each person presented their subjective analysis and justified their understanding of what they captured during the data collection phase. The lead researcher facilitated these sessions and compiled the results into a report. The detail of these results, although subjective, provided a form of cross-checking anticipated versus actual revelations of the findings.

The draft country reports were sent to the research task team and to the Plan International Colombia country director for review and input, with specific responsibility to craft country recommendations.

1.5 Ethics

The design of this study adhered to Plan International’s Research Policy and Standards and was subjected to an ethics review by an external child rights academic through senior management in the research department of Plan International. Key ethical considerations included the following:

1.5.1 Child protection

One of the guiding ethical principles of this research is that no participant comes to harm as a result of the study. To this end, the protection adviser in each country trained all research assistants on Plan International’s key child protection issues and child protection policies. All research assistants also signed Plan International’s Child Protection Policy as a pre-condition of engaging in the research process. The research assistants were informed of procedures to follow if concerns arose regarding the protection or safety of participants while conducting the research. During the training, the research assistants were presented with examples of child protection scenarios that have arisen in past research projects and were given guidance on how to respond.

Child protection advisers in each country reviewed all research tools, including the survey and tools for the creative and reflective workshops, to reduce the risk of including any upsetting or disturbing questions that might impact the participants.

1.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The anonymity and privacy of the research participants was respected. Any personal information regarding the participants was kept confidential. All data was stored in Nvivo with a unique ID and no corresponding information of participants.

1.5.3 Informed consent
Informed consent processes were undertaken for all participants engaged in the study in order to secure the approval of the participants themselves as well as community leaders, school officials and primary caregivers. The consent forms for parents and participants were adapted from Plan International’s Girls’ Speak Out research and from international guidelines prepared by the World Health Organization.

The informed consent processes included information on the intended purposes of the research, how Plan International would maintain confidentiality of the focus group discussions and data, the anonymity of participants, potential risks and benefits of participating, participants’ rights of silence and disclosure, and plans to utilise the research findings. Participants were assured that they had the right to stop or end the interview at any point if they so wished. Participants were also asked to advise researchers where they would like the interview to take place, in order to assure the participants’ confidentiality and safety. Researchers were asked to note on each interview sheet if they observed any family member attempting to listen in or to report if the respondent became nervous during the interview. Any such cases were reported directly to the research task team to assess if a participant was at risk or required a follow-up visit by Plan International staff. The safety of the participants served as the guiding principle throughout the research process.
Section 2: Setting the scene: understanding gender inequality, discrimination, social norms and sanctions as experienced by adolescent girls and boys

This section firstly provides an insight into the lived realities of the adolescent girls and boys who took part in this research, outlining a set of shared and interconnected challenges that mark the communities within which they live. Secondly, this section explores how adolescent girls and boys experience gender inequality and discrimination, and how this affects their lives.

Responses were categorised using the ecological model outlined in section 1.3, allowing the data to be presented in a way that helps to better understand how discrimination is experienced by adolescent girls and boys in the different dimensions they occupy and move through: as individuals, at home, school and in the community. Experienced gender inequality and discrimination is presented in relation to these specific dimensions, analysing how these dimensions act to either restrict or advance their rights.

2.1 Intersectionality of economic hardship, violence and gender norms

Both adolescent girls and boys reported shared and interconnected challenges within their communities. Most commonly discussed were widespread violence, and economic hardship. There were frequent reports of the normalisation of both physical and sexual violence. Violence was discussed as preventable if adolescents took good advice from their peers or parents. Economic hardship or poverty was presented as inter-related with the risk of girls dropping out of education and of boys getting involved in gangs. Experiences of these challenges varied notably when analysed through a gender and social norms lens. Girls in particular reported how the gender norms upheld by the family restrict their time, freedom and access to education.

2.1.1 Poverty intersects with gender norms, education and gang violence

Economic hardship was widely discussed as a factor curtailing girls' opportunities, education and aspirations. Closer scrutiny of girls’ discussions revealed experiences interconnected with gender norms operating within the family. Girls reported that boys had a greater chance to complete their education compared to girls, suggesting bias towards sons. Girls linked the ability to finish school to the family’s economic circumstances and to parental support for investment in their daughter’s education. They also made links between attending school and self-esteem, highlighting the importance of girls’ education for developing self-esteem.

“...if they do not have a good economic situation or their rights are violated, from generation to generation girls have believed that the best way out would be to form..." (Girl, Villanueva)
their own family or not be studying any more. Maybe it also has to do with education because they do not have opportunities to get ahead or to study.” (Girl, Clemencia)

Boys, on the other hand, did not discuss economic hardship in the family as posing a threat to their educational opportunities. Poverty was described as a factor that could influence boys to get involved in drugs and gangs, guided by the belief that selling drugs would generate income and resolve their situation. However, as one girl noted, this could lead to further problems: as boys get addicted to drugs they need to find ways to get money to pay for their habit.

“When they start using drugs, they don’t know how to get money, so they start to steal in stores. They even end up selling it because they know they are going to get a lot of money.” (Girl, Villanueva)

Boys frequently referred to cases of boys in their community getting involved in gangs and dropping out of school. Once they became a gang member, they were pressured to ignore their studies and this gradually led to boys dropping out of school, often resulting in an end to their education.

2.1.2 Gender-based violence

While violence affects both girls and boys, experiences and perceptions of violence in public spaces differs considerably between girls and boys. In interviews and workshops, violence was presented as occurring regularly in all communities but was particularly prevalent in the urban area of Nelson Mandela. This included gang violence and violence against women. It was made clear that different threats could be expected according to gender. Boys discussed the threat and reality of physical violence as normal parts of their lives on the streets and in their communities. Girls, on the other hand, discussed the threats and experiences of sexual violence, rape and sexual harassment as common incidences.

Boys presented gang violence and street violence as the prevalent threats in their communities. The prevalence of gang violence meant that boys were at risk of being wrongly identified as members of gangs from other territories, which led to caution about moving around public places.

“The neighbourhood is very dangerous and in the case of boys, if we go anywhere they can hurt us because they think we are gang members. So we stay in our houses for precaution.”(Boy, Nelson Mandela)

“They [boys] get involved with gangs, they come from large families and some of them are enemies. They fight all the time and when they grow up they still do not talk to each other, they continue fighting and even kill each other.” (Boy, Villanueva)

Boys also talked about how becoming involved in gangs leads to a life of executing violence, including against women and girls, with a negative impact on their schooling, families and friends. Boys discussed the need to be tough and strong to survive these conditions, mirroring the dominant norm of masculinity in the community. Respondents explained how taking bad advice from peers could result in drug taking and sexual violence and suggested that a life of gang violence could be avoided if they took “good advice” from peers and families, and furthermore how maintaining a positive attitude could be powerful.

“My father says that I don’t have to hang out with bad people, that they can harm me. This is the advice that I accept and put into practice.” (Boy, Sincerin)

“When a boy sees these gangs a lot he wants to stop studying and get into gangs, that’s where you get lost and use drugs, because true friends give you good advice but gang members tell you not to study… if some gang member tells me not to study, I have my positive attitude that I want to study and don’t do what they say.” (Boy, Nelson Mandela)
One boy described how he was chased continually because he no longer wanted to be part of the gang and fight. Attempting to remove himself from violent circles resulted in threats of further violence. Girls also acknowledged the challenges that boys face when trying to remove themselves from gangs.

“There is a gang where I live and I know some of them want to make a change but it is hard to get out of the gang and, if a boy manages to go out, people talk about him and he has to face horrible things; I would not like it if I was in his place.” (Girl, Arjona)

Girls described their awareness of cases of rape which add to the restrictive environment of fear. Adolescent girls regularly shared their own experiences of sexual harassment by men. One girl described the harassment she faced and how her father’s good advice helped her to stay safe.

“The obstacles that girls have in Villanueva are because of men because it is unsafe to be here. There are many rapes, many older men saying dirty things to women and girls. It feels horrible because they have even approached me and it is disgusting, they say ‘oh baby, I want to have you, come to live with me’. It is horrible and uncomfortable; they are about 40 or 50 years old. Fortunately, I have always trusted my father, he has always helped and advised me, he has always been there defending me.” (Girl, Villanueva)

Boys also discussed drug taking as a factor that can increase the threat of rape for girls. One boy from Sincerin said: “when girls see men using drugs it can affect them because one of those men could hurt or rape her.” When asked why he thinks men are more involved in drug taking and violence he responds: “That happens because people who use drugs never had someone to advise them not to take the wrong road and that is why they are causing damage and raping women”. One girl described how young girls also get kidnapped for ransom money, demonstrating how gender and age are intersecting dimensions that increase the risk of violence to young girls.

“There are those who use drugs and are desperate for having money and cannot get it in any other way, they kidnap the youngest girls.” (Girl, Villanueva)

The discussions illustrated the extent to which violence is both gendered and normalised in the adolescents’ community.

2.2 Adolescent girls’ experiences and perspectives of gender inequalities

2.2.1 Individual

Across all communities girls expressed recognition that their agency was limited to varying degrees in their family life, at school and in their community. Girls said that they lacked a voice in matters that concern them: they reported not being listened to by their families, their communities, and sometimes at school. Girls perceived that underlying this lack of voice and choice was the lower value that society attributes to girls. Girls felt that others expected them to be passive, submissive and silent. This excluded them from decisions they felt were influencing their futures.

Girls talked about how these beliefs played out in every sphere of their lives. One girl framed discriminatory gender norms as contrary to the Constitution of Colombia. She highlighted the importance of developing self-esteem as a way to challenge and shift such norms.

“Men always see us as if we were less than him and that is not what the Constitution says. Parents give more freedom to men, maybe because we are more defenceless. We are defenceless because we do not have the authority to speak to others and they do… We do not feel listened to, they do not see the capacity that we have to express ourselves, they do not generate confidence in us. In the past women could
not vote or work because they did not have the capacity to do it and had to stay at home. That still happens nowadays because many men say that women cannot work because they are made to stay in the house, that they have to cook and clean. Self-esteem is important because if I have confidence in myself and I live in an environment where they transmit confidence, these obstacles are not going to be considered impossible, but possible.” (Girl, Arjona)

2.2.2 Family

Girls described their homes and families as a place where gender power relations and gender discrimination affected them daily. Girls felt that how they are expected to behave in the household and family is very clearly defined and enforced by their parents, brothers and wider family. The gendered expectation of girls included staying inside the home, carrying out household chores and being submissive and responsive to the demands of their family. Girls identified the clearly marked and entrenched gendered roles and responsibilities in families as unfair – they were expected to carry out household duties, while their brothers were not. Girls were keen to express the injustice of this, how it limited their time for study, recreation and rest, and how this in turn compromised their rights.

“My mum does not say anything to my brother, my father scolds him but he is rude also with my father. My mother is very passive, I don’t say anything to my brother because then he tells me many ugly things. Besides, if he ignores his mother, how can I expect him to listen to me? At home I have to sweep, wash the dishes and wash my brother’s clothes. He was brought to the world as a trophy that is cleaned and taken care of and it makes me feel bad, how is it possible that I have to do everything and also have to wash his clothes? He can learn too.” (Girl, Sincerin)

Parents controlling girls’ movements was frequently discussed as a manifestation of gender inequality in the home. This impacted girls’ freedom of movement outside the home, and their opportunities to spend time with peers. “Good” girls were expected to conduct their lives in the private sphere and avoid unnecessary presence in public places. This was connected with their age and parents’ fear of the daughters becoming pregnant. This was compounded by girls’ own fear of being criticised and accused of unchaste or risky behaviour in public spaces.

“We girls have different stages in our lives, one of them is adolescence and when we are in this stage girls are always more rebellious. So our mothers think our virginity is in danger and that we are going to find boyfriends in the streets, and streets do not have anything good for us girls. On the other hand, mothers don’t care if their sons lose their virginity or not.” (Girl, Sincerin)

“In my family my brother is allowed to go out and they give him money, but if I want to go out they ask where I go and don’t give money. Perhaps it is for safety but I feel bad because they don’t trust us. Here it is common that boys have more freedom than women.” (Girl, Arjona)

2.2.3 School

Some girls felt that the ingrained gender stereotypes held by families and communities also flowed into the classroom, perpetuated by gender discriminatory attitudes of some teachers. This led to a bias towards boys’ voice and participation over girls’.

“At school, when a boy is going to talk they pay more attention to him than to a girl because they have much more authority to talk about several issues…in the school a girl must be conservative, delicate and passive – a woman has to listen.” (Girl, Arjona)
Furthermore, girls felt that their aspirations for careers were stifled by expectations that they should fulfil gender roles as mothers and housewives. One girl mentioned the positive attitudes of her teachers but this conflicted with the negative attitudes of her parents, who supported her continuing education but also discouraged her from pursuing a career that involved subjects considered difficult for girls.

“In the case of teachers, they are positive: they want us to get ahead. My parents have positive and negative attitudes, for example, the career I want to study is business management and they say no, business management involves a lot of maths and I am not going to be able to do it. They are stopping my dream.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

“I want to finish school and go to university, but a challenge is when [people] tell me that I cannot because after I finish school, I must have children and stay in the house.” (Girl, Villanueva)

2.2.4 Community

Girls perceived the community as valuing the position of boys over girls and recognised that power relations are firmly tipped in favour of men and boys. Just like in the home and in school girls are expected to be submissive, silent and to conduct their lives in the home or private sphere. They report how their parents reinforce this norm by restricting their presence and movement in community spaces.

One girl from Villanueva described how a ‘good’ girl “does not like to be in the streets or in the house of someone else, she is always in her house and only goes to school or to the grocery store”. She explained that non-compliance with this norm brought negative consequences such as gossiping, social stigma and bullying.

The community appeared to be the least supportive in terms of adolescent girls’ and boys’ efforts to challenge gender inequality. The criticism at home for attempting to support a more equal gendered environment is less than in the community. Attitudes and actions that challenge or deviate from ingrained gendered norms in the community can lead to stigmatisation and exclusion from friendship groups, and even violence.

2.3 Adolescent boys’ perspectives and experiences of gender inequalities

2.3.1 Individual

Boys described the expectation of boys and men in their communities as being physically strong, emotionally restrained and heterosexual. They discussed how they are expected to be dominant as decision makers, and to protect their status quo as men in all spheres of life. Fathers, peers and members of the community favour adolescent boys who comply with the norms of dominant masculinity and sanction those who don’t through criticism and by stigmatising boys’ behaviour as gay. Boys discussed how this conditioned and limited their behaviour, in relation to how they express themselves and behave.

“Men are taught not to cry, not to be weak, to be strong,” according to one boy. They are always told that they are the bosses in the house, on the street, at work and at school, that they should not receive orders from anyone, that they have to progress, they should go out every weekend, and be popular among friends. The boy described how people say: “be careful you don’t fall in love because if you do, you lose, as women start to give you your orders and take your money away. They are also advised to be sexist.” (Boy, Villanueva)

2.3.2 Family
Boys recognised that power relations are firmly biased towards men and boys at home. They widely acknowledge that girls were treated differently to boys. Some attributed this to the lower value that society placed on girls.

“It is expected that a boy is strong and contributes to the community, while girls are weak and are always at home doing chores.” (Boy, Clemencia)

They identified the ways in which gender roles were enforced in the home, how they were socialised to maintain the status quo, and how boys faced negative sanctions when attempting to challenge these gender norms.

“For me, it is people who have beliefs about what a girl or a boy should do, because it is difficult to contribute to a change since those people have a closed mentality. You learn but they do not let you change things because they have their own beliefs and say there are things we cannot do because we are boys and in the case of girls they cannot do heavy work because they are girls. It can be an obstacle for us who are agents of change.” (Boy, Villanueva)

“With regard to gender equality, one of the same challenges is that some of us sometimes clean our houses, also our friends or classmates who live in this neighbourhood. Sometimes we cannot help with the house chores because others say that women are the ones who have to do that.”

[Interviewer] “What do you think when you receive those criticisms from your friend?”
“I tell them that I also live in that house and so I have to support my sister and my mother with the house chores.” (Boy, Clemencia)

2.3.3 School

Boys reported that normative expectations of how a boy should behave and act in the classroom reflected the wider expectations of society. Any behaviour deemed not sufficiently masculine attracted negative sanctions from peers, and drew criticisms in the form of questioning of a boys’ sexuality.

“I was in 8th year of school there was a boy who was very shy and liked to hang out with girls, so others called him gay but he was not, he was quiet and they bullied him until someone advised him to change and behave like a macho. He changed his attitude and now he is even worse than them, he behaves in a different way. Each person has a personality and you are free to change, but I am not going to fight to be noticed. If I change it is for good, for example if I see a boy who studies and want to progress I change my attitude because I want to be like him”. (Boy, Sincerin)

“I have a cousin living with his sister and mom; since his dad is always traveling because of his job and his sister studies in Cartagena, he has to help her mom do the house chores. At school, he is bullied because people say he is gay, his classmates say to him that men must do nothing, house chores are for women. He says he does not care, and people call him faggot”. (Boy, Sincerin)

Girls reflected that boys are also criticised if they do subjects that are not considered sufficiently masculine. They are encouraged to avoid subjects that are traditionally considered as feminine.

“Another challenge for boys is that sometimes in our classroom girls participate more and boys don’t participate much. If a boy participates the rest of them think he is different, that he is not a man but is homosexual for speaking so much because in our school it is very difficult to see a boy who is interested in studying.” (Girl, Arjona)

“A man is told to study so he becomes a lawyer, a doctor, a criminalist, an engineer or a teacher, but a woman should be a doctor, a teacher, an administrator or a biologist.
It would look very strange if a woman were principal, councillor or director. For example, a man is expected to be a lawyer but if he studies arts then he is criticised.” (Girl, Arjona)

2.3.4 Community

Boys also described their community as a gendered space – a place marked out by a set of rigid rules around what actions and behaviours are deemed appropriate for girls and boys. Boys widely reported pressures to conform to dominant masculine behaviours and attitudes, including appearing tough and strong, and being out on the streets.

Boys also reported that their sense of self is shaped and guided by what others – their peers, families and communities – expect of them “as boys”. Some reported that this gendered normative expectation had a direct impact on how boys act and behave.

“The main challenges that boys in Clemencia face is that if men do things that women should do, they discriminate against him by saying that he is gay and such things”. (Boy, Clemencia)

“I think the problem would be that my father wouldn’t like to see me playing with dolls, he would not allow me to go outside anymore”. (Boy, Clemencia)

Girls reflected on the pressure that boys in their communities faced to conform to heterosexual norms of masculinity. They recognised that this had an effect on boys’ capacity to freely express their emotions and sentiments.

“If a man adopts certain behaviours, when a man may want to cry, or to say what he feels, because he has always been told that he must be strong, that he should not be beaten or abused by another person, that he should always be strong and should not show weakness. I think that can also affect men a lot because they do not develop their feelings or sensitivity about things and it always brings psychological problems. Furthermore, they are not free to express their feelings with their peers or to practise the profession they want because society would criticise them. For example if a man wants to be hairdresser or speaks in a different way or has a different tone of voice than other men, because men are expected to have a strong and firm voice, always with character.” (Girl, Clemencia)

“Boys cannot express their feelings because they call him ‘gay’ or ‘fag’. If he does not walk as they expect, he is gay; if he does not talk as they expect, he is gay; so if he plays with dolls it would be a total frustration for his parents. I think men and women suffer a lot as we live in a sexist society.” (Girl, Clemencia)

2.5 Dominant beliefs underpinning gender norms

The research highlighted the extent to which violence is normalised in communities. Further, it showed an acceptability of violence against women and girls linked to control of girls’ behaviour and movement. Parents enforce gendered expectations of girls’ roles in the home by assigning them to the bulk of household chores. Girls widely reported having to seek permission to be outside the home or on the streets, whereas boys were free to take their own decisions about their movement in public spaces. Girls felt this is an injustice; however, they recognised that their parents were trying to protect them from violence. Parents’ good intentions for their daughters, they felt, were in fact a manifestation of gender inequality.

“Society imposes a law, for you to be accepted you must comply with that law… [it] does not let you express yourself as you are because … it is said that girls should be in the house.”(Girl, Sincerin)
“A boy says, ‘I am going out’ but the girl must say ‘mum, give me permission to go to a place’ and the mother says, ‘with whom and at what time?’ Boys are not reproached but girls are.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

“Around my house, parents mistreat girls, they don’t let them go out or talk to anyone but boys can go out because they are men, they can defend themselves. I don’t agree with that because here [in Champions for Change] I learned about gender equality, all boys and girls have the same rights and it is not fair that because of being a girl you cannot go out or talk to anyone – I don’t agree with that.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

Boys confirmed that they are not restricted in their movement to the extent that girls are by their parents. They also reflected how they are taught to adopt dominant behaviours over girls, indicating how traditional male roles may be preserved.

“It affects everyone because if the boy sees his father telling his mother that she is useless, that she can’t work and that she is only there to be abused and do the chores, the boy would also learn to abuse women.” (Boy, Clemencia)

“I think it is because of the teachings that our parents give us, sometimes they teach us to be violent with a woman – for example, my mum divorced my dad because he used to beat her a lot, he became drunk, aggressive and beat her. My mum decided to stop that situation and came with us to live with my grandmother.” (Boy, Clemencia)

2.6 How norms are maintained: applying sanctions among peers and in the community

Adolescence is often framed as a period of self-exploration, and of discovering one’s identity, including a sexual identity19. The research study in Cartagena, Colombia allowed the exploration of adolescents’ beliefs and expectations of what they should do and what others should do in a context of machismo20. If adolescent girls and boys were perceived as not complying with the dominant social norms, they widely reported being labelled “slut”, “lesbian” or “butch” for girls, or “gay”, “fag” for boys, and of being distanced or excluded from their peer groups. Heterosexual identity, as an expression of traditional gender norms and gender roles, was presented as the normative, accepted sexual identity for girls and boys – behaving or acting in a way that the community perceives as homosexual was clearly not deemed socially acceptable.

“[… if I am with girls I am going to be called a lesbian, and if I am with boys I am a butch, so you don’t know what to do because things are bad all the same.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

Given that adolescence is also a stage where popularity and social skills can determine social standing among peers, the risk of being depicted as “other” and excluded carried a

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20 “[…]the word “machismo” is used to describe a socio-cultural model of masculinity that, passed on from generation to generation, dictates the attitudes, values and behaviour that men should adopt to be considered men and to feel that they are men. It encompasses not only the way that men relate to women but also to other men and to children in both the private and public spheres of life.” (R.Welsh, 1993, Men aren’t from Mars: Unlearning machismo in Nicaragua, p.15)
great cost for both adolescent girls and boys. Some reported negative social sanctions as having impacts such as depression and prompting a desire to leave home and community.

2.7 Social media and bullying: how girls monitor and sanction each other

Girls in the urban area of Nelson Mandela described the pressure to be popular based on the notion that popular girls are more respected and consequently more valued by other girls. Three out of the four interviews from this area cited pressures that girls faced to be popular in social network circles and how girls used social media to monitor and stigmatise other girls. One girl reported the risk of having her reputation on social media platforms damaged when associating with the wrong girls. She explained how she was avoiding her cousin, whom other girls had called a slut.

Social networks were also described as a vehicle for bullying. One girl, who identified as Afro-Colombiana, described how her “black friend whose skin is darker than mine and has short hair” was discriminated against on account of her ethnicity and different style. She explained: “many times people told her she did not fit in and she was even a victim of cyber bullying in social networks” (Girl, Nelson Mandela).

Another girl whose family migrated from Venezuela described similar racial discrimination from girls at school when she moved to the community.

“First because of my accent, they use to bully me. They used to call me ‘the thrown Venezuelan’ because my parents are Colombian but I come from Venezuela. They used to bully me in class but it has lowered now because I cried a lot.”(Girl, Nelson Mandela)

There were also examples of girls describing how they policed their own behaviour in order to avoid sanctions and to gain “respect” from men and other members of the community.

“I don’t say [rude] words because I have never and I will never say something like that, but women say rude words ... so men start to disrespect them and call them machorra [butch] because they use the same expressions of men. I think women should try not to say those things in order to make men respect them.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

This section has illustrated the challenges that adolescent girls and boys faced in their communities and how these were gendered experiences. The context of violence clearly marked the adolescents’ lives, upheld by norms of masculinity that condone violence against women and girls –undermining girls’ ability to express their opinions, make decisions and develop their own agency. Economic hardship impacted girls and boys differently, often underpinned by a gender bias that again limits girls’ opportunities and capabilities. The gender norms and power relations that uphold the status quo were experienced by adolescent girls and boys across all spheres of life. In addition, sanctions are applied more harshly when girls do not conform to the expected norms. Intersecting discriminations have also been illustrated, highlighting the social stigma and violence faced by homosexual adolescents, and the sanctions and exclusion faced by those from minority ethnicities. Dispersed in the discussions is the hope and commitment of adolescents’ to advance gender equality and dispel the negative discriminatory attitudes of peers, parents and communities.

The next section will outline the extent to which attitudes, behaviours and norms that drive gender discrimination and inequality were deeply entrenched, and how this in turn formed a significant challenge for adolescent girls and boys who were committed to advancing gender equality. Using social norms analysis, the next section will also highlight how an intricate set of deeply held attitudes around gender roles and responsibilities were maintained through power and control, and what happens when these long-held ideas and norms about how people should behave were confronted by new ones.
Section 3: Key findings: shifting discriminatory norms: possibilities, consequences and pathways to change

This section uses social norms analysis to present how power is promoted, protected and reinforced. It considers the perceptions of adolescents regarding the origins of discriminatory gender and social norms. It explores whether adolescents perceive these norms to have a permanent impact over their life course or whether they could be challenged and changed. Following this, two vignettes outline girls’ and boys’ experiences of how norms shaped their beliefs and actions; and how social norms either protected or eroded their rights. Finally, it explores who and what can positively help shift discriminatory norms, and identifies some of the tensions around shifting or challenging norms.

3.1 Adolescents’ perspective on the possibilities of shifting discriminatory norms

Adolescent girls and boys were asked to reflect on the origins of gendered expectations relative to notions of how girls and boys should behave and act. For the most part, they discussed how they had learned gendered attitudes and behaviours that had been passed down from generation to generation. Guidance on normative ways girls and boys should behave and act began in the home and was then reinforced by community beliefs and expectations. This was most evident when examining girls’ clearly articulated perspectives around gendered roles and responsibilities in the household, where girls’ and boys’ roles were clearly demarcated.

One girl talks about how the division of roles and responsibilities had been established by society a long time ago and how these ideas and gender norms are continually reinforced by communities and households, and in turn restrict girls’ aspirations and capabilities:

“According to our society and because of the simple fact of being a woman, and because this ideology has been instilled for a long time, women have to stay in the house. Sometimes societies are too strict with their laws and they want to keep us in the house doing the chores and other things, they do not want to let us be what we want to be. This is an obstacle that has always existed for the mere fact of being a woman: we cannot do what men do…” (Girl, Sincerin)

Some discussed how they are continually trying to find ways to shift these discriminatory attitudes and behaviours with the support of projects like Champions of Change.

“Day by day we live through rejection, discrimination, criticism. They don’t let us be what we want to be and it is something that comes from generation to generation. Maybe our grandparents or parents do not want to have those thoughts but it is something they have been instilled and it is difficult for them change that way of thinking overnight. Every day we see how they discriminate against women, how stereotypes limit us as if we were inside a circle, as if we were weak and only doing house chores. There are men who clip women’s wings, even their parents clip their wings, the situation is very difficult here in Clemencia. We continue trying to find the means to solve these issues, but they are still there. Thanks to this type of projects [Champions of Change] it has been possible to gradually reduce these challenges in an assertive way.” (Girl, Clemencia)

Boys echoed the girls’ perceptions, identifying that ideologies around gendered roles and expectations are passed down through the elders and families, and they are reinforced by the community and peers. While boys acknowledged that these attitudes might be hard to
shift, they also expressed the belief that it was possible to do so, particularly in the case of their peers.

“I believe it is something cultural that has been transmitted from our parents since they think that is the education we should receive. Those are limitations we have in our personality because if you are limited to what you have been taught you don’t accept that your son can be different… It is something of the communities that is very difficult to alter or change but it can be done because they have accepted that times have changed and that each person is different.” (Boy, Sincerin)

“The elders since they have a mentality since childhood, they were instilled a long time ago and it is really weird for them to see these things… and chauvinists because they have a fixed idea of what men and women have to do. There are very few in my community because most people are young and have a different mentality. The most chauvinist ones are the elderly because they have fixed ideas in their heads and are stubborn.” (Boy, Clemencia)

Adolescents attempted to distance themselves from the continuum of these norms. Girls and boys frequently expressed that times are changing and acknowledged that people can shift their attitude, which is evidence of an emerging so called “tipping point”. Moreover, they suggested that they can disrupt this generational flow by teaching those around them and the generations to come about non-discriminatory attitudes and behaviours with the support of gender equality projects such as Champions of Change.

3.2 Exploring the experiences of norms through vignettes

In order to further explore adolescents’ ideas and perspectives on how discriminatory gender and social norms can be shifted, the study utilised two hypothetical vignettes based on fixed gender roles and social norms. One of the vignettes explored girls’ experiences of gendered roles in the household, and the second boys’ experiences of gendered power relations in intimate relationships. Once the stories were underway, the power of imagination and adolescents’ own narrative allowed for both girls and boys to contemplate various scenarios where change would be contested and power protected. They further imagined scenarios with positive outcomes for the characters, and explained how these might arise.

The challenges experienced by adolescent girls and boys were then examined through two scenarios – one exploring girls’ experiences of gender roles and responsibilities in the family, and another on boys’ experiences of gendered power relations in intimate relationships.

Standard vignette methods have proven extremely useful for quickly identifying the norms, attitudes and beliefs that help sustain a practice in a particular setting. For this research, two specific vignettes were designed with the aim of closely reflecting the lived reality of many adolescent girls and boys in the area where research was conducted.

3.2.1 Vignette Scenario 1: gender and social norms in the household

The girls’ exercise was carried out in four different research locations: Sincerin, Clemencia, Nelson Mandela and Villanueva. The girls discussed the story of Mireya and her role within the family with regards to household chores. A total of 38 girls took part. As the story evolved, the girls were encouraged to discuss and reflect on how gender inequality interacts with their daily lives. Throughout they were asked to react to the characters’ attitudes and behaviours, discuss how this makes made them feel and what they think the characters should do at each stage. They were asked to respond to the different situations, comment on the types of sanctions the central character would face in the case of non-
compliance of normative expectations, reflect on who has power and influence in the story, describe their desired outcome for the story, and discuss who might have the power to influence this shift to a new or desired norm.

**Mireya’s story**
The central characters in the story are: Mireya, the daughter who performs the household chores when she returns from school daily, reflecting the situation of many girls in charge of domestic chores in their homes; Mireya’s mother, who is proud of Mireya, who performs all the chores well and also does well in her school work; Mireya’s two brothers, who like to play soccer, hang out with friends and watch TV; Mireya’s father, who does not carry out any household chores.

Mireya begins to question the fairness of the situation she finds herself in – why she has to complete all the chores and her brothers are free to do as they please. She also recognises that her friends are in a similar situation. Her mother is unaware or does not acknowledge the “unfairness” of the situation.

Mireya’s uncle, her father’s brother, comes to visit. The uncle gets up early, makes the family breakfast, takes the girls to school and divides up the household work between Mireya and her brothers when they get home. Each of the family members have different reactions to these changes. Mireya’s brothers are upset because they believed that the household work is solely Mireya’s responsibility. Mireya is happy because now she has more time to study and play with her friends. Her mother agrees with her uncle and her father doesn’t know what to think.

The story continues as the workshop participants are told that after the uncle leaves, her mother continues to divide the household chores equally between Mireya, her brothers and her husband. However, Mireya’s brothers sabotage their mother’s efforts – they do not arrive home at the agreed time, and they pretend to be ill, and leave jobs half done. Because of this, the housework returns to being the sole responsibility of Mireya and her mother. Mireya is very sad and her mother is frustrated as she does not know how to involve her husband and sons in the household responsibilities.

### 3.2.1.1 Identifying gender discriminations and articulating a desire for change

Girls in all four groups felt that they could identify with Mireya. They confirmed that others, their families and communities expect girls to perform these chores. While they felt that traditional gender roles are clearly marked for girls, they recognised that Mireya’s situation is a form of gender inequality and a manifestation of unequal power relations. They discussed the unfairness of the situation, adding that all family members should contribute to the upkeep of the house as a shared responsibility. However, they felt that Mireya could change this situation as she enters into womanhood and has her own children, by teaching them new ideas and imposing fairer rules in her family. One girl took the discussion further by highlighting the importance of girls not letting go of their dreams and highlighted the importance of women’s economic empowerment as an integral factor that increases women’s influence in setting the rules.

“As things stand, I would say Mireya’s mum expects her daughter to have children and a husband, be a good housewife, do all the house chores, and she will also act in the same way with her family as she does at home. Her mum does not expect Mireya to impose her own rules, because these were the stereotypes her mum taught her. If Mireya has a girl and two boys, as it is in her family, she is going to teach the same to her daughter … it is a shame because it passes from generation to generation. I wish Mireya did not grow up with this idea, but she realises she should not live the same with her new family and can impose different rules.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)
“In the past, if some parents had a girl, they would educate her for raising children; but if we accept it, we are letting go of our dreams and goals. It was also thought that men were the only ones who could have a job and support their wives economically, because women could not work; but this does not really allow women to progress.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

3.2.1.2 Value, gender norms and sanctions interconnect with girls’ position of power
While the girls recognised the unfairness of gender norms at play, they also expressed the view that they had little choice but to conform to them. Girls reported that they would face withdrawal of affection or permissions, verbal abuse and in some cases physical abuse if they did not complete their household duties. Some girls discussed that Mireya’s parents valued her more for doing the housework than for being a good student. The bias in favour of boys was reportedly replicated by many families in the community. This highlights the low value placed on girls’ within the family hierarchy, limiting their agency and power to negotiate better outcomes.

“I tried to change the situation when they sent me to run errands because I always had to leave what I was doing to run the errand. Once I tried to talk to my mom and she told me to go run the errand if I did not want her to hit me with the flip-flops.” (Girl, Sincerin)

“Unfortunately, in Clemencia parents are always proud of their sons, but only proud of their daughters for doing chores and being good students. My dad doesn’t realise that I am a good student, he only notices when I do not do the chores. It’s the same for many girls: our parents say to us ‘How do you pretend to deserve permission? If you do nothing, how do you demand to go out? You are not useful.’” (Girl, Clemencia)

3.2.1.3 Costs and benefits of challenging the status quo
Participants felt that Mireya’s mother was unconcerned with challenging the distribution of household chores. It was the uncle’s arrival that led to changes being introduced. The girls felt very positively about these changes and how they would protect Mireya’s rights to fulfil her education and her right to recreation.

“I think the uncle made a very important change because the brothers will not think that it is Mireya who has to do everything, and the father will also little by little realise that it is better, since his daughter thus can improve her academic performance because she will have time, because a woman needs time, just as men can play and have fun she also has that right. So the uncle sought a practical way to ensure that her right to fun and recreation is fulfilled.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

Reflecting on the uncle’s practices, the girls concluded that he must come from outside of the family or community to have such different ideas about sharing the chores. Although they welcomed and supported the changes made, they suggested that he could face sanctions in the form of criticism for taking on “women’s work” in the household.

The girls identified clear positives for Mireya and her mother as a result of the newly established rules and practices in the home: they will be more relaxed, the family will be able to spend more time together and perhaps have some fun together. Mireya will be less tired and have more time for study and friends. Girls also mentioned that it would make Mireya feel good to have the support of her family.
The possibility of maintaining the new approach of sharing the domestic chores between Mireya and her brothers was overwhelmingly viewed as the desirable outcome but girls also discussed its difficulties and limitations. They generally accepted that Mireya’s brothers would be upset with the changes as they would have to give up their free time. The brothers would want to protect their higher position in the house as males as the gendered power relations benefitted them.

Some girls suggested that the new rules introduced by the uncle may have contradictory effects on the father: he might feel that his position and power as head of the household has been usurped; or that he should have done this already and should support the uncle’s changes. Some girls perceived the father as the person who has the most responsibility for maintaining a more equitable division of household labour. He should lead by example, carrying out chores in the household and positively influencing his sons’ behaviours and attitudes. One girl said: “Her dad should change his attitude with his sons, he thought it did not matter if his sons did not do the chores, he should create rules. Her dad should be a role model for his sons.” (Girl, Sincerin)

3.2.1.4 The importance of dialogue and engaging families in gender equality

The girls reflected on ideas and strategies to re-establish the positive practices introduced by Mireya’s uncle. There was a general sense of hope that the situation for Mireya could improve again. The girls suggested that, through communication and deeper reflection on gender discriminatory attitudes and practices, all family members learned that it is reasonable to share responsibilities and that change is possible.

Overall, the girls presented this change as one that could potentially build stronger, more supportive relations between the mother and daughter and equal relationships within the family. According to one girl: “They will learn that women are not only good to do chores but they can play different roles; the mother and the girl can talk to each other – ‘Darling, how are you doing in school?’” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

The girls were hopeful that by improving communication at home and by her parents and brothers receiving support to change their gendered attitudes and practices, Mireya can look forward to a brighter future:

“Mireya’s mum could finally listen to her daughter and talk to the uncle. The uncle talked to her about some workshop he was teaching, called Champions of Change, so she went to the workshops with her husband and their children. Mireya’s brothers realised they were mistreating their sister and everyone realised Mireya was not a maid. With all the changes made at home, the situation changed; now, Mireya likes painting and going to theatre classes in the afternoon.” (Girl, Clemencia)

Some girls also suggested that Mireya’s mother needs an increase in self-esteem, to realise that she is just as important as the father. The mother’s economic empowerment was deemed a positive way to establish and maintain more equal power relations in the household. They felt that the mother could be empowered by attending the Champions of Change project to support her understand gender inequality issues and how to tackle them. Another girl suggested that Mireya’s mother could act as a role model to other women if she were able to sustain these changes within her home, thus highlighting the potentially influential role of the mother in this outcome.

“Mireya should talk to [her mother] and guide her at this point of her life. Her mother should think her decisions are as important as Mireya's dad’s, even though she thinks her husband is the head of the house.” (Girl, Clemencia)
“If Mireya and her mum want to change these stereotypes, they must firstly look for help. For example: if this problem happens in Clemencia, we [the girls participating in the research and in Champions of Change] can find support at Champions of Change, they can help us. In this way, Mireya and her mum could understand topics related to stereotypes and gender inequality so that they can change their situation.” (Girl, Clemencia)

3.2.2 Vignette Scenario 2: power relations in sexual relationships

37 boys in three communities (Nelson Mandela, Sincerin and Villanueva) discussed the story of Pablo and Esperanza, their sexual relationship and the influence of an outside person, Adolfo. The boys were asked to reflect on the story at different stages and to put themselves in the position of the various characters. They were asked to reflect on the characters’ different positions at various stages of the story, and to think about what each of them would or should do in these scenarios, about who would influence their behaviour and about how they would like the story to end.

Pablo and Esperanza’s story

Pablo is 17 and lives with two brothers and a sister. His mother cares for the family and sells cakes at the local market and his father is a mechanic. Pablo has had a girlfriend called Esperanza for one year. She is insisting that Pablo uses a condom when they have sex, but he prefers not to as sex feels better without a condom. Pablo also tells Esperanza that it is her responsibility to avoid pregnancy by taking birth control pills. He thinks that she should not expect him to use a condom because he has already said that he won’t. Esperanza does not agree with Pablo’s attitude; she tells her boyfriend that contraception should be a shared responsibility. Esperanza does not feel good about the situation but she is not sure what to do as she loves Pablo.

Esperanza has a conversation with her friends – she tells them that she loves Pablo very much, but when she asks him to use a condom he refuses. She says that sometimes she does not want to have sex with Pablo but ends up doing it anyway as he gets annoyed when she says no. Pablo has told her that it is natural for boys to need more sex than girls and a good girlfriend is always willing to respond to the needs of her boyfriend.

Pablo’s cousin Adolfo comes to visit. Adolfo and Pablo are close cousins and Pablo confides in Adolfo, explaining that he does not understand why his girlfriend continually naggs him to use a condom and, worse, suggests that he should also take responsibility for contraception in the relationship. Adolfo explains to Pablo that he should respect the wishes of his girlfriend and take on shared responsibility for contraception use in their relationship.

3.2.2.1 Adoption of positive beliefs: responsibility for contraception in intimate relationships should be shared

Across the communities boys identified with the scenario presented to them to varying degrees, but consistently agreed early on that Pablo was wrong in not listening to Esperanza and that contraception should be a shared responsibility. Boys said that they felt that if they were the friends of Pablo they would give him the advice that he should use a condom because he shares the responsibility for preventing pregnancy. “It is the responsibility of every person because everyone has the same rights,” they said. This illustrates a shift away from the dominant social norm that contraception is the responsibility of women and girls.

3.2.2.2 Unequal sanctions for girls and boys – boys’ solidarity with gender discrimination faced by girls

Although this was presented as a shared responsibility, the discussions indicated that in reality girls carry the real cost of unprotected sex with possible pregnancy. Boys reported that pregnant adolescent girls faced negative sanctions such as criticism, rejection and
exclusion from the community and school. They gave examples of girls being kicked out of their homes and forced to live with the boyfriend, and said that girls’ early pregnancy could result in them dropping out of school and ending their education. They attributed this to the lower value placed on girls in society. “Girls would be mocked and rejected,” one boy said. On the other hand, boys were often praised for getting girls pregnant, receiving positive reinforcement.

“In this community girls are less valued. When a girl gets pregnant the boy says he is going to be a father and people even give him presents and congratulate him, but girls are kicked out from their house and even are verbally and physically abused…”(Boy, Villanueva)

3.2.2.3 Influence of peers: good friends’ and bad friends’ positions
When discussing the positions that Pablo and Esperanza’s friends would adopt, the boys mostly agreed that they would advise the pair to avoid sexual relations until they could agree on a form of protection: “to avoid diseases or pregnancies” – “she should not have sex with him because he could transmit her a disease” (Boy, Nelson Mandela).

When the boys discussed the possible positions of Esperanza’s friends and the advice they might give to her, they largely agreed that good friends would say that Esperanza should not have sex with Pablo without a condom saying: “if he loves her so much he should use a condom” (Boy, Sincerin). However, they noted that "bad friends" of Esperanza would advise her to “do it without a condom if she likes it” (Boy, Villanueva). Some boys also reported that they would prefer to have sex without a condom: respondent noted that he knows similar cases in his town: “Here there are some women who said it is better to do it without a condom because it feels better” (Boy, Villanueva). Another suggested: “It is better not to use contraceptives to feel more pleasure” (Boy, Sincerin).
3.2.2.4 Change dynamic: the power of communication and the influence of peers

The perceived importance of increased communication came across strongly in the responses to Pablo and Esperanza’s story. The boys reflected on how Esperanza would feel after Pablo changed his mind. Some extended this line of thought and went as far as to say that Pablo should now talk with his own friends to encourage them to also change their behaviour towards girls. “Pablo should take the advice of his cousin and tell his friends so he would not force his girlfriend to have sex with him” (Boy, Sincerin).

The boys also said that Pablo and Esperanza should discuss their relationship to reach an agreement where “they should have sex when both of them make the decision” and with Pablo using a condom. The boys felt that by reaching a consensus and avoiding pregnancy, Pablo and Esperanza would be happy – this would be a good outcome for their story. They also highlighted the need and the commitment to educate the next generation on Adolfo’s teachings: “I would pass the advice [he] gave to Pablo from generation to generation” (Boy, Sincerin).

3.3 What is the potential for change?

The evidence presented in this section reflects the extent to which adolescent girls and boys feel that gendered and social norms are deeply entrenched and hard to shift, and how this in turn presents a significant challenge to those adolescents who are committed to advancing
gender equality. They reflected on the kinds of changes they would like to see for the central characters in the vignettes to experience a positive outcome, and identified the following key actions:

- **The power of peers and dialogue:** In Pablo and Esperanza’s story, the critical importance of the peer group was highlighted; on the one hand peers can reinforce and normalise male violence against women and girls, and on the other hand, they can help to challenge them. All groups felt that Pablo should listen to Adolfo and that his role as a mediator was appropriate and helpful. The boys imagined that “in [Adolfo’s] community they do not force girls to have sex with men, but when she decides to”. The boys viewed Pablo’s change of mind as a desirable outcome for the story. They were hopeful that this would lead to positive changes in Pablo’s attitudes and behaviours towards Esperanza and imagined a happy and healthy outcome for the relationship.

In the discussions, while the boys identified that communication between Pablo and Esperanza was the only way possible to have a positive outcome, they continued to struggle with their own deeply held attitudes towards girls and women and the expectation of male dominance in intimate relationships. However, most boys demonstrated positive attitudinal change in relation both to using contraception and sharing responsibility for contraception, illustrating the power of Champions of Change in shifting ingrained norms on male roles and responsibilities in intimate relationships.

- **The power of engaging families in adolescents’ empowerment journeys:** In the case of Mireya, the uncle was able to temporarily change the situation; once he left the scene, the situation quickly reverted back to where it was before. The group discussed how the new behaviour could be maintained in order to bring about a more equitable and sustained change. Girls discussed the influence that the father could have in supporting this change, adopting new attitudes and practices that promote gender equality in the home. They felt this would be a powerful approach to engage the brothers in challenging their own gender discriminatory attitudes; the father would lead by example and illustrate to his sons the positive outcomes for the family. However, they acknowledged that both the father and brothers would need support in this journey and identified the importance of engaging in a gender equality programme.

- **The power of solidarity and empowerment of girls and mothers:** The girls also felt that Mireya’s mother had an important role to play in influencing and bringing about positive gender equitable change in the family. However, they acknowledged her limited power in sustaining the new practices once the uncle had left. They recognised that for the mother to have a real chance of sustaining more gender equitable norms she should be allowed to engage in a process of her own empowerment once the uncle had left. They concluded by positioning the mother as a role model who could influence positive gender norm change among families in the community, shifting the mother from a woman with no influence to one with power to contribute to wider gender norm change.

The other alliance worth noting was that between mother and daughter. At the beginning of the story there was consensus among the girls that the relationship was not one of support or solidarity. However, when girls discussed the positive outcomes they would like to see, they specifically mentioned improved communications and a more supportive relationship with the mother.

With all this in place, girls felt that Mireya could look forward to a brighter future.
Box 4: The power to visualise change

Adolescent girls and boys can provide valuable insights into their capacity to visualise different paths other than the existing and accepted contexts of social and gender norms when consulted. The reflections that emerged from discussing the vignette scenarios in the previous section provided valuable perspectives from adolescents on how to disrupt the pattern, identifying what could change, how and with the help of whom given a scenario that is adaptable and changeable, and when directed by the narrative of adolescents themselves. This exercise puts the power in the hands of the adolescents, who narrated envisaged new equitable rules that result in better outcomes and more positive relationships for those involved.

The evidence presented in this section shows how adolescents acknowledge that ingrained social and gender norms are hard to shift, but nonetheless that there were opportunities to change discriminatory ideas and practices among the younger generation. There was an interesting distinction between old ideas and ways that had negative associations; and new ideas and ways that they associated with hope for a better and more gender equitable future. It is important to highlight that for adolescents, sanctions applied by adults could have a greater cost and consequence for them than sanctions they may face from peers.
Spotlight on girls’ perceptions: addressing violence against women and girls in the communities

A striking aspect of the interviews and workshops with girls was their descriptions of girls they knew in the community that were survivors of sexual abuse and rape. Equally striking was a reluctance to report the violence to police.

Role of psychological and social support
The threat and fear of violence and sexual violence in the streets was discussed in detail by a focus group in Sincerin. Girls talked about how the psychological trauma of sexual abuse deeply marks their lives and how it becomes a long struggle to overcome these problems. They discussed the role of social workers and psychologists in supporting young girls who have been subjected to sexual assault or rape to deal with the trauma, giving them the tools to recover.

Power of violence and fear in silencing girls
Several cases emerged where incidents of violence against women were not reported to the police or relevant authorities and offences went unpunished. Violence in the community was presented as a normal occurrence and consequently condemning such behaviour was unlikely. Girls reported that there are many cases where the abused stays silent and does not report for fear of being threatened with more violence. These threats were discussed as a central factor influencing the non-reporting of violence against women and girls.

“Many women have been afraid of their partners.”

“There are men who disrespect under-age girls, they touch them. There was a similar case here, we did not say anything about it, people can hurt us and our family.”

“I think people do not report because of fear. Sometimes, people do not care because they are not going through that situation and there is no one from their family involved. When people see a couple fighting, they encourage them, asking the man to hit the woman.”

"Most of the time, women keep quiet because men threaten them. They fear their partners. If women say something about their problems, men say they can kill them.”

“There is a lack of rules and more pressure at facing violence. Nobody here does anything, people do not even call the police – it is like nobody cares about it.”

The reflections of girls very clearly outline, firstly, that girls and women are often living in fear of their partners; secondly, that staying silent is the normal response when women and girls have been violated; thirdly, that staying silent is a tactic used by women and girls to avoid further violence or the threat of violence; and, lastly, that the local police and community are ineffective and can be seen to ignore these cases, given the dominance and normalisation of violent behaviours in their communities.

Allies within the family
When asked who could help support the girls in these situations, most identified their mothers as a first reference point, followed by other family members, such as fathers or aunts. When asked what advice they would give to a girl who has been subjected to violence, answers included: “They would provide her with trust and support”. Most importantly they would encourage her not to stay silent about the abuse and to speak up, finding someone trustworthy to confide in and to accompany the girl to get the support she needs.
Several respondents mentioned relatives who work as public officials. While they seemed to feel able to trust them, they pointed out that there were clear limits to what these relatives could achieve, and also mentioned the possible retaliation that those who deal with the authorities could face.

“My aunt is a social worker … I tell her everything; if something happens to me, I tell her. She always says that is what girls have to do, to find someone who listens to them and knows what to do.”

“My mum works in the City Hall with young people at risk. She asked me to accompany her to do some surveys and when we were walking a friend of mine (who is in the gang) asked me my name on Facebook. I told him and he sent me a friendship request. When my mum was making the survey with him he told her that he would like to get out of the gang but his friends wouldn’t let him. He can go out but he would be in danger. His mother filed a lawsuit and the gang damaged her house.”

Inaction from authorities
There is a sense that the changes required in the community to halt violence may be very difficult to achieve. When asked how gang members behave towards girls in her community, one girl replied: “There are some gang members that disrespect us a lot because they are even able to rape girls, the community talks to the police but the police does not do anything”. A girl from the same community described how violence within the community prevents any legal progress to improve the community. Furthermore, neighbourhood dynamics make it difficult for both “the authorities” to investigate and for the victims to trust the authorities to take action.

Girls’ suggestions for change to prevent violence against women and girls
Girls were asked what they would do to address the situation of violence against women and girls in their community and to identify actions that, if implemented, could improve the situation. Responses reflected a multi-faceted approach:

- challenging parents’ violent attitudes and behaviours at home
  
  “We should talk to each other properly, with respect and not using words that can be offensive to other people.”

- mobilising women and community members to stand up against violence against women and girls.
  “We need to march against violence against women.”

- creating outreach networks to women, with female leaders talking to women and girls to give them the confidence to speak out and supporting and building confidence to embolden women and girls to report violence
  “We must talk to women so that they are not afraid and face their reality. Women must know that if a man mistreats them, they have to speak out.”

- setting up safe spaces for women so they can talk about their experiences of violence.
  “There has to be more spaces and places where women can talk about what they are going through.”
• engaging with men and boys to tackle the attitudes and behaviours that lead to violent actions.
  “I would talk to men so that they can reflect on, because many of them are jealous which can become a disease.”

• upholding and imposing the law so that offenders are punished.
  “I would impose penalties: if a man beats a woman, he must go to prison.”
  “There are men who go to prison, but when they get out, they keep continuing the same. Some of them reflect on, but other ones do not.”
  “If I were the mayor, I would enforce the law forbidding violence against women. If people do not respect the law, they will be punished.”
  “I would impose penalties: if a man beats a woman, he must go to prison.”
  “There is an article in the constitution which prohibits violence against women. We have to make this article known so that men can realise that they are acting improperly.”
Section 4: Key findings: understanding the pathways to change: adolescent girls’ and boys’ experiences of positive actions to promote gender equality and social change

This section presents potential pathways towards change using an empowerment and rights framework in order to articulate girls’ and boys’ changing sense of agency and their opportunities for participation. By overlaying a social norms analysis it outlines the main challenges from the perspectives of adolescent girls and boys on the process of change. The Colombian study provides an opportunity to see whether adolescents can navigate past so called “sticking points”. It also offers insights into how adolescents can identify and make the most of so called “tipping points”.

The section first considers the individual change journeys connected to girls’ empowerment, exploring how increased agency has led to positive outcomes in their individual lives. Secondly, it considers the individual change journeys connected to boys’ empowerment to support gender equality that has led to positive outcomes in their lives. Thirdly it considers the collective efforts of girls and boys working together to advance gender equality and social change, exploring some of the associated successes and challenges. The section then addresses key changes that adolescent girls and boys would like to see at different levels and their ideas for advancing these. Finally, it presents adolescent girls’ and boys’ views about who or what could influence the type of change they want to see.

4.1 Girls’ empowerment and individual actions for change

Fostering the full potential of adolescent girls is a critical factor in the fight for gender equality. The opportunity to negotiate more equal relations and equal opportunities for themselves remains at the core of any movement towards social change and gender equality. The research highlights just how meaningful girls’ individual journeys towards empowerment can be for them, for their peers – both female and male – and for others around them.

Girls discussed many positive outcomes as a result of taking part in Champions of Change. Throughout individual interviews and workshops, adolescent girls repeatedly discussed the importance of building their self-esteem, gaining new knowledge on gender equality and girls’ rights, and learning to use their voice. This equipped them with a powerful tool kit to negotiate better outcomes for themselves and other girls. Girls were keen to express the positive outcomes of their actions to tackle gender equality in the home and among peers, underlining the satisfaction they gained from this. This demonstrated a sense of greater agency among the girls, as they realised that they can achieve their goals – a powerful stage of their empowerment.

4.1.1 Developing self-esteem

The girls’ progression through a journey of individual empowerment led to a self-recognition that, as girls, they were powerful, valuable and brave – contrary to what they had been taught about themselves: that their abilities were limited in comparison to their male peers. The importance of developing their self-esteem constantly ran through discussions with girls in all communities, coupled with a motivation to challenge gender discriminatory attitudes.
and practices. This shift in the way that girls perceived themselves, from feeling powerless to powerful (developing power within\(^{22}\)), was a critical part of girls’ journey of empowerment.

“Because I feel confident, I know what I can give, what I can achieve. I know everything I must know to confront a person, to have a dialogue and say, 'yes I can because of this and this', it is worth fighting when you want something.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

“I have learned what assertiveness is, how I have to enhance my self-esteem, how I have to deal with sexuality, gender, how to take care of my body, how I have to change stereotypes.” (Girl, Villanueva)

4.1.2 Self-confidence and assertiveness: speaking up, changing attitudes and resisting norms

The increased sense of self-esteem among the girl respondents, coupled with new knowledge they have gained on gender equality and their rights in programmes like Champions of Change, resulted in the feeling that they had both the confidence and knowledge to speak up and to question gender discrimination. In general, girls discussed their households as spaces where they felt increasingly able to challenge accepted norms and attitudes, particularly those of their parents – they felt that they had information that others did not and that there was the possibility of being able to introduce new ideas and change minds. Girls widely reported the positive outcomes arising from changing their parents’ attitudes.

“There are differences at home because my father says that I do not have the same rights as my brothers. I have been talking with my dad and he has understood, he is letting me do the things he didn’t let me do in the past. He didn’t let me play with boys, that is, with my classmates, he wouldn’t let me talk with other girls because it was bad, because then I would get into trouble, gossiping. Since my mother has talked more with him he is changing his mind.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

“So when I entered the project I started to understand and I told my mum that there should be equality because it was not possible that I had to wash the dishes and my brother came home and got dishes dirty and did not wash anything because he is the man. Then I told her that it was machismo, she began to understand me and we began to talk. So now when I go out I tell her where I am going, if my brother goes out he also says where he is going, so I do not see that inequality anymore.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

Throughout interviews and workshops girls expressed that they felt their voices went unheard. The opportunity to develop “a voice” and to occupy spaces where people can listen to them was therefore of significant value.

“My family have never heard what I have to say, I prefer not to express my opinion so I am not rejected. The places where I feel heard would be here in Plan, in the school and in this interview” (Girl, Villanueva)

As this quote illustrates, girls did face specific challenges in negotiating changes in the family. Attempts at sharing information on rights, the benefits of gender equality and engaging in gender aware dialogue were often shut down by fathers and brothers who realised that these changes would result in them losing their privileges within the family. Boys on the other hand did not express many challenges in this regard and often expressed that taking action by taking over chores that are usually assigned for women was easy.

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\(^{22}\) Cornwall, A. (2016) op. cit.
4.1.3 Becoming a role model: advising and supporting peers

Girls reported how they have been able to transfer the knowledge and skills they have learned during the programme to influence better outcomes for other girls. Girls regularly talk about the importance of advising their peers in helping to solve their problems, using the newly learned positive communication skills and sharing the knowledge they have gained in the Champions of Change programme. Girls describe how being able to support and show solidarity with their peers has a positive impact on their own self-esteem and sense of agency.

“Last week two classmates were in conflict and one of them was looking for the other to fight. I told her that was not the solution because it is better to fix things through dialogue, so they talked to the coordinator and things were fixed. It does not look good to be in conflict between classmates. I felt good because I could see how things changed and I know that, just as I supported my classmate, I can continue to support others.” (Girl, Arjona)

“I know a girl, she attends Plan, we are friends since I was little. Her mother reproached her, criticised her all the time, and with the advice we received and shared, she realised that she has the power and that she can express herself freely. So, she told her mum that she was not going to be what her mother wanted, that she can be as she is, that if the mother was proud of her she should accept her as she is, not as people wanted her to be. Now she is very funny, she is no longer shy, she has gone through a big change.” (Girl, Villanueva)

Many girls were able to share how they have transferred their skills and knowledge to gain positive outcomes for girls to other spheres of their lives. For example, one girl talked about how she was able to negotiate greater participation for girls in her school.

“We had a debate at school to choose an official. I asked them [the teachers] what could be done to ensure greater participation for girls; it was a way of confronting this situation.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

One respondent talked about how she was able to support a girl from another village while she was on vacation in San Antero. She explains:

“I had already started my participation in the Plan project and I said to myself: ‘If I have the tools, why not?’ So, I sat her down and I told her: ‘I am your friend, you are a young girl like me so we can understand each other’ and she told me everything. So I used the tools, it was a little hard as she was reluctant. About five days later I went to her house and saw her talking to her parents. Later she came to my house and said: ‘I already talked to my parents and they say they are going to enrol me in the soccer school, I also talked to the boys and told them I had the same rights as men, that the soccer field was not theirs, but of the community. Now all of us play together and my father has a little more confidence in me and the community. At school I don’t let boys bully me, I know how to defend myself, I have the tools.’ Then I said: ‘if you have friends with the same problems, now you have the tools to help them’.” (Girl, Sincerin)

This is a powerful demonstration of how girls were not only able to use new skills for their own development and decision making, but also to support others and influence positive changes for girls in other areas of their lives such as at home and at school. Girls’ active use of their knowledge, their skills and their agency was a critical part of the journey towards personal empowerment and the fight against gender inequality.

While many girls perceived themselves as positive role models among their peers, they also discussed the importance of engaging with adult women who inspired them through their
courage to challenge gender norms and who succeeded in achieving their goals in a male-dominated sphere of life.

This powerful example of an inspiring visit by Mariana Pajon, also known as the “Queen of BMX” in Colombia, illustrates the point. Pajon won her first national title at the age of five, a world title at the age of nine and is a two-time Olympic gold medal winner.

“When Mariana Pajon came, I talked to her and she said one of her challenges was that society told her she couldn’t be what she wanted, because the sport she practises is BMX, that she was going to get hurt and that since she was a girl she had to be delicate. She said she was so insistent in her practices and willingness to fulfil her dream that at the end they had to support her. Her dedication was stronger than what society told her, so she fulfilled her dream and now there are many girls practising BMX and do not see it as an obstacle. The inner power is stronger than the power over.” (Girl, Villanueva)

This highlights the critical role that young and adult women can play in challenging and transforming gender norms, pushing the boundaries of expectations and aspirations for upcoming generations of girls.

4.2 Boys as supporters of gender equality and boys’ individual actions for change

As part of the Champions of Change programme, adolescent boys undergo a journey and process of supporting girls’ empowerment. They frequently mentioned how this brought about positive changes in their own lives. Using their increased knowledge on gender equality and rights and their skills to discuss and negotiate, they were successful in bringing about positive changes in their families and among their peers.

4.2.1 Attitudinal shifts towards support and solidarity

Boys discussed the individual changes they have experienced as a result of participating in the Champions of Change programme. Some boys discussed how they had managed a shift from the dominant masculine attitudes and behaviours to more gender equitable relations. This was evidenced through boys’ discussions, highlighting their capacity to identify gender inequality, understand the negative impact this has on girls’ lives and transition to a position of solidarity with girls in their shared goal of advancing gender equality. The knowledge and skills they acquired gave boys the confidence and skills to support girls’ empowerment and tackle gender inequality.

“For me [the information] has been key because it has enabled me to explain to other people about gender equality and stereotypes … it is difficult for them to change their mentality since they have always been doing the same things… it is only in last years that the issue of gender equality and stereotypes has emerged…” (Boy, Clemencia)

“I am supportive when I respect women.” (Boy, Nelson Mandela)

4.2.2 Boys’ actions in solidarity with girls

There is a strong sense from the research that boys’ own attitudes have begun to change. A good example of this came through the reports of many boys taking actions to challenge gender roles and responsibilities in the home, most frequently through taking on domestic chores. Some boys who engaged in supporting more gender equitable roles in their households were consciously more supportive of their mothers and sisters, suggesting a deeper understanding of how the unequal burden of chores restricts their mothers’ and sisters’ time to engage in other activities and to have time for themselves.
“I told my mum that I could help her, that I can also cook and do the laundry; in the past she couldn't go out but now she can visit my aunt and I cook… my dad says it is okay, that we should also help.” (Boy, Sincerin)

Many boys expressed a willingness to encourage other people to change, having strongly bought into the benefits of more equal relations. Like the girls, they expressed a sense of enhanced confidence to communicate with others. For boys, this sense of confidence was more explicitly linked to them taking on a new role as gender advocates, and working in solidarity with girls.

“We understand because we know what gender equality is, but if there is a person who doesn’t know, we should explain [because] when you buy an hygienic towel for your mum they call you gay.” (Boy, Sincerin)

“At that time I didn’t know about Plan or gender equality but now I know that girls have the same capabilities. I have changed my mentality and now I give girls more opportunities to play and be free like us.” (Boy, Clemencia)

Boys also expressed the importance of engaging their fathers on the importance of gender equality in the home. “I would say: ‘Dad, I do not like to wash dishes’, but since now we are in gender equality all of us are equal and so we have the same duties,” one boy said. Another described a sense of empathy towards his mother: “We have feelings and we can also help our mothers” (Boy, Clemencia).

These responses illustrated the boys’ commitment to challenging unequal gender relations and practices and how they had successfully negotiated positive changes in their families and among their peers. However, the way some boys described these changes — “helping mothers” and “giving girls’ equal opportunities” — revealed an ingrained belief that these were still chiefly female responsibilities that they were helping with. While the discussions indicated a positive shift towards gender equitable attitudes and behaviours, a deeper reflection on the unequal power relations at play is needed in order for the shift towards gender equitable relations to be more transformative.

4.2.3 Being a role model: supporting positive attitudinal shifts among peers

Boys also wanted to support their peers to make positive attitudinal changes and improve their relationships. In the workshops, when asked about their wishes for the future, boys in Nelson Mandela mentioned having the “courage to move forward” and “helping others to change their way of thinking”. Another commented on how he influenced his friend to adopt a more open and equitable attitude and how this made him feel: “I am really pleased, not so much for the goal I have fulfilled, but for him because he is not going to be closed minded anymore, since he is going to be more intelligent” (Boy, Sincerin).

The following case study illustrates the positive influence of boys who advocate for change, challenging their peers’ gender discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, showing solidarity with girls and committing to advancing gender equality in their communities.

**Case study – Victor**

Victor is a 16-year-old boy from rural Sincerin who is advocating for gender equality. “I know people who do not support the inequality that exists in Sincerin,” he said. Victor wanted to bring these people on board in his fight for equality, but believed that campaigning wouldn’t make that happen. Campaigns, he said, “are useless”. People need to be touched on a deeper level and engaged differently. The approach that Victor advocated was through involving the community organising games for instance, “where people learn about values and gender equality”, and through leading by example.
Victor is open about the price that boys like him pay for advocating change. “They are mistreated by other people,” he said, adding “many people treat them poorly.” He himself was affected by one of the most common sanctions experienced by boys who speak up about or act on gender equality in Colombia: “[They] have even called me gay.”

But Victor stood his ground. “I try to change them until they understand and join our point of view on how to treat a woman.” It wasn’t easy. Touching on deeply ingrained fear of social sanctions among boys, Victor said: “Many said they were not able, they said ‘I am not able to be a leader, other people could judge me’.”

It was obvious to Victor that changing things required determination: “People who want to make a change have to make a decision and really do it.” Many boys teased him, when Victor and others talked to them about gender equality, but “we speak to them seriously, so they see it is a serious issue.”

The work Victor did had a positive impact on him, and he could see the same in those boys who, like him, were standing up for gender equality. “We feel very good.” There was increased self-esteem, and initiating action increased a sense of agency. “We feel great because we have done something; we have been useful for someone.” Victor was observing real change among boys. Many, he says, used to treat their girlfriends badly, “but they are learning what we teach them”.

Something else was happening: when girls saw boys trying to support their position and advance their rights, they changed their attitudes towards boys. “It is good because girls see that we boys are changing so they see us in a different way, they are working with us to know that we are the same as them.”

A yearning for new role models became obvious when Victor talked about a local man he described as “very revolutionary”. This man, Victor says, was teaching boys about positive values, and gender equality as a part of this. “Boys are growing up and when they are adults they will know what gender equality is.” Institutions, on the other hand, could not be trusted to instigate change, according to Victor. The government, he said, only ever requests money, but “we poor people are the ones who put it into practice.” There was a sense that change wouldn’t be effective if it happened top-down; it would need to arise from the bottom up.

Asked about the future of his community, Victor said: “I would like that there is not so much violence.” He wished for girls not to be affected by gender inequality, and for boys not to be called gay for speaking up or taking action. He wished “that girls could play soccer as something normal; that is what we have to do in order to have gender equality.” Parents, he said need to see and support this.

Victor wished that children growing up in Sincerin did not see gender inequality as normal, but he was clear that “if things don’t change they are going to continue growing up like this.” To achieve real change, individual action was not enough: “It is important to change our community,” Victor said, “and everything around us.”

4.3 Building solidarity: girls and boys transforming power relations

As the previous discussion demonstrates, the girls and boys involved in this research had begun their own journeys of consciousness-raising towards gender equality. Their participation in the Champions of Change programme enabled them to experience their power as individuals to develop more equitable attitudes, to mentor others and to begin to act to influence change. At the same time, they have begun to experience the transformational power of collective action through working in groups and through sport, on an agenda of social change.
During focus groups girls and boys were asked to reflect on whether they felt it was better to work as separate groups of girls and boys or as a mixed group to advance gender equality and social change. Overwhelmingly, both girls and boys felt it was more effective and powerful to work as a collective. There was a strong sense that this provided them with more power to influence their peers, families and communities, and to promote gender equality.

Comments demonstrating this included: “Working as a team you can support yourself more”; “Union means strength”; “By yourself you don’t think so well as in a group, because in [a] group there is always more ideas”; and “it is better to work in mixed groups so that both women and men can give their points of view”.

4.3.1 The power of the collective: challenging and transforming unequal power relations

Girls frequently pointed out that working in mixed groups improved both boys’ attitudes towards girls and deepened their understanding of gender inequality. The mixed groups of Champions of Change also required boys to communicate and socialise with girls, upholding gender equitable attitudes and behaviours.

“Working with boys has somehow changed something, which is good because we [the girls] changed a little bit the way of thinking about men.” (Girl, Arjona)

“…mixed groups are important because they engage with each other and it helps to change the thinking that the boy who walks with women is a fag or the girl who walks with men is a butch.” (Boy, Nelson Mandela)

There was a clear recognition of the opportunities to transform unequal power relations by working as a collective to advance gender equality, as illustrated by comments such as:

“It is important to work together so that we can demonstrate that both men and women have the same rights. The idea is to be a good partner and help each other.” (Girl, Sincerin)

“People, wanting to change this situation, should come together so that there can be an efficient change and people can unify their proposal in order to make a change for the better.” (Girl, Arjona)

Both girls and boys said that working as a collective demonstrated to the wider community that everyone can work together for gender equality. They discussed how, through their actions, sense of belief and commitment, they can encourage community members to see how personal change can lead to positive, more gender equitable outcomes for the community. This was the case, particularly, where changed behaviour was visible, such as when girls played soccer with boys in public spaces.

“Through soccer we have realised that all girls together and playing with them, it will be possible to change the mentality, since men will not see us as weak persons. In addition, change does not start with a single person, change starts with everyone, working in teams we can draw more attention.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

Through the Champions of Change mixed soccer programme, boys learned how to socialise with girls and, over time, to support their participation in a traditionally male sport. Gender norms and power relations were challenged on the pitch by adopting rules that promote gender equality and fair play for both girls and boys. This permitted participants to challenge and tackle their own internalised gender stereotypes. Boys shared how this made

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23 See section 1, box 1.
them feel good about themselves and how, over time, it led to improvements on how girls view them and relate to them.

“I feel great because it is a good thing for girls and boys. It is good because girls see that us boys are changing so they see us in a different way, they are working with us and know that we are the same as them.” (Boy, Sincerin)

“In my neighbourhood we play soccer with girls and we feel happy.” (Boy, Villanueva)

“If the team is not compact and they do not interact with each other there are no positive results, but if they work together they reach positive results.” (Boy, Villanueva)

One girl commented on how the increased visibility of girls playing sport in public spaces led to girls’ increased participation in school, indicating the positive effect of mixed group activity in other spheres:

“From my point of view [improvements are] the freedom of expression we have now and in the way they are treating us. In the past, we were less visible because they did not realise that we had the same capabilities as the rest of them – for example, the capacity to represent our school in sports just like men.” (Girl, Villanueva)

4.3.2 Working in mixed groups: benefits and challenges

The above reflections, from both girls and boys, were positive overall. There was a positive view of solidarity between girls and boys and of the value this could have for both. However, some girls commented on how the power dynamics in mixed groups could still be tipped in favour of boys, and how this could make equal interactions difficult. As one girl said, boys in mixed groups sometimes talked to them “without respect, but with irony and mockery; they want to give us orders.”

Girls also acknowledged that on particular issues working as a separate group could be beneficial. Violence against girls, for instance, might require the type of space and reflection that can only be provided by a girls-only safe environment. As one girl said: “there has to be more spaces and places where women can talk about what they are going through.” (Girl, Villanueva)

However, both girls and boys also said that the dialogue that could be created by mixed groups might have served as a starting point for working towards change in certain areas, including violence, as this comment illustrates:

“Both men and women must relate to each other. If we look at the case of violence against women, we can all do something through the dialogue including all the knowledge we have.” (Girl, Sincerin)

4.4 The power of a new generation: shifting from individual to collective consciousness

For the most part adolescent girls and boys felt that their effectiveness in contributing to positive change to advance gender equality was primarily at the individual level through parents, families and peers. Both adolescent girls and boys acknowledged their success in advocating for more equitable power relations in the home and understood these experiences as a potential lever for negotiating successful change in the wider community. A clear commitment to working with the wider community to advance gender equality came across in discussions with girls and boys.

“When I was at home I explained to them about gender equality, that we are equal and should not despise women or treat them with disrespect, like women should not treat men with disrespect. When I was in the countryside we used to talk about it
because some friends from my neighbourhood were also participating in the project.” (Boy, Clemencia)

“We should work together in the community for establishing rights for women so that we, women, can have access to public spaces.” (Girl, Villanueva)

Whilst the community proved a more difficult site of change for adolescent girls and boys - and for girls in particular - girls were keen to highlight the need for more interaction and support from the community in order to advance gender equality on a collective level. Girls offered a deeper reflection on the difficulties of affecting change at the community level and described the slow process of changing attitudes, recognising that whilst the process is neither immediate nor linear, collective advances can be made over time.

“We should discuss about this in the community since they should support us to move forward. For me, one of the attitudes would be support, the community should support the decisions we make, because as they say, we are the new generation, so I think they should give advices to us so we can move forward and make a difference. I would try to convince them to create groups of boys as well as of girls and encourage dialogue. Giving talks and showing people that it is possible to achieve that change. We need to do this not only once, but constantly so that they see a change, which is a good change that will benefit everybody equally.” (Girl, Villanueva)

“The positive thing is that you gradually teach people that things should not be like that, that you have to improve them and work harder to make things better. The idea is to gradually improve. There are people who don’t listen but you can teach them step by step, like a grain of sand at a time, until they become interested in things.” (Girl, Clemencia)

Girls identified actions to tackle gender inequality in the community: one girl described how she approached the city councillor and talked to him about the need to hold a meeting with the community on the harmful effects of discriminatory social norms and practices and about educating citizens on rights issues such as the rights to sexuality, freedom of expression and equality.

“I even talked to the city councilman, who is the highest leader of the community, to call the whole community and explain … how we all have the same rights, so there is no more of these events because how is it possible that a 15-year-old boy takes his own life for the simple fact that society does not accept him as he is? The meeting would be to explain things, because here we live in ignorance. So, if they [the community] know at least that all of us have the same rights, things would be different because obstacles would be reduced and there would be more freedom of expression.” (Girl, Sincerin)

Another girl described herself as a community reporter. She would like to see change implemented on many levels and would like to contribute to and lead positive changes for girls on a local level with the mayors and at a national level with the Ministry of Defence of Rights. Her stance illustrates girls’ desire and capacity to take up leadership roles and contribute to wider social change, promoting gender equality on a collective level. Within this is a clear expression of power of “young people” in bringing about these changes.

“I would look for those girls who feel diminished or less capable than others to support them and then spread what I have learned. What I have learned here in Plan is that I do not just want to stay here, I want to disseminate this learning throughout the community to make other people also reach another level. Not only here in this
community but also in other villages. We are a lot of young people who will contribute to achieve these results. If we embrace this project from now, more initiatives could be implemented, other girls can have better initiatives… If I go to the Ministry of Defence of Rights and they do not pay attention to what I want to say, I have those tools [as community reporter and Champion of Change agent] to present those facts on television, but if they don’t listen to me, there are other institutions above them. For example, I have been able to interview the mayors, so the president and the governor are agents who could help me guarantee the right that I want to be fulfilled.”

(Girl, Sincerin)

Champions of Change enabled both girls and boys to have access to information that other members of their communities did not, in particular highlighting the power of the new ideas that a younger generation is able to contribute to society.

These powerful quotes illustrate that girls, despite feeling excluded from participating in community spaces, contributed well-thought through initiatives for change in their communities and demonstrated the potential of leadership in bringing about positive change in the community. The following case study demonstrates this. Vivian is a 14-year-old girl from Clemencia who discussed the need for change on multiple levels – family, community and institutional – so that gender equality to become a reality in adolescent girls’ lives.

**Case study – Vivian**

“Adults are fundamental in the construction of our lives and personalities. If there are adults who think and act with gender equality… young people will feel more confident.”

For Vivian, it was clear that many different people and institutions were responsible for entrenched gender norms and inequalities that deprive girls in Colombia from their right to education and prevent them from getting on in life.

The media, she said, play an important part in reinforcing discriminatory attitudes. Soap operas, for instance, normalise violence against women. They tell young girls “that women should seek refuge in a man or that men should be superior to women.” Having watched these soap operas from an early age, she said “you don’t realise that it is affecting you really seriously because you are learning to see those things as normal.”

Educational institutions, she continued, don’t treat girls and boys in the same way, and limit women to certain careers. “It is always seen that men have careers and do everything and that it is wrong for women to do that.” Universities give men more opportunities to study, and “women are not given the same opportunity to get ahead.”

The family, Vivian said, does the same. Parents prioritise boys’ education over girls’ and in some cases actively prevent girls from studying. “When there are boys and girls in the family, they offer the best opportunities to boys.” Additionally, parents are role models and primary duty bearers: “They are the first people who are always there … and if they teach us the wrong things, that is what we will learn from an early age.”

Vivian was involved in the Champions of Change programme and she played in the mixed soccer team. What she learned through the programme empowered her: “I suddenly felt strong and determined to talk to my mother and tell her everything I had learned. I started to give her examples and she started to listen to me.” Vivian was also a member of a communications programme. This, for her, was a great source of learning. “We are a group of men and women who have different positions in the organisation.” Vivian described how the group started to talk about gender equality. During these discussions, Vivian tried to respect what others think, but she also tells them her opinion. “I am not afraid to speak anymore,” she said.

“When you learn about gender equality,” Vivian said, “things change. It teaches you something and you get to know yourself and learn new things, such as how to speak...
assertively and how to make your own decisions. This gives us motivation to fight against inequalities and discrimination.” She got great satisfaction from this, because she saw that it was possible to change others and make them see that they can change their lives.

But while individual action was important, and while influencing those around her and promoting gender equality could bring some change, Vivian was clear that young girls like her cannot bring about the change that is needed on their own. Collective change is important. She identified “the Major’s office, the institutions, dance and theatre groups” as duty bearers who need to get involved and actively promote gender equality in the community.

Changing situations in the home environment continues to be difficult. “It is important that adults support us to get ahead because I implement what I am learning in the neighbourhood, or when I am in school, but at the home it is the opposite.” Parents and teachers need to be involved. Vivian hoped to influence adults to change the situation, but she knew this wouldn’t happen overnight. Parents, she said, need to learn what young people in Colombia are doing. “Adults are fundamental in the construction of our lives and personalities,” she said. The more she talked to her parents, the more she started to realise how they had begun to doubt their own beliefs. “If there are adults who think and act with gender equality, young people will feel more confident.”

It is not enough to change the beliefs of parents according to Vivian, who imagined what her community would be like if gender discrimination was a thing of the past: “I would like the community of Clemencia to change their beliefs that there must be separations and divisions, such as the divisions we see every day between boys and girls. I imagine a united Clemencia that is concerned about what happens to people, that women adopt good and healthy behaviours so that they can express their feelings, and that men and women are treated equally.”

4.5 Collective actions to promote gender equality

In the workshops, both girls and boys talked about their wishes for the future. They were able to talk about the changes they would like to see in their households and communities, and the activities they would like to undertake in the future. Their discussions covered the following suggestions for how change could be realised:

4.5.1 Engaging their families and communities

In both the interviews and workshops, there was a strong sense that the adolescents wanted to see messages of gender equality reach more people in their families and communities.

While adolescents felt that these were contributing to positive change, they felt that a more collective approach to raising awareness with families on the importance of gender equality would have a wider effect. Girls discussed the following as the key areas of change that they believe would bring better outcome and opportunities for girls in the family:

- Repositioning girls’ role and value in the family: girls believed household chores should be equally distributed between brothers and sisters. Girls wanted to be valued for their achievements (educational and others) and disrupt the current trend of primarily valuing daughters according to their gendered roles in the household.
- Advocating for and advancing girls rights in the family: girls believed that there was a need to build trust between parents and daughters, that girls’ movement should not be controlled unfairly compared to their brothers, and that parents should make time to talk and listen to their daughters concerns and not use verbal or physical violence in the home.
Although adolescent girls and boys did not feel that they were as effective at creating change at community level as they were at home, their influence as a collective was evident through their visible presence in the community. Playing soccer together as a mixed group and working collectively to advance gender equality had the potential to positively influence others’ attitudes and behaviours. Overall adolescents felt that they needed more support from the community in order to advance their actions and collective efforts. Adolescents discussed the following actions as key to bringing about a more supportive and gender equitable community environment:

- Increased efforts to widen the participation of girls: this would ensure that girls’ voices are heard by including them in community dialogue and decision-making spaces.
- Increased spaces for adolescent girls and boys to work together to advance gender and social change, supporting the strengthening of their networks.

4.5.2 Ensuring legal change and implementation of existing laws

There was consensus amongst adolescent girls and boys that laws to prevent violence against girls and women are not always being implemented. This was particularly stressed by girls highlighting the ineffectiveness of the legal frameworks in their communities. Adolescent girls outlined a multifaceted approach to tackling violence against women and girls (see section 3.5.1) which underscored the importance of duty bearers upholding the law.

4.5.3 Initiatives for advancing gender equality and social change: popular education and social communication

Despite the limitations imposed by gender and generational power relations, adolescents identified and proposed strategic initiatives for change that would empower them to effect change at a community level.

Popular education and social communications methods were frequently discussed as effective ways to advance gender equality and promote social change in the community. This was presented as a strategic way to engage with the community on both a wider and a deeper level. Adolescents discussed the power of community social dramas, theatre and films as effective in tackling discriminatory and ingrained gender and social norms that are dominant in the community and in giving positive meaning to the value of women and girls.

“I would do some lectures, plays, movies, series, brochures to call people’s attention because there are people who do not pay attention to newspapers. People focus more on the movies or the internet. That would be the most effective way to reach people. A few days ago some people came, and in the library we prepared a play about stereotypes, about women who stay home while men did heavy jobs. I would like to see that people are fairer and help each other, also to have more gender equality to eliminate stereotypes because women have the same rights as men. Men can do the things that women do, and women can do the same things as men, have fun and play soccer.” (Boy, Sincerin)

“I would start with projects that the community can assimilate very fast, like a cinema. I would make the decision to make a community film so they see equality in that film. It would be a short film showing certain things and teaching others.” (Boy, Sincerin)

The adolescents discussed increasing their reach by using media outlets that they have access to, such as radio and as community reporters for newspapers and television disseminate messages and ideas on harmful gender and social norms.
“I believe my parents are proud of what I am accomplishing. Every time I raise my voice on my radio programme I can expand my knowledge and make it possible that other people open their eyes and see that is not a dream where a ‘prince charming’ comes and rescues you. No one can rescue you, but you can rescue your own inner power that has been lost in those stereotypes, inequalities and sexism in which we live.” (Girl, Clemencia)

Adolescents identified using information and communication technologies, the internet and social media to share and disseminate knowledge on gender equality and to create spaces for mixed male and female adult and youth groups. These could be used to promote intergenerational dialogue and address issues of violence, as well as exchange ideas for actions for change.

“One of my proposals is to create a web page because there are parents who are interested in social networks or want to have more interaction with their children by these means. I would share all my knowledge and the things that are changing, so that people know how things were before and after the project. I would give pedagogical talks because sometimes we get bored in simple talks. They must be conducted in a place where people feel more relaxed, with ice breakers, valuing the rights of girls, and avoiding stereotypes.” (Girl, Clemencia)

Adolescents presented creative social communications initiatives that allow them to take power into their own hands and advance change on a community level through alternative mechanisms – albeit recognising power relations that limit their efforts. This clearly illustrates that once consulted, adolescents can identify powerful ways to connect with the wider community, disseminate their knowledge on gender equality and begin a slow process of change, challenging and potentially transforming discriminatory attitudes and practices on a more collective level.

4.6 Building support for change: gaining allies and building support

Adolescent girls and boys have embarked on powerful individual journeys towards change on gender equality. In many instances, these steps are being furthered, supported or complemented on a community level. However, meaningful wider change will remain out of reach if these individual and collective efforts go unsupported.

The girls and boys in this research were asked to reflect on whom they considered were the key actors to help support and influence the changes they would like to see implemented. They identified a range of allies and change agents – and clearly stressed who they feel should be doing more to advance gender equality.

4.6.1 Parents and families

Parents were described as key influencers on attitudes and behaviour by socialising children into acceptable behaviour and transmitting norms across generations. Adolescents described the importance of parents giving good advice to their children, being supportive, listening to and valuing girls and boys equally.

Girls highlighted the urgency of addressing gender norms at the family level and highlighted the potential power of bringing the family along on the adolescents’ journeys to advance gender equality. Furthermore, they identified the power of parents as role models for other parents in transmitting gender equitable ideas, norms and practices that could influence families in the community more widely.

Transforming discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in the family was identified as the cornerstone for wider changes in communities.
4.6.2 Local governance
Adolescents identified councillors, mayors and local officials as having the power and the capacity to raise awareness on the importance of attitudes, relations and behaviours on gender equality in the community. They frequently discussed the need for local governance to actively promote gender awareness in schools and the community by opening up spaces for gender and intergenerational dialogue, disseminating information on gender equality and resourcing community educational activities to advance gender equality. Local governance, it was said, could do more to advance gender equality.

“Councillors and representatives of neighbourhoods are capable of generating trust and communication between the people they lead, changing stereotypes and fostering things that could benefit girls. They don’t know yet the things that affect women in our town, but we could tell and help them to develop activities or programmes that benefit the community.” (Girl, Sincerin)

“The president of the community can include these [gender equality] issues because [it is] fundamental to include these issues when they talk about the Community Action Board and issues of the sector. These topics should be included to disseminate this empowerment, so there is gender equality, not inequality.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

“The mayor has more power than us, they can develop projects, campaigns, social mobilisation at schools and talk about equality. They could also project films showing situations about gender equality and reflect on it. They can also organise contests where men have to cook and women have to play soccer in order to make them understand what the other does.” (Girl, Arjona)

4.6.3 Institutions and their role as duty bearers
Adolescents identified the role that institutions have in upholding their responsibilities as duty bearers, tackling gender inequality at national and institutional levels. Acting in solidarity and supporting gender equitable attitudes and practices were understood to be powerful ways to advance gender equality. Duty bearers’ responsibility to ensure citizens’ equal rights was seen as an important starting point.

“The president, the mayor, the governor and other leaders, they know rights and can create a society where we have equality. They have lived in a world where they know what it feels like. Also parents, because everything starts from home. Also friends who can help us in those responsibilities.” (Girl, Arjona)

Girls were quick to point out that women are excluded from political spaces and businesses.

"It is always men who participate in politics and work in the construction area, and the role for women is to work in a family home and be a housewife. Women should have a greater participation in business and politics." (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

Adolescent girls discussed the potential power that institutions could have in advancing gender equality and tackling discriminatory gender norms if they took up their roles as duty bearers. Hope was expressed that laws or policy enacted from above could have powerful potential in challenging the norms and behaviours that limit girls’ opportunities:

“The state could say: ‘everyone has the right to this, be it man or woman’, but it is not what you see, it is not what is happening. There are always stereotypes, beliefs that are always marking us and telling us what men and women should do, and that limits us to do things or fills us with fear.” (Girl, Clemencia)

The media was also discussed by both girls and boys as having a role in tackling gender inequality. A moral duty not to promote soap operas that normalise violence against women
and girls was specifically mentioned. As one boy explained, “boys see men beating women on the TV and want to do the same thing” (Boy, Villanueva).

4.6.4 Non-governmental organisations

Gender equality programmes such as Champions of Change were consistently identified as a powerful influencer and mechanism to transform discriminatory attitudes of adolescent girls and boys. Almost all respondents talked about the potential of non-governmental organisations for raising awareness and sharing information about gender equality with parents and community members. They discussed other organisations working on child protection and gender equality issues in the area, highlighting the importance of partnerships and organisational solidarity.

4.6.5 Role models

Female role models, such as female family members or well-known sports women, were mentioned as having a positive influence on raising girls’ expectations of what they could achieve. The girls were inspired by visible cases of positive change makers who have succeeded in bending or transforming gender norms and relations by taking up careers in male-dominated areas or professions. Working in solidarity with female role models who redefined gendered expectations of what women and girls can achieve could be a powerful mechanism to support and enhance the agency of adolescent girls. Male role models were discussed as playing an important role for boys and having an equally powerful effect on influencing more positive attitudes and behaviours among boys.

The adolescents participating in the Champions of Change programme were making steady progress in advancing gender equality at home and among their peers. However, it was clear from their reflections that the State, institutions and duty bearers were failing to support adolescent girls’ and boys’ efforts to advance gender equality, and furthermore were failing in their responsibilities to actively promote gender equality.
Section 5: Discussion of key findings: what works to promote gender equality?

The previous sections presented the complexity of the Colombian context for adolescent girls and boys who are seeking change in the face of widespread gender discrimination and economic hardship. Girls experienced the interplay of various factors and conditions differently from boys; in an often violent context, there were limited opportunities for education, economic activity and participation for girls. In addition, sanctions were applied more harshly when girls did not conform to expected norms.

The report also examined both the sites and agents for change by applying a social norms lens to the context. It uncovered an intricate set of deeply held attitudes around gender roles and responsibilities, power and control. It then presented the pathways for change from the perspectives of adolescent girls and boys, signalling so called “tipping points” and “sticking points” and some successes despite the early-stage implementation of the Champions of Change programme. It is clear that, in Colombia, there is potential in the power of adolescent girls and boys to promote social change. They were able to show the development of their internal assets and resilience, their ability to embrace new ideas and ways of being, and to demonstrate the power of collective action when receiving a gender sensitive education like the one in the Champions of Change programme. The research furthermore highlighted the ways that dominant power relations sustain social norms in order to maintain the status quo and associated privileges for those with power.

While section 4 of this report outlined progress towards shifts in attitudinal, behaviour and norm change, much more is needed. Transforming entrenched attitudes and gender norms requires a deeper internalisation of power and privilege, and a focus on the transformative power of relationships built on the values of equality.

This section analyses the levers of social change further and presents five key drivers essential for achieving transformational change and promoting gender equality.

5.1 Girls should engage and negotiate from a position of power

A more explicit acknowledgment of how norms are protected is needed in order to support girls to engage and negotiate more directly from a position of power. Despite positive reports of successes to date of the Champions of Change initiative, the family continues to be a so called “sticking point” for the Colombian girls. Girls continue to engage from a position that requires them to play roles that support the dominant norms. Many girls shared experiences of only being in a position to bargain for equal rights or permissions if they had completed their chores to a high standard or completed extra chores in the home. For girls, freedom of movement outside the home was also a privilege to be won. Section 4 outlines how girls articulated the need to address the lower value attributed to girls in families and for an increased focus on advancing girls’ rights within the family. Girls could benefit from having safe female-only spaces to be made available as a complement to the Champions of Change groups for girls to discuss amongst themselves the specific challenges they face and identify opportunities for how they could safely negotiate within the family.

In addition, the dominant gender norms around the role of girls in public spaces encouraged them to be more submissive and less vocal. Notions of ‘good daughter’ and ‘good girl’, staying in the home and not being seen on the street, will continue to constrain adolescent girls’ abilities to realise their potential. As such, girls who either defined themselves or were defined by others as Champions of Change, were by necessity challenging the dominant gender norms that restricted their activity. It is also important to acknowledge the increase in
sanctions and bullying through social media channels. It is critical that their challenge is acknowledged, and that safe female-only spaces which can provide opportunities for more targeted mentorship in which girls can discuss challenging and sensitive issues with other girls. In addition, “Do No Harm” principles should be emphasised in programming that is explicitly political and likely to challenge the status quo.

5.2 Build powerful networks of peer groups and mentors

Both vignette scenarios presented in section 3 identify just how powerful peer influences can be. Combined with the high motivation of young people to act as mentors and supporters of others, developing networks of peers presents an important opportunity in the fight for gender equality. Building adolescents’ critical consciousness and agency through group discussions, training, cultural activities, sports and relationships of solidarity is a key component in adolescents taking collective steps towards challenging discriminatory gender norms.

The Colombia context clearly demonstrated the power of the mixed soccer groups: adolescent girls and boys publicly and visibly demonstrated to the wider community their collective actions to advance gender equitable in the community, leading by example. Importantly, increased visibility of girls in safe public spaces was discussed as having the potential to challenge men’s and boys’ attitudes towards girls’ right to occupy public space.

Going one step further and realising the potential of networks of gender equality advocates to act as mentors for others is critical. Adolescents, particularly girls, identified public role models and peers as having the potential to raise the expectations and aspirations and in pushing the boundaries beyond the norms and the expectations of the community. Equally, girls’ own contributions as mentors could become increasingly visible through the development of networks, in which they could also gain a sense of solidarity and support from their peers. It was notable how much importance adolescent girls attached to their own agency and confidence as mentors and supporters of others. The power of networks of gender activists further develops girls’ potential for increased agency through having “voice, choice and control”.

5.3 Work together: the critical importance of intergenerational gender dialogues

The Champions of Change curriculum identifies gender dialogue as an important part of the process towards social change. Indeed, gender dialogue is of critical importance in this process. Both girls and boys in the research have identified the need for more intergenerational gender dialogue in their work to secure long-lasting and sustainable social change. The evidence presented in this research illustrates firstly that expectations of and sanctions faced by adolescent girls are different to those applied to adolescent boys, and are deeply rooted in unequal power relations. Secondly, it shows how power relations at play within gender groups— for example, within families, adult women who do not want to disrupt the status quo, or have limited power to, can serve to reinforce gender norms. Thirdly, gender power relations can be inter-generational in nature, and supported by a process of gender socialisation.

Whilst in section 4, adolescents in Colombia demonstrated their leadership potential by taking initiatives and actions to engage their community in gender dialogues. The report revealed that especially the community is largely excluded from the more successful

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24 Champions of Change define gender dialogues as intergenerational dialogues that ensure girls’ and boys' commitment to gender equality is supported by their families and communities.
examples of gender dialogue and is instead described by the adolescents as comprising those who uphold discriminatory norms, through a range of sanctions, criticism and violence.

Methodologies for more transformative community work in the form of community theatre, social communication and participatory/co-designed social norms campaigns could deepen the approach of the Champions of Change model in terms of seeking to communicate across generations and shifting the most heavily entrenched attitudes and norms.

5.4 Bring parents along: intergenerational shifts and deeply embedded gender norms

Parents, in particular, need to be “accompanied” through the process of change. This demand for structured engagement with parents is urgent, as the research has demonstrated that tensions within the household are an issue. It also illustrated that girls can be at risk of violence, abuse and neglect as a result of their efforts to exercise agency and choice. They outlined the need for parents to be engaged in workshops that tackle gender norms and gender power relations.

“I would like to do many things, but first I would like to give a lecture or a workshop for parents because if you transmit this information to parents, they will transmit it to their children. Then I would make workshops, lectures and recreational activities with children, where boys would play the roles of girls and girls play the roles of boys to see how it feels, sharing the ideas and knowledge they learned in the activity.” (Girl, Nelson Mandela)

“We must create a school where parents can talk about topics related to stereotypes, inequality and the rights and duties we have, because those are the main problems we face here. Those families having male members should teach men how to change stereotypes related to gender. Talking about gender inequality can also take us to topics related to self-esteem and acceptance which can help our parents understand more”. (Girl, Clemencia)

In section 3, adolescent girls specifically highlighted the potential power of engaging mothers in an accompanied process of empowerment. They discussed the importance of mothers developing their own sense of self, self-esteem and how increasing their knowledge on gender equality would lead to better outcomes in attempting to advance gender equality within the home. In addition, girls outlined that mothers having access and control over their own economic resources would increase their influence and success in setting gender equitable practices within the family.

The research demonstrates that successful gender dialogue must go beyond the initial efforts to empower and engage young people and their peers, and move towards dialoguing more deeply with their parents, families and communities.

Inter-generational dynamics either act to provide opportunities for change (new ideas and new ways of doing things) or prevent change (tension and conflict between parents and young people, older community leaders and young people creating sticking points). The contextual analysis presented in section 1, as well as the social norms analysis of section 3, unveil the inter-generational dynamics and power play that act to entrench discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. What is also clear is that the household is the most pressing site for change, and is where there is a more immediate opportunity for gender dialogue across generations.
5.5 Address structural discrimination: ensuring an enabling environment for social change

More active engagement with duty bearers and formal structures of government as part of the Champions of Change model was identified as the next crucial step by most of the adolescent girls and boys. This was identified as being of critical importance in view of the threat of violence faced by girls. Mobilising for social change on a collective level requires a safe enabling community environment, particularly for girls. Adolescent girls underlined the role for local and national governments to protect their rights to live free from violence, to equality and to non-discrimination. The Colombian adolescents engaged easily with a vision that included the opportunity to address structural discrimination. At the centre of this approach is the role of the state and institutions as duty bearers to address the situation of violence against women and girls.

However, young people may need targeted support from their allies in order to engage meaningfully with formal structures of the governments. The research uncovers some of the limitations to date. Formal spaces where potential change could be negotiated are largely inaccessible for young people. Gaining legitimacy in formal public spaces and structures continues to be a challenge for younger people and girls in particular.

5.6 Next Steps

The research demonstrated that in order to transform attitudes and norms a specific focus is required to uncover the unequal power relations at play, to expose internalised, invisible power dynamics, and to actively rebuild the consciousness of all involved. This effort should seek to go further than simply challenging gender discrimination, and more explicitly towards identifying strategies for supporting power shifts, particularly within relationships – whether these are intimate, among peers, in families and within communities. In particular, it is important that the balance of responsibility for creating transformational change is shifted in the direction of duty bearers. Overall, the adolescents’ perspectives presented in this report demonstrates the importance of a multi-faceted approach to social change, which brings people along while building a critical mass of support for gender equality.

Additional research to better understand the perspectives of various reference groups, in particular parents, teachers and community leaders, is important for a deeper understanding of the dynamics that the Champions of Change programme is seeking to shift.
About this report

This qualitative study was designed to identify opportunities for changing norms that limit girls’ freedoms and rights. Its aim was, in particular, to uncover enabling factors and conditions that can positively contribute to improving the lives of girls in low- and middle-income countries through both individual and collective change. To this purpose, the research looked at the cases of adolescent girls and boys living in five communities in Colombia. The adolescents were selected on the basis of their participation in Plan International’s Champions of Change gender equality programme. Their participation in the project was integral to the research study; it allowed for in-depth exploration of social change from the perspective of adolescents who are actively engaged in advancing gender equality in their communities.

This report is part of ‘Voices of hope’, a series of studies designed to identify opportunities to change the norms that limit girls’ freedoms and rights: see https://plan-international.org/voices-of-hope for more details.

About Plan International

We strive to advance children’s rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it’s girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children’s rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

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