HEAR OUR VOICES – REGIONAL OVERVIEW FOR WEST AFRICA (AUGUST 2014)

Girls' Empowerment in West Africa (Benin, Cameroon, and Liberia)

Finding from the Girls Empowerment Star

In **Benin**, Plan spoke with 83 adolescent girls in PU Couffo and PU Atacora*, in three communities. On average, girls in **PU Couffo** felt most empowered around *safety,* and least empowered to decide over *pregnancy*. *There was no quantitative data available for the Girls Empowerment Star in PU Atacora.*

In **Cameroon**, Plan spoke with 134 adolescent girls in PU Biteng and PU Bamenda, in five communities. On average, girls in **PU Biteng** felt most empowered about *feeling valued* in the community, and least empowered around deciding if and when to get *pregnant*. In **PU Bamenda**, girls claimed that they felt most empowered to access *school* and least empowered around *feeling valued* in the community.

In **Liberia**, Plan spoke with 167 adolescent girls in PU Bomi and PU Lofa, in six communities. On average, girls in **PU Bomi** felt most empowered around *safety*, and least empowered around deciding if and when to get *pregnant*. In **PU Lofa**, girls claimed that they felt most empowered around *feeling valued* in the community, and least empowered deciding when they get *pregnant*.

Figure 1: Girls Empowerment Star: Frequencies of highest and lowest average rated dimensions of girls' empowerment by PU in West Africa: On average, girls involved in the study in Benin, Cameroon, and Liberia felt most empowered around feeling valued, school, and safety, and least empowered around aspects of pregnancy, speaking up, feeling valued and marriage.
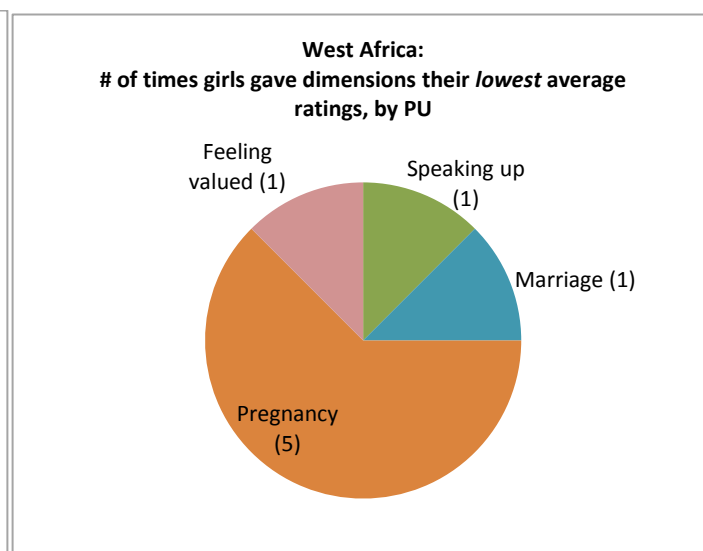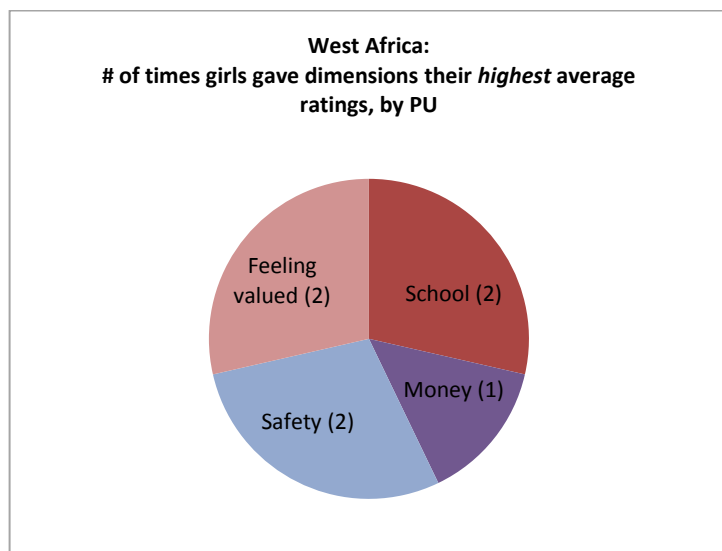
* Frequencies refer to numbers of PUs by region in which girls rated a dimension highest on average across data from selected communities. The maximum number of PUs per region is six, with two PUs per country, and three countries in West Africa. Frequencies derive from data from three selected communities per PU and may not be representative of all communities in all PUs in Benin, Cameroon or Liberia.

- *Feeling valued*: Girls involved in the study in West Africa said that adolescent girls felt empowered as well as least empowered around **feeling valued** in their community. For instance, in Benin over half (55%) of the girls Plan spoke with said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel valued. On the other hand, 57-64% of girls who participated in the study in Liberia said that the concerns of adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' matter in the community. Girls often feel valued and supported by their parents:

  > *"[Girls] feel valued because their parents speak on their behalf when there are problems", said one adolescent girl from Liberia.*

  In Cameroon, the responses from adolescent girls varied. For instance, in one area in Cameroon (PU Biteng), 50% of girls Plan spoke with said that adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' feel valued in their community, while 47% of girls in another area (PU Bamenda) said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel valued in the community.

  > *"The girls are like servants of boys and men. Their issues don't really matter," said one adolescent girl in Cameroon.*

  Some girls in Cameroon claimed that adolescent girls were only appreciated when they conformed to and performed traditional gender roles and responsibilities.

- *Safety*: Girls involved in the study felt relatively more empowered around **safety**, especially in Benin and Liberia. In Benin, 59% of girls involved in the study said girls 'always' or 'often' feel safe in their community (although 33% said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel safe). In focus group discussions, adolescent girls commonly associated an increase in a sense of safety to a recent decrease in kidnappings in these communities.

  In Liberia, between 48-57% of girls Plan spoke with in nine communities said that adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' feel safe in the community. Many of the girls said that 'we are safe in our community. There is no one chasing after us'. There were no comments to illustrate issues that leave some girls feeling less safe than others. These findings could also reveal a link between speaking up and levels of safety. For instance, 41-48% of girls Plan spoke in Liberia said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' say what they think in front of a man or boy. This may be related to their silence in response to being asked about their perceived level of safety and speaking up about issues of girls' insecurity in their homes, on the roads, in the community or at school.

- *Pregnancy*: One of the major issues for adolescent girls living in study communities is **pregnancy**. In West Africa, girls interviewed from all five participating PUs reported a lack of decision-making over pregnancy frequently as an urgent concern and major constraint to girls' empowerment. In one programme area in Cameroon (PU Biteng), 77% of girls who Plan spoke with claimed that they 'never' decide if they get pregnant. Girls are not educated about safe sex and how to prevent pregnancy. Other girls start having sex at a young age or their parents force them into early marriage. Sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse are all drivers of early pregnancy for many girls in Cameroon.

  > *"Girls seldom decide whether or when to get pregnant because sometimes their parents push them to ask for money from boys and boys never give money for nothing," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.*

  > *"Many boys refuse to use condoms or remove the condom during sex," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.*
  > *"Some girls are victims of rape," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.*

"Some parents use their girl children to settle debts thereby forcing them to get married to people they don't love," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.

In Benin, 71% of girls involved in the study said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' decide if they get pregnant. Adolescent girls felt that decisions about pregnancy were often made by men who held the power to decide over pregnancy. Girls involved in the study in Benin were also largely unaware of contraceptive methods and sexual and reproductive health information. Of the girls who were aware of prevention methods such as condoms, they lacked the financial resources to purchase them. In Benin, it was also revealed that girls who are more educated and who have educated parents sometimes exercise greater decision-making power over pregnancy.

"Often, it is the husband that decides—girls rarely have the option to decide if they want to become pregnant. There are some isolated cases—very often among educated individuals—where a husband supports his wife's choice," said one girl from Benin.

In Liberia, 78-79% of girls involved in the study claimed that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' decide if and when to get pregnant. Many participants claimed that adolescent girls have no say over pregnancy and many girls are not familiar with contraceptive methods. Many parents force girls into marriage early to avoid stigma or early pregnancy, and some parents reportedly encourage daughters to pursue gifts and money from boys and men, for which girls are expected to provide sex in exchange.

"We get pregnant because we are not protected," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.

"[…] we are not taking prevention and we drop out of school when we get pregnant," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.

"Because some of us are poor, we look for our daily needs to make it, and in the process get pregnant," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.

Early pregnancy is a driver of early and forced **marriage** and **school** dropout in these communities as parents are concerned with avoiding social stigma while also coping with poverty. Sexual and gender-based violence, and economic exploitation and abuse often factor in to girls' lack of **safety,** early pregnancy, and ultimately school dropout as a result of seeking money for school fees and for their basic needs. Girls' face challenges in feeling confident and comfortable **speaking up,** and saying what they think, feel or fear in front of boys or men.

Highest Levels of School Equality in West Africa (Benin, Cameroon, Liberia)

Findings from the School Equality Scorecard: Highest Levels of School Equality

In **Benin**, Plan spoke with 131 girls in 5 schools and 297 boys in 10 schools in PU Atacora and PU Couffo. In **PU Atacora**, boys rated *encouragement* as the highest level of school equality by girls (no data was available for girls in this PU). In **PU Couffo**, both girls and boys rated *encouragement* as the highest level of school equality by girls.

In **Cameroon**, Plan spoke with 256 girls in 10 schools and 299 boys in 10 schools in PU Biteng and PU Bamenda. In **PU Biteng**, girls felt that *class participation* and *encouragement* were the highest areas of school equality by girls, while boys said that *class participation* and *sports participation* were the highest. In **PU Bamenda**, girls felt that *class participation* and *leadership* were the highest areas of school equality by girls, while adolescent boys said that *class participation* and *chore burden* are the highest areas.

In **Liberia**, Plan spoke with 187 girls in 6 schools and 184 boys in 6 schools in PU Bomi and PU Lofa. In **PU Bomi**, girls felt that *safety and school* was the highest area of school equality by girls, while boys said it was *sports participation*. In **PU Lofa**, both girls and boys felt that *safety at school* was the highest area of school equality by girls.

Figure 2: School Equality Scorecard: Frequencies of dimensions girls and boys rated the highest on average by PU in West Africa: On average, adolescent girls involved in the study in Benin, Cameroon and Liberia rated encouragement, class participation, and safety at school as the highest level of school equality by girls, while adolescent boys felt that encouragement, class participation, and sports participation were some of the highest levels of school equality by girls.
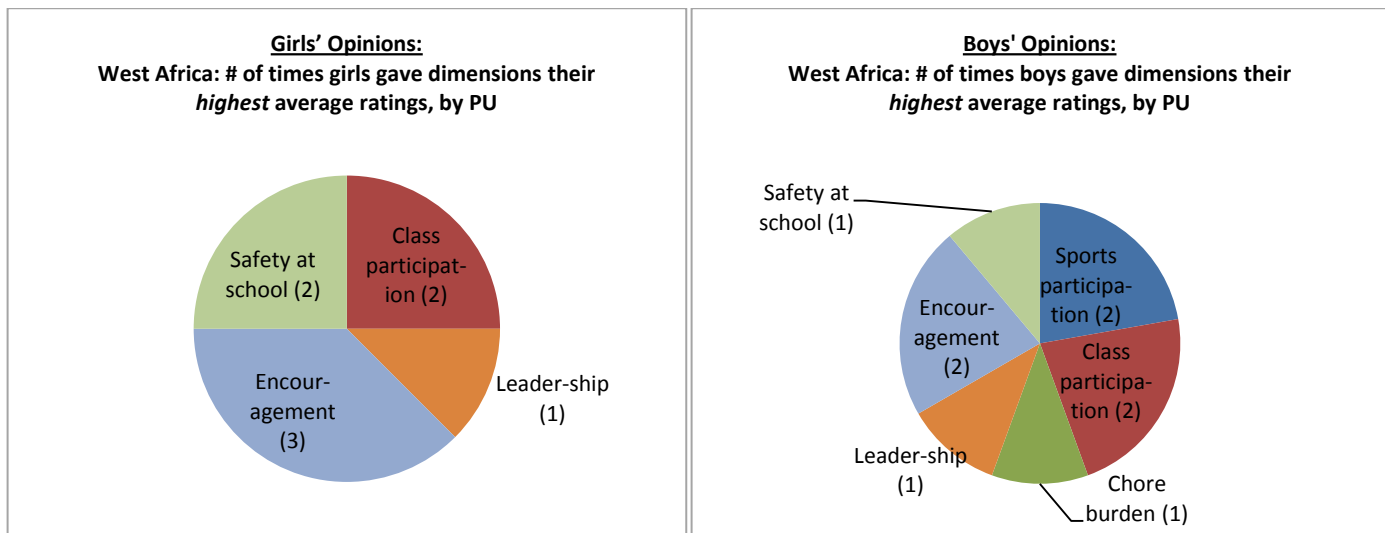
* Frequencies refer to numbers of PUs by region in which girls rated a dimension highest on average across data from selected communities. The maximum number of PUs per region is six, with two PUs per country, and three countries in West Africa. Frequencies derive from data from selected schools and PUs and may not be representative of all schools in all PUs in Benin, Cameroon or Liberia.

- *Encouragement*: Girls and boys involved in the study in West Africa said that adolescent girls are often *encouraged* to succeed in their schoolwork as much as boys, especially in Benin and Cameroon. In Benin, 87% of girls and 67-71% of boys involved in the study claimed that adolescent girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged in their schoolwork. When in comes to school, girls reported that they receive as much social and academic support as boys from their teachers. They are encouraged to participate and work hard to obtain good grades.

"Girls, like boys, are always encouraged to get good marks – the teachers encourage the girls to participate in class by giving them compliments like 'very good!' and 'bravo!'," said one adolescent girl in Benin.

"There is no discrimination in class," said one adolescent girl in Benin.

In Cameroon, 59-63% of girls and 52-58% of boys said that adolescent girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged in their schoolwork as much as boys. There may be a correlation between levels of **encouragement** and **leadership** in these communities. Adolescent girls commented both on the encouragement of parents and teachers, noting that some parents give equal opportunity to daughters as sons to attend and succeed in school. Some commented that more parents value and prioritize girls' education than in the past.

"Parents now recognize the credits of an educated girl; many are making efforts for their girls to complete their education," said one adolescent girl in Cameroon.

Still, not all adolescent girls are equally encouraged, as education may be considered less important for their future roles as wives and mothers, than it is for boys' roles as husbands and fathers. Boys are expected to get jobs after school and provide for a wife and children. Attitudes and gender roles are changing, though, with some parents recognising that girls who complete their studies and work can contribute economically.

"Because girls can likely be pregnant at any moment, encouraging and investing in their education may mean 'wastage of resources for the family'," said one adolescent girl in Cameroon.

"Some parents still encourage boys more than girls to succeed in schools and will invest limited resources only on boys education as opposed to girls, as they still believe girls are 'property of other families', and hope that their boy children's success will mean success for their families," said one adolescent girl in Cameroon.

In Liberia, only 30-53% of girls and 34% of boys involved in the study felt that adolescent girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged equally as boys.

- *Class participation*: Girls and boys involved in the study in Cameroon felt that class participation was one of the highest levels of school equality. For instances, 67-76% of girls and 61% of boys said that adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' participate in class as often as boys.

  "The teacher never asks questions only to boys or girls, but to the whole class so that boys and girls give their answer freely," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.

  "Some girls are very intelligent and to show off, they respond to all questions asked," said one adolescent boy from Cameroon.

The findings in Cameroon revealed that girls and boys participate equally in theory, but less consistently in practice. Some adolescent girls see certain girl classmates as 'more intelligent' and it is these girls who participate in class activities as much or more than boys. Some girls also work very hard to succeed academically in part to fight negative views of their academic capabilities among peers, teachers or parents. On the other hand, others adolescent girls fear shaming and mockery by boys if they raise their hand and offer wrong answers in class. Some girls have internalised negative gender stereotypes about their capabilities, believing that girls generally learn more slowly than boys. Some girls, particularly from poorer families, voiced feeling ashamed to stand up in front of the class because of state of their

clothes. Others said that girls who "go out with teachers" behave in a shy, reserved manner in class, and therefore participate less. Adolescent boys felt that while some girls are intelligent and bold, others participate less as they are afraid to give wrong answers and risk being mocked in class. Some boys, like some girls, have internalised a negative gender stereotype that boys are more intelligent than girls. Others raised assumptions that girls who participate less in class are preoccupied with concerns over their dating partners or their children while they are at school.

> *"Some girls want to prove their parents' wrong, so they tend to work very hard to succeed in their exams," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.*

> *"Most girls do not participate in class because they are day dreaming and thinking of the teachers who they are dating, or their boyfriends whom they will meet at the end of classes or their children left at home," said one adolescent boy from Cameroon.*

Participants in Liberia rated class participation as lower levels of gender equality at school for girls – 26-52% of girls and 32-58% of boys involved in the study felt that adolecsent girls 'always' or 'often' participated in class. In Benin, more girls (72%) than boys (45-46%) said that adolescent girls participate equally in class as boys.

- *Safety at school*: The majority of girls and boys Plan spoke with in Liberia felt that **safety at school** was a high level of school equality by girls – 40% of girls in one area (PU Bomi) and 50% of girls in another area (PU Lofa) claimed that adolescent girls 'always' feel safety at school. Adolescent girls said that feeling safe at school was a key factor in allowing them to concentrate on their studies and achieve good grades. It was revealed that teachers often create a safe learning atmosphere and protect the students.

> *"We and the boys are friendly and the teachers serve as parents to protect us at school," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.*

> *"When we are at school, we feel free because no one is disturbing us," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.*

> *''We are always safe at school because our teachers create safe learning environment for everybody," said one adolescent boy from Liberia.*

On the other hand, some students in Benin felt that safety at schools was a low level of gender equality at school for girls. For instance, in Benin (PU Couffo) 48% of boys and 27% of girls claimed that girls are 'never' as safe as boys when they go to school.

Lowest Levels of School Equality in West Africa (Benin, Cameroon, and Liberia)

Findings from the School Equality Scorecard: Lowest Levels of School Equality

In **Benin**, Plan spoke with 131 girls in 5 schools and 297 boys in 10 schools in PU Atacora and PU Couffo. In **PU Atacora**, boys rated *early pregnancy* as the lowest level of school equality by girls (no data was available for girls in this PU). In **PU Couffo**, girls said that *latrines* were the lowest level of school equality by girls, while boys said *early pregnancy*.

In **Cameroon**, Plan spoke with 256 girls in 10 schools and 299 boys in 10 schools in PU Biteng and PU Bamenda. In **PU Biteng**, both girls and boys felt that *latrines* and *early pregnancy* were the lowest areas of school equality by girls. In **PU Bamenda**, girls felt that *early pregnancy* was the lowest area of school equality by girls, while adolescent boys said that *sports participation* and *early pregnancy* are the highest areas.

In **Liberia**, Plan spoke with 187 girls in 6 schools and 184 boys in 6 schools in PU Bomi and PU Lofa. In **PU Bomi**, girls felt that *latrines* were the lowest area of school equality by girls, while boys said it was *early pregnancy*. In **PU Lofa**, both girls and boys felt that *early pregnancy* was the lowest area of school equality by girls.

Figure 3: School Equality Scorecard: Frequencies of dimensions girls and boys rated the lowest on average by PU in West Africa: On average, adolescent girls involved in the study in Benin, Cameroon, and Liberia rated early pregnancy and latrines as the lowest levels of school equality by girls, and adolescent boys rated early pregnancy, sports participation, latrines, seeking help, and encouragement as the lowest levels of school equality by girls.
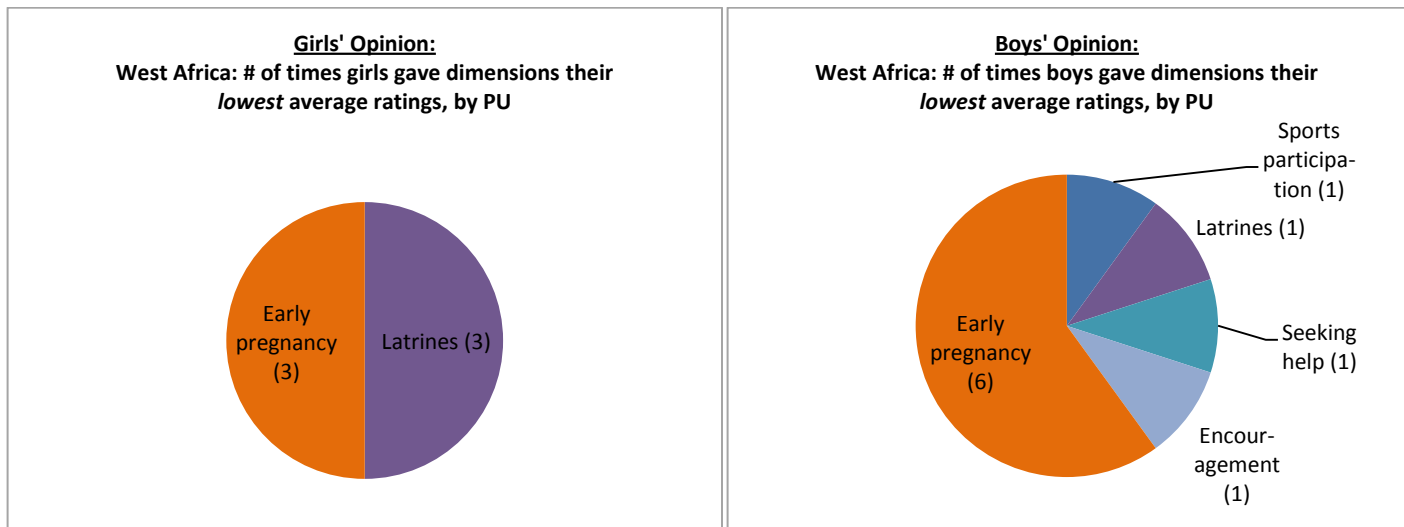
* Frequencies refer to numbers of PUs by region in which girls rated a dimension highest on average across data from selected communities. The maximum number of PUs per region is six, with two PUs per country, and three countries in West Africa. Frequencies derive from data from selected schools and PUs and may not be representative of all schools in all PUs in Benin, Cameroon or Liberia.

- *Early pregnancy*: Both girls and boys involved in the study in West Africa rated ***early pregnancy*** as the lowest level of school equality by girls. This was most prevalent in Benin whereby 88% of girls and 61-86% of boys involved in the study claimed that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' continue school after having a baby.

   "After giving birth, girls do not want to return to school because they fear being mocked by their peers. They tell themselves: 'If I go to school, I will feel humiliated.' […] Girls do not go back to school for many reasons, including the fact that they must care for their newborn. They also worry that classmates, teachers and administrators will make fun of them and single them out for setting a bad example," said one adolescent girl in Benin.

   "Girls never come back to school quickly after an early pregnancy. Two years ago at our school, a 16-year-old boy who was a good student started seeing a girl, who then became pregnant. Both were expelled. While the boy was able to attend a different school, the girl stayed home after giving birth: her classmates mocked her and she refused to go back," said one adolescent girl in Benin.

In Benin, girls who are pregnant and young mothers most often drop out of school and often are not encouraged by peers, teachers or parents to return to their studies. High levels of ***encouragement*** may be linked conversely to boys' and girls' low ratings of ***early pregnancy***. While boys and girls perceive that considerable encouragement may be given to girls in the classroom, notably when they set a good 'example' for their peers, pregnant girls or young mothers are instead socially and academically excluded. Low scores on ***early pregnancy*** were associated with examples of shaming and mockery of pregnant girls and young mothers. Boys reported that, to improve gender equality in schools, emphasis needs to be placed on sexual and reproductive health training, including early pregnancy prevention, and an encouraging dynamic between all students and teachers.

In Cameroon, between 31-54% of girls and 44-64% of boys claimed that adolecsent girls 'never' or 'seldom' return to school after having a baby. Participants said that adolescent girls rarely return to school after having a baby because: it is challenging for girls to catch up academically; girls are mocked and bullied by classmates; parents fear their daughters will become pregnant again; marriage and husbands forbid girls to continue their studies; and girls lack time, childcard support, and financial resources for school.

   "Most girls after putting to birth will not like to go back to school because of shame due to jeering by their peers," said one adolescent girl from Cameroon.

   "With a baby as another responsibility, some parents do not have the means to send back these girls to schools," said one adolescent boy from Cameroon.

   "Their husbands do not allow them to continue going to school," said one adolescent boy from Cameroon.

In Liberia, 53-55% of girls and 37-39% of boys claimed that adolecsent girls 'never' or 'seldom' return to school. Some girls said that an increase in household responsibilities and childcare limits adolecsent girls' ability to return to school, and other participants cited the absence of sexual and reproductive health information and services available for girls. Some boys said that they often continue school after having a child, while others claimed that boys are also at risk of dropping out of school after having a baby.

   "We have [the] chance to go to school when we have baby, but not girls," said one adolescent boy from Liberia.

"Sometimes we do not attend school after having babies. Because we have additional responsibility," said one adolescent boy from Liberia.

- *Latrines*: Participants, especially adolescent girls, said that **latrines** were one of the lowest levels of school equality by girls in West Africa, however responses varied considerably. In Benin, 86% of girls and 55-62% of boys involved in the study said that there are 'never' or 'seldom' toilets at school that girls feel comfortable using. Girls feel uncomfortable using the school latrines and tend to only use them in emergencies or when boys are not around.

    "Girls never feel comfortable using the existing latrines because they are cracked and in poor condition, so they are afraid to use them. They also worry that boys will walk in on them, because the latrines are shared," said one girl from Benin.

In Cameroon, 67% of girls and 70% of boys involved in the study in one area (PU Biteng) claimed that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel comfortable using school latrines. Participants said that school latrines are often filthy, cause illnesses, are mixed sex, and lack privacy and security. Latrines that are far away from school increases risks and incidences of school-related sexual and gender-based violence. On the other hand, 59% of girls and boys from another area (PU Bamenda) claimed that girls always or often feel comfortable using the latrines at school.

"Teachers and pupils use the same toilets. Girls are uncomfortable sharing their toilets with boys and adults," said one adolescent girl in Cameroon.

"The toilets are away from the classrooms and have become a 'crime area'. This is where girls are brutalized and raped and it is equally where boys and girls have their rendezvous," said one adolescent girl in Cameroon.

"The toilets have some opening where boys peep on girls using the toilet, thereby making girls uncomfortable using them," said one adolescent boys in Cameroon.

In Liberia, more girls (60-71%) than boys (33-37%) said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel comfortable using the school latrines.

"Our school toilet is used by the community members … it can be nasty and if you sit on it you get sick," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.

"Others misuse the latrine and when we sit on it, we can suffer from infections. […] boys and girls use the same toilet," said one adolescent girl from Liberia.

Quotes from Benin

School latrines

- *"Girls never feel comfortable using the existing latrines because they are cracked and in poor condition, so they are afraid to use them. They also worry that boys will walk in on them, because the latrines are shared."* – girl, PU Couffo school, Benin
- *"Girls say that there are five latrines at their school, but they do not have access to them because they are not maintained."* – girl, PU Couffo school

Pregnancy

- *"Often, it is the husband that decides—girls rarely have the option to decide if they want to become pregnant. There are some isolated cases—very often among educated individuals—where a husband supports his wife's choice."* - girl, PU Couffo community
- *"After giving birth, girls do not want to return to school because they fear being mocked by their peers. They tell themselves: 'If I go to school, I will feel humiliated.' […] Girls do not go back to school for many reasons, including the fact that they must care for their newborn. They also worry that classmates, teachers and administrators will make fun of them and single them out for setting a bad example."* – girl, PU Couffo school
- *"Girls never come back to school quickly after an early pregnancy. Two years ago at our school, a 16-year-old boy who was a good student started seeing a girl, who then became pregnant. Both were expelled. While the boy was able to attend a different school, the girl stayed home after giving birth: her classmates mocked her and she refused to go back."* – girl, PU Couffo school

Encouragement

- *"Girls, like boys, are always encouraged to get good marks – the teachers encourage the girls to participate in class by giving them compliments like 'very good!' and 'bravo!'"* – girl, PU Couffo
- *"There is no discrimination in class."* – girl, PU Couffo school
- *"Girls also always receive encouragement in the classroom."* – boy, PU Couffo school
- *"Girls are always encouraged to set the example for the other girls and especially to ensure there is a good ambience in the classroom."* – boy, PU Couffo school

Quotes from Cameroon

School latrines

- *"The toilets are away from the classrooms and have become a 'crime area'. This is where girls are brutalized and raped and it is equally where boys and girls have their rendezvous."* – girl, PU Biteng school, Cameroon
- *"It's too dirty. We are not comfortable there at all."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"The toilets are mixed [sex] and do not have walls. The girls prefer not using them at all because of the lack of privacy."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"Teachers and pupils use the same toilets. Girls are uncomfortable sharing their toilets with boys and adults."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"The toilets are messy and usually the cause of illnesses for girls."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"Some boys spy the girls when they are using the toilets."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"The toilets are away from the classrooms and have become a 'crime area'. This is where girls are brutalized and raped and it is equally where boys and girls have their rendezvous."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"The toilets are messed up by boys and girls are afraid of contracting infections."* – boy, PU Biteng school
- *"Girls are never happy to go to the toilet because there is only one toilet for boys and girls."* – boy, PU Biteng school
- *"The toilets have some opening where boys peep on girls using the toilet, thereby making girls uncomfortable using them."* – boy, PU Biteng school

Pregnancy

- *"There was one intelligent girl in my community who is a dropout today due to early pregnancy. Her father refused to provide her school needs requesting her to look for the money like her friends. She tried getting the money her own way and finally ended up with a pregnancy, which has led her to the present predicament."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"It is a disgrace for a girl to get pregnant before marriage in my community, therefore to prevent a mature girl from getting pregnant outside marriage, parents prefer to send them in for an early marriage, even if that is not what the girl wants."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"Girls seldom decide whether or when to get pregnant because sometimes their parents push them to ask for money from boys and boys never give money for nothing."* – girl, PU Biteng community

- *"Some boys refuse to use condoms because they say it reduces pleasure during sex. To convince the girls, they promise them money and gifts from town."* – girl, PU Biteng community

- *"Girls do not decide when they get pregnant because most of the time it happens by accident. Also, they do not know how to prevent it."* – girl, PU Biteng community

- *"Most boys deceive girls. 'I will assume responsibility for the pregnancy should you get pregnant'."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"Many boys refuse to use condoms or remove the condom during sex."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"Due to poverty, some girls are forced to go after men/boys to have money to meet their basic needs."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"Some girls are victims of rape."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"When some have stopped breastfeeding, they are given a second chance to go back to school."* – girl, PU Biteng school

- *"Some parents might babysit while their daughters continue with school."* – girl, PU Bamenda school

- *"When they don't have baby sitters, they can't go back to school."* – girl, PU Biteng school

- *"Girls who have had babies always feel discouraged when they see their friends ahead of them."* – girl, PU Bamenda

- *"Parents do not encourage them to go back to school. Most of them will say 'that is what she wanted, can't continue to waste my money on her. Thus they dare not 'risk' any additional money on the girl anymore as she may go and become pregnant again."* – girl, PU Biteng

- "Most girls after putting to birth will not like to go back to school because of shame due to jeering by their peers." – girl, PU Biteng school

- "With a baby as another responsibility, some parents do not have the means to send back these girls to schools." – boy, PU Biteng school

- "Some girls usually go and stay with the person responsible for their pregnancy and these men do not sent them to school." – boy, PU Biteng school

- "Their husbands do not allow them to continue going to school." – boy, PU Bamenda school
  "There was a girl who could not continue school because after putting to birth she was sick, and hadn't any money to continue schooling, because her father abandoned her with her mother and got married to another woman." – boy, PU Bamenda school

Marriage

- *"There is a high level of co-habitation in my community since most parents refuse to provide for girls needs forcing them to go and live with boys or men who can provide for their needs."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"Some parents use their girl children to settle debts thereby forcing them to get married to people they don't love."* – girl, PU Biteng community

- *"Some parents when they no longer have money decide to send their daughters to marriage because they know they will collect high bride prices."* – girl, PU Biteng community

School

- *"Most parents prefer to send the boys to school when finances are limited, as they believe girls are 'properties' of other families, meanwhile boys will take care of the family in the future."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

- *"Many parents are scared to send their girls to school for fear that they might contract sexually transmissible diseases and get pregnant."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

Class participation

- *"Some girls want to prove their parents' wrong, so they tend to work very hard to succeed in their exams."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"The teacher never asks questions only to boys or girls, but to the whole class so that boys and girls give their answer freely."* – girl, PU Bamenda school
- *"Some girls are very intelligent and to show off, they respond to all questions asked."* – boy, PU Bamenda school
- *"Most girls do not participate in class because they are day dreaming and thinking of the teachers who they are dating, or their boyfriends whom they will meet at the end of classes or their children left at home."* - boy, PU Bamenda school

Sports participation

- *"Boys and girls participate in sport activities, but are not given the same exercises. The girls are not capable of doing as much as boys."* – boy, PU Biteng school, Cameroon
- *"Boys and girls participate in sport activities, but are not given the same exercises. The girls are not capable of doing as much as boys."* – boy, PU Biteng school
- *"Some girls use this as an opportunity to challenge the boys who are weak in sport in their class. Girls are willing to do sports, but boys mock at them when it is not well done."* – boy, PU Biteng school
- *"Girls do not like sport activities, they feel obliged to do it to avoid having Zero marks in their examination."* – boy, PU Biteng school
- *"Girls are weak, soft, lazy and do not like rough activities."* – boy, PU Biteng school
- *"Some girls do not want to smell and have a bad odor in class."* – boy, PU Biteng school

Chore burden at school

- *"The school authorities believe that girls are better cleaners than boys and they turn to assign only the girls."* - boy, PU Bamenda school, Cameroon
- *"Boys believe that it is the girl's duty to clean, sweep, mop the class rooms so they don't participate."* - boy, PU Bamenda school
- *"The school authorities believe that girls are better cleaners than boys and they turn to assign only the girls."* - boy, PU Bamenda school

Speaking up

- *"My mother does not speak to my father of what she feels and she needs, what more of me."* – girl, PU Biteng community

Feeling valued

- *"Issues affecting girls' rights are commonly seen as 'normal', thus no cause for concern."* – girl, PU Bamenda community
- *"The girls are like servants of boys and men. Their issues don't really matter."* – girl, PU Bamenda community

Encouragement

- *"Parents now recognize the credits of an educated girl; many are making efforts for their girls to complete their education."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"Boys are more encouraged than the girls because in a situation where a girl do not secure a job at the end of her education, she still has the chance of getting married and her husband taking care of her. But for boys, once you cannot have a job, no woman will like to get married to a jobless man."* – girl, PU Biteng school
- *"Most of our parents are now recognizing the benefits of educating girl children, as it is mostly girls who think of their parents when they pick up a job. [Our] community has greatly developed with beautiful houses built and parents travelling abroad, thanks to girl children who have succeeded in life. Thus most parents tend to place more encouragement on girls in schools."* – girl, PU Bamenda school

- *"Some parents still encourage boys more than girls to succeed in schools and will invest limited resources only on boys education as opposed to girls, as they still believe girls are 'property of other families', and hope that their boy children's success will mean success for their families."* – girl, PU Bamenda school
- *"Because girls can likely be pregnant at any moment, encouraging and investing in their education may mean 'wastage of resources for the family'."* – girl, PU Bamenda

Leadership

- *"Students have the right to choose their leaders irrespective of their sex."* – girl, PU Bamenda school
- *"When you are the most intelligent, you can become the class prefect irrespective of whether you are a boy or a girl, e.g. we have female and male school prefects, however girls occupy most leadership positions in my school as they are more intelligent."* – girl, PU Bamenda school

Quotes from Liberia

School latrines

- *"Our school toilet is used by the community members … it can be nasty and if you sit on it you get sick.''* – girl, PU Bomi school, Liberia
- *"Others misuse the latrine and when we sit on it, we can suffer from infections. […] boys and girls use the same toilet."* – girl, PU Bomi school
- *"We do not have privacy using the latrines. The boys also use our latrines*." – girl, PU Bomi school

Feeling valued

- *"Most of the girls said that they feel valued because their parents speak on their behalf when there are problems."* – girl, PU Lofa community
- *"Some said that their parents are treating them well because the girls will take care of them in old age."* – girl, PU Lofa community

Safety at school

- *"We and the boys are friendly and the teachers serve as parents to protect us at school"* – girl, PU Bomi school
- *"When we are at school, we feel free because no one is disturbing us."* – girl, PU Lofa school
- *''We are always safe at school because our teachers create safe learning environment for everybody".* – boy, PU Lofa

Sports participation

- *''Boys and girls are participating in sports activities equally.''* – boy, PU Bomi school
- *''Boys and girls are participating in sports activities because sports bring unity and also make us to associate.''* – boy, PU Bomi school

Pregnancy

- *''Early pregnancy makes girls responsible soon and they drop out of school.''* – girl, PU Lofa school
- *"We get pregnant because we are not protected.''* – girl, PU Lofa school
- *"[…] we are not taking prevention and we drop out of school when we get pregnant".* – girl, PU Lofa school
- *"Some girls get pregnant because of material things."* – girl, PU Lofa school
- *"Because some of us are poor, we look for our daily needs to make it, and in the process get pregnant."* - girl, PU Lofa school
- *"Sometimes we do not attend school after having babies. Because we have additional responsibility."* – boy, PU Bomi school
- *"We have to look for daily means to take care of the baby*.'' – boy, PU Bomi school
- *"We have [the] chance to go to school when we have baby, but not girls".* – boy, PU Lofa school