



Girls in Cambodia

In 2006 Plan International UK began a research study following a group of 142 girls and their families from nine countries across three continents (Benin, Brazil, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, the Philippines, Togo, Uganda and Vietnam). The aim of the study was to track a cohort of girls from birth to 18 in order to better understand the reality of their daily lives. This report is the culmination of the first 10 years of this primary research. The study documents the detailed experiences of the girls, their families and the environments they live in. It helps to put a human face on the available statistics, theories and academic discussions, including the voices of the girls themselves – describing their hopes and dreams and their daily realities. It provides genuine insight into the way family and community shape girls' expectations of what they can do, and be, right from the very beginning.

Plan International UK strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. As an independent development and humanitarian charity, we work alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

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Photos in this report are not of the cohort girls

Cover image: A girl in the Philippines



Real Choices, Real Lives: Girls' Burden of Unpaid Care



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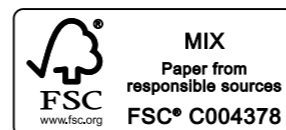
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Part 1 : Eleven Years On

Introduction

In 2006, Plan International UK began a research study following a group of 142 girls from nine countries¹ across three continents. The 'Real Choices, Real Lives' cohort study was initially set up to bring to life the analysis and statistics being presented in Plan International UK's 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' report series, first published in 2007. The aim of the cohort study is to follow the lives of the girls involved from birth until the age of 18. The information from the cohort study provides real insight into the daily experiences of girls and their families worldwide.

'Real Choices, Real Lives' is a relatively small cohort study but it enables Plan International UK to examine, in depth and in detail, a range of issues affecting girls' lives. Every year, researchers visit the girls and their families to document the changing world in which the girls are growing up and to see how their lives are developing. A longitudinal study of this sort is rare and, over the years, researchers have been able to track and monitor the different life stages of the girls taking part and the factors that influence them. The in-depth qualitative research undertaken provides rich and nuanced material about the girls themselves, and also illuminates the attitudes and behaviour of the families and communities they are part of.

The purpose of the study is to build a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities that girls face as they grow up in various countries around the world. This unique dataset is gathering information on the social, economic, cultural and institutional variables that influence girls' lives and opportunities through

the perspectives of girls themselves. It demonstrates what these very varied countries have in common with regard to the experiences of girls as they approach adolescence and where and sometimes why there are differences. By documenting and analysing the girls' thoughts and experiences at different stages of their lives the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study is able to foster a clearer understanding of the root causes of gender inequality and of the social norms, attitudes and cultural practices, which are embedded at home and in community life. This analysis is important: first of all to inform how we support girls in our work and the findings from this study will also enable Plan International to develop wider recommendations for targeting gender inequality at a policy and programme level.

2017: Eleven Years Old

The girls in the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study are now 11 years old. Plan International UK has tracked their lives from birth – through their first steps, first words, first experiences of school, their developing independence as they progressed into middle childhood – and now, for the last two years, their transition into early adolescence, their experiences of puberty and their developing understanding of the world around them and their role in it. Alongside the girls, we've talked to the families, mostly parents, some grandparents and other relatives, about their attitudes towards parenting and gender roles at home, and how these have changed – or stayed the same – as we have followed the girls through the different stages of infancy and childhood.



Eleven years of gathering in-depth qualitative data has enabled us to identify the influences shaping the girls' lives as they enter their second year of early adolescence. We can see how family dynamics, economic status and the physical and cultural environment the girls live and interact with offers opportunity or to impedes progress. This longitudinal approach allows us to analyse the most powerful individual and collective factors exerting control over the lives, and gender roles, of the girls in our study. As the new data comes in, we reflect on the girls' experiences, looking at the economic situation of the family, their health and how they are getting on at school. The girls talk about their hopes and aspirations, and express their opinions

and their fears.

In addition to the annual update findings this year, the analysis will concentrate on how, and to what extent, established gender roles and social customs are increasing the time girls spend on household chores and care work, and what impact this is having on their opportunities to learn and develop. As their domestic responsibilities increase (which they have done, in most cases, each year of the study), time poverty will undoubtedly affect their academic success and their capacity to find decent work. Each of these factors perpetuate entrenched gender roles and keep women and girls from realising their potential. Since their early childhoods, the girls in this study

have been prescribed a 'curriculum of chores' to follow in order for them to be considered "good" girls, daughters, sisters and future wives.

Our data clearly indicates that the burden of domestic work is perpetuating gender inequality and limiting girls' opportunities at school and in terms of their economic and social empowerment. As the girls get older, Plan International UK will be particularly interested in continuing to track the impact of this curriculum of chores and its potential to exacerbate risk of vulnerability to violence later in life.

As the girls move into early adolescence and puberty, we have also found, in this year, that there are varying levels of knowledge and understanding of sexual and reproductive health. The data shows that most of the girls who do report knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, whether it is correct or not,

gather their information from female family members. It's clear that if there is a continued lack of information, or continued misinformation, about safe sex practices, then the girls in the study could be at risk of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

In 2017, we conducted a retrospective analysis of the girls' experiences of violence.² The analysis found there has been a marked and worrying trend in the number of them reporting varying levels of abuse as they move into early adolescence from middle-childhood. Our analysis indicates that this is linked to two factors: as they enter puberty their identity becomes increasingly sexualised – they are no longer seen as little girls – and their increased mobility. They travel further to school, for example, and this potentially puts them at increased risk of violence.



Girls in Togo

Acceptors, Consenters and Resistors: Tracking the changes from 10 to 18

"Girls are weak... If [they are strong], no one will love us when we grow up. We should also beautify our body. At Pchum Ben (a religious festival), we should make up our face... It is okay if boys are not beautiful, but they must be rich."

Roumany, Cambodia

All of the girls in the study are aware of the social rules and structures that surround their home life, their relationships with family members and their school activities. Questions about household chores and play reveal early differences surrounding the families' expectations of what girls and boys can and should do. The girls in the study reflected this from an early age. Not all of them are happy to conform to the roles generally imposed upon

them and the extent to which they agree with or challenge this stereotyping varies.

Our analysis over the last two years has identified three groups among the girls and their families, largely categorised as follows:

- The 'acceptors' – those who do not appear to question gender norms;
- The 'consenters' – those who demonstrate attitudes that question gender norms but do not feel able or want to challenge them;
- The 'resistors' – those who challenge gender norms both in their attitudes and, in varying degrees, their behaviours.

"Girls are not given equal chances as the boys to go school... No, it's not fair... Because the girls are left at home working as the boys go to school."

Mirembe, Uganda

Although these groupings are proving useful to our analysis – the girls do not always fit neatly

into the categories of acceptor, consentor or resistor. They have changed over time and will continue to do so. We are currently looking at a multitude of factors which may influence an individual girl's ability to resist and at why they support resistance in some girls and not others. The factors emerging range from the availability of positive role models, to a girl's position in the family, to levels of poverty, as well as the prevailing attitudes in the community and the individual's family. For example, a recent study in Uganda has shown the importance of parental ideas, particularly mothers' views, on shaping and challenging gender norms. In some communities, ideas around girls' early marriage are slowly beginning to shift. The researchers found that some parents had more equitable views on girls' education and if decisions needed to be made on whether or not to take children out of school, they felt these should be based on academic performance rather than gender. They also recognised the importance of

education for girls, especially in enabling girls to cope if a (later) marriage did not go well.³

Going forward, the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study will be able to do in-depth longitudinal analysis of some of the resistors and their families, like Ayomide quoted below, to tease out the factors that encourage resilience and the ability to challenge the status quo. Tracking these changes will, over the years, help our understanding of the multiple factors – individual, political and cultural – which support or impede girls' ability to resist gender stereotyping in all aspects of their lives.

"No, my parents don't expect different things from me and my sisters in relation to my brothers because they want the best for all of us. I think that this is normal... My dream is to become a minister. I have designed my office and I see myself sitting in it arranging my files."

Ayomide, Togo

Education

As with previous years we have found that at age 11, the cohort girls and their families are largely committed to their continuing education. Overall, parents want their children including their daughters to enjoy a better education than their own. They see it as driving positive change in the girls' lives. The girls themselves also have high hopes: they often report to Plan International UK researchers that they would like to complete secondary school and go on to study at university.

Hopes, dreams and worries

"I would like to go as far as university and gain a doctors diploma. I dream about becoming a doctor because this is what my mother had started to study before becoming pregnant; she had to abandon her studies. I would like to make her proud of me."

Thea, Benin

However, despite the high educational aspirations among families, parental worry about being unable to support the girls financially to progress academically has intensified. This mainly due to increasing poverty and reliance on single and insecure income streams, such as rain-fed agricultural labour. Melanie's mother in the Philippines told our researchers:

"I'm worried that she might be dreaming of finishing her studies but we fail as parents to support her... She's so interested in her studies that she wakes up at four in the morning, especially if there are school competitions... If she has a dream that she wants to pursue, and we can't afford to support it,



A girl in
Vietnam

I'm just worried about what she might think. That's what I'm worried about. I'm scared that her mind might change into something else."

Melanie's mother, the Philippines

Likewise, as the girls get older, parents have become increasingly vocal about the risks of gender-based violence: harmful practices such

as child marriage, early pregnancy and sexual violence – all potential barriers to the cohort girls progressing academically.

"Well, I am scared she might get married too young, that at least I can prevent, because I want her to learn, not to pay attention to too many boys. She knows that once you get involved with a man, you tend to forget about school."

Sharina's mother,
Dominican Republic

At 11 years old, the girls have a varied curriculum at school, covering reading, writing, mathematics and physical education. Most are now literate, to varying levels, and many report learning another language, such as English, in addition to their mother tongue. However, many of the girls still have trouble reading and writing and many of them, and their parents, worry about not understanding the school curriculum. Consequently, in some cases, academic progress is slow and leads to grade repetition.

"I don't think there are any other subjects she should be learning. What worries me is the new curriculum, I wish the government would change it because we can't get on top of it."

Alice's mother, Benin

"Missing some classes..."

This year, all the girls, except for one, are enrolled in primary school but attendance is a different issue. Fourteen girls reported having to repeat a grade and while only one reported attending irregularly, 51 reported "missing some classes" and six girls reported having dropped out

of their classes at some point.

Whatever the precise reason for poor attendance at school, poverty plays a central role: the inability to afford school fees or school-related costs are a key concern for the families in the study. Beti from Uganda, like many girls in the cohort sample, told our researchers that she is regularly sent home from school because her fees have not been paid:

"I went to school and was sent back home for school fees... [It annoys me] to just sit home when every time I go to school, they send me back home for school fees."

Beti, Uganda

There are other issues leading to poor attendance. Some families have reported distance as a barrier. Transport may cost money, parents may not be comfortable with their daughters walking to school unsupervised and taking them has an impact on the parents' time for work or household tasks:

"This year, my family condition is worse because we are impoverished, and local weather is unfavourable for a good yield. My family is in this condition because my father is very old, my husband is disabled, and my children are too young to earn money. Davy is never absent from school, but sometimes she goes to school late because she doesn't have a bicycle and the school is far."

Davy's mother, Cambodia

Others have reported safety fears: both the danger from passing traffic on the journey to school and the risk of gender-based violence is a key concern for the girls' families.



As they get older, the girls themselves report that this risk of violence is increasingly becoming a reality:

“Something bad could happen if it’s too far. There is always a fight, and sometimes I say: ‘Francisca, let’s go through this alley here’, because I do not want to go near a fight.”

Tatiana, Brazil

As the girls become more aware of the violence around them, and their vulnerability to it, their fear of it is also increasing:

“Long ago (maybe two years), a nine-year-old girl was raped in the forest and she was beaten to give

her bracelet and necklace... I was [also] afraid to travel on the lower road where my aunt was [nearly] hit with a club. Only women were hit.”

Roumany, Cambodia

These incidents are bound to influence both the families’ willingness to let their girls out of their sight and the girls’ own attitudes, which will have an impact on their journey to school.

“When I ride my bicycle to school alone, I am afraid of being raped as the road to school is quiet.”

Sokhana, Cambodia

Other families report that poor-quality education is a crucial factor in inconsistent attendance: irregular

teaching schedules, lack of teachers, and inadequate teaching means that they don’t see any benefit from their daughters going to school. Juliana’s mother, for example, has been very frustrated with the quality of available state-funded education. She wanted to send Juliana to a private school, as she thinks the quality and consistency is better, but this year has been very difficult financially – her husband recently lost his job so she has been unable to do so.

“...The teachers miss work very often. [Juliana] hardly ever has classes – when there is no water, there is no class there. It’s a mess, and it seems that the school building is rented and as the mayor is not paying the rent, there’s a huge problem. And who suffers the most? The students... Juliana (and her sister) have always done so well at school... and after she came to study here, at this school, her performance fell a lot, do you see?”

Juliana’s mother, Brazil

Irregularity of attendance is a complex issue, which is widely regarded as affecting girls’ development and educational attainment globally. Some of the girls in the study, particularly older siblings, have reported on their own and others’ experiences of missing school due to daily chores or care work at home, or helping with agricultural labour at harvest time. Additionally, adolescent girls are often the ones looking after siblings when their mothers are ill or need to work: as other research studies have noted, this contribution to the family income comes at a cost.⁴

In poorer households, mothers are often forced to choose between their income-earning potential and their

daughters’ education. It is “a choice that no mother should be forced to make, and no child should have to live with.”⁵ This domestic burden placed upon older girls, at the expense of their education and future prospects, will be discussed in greater detail later in the report.

There are, of course, girls within our sample who report a combination of the reasons highlighted above, or all, as to why they are attending school irregularly, or dropping out altogether.



A girl travels to school in Cambodia

Case Study: Nimisha, Uganda

"(This year we've experienced) poverty that we never expected..."

Nimisha lives in a semi-rural area of Uganda, in one of the poorest districts with her parents and siblings. Over the years, the family have struggled with illness and poverty and the consequences have been serious. When Nimisha's elder step-brother died two years ago, the family were in a desperate situation. They could not afford the funeral costs and felt unable to ask neighbours or those in their community for help.

Nimisha and other family members suffer regularly with malaria. This year, the family reported that Nimisha's malaria was so bad that she had been underperforming at school as a result. They also said that famine had forced them to reduce the family's food intake, leaving Nimisha and her siblings with only one meal a day.

The resulting hunger and poor nutrition have also contributed to Nimisha's poor academic progress this year. She is small for her age and her family believe that malaria has stunted her growth. Her father sees a clear link between Nimisha's poor academic progress and the combined impact of poverty, hunger and malaria:

"What I know is that she would have performed better at school than she did if she had not caught malaria. It was very serious and also the famine affected her. Hunger is sickness so these two things are mixed up."

Despite this, Nimisha's parents have high hopes for her education, they want her to progress and go further than they did:

"Nimisha being at school, I hope that if she completes school she can find herself a better life."

To add to this, Nimisha's father, the family's main breadwinner, has an ongoing illness which he has not been able to seek treatment for. He says that the hospital is too far away and too expensive. His illness prevents him from being able to work – harvesting and selling the family's



A girl and her father, East Africa

crops – as much as he would like to. His illness is one of the driving forces behind the family's extreme poverty and lack of basic food.

Despite Nimisha's father's fairly open approach to gender roles at school, and the home, it seems that tasks and responsibilities within the household are still split according to traditional patriarchal lines, with Nimisha's mother and her female siblings performing the majority of household chores. Nimisha's father says that he sometimes helps out with cooking the meals:

"I sometimes go to cook. I don't want to lose my wife since I am now old, where will I get another one?"

Last year our researchers reported that he was peeling yams in preparation for the family meal with Nimisha's help.

Nimisha herself reports that she spends nearly 10 hours per day on household chores: including ironing and washing clothes, sweeping, cooking, digging and washing utensils. Nimisha says she carries out these chores with her mother and spends time practicing reading with her father. It is hard to see, if she does this every day, where and how Nimisha would have time to take part in school and homework activities or in playing and developing friendships.

Nimisha's father and male siblings carry out chores outside of the house such as bricklaying, chopping wood or agricultural work. When asked about the difference between men and women's chores, Nimisha says that women cook, and that this is fair because "that is what women are supposed to be doing". Over the years the family have alluded to being worried about gender-based violence in the community, and are particularly worried about Nimisha being kidnapped as she was at the age of two:

Q. *Do you have any worries as Nimisha travels to school or while she is at school?*

"Apart from these people who are planting sugar canes everywhere, we had no problems because the kidnappers one time had taken her when she was just two years [old]. This keeps worrying us that it might happen again because everywhere they go to collect water is full of canes."

Nimisha says the best part of her day is praying, "because I can pray to God whatever I want him to do for me". She can see that she has grown up and no longer plays the same games such as "blowing sand, role playing mother and father, cooking food, making dolls and building houses" because, as she says, "I am grown up now". Nimisha enjoys school; her favourite subject is mathematics, and she reports also enjoying cleaning the classroom, which she says is done more by boys than girls. Nimisha says that boys and girls play separately at school in completely different areas. She would like to stay in school until the grade 'senior six' and she would like to become a nurse in the future. Nimisha says it is important for both girls and boys to have equal opportunities to study: "So that we can help the nation."

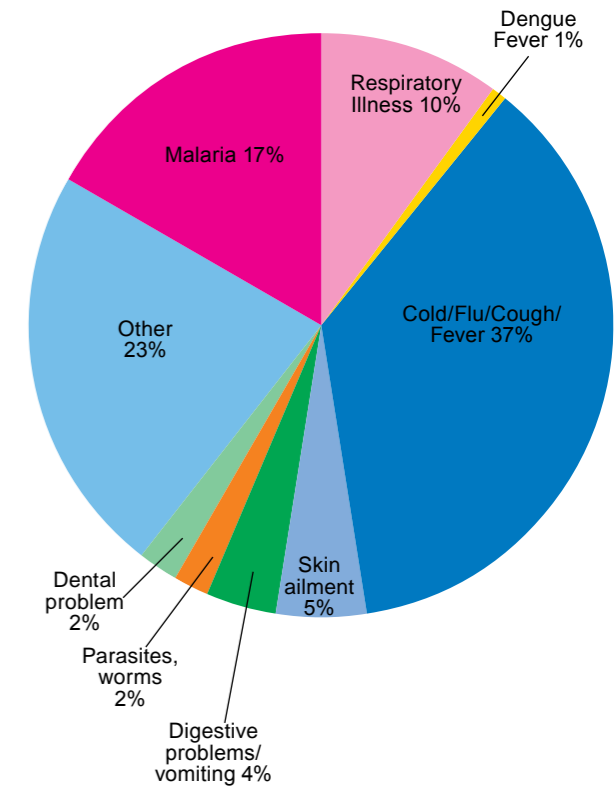
Unfortunately, Nimisha's story is a common one. Many girls in the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study, are struggling with a combination of poverty and ill health which affects their academic progress and may continue to have an impact for the rest of their lives.

Health

This year, the majority of health problems reported were coughs and colds, sometimes developing into more serious respiratory issues. However, over the years, many of the girls in the study have been affected by serious illnesses which are exacerbated by poverty and a lack of information. Malaria is often reported and this year, 14 girls were affected by it: eight in Uganda, five in Togo and one in Benin.

Nearly all of the girls in the Ugandan, Togolese and Benin cohorts have been affected by malaria at some point during their lives.

Type of Illness Reported



Sexual and Reproductive Health:

"I have heard of this at school. We were taught about puberty, and reproductive and sexual health, but I don't remember it. I think it is good for us to be knowledgeable."

Bopha, Cambodia

As the girls progress into early adolescence, our data has reflected further on their attitudes towards, and knowledge of, menstruation, sexual and reproductive health education as well as their thoughts on marriage and pregnancy:

"I sometimes wonder how girls become pregnant, I'm trying to understand this as soon I'll be a big girl."

Annabelle, Benin

Some of the girls reported being afraid of menstruation and others admitted knowing nothing about it. Most quoted what they had learned at school, though some had also talked to their mothers or other female relatives.



A girl in the Dominican Republic

"My mom was telling me that when I start developing, I have to be a good girl and not fall in love at 10 or at 11 – the same as the other girls..."

In memory of...

Sadly, seven of the girls from the original cohort have died. Lillian from Benin, Aisosa from Togo and Nicole from the Philippines died in accidents. Nicole drowned, a leading cause of death for children in the Philippines. She had no sanitation facilities at home and was swept away while using the river.

Nasiche from Uganda died from malaria; Omalara from Benin and Izegbe and Isoka from Togo died from undiagnosed illnesses.

All these deaths come back to poverty – the 'accidents' to poor housing and lack of sanitation facilities and the 'undiagnosed' illnesses to malnutrition, the cost of medical care and the distance to a medical centre. Six of the deaths occurred before the girls reached their fifth birthday.

In recent years, the global under-five mortality rate has declined by more than half, dropping from 12.7 million in 1990 to six million in 2015. However, despite this, in 2015 16,000 under-fives were dying every day.⁶ The deaths of the girls in our study can only emphasise further how important it is to maintain the focus on reducing under-five mortality.

the same as her, since she started falling in love with my father at age 13... Menstruation... when you have that already, you can't eat fish, you can't eat anything. And it's better [that way], you see, because they tell me that that's good."

Q. And what have they (the teachers) said about sex?

"Sex is with a male's penis and a female's vulva."

Q. And how to avoid pregnancy? Have they talked about that?

"To not have sex."

Stephany, El Salvador

As this quote shows, like many of the girls in the study, Stephany has some knowledge of menstruation and pregnancy through her mother and also her teachers at school, but the advice is misinformed. Apart from promoting abstinence, she has been given no information about pregnancy prevention. The mothers of the cohort girls in El Salvador were all under 18 when they got pregnant and many of them were in their early teens – demonstrating the need for more effective forms of contraception to be available and understood.

Dolores, from the Philippines, where the subject seems to be addressed more openly, had one of the clearest views on why education about sex and reproduction is so important:

"It's good [to be taught about menstruation, sex and how to avoid getting pregnant]... To avoid getting pregnant early... If you got pregnant early, you'll get sick... Well, she doesn't know how to take care of her baby yet... It will destroy her studies, if she got pregnant early... She might not return to school, because she'll always be mocked [or laughed at]."

There are notable differences between the levels of knowledge the girls have and how explicitly these things are discussed. In West Africa, for example, many of the parents have forbidden our researchers to ask questions focusing on these topics. Where questions were asked, many of the girls in the West African cohort reported that their knowledge was very limited:

"I know about looking after my body but I don't know what puberty is."

Reine, Togo

The bulk of any knowledge they do have tends to come largely from older female family members. Ayomide, when asked about periods, told researchers:

"Yes, I know what to expect. My sisters have explained it to me." In Uganda, Amelia had learnt from "girls at school and my friends".

These findings are supported by the wider academic literature which also reports a considerable lack of knowledge among young girls – and boys – on issues around menstruation and reproduction. For example, in Cambodia, several studies highlight the lack of knowledge and education among young people on issues around puberty and sex education.⁷ Although girls sought advice from their mothers or other female relatives on menstruation, widespread persistent negative attitudes toward menstruation were reinforced in schools through lack of information and appropriate menstrual hygiene management measures, all of which contributed to girls' fear and confusion around menarche.⁸ Similarly in Uganda, particularly in rural areas, girls remain uneducated about these issues.⁹

Family Economics

Yet again this year, the majority of the families in the cohort study have reported that their economic situation has declined. This is particularly evident, as the graph below highlights, for the countries in the study sample where families are reliant on rain-fed agriculture, such as Uganda, Togo, Benin and Cambodia. Families report of changing, or more extreme, weather patterns, which reduce agricultural production, affecting both their diet and their livelihood. They also talk of food prices rising as a result of crop failure.

“This year we experienced a long drought when it should have been the rainy season which adversely affected our crops. As a result we were often left hungry in the middle of the day even the children, including Tene. I remember one time when I came back from the market, she was lying on the

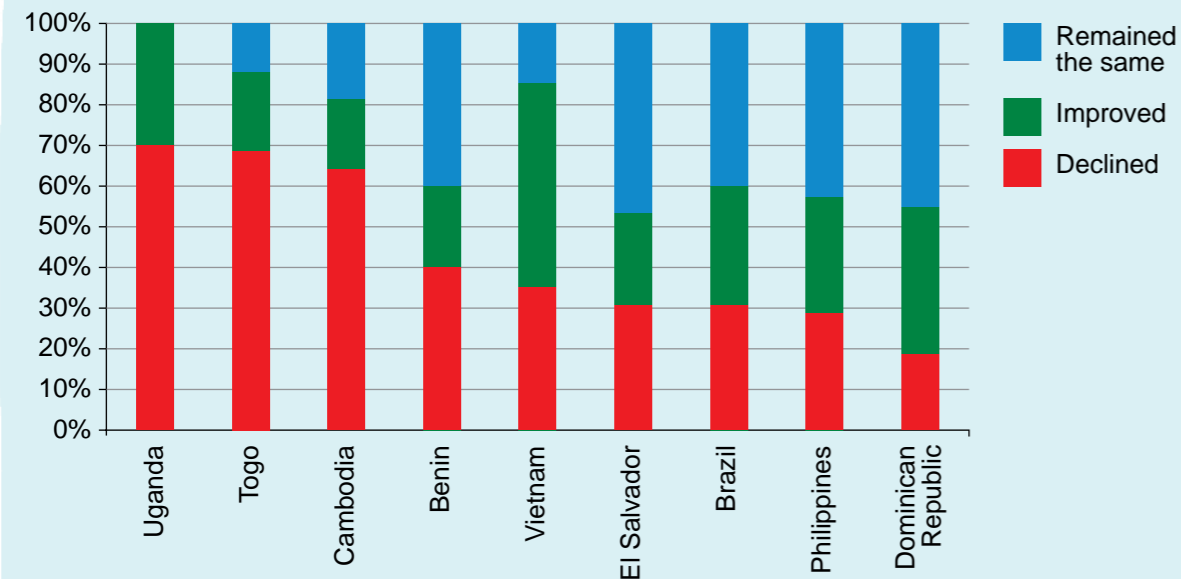
terrace and said she couldn’t go to school that afternoon as she was too hungry so she had to stay at home.”

Tene's mother, Togo

Families’ responses to this economic decline and subsequent food shortages has varied. However, as with previous years many parents adopt the ‘work harder, eat less’¹⁰ approach as their only option. In addition, many of the families experiencing extreme economic hardship have reported being late paying school fees, or not paying them at all. Unlike many of the Ugandan cohort, Justine's family have a more diverse income stream than most – her mother has set up a small business selling cassava chips and petrol, and her father is a farmer who also works as a veterinary assistant. However, despite this, even they have reported an economic decline this year and like many of the

Reports of changes in families’ economic status (2017)

Ordered by % reporting a decline



A girl in Uganda

Ugandan families in the study, have only been able to eat one meal per day and have been late paying Justine's school fees:

“We do not have enough food to eat compared to other days due to less harvest caused by the long drought... Sometimes we have difficulties in paying Justine's school fees... We go in for loans but all in all, we need to work hard.”

Justine's mother, Uganda

Other Ugandan families like Jane's, who are extremely impoverished, dependent only on small-scale agricultural produce, also report how much they are struggling. This

year, Jane's mother described how essential items such as posho (a staple maize/flour based food) and soap had increased in price, making it difficult for the family to afford to buy them. As well as the increase in the price of shop-bought items, drought caused the families’ crops to fail, leaving them with not enough to eat, difficulty in paying for school fees and other essentials and at risk of increasing their debt:

“Our crops have dried up because of too much sunshine and there is no food for our family... We depend on crops. This means lack of money. [Jane] gets little food, and we have delayed payment of her (school) fees.”

Jane's mother, Uganda

Case Study: Rebeca, El Salvador

Rebeca lives with her grandmother, her aunt, her baby cousin and her aunt's partner. Rebeca's step-grandfather does not appear to live in the household, though he is responsible for supporting the family financially. The family were evicted from their home last year, and had to move to a rural area. They live in a house owned by a family member who has agreed to let them stay there as they had nowhere else to go. Rebeca's father has migrated to the United States and sends remittances to the family, but this seems to be irregular. Not much is mentioned of Rebeca's mother, though from time to time, the family report having to asking her for financial support.

"Sometimes when my mom doesn't have the money or we don't have enough to get her medicine, we ask Rebeca's mother and say to her, 'Look, give us money for medicine for your daughter, help her out', because it's almost obligatory that we go because my mom is prideful and she says that it's been hard for her to raise the girl. She wants to see how she turns out, but when we have no other options we do have to go running to her."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

Her grandmother is very protective of Rebeca and views her as her own daughter:

"She adores her. She gives her everything. She goes around with her, gives her little things and since she says she's like her daughter, she's getting bigger and she asks her for little things, and I see that she does love her."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

Rebeca's family treat her with an extra degree of care due to her general health and developmental problems. She has a number of health conditions, such as a bad heart

which she had surgery for last year, as well as bad asthma. She also appears to have some learning difficulties as well as problems interacting with other children socially:

"Well, she doesn't talk and they make fun of her. They're mean to her, they tease her, and since she doesn't talk, she can't defend herself... She tries to play more with other girls, although both boys and girls bother her, she gets along more with girls."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

Rebeca's educational progress has been slow and marred by illness and financial difficulty. This year, she dropped out of school half-way through the academic year, because "she didn't want to go anymore". She was in a grade three years below her age-appropriate level and was unable to progress to the next grade because she could not read, and worryingly, her family report that she is actually getting worse academically. Rebeca herself told researchers that she liked her classes but didn't like "sweeping" and when asked how boys and girls behave in school, she answered "badly".

The family income is insecure. They do not grow crops and have to buy all their food as well as other household items. They are vulnerable to rising prices and, this year, their financial situation got worse as Rebeca's step-grandfather, who had been the main breadwinner, was unable to work. Rebeca's grandmother works "in a house" doing domestic work and supplements this by doing laundry. Rebeca's uncle (her aunt's partner) works as a waiter seven days per week, earning \$8 a day. The family also receive remittances from time to time from Rebeca's father:

"Well, regarding the economy, my stepfather worked in the fisherman's dock before but he has been without work for almost a year... and my mom has started working but money isn't coming in like it used to."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador



A girl and her pet rabbit, El Salvador

"That hadn't ever happened to us..."

The loss of Rebeca's step-grandfather's income has been significant. Spending on essentials like food and health care has been reduced which has been distressing, especially when the children go hungry:

"It's affected us quite a bit because, as I said, my stepfather was left without a job and his money doesn't make ends meet. My mom lost her job and had to start up the bread sales. Sometimes we'd just eat two eggs with beans, and since Rebeca likes things to be abundant, she'd cry and my mom would feel desperate. That hadn't ever happened to us."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

The family live in a small building:

"There are just two rooms. The other one is for the kitchen and so we wanted to make another little room so that my mom and Vilma could move into it. But because of money we haven't been able to do it."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

Money has been so tight that the family have needed help with their daily living expenses:

"Thank God we have family close by, and always God. There's always someone who would help us."

Q. And in what way?

"They'd give us food for the day."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

Rebeca seems to have few friends but, despite the family's increasing poverty, is fortunate in the support she gets from her grandmother and her aunt. They appear keen for her to finish her studies although, according to her aunt, Rebeca herself does not like school:

"She said that they would hit her and take her money away but my mom says that maybe that was an excuse not to go so she sent her this year."

There are several factors, including Rebeca's academic difficulties, which might prevent her from continuing at school: the family's poverty, her own reluctance to go and her lack of social skills all make life extremely hard.

Q. What could keep Rebeca from reaching that level in her studies?

"The economic part, or that she no longer wants to, or that her friends reject her, more than anything when you don't have friends at school you feel very alone."

Rebeca's aunt, El Salvador

A family in the Philippines



The Informal Economy

Many of the families in the cohort study, across all countries, rely on work in the agricultural or informal sector. If they fall ill – for a short, or long period, or another family member falls ill and they have to care for them – there will be no money coming in. As many of the families cannot afford preventative measures against diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, this means the ‘breadwinners’ of the house are often sick, creating gaps in employment and income and adding pressure to children in the household to fill the gaps, whether it is inside the home or outside in the fields. Children will often be required to care for sick relatives, and due to gender roles, this often falls to the girls in the family.

“My family condition has changed. This year, we were short of food in the middle of the year because we were sickly, and my husband had to do the farming alone. Lina is fine. I try my best not to let my children go hungry... My spending increases

when I am sick and I must pay my debts to others and the bank. When we are short of food, I borrow money from the bank and sell my labour.”

Lina's mother, Cambodia

The countries in the study, like the Philippines, where families are more likely to have a dual or diverse income stream tend to have reported a more stable economic situation over the past year. Rubylyn's father in the Philippines works as a hired day labourer at coconut plantations and other agricultural sites, but he also works for a motorbike delivery service:

“Yes, he's only doing labour. But if someone gives him the opportunity to ride a motorcycle, since he knows how to ride it, then he also does it because he's getting paid driving it.”

Rubylyn's mother, the Philippines

The families in the cohort study who receive a form of social support from the government are also able to boost

their income and have a little protection from the ups and downs of the wider economy. The Philippines, Brazil and the Dominican Republic are the only three countries where families reported government financial support schemes. Though, in previous years, families in both El Salvador and Vietnam have also received some sort of government assistance. In the absence of state help, many rely on informal networks of friends and family to help them out and increasing numbers of mothers migrate for work leaving children in the care of grandparents. This year, a total of 16 of the cohort study girls are living with their grandparents or in some cases great grandparents.

Violence

As we have seen in the earlier section on education in this report, girls' mobility is restricted by the violence they have both heard about and experienced. This is yet another factor reinforcing their domestic role and keeping them more confined to home and their immediate neighbourhood than their male peers.

Global research with girls and women over the years also indicates that violence is one of the key barriers to gender equality. Girls talk about their experience of it at home, at school and in their wider communities.^{11,12} They do not feel safe. Both the fear and the fact of violence saps girls' confidence, and limits their opportunities: it keeps them “in their place”.

This year, we looked specifically at the experiences of violence among the girls and their families taking part in Plan's ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ cohort study sample and there has been an increase in the total number of girls reporting incidences of violence: 109 11-year-old girls reported violence, compared to 74 10-year-olds. As girls grow so too does their experience of violence and

– as mirrored in wider research – it happens at home, at school and in the community. Our analysis of the girls' experiences looks at physical (including sexual), emotional and structural violence (for example non-individual, institutionalised violence); the perpetrators can be parents, family members, teachers and peers, as well as strangers.

This is a worrying development, and could be attributed to the girls now moving into early adolescence and increasing both their mobility and their visibility. They may walk further to school, they may run errands or see friends who are outside the immediate family circle. They are also approaching puberty and will be increasingly viewed as sexual objects. These changes in their lives are all accompanied by rising risk.

They're afraid...

Many girls have grown up in homes and communities where violence is rife. In El Salvador and Brazil, gang violence occurs on a daily basis; many of the girls' mothers have reported partner violence and abusive relationships. It is worth noting that all of the mothers in the El Salvadorian cohort were under the age of 18 at the birth of their first child; the youngest was only 13 – just two years older than the girls in our research study.

“Yes (It is dangerous for girls to walk to school alone)... because there are a lot of crazy men drinking booze on the streets. The girls are afraid... They're afraid to walk alone at night.”

Natália, 2017, Brazil

In Uganda, despite being only 11 years old, the girls in the cohort fear being raped while walking to school and



A girl and her sister, El Salvador

tell of other girls in their communities which this has happened to. Likewise, in the Asian cohort countries, girls fear being attacked or kidnapped on their way to school and report high levels of violence when they get there.

Violence at school is the most common form of violence reported by girls across our cohort study, and peers, rather than teachers, are the main perpetrators of that violence. In 2017, there were 77 reports of violence at school – 65 inflicted by other children, 12 by adults. Girls tell of boys bullying them verbally and physically: describing boys pushing their way into the school toilets and harassing them. Many girls are now reducing the amount of time they spend playing and socialising with boys, who they see as “rough” and “violent”. Some girls appear to have distanced themselves from boys altogether, creating separate gendered spaces.

“Teachers treat girls well. They advise them not to go around

looking for a boyfriend because no one wants to go around with a big belly at a very young age.”

Gabriela, 11, El Salvador

It is not only the girls who are concerned about violence at school – their parents are increasingly worried about their daughters being attacked, raped or kidnapped on their way to school and becoming pregnant as a result. Some parents and grandparents accompany their daughters on the often long journey to school, but others are unable to do this and many girls travel alone. The study will continue to monitor whether these safety risks will affect the parents’ continued support for their daughters’ schooling as they get further into adolescence. It is already clear from earlier focus group discussions with older adolescent girls in the cohort communities that opportunities for girls can become restricted in later adolescence due to the threat of sexual violence.

“Education must be equal for boys and girls; our rights must be equal, too, but this doesn’t happen. Often, we want to take a professional course, but the community doesn’t offer it. Our mothers never let us take a course outside the community because normally the school is far from home and they are afraid of sexual violence and harassment. The boys want to go too, and there isn’t enough money for both, so the boys end up taking the course.”

Teenage girl, Brazil

The data demonstrates not only that violence becomes increasingly common during the transition from middle childhood into early adolescence. Violence, or the fear of it, is often used at home to teach a curriculum of gender roles and chores that shape girls towards their expected future roles as wives and mothers. Many of the girls, like Dembe from Uganda, talk about being beaten: “We

only play at home. My father refuses to let us go elsewhere. If we go, he beats us.” Eshohana, who is from Togo, told us also about her mother’s reaction to seeing her play with boys: “If mom sees me having fun with the boys, she beats me saying ‘Have you ever seen girls playing with boys?’.”

We know that violence, actual or anticipated, constrains girls’ mobility, opportunities and aspirations, and we can see that the girls in the ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ study are already reporting ways in which they have changed their behaviour and actions to reduce the threat of violence.

Many girls report altering their school journeys to avoid “bad men”, making their daily commute twice as long and ultimately their schooling more difficult. Despite the best efforts of many of their families, the girls in these communities will find that as they grow, violence, and the fear of it, may shape their lives. It may determine where they can go and what they can be – even when they escape physical harm.

- 1 Benin, Brazil, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Philippines, Togo, Uganda and Vietnam.
- 2 Plan International UK, ‘Real Choices, Real Lives: Violence in Girls’ Daily Lives’, 2017.
- 3 Wodon et al., 2016.
- 4 Samman, Emma et al., ‘Women’s work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis’, ODI, 2016.
- 5 Samman, Emma et al., ‘Women’s work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis’, ODI, 2016.
- 6 [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)
- 7 Sommer, M., Ackatia-Armah, N., Connolly, S. & Smiles, D. (2015), ‘A comparison of the menstruation and education experiences of girls in Tanzania, Ghana, Cambodia and Ethiopia’, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 45:4, 589-609; Scandurra, L., Khorn, D., Charles,

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- 8 Sommer M et al., 2015.
- 9 Muhanguzi, F. K., Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, G. & Watson, C. (2017), ‘Social institutions as mediating sites for changing gender norms: Nurturing girl’s resilience to child marriage in Uganda’, Agenda, 31:2, 109-119.
- 10 Plan International, ‘Because I am a Girl – The State of the World’s Girls: Pathways to Power’, Plan International, 2014.
- 11 See for example: UNICEF, ‘A Statistical Snapshot of Violence Against Adolescent Girls’, UNICEF, 2014.
- 12 Plan International, ‘Girls Speak Out 2015, Counting the Invisible’, Plan International, 2016.

Part 2 : What girls do, what boys do and how work at home impacts on life outside it

“Ah, boys study and play, and girls must help their mothers.”

Larissa, Brazil

In recent years the issue of unpaid care work has become a major focus for many development organisations, policy makers and academics.¹³ For the most part, this focus has been on women’s unpaid care work. Questioning the impact of women’s domestic responsibilities on their ability to participate in the labour force, examining women’s time use, the value of “women’s work”, and the link between unpaid care and violence against women. It also raises other considerations such as the impact of unpaid care work on those with disabilities, in poverty and/or from rural communities.¹⁴

Yet, despite the research, and despite a growing focus in programme and policy terms on unpaid care work there is much less attention given to the experiences of girls: their specific needs and priorities are often lost within a focus on outcomes for women.¹⁵ According to the Overseas Development Institute, this reduced emphasis on girls is exacerbated by the overall lack of data on children as caregivers, which is limited (for instance) by the fact that most children doing unpaid care work live in houses headed by adults.¹⁶ Moreover, children often see household chores as something that benefits the family as a whole and feel that there are direct or indirect benefits for them personally if they engage in unpaid care work.¹⁷ Their willingness to take on household responsibilities may also

reflect an acceptance of gendered social norms by young girls – and boys – and domestic chores being an inevitable part of being a girl. Nevertheless, research is starting to highlight girls’ experiences of unpaid care work. It is clear they take on a much larger proportion of this work than boys,¹⁸ and that it is ultimately a major obstacle to girls enjoying their rights to education, health services and economic empowerment.¹⁹ In particular, the ‘Young Lives’ research study²⁰ has provided greater insight into the experiences of girls, showing that girls aged five to nine years old spend 30 per cent more time on chores than their male counterparts, and that this increases to 50 per cent when girls reach 10-14 years old.²¹

Emerging research on girls’ unpaid work from the Institute of Development Studies, ActionAid and UNICEF, provides further evidence that girls are “shouldering a disproportionate share of the unpaid work compared to boys”.²² This research indicates that girls are being trained in household tasks from as young as five years old and are often expected to take over when mothers and other female family members are at work, ill or away from home. Girls from large families, those living in rural communities or caring for people with disabilities, and those whose families cannot afford alternative childcare are particularly affected.

Policy makers are starting to acknowledge the importance of collecting data on children’s work within Time Use Surveys (TUS).²³ Nevertheless, at present there is considerable variation across countries



A girl does chores in Cambodia

in relation to the availability of TUS as well as the methods employed and the age range of participants within the surveys. TUS for the ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ research countries remains relatively limited and variations in the total time worked across the countries may also be due to different methodologies employed in TUS or relate to more substantive differences between particular countries such as gendered norms about what constitutes men’s and women’s work. Therefore, it is difficult at present to draw on wider research to indicate whether the findings in this study correspond to wider trends in relation to children’s work.

The role of women and girls as

unpaid household workers is a key factor in defining their status – or lack of it. It not only limits independence and the economic and social opportunities of girls and women but daily domestic duties also serve to reaffirm female subservience and perpetuate the notion that girls are worth less than boys. As wider research indicates, this idea, if it remains unchallenged, can stay with both girls and boys for the rest of their lives:

“Within the first seven years of life, girls are already indoctrinated into the idea of being subject to men. This starts on the household and is reinforced in the community.”²⁴

Additionally, this concept of female inferiority may also encourage the violence against women that is so widely reported and, which as we have seen, the 11-year-olds in our study are increasingly subject to.²⁵

Too much work at home, too little time at school

Unsurprisingly, many girls in the cohort study are reporting absence from school as a result of their support and help with domestic chores both inside and outside of the home. Given the insecure nature of many family incomes, illness, accident or unexpected emergency can mean girls’ availability to do domestic chores takes priority over their schooling. Girls tell us they are expected to help care for younger siblings, or to help with running the household, when their mothers are needed elsewhere or are ill. Likewise, during harvest periods, many girls are absent from school in order to help their families in the field, or to take their mother’s place at home while she helps with the harvest.

“I am absent when I am sick. Sometimes, my mother asks me to be absent in order to take care of my younger siblings because she is busy harvesting rice.”

Nakry, Cambodia



A girl in Brazil

Research from the ‘Young Lives’ study has shown that there is a clear relationship between household “health shocks” and children taking on increased work – either paid or unpaid. Parental health issues tend to be more important for older children because they reduce the financial resources available within the household for investment in education and older children are often taken out of school and sent to

work. The analysis found important gender differences: when the “health shock” affected the father, children (particularly boys) took on paid work to compensate for income loss due to a father’s illness or death. In the case of a mother’s illness, older girls take on additional domestic tasks but do not reduce the time spent at school.²⁶

Many girls also report being absent, or late, for school on a regular basis, due to the daily demands of

household chores; something that most boys in the household are not compelled to do. Interestingly, there appears to be a significant distinction between the under-reporting of girls’ absence from school as a result of her assistance with domestic chores from parents or family members, compared to the increased number of girls discussing this with our researchers. There is no clear, prescriptive answer as to why this might be. However, we do know that parents may underestimate the time it takes for girls to carry out their domestic chores, or they may not want to disclose the reality to the researchers as it runs counter to their aspirations and hopes for their daughters.

“Sometimes when my mother goes out and there is nobody to stay at home, I stay at home, taking care of the house.”

Bianca, Brazil

Ingrained gendered roles, responsibilities and behaviour within families and communities continue to order how chores are divided. Our analysis has found that across many of our cohort families, there appears to be a strict gendered division of labour which tends to dictate that girls bear the responsibility for supporting their mothers within the home and are required to help with care work such as looking after younger siblings, cooking, cleaning and collecting food and water. All of the girls in the cohort

	Benin	Brazil	Cambodia	Dominican Republic	El Salvador	Philippines	Togo	Uganda	Vietnam	Total
Time spent on girl’s household chores (daily), reported by the girl										
Less than 30 minutes	3	3	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	16
30 mins – 1 hour	1	2	1	5	1	2	1	0	8	21
1-2 hours	5	0	7	0	3	1	2	3	1	22
More than 2 hours	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	2	2	9
Time spent on girl’s household chores (daily), reported by the family										
Less than 30 minutes	4	3	1	1	3	0	1	1	7	21
30 mins – 1 hour	2	2	4	11	2	7	1	2	7	38
1-2 hours	4	3	1	0	2	0	15	2	3	30
More than 2 hours	0	1	7	0	3	1	0	6	2	20
Total reports	10	10	14	12	13	14	17	12	20	122

study are required to carry out chores on a daily basis. And, as they get older, they are often required to take on even more responsibilities. Many families, despite having ambitious aspirations for their daughters' education, still view the domestic sphere as entirely "women's work" and girls are expected to take this on in their capacity as daughters, and eventually, wives and mothers. Last year, we asked the girls in the study what constitutes being a "good" girl, daughter and friend; the responses were revealing. A "good" girl does what she is told, sticks to the rules and is quiet and disciplined.

"To be a good daughter, I should do housework and do what my parents want... Good girls behave well at home and do everything they are told to do... My parents make me and my sisters work much harder than my brothers and I think they're right."

Reine, Togo

The amount of time it takes girls to carry out their chores varies: ranging from 30 minutes to more than five hours per day with some reporting doing even more. Girls are often expected to finish their duties before and after they attend school, leaving very little time for them to do their homework, play with friends or rest.

A study of the impact of water collection on girls education in Ghana suggests that if time spent hauling water was halved this would increase school attendance by around seven per cent for girls aged five to 15, with the results being more marked in rural areas.²⁷

This year some of the girls reported how hard it is every day to try and complete their household tasks alongside their school work. Alice in Benin is often in a rush to get to

school in the morning but accepts her numerous chores which include sweeping the floor and compound and washing the dishes, as well as preparing a meal: "I prefer the morning because I am in a hurry to finish my household chores, wash myself and go to school". Despite this long list of jobs, Alice says that as she is the youngest in the family, she doesn't do more than others but helps her older siblings and mother. The reality of fitting education and schooling around household work and care responsibilities mean that the girls' time to learn is seriously compromised and it could be argued that this is, at least in part, the reason for much of the poor academic performance and grade repetition.

In turn, the lack of academic progress is also likely to discourage girls from going to school and their parents from sending them. Gender and age have a large role to play when deciphering who is responsible for what task is delegated: it is apparently often unacceptable for older males to take on household-based, or care work, though boys sometimes help out. The rigidity of norms (and what is or isn't appropriate for men and boys to do) will depend on the context, although broadly speaking there appears to be a strict gendered delineation between inside and outdoor work:

"Men don't do domestic work, only women do this and they go to the market. Boys and girls help with domestic chores. As an example, my mother always draws the water and my father has never done it because the women cannot stand by and watch the men doing it. My big brother sometimes prepares food but not for everyone."

Alice, Benin



A girl at school in Cambodia

Case Study: Davy, Cambodia

Davy lives with her elderly grandfather, two parents, elder sister (aged 17), brother (aged 13), and two younger brothers (aged nine and six). Her father is disabled after losing a leg and her mother is the sole breadwinner. Davy accepts that chores are split according to gender and helps her mother and elder sister with the bulk of the household work:

"I think it is different because men and boys do heavy work such as chopping wood, collecting water and breaking soil... Female work includes washing dishes, cooking rice, and washing clothes. I think it is fair because boys and men are stronger."

She says it takes her around two hours a day to do her chores: "I cook rice, wash dishes, wipe things in the house and collect fire wood. I carry fire wood from the ground floor to the first floor because the kitchen is there." Davy says that she does occasionally have to miss school to help her mother or look after her brother: "I was absent [from school] because I was busy helping my mother." Despite this, her mother reports that she is never absent from school,

and only helps with a small portion of the firewood collection.

Davy's elder brother has recently dropped out of school in order to train as a barber, and it is not clear whether her elder sister is still in school or not. This year, Davy's mother discussed the difficulties she faces trying to support her family: "This year, my family condition is worse because we are impoverished, and local weather is unfavourable for a good yield. My family is in this condition because my father is very old, while my husband is disabled, and my children are too young to earn money. [Davy] is never absent from school, but sometimes she goes to school late because she doesn't have a bicycle and the school is far."

She told researchers that despite her wish for Davy to have a better education than her own, and a future career, she is worried about her ability to continue to pay for her schooling. As Davy gets older, and further into her adolescence, it will be interesting to monitor whether the demands on her time for domestic work continue, and whether this will result in her increasing absence from school.

What do you learn at school?

The gendered division of labour is not confined to the home but follows girls to school where nearly all of the girls in the study are responsible for a number of daily chores to a greater extent than the male pupils.

"Before the teacher arrives, me and my friends do mathematics exercises and then we sweep the classroom."

Isabelle, Benin

While it does appear that boys also have school based chores that they are responsible for, there seems to be a gendered divide in the type of chores which they are required to undertake – similar to that divide that exists at home. Boys are largely responsible for "outside-" or "manual-" based chores such as fetching water; girls' tasks are largely based within the classroom or compound, such as sweeping and collecting rubbish.



A girl with her brother, Cambodia

Acceptor, Consenter, Resistor?

This year, in keeping with our 'acceptor, consenter and resistor' framework, we are seeing a difference in how girls respond to chores at school. Many voice their dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of these tasks and the time taken to carry them out. They frequently draw attention to the increased time boys have to play at school as a result.

Q. *If you were a boy – think about a boy from the school from your class – would your ordinary school day be any different?*

"Ah, it would be just playing, because the boys there just play."

Larissa, Brazil

"Girls have to do school chores because the teacher says that if someone fails to do them, they have to stand on one leg. Sometimes, boys don't do them, and girls have to do them instead. Also, the teacher says that if boys don't do it, girls have to help them... I think it is not fair because the teacher always asks girls to do them."

Roumany, Cambodia

Other girls in the study, the consenters, are less indignant and more resigned: they might not necessarily agree with the inequality of the division of chores between boys and girls but they nevertheless accept it as an unavoidable; nor do they have the agency or support to be able to question or challenge this further.

Q. *Do girls do chores more than boys when at school?*

"Yes."

Q. *Do you think this is fair?*

"No."



A girl at school in Benin

Q. *Why is it not fair?*

"Because it's over loading girls as compared to boys."

Mirembe, Uganda

For both resisters and consenters, at school, the degree of dissent tends to be measured more in words than behaviour: active resistance is particularly hard in this context compared to at home where some girls have the support of their mothers or older siblings.

A comment made by many girls is that boys often do not do cleaning tasks as well as girls at school or at home. They feedback that boys cannot clean as thoroughly just because they are boys and are innately not as capable of keeping things tidy. This goes back to the curriculum of chores that girls are taught from an early age which encourages them to believe that they are better suited than boys to caring, cooking and cleaning. Even those who feel that giving girls the greater share of any domestic chores is unfair also believe that this is just how things are – boys make things dirty; girls clean up.

"Yes, boys are so lazy, they do not like sweeping and cleaning the classroom. They do

not do it well, either. It's not fair... Boys play more and make the class dirtier more than girls do, but they don't clean the class well, so it's not fair."

Kim, Vietnam

There are also girls within the study who do accept their role, apparently unquestioningly. They do not seem to feel that the heavier load of chores at school is unfair and appear happy with a system that divides society into male and female jobs, attitudes and abilities. Girls and women, the cohort girls feel, are better at cleaning and tidying, and boys should not be overly concerned with this type of work.

"My sisters and I do the same tasks but I have more jobs than my little brother because I am a girl and I will live with my husband later... Yes, it's our duty. That's the way it is. The teachers make us sweep the classrooms so it's clean but the boys don't sweep well."

Annabelle, Benin

Filling the Gap

“When mother asks me to do something, she’ll say: ‘You’ll be absent today because we’re doing something.’”

Reyna, the Philippines

Increasingly, the study has found that where there are opportunities for the girls’ mothers to participate in paid work, or to work outside the house in other areas, such as supporting the family’s agricultural harvest with the responsibility of caring for younger siblings or household care gap often falling to the cohort girl. Many of the families do not have social or other family support to rely on in times of illness, emergency or seasonal agricultural demands. As a result, despite their participation in income-generating activities, most of the mothers in the study still have households to run. Wider research has indicated that girls are shouldering a disproportionate parcel of this care and domestic work compared to their brothers and male friends and the analysis from Plan’s ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ study largely supports this view.²⁸ As the data has demonstrated, the cohort girls have been immersed in a ‘curriculum of chores’ from an early age and their responsibilities are increasing as they get older. Their role as substitutes for their mothers is beginning to dominate their right to education.

“Sometimes we go out to do errands. Sometimes because I go to the clinic. Sometimes I have to go to the port to do some shopping... Sometimes I have to take care of mommy if she’s sick. Sometimes I can do something for her, like if she can’t get up. That is why I hardly go to school.”

Valeria, El Salvador



Girls in the Philippines

In the Philippines, it seems that there is absence from school in order to support domestic work among both boys and girls, but this is divided along gender lines between work outside and inside of the home:

“My boy classmates go fishing.”

Q. *That’s why they are absent?*

“Yes.”

Q. *How about the girls?*

“They get sick or sometimes they have to take care of their younger siblings.”

Rosamie, the Philippines

Making Ends Meet

As well as filling in for their mothers at home, the study, in line with wider research findings, has found that as girls get older they are also required to support their families with income-generating work. Although research on the whole indicates that it is boys who take on the primary responsibility for the family finances in households affected by illness, girls also play their part. A quantitative study conducted in Uganda found that among households with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), girls tended not only to shoulder most of the household chores but also to earn money to compensate for household labour loss. The study found that girls spent seven hours more per week in paid work compared to boys.²⁹

Our analysis also indicates that girls are reporting absence from school as a result of having to work in the fields during peak harvesting seasons in order to help their families financially.

Q. *So you’ve been absent at school. What do you and your Mama do when you’re absent?*

“Help out in the field... Sometimes when mother or father have a fever, we do the harvesting.”

Reyna, the Philippines

Some of the girls in the study have reported that they know of girls in their community who have had to drop out of school altogether because of the pressure to support their families in the fields, or elsewhere. Very low-income households who are solely dependent on informal, and insecure incomes, often have to choose between feeding their families or educating their children. We know from Plan International’s wider work supporting adolescent girls that families often struggle with the

contradictions of needing their older girls’ help both at home and in income-generating activities against the longer term good of them continuing their education. Girls may also be married off too early, which in most cases puts an end to their education, in order to relieve the financial burden on the family.³⁰

“I think it is difficult for girls because parents don’t want them to study.”

Q. *Why don’t they want girls to study?*

“They want them to help do farming. Some parents have no money to support their study. Many girls quit school. Some parents have no money for their study. Some ask their daughters to dance in the orchestra and sell labour such as picking rubber seed, pulling cassava, clearing grass and growing cassava.”

Mealea, Cambodia

Overall despite most of the study participants being enrolled in school and many of them having parents who express a commitment to girls’ education the realities of daily life and the accepted models of male and female behaviour are having an enormous impact not only on the girls’ ability to attend school regularly and learn but on how they spend their time generally. It is increasingly difficult for many of them to study at home or to have the chance to relax and to socialise. They are also often unable to escape the established female role of cleaner and carer when they are at school. All this will have a continuing impact on their academic progress, their self-confidence and their ability to see a role for themselves beyond the domestic one of wife and mother.

It's just the way it is: the gendered division of labour

Over the years, it is interesting to note that girls and their families frequently use the phrase "it's just the way it is" when questioning or discussing gender roles, particularly the division of labour within households, and ultimately, who holds the power. The power of social norms, the way things have always been done, can be so strong that people often adopt them without understanding why they exist, or even without truly believing in them. The roots of gendered behaviour are so deeply embedded that they can seem immovable.

Overall this year, the proportion of male to female sharing of household tasks is largely unchanged. The study is made up of a majority of families who report that domestic chores are largely performed by females, a substantially smaller group who report sharing chores equally, and a very small number of families (only three) where men do the lion share.

"Here in the house, he does very little because he's always out working. My chores here are sweeping the floor, washing the dishes, cooking lunch, doing the laundry, cleaning the yard every day."

Tatiana's Mother, Brazil

In many, if not most, families the women and girls are responsible for the interior (or domestic chores) and men and boys for either paid work outside of the house – chores which are perceived to be heavier or require greater physical power. This division of labour prevents women from entering the paid workforce and, being confined largely to the home, restricts their financial, social and psychological independence.³¹ It also limits their opportunity and ability to acquire new skills and undermines any chance of building the self-confidence necessary to challenge the gender stereotyping that has kept them "in their place" for generations.

Household chores

	Benin	Brazil	Cambodia	Dominican Republic	El Salvador	Philippines	Togo	Uganda	Vietnam	Total
Majority performed by females	8	10	11	12	8	9	17	12	13	100
Majority performed by males	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Shared equally	1	0	2	0	5	4	0	0	6	18
Total reports	10	10	13	12	13	14	17	12	20	121

The Acceptors: "These roles rarely change..."



A girl collects water in Southern Africa

It is hardly surprising then that in some families the mothers, or female heads of households, are positive in their acceptance of the status quo. They find it fair that women and girls are responsible for the domestic chores in the household and may even want to actively promote this division of labour between males and females: for them domestic chores are entirely "women's work" while men have an active role as the breadwinner for their families. It seems that on the rare occasions when men do take over some of the domestic tasks, it is only because the mothers in the study are ill or away from the home for a period of time.

"Generally, the women look after household jobs and the men are responsible for work in the fields.

The girls and boys help all the adults with their work. In some cases men help with the cooking if

the woman is ill and sometimes women help with the weeding in the field; it's a fair division where no one is being tricked... These roles rarely change unless the woman is away which means the man has to do the cooking."

Folami's mother, Togo

Similarly, many of the fathers in the study appear to be happy with the way things are, and take it entirely for granted that girls should be responsible for the housework:

"A good girl is well behaved at home, and well-dressed. She must be good for everything and can help do all housework. A good boy should be the same. He should help us, but he should not do much housework."

Sothany's father, Cambodia

The Consenters: "I think it is not fair..."



Girls do chores in Uganda

However, not everyone is quite so keen on the accepted male/female division of labour. Some of the mothers in particular indicate they might like a change but seem to feel powerless to act:

Q. *And why can't a boy cook or wash the clothes?*

"oh, because they will call him gay, supposedly here, because my husband, when he was in the capital, he washed clothes, cooked, everything."

Q. *But does your husband do that here?*

"Not anymore."

Chantal's mother, Dominican Republic

Madelin's mother remarked that in her community sexism was rife:

"People think that only women can wash up."

As these comments illustrate, many women are reluctantly accepting a status quo they are not really happy with. Many also discussed the intergenerational differences between their own relationships and what they wish for their children.

"Men often bully women, ah, that: 'if my wife doesn't give me a glass of water, I won't drink it', even if they are right there... They won't even get up. 'Look, get me a glass of water.' They don't even get up... But if the wife isn't there, he is forced to get up to get his glass of water... No, I tell my sons they have to learn."

Valerie's mother,
Dominican Republic

They feel there has been progress: some of their sons take on more of the domestic burden than their fathers or even their older brothers would have done while they were growing up. They are hopeful that for their younger children there will be more equality between their daughters and sons as they grow into adults and begin families of their own.

"I think it is not fair. When they grow up and have families, I think they should help each other... I don't know how to make changes, but I see that mostly sons understand these tasks when they have wives."

They work hard (collect water, cook rice, etc). I think we should have discussions about helping each other. In one family near my house, the husband and wife help each other, and they have happiness."

Lina's mother, Cambodia

The Resisters: "It should be equal..."



Girls play volleyball in Cambodia

A smaller, yet significant number of families do appear to be resisting gender stereotypes both in their attitudes towards domestic work at home and in their behaviour:

"No, no, no. It should be equal. And boys should learn the same things, and tasks should be divided equally in the house but you know that our parents' tradition in the past was that girls were for doing housework and boys were for working, and it's not like that. Everyone has the right to work, everyone has the right to clean, and everyone has the right to cook and wash the clothes."

Saidy's grandmother,
Dominican Republic

Natália's mother is another apparent resister. The family – father, mother and six children – live in the north of Brazil. Natália's father makes a living as a bricklayer and her mother largely looks after the home, while taking on some paid sewing work.

"I always call their attention and say: 'My son, you do this. Washing a shirt won't hurt you. If

you take a shower, you pick your underwear up and wash it. If you brush your teeth, don't leave the brush there, put it in the right place... You have to take care of your hygiene.' It doesn't mean anything if a man cooks a meal or washes his clothes, this is not a flaw – everybody does it – and I say: 'You won't have Mummy around forever'."

Natália's mother, Brazil

This year, Natália's mother told our researchers that her family was unusual in the local community as she made sure there was equality between the sexes in terms of the domestic work load. She feels that it is important for boys to learn about chores so that they can look after themselves in later life:

"My boys, sometimes they do things. They prepare the food, get the rice out of the pan and I say: 'You have to learn, my son, because when you go away, nobody's gonna do this for you'...Yes, I always tell the boys they have to do the same things – it's no shame... No., it's very different [in other families]. Usually one person does everything in the house."

Natália's mother, Brazil

Despite the seemingly resistant attitudes of both Natália's mother and Saidy's grandmother, when our researchers asked detailed questions as to who carries out specific chores it appeared the majority were in fact still done by the women. This suggests that perhaps while attitudes towards gender equality within the household are changing, it is still difficult to bring about concrete changes in behaviour. However, Saidy and Natália have both been exposed to different ways of thinking, and to a smaller extent, different ways of behaving, as have the men and boys in these households. Tracking the impact of this over the next few years will be illuminating.

Building equality at home

Progress is slow, but Natália's mother and Saidy's grandmother are not alone, there are encouraging signs of resistance across the nine countries:

In Cambodia, Leakhena's mother commented:

“When living with their parents, men do no housework. But after they get married, they love their wives and can do this task themselves. For instance, my son helps his wife do household chores. I said, ‘It is better for you to help your wife do housework.’”

In Uganda, Amelia's mother was also convinced that things had changed:

“There is no specific work for both men and women. If you just sit and wait to be served then you won't be in position to eat. The jobs are not different, maybe the drivers, but even a woman can drive her car to work.”

And significantly, among the study families in the Philippines this year, there appears to be something of a concerted effort to resist the inequality embedded in the “normal” household division of labour. Chesa's mother who told researchers: “There doesn't seem to be anyone like that here. Whatever work one has, they help each other out because whatever they see they also copy. Whatever work they see, they say to their siblings, ‘Let's do that, so we finish quickly,’ the three of them” – which was reflecting a wider trend. It seems that many families are reporting non-gendered selection and distribution of chores and are happy with this arrangement – with many

parents acknowledging that this is a generational shift from their own childhoods:

“It shouldn't always be just girls doing it. I really don't like that idea. But I admit that it wasn't like this before. Boys didn't act like this before. It's only now when I reached this age that I became aware that today it's not only the girls doing chores at home, but rather boys are also doing it now. But my children and I are used to that kind of living already.”

Melanie's mother, the Philippines

Both Jasmine's mother and Jocelyn's mother also told researchers that, in their families, “the work is divided equally” and not according to gender.

Similarly in Vietnam, there are families who report that domestic tasks are shared more equally:

“Many men don't do the chores the same as my husband does. They consider those chores are their wife's responsibilities. They think cooking food is women's task and they only tend pigs and then are relaxed. They don't care whether their wife goes back home early or late – their wife still has to cook as normal. However, my husband doesn't behave like that. For example, when I come home late, he will cook food and wait for me to eat.”

Trinh's mother, Vietnam

This view was supported by Oanh's father, who told the researchers:

“It's fair to men and women in my family: cooking, shopping... If anyone has free time, that one does housework. For example, if we run out of rice and my wife is not at home, I will do the husking or go to buy some food.”

The issue of the balance of domestic work and how girls spend their time is becoming increasingly important as they get older. It is reassuring to see that many families are questioning the established rules of behaviour but it is also difficult to ascertain how far the girls and their mothers are really able to bring about change on their own without support from the wider community. Despite some of the more definite attitudes and reported changes in behaviour from the families in the study, further analysis often reveals a more complex picture. The girls and their mothers are not easy to define simply as ‘resistors’ or ‘acceptors’ as they may possess elements of both in how they express themselves and in the patterns of behaviour emerging in the different families. It is safe to say that power at home still rests primarily with the men, girls' education is at risk from their domestic roles and, though many see it as not fair, changing the rules, in terms both of domestic chores and gender roles more broadly, is proving difficult.

Conclusion

“I want to have no labour division between male and female work. I want boys to help do female tasks such as cooking rice, and girls and women should wash dishes and help do male work.”

Thearika, Cambodia

The data collected over the last two years, as the girls enter early adolescence, has really emphasised how difficult it is for girls' lives and opportunities to change. When families struggle with poverty they will fall back on tried and tested coping mechanisms which bring short-term gains against a longer term strategy

which might eventually bring about a more secure future. It is hardly surprising that, faced with hunger, families prioritise food over school fees. And who is going to support girls' education in times of hardship when patriarchal tradition dictates that girls go to their husbands' families and boys look after their parents?

Many, if not most, of the girls in the study are time-poor: it is this that differentiates them from their brothers and other male peers. Domestic chores eat into their time to study and into their social/play time and their household responsibilities are increasing as the girls get older. This will limit them academically, lead to fewer qualifications and skills and poorer job prospects. It will also affect their self-confidence, their social skills and their ability to make friends and contacts outside the family, which in turn will affect their access to the information they need to make informed decisions about all aspects of their lives.

Girls are schooled into an acceptance of a curriculum of chores from an early age: their idea of what they can aspire to is limited by their domestic responsibilities and by the whole concept of “women's work”. There is little articulated awareness of the impact of this domestic focus from either the girls themselves or their families. Their world shrinks and, as they grow, many of the cohort girls begin to unquestioningly accept the gender roles allocated to them including the idea that a “good girl” is obedient, caring and hardworking:

“Good girls work in the house: drawing water, sweeping the court and going to school and they stay quiet. It's the same for the other girls in the area.”

Anti, Togo

This acceptance, not only from the girls but from their families and communities, in itself limits the possibility of transformative change. Girls rarely see alternative role models close to home or come into contact with other ways of being. The idea that girls are worth less than boys – which their role as household servant reinforces – also makes girls more vulnerable to violence in all its forms. The impact of the imbalance in domestic life is far-reaching and the rules of behaviour are firmly entrenched in family and community life all over the world.

“It’s not fair...”

However it is nevertheless clear from the study data that over the last 11 years, attitudes, and in some cases behaviours, have shifted. Parents know it is better to keep their daughters in school even when they struggle to do

so. Many of the girls say clearly “it’s not fair” and some will fight for their equality.

Girls’ rights are also on the agenda in national and international forums and campaigns for their right to be educated, to live free from violence and to be valued equally with their brothers are in the forefront of development campaigns, policy drives and programme design. Violence against girls and women is increasingly recognised, publicised and punished, though so far not effectively enough.

This impetus must not be lost and in understanding the detail of girls’ daily lives, ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ can help put in place the policy and programme, the legislation and the education which will make a meaningful difference as these 11-year-olds grow into young women.

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16 Emma et al., ‘Women’s work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis’, ODI, 2016.

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19 Chopra, Deepta and Sohela Nazneen, 2016; Samman, Emma et al., ‘Women’s work: Mothers, children and the global childcare crisis’, ODI, 2016; UNICEF, ‘Harnessing the Power of Data for Girls: Taking stock and looking ahead to 2030’, UNICEF, 2016.

20 ‘Young Lives’ is a longitudinal study of 12,000 children over a period of 15 years (2002-2017) in Ethiopia, Peru, Vietnam and India. For more information see: www.younglives.org.uk

21 Crivello, Gina, ‘Care and Children: Young Lives’, UNICEF, 2016; Crivello, Gina, ‘Tracing the links between girls’ unpaid care work and women’s economic empowerment’, www.younglives.org.uk

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Recommendations

It is important to acknowledge that much excellent work has been done recently – particularly by the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment,³² the UK Gender and Development Network,³³ as well as other individual agencies³⁴ – to develop comprehensive recommendations in relation to unpaid work. There is a strong consensus around the need to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid work, and to improve the representation of those affected in decision-making processes.

This study has sought to contribute to and enrich the discussion around unpaid care by highlighting in particular the roles and responsibilities of girls. As this study has shown, patterns of inequality are established in childhood – in particular, in early adolescence – and can become increasingly normalized and entrenched over time, contributing toward roles and expectations in later life.

It is therefore recommended that governments and policymakers should:

Recommendation 1: Support the recognition of unpaid care work by:

- **Funding data collection, including time-use surveys, that captures and recognizes children’s work.**
A key first step is to better understand the scope of unpaid care work and its distribution within households. Time-use surveys have proven useful tools, and funding should be made available for such surveys to improve the measurement and understanding of unpaid care and household work. These surveys must be done in such a way that they can be disaggregated by sex, income bracket, rural/urban location, migration status and other key characteristics – including, importantly, age, in order to make visible the often hidden contributions of children to their households. Other relevant age-sensitive indicators should also be tracked, including, for example, the number of girls dropping out of school due to domestic burdens.
- **Promoting the systematic use of gender-responsive budgeting and age-sensitive gender impact assessments.**
These processes help to highlight the gendered impacts of government policies and programmes on women, men, girls and boys and to shape more appropriate responses. Macroeconomic policy is never gender-neutral, and policy proposals should explicitly analyse and consider the likely effects on the often invisible burden of unpaid care shouldered by women and girls. Even positive strategies – including, for example, schemes designed to facilitate women’s entry into the labour force – should be monitored for potential negative knock-on effects on adolescent girls forced to fill gaps in households with working or absent parents.

Recommendation 2: Promote the reduction of unpaid care work by:

- **Investing in technologies and infrastructure that reduce the burden of unpaid work.**
This may include safe roads and safe public transportation, piped water, clean cook stoves, home electricity and access to fuel in both rural and urban areas. Investments should be based on analysis and pilots of what will be most effective in reducing unpaid work, ensuring that new technologies do not inadvertently exacerbate women and girls’ time poverty.

Recommendation 3: Support the redistribution of unpaid care work by:

- **Shifting social norms that dictate what is women's and girls' work and encouraging more equitable distribution within households.**

It is critical to work with men and boys – and to feature and spotlight male champions and influencers – to promote more equitable distribution of labour within households. Schools should also be recognized as key sites of intervention, recognizing that gendered-assignment of school chores can contribute to emerging attitudes and assumptions about what is appropriate and expected for girls and for boys. Teachers should be trained in gender-responsive pedagogy and supported to ensure that learning environments do not reinforce harmful norms and stereotypes, and instead promote more positive messages.

- **Investing in affordable, accessible high-quality care services, including for children, the elderly and the disabled.**

For struggling, time-poor households, redistribution among members of the household will not be sufficient on its own to alleviate the burden of unpaid care work. Governments have a responsibility to provide quality care services as part of broader commitments to universal social protection. Paid care work must also be decent and valued work, with appropriate wages, training, working conditions and support.

- **Investing in research around models of care provision.**

NGOs, women's rights organizations and self-help groups, labour associations, and other actors are piloting and exploring alternative models of alleviating and redistributing the burden of care. Further research is needed into how the most promising of these initiatives could potentially be scaled up more widely.

Recommendation 4: Facilitate the representation of those affected by the burden of unpaid care work by:

- **Ensuring carers – including girls and young women – are better able to meaningfully participate in decision-making structures at all levels.**

This requires identifying and seeking to overcome the multiple barriers to women's, and particularly girls', participation in decision-making, from the local or traditional level up to the national level. Positive steps may also include supporting and building the capacity of women's and girls' rights organizations, carers' associations, etc. to advocate for opportunities for those most affected by the burden of unpaid work – and therefore best placed to identify effective and ineffective solutions – to have a meaningful voice in relevant policy processes.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a largely qualitative methodology and is embedded in a feminist research perspective which aims to reject power hierarchies and gender discrimination. It builds upon a life-course approach, focusing its attention on critical transition points, and on how the influences in early girlhood and middle-childhood will define girls' later lives. When the study began, it was rooted in principles of grounded theory,³⁵ based upon data systematically gathered and analysed, with some central lines of inquiry mirroring the Millennium Development Goals. Over time, as the amount of data increases, the need for more complex lines of inquiry has emerged. The flexibility inherent in the qualitative approach has allowed the study to adapt to the lives of the families and girls as they get older, making adjustments year by year to the in-depth ethnographic interviews.

Age-appropriate and some interactive tools are introduced each year to allow us to engage in a holistic manner with the experiences of the girls and to help us understand their sense of self and their engagement with the world around them. The data now provides us with a rich picture of the world that the girls are growing up in, the social rules, structures and relationships that surround them, and a real sense of the opportunities and challenges of life from their viewpoint.

Data collection occurs on a yearly

basis, with the support of the nine participating Plan International Country Offices and their research teams. They are in turn supported centrally by the research team at Plan International UK and, in several of the countries, by local academic institutions. Trained local researchers are bound by the global child protection policies of Plan International and ethical guidance from best practice experiences of NGOs working with children. Data is coded and analysed adhering to Plan International UK's child protection policy to prevent any misuse of data or images that might jeopardise the wellbeing or safety of any of the participants.

This birth cohort started in 2006, following 142 girls born between 1 January 2006 and 31 December 2006. The sample group are all from countries where Plan International works and where the country office team were happy to take part in the project. The sampling was purposive, and each country was requested to sample in this way:

- 50 per cent urban;
- 50 per cent rural;
- Date of birth of the girls falling between 1 January and 31 December 2006;
- Family income: low (self-defined, using Plan International Country Office indicators).

Theoretical framing

“All too often, women are not treated as ends in their own right, persons with a dignity that deserves respect from laws and institutions. Instead, they are treated as mere instruments of the ends of others – reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets, agents of a family’s general prosperity.”

Martha Nussbaum, 2000³⁶

The ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ research is following girls growing up in the 21st century in the context of grinding poverty surrounded by social norms that either inhibit or support their progress. In order to examine girls’ development in this way, the research makes the connection across two approaches: capabilities³⁷ and the study of social norms.

There is a large and interdisciplinary literature which explores what social norms are and why people tend to comply with them. This body of thinking understands social norms as patterns of behaviour motivated by a desire to conform to the shared social expectations of people who are important to them; they may both value others’ approval and fear their disapproval. They can be defined as the ‘informal rules that govern our behaviour’.³⁸ 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.³⁹ This difference between the rules or standards people commonly expect and what they actually do has led to some distinguishing between ‘injunctive norms’ (what people believe they



A girl and her mother in the Dominican Republic

and others are supposed to do) and ‘descriptive norms’ (what people actually do).⁴⁰

Social norms differ from attitudes in that they are ‘interdependent’ – they reflect values shared amongst a group of people. Actual behaviour is influenced by an interplay of social norms, personal and factual beliefs, and other external circumstances – such as poverty. Social norms themselves can be both positive and negative; they can both drive and prevent change, help to explain weak implementation of laws intended to protect and extend women’s and girls’ rights (social, cultural and economic) and mean that discriminatory practices are continued.⁴¹

The capabilities approach, first articulated by the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen in the 1980s and further developed by several scholars,⁴² is focused on what people are able to be and what they are able to do; the choice they are able to exercise. To Sen, human capabilities, or ‘substantial freedoms’, are the ones that allow “people to live the lives they have reason to value and enhance the real choices they have”.⁴³ In addition, societies should support access to opportunities and dignity, which people may then choose to exercise in action, or not. The centre of Sen’s vision is the richness of human life and, within that, people’s capability to function in society, rather than the usual concentration on rising GDP, technical progress, or industrialisation.⁴³

He outlines five distinct freedom domains: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. Freedom, he says, is a principal determinant of individual initiative and social effectiveness; it is good primarily because it enhances the ability of individuals to help themselves,

a property that Sen describes as the ‘agency aspect’ of the individual.⁴⁴ The main elements of Kabeer’s⁴⁵ women’s empowerment theory – access to resources, the role of agency, and a sense of achievement – are also critical to our analysis.

This framework allows us to explore some of the similarities and differences across and within households from a gendered perspective. It enables us to understand better the impact on women’s and girls’ capabilities, agency and choice when resources are scarce; how they adapt in these contexts; and to explore in greater depth the impact of coping on their capabilities and personal empowerment. The application of life course analysis to the data helps us to understand girls’ progress and the factors that either support or impinge on the development of their capabilities, over a period of time.

“When poverty combines with gender inequality, the result is acute failure of central human capabilities.”

Martha Nussbaum, 2001⁴⁶

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'Real Choices, Real Lives' Cohort Study Map; Where the girls live

