



REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES: GIRLS **CHALLENGING** THE GENDER RULES

Synthesis Report

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ABBREVIATIONS

GBV	Gender-based violence
GII	Gender Inequality Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NEET	Youth not in education, employment, or training
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	South East Asia
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
VAW	Violence against women



INTRODUCTION

Since 2007, Plan International UK has been following the lives of girls across nine countries in three regions (see Map 1).¹ Our qualitative longitudinal study, *Real Choices, Real Lives*, provides significant insights into the choices, decisions, and realities that shape girls' lives as they grow up in a gendered world (see Box 1 and Annex). Given our position as an organisation promoting children's rights, with a focus on adolescent girls, the evidence from *Real Choices, Real Lives* holds value for informing our gender transformative programming and policy work, as well as that of others in the field.² As such, evidence from the study is targeted at international development practitioners and policy makers, as well as the development research community.

The study identifies the strength of gendered expectations, but also that there is potential for gender norms to shift – with girls, and their families, questioning what is considered appropriate and beginning to do things differently, or aspiring to things being different. In 2019, three regionally-

focused reports analysed the *Real Choices, Real Lives*' longitudinal data to explore *when, where, how, and why* the Cohort girls challenge gendered norms in their lives. The first report looked at the 37 girls and their families in the Cohort's three Sub-Saharan African countries – Benin, Togo, and Uganda,³ the second report looked at the 46 girls and their families in the three South East Asian countries – Cambodia, the Philippines, and Vietnam,⁴ and the third report looked at the 35 girls and their families in the three Latin American and Caribbean countries – Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.⁵ Each report looked in depth at the specific context of the girls through a selection of detailed case studies. In doing so, our analysis sought to understand varying influences that may be playing a role in how/why the girls reproduce or question/challenge gendered norms.

Our analysis up to when the girls turned 12 provides the foundation for considering whether they will continue to hold the same attitudes/beliefs as they grow older,



At home in
Vietnam, 2018

Box 1 Background of the *Real Choices, Real Lives* study

Real Choices, Real Lives is a longitudinal study tracking the lives of a cohort of girls from when they were born (in 2006) until they turn 18 (in 2024). The study is being undertaken in nine countries across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Benin, Togo, Uganda), South East Asia (SEA) (Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam), and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador).

The methodology is based around a core approach which, from the beginning of the study, has drawn on in-depth interviews with caregivers and, since 2013, when they turned seven, with the girls themselves. Whilst our study primarily focuses on the girl and her immediate family, we also consider the wider context to inform our analysis. For example, we have undertaken life histories with parents and interviews with other household members. Over the years, we will look to strengthen our understanding of the girls' wider contexts – as social networks become increasingly defined in the girls' lives and influences beyond their immediate family become more prominent.

The annex provides further detail on the study design and future direction.

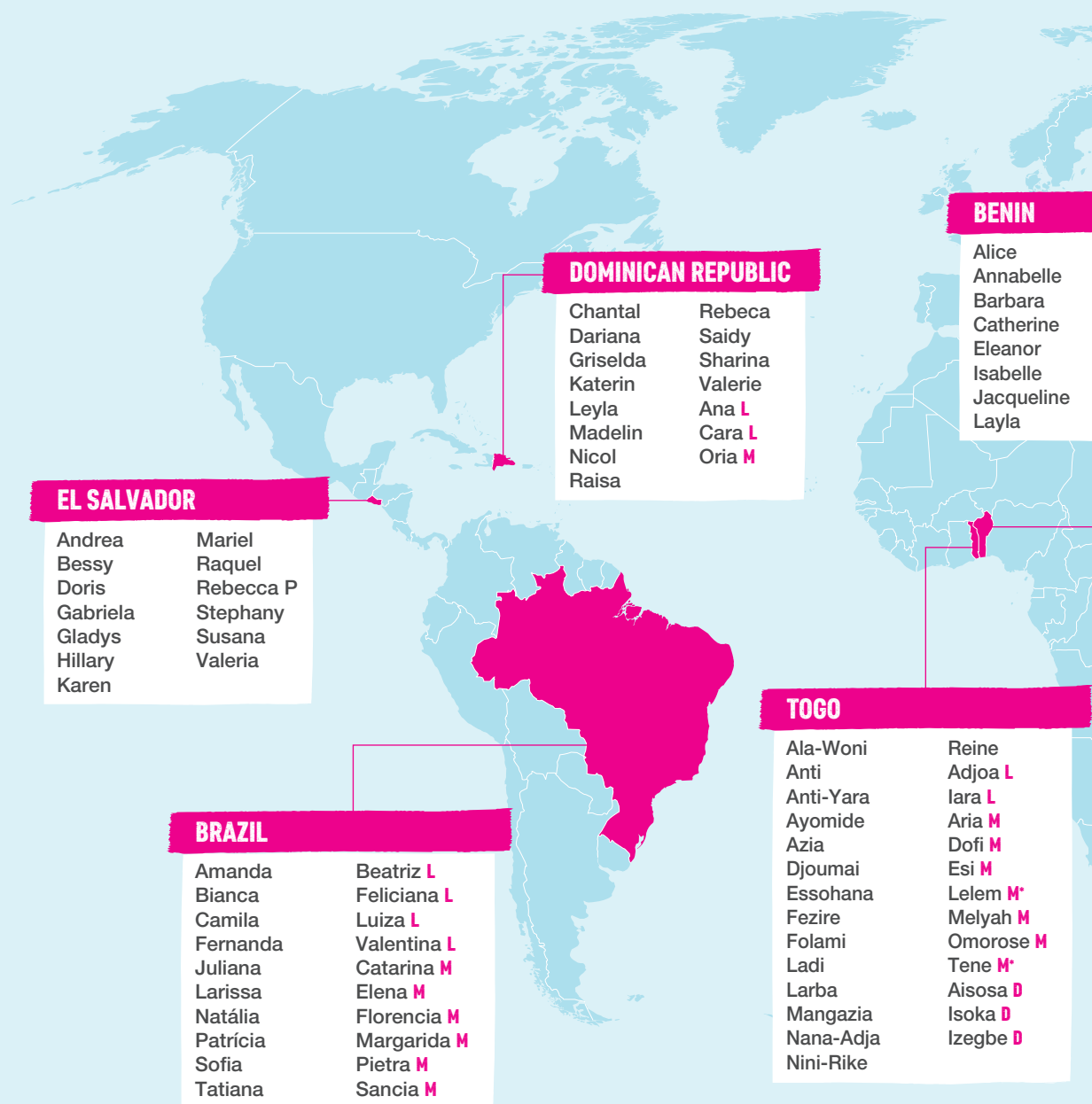
and how outcomes in their lives might be influenced. The longitudinal nature of *Real Choices, Real Lives* means it is uniquely placed to track this as the girls continue to develop through adolescence. This information can be used to inform programming and policy within the international development community to

take account of girls' contexts and facilitate positive social change.

This report is a synthesis of the findings of the three regional reports, looking at the similarities and differences in where, how, and why the Cohort girls across the nine countries are challenging the gender rules.

MAP 1: REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES COHORT STUDY MAP

Where the girls live



KEY

- M** Migrated
- D** Deceased
- L** Left the study
- as of 2017

VIETNAM

Chau	Oanh
Hang	Quynh
Hoa	Sen
Huong	Tan
Kieu	Thi
Kim	Thom
Ly	Tien
Mai	Trinh
Nguyet	Uyen
Nhi	Yen

PHILIPPINES

Chesa	Melanie
Christine	Michelle
Darna	Reyna
Dolores	Rosamie
Jasmine	Rubylyn
Jocelyn	Angela M
Mahalia	Nicole D
Maricel	

UGANDA

Amelia	Rebecca
Beti	Sheila
Jane	Shifa
Joy	Sylvia
Justine	Achen M
Miremba	Dembe M
Namazzi	Nasiche D
Nimisha	

CAMBODIA

Bopha	Reaksmey
Davy	Roumany
Kannitha	Sothany
Leakhena	Thearika
Lina	Kanya M
Mony	Mealea M*
Nakry	Sokanha M*
Puthea	

1 EXPLORING AND CONCEPTUALISING ‘DISRUPTION’ OF GENDERED SOCIAL NORMS

Gendered social norms and stereotypes underpin and reproduce inequitable practices (such as the unequal division of household labour, and early marriage and pregnancy) that ultimately result in girls and boys (and women and men) enjoying differential access

to resources, as well as unequal opportunities and outcomes (see Box 2).⁶ By looking at the norms at the root of social inequalities and how individuals are socialised, research can inform gender transformative policy and programming to create more equitable societies.

Box 2 Definition of social norms and gender norms⁷

Social norms: *the ‘informal rules of the game’, influencing behaviour within any social group about what other people do (the typical behaviour) and what one should do (appropriate behaviour). Importantly, social norms carry social implications – i.e. rewards when followed and sanctions when not followed.*

Gender/gendered norms: *a socially constructed set of ‘acceptable’ feminine/masculine behaviours which individuals are taught to ‘perform’, usually according to their sex. Failure to ‘perform’ one’s allocated gender carries consequences, whilst adherence is rewarded.*

1.1 GENDER SOCIALISATION AND INFLUENCING

Gender socialisation sees the reproduction or transferral of ‘acceptable’ feminine/masculine behaviours – or gendered social norms – via interaction with various individual, social, and structural influences (see Figure 1).⁸

Judith Butler, among others, argues that there can be ‘slippage’ in the reproduction of gendered social norms, wherein individuals question, challenge, or reject what is socially ‘acceptable’.⁹

Figure 1 Gender socialisation: spheres of influence in girls’ lives





Collecting firewood in Cambodia, 2018

Table 1 Indicators per Cohort country

	Gender Inequality Index, 2017 ¹⁰	Child marriage (before age of 15) ¹¹	Child marriage (before age of 18) ¹²	Adolescent birth rate 15-19 year olds (per 1000 girls) ¹³	Average number of children per woman ¹⁴	Female labour force participation (% +15 population) ¹⁵	Male labour force participation (% +15 population) ¹⁶	Female enrolment in tertiary education ¹⁷	Male enrolment in tertiary education ¹⁸	Female youth 15-24 not in education, employment, or training (NEET) % ¹⁹	Male youth 15-24 not in education, employment, or training (NEET) % ²⁰
SSA											
Benin	0.611	7%	26%	94	4.87	69%	73%	8%	22%	26%	15%
Togo	0.567	6%	22%	85	4.35	76%	79%	6%	15%	16%	7%
Uganda	0.523	10%	40%	140	5.46	67%	75%	4%	5%	8%	3%
SEA											
Cambodia	0.473	2%	19%	57	2.52	75%	88%	12%	14%	15%	10%
The Philippines	0.427	2%	15%	47	2.88	46%	74%	40%	31%	29%	16%
Vietnam	0.304	1%	11%	30	1.95	73%	82%	29%	29%	0.6%	0.6%
LAC											
Brazil	0.407	11%	36%	59	1.74	54%	74%	59%	44%	29%	19%
The Dominican Republic	0.451	12%	36%	90	2.38	51%	78%	65%	35%	31%	18%
El Salvador	0.392	6%	26%	69	2.05	46%	79%	31%	28%	39%	15%

The figures highlighted are the highest or lowest across the three regions



Shelling pigeon peas in the Dominican Republic, 2018

1.2 EXPLORING GENDER SOCIALISATION AND CHANGE IN REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES

Drawing from this conceptualisation of the gender socialisation process, its fluctuations, and potential for ‘slippage’, we identified where the *Real Choices, Real Lives* Cohort girls and their families demonstrated this potential, and refer to these instances as ‘glitches’ in the reproduction of gendered norms (see Box 3).

We observed these ‘glitches’ through discursive, attitudinal, and described behavioural changes²¹ articulated by the girls in terms of expectations of their behaviour related, for example, to their household

Box 3 What do we mean by ‘glitches’?

‘Glitches’ refer to instances where the girls either stated that they noticed a difference in expectations for males and females, expressed an attitude which challenged these expectations, or described a behaviour where they actively challenged these gendered norms. We were also able to observe ‘glitches’ through family members’ descriptions of the girls’ attitudes and behaviours.

Table 2 What is and is not captured in our data

Typology	What we observe in our data	
Discursive	Identifying differences	“Women do more chores than men... the men only play, watch TV, they don’t do anything.” Doris, El Salvador, 2016
Attitudinal	Verbal attitudes	“My parents prefer the boys to concentrate on field work and the girls on household tasks. I don’t find this fair.” Essohana, Togo, 2017
Behavioural	Described behaviours	“She doesn’t like wearing skirts, [she] likes boys’ clothes... she wears men’s clothes.” Ly’s mother, Vietnam, 2016
Typology	What is outside the scope of our data	
Behavioural	Individual active behaviour	Observed behavioural change on the Individual Level
Norm change	Collective active behaviour	Observed behavioural change beyond the Individual Level (family, social network, community etc.)



Playing with her family in Togo, 2018

responsibilities, or to their interactions with boys, as well as to their future roles, both in terms of education or employment and relationships, marriage, and children (see Table 2).

By highlighting these inconsistencies, our analysis of ‘glitches’ reveals how the process of gender socialisation is constructed and has the potential to change. Our analysis also explored what or who in the girls’ lives may have influenced – or be influencing – these

‘glitches’ on the Individual, Social, or Structural Level.

In highlighting potential influences, we also identified persistent constraints. We analysed these ‘glitches’, or deviations, as indications of where there may be potential for gender norm transformation if, and when, the broader social, economic, and political conditions align, rather than as evidence of disruption or change of gendered social norms in themselves. The findings are intended to inform interventions seeking to transform gender norms.

1.3 MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE THREE REGIONAL REPORTS

1

ALL 118

Cohort girls challenge gendered norms and what is expected of them in at least one area of their life, demonstrating the potential for gender socialisation to be disrupted.

2

EARLY ADOLESCENCE

is an important period of identity formation and heightened awareness of gendered norms, making it a critical point for interventions to disrupt – rather than ingrain – gender inequitable attitudes and practices.

3

The process of disrupting gendered expectations – the ‘glitches’ that occur – is

NOT LINEAR.

It varies and fluctuates across time as well as across different aspects of girls’ lives, creating limited but powerful windows of opportunity for norm change.



4

SOCIAL LEVEL

influences (household dynamics and the wider community) are significant in forming or breaking gendered social expectations, in particular:

A

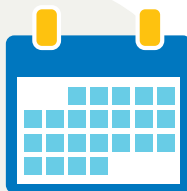
examples of what ‘not’ to do (adolescent pregnancy, dropping out of school);

B

exposure to non-normative gender roles (single-parent households, female breadwinners);

C

attitudes and behaviours of family members, males in particular.





5

STRUCTURAL LEVEL

changes in legislation, gender equality discourse, and the wider economy show evidence of influencing gender roles in the household and gender equitable attitudes concerning, for example, child/early marriage, girls' education, gender equality and rights. However, Structural Level laws prohibiting corporal punishment appear to have had limited effect in most contexts.

6

Gendered norms, dictating what is 'acceptable' for girls and impacting their ability to choose how they live their lives, are structurally linked to gendered norms which dictate



WHAT IS 'ACCEPTABLE' FOR BOYS.

It is vital to challenge social expectations of both 'femininity' and 'masculinity' if gender norm change and gender equality are to be achieved.



2. EXPLORING 'GLITCHES' IN THE GENDER SOCIALISATION PROCESS

2.1. WHERE AND HOW THE COHORT GIRLS CHALLENGE GENDERED NORMS

All 118 Cohort girls have shown at least one instance where they have challenged gendered norms and what is expected of them in their lives, demonstrating the potential for gender socialisation to be disrupted.

Whilst there is variation across contexts in the way in which 'glitches' are expressed and to what extent, Cohort girls in all three regions

demonstrate 'glitches' in the reproduction of gendered norms related to:

- **girls' future roles – education, career, motherhood, and marriage**
- **girls' domestic responsibilities**
- **girls' interactions with boys**
- **girls' behaviour.**



PLAN INTERNATIONAL VIETNAM

Discussing her social network in Vietnam, 2018

2.1.1. Girls' future roles – education, career, motherhood, and marriage



Education and career

Across the Cohort, girls and their families emphasise the importance of education not only for the girls to have a better and more stable life than their parents financially, but to have greater overall control over their choices, particularly regarding marriage, relationships and pregnancy.

“I hope that Margaret progresses well in her studies so she can find a good job and be financially independent so that she can take care of herself and her children even if her husband can’t.”

Margaret’s aunt, Benin, 2017

“If they [girls] don’t study there’s no future; the only option left for them is to work in the cane field, fetch wood or rear animals to sell them.”

Gabriela, El Salvador, 2018

“I think if Leakhena wishes to further her education, I will make her finish [a] Bachelor’s degree. I think education is very important to make [a] living in the current society.”

Leakhena’s father, Cambodia, 2017

Almost all of the Cohort girls and their families express aspirations for the girls to attend university and gain a degree. However, aspirations concerning education and employment can be seen to shift as the girls get older and the realities of limited access to opportunities become more apparent. Across the nine Cohort countries access to higher education remains limited for low income households and national statistics often hide significant regional disparities. Interestingly, a number of girls in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador – where rates of female enrolment in tertiary education are actually higher than the other Cohort countries (along with the Philippines, see Table 1) – demonstrate awareness of what is ‘realistic’, or alternative to higher education, and how to achieve it.

“[I want to study] until the second year [of high school: Grade 10] ... not university, because I want to train to become a beautician.”

Mariel, El Salvador, 2017

“Sometimes I close my eyes and I think that when I’m 20 I will finish college and then I will start a computer course.”

Juliana, Brazil, 2017

“[I plan to study] until the second year of high school (Grade 10). To do teacher training.”

Doris, El Salvador, 2017



Motherhood and marriage

Child and early marriage²² is a particular concern for Cohort parents in Uganda, Benin, Togo, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Although in these contexts rates remain high, many of the Cohort girls and their families express strong objections to child and early marriage.

“[My worries are] if she goes with friends, if she’s not following our advice, and if she will marry at an early age.”

Dolores’ mother, Philippines, 2017

While most predict marriage in their future, a small number of Cohort girls also challenge the expectation of marriage as an inevitability for girls, highlighting the gender inequitable and sometimes violent aspects of marriage that they are aware of:

“Being alone is happier, I’ll be more independent. If I had a husband, I would have to do a lot of things and do everything according to my husband’s wishes.”

Huong, Vietnam, 2018

“I want to be a nun as I don’t want to get married or have children.”

Margaret, Benin, 2017

“Sometimes I think about raising a family, having two or three kids, but sometimes I don’t think so... because many women suffer with the separation, the husband goes and kills her, and I don’t want that.”

Patrícia, Brazil, 2017

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the predominant concern for Cohort parents is adolescent pregnancy. Here, the average age of the Cohort mothers themselves at first pregnancy was 16 in El Salvador, 17.5 in the Dominican Republic, and 19.8 in Brazil. The Cohort girls in these contexts demonstrate awareness of the negative consequences of adolescent and early pregnancy and express a desire to avoid this:

“To be honest, I think it was very wrong for her... to have me at 15... she didn’t even finish her studies, she didn’t go to university. I think she should have finished her studies and gone to university before having a relationship.”

Juliana, Brazil, 2018

“She was 16 when she had me.” [“Do you want to be a mum at that age?”] **“No.”**

Doris, El Salvador, 2017

Cohort girls in the SEA countries, and a number in the SSA countries, specifically indicate not wanting to have as many children as their mothers had – highlighting the importance of access to family planning education and services:

“I don’t want to have as many children as my mother has; I can see my mother’s [life] is so hard.”

Trinh, Vietnam, 2018

“I will get married like my mother, but I won’t have lots of children like her.”

Djoumai, Togo, 2017



2.1.2. Girls’ domestic responsibilities

Almost all Cohort households explicitly describe a gendered division of labour wherein tasks are assigned according to what are regarded as ‘appropriate’ or ‘natural’ types of work for males and females. Across the Cohort, the burden of domestic tasks is the most dominant area where the girls challenge gendered norms; most find that this burden has increased drastically as they enter adolescence. Many of the Cohort girls in the LAC countries notice the impact this has on how, and in particular in which spaces, they and their male peers spend their time:

“[The boys can go out to play] because they don’t do anything... They go out to play, and we’re stuck here doing the chores.”

Doris, El Salvador, 2017

In the SSA data, some girls highlight the contradictory allocation of work based on gender they observe in their households, where girls can be required to carry out both ‘female’ and ‘male’ tasks but not vice versa:

“My parents prefer the boys to concentrate on field work and the girls on household tasks. I don’t find this fair: the boys could also do some housework as we girls have to go to the fields to help with the planting and the harvest.”

Essohana, Togo, 2016

Interestingly, this is slightly less present in the SEA data, which may be an indication of a more equitable division of labour in some households in comparison to those in the other two Cohort regions, or in fact an indication that the Cohort girls in the SEA region are more accepting of gendered ‘types’ and division of work.

“My mom goes to work to earn money; my father is at home and does the chores around the house.”

Oanh, Vietnam, 2017

[“Do your older brother or father wash clothes too?”] **“No... Because they are boys.”**

Michelle, Philippines, 2018



2.1.3. Girls' interactions with boys

A common, and increasing, concern raised by Cohort parents in all nine countries is the dangers of girls' interactions and relationships with boys as they enter adolescence. In the SSA countries in particular, the Cohort girls are prohibited from having male friends or from playing with boys out of fear of violence, while in the LAC and SEA countries the concern is focused on preventing sexual relationships and sexual violence. While gender-based violence and femicide is particularly prevalent in the LAC countries, it is an issue which exists in all nine contexts, and indeed globally. The Cohort girls show awareness of the need to stay safe, however, many also question this requirement to stay away from boys completely and challenge expectations by continuing their friendships with boys.

“...my parents and big brothers don't like me playing with boys, they tell me off and sometimes smack me if I do... So, at school, I like playing with my friends who are boys but not at home.”

Essohana, Togo, 2017

“[My grandmother] says I shouldn't be around boys. And when they come to play with us, I'm supposed to quit playing.”

Juliana, Brazil, 2017

[“And do you always play with boys too?”] **“Yes.”**

Juliana, Brazil, 2018

“[When] I grow up more, I [will] still make friends with [boys] because they are good to me.”

Roumany, Cambodia, 2016



2.1.4. Girls' behaviour

As they get older, expectations around how girls should behave and how they should look become increasingly restrictive and gendered. Particular games, sports, clothes, and behaviours are reserved for males and the Cohort girls in the SEA Cohort and Vietnam in particular challenge these norms.

“[Being beautiful is] not necessary... We [girls] just need to get good academic results and be kind. There's no need to be beautiful.”

Mai, Vietnam, 2016

“Sometimes I play powerful games, I also think that I am a boy. I have a friend. She always thinks that she is a boy. She also plays the powerful games like me with boys.”

Huong, Vietnam, 2016

“Girls should be strong and determined because girls are also human.”

Puthea, Cambodia, 2017

A dominant gendered norm in the SSA and SEA Cohort countries is that girls are, and should be, better behaved than boys and the definition of a ‘good girl’ for most Cohort parents revolves around how obedient and deferent she is. While most Cohort girls recognise the importance of being respectful, some challenge this norm where they view obedience as a lesser priority.

“It's not right [that some girls are prevented from going to school by their parents] because it's more important to have education than follow orders.”

Chesa, Philippines, 2017

“I don't do anything [my parents ask me] against my heart and can't be forced to do things I don't want to; whatever I do, it's my decision.”

Justine, Uganda, 2017



The norms that go unchallenged

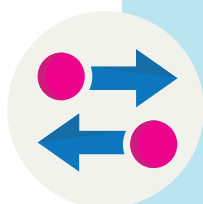
Girls' voices: saying "no" to parents

In 2017, when asked if they felt they could say "no" to their parents,²³ the Cohort girls demonstrated significant differences between countries and regions.

Uganda saw the highest proportion of girls who stated they felt they could say "no" to their parents (10 out of 13), followed by **Vietnam** (11 out of 20), while just one girl in the **Philippines** and two in **Benin** stated that they could.²⁴

Uganda	10/13 (77%)
Vietnam	11/20 (55%)
Cambodia	5/12 (42%)
Togo	5/15 (33%)
El Salvador	4/11 (36%)
Dominican Republic	4/11 (36%)
Brazil	3/10 (30%)
Benin	2/10 (20%)
Philippines	1/13 (8%)

Girls in all nine countries cited fear of violent punishment for lack of obedience as a reason they felt they could not say "no" to their parents. In **Cambodia**, the **Philippines**, **Togo**, **Benin**, and **El Salvador** in particular, the Cohort girls reported experiencing corporal punishment by their parents or carers. The *Real Choices, Real Lives* data shows that despite the existence of some level of legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in all nine countries, its continued use not only harms girls' bodily integrity, but further limits their agency.



Girls' freedoms: movement and access to spaces

The role of real and perceived risks of violence against women and girls – as well as community violence in the Latin America and Caribbean contexts – in restricting girls' freedoms is prevalent in all of the Cohort data and is increasing as the girls get older. While many of the Cohort girls notice a difference in their sphere of movement and access to spaces compared with that of their male peers, few actively challenge these norms, demonstrating instead an awareness of the dangers this would represent. In this way, violence against girls represents a two-fold trap: the gendered norms which restrict their freedoms are (often) intended to protect them, but also perpetuate norms which bind women and girls to the household sphere, and normalise the association of males with violence, without addressing the root causes of this violence.



Dreaming of a future career as an architect in Brazil, 2019

2.2. EARLY ADOLESCENCE AS A CRITICAL POINT OF INTERVENTION

The level of physical and emotional development of the girls at age 11/12 varies between countries and regions. However, the impact of the onset of adolescence for the girls is evident in all nine contexts not only through the increasing emphasis placed on, and pressure to conform to, gendered expectations of behaviour, but through the girls' heightened awareness of these expectations.

Gendered norms can lead to restrictions on girls' movements. Whether due to fear of gender-based violence and adolescent pregnancy, to discourage girls from participating in activities regarded as inappropriate, or to carry out household work, the Cohort girls describe how these

restrictions have an increasing impact on how and where they spend their daily lives. This awareness is often accompanied by attitudes and in some cases described behaviours which challenge these norms and represent a critical moment where norms have not been completely reproduced, or not yet become ingrained.

In Benin, Togo, and Uganda and in some cases in the SEA Cohort, these norms are

Juliana, Brazil, 2016 versus 2018

"I think girls should behave like ladies and boys like gentlemen... [Girls should] dress better, fix the hair, keep the legs crossed."

Juliana, Brazil, 2016

"They [my school friends] make fun of me, they say I'm a tomboy, that I'm always playing ball, all the time, with the boys... then I tell them that this is sexist, because a girl can play ball just like a boy."

Juliana, Brazil, 2018

'Adolescence' refers to a period in the life course that comes after childhood and before adulthood between the ages of ten and 19.

'Early adolescence' refers to the period between ages ten and 14.



Working alongside her father in Benin, 2018

yet to be fully enforced by family and community – family members often indicate that this is because the girls are still regarded as children, but suggest the situation will change when they get older.

“Yes, she has friends from school, and she has friends who are boys. I’m not bothered about this for now, as they are still children.”

Layla’s mother, Benin, 2017

“When Rebecca goes beyond this age, I will not permit it at all to

play among groups of boys.”

Rebecca’s father, Uganda, 2017

In contrast, many of the Cohort girls in the LAC cohort are regarded as young adults. Where some have already begun romantic relationships with boys and are expected to carry out the household tasks of adult females, it is possible to see where certain windows of opportunity to influence alternative outcomes are closing – in cases where girls who previously challenged norms now regard them as inevitable or just the way things are.

Ly, Vietnam, 2014 versus 2018

“Boys do not have to do housework. They just go to play. They play skipping, football.”

Ly, 2014, Vietnam

“[At school I am a] team leader, my teacher assigned me... [I should] clean up, but I never do. I asked some boys to clean up for me... I request them [to] do [it] and they must follow.”

Ly, 2018, Vietnam

Leyla, the Dominican Republic, 2017 versus 2018

["And your brother doesn't do chores?"]

“No.” ["Do you think it is fair?"] **“Well, both should do the same thing... Because we both have the same rights.”**

Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2017

“[My brother] doesn't do anything at home and he is always out... Thing is, we girls have to do chores because we are girls, the boys can't do that much...”

Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2018



Walking to school in the Philippines, 2018



Cleaning and cooking at home, Uganda, 2018

2.3. DISRUPTION OF GENDER SOCIALIZATION IS NOT ALWAYS LINEAR

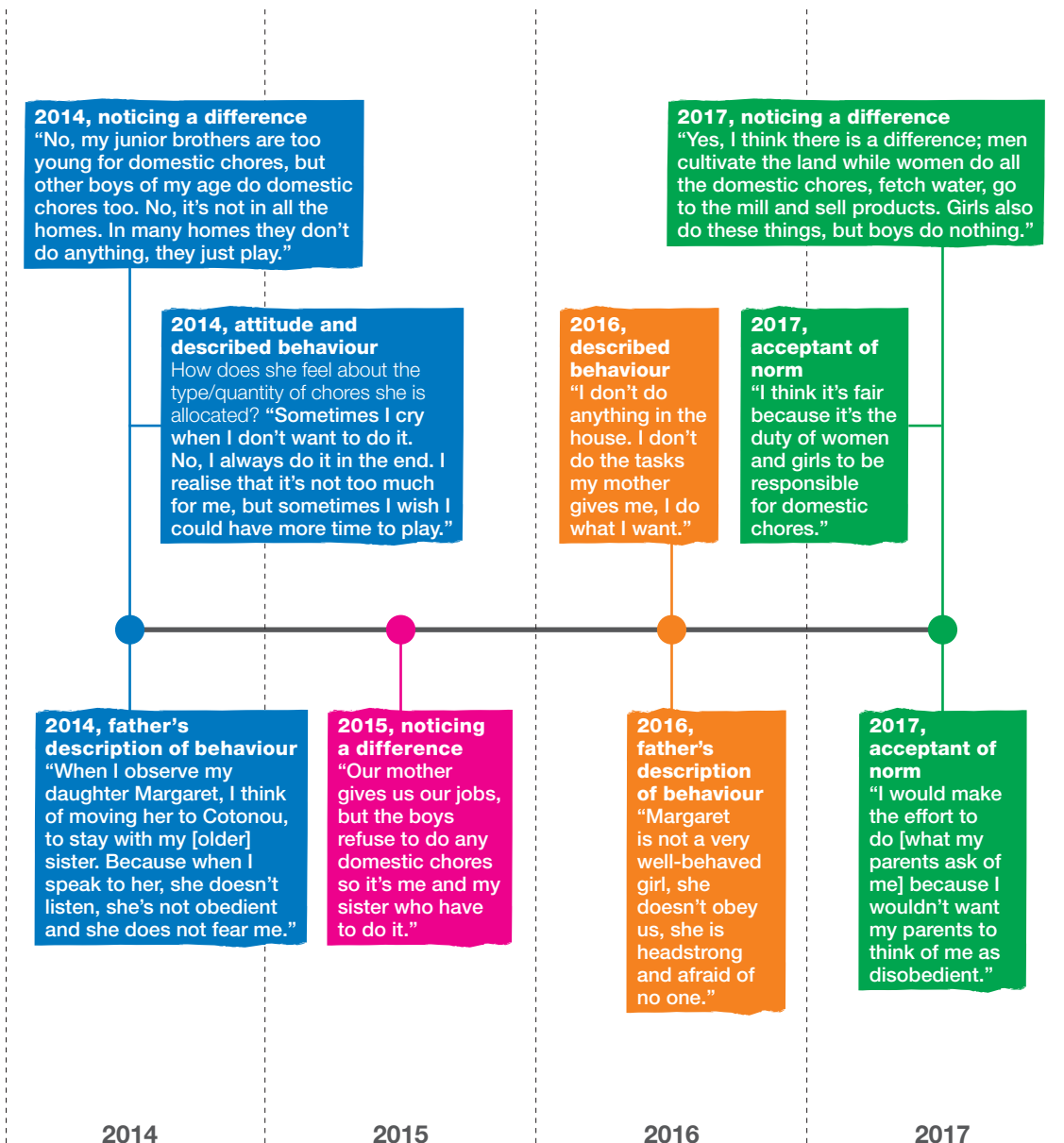
While early adolescence represents an important period for the disruption of gendered norms, the longitudinal *Real Choices, Real Lives* data also shows that this process of disruption is not always linear. Girls may conform to gender norms, begin to challenge them, and then return to conformity – having not been supported in their disruption, but rather had it ‘stamped out’. Looking at Margaret’s case in Benin (see case study on page 29), we see that up to 2016, she criticised the gendered division of labour in the home, where her brothers are able to refuse to carry out their work, leaving their sisters to complete all of the tasks, and

began to refuse to do what was asked of her: **“Our mother gives us our jobs but the boys refuse to do any domestic chores so it’s me and my sister who have to do it”** (2015); **“I don’t do anything in the house. I don’t do the tasks my mother gives me, I do what I want”** (2016). However, after being sent away to live with her paternal aunt due to her lack of obedience and lack of deference to her father, Margaret’s attitude appears to have shifted back to acceptance of these expectations: **“I would make the effort to do [what my parents ask] because I wouldn’t want my parents to think of me as disobedient”** (2017).

CASE STUDY: MARGARET, BENIN, 11²⁵

Margaret is the second eldest child in a family of seven. She has an older sister, aged 16, two younger brothers, nine and six, and a younger sister, aged two. Margaret was living with her mother, father and four siblings in a village in Couffo Department, south-western Benin until 2017 when she was sent to live with her paternal aunt, uncle, and 13-year-old female cousin because 'she was not obeying her parents' (interviewer observation, 2017).

Summary of 'glitches' timeline:



2.4. SOCIAL LEVEL INFLUENCES ON GENDERED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

Margaret's case also points to the role of the wider social network in girls' lives. Across the nine Cohort countries, when exploring where girls' attitudes and behaviours which challenge gendered norms may originate from, **Social Level** factors – in the household and wider community – present the most significant evidence of influencing

the Cohort girls. Parents' and carers' own experiences which are communicated to the girls, exposure to non-normative gender roles in the household, and the attitudes and behaviours of family members which help reproduce or shift gendered norms are all influencing factors we can identify in the *Real Choices, Real Lives* data.

2.4.1. Examples of what 'not to do'

The role of mothers, grandmothers, and other female carers is central in the gender socialisation process, as gendered social norms across all of the cohort countries see girls spending the majority of their time at home with adult females. In the Latin America and Caribbean Cohort in particular, the Cohort mothers' experiences of adolescent pregnancy, relationships, and dropping out of school are provided by the mothers themselves and other family members as examples for the girls of what 'not' to do. Their aspirations for the girls to gain an education and be in control of their futures are directly linked to communicating the risks and obstacles that adolescent pregnancy and relationships bring to girls in particular.

"Because I had her as a single mother and with different problems and I hope that doesn't happen to her."

Gladys' mother, El Salvador, 2018

"To be honest, I think it was very wrong for her [my mother] to have me... at 15... she didn't even finish her studies, she didn't go to university. I think she should have finished her studies and gone to university before having a relationship."

Juliana, Brazil, 2018

"I tell them my experiences when I was a young woman. Especially when I got married; it was unplanned. I truly regret not being able to finish my studies."

Melanie's mother, Philippines, 2017

Girls in the **Togo** Cohort also draw from observations of their mothers' lives when challenging norms related to motherhood in a country where the average number of children per woman remains high at 4.35 (see Table 1): **"I will get married like my mother, but I won't have lots of children like her"** (Djoumai, Togo, 2017). A number of girls in the **Philippines** Cohort specify that they would like to have **"just two"** children, unlike their mothers: the average number of children per Cohort household is 4.5. The ability to realise these aspirations is of course dependent on the girls' access to quality sexual and reproductive health education and services.

Girls expressing that they want to do 'something different' from their mothers also applies in many cases to the type of work they aspire to do in the future. The majority of Cohort mothers/female carers work in agriculture or as informal traders (see Box 4), with the Vietnam Cohort including the

largest proportion of women in ‘professional’ work (i.e. requiring specific qualifications). A common sentiment expressed by Cohort mothers is the hope that their daughters will not do manual work but will do something requiring training or qualifications, which the Cohort girls themselves reiterate.

“Well, my dream is for her to become a professional, not to let anyone humiliate her, to have a job so that she improves herself in many ways, so that she doesn’t have to depend on anyone.”

Katerin’s mother, Dominican Republic, 2018

“[School is important for girls] because we have to become professionals, because if we don’t go to school and [if we] leave school we have to end up working as maids, and things like that, and that’s not good.”

Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2018



Some girls whose mothers/female carers carry out informal work use their mothers’ careers as a baseline, but aspire to go further:

“My life will be different from my mother’s because I will have my own shop which I will manage, whereas my mother sells sand that she collects, to [sell to] other people.”

Djoumai, Togo, 2017

Box 4 Female employment in the Cohort, 2017-2018

Country	Number of main female carers in employment	Type of employment
Benin	10 out of 10	Eight are traders
Togo	15 out of 17	13 are traders
Uganda	11 out of 13	Nine are farmers
Cambodia	Eight out of 12	Five are farmers
The Philippines	Seven out of 14	Five are farmers
Vietnam	17 out of 19	Occupations are mixed: with one government official, one accountant, one teacher
Brazil	Six out of nine	Occupations are mixed
The Dominican Republic	Six out of 12	Occupations are mixed
El Salvador	Nine out of 13	Five are traders

2.4.2. Exposure to non-normative gender roles

An interesting aspect observed in the Cohort data is the influence of the girls' exposure to non-normative gender roles in their challenging of gendered norms, whether exposure is long-term due to their main carer being a single parent or the head of a household in a polygamous family, or short-term due to specific circumstances such as an economic crisis or illness.

Looking at the case of Ly in Vietnam (see case study on page 33), whose mother is a single parent and widow, Ly and her mother are responsible for all tasks, domestic and manual, and Ly's mother also provides the sole income for the household through traditionally 'male' work of farming and bricklaying.

Ly's case is particularly interesting due to the shifts in her attitudes, behaviours, and the way she describes herself in recent years. In 2016, Ly reiterates the norm that it is important for girls to be beautiful **"because there are**

many people who love beautiful girls" (Ly, 2016), but the same year her mother begins to describe Ly's apparent rejection of norms of 'femininity': **"She doesn't like wearing skirts, [she] likes boys' clothes, she often wears caps instead of wide-brimmed hats... she wears men's clothes"** (Ly's mother, 2016).

In 2018, Ly indicates that she has made an independent decision to dress **"like a boy"** and make her style **"more manly"** (Ly, 2018). While Ly's mother indicates issues with her daughter's behaviour in terms of not doing what she is asked at home (**"Her character is so stubborn that if I scold her, she will not listen to me"** (2018)), she does not appear to criticise or question Ly's appearance or behaviour which challenges gendered norms of 'femininity'.

The non-normative gender roles in the household may have played a role in influencing both Ly and her mother's attitudes and behaviours concerning gendered norms, as practicalities have meant that traditional gender roles have necessarily been rejected.



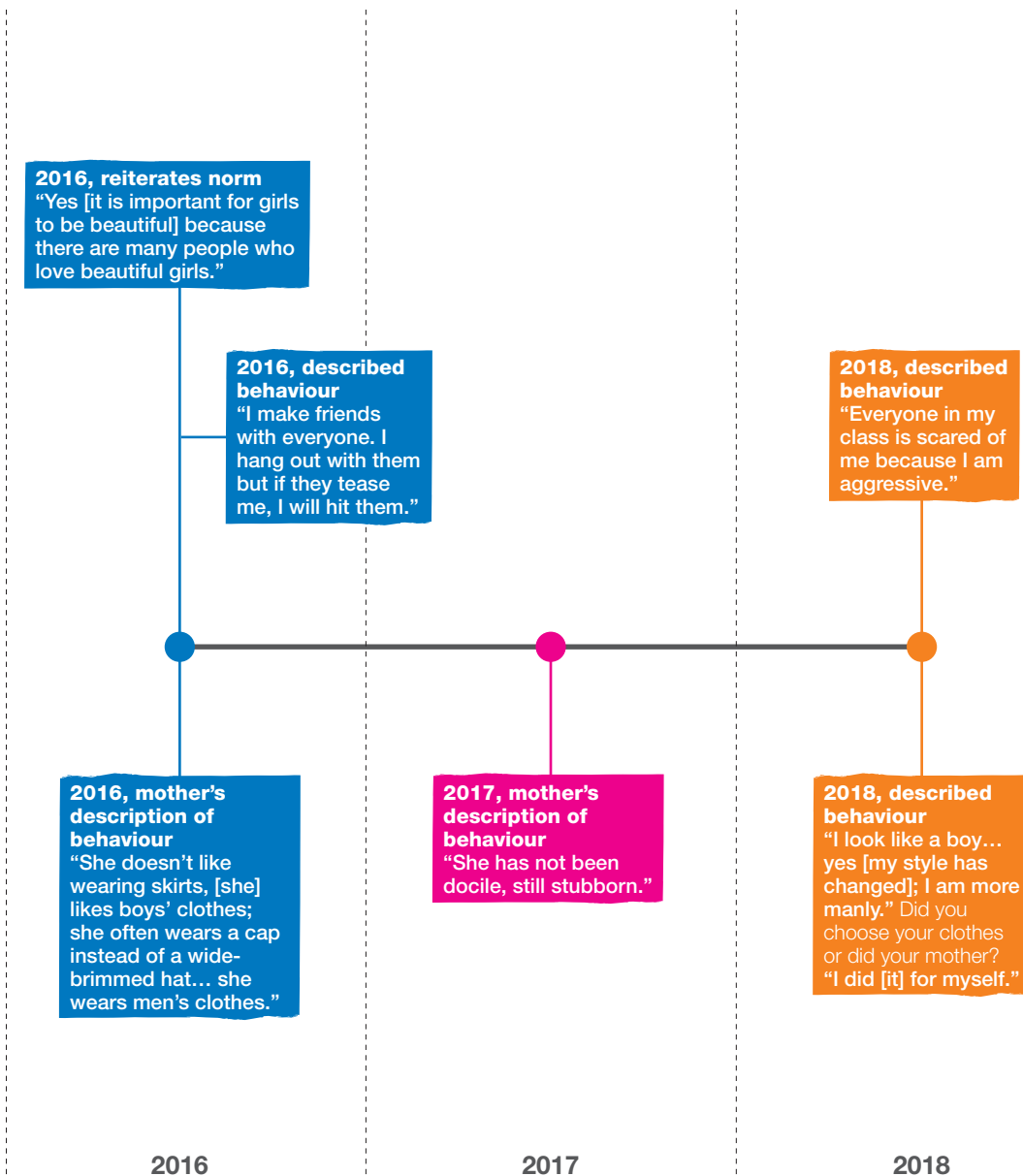
PLAN INTERNATIONAL CAMBODIA

Tending to crops in Cambodia, 2018

CASE STUDY: LY, VIETNAM, 13²⁶

Ly lives alone with her mother in a village in Quang Ngai Province on the South-Central Coast of Vietnam. Ly's father died before she was born and her mother carries out both economic (mainly agricultural) and domestic activities for the household. Ly's mother describes her daughter as “**stubborn**” and “**not docile**”, among aspects of Ly's behaviour which diverge from expectations of girls in the community.

Summary of ‘glitches’ timeline:



2.4.3. Attitudes and behaviours of family members

In numerous cases, attitudes which challenge gender norms expressed by the Cohort girls reflect those expressed by female parents and carers, particularly where there appears to have been some effort to change behaviours. In Uganda, for example, Beti's mother described how her view that the gendered division of labour in her home was unfair led her to change the way things were done – an attitude and behaviour reflected by Beti herself in 2017:

“Previously, during rainy seasons, we would say only girls or only boys should do this or that, but we discovered that it affects them... As for me, I noticed that it was unfair, so I decided that everyone should get involved.”

Beti's mother, Uganda, 2015

“No [it's not fair]... Because the chores women do are more as compared to those done by the men.” [“How do you think there could be more balance?”] **“By teaching the children discipline and also by telling them to do all kinds of chores, [whether they are] a boy or a girl.”**

Beti, Uganda, 2017

Where Cohort fathers/male carers challenge, or appear to challenge, gendered norms – which is only in a minority of cases in each region – the impact on the girls' realities is mixed. Like a number of girls in the LAC Cohort, Fernanda, from Brazil, enjoys playing football, but her mother criticises this and Fernanda's preference for wearing sporty clothes usually worn by boys: **“Her mother argues with her. [She says] ‘My daughter, try to wear nice clothes, girls' shirts’”** (Fernanda's father, 2017). Fernanda's peers call her names for the

same reason: **“Other girls started talking, kept teasing her, like ‘Hey, girl, are you going to be a ‘sapatão’?”** (a sexual slur in Brazilian Portuguese meaning ‘lesbian’) (Fernanda's father, 2017). In contrast, her father encourages Fernanda to play football and hopes that she becomes a police officer rather than a teacher: **“It would make me very proud if she did that... her thing is playing ball, or this police thing, because she's really bull-headed”** (Fernanda's father, 2017). In 2018, Fernanda continues to play football with both female and male friends and is on the boy's football team at school.

There is also, however, a clear disjuncture between attitudes and behaviours, demonstrating the need for greater focus on translating gender transformative attitudes into real tangible change in girls' daily lives. For example, Leakhena's father in Cambodia is a police officer in his community and talks about the link between gender norms and discrimination, as well as domestic violence:

“I think we can change it if we learn about gender. Nowadays, they don't know about gender, or their rights. If they are well-informed, they can reduce domestic violence or discrimination against gender.”

Leakhena's father, 2017

“Some husbands wait for their wives to cook. If their wives cannot cook on time, they will blame, or beat them. This is the root of violence. I am a violence mediator.”

Leakhena's father, 2017

Despite this, Leakhena and her mother describe a gendered division of labour in their home:

“[Leakhena] cleans [the] house, washes dishes and clothes, cooks rice, and helps sell my groceries... My son never helps with housework.”

Leakhena's mother, 2018

“I think girls and boys should do the same school chores, but we can do different tasks at home... At home, boys can chop and collect heavy wood.”

Leakhena, 2017

Similarly, in Uganda, Jane's father demonstrates awareness of the negative impact that norms requiring women to carry the burden of housework have: **“No, they are not [satisfied with what they do compared to men] because they are doing too much so I think it's not proportionate and [there is] no equity in these roles”** (Jane's father, 2017). Yet, when asked if he supports a change in these norms he states: **“I can't handle my wife's chores and roles, so I don't want them to change”** (Jane's father, 2017) showing a lack of willingness to act.

Role models in the extended family and community

In some cases, the Cohort girls explicitly indicate that members of their extended family have influenced their attitudes or aspirations, either by providing an example of non-normative behaviour, an example of what is possible, or directly providing an opportunity for the girls to do 'something different'.

“[My uncle] keeps telling me to finish school here quickly so I can... go to university there [in the city]; when I finish here, he will pay me to go to university there like his dad paid for him to go.”

Leyla, Dominican Republic, 2018

“[A friend of mine] is working as a flight attendant in the airport; she comes to visit me every three years... She goes to Spain, Honduras, Nicaragua and all sorts of countries. Yes, that has been my dream since I was very young... The moment I finish Grade 9 I'm off. To the United States.”

Stephany, El Salvador, 2018



PLAN INTERNATIONAL DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

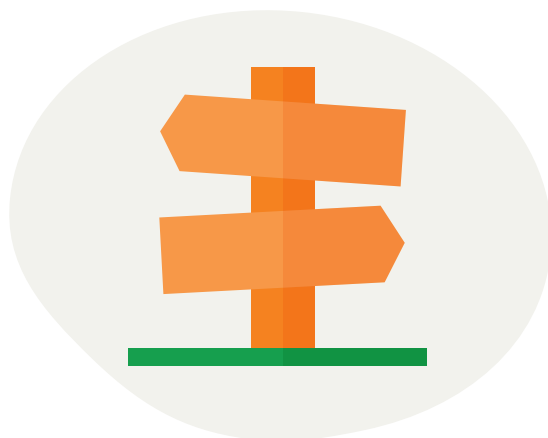
Helping on the family plot in the Dominican Republic, 2018

2.5. STRUCTURAL LEVEL INFLUENCES ON GENDERED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

2.5.1 The role of economic crises and female employment

Girls' exposure to non-normative gender roles in the household is a factor which is itself often influenced by Structural Level circumstances and changes, such as in Juliana's case in Brazil (see case study on page 37) where the 2014 economic crisis²⁷ caused a significant shift in household dynamics. Prior to Juliana's grandfather losing his job due to the crisis, her grandmother did not work and carried out all of the domestic work – with some help

from Juliana and her sister – and was overall acceptant of traditional gendered norms. Juliana's grandmother then became the family breadwinner, entering employment as a domestic worker for a family, leading to her taking the lead on economic decision making in the home and requiring her husband to share the burden of housework: **"He sweeps, he cleans, he cooks, you know? We share"** (2017). Juliana herself noticed how her grandfather was now helping with housework, and having previously expressed fairly gender normative attitudes, from 2017 vocalised challenges to these norms: **"There are men who wash the dishes, sweep the house, and there are men who don't, so the women have to do it every day"** ["Do you think this is right, this is fair?"] **"No, I don't think so."** (2017). The changes in Juliana's grandmother's attitudes and behaviours, catalysed by a financially necessary shift in traditional roles, can be seen reflected in Juliana's own convictions: in 2018 she expressed increasingly resistant attitudes to gendered divisions of labour.

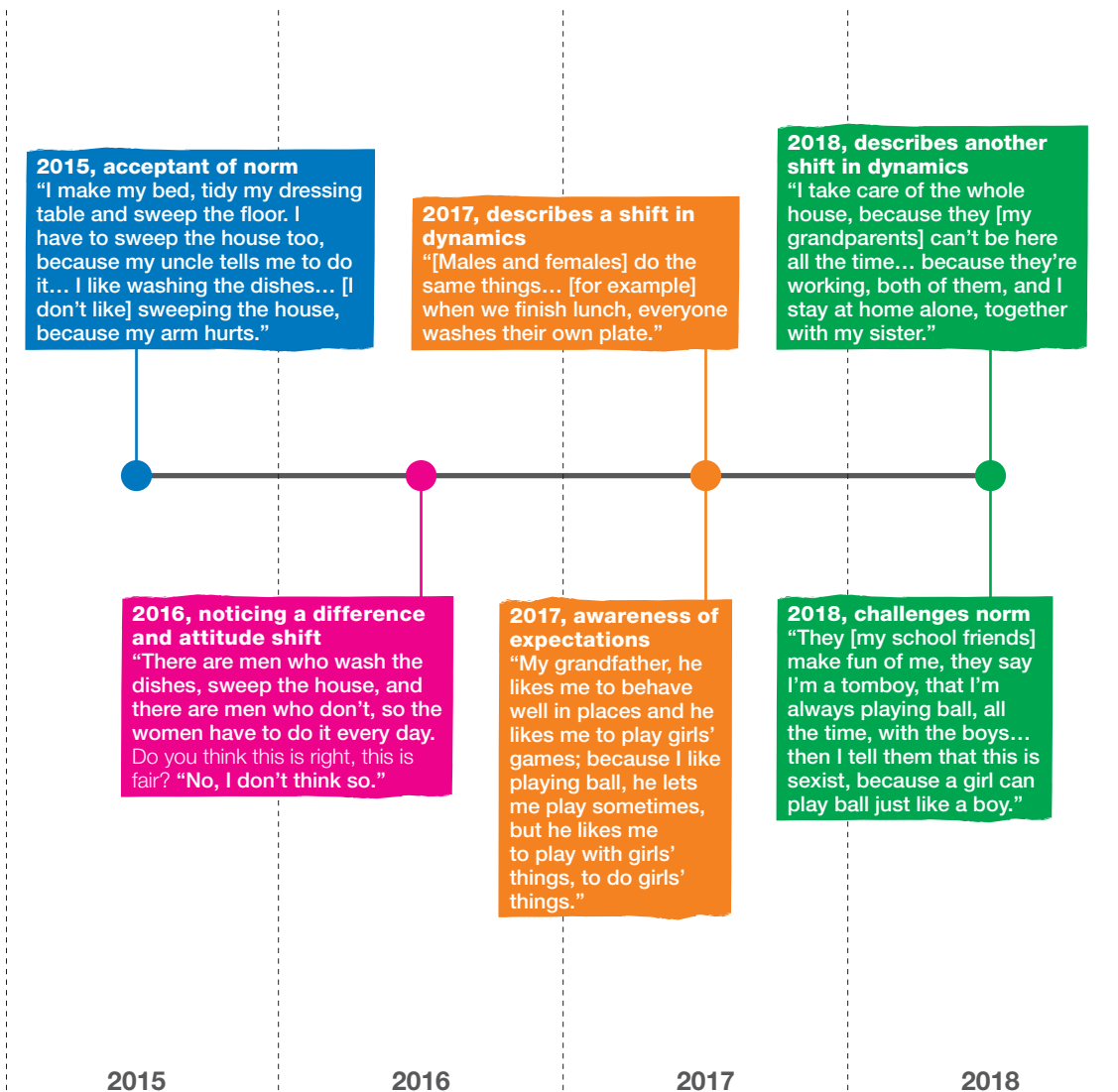


Gathering at the family compound in Togo, 2018

CASE STUDY: JULIANA, BRAZIL, 13²⁸

Juliana lives with her maternal grandparents and younger sister (11) in an urban area in the north-eastern state of Maranhão in Brazil. Until 2018, Juliana had frequent contact with her mother (28), stepfather (33), and two half-brothers (eight and four) until they moved out of the area, and until 2018 Juliana appeared to have no contact with her father. Due to the 2014 economic crisis in Brazil, Juliana's grandfather was unemployed for much of the period 2014-2018 and Juliana's grandmother became the family's breadwinner as a domestic worker, having never previously worked. In 2018, Juliana's grandfather became employed as a janitor, shifting the family dynamics once again.

Summary of 'glitches' timeline:



2.5.2 The role of ‘rights’ and ‘equality’ language

Equal access to education

Girls and their families across the Cohort strongly advocate girls’ (and boys’) education and indicate how they prioritise ensuring the Cohort girls attend school as a means of gaining a brighter and more secure future than their parents, as well as avoiding early pregnancy and marriage. However, in **Vietnam** and **Cambodia**, the use of ‘equality’ and ‘rights’ language in relation to access to education and opportunities is especially prominent:

“Girls and boys should be educated, that is equality” (Tan, Vietnam, 2018); **“All children should learn the same things because we have equal rights”** (Reaksmey, Cambodia, 2017) and some indicate that these ideas

have been communicated to them at school: **“I think boys and girls should all go to school because the teacher tells us not to discriminate against each other”** (Roumany, Cambodia, 2017). A number of girls in Vietnam indicate an awareness that things have

changed, for the better, in terms of girls’ access to education in their country:

“This is the era of equality. Boys and girls can both go to school. There is no discrimination like in the past that boys could go to school while girls couldn’t.”

Hang, Vietnam, 2017

“[It is important that girls and boys learn the same things at school] because boys and girls are equal now and they have [the] right to go to school. If they are not allowed to go [to] school, they will feel [that it is] discriminatory.”

Hoa, Vietnam, 2017

Girls’ literacy rates and primary school completion have increased in both countries in the past 20 years and have notably

overtaken those of boys. In Vietnam there has been a particular national focus on respect for education.²⁹ While Hang in Vietnam acknowledges that in the past it was less likely that girls would gain an education, there is a sense that when discussing equal access and rights to education some girls are demonstrating an awareness that many boys in their communities are less engaged at school, and more likely to miss classes or drop out. Uyen in Vietnam identified a double standard with regard to an emphasis on girls’ education, reflecting gendered social norms which expect males to carry out manual work: **“...if boys are absent from school, or drop out from school, they will have a job when they grow up. [But] girls who are absent from school will be called as follows: ‘You are girls but why you are lazy, why do you not go to school?’”** (Uyen, Vietnam, 2018).

Marriage and legal discourse

SEA Cohort girls in Vietnam and Cambodia in particular refer (both directly and indirectly) to the ‘illegality’ of child marriage – under the age of 18:

“[Girls should marry] from 18 years old. I heard of this from other people. I heard someone [say] that.”

Yen, Vietnam, 2018

“Girl[s] should get married at 18 [and] up. I don’t know why.”

Roumany, Cambodia, 2018

“She [a 15-year-old girl in the community] is not old enough to get married and have a child. Anyway, it is illegal for her to do so.” [“What do you mean by ‘illegal’?”] **“I mean she broke the laws issued by the government.”**

Hang, Vietnam, 2018



Picking fruit in Vietnam, 2018

In both countries the legal age for marriage is 18 for girls, however, in Cambodia individuals can still marry at 16 with parental consent and in Vietnam the minimum age for marriage is higher for males at 20. This demonstrates that the existence and, importantly, the awareness of Structural Level legislation can better enable gender inequitable practices such as child and early marriage to be challenged by individuals and communities.

Continuing use of corporal punishment despite illegality

There is legislation in place in all nine Cohort countries which prohibits the use of corporal punishment at school, however, just three countries – Benin, Togo, and Brazil – have prohibited its use in all settings, while its use is still legal in the home in the remaining six countries.³⁰ Cohort girls in all nine countries report experiencing or witnessing violent discipline either at home, school, or both and while the common attitude expressed by parents and carers is that corporal punishment is bad, unacceptable, and in some cases acknowledged as something not just ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’ but ‘illegal’ and something that should be avoided, many also admit to using violent discipline on their children to varying levels and view it as necessary to correct bad or risky behaviour.

Notable in the SEA Cohort in particular are descriptions from the Cohort girls and their families of a significantly more severe and frequent use of violent discipline against boys at home and school than against girls – perpetuating a harmful association of violence with males and ‘masculinity’.

“My teacher loves the girls more than the boys. I often see her hit the boys.”

Sen, Vietnam, 2017

“I don’t like boys. They are stupid. I hate them. I often beat my son, but I

rarely beat my daughter because the boy is bad and stubborn.”

Reaksmey’s mother, Cambodia, 2017

Equal division of labour

Only a very small minority of households in the Cohort do not describe some form of gendered division of labour, where domestic responsibilities are allocated according to concepts of what are ‘acceptable’ types and quantities of work for males and females. These are the gendered norms most consistently challenged by the Cohort girls and, in the SEA Cohort in particular, parents and carers also express attitudes which appear to challenge the norms that see females carry the burden of domestic work, using the language of ‘equality’ to justify why they advocate for a more equitable division of labour.

In response to the statement: ‘*Boys and girls should have the same household responsibilities*’, asked in 2018, all parents/ carers in the Vietnam and Cambodia Cohort, and all but one in the Philippines Cohort, agreed.

“Strongly agree. I think boys and girls are equal. There [should be] no discrimination.”

Huong’s mother, Vietnam, 2018

“I strongly agree with this statement because boys and girls have equal ability and can help each other.”

Leakhena’s mother, Cambodia, 2018

“Agree. Yes, they should be equals.”

Darna’s father, Philippines, 2018

This use of language in these contexts in particular suggests that there is a slightly higher level of public consciousness related to human rights and gender equality discourse, and while this does not necessarily mean that



Reading at home in Brazil, 2019

the division of labour is equitable in these households, it does indicate the potential for changed behaviours. The role that Structural Level influences play in the dissemination of language which facilitates the expression of attitudes which challenge gendered norms is something the *Real Choices, Real Lives* study would like to investigate further.

Role models

The influence of female representation in public life provides, at the Structural Level, not only aspirational objectives for the girls, but in some cases attitudinal shifts in their family members with regard to ‘what is possible’ for girls and challenging traditional gender roles. In **Uganda, Benin, and Togo** – which have the highest rates of gender inequality in

the Cohort (see the Gender Inequality Index in Table 1) – girls and their parents refer to the female politicians that are visible in their respective countries as evidence not only that these careers are possible and ‘acceptable’ for females, but that this also impacts other gendered concepts such as the household division of labour.

“My role model is the Rt. Hon. Kadega.³¹ I admire her because she has a lot of money and she knows English.”

Nimisha, Uganda, 2017

“I think [my parents] want me to continue going to school and become a minister.”

Folami, Togo, 2017

"If you have a woman minister, should you wait for her to come back from her work to cook for you? No! You can't wait for your minister wife to come home and cook. Everything that men do, women can also do and vice versa."

Alice's father, Benin, 2017

Cohort parents and carers in **Brazil** also indicate that their attitudes, which support the concept that females can lead a country, were influenced by the election of female President Dilma Rousseff (President from 2011-2016).

"[I think that women can lead a country] because we've already had Dilma, right? And if it hadn't been for a few things, she'd still be there now."

Sofia's mother, Brazil, 2018

"[I think that women can lead a country] because a woman, Dilma, Dilma used to lead the country."

Juliana's grandmother, Brazil, 2018

The visibility of female role models in sport through televised competitions and tournaments can also be seen to influence what girls and their family members regard as 'acceptable' and 'possible' activities and behaviours for girls, if not careers.

"[Women playing football] is all right, it is a good sport, I have seen girls playing it on the television."

Dariana's mother, Dominican Republic, 2011

In the Latin America and Caribbean countries, many of the Cohort girls express a strong interest in playing football. In Brazil, where women's football has seen increasing attention and success on the international stage and star players have spoken out against discrimination, female participation in football was illegal until 1979 and significant

intergenerational contrasts in attitudes on this topic can be seen. In the case of Juliana, for example, her grandfather is strongly against girls playing a traditionally 'male' sport:

"It is not normal [for girls to play football]. Girls have to practise sports which are more adequate for them."

Juliana's grandfather, Brazil, 2011

While her mother has a different opinion:

"Yes [it is all right for girls to play football], I like playing football myself."

Juliana's mother, Brazil, 2011

Structural Level shifts in gendered norms do not always translate to the Social and Individual Levels, which can be a barrier to changed attitudes and behaviours, depending on who or what has greater influence in an individual girl's life.

The risks of language

While there is evidence of the potential for **Structural Level** progress in gender equality legislation and discourse to filter down to **Social** and **Individual Level** attitudes, it is important to underline how the use of 'rights' and 'equality' language can mask a lack of change in behaviours and practices when it comes to gendered social norms. Instances where male family members in particular refer to the achievement of 'equality' and indicate that things "have changed" in terms of gender roles and women's economic empowerment in these contexts often do not reflect the realities described by their daughters and other female family members, nor the wider evidence which demonstrates the persistence of gender inequitable practices. Making sure that language is available for individuals to vocalise their challenges to gendered norms is an important first step, however, providing the instruments and resources for individuals, families, and communities to realise norm change is vital.

2.6. CHALLENGING SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OF BOTH ‘FEMININITY’ AND ‘MASCULINITY’

Gendered norms, dictating what is ‘acceptable’ for girls and impacting their ability to choose how they live their lives, are inherently tied to gendered norms which dictate **what is ‘acceptable’ for boys**. It is vital to challenge social expectations of both ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ if gender norm change and gender equality are to be achieved. Notable in the South East Asia and Latin America and Caribbean Cohorts is the interaction of a strong, harmful association of aggression and violent behaviour with males – perpetuated by a disproportionate use of violent punishment on boys – with girls’ resistance to the

gendered norms which label boys as strong and girls as weak, the result being girls taking on those harmful behaviours associated with ‘masculinity’:

["Did your style change?"] **"Yes, I am more manly... Everyone in my class is scared of me because I'm so aggressive."**

Ly, Vietnam, 2018

"[It is important for girls to be fit and strong] because when a boy hits me, I can hit him back."

Katerin, Dominican Republic, 2018



PLAN INTERNATIONAL BENIN

Doing washing at home in Benin, 2018

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2019 analysis of the *Real Choices*, *Real Lives* longitudinal and qualitative data across the three regions and nine countries in the study Cohort evidences the value and necessity of long-term research and programming which prioritise listening to girls' experiences, attitudes, and behaviours. The Cohort data demonstrates both the unique national and social contexts in which girls live and their unique identities, and the shared experience of persistent unequal and limiting concepts of gender that impact so many aspects of their lives. Amongst the numerous specific findings outlined in the three regional reports, relevant to girls living in specific economic contexts, with particular household structures, or exposure to violence, the most significant finding at the core of this analysis is the potential shown by all Cohort girls and many of their family members to challenge, disrupt, and change the social norms which lead to negative outcomes in their lives.

By paying close attention to girls' development of attitudes towards and understandings of gender and their own identity during early adolescence, researchers, programmers, and policy makers can better facilitate the translation of the first stages of 'resistance' to unequal norms into changed behaviours. The intention is not for the individual cases presented in this analysis to be taken as reflective of a generalised experience, but rather as examples of where there may be untapped potential and spaces for intervention that have been underdeveloped in practice. From cases like Margaret's in Benin, we can see that the process of disrupting gender socialisation is not necessarily linear and can be interrupted, reversed, or 'stamped out' by **Social Level** factors – in Margaret's case, highlighting the role of child fostering and the extended family in challenging or

reproducing norms as an area to be explored further. With Juliana in Brazil, we can see that individuals can begin to challenge norms due to the impact of wider **Structural Level** circumstances on households – where an economic crisis, which generally leads to greater negative outcomes for females than males, can also require 'practical' shifts in traditional gender roles and in doing so expose gendered norms as a social construct. The cases of Ly in Vietnam and other girls in the SEA Cohort exemplify the harmful impacts of gender socialisation of boys and girls where violence and aggression are associated with 'masculinity' – emphasised by the use of corporal punishment. This demonstrates the necessity for research, policy, and programming to address the roots of social expectations of both 'femininity' and 'masculinity' to tackle violence and enable individuals to explore their identity outside of these binary constraints.

Types of intervention

- **Intervene earlier:** recognising the significance of adolescence as a period of identity formation and of a heightened awareness of both gender development and the expectations related to gender development during this time, pre-adolescent intervention provides opportunities to influence development before these are ingrained.
- **Employ adaptive programming approaches that allow for risk, failure, and learning:** recognising that social norm change is complex and multi-faceted, and that interventions will need to be responsive to changing dynamics.
- **Commit to sustained, long-term interventions throughout adolescence:**

recognising that social norm change takes time and is unlikely to be accomplished in short-term project cycles.

- **Invest in and allow time for formative research:** to aid understanding of which norms are most relevant for particular behaviours, who are the key reference groups, and which norms may be most susceptible to influence or change.

Programme components

- Design programmes informed by research which first and foremost listens to adolescent girls and acknowledges their unique experience of gendered social norms.
- Based on the findings that Social Level influences are significant in the gender socialisation process and that a girl's social network can shift across the life course, consider the significance of – and develop programmes that enhance – the potential of the following in breaking down gendered social norms.
 - The role of the extended family and practices such as family fostering in forming and breaking social norms.
 - How circumstances such as economic crises and shifts in employment trends may create unexpected windows of opportunity for social norm change.
 - How family members who may hold attitudes which challenge gendered norms can be supported in translating them into real behaviour change in the household.
 - How exposure to non-normative gender roles in the household could be built upon to challenge gendered norms on a broader level.
- Based on the findings that interactions between boys and girls are increasingly regarded as increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies and violence in early adolescence, engage parents and carers as well as adolescents in the creation of non-gendered safe spaces and activities for male and female adolescents to build positive relationships and invest in comprehensive sexuality education for adolescents and parents/carers to enable positive and informative communication.
- Based on the findings that a number of the Cohort girls express a wish to have fewer children than their mothers or no children at all, ensure that adolescents have access to family planning services - including the provision of contraception and safe and legal abortion - to enable them to have control over their bodies.
- Based on the findings that the majority of the Cohort girls aspire to attend university and/or gain vocational qualifications, work with local, regional, and national authorities to improve accessibility to higher education institutions for girls from low-income households, as well as ensuring that girls and families are aware of all of the vocational and employment opportunities available to them and how to access them.
- Based on reports from Cohort girls in all nine countries of the use of corporal punishment in homes and schools, invest in programmes which work with parents/carers and teachers to develop disciplinary methods which are not violent, are not overly dependent on 'authority', and do not perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes such as an association of 'violence' with 'masculinity'.
- Based on the reports of Cohort girls and their families of the need to restrict the movement of girls in communities in order to protect them from gender-based violence, work with communities and authorities to promote communication within the community about the links between gendered norms and gender-based violence, and improve safe mobility and access to spaces for girls.

ANNEX ONE: REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES OVERVIEW

Background and study design

Overview: *Real Choices, Real Lives* is a longitudinal cohort study tracking the lives of girls from their birth in 2006, until they turn 18 in 2024. The study is being conducted in nine countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, South East Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. It is embedded in a feminist research perspective and builds on a life-course approach exploring critical junctures in girls' lives and the influences of early childhood as they enter early adolescence and beyond.

Approach and methodology: The flexibility inherent in the qualitative approach has enabled us to adapt lines of enquiry in each data collection round, reflecting and building on issues present in girls' lives as they grow up. However, our methodology has remained consistent and is based around a core approach which has drawn, from the beginning, on in-depth interviews with caregivers and, since 2013 when they reached age seven, with the girls themselves. The interviews are supported by participatory and age-appropriate methods, and we have also sought wider perspectives: through life histories with parents and interviews with other household members. We primarily focus on the girl and her immediate family but, in seeking to explore and understand gendered social norms, also include broader evidence to inform our analysis of her community and wider influences. Over the years, we will look to strengthen this – as social networks become increasingly defined in girls' lives.

To date, data collection has been undertaken on an annual basis, coordinated from Plan International UK working alongside Plan International country offices and nationally-based research teams. Data is analysed using

NVivo, using a case study approach for each of the girls to support longitudinal analysis.

Sampling: *Real Choices, Real Lives* is a relatively small cohort study, with a total of 146 girls forming the original selection across all nine countries. However, there were immediate dropouts as well as deaths – reducing the number to 142 in the first years. Further, due to around half of the girls in Brazil having migrated by 2013, an additional five girls were added to the Cohort. As such, accounting for all girls (including those that have died, migrated or left the study) a total of 156 girls (and/or their families) have at some point been involved. By 2019, a total of 118 girls were actively participating in the study (ranging from between 10 and 20 in each country).

Across the nine countries, girls were sampled firstly based on their year of birth (2006). Secondly, the household context was considered with girls selected from among the lowest income households in each country context. There is rural/urban variation across the countries, which is reflective of wider urbanisation dynamics: in Brazil, for example, the majority of the girls are from urban/peri-urban contexts, while in Benin, Togo, and Uganda the girls are from rural locations.

Ethics: Ethical principles guide our research practices and process from design through to analysis. All research activities are undertaken in line with Plan International's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies. Anyone undertaking the study is required to adhere to strict codes of conduct and additional safeguarding measures are put in place including in the handling of data. Ethical clearance for the research has been sought and obtained from



Family time at the beach in the Philippines, 2018

Plan International Global as well as from national ethics review authorities (where these apply to social research), as part of an ongoing commitment to continually strengthen ethics practices. Principles of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent have been applied, with caregivers asked for consent on an annual basis and girls asked to provide assent (annually, since 2013).

Limitations of the data: The sample size is relatively small. However, this is offset by the depth of data as well as the length of time – 12 years – over which it has now been collected. Further, the data does not claim to be ‘representative’ but highlights the generalised experiences of girls across contexts which we know are marked by gender inequality. Its value lies in the nuance and depth of the analysis.

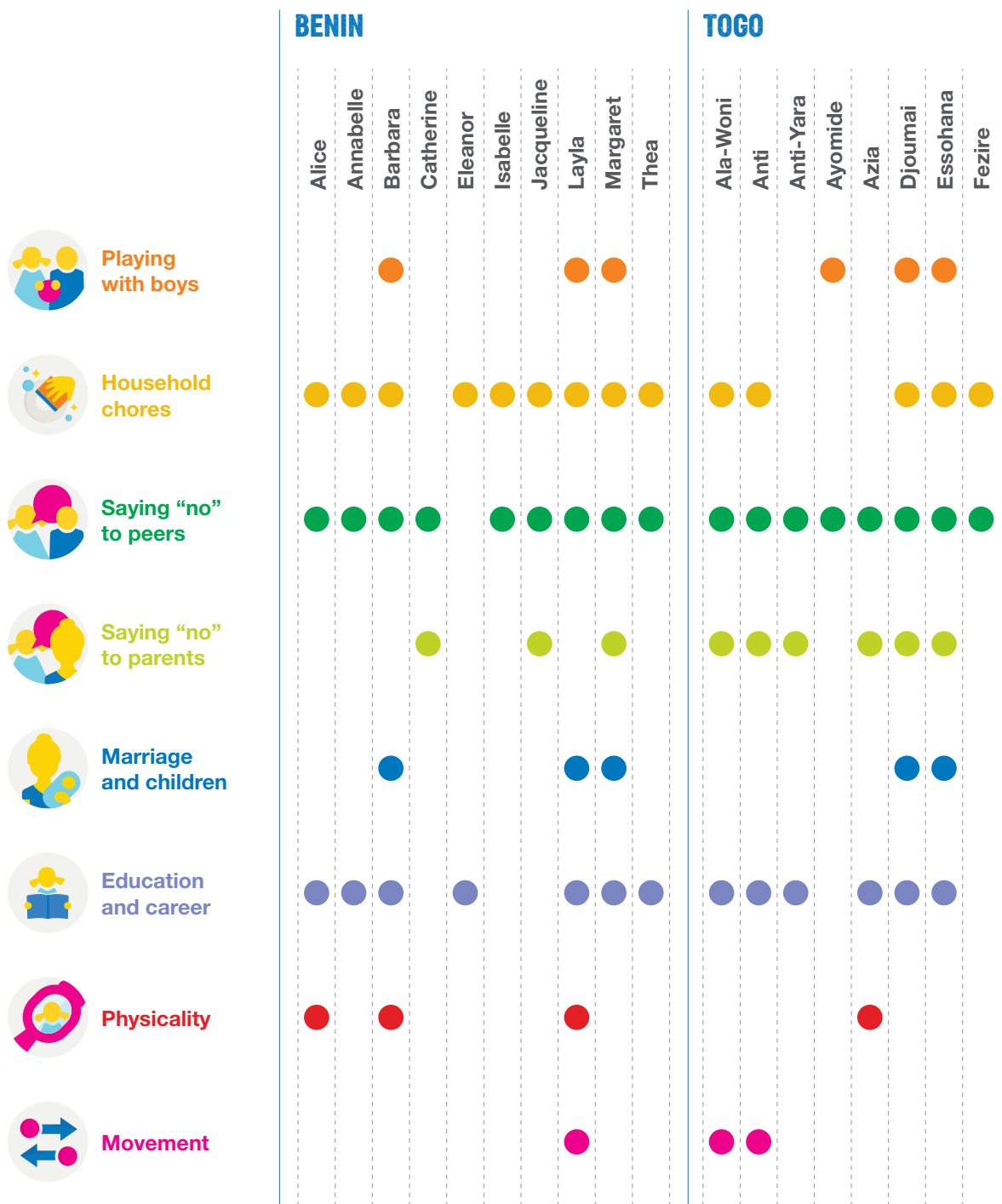
In addition, we acknowledge that not directly engaging boys (i.e. a male cohort) is a limitation in terms of how we explore and understand gendered social norms. However, the study was

specifically designed to focus on girls and their experiences. Through our design we seek to understand girls’ own perceptions of relations with both other females and males, as well as to take account of broader perspectives, where feasible: in some years we have undertaken wider analysis with communities, looking at schools for example, and conducting focus group discussions with older girls (mainly relatives). Drawing analysis from these components also relates to understanding the girls’ wider social reference group, which is important for our consideration of norms. It is an ongoing priority to develop approaches that will enable us to explore wider perspectives in a systematic and meaningful way.

Lastly, whilst the value of the study comes from taking account of girls’ lives broadly – in terms of a range of dimensions, including education, health, household economy, and relationships – this is simultaneously a limitation. The study’s breadth means there are some areas where we do not have sufficient detail to draw conclusions.

ANNEX TWO: GLITCH MAPS

Sub-Saharan Africa



UGANDA									
Folami									
Ladi									
Larba									
Mangazia									
Nana-Adja									
Nini-Rike									
Reine									
Amelia									
Beti									
Jane									
Joy									
Justine									
Miremba									
Namazzi									
Nimisha									
Rebecca									
Sheila									
Shifa									
Sylvia									

South East Asia

VIETNAM



Expectations of behaviour



Division of labour



Interaction with boys



Marriage and children



Education and career



Expectations of appearance



Saying "no" to peers



Saying "no" to parents



Movement



Language of 'equality' and 'rights' (and 'progress')

	Chau	Hang	Hoa	Huong	Kieu	Kim	Ly	Mai	Nguyet	Nhi	Oanh	Quynh	Sen	Tan	Thi	Thom	Tien	Trinh	Uyen	Yen
Expectations of behaviour	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●		●		●		●	●		●	
Division of labour	●		●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Interaction with boys		●		●				●			●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Marriage and children	●	●		●		●	●	●					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Education and career	●	●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Expectations of appearance	●		●	●			●	●			●			●	●	●		●	●	●
Saying "no" to peers		●	●	●					●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
Saying "no" to parents	●	●	●					●	●	●				●	●	●			●	●
Movement						●										●			●	
Language of 'equality' and 'rights' (and 'progress')		●	●	●				●		●	●			●		●		●	●	

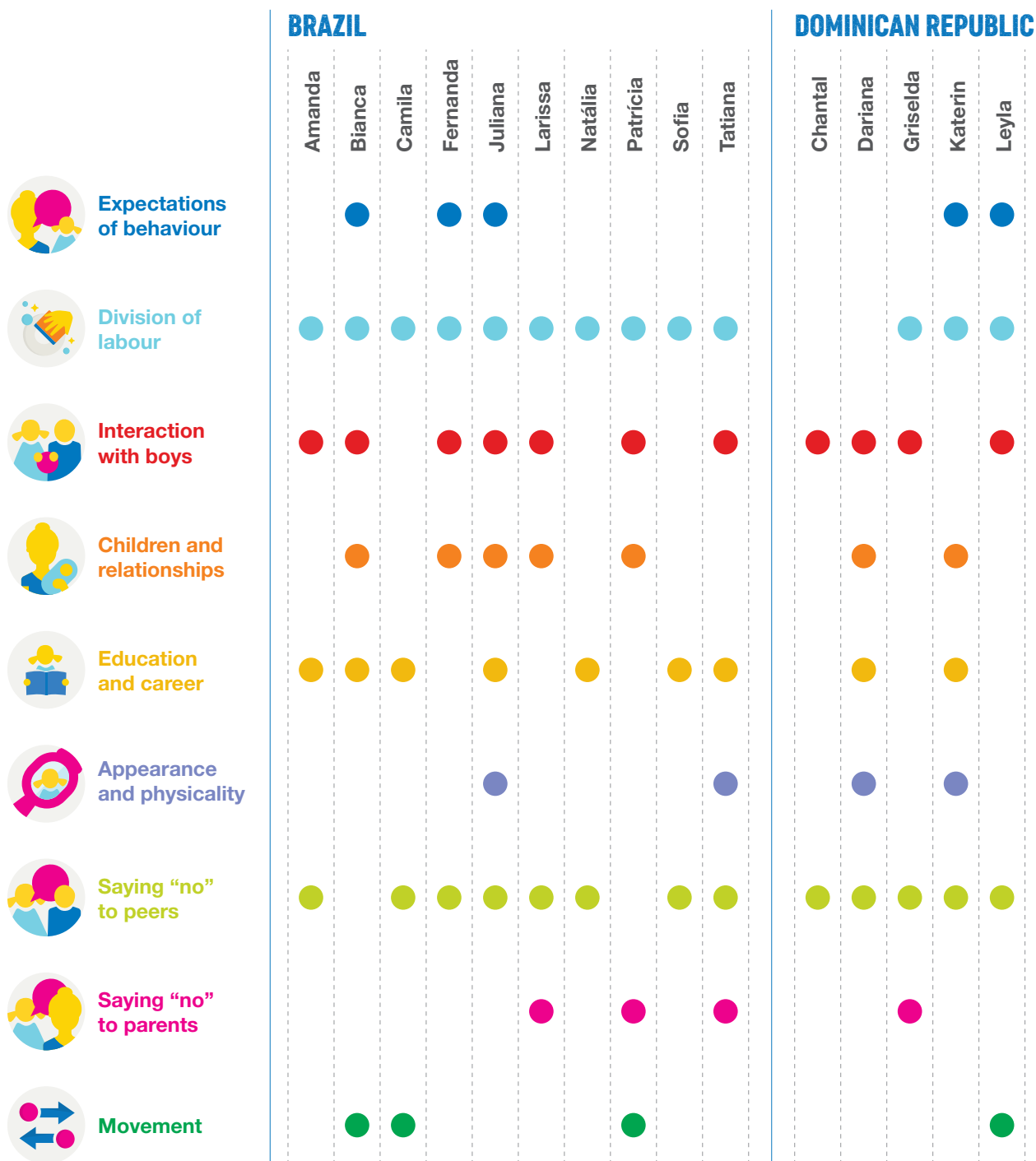
THE PHILIPPINES

Chesa	Christine	Darna	Dolores	Jasmine	Jocelyn	Kyla	Mahalia	Maricel	Melanie	Michelle	Reyna	Rosamie	Rubylyn
●				●				●			●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●		
●	●	●		●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●
		●			●								
●	●	●		●			●	●			●	●	●
●	●	●	●	●			●				●	●	
													●

CAMBODIA

Bopha	Davy	Kannitha	Leakhena	Lina	Mony	Nakry	Puthea	Reaksmeay	Roumany	Sothany	Thearika
	●	●					●				●
●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
●	●			●	●	●		●	●	●	●
	●	●	●			●	●		●		●
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	●					●	●	●	●		●
		●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
								●	●	●	
				●			●				
				●			●				

Latin America and Caribbean



Madelin									
Nicol									
Raisa									
Rebeca									
Saidy									
Sharina									
Valerie									

EL SALVADOR

Andrea									
Bessy									
Doris									
Gabriela									
Gladys									
Hillary									
Karen									
Mariel									
Raquel									
Rebecca P									
Stephany									
Susana									
Valeria									

ENDNOTES

1. Based on the data collection completed in 2018 and 2019 (in Brazil and Cambodia data collection took place in 2019) there were 118 families actively participating across the study. In one case in Togo, the girl herself had migrated but her family continued to participate and in Brazil, one girl and her family did not participate in 2019 but, as they were involved until 2018, they have been included in the longitudinal analysis for this report. The original sample in 2006 included 146 girls, however, there were a number of deaths in the first year and there have been dropouts. Over the years, some girls and/or their families have been unavailable (for example through migration). Annexes to the main reports present full tables summarising the data held for the Cohort girls across the various countries.
2. Plan International (2018) *Getting it Right: A Guidance Note for Gender Transformative Programming and Influencing* provides an overview of Plan International's approach to gender transformative change, and our broader recognition that change takes time, is highly context specific, and cannot be achieved by one intervention alone.
3. The full Sub-Saharan Africa regional report is available online: <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-real-choices-real-lives-report-2019pdf/download?token=1XZdZ07F>
4. The full South East Asia regional report is available online: <https://plan-uk.org/file/rcrl-girls-challenging-the-gender-rules-cambodia-the-philippines-and-vietnam-full-reportpdf/download?token=5h8Q8s4Q>
5. The full Latin America and Caribbean regional report is available online: https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-rcrl-report-lac-finalpdf/download?token=_ydgkC5
6. ODI (2015) *Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide*. Research and Practice Note, Knowledge to Action Resource Series 2015. London: Overseas Development Institute.
7. We refer throughout to gendered social norms. Definitions are drawn from the works of Bicchieri, C. (2017) *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure and Change Social Norms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Mackie, G. and F. Moneti (2014) *What are Social Norms? How are They Measured?* UNICEF, UCSD Center on Global Justice; as well as a synthesis presented in Alexander-Scott, M., E. Bell and J. Holden (2016) *Guidance Note: Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*. London: VAWG Helpdesk.
8. Basu, S., X. Zuo, C. Lou, R. Acharya, and R. Lundgren (2016) Learning to Be Gendered: Gender Socialisation in Early Adolescence Among Urban Poor in Delhi, India, and Shanghai, China. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 61, Issue 4, Supplement.
9. Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge; Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge; Butler, J. (2009) Imitation and Gender Insubordination. In J. Storey (ed.) *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Anthology*.
10. The Gender Inequality Index measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development: reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by the proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and the proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>
11. Girls not Brides, data from 2017. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/atlas/#/>
12. Girls not Brides, data from 2017. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/atlas/#/>
13. Most recent available data. For Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador: UNFPA demographic dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend> For Brazil: World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?locations=BR>
14. Most recent available data. For Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador: UNFPA demographic dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend> For Brazil: World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=BR>
15. Most recent available data. World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>
16. Most recent available data. World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.MA.ZS>
17. Most recent available data. For Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador: UNFPA demographic dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend> For Brazil: World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE?locations=BR>

18. Most recent available data. For Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador: UNFPA demographic dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend> For Brazil: World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.MA?locations=BR>
19. Most recent available data. For Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam: UNFPA demographic dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend> For Brazil, Dominican Republic and El Salvador: World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.NEET.FE.ZS>
20. Most recent available data. For Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam: UNFPA demographic dividend. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend> For Brazil, Dominican Republic and El Salvador: World Bank Data. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.NEET.MA.ZS>
21. This is in part related to our research methodology (which does not involve observation over a sufficient length of time to determine 'normal' behaviours), as well as the inherent challenges of determining and measuring social norms. See Annex One.
22. 'Child marriage' is any formal marriage or informal union where one or both of the parties are under 18. 'Early marriage' refers to marriage before 18 in contexts where individuals are legally 'adults' and can marry before 18. However, early marriage is also sometimes used to describe marriages in which one or both spouses are 18 or older, but with a compromised ability to grant consent.
23. Although the questions were systematically asked across the Cohort, there is, of course, need to exercise caution with analysis based on hypothetical questions and the answers they elicit. In asking the questions, our interest and analysis is largely in exploring perspectives and the potential disjuncture between what girls (or their family members) think is acceptable for themselves vs. what they think would be acceptable when judging others' actions.
24. 115 Cohort girls answered this question in 2017.
25. A detailed case study for Margaret is included on page 40 of the SSA regional report. <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-real-choices-real-lives-report-2019pdf/download?token=1XZdZ07F>
26. A detailed case study for Ly is included on page 26 of the SEA regional report. <https://plan-uk.org/file/rcrl-girls-challenging-the-gender-rules-cambodia-the-philippines-and-vietnam-full-reportpdf/download?token=5h8Q8s4Q>
27. The New York Times (2014) 'Brazil Fell into Recession in First Half of Year, as Investments Dropped', *The New York Times*, 29 August 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/business/international/brazil-fell-into-recession-in-first-half-of-year.html>
28. A detailed case study for Juliana is included on page 64 of the LAC regional report. https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-rcrl-report-lac-finalpdf/download?token=_ydghkC5
29. Respect for education has been described as "essential to the Vietnamese character". London, J. (ed.) (2011) *Education in Vietnam*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p.2.
30. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children. <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/>
31. Rebecca Kadaga, first female Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, in position since 2011.



Plan International UK

In 2006, Plan International UK began a study following a group of 146 girls from nine countries across three continents. *Real Choices, Real Lives* will follow the lives of the girls involved from birth until 2024, when they will reach the age of 18. The study is undertaken across Sub-Saharan Africa (Benin, Togo, Uganda), South East Asia (Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam) and Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador). The information from the cohort study provides real insight into the daily experiences of girls and their families and fosters a clearer understanding of the root causes of gender inequality and of the social norms, attitudes and cultural practices which are embedded at home and in community life. Plan International UK strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. As an independent development and humanitarian charity, we work alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

Cover photos: Two girls hold hands in Brazil, 2019, 2018, Cycling with her sibling in Cambodia, 2018, Carrying out household work in Togo

COVER PHOTO CREDITS: PLAN INTERNATIONAL BRAZIL, PLAN INTERNATIONAL CAMBODIA, PLAN INTERNATIONAL TOGO

Plan International UK
Finsgate,
5-7 Cranwood Street,
London,
EC1V 9LH

www.plan-uk.org/policy/real-choices-real-lives
@PlanUK
policy@plan-uk.org
T: 0300 777 9777
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