



VOICES OF HOPE:

**ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND BOYS CONTRIBUTING
TO INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CHANGE TO
ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN UGANDA**

International Day of the Girl Research 2017 for Plan International

Voices of hope:

Adolescent girls and boys contributing to individual and collective change to advance gender equality in Uganda

Uganda Country Report
by Feyi Rodway with Jean Casey

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

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Section 1: Background, methodology and ethics

1.1 Background and rationale

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

Box 1: Champions of Change¹

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

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

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

Girls' Journey of Change: Girls begin their journey by increasing their sense of self-worth. Once they join a group of girls, they begin to appreciate the strength in unity. They begin to recognise gender inequality and how it affects their own lives. They

¹ Plan International 'Internal Champions of Change Briefing Note'

visualise equality, and what they can do to promote it. They identify supporters and invite others to join them on their journey to equality. Celebration of every small step is a key part of this journey.

Boys' Journey of Change: Boys begin their journey by preparing to embark on a process of self-reflection. They begin to recognise themselves as a part of gender inequality, and to recognise their own privileges and costs. They can then visualise gender equality, recognise others who value equality, and make their own commitment to change. They begin to eliminate sexism from their life, and to invite others to do the same. Together, they take steps to promote gender equality, and to celebrate change.

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

The adolescent girls and boys who took part in this research study completed the Champions of Change programme in two phases – the first in November 2016 and the second in February 2017. All research participants were part-way through the curriculum's modules when the research was conducted. The Champions of Change modules are as follows:

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

Boys' Module 1: Sharing solidarity
Boys' Module 2: Being a gender transformative young man
Boys' Module 3: Being responsible regarding sexuality

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

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

1.2 Research questions

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

- 1) How do adolescent girls and boys describe how positive change happens in attempting to tackle gender discrimination?
- 2) What do participants identify as positive enablers of change – i.e. factors and conditions – that would allow girls to access and realise rights that are often denied to them (for example, to complete school, report instances of sexual abuse and domestic violence, work with community leaders to influence gender norms)?
- 3) Who are the “change makers” who can influence social norms for a more gender equal society?
- 4) What role do other social factors (such as ethnicity, marital status, economic status, gender, level of education, age) play in fostering or hindering social change?

1.3 Conceptual framing

In order to answer these questions, the research applied a conceptual framing, presenting the experiences, perceptions and opinions of girls and boys in relation to specific dimensions² in their lives. It used Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model³ to analyse how these dimensions act either to restrict or advance their rights. This broader child rights framing helps to articulate girls’ and boys’ differing senses of agency and their opportunities for participation in family life and in their communities. It also frames how the study outlines potential pathways towards change, detailing the main challenges for promoting change from the perspectives of adolescent girls and boys.

Applying an additional lens on the life course then allows the lived experiences of girls and boys to be understood better in the context of various turning points and critical events.⁴ This enables an examination of how the expectations of others shift as young people enter adolescence and an analysis of how age-related dynamics influence power relations.

The study’s design was built from an analysis of empowerment theory, seeking to explore who has access to power, who is able to utilise their power and whom they may have power (or influence) over. It draws from the work of Kabeer⁵ and of Cornwall,⁶ considering four inter-related components to develop an understanding of how girls and boys potentially exercise choice and influence social change:

- resources: including access as well as future claims to material, human and social resources (*the pre-conditions*);
- agency: including decision making, negotiation, manipulation (*the process*);

² These dimensions are the individual, the family/household/peers and the community.

³ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) ‘the Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design’, *Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA*.

⁴ Kirkpatrick Johnson, M. *et al.* (2011) ‘Insights on Adolescence from a Life Course Perspective’, *Journal of Research in Adolescence*, Mar 1 2011; 21(1): 273–280.

⁵ Kabeer, N. (1999) ‘Resources, Agency and Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment’, *Development and Change*, vol. 30

⁶ Cornwall, A. (2016) ‘Women’s Empowerment: What Works’. *Journal of International Development* 28, 342–359 (2016)

- achievements: including wellbeing outcomes, both material and human (*the outcomes*);
- relationships: including *power within* (girls' and boys' internal power and capacity), and *power to* (their relationships with others), as well as the power dynamics within groups.

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

Social norms, the unwritten rules regulating behaviour in a group, are one of the most studied motivators of human actions. Many theories exist around what social norms are and how they influence behaviour⁷ including the frequently cited work by Cialdini et al.⁸ Cialdini (1990) defines social norms as people's beliefs about what others do (descriptive norms) and what others approve and disapprove of (injunctive norms). Norms are separated from individual attitudes: for example, a person might want to do one thing, but instead does another to accommodate what they believe to be expected from them. The power of social expectations and the drive "to belong" can be so strong that people follow norms even where these contradict their personal beliefs and attitudes.⁹

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

⁷ Chung, A. and Rimal, R.N. (2016) 'Social Norms: A Review', *Review of Communication Research*, 2016(4), 1-28. doi:10.12840/issn.2255-4165.2016.04.01.008; Cislighi, B. and Heise, L. (under review) Four avenues of normative influence.; Young, H.P. (2015) 'The Evolution of Social Norms', *Annual Review of Economics*, 7(1), 359–387. doi:10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115322

⁸ Cialdini, R.B., Reno, R.R. and Kallgren, C.A. (1990) 'A Focus Theory of Normative Conduct: Recycling the Concept of Norms to Reduce Littering in Public Places', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(6), 1015–26; Reid, A.E., Cialdini, R.B. and Aiken, L.S. (2010) 'Social Norms and Health Behaviour', in A. Steptoe (ed.), *Handbook of Behavioural Medicine* (pp. 263–71). New York: Springer.

⁹ Marcus and Harper (2014) cited in ODI (2015) *Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide*. London: Overseas Development Institute

¹⁰ ODI (2015) *Support to women and girls' leadership: A rapid review of the evidence*. London: Overseas Development Institute

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

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

1.4 Methodology

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

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

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

1.4.1 Research location and sample

¹¹ The World Bank (2013) *On Norms and Agency: Conversations About Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries*. Washington DC: World Bank Group

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

¹³ AWID (2004) 'Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice.' *Women's Rights and Economic Change*, vol. 9

¹⁴ Berg, B.L. (2001) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (4th ed.). Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon; and Bernard, H.R. (2011) *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th ed.). Lanham, Maryland; Plymouth: Altamira.

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

The selection included criteria that the participants in this research must have participated in a girls' empowerment initiative such as Champions of Change. In order to explore and respond to the research questions, a certain level of exposure to gender equality and child rights concepts and the ability to analyse discriminatory gender and social norms was required; the adolescents engaged in the Champions of Change programme fulfilled these criteria.

In addition, participants were sampled to capture experiences of intersectionality and intersecting vulnerabilities. The sample features adolescents from urban and rural areas (with a 1:2 ratio), ethnic minorities, girls/boys in or out of school, young mothers/young fathers, married girls/boys, migrant girls/boys and adolescent girls and boys living in poor and disadvantaged families. Given the small scale and qualitative nature of the research, a purposive sampling approach was applied. The research in Uganda included 109 adolescent girls and boys in total.

1.4.2 Characteristics and identities of girls and boys

In Uganda, the age group of adolescent girls and boys who participated in the research ranged from 15 and 21, with an average age of 17. Half of the female sample were young mothers, and a significant proportion had dropped out of school. Some of the male respondents were fathers; most were still attending school or post-secondary education or training. Many respondents confirmed during the course of the discussions that they were either single or double orphans. Confirmation of various characteristics allowed for a deeper analysis of the intersectionality of discrimination as explored by the respondents in the research.

1.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

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

1.4.4 Creative and reflective workshops

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

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

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

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

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

Box 2: Exploring social norms in the workshops

To understand social norms, the research looked at what participants believed others did and approved of. To complete this understanding, data was collected on participants' behaviour (what they did) and on personal attitudes (what they found was good or bad), following recent advancement in social norms diagnosis and measurement.¹⁵ A vignette tool¹⁶ was adapted to unpack the social norms that are influencing girls' and boys' capabilities and opportunities and to explore how social change happens. Scenarios that were familiar to girls and boys allowed the adolescents to explore gender and social norms and to map out the process of influence and change.

The vignette scenarios included various questions to generate information on different areas:

1. Questions that explore attitudes towards gender norms and gender discriminatory practices to gather information on where and how social norms are operating in a community and how social norms can be changed through individual and collective behaviour.

¹⁵ Cislaghi, B. and Heise, L. (2017) *Measuring Gender-related Social Norms: Report of a Meeting, Baltimore Maryland, 14–15 June 2016*. London: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

¹⁶ Care (2009) *The power to lead: a leadership model for adolescent girls*. London: Care International

2. Questions that explore the consequences of not following a social practice to provide information on an individual's reference group¹⁷ and the inherent social norms. Reference groups show who matters for the choices of an individual and how the individual perceives the expectations from peers.¹⁸

1.4.5 Research task teams

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

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

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

1.4.6 Data collection, processing and analysis

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

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

In Uganda, 64 adolescent girls and 45 adolescent boys took part in the research activities. Respondents came from the communities of Kampala, Kamuli, Buyende and Lira. At each research location, the adolescent girls and boys either took part in a creative workshop (48 girls; 36 boys), or in an in-depth semi-structured interview (16 girls and 9 boys).

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

¹⁸ Mackie (2013) cited in ODI (2015) *Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide*. London: Overseas Development Institute

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

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

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

1.5 Ethics

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

1.5.1 Child protection

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

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

1.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

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

1.5.3 Informed consent

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

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

Section 2: Setting the scene: understanding gender inequality and discrimination as experienced by adolescent girls and boys in their communities

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

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

2.1 Intersectionality of economic hardship, violence and gender norms

Both adolescent girls and boys reported a series of interconnected challenges within their communities. Most commonly discussed in the Ugandan study were family and economic hardships, and widespread violence, both inside and outside the home. Reports of both physical and sexual violence being normalised were common. The experiences of these challenges varied between girls and boys. In addition, family dynamics appeared to become increasingly complex as girls get older. Many research participants reported conflict and tension within their households as adults attempted to maintain the dominant social norms, in the face of behaviour and/or attitudes that appeared to deviate from the norm, particularly in the case of girls.

The Ugandan context provided a rich tapestry of discussions in relation to gender inequality and discrimination, social norms and social change. This is partly due to conflict in the north of the country¹⁹ that has contributed to create the complex context in which girls and boys grow up. Some respondents mentioned specific challenges or barriers that girls and their families faced after the conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army resulting in both single and double orphanhood, early pregnancy and migration. Girls and young women also reported being left with the responsibility of looking after their siblings when one or both parents die prematurely. Discussions held with girls and boys in Kampala suggest trends in Uganda's urban centres towards more positive norms around gender roles and responsibilities.

2.1.1 Poverty intersects with gendered norms at home

While both girls and boys described the ways that poverty and economic hardship influence their daily lives, they were affected differently. Both girls and boys reported their parents' inability to afford school fees and school-related supplies. However, the challenge of premature drop out from school reportedly affected girls more as the

¹⁹ Lira was the research location in Northern Uganda.

dominant gender norm considers girls' education to be a less valuable investment than boys'.

"When a parent is poor, he or she cannot be in a position to pay for both a girl's and boy's school fees and which I think that's the only thing that cuts across."

[Interviewer] "And what do you feel is different?"

"Those social norms exist that a girl child does not study. A girl child has no value before the parents. That's why it's the girls who are mostly affected."

(Girl, Buyende)

Many of the respondents were orphaned and have had to find ways to cope with challenges, including supporting siblings or other family members. There were several comments around the particular struggles that orphaned girls and boys faced, such as economic hardship and stigma from the community. This seemed to be a common experience among both girls and boys. For example, in the Buyende boys' workshop, the death of one or both parents was the most frequently mentioned challenging moment. However, for girls the situation was more complex as the death of parents was likely to further constrain them socially and economically. The following example illustrates how girls' chances were more severely affected by intersecting inequalities than boys' chances:

"The girls who have no parents are looked down at and let's say that if they are moving almost naked due to lack of proper clothing, they have no proper way to survive. People are usually just looked down at and that is what increases the challenges among orphaned children. And also let's say, for a girl that has already dropped out of school, so such girls are seen as people with no future and there is nothing that can help them. So when they usually go into the community, they are looked down at by people because they see nothing good that she will contribute in the community in the future. So that can increase the challenges because you are living in fear. You cannot even associate well with your friends who are school-going. They will also not care for you anymore, and do not want to be seen in the same space with you anymore." (Girl, Lira)

Girls also experienced the economic constraints of their families in a number of other ways than boys. For example, many girls who took part in the research mentioned that their parents were often unable or unwilling to meet their daily needs, such as purchasing sanitary products. Girls reported that as they approach adolescence, the expectations of others about girls' capabilities begin to change, and they were expected to be more financially capable. In this context, transactional relationships were more likely to be reported. In the research, both girls and boys frequently mentioned girls having "boyfriends"²⁰ to support them financially – providing money for sanitary products and school fees – as a response to the economic hardships that girls faced within their families.

²⁰ In Kampala and other urban centres, "boyfriends" are more likely to be older peers and adult men. In rural locations in Uganda, "boyfriends" tend to be age peers.

“Other situations at home force her to fall into relationships and such things... [this] can force the girl to fall into love.”

[Interviewer] “So should we say that if a girl gets a boyfriend, her problems will have been solved?”

“At the moment she can be thinking that that’s the best solution she is having. But she ends up with an end result that’s disastrous.” (Girl, Kamuli)

One girl explained how gender norms not only supported exploitative situations, but acted to create a dependency on boys and older men that limited girls’ and young women’s choices.

“The second issue is that those challenges come for girls because the girls over-depend. [They] believe in boys, like with the teachers, you might be over laughing with them, all the time you are spending with the teacher and the teacher asks you to love him. So instead of running away, you keep getting closer.” (Girl, Kamuli)

Transactional relationships appear to be largely sanctioned by parents and others, perpetuating a set of limiting social norms which commodify sex, and putting girls at significant risk of pregnancy

“Some others are not raped, but like I told you, it’s the mistreatment from the parents. [It is] like abusing you, telling you that you’re now too big: go and get married. You [are] asking for money, maybe to buy smearing oil and they do not give [it to] you. As a result, you end up getting a boy who can provide for you, giving you money to buy whatever. You end up conceiving at a young age.” (Girl, Buyende)

“...they [the parents] believe that girls are born purposely for marriage. On the other hand, [there are] parents around – who I witness – they go and sell themselves in the presence of their girls. You find that their girls are also doing the same. Then the lack of basic needs in a family, like when a girl is in her period she needs pad, clothes to change. But then the family is not able to provide and these girls think like making money through prostitution.” (Boy, Kampala)

Others talked about how limitations combined with changing expectations result in additional and inappropriate levels of responsibility for girls. They cited examples of girls becoming responsible for paying school fees themselves or being reliant on family members other than their mothers and fathers to pay school fees. According to the girls, this situation could increase the risk of school drop-out.

“[She] started paying her own school fees at the age of 12. This was a little bit hard for a young girl to do it on her own. She couldn’t manage this all alone, and so along the way she dropped out of school.” (Girls’ workshop, Lira)

“After her aunt failed to pay her school fees, she had to seek support from her vulnerable mother. It was a real struggle, so she dropped out of school.” (Girls’ workshop, Lira)

2.1.2 Violence against girls

At the same time, options for girls appeared to be limited, as they reported being branded as “bad girls” if they become pregnant as a result of having a relationship, possibly because pregnancy is a more visible symbol of early sexual activity. Pregnancy was also reportedly likely to generate financial costs for the girl’s family, unless a marriage was subsequently arranged. In general, according to the girls, families, communities and even girls themselves had negative attitudes towards girls who become pregnant. One respondent expressed her feeling about girls who are pregnant at a young age in this way:

“A girl starts going into relationships early when she is not yet of age in order for her to own these things and yet she cannot afford them. This brings about early pregnancy and once you get pregnant, you would’ve ruined your future. There’s no good that you will achieve in the future... at times, people talk a lot of bad things about them. For instance, if this person’s daughter has no job, she just keeps moving up and about. We don’t know what is wrong. Even school has failed. She has also failed in marriage. Now we don’t even know how she will survive in this world.” (Girl, Lira)

Just over half of the female interview respondents were already mothers, most becoming pregnant at the age of 13 or 14. They presented a mixed picture of the support that they received from their parents, how they were able to negotiate (or not) returning to school, and how they were able to avoid (or not) early marriage. In addition, many of the girls who took part in the research described “harsh” parents, a general lack of support and a lack of engagement from parents in shaping their lives. This form of negligence contributes to patterns such as early sexual debut, pregnancy and transactional relationships, ultimately perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of household poverty, underpinned by social norms which commodify girls’ bodies and sexual activity.

“I think the village people have strong desire for young girls. Raping young girls is not [a challenge] for them. The other issue is that most parents are drunkards. So while they are taking the alcohol, they begin discussing exchanging girls for alcohol. When he finishes taking the alcohol and gets back home, he begins chasing you out of the home. He gets *pangas* [knives] to send you away to go and marry the son or the particular person who bought the alcohol. What happens is that even the girls run away [eventually], even if not with that particular boy or man but finds one of her choice, because when your parents surrender you, nobody can come in to help.” (Girl, Buyende)

“Some of our parents are drunkards. What they think is to marry off their young daughters whereby they receive dowries, which they use for buying alcohol.” (Girl, Lira)

At the same time, it became clear during the workshops with boys how sexual violence and rape was normalised. This was evident across all workshops and locations. This issue is explored further in section 3. According to girls, the home was also a space where the status quo was maintained through violence and abuse, regularly meted out against girls who attempt to resist social norms. During one of the workshop exercises, several girls gave examples of how their mothers abused them when they attempted to re-enter school after having a child.

2.2 Dominant beliefs underpinning norms

The research identified a range of dominant social norms. These included:

- An acceptability of violence against women and girls linked to the desire to control girls' and women's behaviour and movement. Girls were routinely subjected to violence in the home if their behaviour is deemed unacceptable. Violence and abuse was used as a tool both by men and older women.
- Men's role as decision makers was consistently reinforced in both private and public spaces. Particularly in rural areas girls and women had little say about decisions in the home, for example, regarding marriage, school attendance and strategic/long-term financial matters. Men (both older and younger) and older women, in particular, protected these norms both in the home and in the wider community.
- Adolescence was considered to be a life stage when the participants were expected to become more independent and "look after themselves". However, this was at times a challenge for girls, in particular, as they were less likely to find work outside the home due to their age and gender, had limited educational opportunities and had less agency around decisions regarding marriage than boys.
- In contrast, families, peers and the wider community expected boys to portray strength, be dominant or influence women's decision making, and be visible in public or community spaces. Boys were expected to conform to the dominant masculine behaviours and to reinforce their dominance through the use of violence and abuse. They also reflected on how they were taught to adopt dominant behaviours over girls in order to protect and preserve men's status quo in the family and community. This suggests that adolescent boys were being conditioned to maintain and uphold a patriarchal society.
- An emerging set of more modern gender norms were identified by the girls and boys in urban areas, where decisions in the home were more likely to be made in an equitable way, and where girls could choose a husband or partner. Norms around male dominance in formal decision-making had also changed in urban Uganda, and several female politicians and duty bearers were identified in the research. These changing norms present a picture of progression towards more gender equitable norms in some parts of country.

The following two sections explore the dominant norms through the different forms of gender inequality that girls and boys face. These are connected to the dimensions²¹ within which they occur in girls' and boys' lives. It presents both girls' and boys' perspectives, allowing for a deeper understanding of how gender inequality plays out in the different dimensions of girls' and boys' lives and the extent to which gender inequality is experienced as an individual, at home and in the community.

2.3 Girls' perspectives and experiences of gender inequality

2.3.1 Individual

²¹ Bronfenbrenner, *op. cit.*

The girls who took part in the research were quick to acknowledge that they are discriminated against for being girls. One girl confirmed the situation in her village, identifying some of the beliefs that guide people's behaviour:

"It's because we the girls are being discriminated [against], the parents only favour the boys. They even say that a [girl] child is a curse – if you start a journey and the first thing you meet is a girl and you're a man, it's considered as bad luck so you have to go back [home] until you first meet with a boy."
(Girl, Buyende)

The same girl talked further about how these beliefs then play out in every sphere of life:

"It's the boys who are leading in everything. Like in leadership, the bigger posts are being given to the boys. [They believe] that the girls cannot handle such posts. The other thing is that girls cannot do heavy jobs and they are only left for the boys... like engineering. Presidency is not meant for girls. People say that a woman cannot rule a man. Because they assume we don't have brains that can transform the country." (Girl, Buyende)

2.3.2 Family

Girls described their homes and families as a place where gender power relations and gender discrimination mostly affected them on a day-to-day basis, as the spaces where these beliefs are socialised in childhood. Girls felt that how girls and boys are expected to behave in the household and family is very clearly defined. Girls are expected to carry out household chores, while this was not expected from their brothers.

"They [the roles] are not the same because a girl child is expected to spend much of her time in the kitchen and for the boy, if he is leaving home, it means he's going to work if he is not at school. And so that is the difference."
(Girl, Buyende)

Parallel to gendered expectations around household work were expectations around what is considered to be appropriate behaviour for girls. Girls reported that they were expected to be submissive and responsive to the demands of their brothers, fathers and mothers. At the same time, girls reported a general desire for both girls and boys to be socialised in a way that anticipates a continuation of dominant gender norms. Those gender norms become instilled as part of most people's unconscious bias and are more likely to be conformed to.

"...a parent can tell you that you have to work since you have to practise what you will be doing in your family [when you marry and leave home]. The boy is going to stay here and take over the inheritance. [This is] just because they believe one day you will leave your parents' home and go and get married." (Girl, Buyende)

2.4 Boys' perspectives and experiences of gender inequality

2.4.1 Individual

Boys described the expectation of boys and men in their communities as physically dominant, as decision makers, and as leaders. They discussed how they were expected to protect their status quo as men in all spheres of life, and that it was

normalised to use violence in order to do so. Fathers, peers and members of the community provided positive reinforcement to adolescent boys who adopted attitudes and behaviours that were considered to be appropriate, including continuing support for their education.

Boys discussed how these norms limited their behaviour, in relation to how they express themselves and how they behave. In interviews with boys in Kampala, for example, there were particular references to drug use among parents, boys and young men. In one interview, a respondent talks about how drug use was considered part of what it means to be a “good boy”.

“The community I come from has particular attitudes that have contributed to these challenges, for example in Bwaise where I come from to be seen as a good boy you have to smoke weed, join a boxing club, work out and develop muscles. You will find that most boys struggle to be involved in the above mentioned behaviours [in order] to be regarded as good boys in my community.” (Boy, Kampala)

2.4.2 Family

In general, boys recognised that power relations were firmly tipped in favour of men and boys in the home. They widely acknowledged that girls were treated differently to boys both in the home and in the community. Some attributed this to the lower value that society places on girls. They also identified the nuanced ways in which gender norms were ensured in the home – through the daily reinforcement of roles and responsibilities, a particularly effective form of socialisation and way of maintaining the status quo.

2.5 How girls and boys experience inequality in the community

Both girls and boys described how girls’ and women’s voices are largely not heard in their communities; for example, they are not invited to community meetings in many rural communities.

“When you look at our community, these problems are only faced by girls, there is no man who can come up and say that he was not allowed to speak in the community meeting. They only do that to the girls.” (Girl, Buyende)

At the same time, in rural communities in particular girls and women are not involved in decision making, in the community nor within the household.

“Girls are not allowed to participate fully in decision making. The community believes women don’t have good ideas; rather they are good at housekeeping. Boys participate fully in decision making, they also play a role in influencing decisions because the community values the boys’ ideas [more] compared to that of a girl.” (Boys’ workshop, Buyende)

At the same time, norms around the dominance of adults and elders reinforced the idea that younger women and men would have less authority in public positions and as such their participation and decision making power was limited. This was confirmed both by female and male respondents.

Both female and male respondents also frequently mentioned early marriage. Girls talked about being pressured into marriage by parents and community leaders when they would prefer to remain in school. Some of the male respondents also talked about being pushed into marriage by their parents, when their parents perceive that they are old enough.

“A parent may come [up] with the idea between them and say ‘Our boy is now big enough, let’s marry him’ and they remove you from the school. [They do] the same to girls.” (Boy, Lira)

“In my community, they decided that boys should get married before the age of 20 years. The clan leaders came up with this sort of behaviour. If you refuse to go by their rules, they punish you by sending you away from home.” (Boy, Buyende)

The power of parental influence was clear and presented a disadvantage particularly for girls. For example, both girls and boys mentioned girls’ lack of right to land ownership, a situation driven by the cultural practice of girls and women leaving the parental home when they marry, and one that is central to the continuation of male dominance over material assets.

“It’s only boys that have ownership over land and not girls. Everything at home is always given to boys first. Boys, to our parents, are the first to be considered.” (Girl, Lira)

“The boys are prepared to become the heirs and take over property in homes, but the girls are not considered as such. They are kept at home doing domestic work and they are only prepared to get married and produce children.” (Girls’ workshop, Buyende)

Social norms appeared to be enforced much more strictly for girls, as this example shows. This is discussed further in section 3.

“You may find in this particular community, they expect maybe a boy to wear a necktie in order to be called a gentleman. Yet you may find one who doesn’t wear a necktie but it doesn’t mean he is not a man. So you find in these communities, they have put social norms [in place], like ‘if a girl can’t mop, she is not a girl. If a girl does not get married by the age of 15, she is not a girl’.” (Girl, Kampala)

This section outlined the extent to which adolescent girls and boys felt that gender discrimination was present in various areas of their lives. In Uganda, the situation was particularly challenging for girls. They experienced the interplay of various factors and conditions differently to boys. In an often violent context, there were limited opportunities for education, economic activity and participation for girls, particularly in rural Uganda.

The next section will outline the extent to which attitudes, behaviours and norms that drive gender discrimination and inequality were deeply entrenched, and how this in turn formed a significant challenge for the adolescent girls and boys who are committed to advancing gender equality. In addition, sanctions were applied more harshly when girls did not conform to the expected norms. Using social norms analysis, the next section will also highlight how an intricate set of deeply held

attitudes around gender roles and responsibilities are maintained through power and control, and what happens when these long-held ideas and norms about how people should behave are confronted by new ones.

Section 3: Key findings: Exploring the norms that restrict or advance gender equality and social change

This section uses social norms analysis to present how power is promoted, protected and reinforced. It presents firstly the adolescents' reflections on the origins of gender norms; and secondly, the sanctions faced for non-compliance with norms. Following this, two vignettes outline girls' and boys' experiences of how norms shaped their beliefs and actions; and how social norms have either protected or eroded their rights. Finally, it explores the potential for change identified by the adolescents.

3.1 Adolescents' perspectives on the possibilities of shifting social norms

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

One respondent talked about how the division of activities, roles and responsibilities had been established a long time ago, and how these ideas are continually reinforced over generations, because boys and men are more likely to remain in the community when they are adults.

Community leaders seemed to play a central role in influencing ideas and decision making around girls' lives. In Buyende, one respondent talked about the community making the decision about when girls get married, particularly if they are not enrolled in school. Parents did not seem to be in any position to challenge this. Another described how it is difficult for parents to uphold more positive attitudes towards girls and how the community was particularly restrictive about girls returning to school once they have given birth.

"The parents lack guidance and counselling towards the young girls. The community members can mislead the parents and ask him to let you go and marry while you are still under age. You can look at yourself as someone still young but the community people come and ask for you since she is home and not schooling; 'give her to me so that I can provide her with what she needs'.

[Interviewer] "So the parents also accept?"

"Yes because of poverty and they cannot provide you with whatever you want."

"If you don't empower a girl that her body is hers and no one would do anything with her body without her consent, you find she is just there when you tell her to get married. She will get married not because she want to get married but because her society says so, her parents are telling her to do so, so you find that the girls have no say in this particular sense because you find

the society has already dictated, girls are supposed to get married at this particular age, so you find that girls do not really have a voice. However much they don't want to go into the marriage, they feel that they do not have a voice, so they just have to bear with whatever they are facing, however much they are really pressing to them.” (Girl, Kampala)

At the same time, there was also a sense that there is a generational divide in attitudes within the community and that changes were beginning to happen – evidence of a tipping point emerging. In Buyende, for instance, some girls described how parents did not have the information they needed to challenge the community, nor to question the guidance that community leaders gave, indicating that there were some who do see the value of change. Despite the recognition that gender norms had been passed down the generations, many of the respondents rejected such concepts and were ready to reflect on their role in trying to shift discriminatory attitudes and behaviours with the support of gender equality projects like Champions of Change.

3.2 How norms are maintained – applying sanctions in the home, among peers and in the community

Both girls and boys expressed fear of losing the confidence of their parents and no longer receiving support from them if they did not conform. However, girls appeared to be more heavily sanctioned in such situations. Several girls gave examples of those who have not done what their parents wanted and who ended up having to support themselves; at the risk of their parents no longer supporting their daily needs or paying school fees. For young unmarried mothers, this situation carries significant risks both to themselves and to their children's wellbeing and security. At the girls' workshop in Kamuli, one participant described how a girl she knew refused to get married when her father said she should. The father stopped paying her school fees, although he later resumed in response to her actions. According to the respondent, “she instead insisted on her studies, she had to support herself ... instead of getting married. This example shows that [she] was determined to study and had a vision but the father did not know as he was forcing her to get married.” (Girls' workshop, Kamuli)

“Because she refused to get married her brother threatened her, ‘I am not going to pay the school fees, I am not going to do this’. So that is the same thing that happens to our peers, they usually tell you that ‘if you do not do this, you are not our friend’.” (Girl, Kampala)

“They can deny and say they never gave birth to you, they ask you to go and look for another family since you are not part of theirs and you lose your clan.” (Girl, Kampala)

Openly disobeying parents or other adults in the community, or raising disagreements with them, was expressed as behaviour that would be heavily sanctioned, particularly for girls. This was linked to norms of respecting parents, elders and leaders, and more specifically on protecting the norms around girls' and women's submission to men.

“What is required of you to be accepted or valued? You have to respect big people; you have to believe in whatever the community believes in because

it's their rules and regulations so you have to follow them. So if you go by that, they won't take you as a bad person." (Girl, Buyende)

For boys, being disowned by parents seemed to be more of a last resort, but was certainly a situation that they fear.

"The parents can also decide to leave the boy and tell him that 'you are no longer my son, from this day henceforth go and get any other parent who you will listen to since you don't pay attention to the things I tell you'." (Boy, Buyende)

Responses suggest more leeway for boys if they act in a "disrespectful" manner towards parents. Nevertheless, boys also risked losing the support of their families as one respondent describes:

"Most boys do not take the advantage of listening to their parents. They rather listen to their friends, as a result their parents feel disrespected and end up refusing to pay school fees for them. While the girls are respectful and obedient, hence winning favour of the parents to be educated." (Boy, Buyende)

The discussions also show how peers can be both a positive and negative influence. The need to navigate various peer groups and influences is expressed as a major concern by girls, as they continually seek to gain others' respect, and gauge who is respected or approved of by adults and by males. One girl explained:

"...peer groups include both good and bad peers and you may realise that when you have bad peers, they may mislead you – for example, they get you a man and ask you to marry him, so these groups also contribute to the challenges that we face." (Girl, Buyende).

In the interviews, girls went further, talking about facing sanctions from friends for both "good" and "bad" behaviour, or for any behaviour that is considered to be different from the group or norm. For example, one girl talked about being isolated from her friends when she started playing football. She described her experiences:

"My friends expected something different, they know girls are not supposed to play football. I say, I will be a footballer and I have to play it, most of my friends had to quit maybe and go. They felt like being a friend to a girl who plays football, it is something, I don't know, how it was looking in the community. But it is what I wanted and another thing is at times, you find girls have friends and if you are doing something not in line with what the friends are doing, still they neglect you. Like when you're so much in church more so in this adolescent stage. Most of the friends neglect you because you'll be doing things in a holy way and it is not what they always want to do, so, at times you become like an obstacle to them. So for them to remove the obstacle, they just neglect you." (Girl, Kampala)

Boys also talked about facing similar pressures from friends and peer groups – risking isolation if they did not follow the kinds of behaviours, positive or negative, that were expected of them, leaving boys without peers to discuss problems. One boy explains: "that boy would be neglected and no one would follow him, while in problems, and above all he will lose his friends" (Boy, Lira).

For girls in particular, there was an ever-present threat of violence and of being raped. The vignettes in section 3.4 explores this with regards to male dominance in intimate relationships. Two female respondents from Buyende described the threat of friends and others in their community organising a group of boys to rape them.

“The other issue is that if you fail to do what they require of you, they can organise for you like four boys and ask them to all force you into having sex with them. They can hurt your genital parts or even get you pregnant.” (Girl, Buyende)

Many girls also mentioned physical, verbal and psychological violence in the home.

“Maybe the parents forcing them to get married and the community members also laughing at you, like when you gave birth the villagers begin talking about you ‘that one who gave birth from home, now she is nothing’. They keep throwing discouraging words as they even mislead your parent. Your parent not to take you back to school. The parent listens and leaves you home and after some time you again conceive.” (Girl, Buyende)

Girls also reported facing stigma from the community, particularly if they have had a child. Comments such as “you’ve thrown your life away” made challenging situations worse for vulnerable girls, in particular, serving to restrict their options after having a child. Many girls talked about community members gossiping and making up stories about them in order to make them feel ashamed – a powerful way of policing behaviours.

“...because for you wherever you go, you will be discussing about me. For example, if am passing you, you might tell the rest that they are saying that [she] has very bad manners. At times you just want to spoil my name before the community people in that even if I had wanted something, I cannot get because you spoke bad things about me.” (Girl, Buyende)

Another girl said: “The cost of girls who do not follow the norms is losing respect and the result is humiliation. She wouldn’t pass in the community without people pointing fingers at her or insulting her in public.” (Girl, Lira)

Building on this theme, some female and male respondents described how one act considered “non-conforming” could mean that they were generally viewed in a negative light by the community and could potentially face the blame for acts that others have committed.

“Everyone will say, it must be so and so because she is the one who normally smokes marijuana around here. In case of any suspicion, no one will bother investigating to find out the truth of the matter. Those are the people you find when they have been killed and yet sometimes they are innocent and have no case to answer. So in most cases such people get very many problems in our society in the way that [if] there is any case that threatens one’s life, such people will always be the first suspects. They are usually suspects.” (Girl, Kamuli)

“When a boy refuse to conform to how the community expect them to behave, they will start to blame him for any bad acts in the community. For instance

when something is stolen in the community they will say, 'Don't look any further, it is the son of so and so who must have stolen it, no one else but him'. So they will blame him for it and even continue to tell others that that boy is spoilt and he has no manners at all." (Boy, Buyende)

Some male respondents felt that sanctions would be applied equally to girls and boys. This was a common perception where discrimination against girls was not fully acknowledged by boys and men.

"Such a child would not be in good terms with everybody. He or she would be rejected in the community. That child would lose many opportunities available to others." (Boy, Kamuli)

Others felt that sanctions could be just as harsh for boys as they were for girls. Respondents were asked: What would happen if a boy did not conform to how their family expects them to behave? There were various responses: "the boy and his family would lose value in the community"; "that boy would be rejected"; "he would lose many opportunities at home".

The research also revealed that girls and boys not only policed each other, but also themselves. For example, girls expressed quite strong opinions around the ideas of how they should act in order to be valued.

"You see a girl who is disciplined is valued ... If a girl is not so much involved in peer groups but if she is involved in the bad peer groups, you also get spoilt because, for example, if you move with the sex workers you also become one, so I conclude by saying not joining bad groups. [Another] point is by not being involved so much with boys. The next point is the girl's dress code because there are some girls who dress badly and this can tempt the boy." (Girl, Kamuli)

As a result, when asked if they believe they should conform to what is expected of them, many girls answered yes – they still wanted to behave in a way that others in their community would respect. This 'sticking point' is explored further in section 4, and is perhaps indicative of the fact that the Champions of Change programme had only recently been launched in Uganda.

3.3 Exploring the experiences of norms through vignettes

In this section, the challenges experienced by adolescent girls and boys are examined through two scenarios – one exploring girls' experiences of gender and social norms around marriage, and another on boys' experiences of gendered power relations in intimate relationships.

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

The participants were presented with a story in the form of a vignette. As the story evolves, the participants were encouraged to discuss and reflect on how gender

inequality interacts with their daily lives. Throughout the study process they were asked to react to the characters' attitudes and behaviours, and discuss how this makes them feel and what they think the characters should do at each stage. They were asked to respond to the different situations, comment on the types of sanctions the central character would face in the case of non-compliance of normative expectations, reflect on who has power and influence in the story, describe their desired outcome for the story, and discuss who might have the power to influence this shift to a new or desired norm.

3.3.1 Vignette 1: Gender and social norms around marriage

The girls' exercise was carried out in four different research locations. A total of 48 girls took part.

One of the dominant social norms that drove expectations of adolescent girls were the norms which guide beliefs on the age of marriage. The girls were asked to reflect on the story and to put themselves in the position of the various characters. They were asked to reflect on the characters' different positions at various stages of the story, to think about what each of them would or should do in these scenarios, and who would influence their behaviour and how they would like the story to end.

Box 3: Nancy and Sarah's story

Nancy and Sarah are cousins and are both 16. One day Nancy comes over to visit Sarah's family. Nancy announces that she is engaged and getting married in a month's time. She also strongly suggests to Sarah that she should also marry soon as she is "getting old".

Nancy reveals that she also knows someone from their village who is interested in marrying Sarah.

But Sarah doesn't want to marry young. She announces that she does not want marry at this age.

The girls' aunt then comes in and agrees that Sarah should not marry. However, others in the family try to make Sarah and her aunt comply.

3.3.1.1 *Girls are willing to challenge beliefs around traditional gender roles*

The girls who took part in the discussion were almost unanimous in their responses, suggesting that Sarah had made the right decision to refuse to get married. They stated that the norms guiding decision making around marriage negatively affect girls' rights to education, to participate and to choose. For example, one of the young mothers from Buyende said that she would advise both Nancy and Sarah not to get married because of the problems involved in giving birth at an early age, and the challenges in taking responsibility for bringing up the child. As a parent herself, she said she would give positive advice to her daughter not to get married when young and to encourage her to continue with studies instead of marriage. These sentiments were expressed most strongly by the girls from Kampala, where it has become more common practice for girls and young women to choose their own partners.

Some groups went further and suggested that the Champions of Change programme should counsel Nancy against marriage at such a young age. They should discuss

with her the effects of early marriage, teenage pregnancy and the risk of HIV, and suggest that she continues with her education.

3.3.1.2 *The power of the personal and the peer*

Some girls then suggested that Sarah has the power to influence Nancy's decision, turning the scenario on its head and presenting girls as having the potential to be powerful agents of change.

“Through counselling and guidance, through conducting dialogues and since there is a saying that, birds of the same feathers fly together, then Sarah can influence Nancy to change her mind from getting married, just like her as a champion of change.” (Girls' workshop, Buyende)

The girls also felt that Sarah's peers are unlikely to make her change her mind, despite the fact that she is challenging an existing norm. One girl suggests: “the peer has no authority or power to change their decision especially concerning marriage because this is a personal issue”. Others agreed that they believe that when girls have goals to fulfil, no one should be able to interfere with the achievement of those goals.

3.3.2 Vignette 2: Power relations in sexual relationships

Boys in all research locations discussed the story of Paul and Mary, their sexual relationship and the influence of an outside person, Adolf, Paul's cousin. The boys were asked to reflect on the story and to put themselves in the position of the various characters. They were asked to reflect on the characters' different positions at various stages of the story, to think about what each of them would or should do in these scenarios, and who would influence their behaviour and how they would like the story to end.

Box 4: Paul and Mary's story

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

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

Paul's cousin Adolf comes to visit. Adolf and Paul are close cousins and Paul confides in Adolf, explaining that he does not understand why his girlfriend continually nags him to use a condom and, worse that she suggests that he should also take responsibility for contraception in the relationship. Adolf explains to Paul

that he should respect the wishes of his girlfriend and take on shared responsibility for contraception use in their relationship.

3.3.2.1 Contradictory beliefs about responsibility for contraception

Across the communities, boys could identify with the scenario presented to them. However, they presented a range of responses regarding the responsibility for the use of contraception in Paul and Mary's relationship. While many agreed that the use of condoms is a shared responsibility, some boys disagreed, suggesting that they would advise their girlfriends to take sole responsibility for avoiding pregnancy and to use pills. Many of the boys in the focus groups suggested that they do have sex without condoms.

3.3.2.2 Influence of peers: "good" friends and "bad" girls

Most of the boys were clear about what constituted "good" advice: "Adolf advised him to have equal responsibility for the pregnancy, not to stay with bad groups and use condoms to avoid pregnancy."

At the same time, others noted that to take this "good" advice would be to go against the dominant norm, which is that contraception is the responsibility of the girl. There were various suggestions that this sets up a situation of distrust between Paul and Mary, and is an unnecessary challenge of his male dominance.

"His friends would say that the girl is not trusted while others would say ladies are not the one to decide for men and others would just laugh at him that he is a coward."

"I think Paul and his friends would say Mary doesn't love her boyfriend, on the other hand, others would say Mary is cheating."

"When Mary says no, I thought she was not ready for that love/relationship, secondly I thought Mary is cheating on me and does not trust me."

3.3.2.3 Dominant masculine beliefs about consent and violence in relationships

During the various workshops, several suggestions were made about how Paul could "get his own way" if Mary continued to refuse sex without a condom. These included:

- violence (rape, including group rape);
- deception ("getting a friend to talk to Mary and convince her about the dangers of using condoms and the good things about having sex without a condom"; "Paul should accept to use a condom but should make a hole in it"; beginning intercourse with a condom on and removing it without Mary's consent; and using money to convince Mary to have sex without using a condom);
- "charm" ("bewitch/charm Mary so that she will do all that he wants; spend money on her – before long she will just accept everything he likes to do with her"); and
- abandonment ("Paul to just leave Mary and get another girlfriend"; "Leave the girl for a while then she will come back to him by herself").

Ultimately, these are all suggestions designed to re-position Paul as the dominant partner, mirroring the norms around girls' submission, conformity and silence. Some boys added: "The girl doesn't love you because if she did she would give you all."

“Friends would say that Mary has embarrassed him by revealing their secrets to her friends.”

3.3.2.4 The importance of peers in supporting shifts in social norms and communication in relationships

The story highlighted the critical importance of the peer group, both in the way that it supports and normalises deeply held social norms – for example, male violence against women and girls – and how it can help to challenge them. The groups accepted that Adolf was presenting a new perspective: “Adolf’s advice is different from those given to Paul by his friends in the community”. They also saw that it could potentially lead to new behaviour on the part of Paul: “Paul should abstain from sex but remain in love with Mary”.

Despite the contradictions being expressed within the boys’ workshops, the respondents largely anticipated a positive outcome for Paul and Mary’s relationship. This is indicative of the fact that boys and young men in Uganda are approaching a tipping point in terms of internalising a new mode of conducting intimate relationships and a new dynamic between girls and boys; women and men. In the discussions, while the boys identified that communication between Paul and Mary was the only way possible to have a positive outcome, they continued to struggle with the challenge of their own deeply held attitudes towards girls and women and the expectation of male dominance in intimate relationships.

3.4 What is the potential for change?

The evidence presented in this section reflects the extent to which adolescent girls and boys feel that gendered and social norms are deeply entrenched and hard to shift. In turn this presents a significant challenge to adolescent girls and boys who are committed to advancing gender equality.

However, their reflections on what kinds of changes they would like to see for a positive outcome for the central characters of the vignettes identified two key actions: the importance of dialogue and communication as a means of negotiating unequal power relations, and the power of the rights discourse for transforming discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Both stories presented interesting distinctions between old ideas and new ways of acting, with both girls and boys presenting visions of hope for a better and more gender equitable future. The use of a rights framework to articulate what was wrong and unfair about the dominant gender norms was particularly powerful from the girls’ story, and presents a useful basis for continued engagement around the need for change.

Girls acknowledged the importance of engaging with their parents when attempting to shift gendered norms. They suggested that dialogue was important but perhaps not enough and highlighted the importance of engaging families in gender equality programmes to support them in their journey of change. This idea is expanded upon in the next section. The boys discussed the importance of dialogue towards equality in intimate relationships, recognising the challenges of the dominant attitudes influencing how relationships were conducted and the prevalence of sexual violence as a manifestation of male dominance.

Section 4: Key findings: Understanding the pathways to change- adolescent girls' and boys' experiences of positive actions to promote gender equality and social change

This section presents potential pathways towards change using an empowerment and rights framework in order to articulate girls' and boys' differing or changing sense of agency, their opportunities for participation, and their vision for social change. By overlaying a social norms analysis,²² it outlines the adolescents' perspectives on the main challenges for change. The Ugandan study provides an opportunity to see whether young people could navigate past the so called "sticking points". It also offers insights into how well adolescents were able to recognise and use the so called "tipping points".

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

4.1 Individual change – advancing girls' individual empowerment

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

4.1.1 Developing self-esteem

In both, individual interviews and the workshops, almost all of the girls talked about changes within themselves and their self-concepts alongside their experiences of direct influence they have had over other people. This suggests a link between how the girls felt about themselves and their ability to influence others.

Progressing through individual journeys of empowerment has led to a self-recognition that as girls they are valuable, able and powerful. This is contrary to what they had been previously taught about themselves, that girls' abilities are limited in comparison to their male peers. In Uganda, this difference in value was most clearly articulated in discussions about differential access to education for girls and boys.

²² See section 1.3 for discussion of empowerment and rights framework and social norms analysis.

Several girls indicated that they had wrestled their right to education from those who had the power to restrict access to it. Their comments clearly demonstrate the association of an increased sense of self with increased agency and participation, a sense that they could achieve their goals and dreams, as well as a sense of satisfaction stemming from this knowledge. This shift in the way that girls perceived themselves, transitioning from beliefs that they are powerless to powerful (developing power within²³), is a critical part of girls' journey towards empowerment.

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

The increased sense of self-esteem among the girl respondents, coupled with new knowledge they have gained on gender equality and their rights in programmes like Champions of Change, resulted in the feeling that they had both the confidence and knowledge to speak up and to question gender discrimination. Some girls also talked about being able to discuss challenging issues with their parents and with community members. The girls felt that they had more information than others and that there was the possibility of being able to introduce new ideas and change minds.

Girls expressed that they had often felt that they were not listened to. The opportunity to develop “a voice” and to occupy spaces in which people can listen to them as a result of being involved in the Champions of Change programme was therefore of significant value to them.

“I used not to speak publicly; I was always quiet but nowadays am very confident and talkative.” (Girl, Lira)

In general, girls discussed their households as spaces where they felt increasingly able to challenge accepted norms and attitudes, particularly those of their parents.

“...there is the possibility of the community looking at you as too old to stay in your father's house and they advise you to get married. But you as a girl, if you know the disadvantages of early marriage, you can let them know and because these people mostly do certain things out of ignorance, when you talk to them, there is a possibility of them letting you go and study.” (Girl, Buyende)

4.1.3 Becoming a role model and advising others

Many girls talked about other young people in their communities beginning to approach them to discuss their challenges and to ask for their advice. This reveals that the girls were not only generally confident about expressing themselves, but also comfortable sharing their experiences. They were also keen for other girls to be able to develop as individuals.

“The positive change for instance, comes in when someone sees what I did and uses the same example to go and do the same elsewhere. Currently I am the one who farms with my mother, I am the one who provides food for my mom, makes sure she is clothed. So another girl can also see that ‘if Harriet

²³ Cornwall, A. (2016) *op. cit.*

can do this, what of me?' She can start making pancakes to sell so that she can also do something good in her family." (Girl, Lira)

"They can ask them to stay home and wait to give birth and then get back to school. So many have listened to me and gone back to school and there is even one with me in the same school who has five children but she went back to school and started senior one." (Girl, Buyende)

"I also pick a few ideas and pass them on to my friends especially those who dropped out of school. One has actually gone back to school while the others here have promised that they will head back soon. So I give them my example and tell them that they have all seen me suffering before but I am now making it... So even in church I was selected as one of the people who has to mentor the youths. I have like 30 church youths that I usually sit down with and talk to them... they love to hear my life stories (my struggles), you never know that could change their mind sets." (Girl, Kamuli)

Many of the girls who took part in the research suggested that they have acted as role models and mentors to others, including transferring and using their mentoring skills in other spheres of their lives. For example, one girl from Kampala talked about how she has been selected to act as a youth mentor by her church. This is a powerful demonstration of how girls were not only able to use new skills for their own development and decision making, but also to support others. Girls' active use of their knowledge, their skills and their agency is a critical part of the journey towards personal empowerment and the fight for gender equality.

In the majority of cases, the examples girls gave were of advising other girls and young women. However, one participant made a point of explaining that she talks to boys as well as girls because she knows that both need to be involved in the change: "I do counsel both the girls and boys because I see I don't fear boys just because I have to feel small. No, I stand strong and talk to the girls and boys." (Girl, Buyende)

This example demonstrates the critical importance of pushing boundaries further and the need for a deeper engagement around the relational nature of the pathways towards gender equality. This will be discussed further in section 4.3.

While the respondents did not talk about the importance of adult role models as such or suggest explicitly that they need more positive role models in the community, there were several mentions of prominent women whom they clearly look up to and who provide a sense that an alternative to the current status quo is possible. In Buyende, girls mentioned the Right Honourable Speaker Rebecca Kadaga, from the Kamuli district and various female Members of Parliament.

"Yes, because when it comes to the leaders of our nation like the female Member of Parliament, speaker, you find that they are leading very well. So if a girl child tries to behave in a good way, she can also be recognised by the public." (Girls' workshop, Buyende)

"I will take an example of the Speaker that she is a woman, assuming she is coming like from my village of Irundu, when the community people used to look at her and never imagined she would be a Speaker one day. She becomes a role model and the parents get to realise that even any other girl

child can do the same and they get courage to take their girls also to school.”
(Girl, Buyende)

Girls’ own recognition of the critical role that both younger and adult women can play in challenging and transforming gender norms is important for enhancing the process of change. This occurs by pushing the boundaries of expectations and aspirations for the next generation of women, and building on incremental gains made through individual actions. Section 5 examines the potential to develop this further, through the strategic development of networks of female change agents and mentors.

Box 5: Spotlight on the power of education

There is a recognition among all respondents that access to quality education is a critical pathway towards individual empowerment. Several examples were given showing the girls’ desire to continue attending school, and their persistent and ultimately positive interactions with their parents about this. Family decisions about school retention and the transition from lower to higher levels of schooling continue to be subject to gendered attitudes regarding the value of investing in girls’ education. That girls in rural Uganda feel able to address this particular challenge more openly is clear evidence of a deeper shift in their consciousness, both about their individual sense of power, and their awareness of the potential of education as a transformative pathway.

“Education changes a girl’s status quo entirely. How? A person who has attained formal education can stand on her two feet and defend her beliefs and visions whereas this is not the case for the illiterate. For example, even in these village meetings, you can practically see that it’s the learnt people who contribute most in the topical discussions as compared to the illiterates just because the former have self-confidence and esteem. So that why I am saying education is very key for the girl child.” (Girl, Kamuli)

“Parents should provide for their children such things so that they can concentrate in class and excel so that if there are male MPs, we also have female MPs.” (Girl, Lira)

However, the school itself appears to be a space where gender norms remain entrenched. This tension becomes clear as girls expressed their concerns about the norms on the investment that parents make in girls’ education, compared to boys’. These norms continue to influence decision making about when girls are expected to complete school, for notions around affordability of school fees and for prompting girls to take risks in order to pay school fees themselves.

4.1.4 Alternative transitions: from girlhood to womanhood

Adolescence is a time when Ugandan girls are actively encouraged to go out and fend for themselves, with limited support from the adults around them. Therefore, girls do move from girlhood to womanhood without a transition stage, an opportunity to build their self-esteem and their sense of personal power. During this transition, girls would ideally be able to experience negotiating with boys and men, being part of healthy intimate relationships, or gradually taking on increased financial responsibilities in a way that allows them to continue to attend school.

There were several girls who described the change that they have experienced during adolescence in terms of increased economic opportunities. These

opportunities were facilitated by programmes specifically designed to support adolescent girls through this transitional life stage. For example, some of the girls in Lira talked about being members of a credit scheme (Bolicap) that they use to save and borrow money. One described a number of positive impacts of this scheme, including being able to pay medical bills, hire farm labour and start small businesses. Another girl said that she felt able to join the credit group because of the confidence she had gained in the Champions of Change programme. Another participant is clear about the wider contribution she felt she could make due to economic participation: “When a child see that the parents don’t have good amounts of money, and yet she has interest in the studies, one can decide to involve herself in a sports activity, dancing activity and she makes sure that at least she has something to work on. So parents could later see that even if they failed to raise the required amounts, at least the child has managed to get scholarships and managed to take away the burden [from them]. Some children decide to do some work as they study. If one gets a job and works, in the morning, and studies in the evening of course this reduces the burden of the parent.” (Girl, Kamuli)

This demonstrates the importance of the development of girls’ internal assets, such as self-esteem and resilience alongside the recognition of when these internal assets can be potentially transformed into external assets, such as financial and material assets. In Lira, a participant described how community leaders in her village have started giving land to girls and selecting them as leaders.

“I have been given a piece of land at home. At school my presentations are respected. I am the head girl and I give good advice to girls on how to behave with good manners. So in the community as a whole, girls are being given land. We also had meetings where they selected leaders, I was amongst those selected as a leader.” (Girl, Lira).

She also explained that she felt happy to have her views respected within the community and puts this change down to the advocacy and peer education activities of the Champions of Change programme.

Box 6: The power to visualise change

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

4.2 Engaging with boys as supporters of gender equality

Boys discussed the individual changes that they have experienced as a result of participating in initiatives like the Champions of Change programme. Some boys discussed how their attitudes and behaviours have shifted from dominant masculinities to more gender equitable attitudes and behaviours. Boys are more able to recognise and challenge sexism and gender equality because they were beginning to internalise the importance of gender equality and recognise the negative impact of

gender discriminatory behaviours and attitudes. The knowledge and skills they acquired have given boys the confidence to support girls' empowerment and tackle gender inequality.

4.2.1 Attitudinal shifts towards support and solidarity

The research strongly indicates that boys' own attitudes have begun to change. Boys reported, for example, that they are taking on more domestic work. Taking the existence of strict gender roles into account this indicates a deeper attitudinal shift and a willingness to challenge social norms around gendered roles and responsibilities.

"Yes, boys now work together with the whole family. There is also division of work, for instance, they may say that the father will go with the boys to clear the garden while the mother goes with the girls to do some weeding. As a result of this, they promote solidarity in the home." (Boy, Buyende)

Many boys recognise their value as change agents as they have expressed a willingness to encourage other people to change. Similar to the girls, they also expressed a sense of increased confidence about communicating with others, acting as gender advocates in their communities and working in solidarity with girls.

"My father was a drunkard but after me talking to him about gender-based violence, he changed... When I joined Champions of Change, I was trained on how to approach and address the situation about gender inequality, meaning now I can approach anybody in the community and sensitise [them about it]." (Boy, Lira)

"I learned I was showing solidarity and that I had it within me. But I never knew how to use it. When NIYETU [Champions of Change] came, they taught me various topics like 'My confidence is my strength', 'Let's get to know each other' and 'How to communicate with people'. They gave me all the skills and the same skill is the one I am using now." (Boy, Kampala)

"I was able to take up such an action because I built up solidarity, confidence and self-esteem. As a result of this I am able to express myself, talk to others freely and also advise them." (Boy, Kampala)

Others went further and talked about how gender norms negatively affect them as boys and how they have become more aware of their ability to challenge those norms. One participant talked about getting boys to stay in school, while another expanded on the specifics of this in his community, where boys are expected to follow in the tradition of contributing to the household's income through fishing: "In Buyende some boys have not followed the community decisions of fishing at the age of eight years [instead of] attending school. I am one of the boys who rejected the rule of fishing at the age of eight years and am now in senior three at Excel Senior Secondary school in Buyende." (Boy, Buyende)

Ultimately, more boys are beginning to identify with positive and more diverse masculinities compared to the restrictive masculinities defined by the dominant social norms in their communities.

4.2.2 Boys' actions in solidarity with girls

Many of the male participants in the research spoke about the types of actions they have taken towards supporting girls, some of them in their family and others among peers or in the wider community.

“What I have done as an individual, involved my family. In our home, we are both girls and boys. But the girls are not gifted by God to perform well in academics as compared to the boys, whenever they reach primary seven they fail and end up getting married. One of my sisters who follows me [in age] failed primary seven, but I persuaded my dad that she should not sit at home and just look forward to getting married. [Instead] she should repeat – she might perform well. She has repeated and now she is going to perform well.” (Boy, Buyende)

“I tried myself, at home, because in our family boys are the ones taken to school. My younger sister got pregnant at school and she was abandoned at home, not to study anymore. But I took initiative. [I talked] to my parents, to forgive my sister and take her at least to a vocational skill training school for her survival. My parents accepted and she is now a tailor.” (Boy, Lira)

The research also revealed that the Champions of Change programme has encouraged several boys to act as peer educators. For example, in Kampala, one participant talked about the confidence he gained through his broader engagement with Plan International’s Safe Cities programme and how he was able to act as a role model for others in his community working towards more gender-equitable attitudes and practices.

“I myself have benefited from the project, I am a peer educator in my school and part of the CEDAW in school clubs²⁴ where we engage our fellow students to understand the core value of promoting gender equitable behaviours... This year during elections of prefects in the school we suggested to vote a girl as the head prefect to show the society that also girls can lead. She won unlike last year when some teachers refused that a girl could be a head prefect.” (Boy, Buyende)

4.3 Transforming gender power relations

As the previous discussion demonstrates, many of the girls and boys involved in the research have begun their own personal journeys of consciousness-raising towards gender equality. Their early-stage participation in the Champions of Change programme has enabled them to begin to experience their power as individuals, to develop more equitable attitudes, to mentor others and to begin to act to influence change. At the same time, girls are beginning to experience the *transformational* power of collective action through engaging with their male peers about the possibilities of healthy intimate relationships, and through working in groups, both formally and informally, on an agenda of social change. Through their own organised actions, girls and boys have been able to begin to develop strategies for social change, despite the challenge of working in a deeply patriarchal context.

²⁴ In Buyende, the Champions of Change curriculum is being implemented through Plan’s CEDAW project.

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

Champions of Change enabled both girls and boys to have access to information that other members of their communities do not, in particular highlighting the power of the new ideas that a younger generation is able to contribute. One boy said: "It is we, the Champions of Change agents who should influence change. Because as the saying goes, 'you can never teach an old dog new tricks'. Likewise we can't depend on the old people... By informing the people that the difference between the girls and boys is one thing, the biological set up, but we are all the same." (Boy, Buyende)

In interviews girls and boys were asked how contributing to change made them feel. The responses here were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents talked about how working for change made them feel good and how pleased they were to receive support to become change agents in their communities. Respondents also talked about their own role as change agents, highlighting that change frequently starts from within.

"I feel happy because even now I can see that we are developing compared to the situations we were in those previous years. There is also solidarity in a way that we are now working together as a community, family and in our school." (Boy, Buyende)

"I feel so good because I also see that I am changing people's lives and therefore I work harder to change more and more people." (Girl, Kamuli)

They also discussed strategies for spreading this information across the community, demonstrating just how much young people value their role as change agents.

"It's me and others who are informed that have to begin this because we can move around and spread this information and educate them. The organisations can come later when we have finished sensitising the community." (Girl, Buyende)

An interesting distinction was made then between the power of the group to bring about change and the influence of individuals. The girl participants in the Kamuli workshop, for example, were clear that they believed that girls should be able to make decisions about their own lives "because the outcome of any activity affects individual life and not [only] the group."

The following example also clarifies the power of the individual to challenge beliefs.

"As an individual you can go to school and you break the belief people have that a girl is not meant to be a lawyer, engineer and doctor and they think that girls are only meant [to be] nurses and in case she is not educated, she has to be in the kitchen and cook. For me I would study and be a doctor just like the men." (Girl, Buyende)

When discussing the change they can bring about as individuals, girls also talked about how their own behaviour can influence change. They discussed how, through their actions and sense of self-belief, they can encourage other community members to see how personal change could lead to positive outcomes for the community.

“If you believe you cannot do something, everyone will believe you cannot, so it is you to come out of your comfort zone and make people believe that ‘yes I can’. So the mere fact that you as a girl believe you can be equal as a boy ... that is a step because it begins with me, it begins with we as the girls. You sit down there and believe that we are inferior, the boys are superior; it will keep on happening because they know you acknowledge being inferior but if you step out of your comfortable zones and know that yes I can do this, everyone will know that.” (Girl, Kampala)

In addition, both girls and boys were highly motivated to act as role models for other girls and boys in their communities. There were some strong examples from boys talking about advocating for girls within their communities and the importance of altering their own individual behaviour in order to work in solidarity with girls. One boy notes that: “First and foremost it is me the boy, I should not use power over the girls by stepping on them. [I should] advocate for the girls to speak freely in the community, promote gender equality and I should also say no to rape” (Boy, Buyende).

4.3.2 The power of the collective

Respondents were asked to reflect on the pros and cons of working in groups and on whether working collectively can contribute to positive change. In interviews, girls’ reflections were positive about the added benefits of working in groups as a way to influence other girls, the community and parents, and to spread their message more widely.

“A group of girls can counsel the parents and tell them the fruits of education and the bad things if someone does not study. If the girls are good they can act as an example by influencing other girls and they change.” (Girl, Buyende)

“The good advice you get from the [Champions of Change] group, you can use it to sensitise your parents from home. If I tell my parents then they bring all of us together and talk to us on how to behave in our home.” (Girl, Lira)

Some girls also noted the value in having both the skills and the confidence to talk to others alone and to talk to them as part of a group. One respondent talked about the value of girls in groups being more able to support friends with challenges and problems.

“Girls can work in a group in a way to check on their friend who is facing a challenge to see that she doesn’t get worse... If the problem is with how to care for herself, these girls can contribute money as a group and try to top up where they can. They can reach out to some other people that they think this person needs assistance. So girls can also work in a group to change the community.” (Girl, Lira)

Box 6: The benefits and challenges of working in mixed groups

The reflections from both girls and boys on working in mixed groups were generally positive. The respondents clearly value solidarity and their increased understanding of each other. Particularly boys were reflexive about their own positions. Girls in Lira

they described working in mixed groups as an opportunity to bridge the gap between girls and boys.

[Solidarity] "...brings about more active leaders with a solid goal, this all comes from understanding each other; agree to a common goal chase." (Boys' workshop, Buyende)

"It made me feel proud. I realised that we all need each other in terms of creating an environment of gender equality, in fact the girls play a big role in this process, there are moments when you can't execute a task which a girl can, so working in a collective group really helps a lot." (Boy, Kampala)

"I felt like [I] am involved towards changing or bridging the gap which is between the male and female. And I felt so good because those challenges still affected me too, as a girl. So, if I took part in solving the challenges, obviously I felt good coz I feel a pioneer and a champion of change." (Girl, Kampala)

However, there were tensions raised and challenges identified by some participants. The participants in the girls' Buyende and Kamuli workshops discussed being teased by boys in the group or participants having little respect for one another.

The male participants in the Kamuli workshop gave the most negative views on working in mixed groups. They were concerned that the groups can create fear and low self-esteem for both girls and boys. One participant summarised: "It brings about insecurity, for example it can be hard sometimes to share personal issues or problems in the mixed group. Some would prefer to share their problems with the same sex, while others [would prefer] a different sex."

In addition to their work with the Champions of Change groups, both girls and boys talked about engaging with other members of the community in a variety of settings and there was a general sense that they were increasingly being listened to. In some cases, these more informal interactions seemed to be a good way for young people to communicate with community leaders and groups of parents at the same time which thus becomes a space to communicate across generations. These examples of working as groups often provided girls and boys with their first opportunities to influence others through the power of collective action.

"During parties or ceremonies, we can go and speak to the parents ... to stop [them] forcing children to marry."

[Interviewer] "Why did you people think this action of speaking at parties would lead to a positive change?"

"It is because the leaders are always present. So they can listen to our concerns and put into action. The parents are always present. Even the girls who dropped out of school can get the chance to listen because when I speak (and everyone knows I am a teenage mother), they can accept. Some of them get pregnant and abort because they assume she won't be in position to give birth, but when they look at me, [they can see that] I managed [to return to school]." (Girl, Buyende)

4.4 Developing an alternative vision of gender equality

In the workshops, both girls and boys talked about their wishes for the future. They were able to talk about the changes they would like to see in their households and communities, as well as their personal aspirations and the activities they would like to undertake in the future. However, their responses regarding their ability to challenge expectations within intimate and other relationships were limited. This is likely to be indicative of the fact that the respondents were in the early stages of the Champions of Change curriculum. Their discussions covered the following suggestions for how change could be realised:

- **Realising personal aspirations**

There was a strong sense among the female respondents that realising a more independent future for themselves, including a desire to be educated, run businesses, and take on leadership positions, could make an important contribution towards shifting norms and expectations around gender roles. One girl confirmed her personal vision: “People can grow up knowing that ‘I too can do this even without having a man besides me’.” (Girl, Kampala)

A few respondents talked about how they would like to see programmes like Champions of Change providing economic support to help respondents fulfil their personal aspirations.

- **Engaging their families and communities**

Both girls and boys presented a broad vision to increase sensitisation activities within their communities to spread knowledge about gender equality in their families and amongst community leaders.

- **Using alternative means of communication**

There were some specific suggestions to introduce community activities to sensitise families and community members. These included for example the use of social media (Boys’ workshop, Buyende), community workshops and dialogue meetings (Boys’ and Girls’ workshop, Buyende), mass media communication using radio and TV (Girls’ workshop, Kamuli).

“We young people have ability to influence and make changes – through different strategies such as social media campaigns, dialogues, drama plays, music, advocacy group towards promoting more equitable behaviours.” (Boys’ workshop, Buyende)

“Drama sessions, for example the way we do it under the Ni-Yetu [Champions of Change] youth programme, we work with these drama groups that are well trained in terms of knowledge and attitude towards gender. They come up with short drama skits that directly portray these kinds of discrimination people face.” (Boys’ workshop, Kamuli)

- **Taking actions in schools and with other groups**

There were several suggestions for activities that could be delivered in schools, primarily around increasing the pastoral support that is available to both female and male students. In the girls’ workshop in Buyende, they suggested the provision of guidance and counselling support from senior teachers, as well as

the implementation of a more professional teachers' code that would protect students from violence.

There were also some suggestions around the added value of joining groups and developing new groups. The respondents largely felt that mixed football and netball matches have helped to gather large audiences and deliver a message about gender equality as people are watching mixed groups play sport and interact together.

"This was successful in the way that it was used as a tool for attracting the attention of the community members, over 200 men and youth would attend these matches. It created awareness, songs concerning gender stereotypes and promoting girl child education, [and] reduced undermining of women in the community." (Girls' workshop, Kamuli)

- **Ensuring legal change and implementation of existing laws**

There were a few mentions of legal changes that the participants would like to see. For example, the boys in the Buyende workshop wanted to see a law that would abolish the practice of 'bride price'²⁵. Those in the Lira workshop wanted to see policies towards gender equality, such as an act to tackle gender-based violence. Several girls identified the existence of legal frameworks that were not currently being implemented as an area requiring change.

4.5 Building support for change: gaining allies and supporters

Both female and male respondents talked about a range of allies and supporters whom they consider to be potential change agents. The Ugandan data is rich in reflections about who could act for change in these communities.

4.5.1 Parents and other adults in the home

Parents were described as a major influence on behaviour. They acted as a mechanism for transmitting norms across the generations by socialising children into acceptable behaviour. Both female and male respondents described the value of parents giving good advice to their children, supporting their children financially and/or materially so that they are more secure, and treating and valuing girls and boys equally. Young people's desire to change parents' attitudes so that they would adopt more gender equitable behaviours was often mentioned. This was considered important as parents are the main decision makers within the home. Both girls and boys talked about how parents set the example as children grow up and that, as such, they should be promoters of more equitable norms.

"We must encourage our parents to always promote equitable behaviours at home to raise children that fully respect each other regardless of the sex and age." (Boys' workshop, Buyende)

²⁵ 'Bride price' refers to money, property, or other form of wealth paid by a groom or his family to the parents of the woman he has just married or is just about to marry.

“[Parents] can create awareness to the community about the benefits of gender equality. For example, in a family when both girls and boys divide roles in a home it makes work easier to complete a task. The role of the parent is to advise fellow parents why it’s ok to value the girls and boys equally.” (Boy, Kampala)

However, most of the girls were clear that they were still expected to respect their parents’ wishes and conform to the dominant norms. As has been illustrated in section 3, this makes the process of challenging the views of adults in the home more difficult for girls than it may be for boys.

“If you don’t have respect for the parents they can never take you to school. For example, if your brother wakes up early in the morning and greets his parents and you the sister do not do that, the parent might stop sending you to school. They have to take back the girls to school, that mentality of saying that a girl child is a curse, it should get out of their heads through counselling.” (Girl, Buyende)

On the whole, both girls and boys felt that, where they could, they were making the most of opportunities to influence change in their homes, by sharing new ideas and information from the Champions of Change curriculum, particularly regarding issues such as education and early marriage. At the same time, both girls and boys felt that community leaders could be major persuaders of attitudinal and norm change in their parents – they were both clear that parents were most likely to respond to these views.

4.5.2 Community and religious leaders

Many respondents, both male and female, identified already sensitised and gender supportive community leaders as important allies. They were likely to be highly regarded by other community leaders and able to pass on messages that are accepted more readily than those coming from younger people.

“If a chairman is well empowered about gender equality, it will be much easier to impart the knowledge to his peers, and his peers would gladly pick up from him because they are hearing it from a peer than from when your chairman knows nothing and has the ideology that men need to be superior and women need to be inferior. Then maybe some kind of surveyor comes and says ‘in this community we are supposed to have gender equality’. The way they would listen to the chairman is not the same way they would listen to the surveyor. So I believe if our leaders are empowered, if our leaders embrace the fact that gender equality is important, it will bring about development because individuals listen more to their leaders than to someone who comes on the outside and tells them how to change.” (Girl, Kampala)

In many interviews, community and religious leaders were identified as continuing to be the gatekeepers of communities and protectors of cultural and religious norms.

“NGOs, they can’t just invade a village to carry out their work without going through the LC 1 [local committee] chairman. So that’s why I believe the chairman also has the capability of changing the mind sets of people in a given village. For example, they put up counselling days for various people and counsel them with the help of elders.” (Girl, Kamuli)

Three respondents, a girl in Kamuli and boys in Buyende and Kampala, talked in some detail about the potential role of religious leaders in creating change. The responses focused on the leaders' convening power and their influence over their congregations. During the boys' workshop in Buyende, respondents also mentioned that religious leaders regularly reach a large number of people and could address their congregations more directly about the challenge of changing the "unwritten rules" of society. When asked in what ways religious leaders could improve the situation for girls in the community, one respondent said: "There are many ways. Such as preaching the word of god, creating work groups, through games and sports, interact clubs. Workshops whereby when they organise such things they can talk to girls and girls can really change. In that if a girl has stress from home, she can interact with even other girls who could have had the same experience and they find ways of going through it." (Girl, Kamuli)

"...in most communities people respect religious leaders. If we encourage them while preaching in church to always advise people to respect girls, we also try to change their behaviours on the different social norms in our communities." (Boy, Kampala)

Box 7: Changing attitudes in the community through popular education and communication

The research uncovered examples of the kinds of creative activities that Champions of Change groups have been conducting to sensitise communities and share information with them. One girl described drama performances about the causes of early marriage, the value of the girl child and domestic violence. She feels these have had a positive impact on the attitudes of various community members. Even where they had initially challenged the performance, the perception was that, ultimately, they appreciated the information shared. She adds: "The purpose of the music was to sensitise the community [about] the girl child and right now [the situation] has improved because we are educating people. Now they know that a girl is as normal as any other child – she can talk and make decisions for herself."

Community engagement tended to provide public platforms to engage about gender inequality. Girls talked about a wide range of other activities that have taken place in their communities, including public sports matches that attract large numbers of men, trigger radio discussions and provide a public platform to discuss about the discrimination that girls face.

4.5.3 Gaining support from civil society and NGOs

In interviews, some girls described needing the support of a third party (a Plan International staff member, for example) to mediate in challenging situations and effectively encourage change from their parents. For example, a girl in Buyende described how with the assistance of a Plan International member of staff and the teachers at her school, she was able to convince her parents after some months that she should go back to school rather than get married, which resolved a tense situation.

"They used to abuse me with harsh words, they would ask me to get married ('you conceived knowing you are big enough so go and get married – go with

your boyfriend'). I don't know where the boy went and even if I had known, I would not allow [myself] to get married because it was accidental and I still wanted school. But after sometime I gave birth normally and one of the Plan staff, Madam Scovia, came and talked to my parents to help... They accepted and took me back to school and right now I am in senior two." (Girl, Buyende)

Almost all respondents talked about the potential of NGOs in raising awareness and sharing information about gender equality with community members. There was a general sense that young people were keen for sensitisation activities to reach further into the communities, for the work to be both deepened and expanded.

Respondents talked about Plan International and other organisations working on girls' empowerment in the community, highlighting the importance of partnerships and organisational solidarity.

"At times these organisations can also help, like FAWEU,²⁶ can help the girl child to be assertive; you speak for what you want while not shying away." (Girl, Buyende)

²⁶ Federation of African Women Educationalists – Uganda.

Section 5: Discussion of key findings and recommendations: what works to promote gender equality?

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

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

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

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

5.1 Girls should engage and negotiate from a position of power

A more explicit acknowledgment of how norms are protected is needed in order to support girls to engage and negotiate more directly from a position of power. This may require safe, female-only spaces to be made available as a complement to the Champions of Change groups. Despite positive reports of the successes to date of early-stage Champions of Change initiatives, it is clear that many Ugandan girls continue to engage from a position that requires them to play roles that support the dominant norms. Many girls mentioned that the need to “demonstrate respect” for their parents and elders remained a so called “sticking point” for them. In addition, there were reports of girls negotiating space to engage with their communities by presenting themselves in a non-threatening way. This tends to mean that girls continue to act within the space that has been assigned to them by those with power, and continue to play more submissive, less vocal roles. Safe, female-only spaces, on the other hand, can provide opportunities for more targeted mentorship and discussions around challenging and sensitive issues with other girls.

Programming should recognise the greater risks associated with adolescent girls advocating for political and social changes and apply principle of 'Do No Harm'. In the Ugandan context, women and girls continue to face barriers to being active decision makers, particularly in the public domain, as this remains a male-dominated space. Girls are expected to be submissive, docile and shy, and not to be outspoken, opinionated or even, mischievous.²⁷ This study illustrated how gendered notions of what makes a "good" daughter or woman continue to constrain adolescent girls' abilities to realise their potential. Girls who are change agents are actively challenging the dominant gender norms through their actions and therefore face inherent risks and challenges.

5.2 Build powerful networks of peer groups and mentors

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

Going one step further and realising the potential of networks of gender equality advocates to act as mentors for others is critical in the context of rural Uganda where visible, young, female role models are limited. Importantly, girls' contributions can become more visible through the development of networks, in which they can also gain a sense of solidarity through support from their peers. In Uganda, it was striking how much importance most female respondents attached to their own agency and confidence as mentors and supporters of others. This was particularly so in the research with groups of urban girls. The power of networks of gender activists further develops girls' potential for increased agency through having "voice, choice *and* control".

5.3 Work together: the critical importance of intergenerational gender dialogues²⁸

The Champions of Change curriculum identifies gender dialogue as an important part of the process towards social change. Indeed, gender dialogue is of critical importance in this process. Both girls and boys in the research have identified the need for more intergenerational gender dialogue in their work to secure long-lasting and sustainable social change. The evidence presented in section 3 illustrates firstly that expectations of and sanctions faced by adolescent girls are different to those applied to adolescent boys, and are deeply rooted in unequal power relations. Secondly, it shows how there are power relations at play within gender groups – for example, within families, adult women intent on maintaining the status quo can enforce gender norms. Thirdly, gender power relations can be inter-generational in nature, and supported by a process of gender socialisation. The community is largely

²⁷ ODI (2014) *op. cit.*

²⁸ Champions of Change define gender dialogues as intergenerational dialogues that ensure girls' and boys' commitment to gender equality is supported by their families and communities.

excluded from the more successful examples of gender dialogue that are presented in the research – it is instead described as comprising those who uphold discriminatory norms, through a range of sanctions, criticism and violence.

The research demonstrates that successful gender dialogue must go beyond the initial efforts to empower and engage young people and their peers, and move towards dialogue with their parents, families and communities. Methodologies for more transformative community work in the form of community theatre, social communication and participatory/co-designed social norms campaigns could deepen the approach of the Champions of Change model in terms of seeking to communicate across generations and shifting the most heavily entrenched attitudes and norms.

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

Participants noted that parents, in particular, need to be “accompanied” through the process of change. This demand for structured engagement with parents is urgent, as the research has demonstrated that tensions around gender norms within the household are an issue for girls and boys. Vulnerable girls appear to be at risk of violence, abuse and neglect as a result of their efforts to exercise agency and choice. One respondent suggests that: “[There should be] design workshop programmes for parents on early childhood development and gender equitable behaviours. Through these workshops, parents will realise the gap they have between [them and] their children’s lives due to the rules set up by them, community and the nation” (Boys’ workshop, Buyende). Intergenerational dynamics either act to provide opportunities for change (new ideas and new ways of doing things) or prevent change (tension and conflict between parents and young people, older community leaders and young people creating sticking points). The contextual analysis presented in section 1, as well as the social norms analysis of section 3, unveil the intergenerational dynamics and power play that act to entrench discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. What is also clear is that the household is the most pressing site for change, and is where there is a more immediate opportunity for gender dialogue across generations.

5.5 Address structural discrimination: ensuring an enabling environment for social change

More active engagement with duty bearers and formal structures of government as part of the Champions of Change model was identified as the next crucial step for most of the Ugandan respondents, both female and male. This was identified as being of critical importance especially in view of the threat of violence faced by girls. The Ugandan respondents also engaged easily with a vision that included the opportunity to address structural discrimination. Many respondents identified that there is a role for local and national governments to act as role models and duty bearers to protect the right to equality and non-discrimination.

“Politicians are role models to a number of young people, community and clan members. They can contribute to the situations of girls and boys through chairing community dialogues to discuss with the community how to advance gender equality and also address other challenges in the community. Politicians also can support or provide funds to support youth-led movements to run programmes to challenge social norms.” (Boy, Buyende)

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

The adolescents also suggested complementary modules for the Champions of Change programme in order to support the economic empowerment of girls and women as economic dependence supports the structural manifestation of gender discrimination.

“Most of the men feel they are superior to the women because they still provide them with money. But if a woman would have a business of her own, if she would be equipped with the social survival skills, she’d be able to earn as a woman and not to depend on the money coming from her husband because in most cases that is what restrains women from their rights because the man knows he is the sole provider, he is the bread winner” (Girl, Kampala).

5.6 Next Steps

The research demonstrated that in order to transform attitudes and norms a specific focus is required to uncover the unequal power relations at play, to expose internalised, invisible power dynamics, and to actively rebuild the consciousness of all involved. This effort should seek to go further than simply challenging gender discrimination, and more explicitly towards identifying strategies for supporting power shifts, particularly within relationships – whether these are intimate, among peers, in families and within communities. In particular, it is important that the balance of responsibility for creating transformational change is shifted in the direction of duty bearers.

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

Overall, the young people’s perspectives presented in this report demonstrates the importance of a multi-faceted approach to social change, which brings people along while building a critical mass of support for gender equality.



About this report

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

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

About Plan International

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

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