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**PROMOTING POSITIVE MASCULINITIES:
FINDINGS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
PROGRAMMING IN BANGLADESH, GHANA, HAITI, AND NIGERIA**

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ACRONYMS

ANC	Antenatal Care
GBV	Gender-based Violence
MNCH	Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health
PNC	Post-natal Care
SHOW	Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
FP	Family Planning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy of the gender-transformative, multi-country Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) Project (2016–2021) funded by Global Affairs Canada, Plan International implemented a male-engagement strategy in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal to promote positive masculinities and engage men in the continuum of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). In the five countries, Plan International, in collaboration with local implementing partners, established 1,041 Fathers Clubs and engaged 15,105 fathers in a course of twenty reflective sessions to broaden their understanding of gender equality, motivate them to question what it means to be a man and a father, promote their equitable involvement at the household level. Furthermore, these sessions provided fathers with safe spaces where men can identify and reflect on challenges related to spousal and family relationships and MNCH/SRHR, and come up with solutions within the group.

This chapeau report presents the results of Plan International's qualitative study on the effects of the Fathers Clubs intervention among men in targeted communities, conducted in February 2019, in four countries¹: Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria. The study findings revealed positive shifts in men's attitudes and behaviours: respondents demonstrated increased engagement in the continuum of MNCH/SRH care and positive masculinities supportive of women's and girls' empowerment. Men have also moved away from stereotypical gender roles and take part in several household and childcare responsibilities, particularly during a woman's pregnancy. However, despite male engagement in household responsibilities, it appeared such roles continued to be perceived as women's domain, as men's involvement was often regarded as "help" rather than a joint responsibility to be shared equally by both partners. Among key changes, participants reported substantial male support for maternal, infant, and child health, including support for women's access to health care during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.

Positive shifts in men's attitudes, behaviours and practices including non-aggressive communication styles, uptake of new roles, and abandonment of harmful behaviours were reported by women, adolescent girls and boys, community leaders, and by Fathers Clubs participants themselves. Respondents observed fewer incidences of gender-based violence, linking this to other improvements in men's



behaviour; though in some communities, respondents did not broach the subject. However, women in all countries also reported increased feelings of love, peace, and less frequent arguments in spousal relationships and within the household. All respondents discussed improved family dynamics, including greater physical presence and engagement of men at home; with reports of improved harmony, bonding, and love within the household – between men and women, and between fathers and their children.

Relationships between fathers and daughters notably improved, with reports of more men enrolling their daughters into school, granting permission for their higher education, and rejecting child marriages. Almost all participants believed these behaviours would be sustained, with some women expressing less certainty that improved attitudes and behaviours would continue. Men experienced disapproval and ridicule from their extended families, neighbours, and friends for adopting new gender roles, such as participating in household chores and taking care of children. Nonetheless, men demonstrated and expressed commitment to their new-found gender roles for the welfare and well-being of their spouses, children, and for themselves. Participation in the Fathers Clubs was universally identified to have triggered changes in the views of men about their roles and responsibilities at home. The Fathers Clubs provided men with both a safe space for collective reflection and served as a support network for them to withstand social stigma and remain committed to the changes they have made in their lives.

1. At the time of field study only four SHOW countries, namely Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria, had at least one batch of men completed full Fathers Clubs curriculum and, therefore, Senegal could not be included.



1. INTRODUCTION

Plan International, under its gender-transformative Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) Project (2016–2021) funded by Global Affairs Canada, implemented a male-engagement strategy as a pillar of the project's Gender Equality Strategy in five countries across Asia, Africa and the Caribbean from 2017–19 to promote positive masculinities and engage men in the continuum of Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNCH) care and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). This innovative approach consists of 20 reflective sessions facilitated by trained local male facilitators, supporting groups of husbands and male partners to transform attitudes and behaviours that harm women and children and promote gender-equitable relationships between couples. In January and February of 2019, Plan International led a qualitative study to gauge the impact of the Fathers Clubs interventions. The study found positive change among Fathers Clubs participants who began to demonstrate more engaged and positive masculinities supportive of women's and girls' empowerment. The study also found that while the shifts in attitudes and behaviours, though overwhelmingly positive and gender equitable, are still underscored with the entrenched gender stereotype that household and care work are essentially women's and girls' roles, with men's support being that of help only and not a shared responsibility, suggesting that deep-seated gender norms, attitudes and roles persist, even when the benefits

of equitable power relationships are noted and embraced requiring longer term engagement than the project's timelines. This document presents the overall theory of change and gender equality strategy for the SHOW Project, a synopsis of the Fathers Clubs approach, as well as the main findings of the qualitative study, which was carried out in four out of the five countries².

1.1 GENDER ASSESSMENTS

The **gender assessment conducted in each of the SHOW countries at the beginning of the project**³ found expressions of patriarchy across Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria are extreme in terms of rigid gender hierarchies, whereby the husband/father is overwhelmingly the head of the family and ultimate decision-maker. Both in Bangladesh and Nigeria, public segregation of women and girls is commonly practiced. This is particularly the case for women and girls from household with lower-income and men and senior family members with little or no educational backgrounds. A clear gender division of labour within households was noted across the four countries where men engage in productive tasks (farming, wage labour, livestock) while women's primary role is reproductive (childcare, eldercare, household work) coupled with supportive productive work. Women's burden of work and resulting time poverty coupled with mobility restrictions was found to reduce their ability to access health care, and to reinforce their financial dependence upon men. The

2. At the time of study four countries – namely Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria – have completed the first batch of Fathers Clubs sessions.

3. SHOW-BORN Gender Equality Assessment, 2017

social status and perceived value of females is measured by the ability to marry, bear children and care for family, and as such, there is strict control of female autonomy including seeking health care, and decision-making around virginity, , reproduction, and sexuality . There were mixed views among women, adolescent girls and male partners regarding male involvement and support in MNCH/SRHR decisions, however, the general perception is one whereby men's involvement in these decisions rarely is consultative or done jointly with their spouses.

Barriers to greater male involvement in MNCH/SRHR decisions and behaviour included tradition and taboos, infidelity, neglect, the instability of some partnerships, and lack of financial means to support their wives/partners. The limited direct male involvement in MNCH/SRHR is driven by both poverty and norms that reinforce male authority and that consider male engagement in this female-regarded domain as a debasement of their power, worthy of ridicule. In Ghana, men exert control over family planning through exclusive decision-making power, and by controlling the financial resources to access related services These views are underpinned by the shared belief that family planning should not be practiced; In spite of these shared beliefs, the reality is that women may exercise agency by secretly practicing family planning, in contravention of strict social norms. While early marriage is not viewed positively, it is common among girls who have begun menstruating. In Bangladesh, the gender assessment found that women have little sovereignty over their reproductive lives. Driven primarily by poverty, the early marriage of girls including pre-teens is highly prevalent and socially facilitated as a mechanism to control virginity and to protect family reputation. In several countries, the preference for male children drives birth rates and early childbearing and discourages the use of family planning. In Nigeria, women's mobility is restricted: for example, they need their husband's permission to go to the hospital and are only allowed to visit a health facility when accompanied by their husband or, in the case of an adolescent girl, their parents. In several countries, male violence against women and girls is commonplace and considered a private matter; women are further isolated by feelings of shame and inferiority and have few supportive resources at their disposal.

1.2 SHOW PROJECT

Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) is a CAD 65 million multi-country⁴, multi-year (January 2016–September 2021⁵) gender-transformative project funded by Global Affairs Canada. It is aligned with

the UN's Every Woman Every Child global strategy to help drive progress towards reaching Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5. SHOW's ultimate objective is to contribute to the reduction of maternal and child mortality amongst vulnerable women and children, including adolescent girls, in targeted remote, underserved regions of Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal. In these countries, the project is implemented in several remote, underserved, and marginalized areas. The target communities not only have cultural diversities and similarities across the five countries but also within the countries.

The SHOW project uses a three-pronged gender-transformative theory of change to improve the demand, supply, and accountability of MNCH/SRHR services.

DEMAND

Improves the use of essential health services by women of reproductive age, adolescent girls, newborns and children under 5

Addresses the root causes of low demand for MNCH/SRHR services based on socio-economic and gender-related barriers

SUPPLY

Improves the knowledge and skills of health workers in MNCH/SRHR to make services gender responsive and adolescent-friendly

To strengthening health governance through gender equitable and inclusive health management committees, and safe and affordable referrals

ACCOUNTABILITY

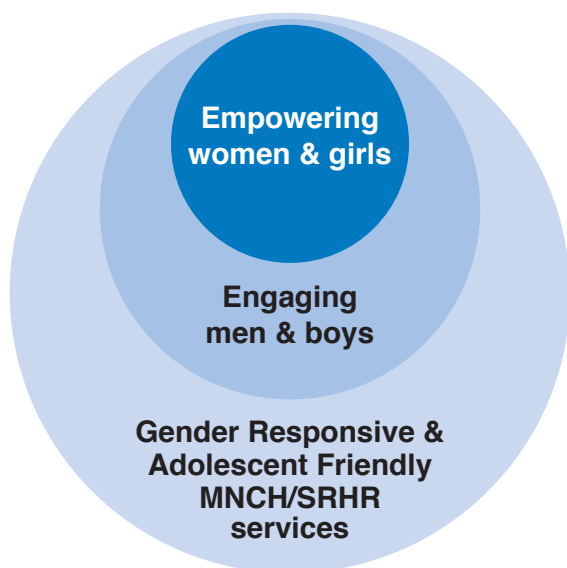
Reliable, timely and quality including sex and age disaggregated health information based on better skills and an evidence-based culture that promotes informed, transparent decision-making and increased efficiency of clinic management and MNCH / SRH budgets

4. Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal.

5. SHOW was extended in July 2020 for 1 additional year primarily targeting continuation of MNCH/SRH services during the COVID-19 crisis. The gender transformative strategy and Fathers Clubs methodology, however, was implemented within the life of the original project timelines of 2016–2020

1.3 GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY:

The SHOW project, right from the outset, is implemented through strategic partnerships with the host governments' Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women Affairs and other relevant stakeholders to roll out several interventions. Male engagement in gender equality has not been very pronounced in any of the host governments' MNCH/SRHR programs, but the positive early results of the approach have generated significant governments' support and interest in developing their internal capacity on male engagement through collaboration with the SHOW project.



Based on the socio-ecological model, the SHOW Project's comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy⁶ envisaged three pillars targeting the social norms upholding gender inequalities. These pillars were further contextualized to address specific gender barriers as identified in the four-country gender assessments. Out of three pillars, interventions around engaging men and boys were designed to increase their engagement in MNCH/SRHR by fostering positive masculinities. The robust male engagement approach, under the gender equality strategy, was designed to address the root causes of gender inequalities and transform unequal gender power relations that act as barriers for women and adolescent girls to access MNCH/SRH services. The findings of the four countries' gender assessment, as discussed above, clearly establish engaging men as one of the essential components to improving women and girls' access to and use of MNCH/SRH services and fostering gender equality.

6. First Pillar: Empowering women and girls, Second Pillar: engaging men and boys, and Third Pillar: gender responsive and adolescent friendly MNCH/SRH services.

7. In Ghana the Fathers Clubs were referred to as Daddies Clubs.

8. Promundo is a global leader in advancing gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys.

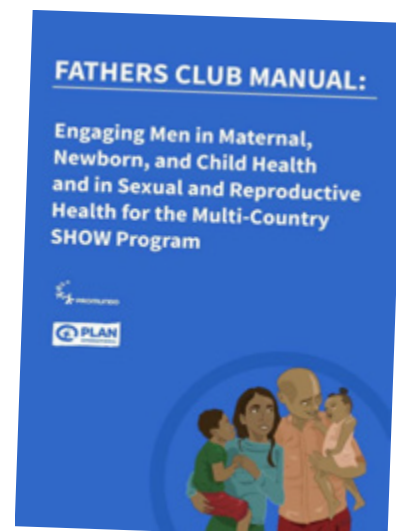
Plan International Canada defines “male engagement” in MNCH/SRHR (also referred to as “men’s engagement” or “male involvement”) as **“men taking an active role in protecting and promoting the health and wellbeing of their partners and children.”** This definition is premised on a vision of lasting and sustainable attitudinal, behavioural and relational change between partners. It views male engagement as a broader concept rather than a list of actions or decisions in which men should participate in the MNCH/SRH continuum of care. It encompasses:

- Men's subjective experiences, motivations, relationships and active participation rather than specific actions as indicative of engagement.
- Focuses on men's agency and relationships as distinct from male participation or involvement, which can be understood to be more passive.

This definition is based on a vision of lasting change in behaviour and relationships, as well as more equitable gender relations. Therefore, recognizing the vital role of men in the health of women and children, the SHOW project's male-engagement approach aims to promote and increase the active participation of men and adolescent boys along the MNCH/SRHR continuum of care as partners and beneficiaries in promoting gender equality.

2. THE FATHERS CLUBS APPROACH

The SHOW Project's Fathers Clubs⁷ approach was jointly conceptualized by Plan International Canada and technical partner Promundo⁸. It enables groups of men to undergo a gender transformative and extended reflective journey of unlearning harmful gender norms and adopting positive masculinities. This approach comprised of three components a) Development of the Fathers Clubs Manual, b) Training/mentoring of community-based male facilitators, c) recruitment of self-selected male groups that are willing to undergo all sessions.



2.1 CONTENT

The Fathers Clubs Manual sets out 20 one-hour interactive gender-transformative sessions that take fathers through a six-unit journey (see below). Fathers gradually gain an understanding of how gender-inequitable norms negatively impact MNCH/SRH outcomes for women and children, as well as men themselves. Groups become safe spaces where men can reflect and learn from their experiences and the experiences of others and begin to test out gender equitable behaviours and solutions to improve MNCH/SRHR. The goal of Fathers Clubs is to promote the equitable and non-violent participation of men as partners in MNCH/SRHR. Clubs target adult men with female partners of reproductive age. These 20 sessions are grouped under six broad themes, as presented below:

I. WELCOME

- Welcome
- Agreement
- Values Clarifications

II. UNPAID CARE WORK

- Hours in a day
- Who does care work?

III. MEN, GENDER & POWER

- Man Box
- Gender Stereotypes
- Persons & Things

IV. PREGNANCY, DELIVERY & BEYOND

- Support Pregnant Partner
- Delivery Room Role
- Pain Alleviation
- Fathers & PNC
- Importance of Breastfeeding

V. RELATIONSHIPS

- Who makes decisions
- What is Violence
- Healthy Relationships

VI. PLANNING FUTURE

- Parents by accident or choice
- Your Child's Future
- Carlota Story
- Closing Circle

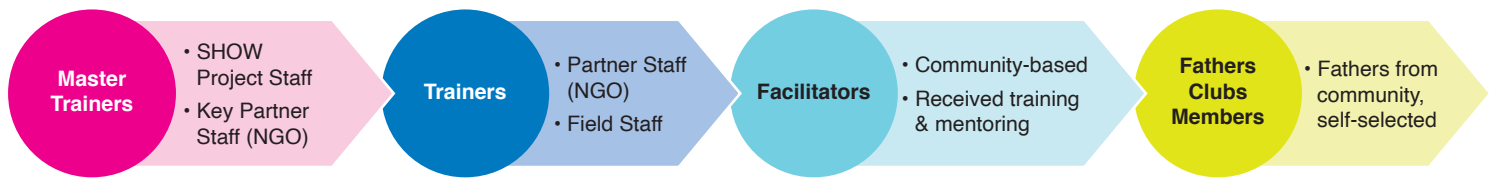
The program takes a gender transformative approach by encouraging participants to question what it means to be a man or a woman in their society, what it means to be a father in the context of MNCH/SRHR. The purpose of these discussions is to motivate men to challenge inequitable gender norms and power imbalances in their personal

lives, and ultimately to promote sustained change in gender relations and power dynamics to improve men's relationships with partners and children and their lives well beyond the MNCH continuum of care period. The sessions are interactive, promoting self-reflection, along with homework assignments to encourage discussions with partners, family members, and peers.

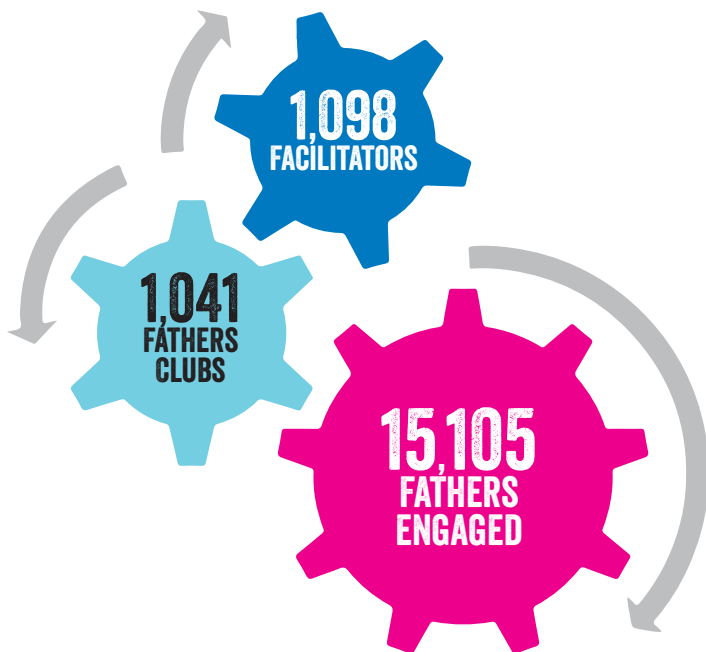


2.2 TRAINING ROLL OUT

In all countries, training to deliver the Fathers Clubs content was cascaded from master trainers to trainers, to community-based facilitators, and ultimately to the fathers in the target community – who self-selected themselves to engage in these sessions (see infographic on the following page). The session focused on unlearning one's gender stereotypes, how to create a safe reflective space, and how to engage participants in actively questioning and challenging inequitable gender norms and power imbalances.



These sessions were organized at a public venue where men usually gather in the target communities, these were often held in a marketplace, near a health facility, at a tea stall or place provided by a community leader. The frequency of each Fathers Clubs’ delivery of individual sessions was determined based on the time availability of the participating fathers. These one-hour sessions were delivered through a flexible schedule of weekly/ bi-weekly cycles, with a check-in to help participants recall the previous session and a check-out to assign a take-home assignment. Facilitators were trained to use various techniques such as role-playing, group discussions, debates, homework, and more to appeal to a diversity of men and different learning styles. The SHOW Project across Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal followed a phased approach for the training of facilitators and the establishment of Fathers Clubs. Training used teach-back methodologies for trainers to strengthen facilitation skills and develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum content and process, eventually **training 1,098 local male facilitators** in several batches during 2017. The project formed a total of **1,041 Fathers Clubs** in five countries and **15,105 Fathers** went through the Fathers Clubs curriculum. These men self-selected themselves to receive the Fathers Clubs curriculum.



3. FATHERS CLUBS STUDY

Plan International Canada in collaboration with Plan country offices and partners conducted a qualitative study to examine stakeholders’ experiences and perspectives on changes in fathers’ household caregiving and activities in SHOW intervention communities. This qualitative study was conducted in February 2019 in four SHOW program countries comprising of Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria. These were the only four SHOW countries where at the time of field research at least one batch of men had completed full Fathers Clubs curriculum and, therefore, Senegal was not included.

This study had one core objective: to examine stakeholders’ experiences of and perspectives on changes in fathers’ household caregiving.

The study explored three domains of inquiry as follows:

- Attitudes and perceptions on the distribution of roles and responsibilities between women and men of household work and caregiving
- Behavior/activity change of male participants in SHOW Fathers Clubs
- Perceptions about the changes in behaviour and activities

3.1 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative **methodology**, adapting tools based on the IMAGES survey⁹ and Helping Dads Care survey¹⁰, was developed to survey Fathers Clubs participants (Fathers), their family members (women, adolescent children), as well as community members (E.g., religious leaders, community health workers, etc.). In-depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted with male members of the Fathers Clubs and community leaders to capture a deeper understanding of changes, if any, among men and allow greater privacy and confidentiality to improve the accuracy of collected data. Focus Group Discussion Guides (FGD) were developed

9. International Men and Gender Equality Survey, Promundo (<https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>)

10. Helping Dads Care, Promundo (https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Promundo-DMC-Helping-Men-Care-Report_FINAL.pdf)



for women, adolescent girls and boys to get broader views from respondents and capture shifts, if any, in attitudes, behaviours, and perception around masculinities in the community, and to triangulate data. Case Studies were also collected. Data collectors were trained in February 2019 on data collection tools, key concepts around Gender Equality, child safeguarding, and integration of Gender Equality and Child and Youth Safeguarding into the study methodology.

3.2 SAMPLE

This study used purposive sampling to identify and reach participants from the target groups. The following table presents the disaggregation of the respondents who were reached in remote rural locations of Bangladesh¹¹, Ghana¹², Haiti¹³, and Nigeria¹⁴. The following table provides the country wise breakup of the study sample:

FOUR COUNTRY SAMPLE SIZE						
	Fathers Clubs members	Female partners	Adolescent girls	Adolescent boys	Community leaders	TOTAL
Bangladesh	12	41	14	16	9	92
Ghana	13	55	21	27	12	128
Haiti	14	42	21	23	11	111
Nigeria	15	66	24	33	12	150
TOTAL	55	204	80	99	44	481

11. Three remote rural locations of Saidpur, Kishoregonj, and Domar in the northern Nilphamari District.

12. Three remote rural locations of Adaklu Have, Leklebi Kame, and Adaklu Ahunda-Kpodzi in Volta Region.

13. Three rural communities of Lamine in Capotille, Acul Samedi in Fort Liberté and Gens de Nantes in Ouanaminthe.

14. Five rural locations, namely Mabera, Mmabera Mujaya, Bado Kasarawa, Kalmalo, and Dagawa.

3.3 LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to the study process and methodology in two of the countries. In Bangladesh, data collection was only carried out in the Nilphamari (Rangpur Division in the north of the country) and not in the other two project intervention districts of Khagrachari (Chittagong Division) hilly area and Barguna (Barisal Division) coastal areas. Similarly, in Ghana too, data collection was only carried out in the Volta Region, and not in the other two project intervention areas of Northern and Eastern Regions. In some cases, it was also challenging to get consent forms signed by the parents of adolescents (due to their non-availability) resulting in some adolescent groups that were smaller than intended. Therefore, the findings from Bangladesh and Ghana do not necessarily reflect the context or trends in other project intervention areas of both countries.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS – EFFECTS OF FATHERS CLUBS SESSIONS

This section presents the changes in male behaviours as reported by participants of the Fathers Clubs and observed by their wives/partners, adolescent children, and community leaders across Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria. The analysis explores reported shifts in male behaviour towards positive masculinity while making relevant contrasts with the views of female partners. Moreover, the analysis examines what triggered change among men, the reaction of community members, and the perceived sustainability of changes in men's behaviours and provide a set of recommendations.

4.1 CHANGES AMONG MEN – POSITIVE MASCULINITIES

4.1.1 HOUSEHOLD WORK AND CHILDCARE

Across the four countries, women respondents observed that husbands/male partners were beginning to take up tasks that have traditionally belonged to women including household chores such as sweeping, cooking, washing, and childcare.

In **Bangladesh**, women have reported men have taken up household chores such as sweeping, cooking, and preparing children for school, as one Bangladeshi woman remarked, “Earlier we had to work for 24 hours continuously. But now we become relaxed due to our husbands’ engagement in household chores,” and others in the group

agreed. Many women indicated a reduction in the burden of domestic chores and childcare responsibilities. Women also reported their husbands were spending more time on childcare and treating girls and boys equally. Adolescent girls reported fathers helping in household chores and its positive effect on mothers’ happiness and mood, making households more peaceful. “I feel so good when I see my father helping my mother and it inspires me to help her as well” shared a smiley adolescent boy in Bangladesh. All men have confirmed changing their roles at home and helping their wives in household chores, as one reported, “there’s no loss in changing myself. Rather my relationship with the family is becoming better every day.” The same change among men was confirmed by community leaders, as one community leader said, “we are finding big change[s] in fathers’ behaviours and attitudes [in taking up domestic chores].”

Similarly, in **Ghana** women also validated this new uptake of non-traditional activities by men including washing family clothes, fetching water, and sweeping, as one woman shared “my husband now assists me and the children with the household chores”. Similarly, like many fathers, one man described his views about the responsibility of household chores as having changed “with the help of the SHOW project, I (now) have the awareness that it is a collective responsibility hence I support her now.” Despite praising men for their changed behaviours and encouraging them for more involvement in domestic work, the community leaders continue to have stereotypical gender views on household division of labor, as one religious leader said, a religious leader stated that “Men are the head of the household and therefore shouldn’t do much household work, but they can offer to help.”

The same positive trends among men were also reported in **Haiti**, where they reported not only participating in housework and childcare responsibilities but also becoming more engaged in food preparation and discussion on nutrition. Although, a few women did not notice such changes in their husbands. The adolescent girls and boys confirmed their fathers now spending more time helping with household chores including cooking and laundry. All men reported positive behavioral changes in themselves and confirmed they are now doing more housework and more to take care of children since participating in Fathers Clubs, including preparing food, doing laundry, cleaning the house, caring for children, fetching water, preparing children for school, as one father said, “Yes, there is change. I am happy to take my responsibilities properly by sharing household chores, in past years I never made the bed, done laundry, nor ironed clothes.” Community leaders also confirmed such changes where men helping their wives in household chores.

In **Nigeria**, all women reported increased help from husbands to manage several household chores, as one indicated, “my husband bathes children and dresses them for school and washes clothes. I mostly do the cooking.” Similar views were reported by adolescent girls, as one excited girl, shared, “Our father does the sweeping; he doesn’t allow us to help him with that. He proudly does the sweeping and [even] wants others to see him doing it.” Adolescent boys also expressed similar thoughts, as one boy proudly shared his father’s support to the mother in doing household chores and “play with kids and does sweeping unlike before.” One Nigerian father shared, “nothing stops a man from doing house chores, even cooking is not forbidden according to the religion.” Community leaders, while holding on to their stereotypical gender norms, maintained that men should ‘help’ their wives in taking care of household responsibilities and taking care of children’s education. One religious’ leader shared, “I think men should help because they are more powerful and have more strength than women, and I think if the housework is too much, it can be dangerous to expecting mothers. They [woman] need to be assisted.”

**WOMAN,
BANGLADESH**

“Earlier we had to work for 24 hours continuously, but now we become relaxed due to husbands’ engagement in household chores.”

**ADOLESCENT GIRL,
GHANA**

“[Now] my father takes care of my younger sibling while my mother carries the load from the farm”

**FATHER,
NIGERIA**

“I help my wife by buying domestic animals for her. I now assist her in bathing the children and preparing them for school, which I didn’t usually do before”.

**WOMAN,
HAITI**

“My partner’s participation in the club has made him more attentive when it comes to household work and taking care of children.”

Across the four countries, the frequent use of the word “help” by men, women, adolescent girls and boys, and community leaders to describe male engagement in domestic activities suggests that despite increased male involvement, household work is still widely considered by many to fall within the domain of female responsibility – rather than a joint responsibility to be shared equally. It

seems men’s perceived key responsibility of earning a livelihood and providing for their families has been at play while respondents describe male engagement in household chores as ‘helping wife’ rather than ‘sharing the joint responsibility.’ Moreover, some women’s responses in Haiti indicates that men’s domestic work appears more justified when there is an absence of a woman who can do it, as one woman said, “A good father should take care of the children when the mother is not at home.”

4.1.2 ACCESSING MNCH SERVICES

Another area of significant change identified was the substantial increase of male engagement around maternity and family health, as reported by all groups of men, women, adolescent children, and community leaders across the four countries.

All men in **Bangladesh** indicated they now paid more attention to the health of their wives and children, as one man commented “we are taking our spouses to the local health center for ANC [visits],” and other men in the group agreed. Women frequently mentioned that fathers were more likely to support their domestic workload at times when they are sick, pregnant, or not available to do the work themselves, as one woman explained, “ I am pregnant that is why husband helps a lot.” Both adolescent girls and boys agreed and were consistently enthusiastic about their respective fathers’ active engagement in household work. Community leaders noted an increased concern among fathers for the health care of their family members – most notably for the health and nutrition of women during pregnancy – and their active support.

In **Ghana**, there is also evidence of increased awareness among fathers of the link between male engagement in the household and the overall health of the family, as one man shared “It reduces stress on the partners at home and promotes good health”. All women made frequent comments valuing the male support, one woman shared, “he [husband] takes me to the hospital when am pregnant and sends the children for postnatal care”.

Men in **Haiti** expressed commitment to health, as they reported to have reduced alcohol consumption. They also expressed newfound realization to support their pregnant women and accompanying them for prenatal visits, childbirth, and postnatal visits. Similarly, women in Haiti also indicated that men are now more involved in nutrition and discuss with their partners what their children should be eating. Adolescent girls and boys have also reported positive changes among their fathers who are now taking a responsible attitude towards family health and maternity-related matters.

Similarly, all men in **Nigeria** frequently mentioned supporting their wives during pregnancy and accompanying them to the health facility. One man sharing his responsible behaviour towards his wife said, “Now I do take my wife to hospital unlike before when I cared less.” Women in Nigeria acknowledged, earlier men did not help their wives during maternity but all that has changed. One woman summed it, “now immediately labor starts they [husbands] take them [wives] to the hospital because of what they were taught [in Fathers Clubs].” There seems to be even loosening of the strict mobility control over women, as another woman shared, “they [husband] now gave us permission to go for the ANC visit even in their absence, and also ensure that we do [visit]”. Adolescent children confirmed fathers taking care of mothers’ health needs, as one adolescent boy shared, “He (father) now allows our mother to attend ANC and visit the hospital when necessary unlike before.” Community leaders noted an increased concern among fathers for the health care of their family members, most notably for the health and nutrition of women during pregnancy.



In **Bangladesh**, several groups reported a reduction in violence at home. Bangladeshi women unanimously agreed that the foremost behaviour change amongst their husbands was a reduction in their temper and aggressive behaviour, and improvement in health treatment. Adolescent girls and boys corroborated the reduction in verbal and physical violence at the homes, as one girl said, “Father used to beat mother before but not now”. Bangladeshi men also talked about a reduction in feelings of anger, as well as their efforts to treat their spouses/partners with greater attention and care, as one man said, “previously I was often very angry with my family members, but now I feel that mutual help increases love.”

Similarly, in **Ghana** women, adolescent girls, and boys all confirmed reduction in violence and arguments. Women have reported that they do not face physical and verbal violence from their husbands like before, as one woman said, “my husband now treats me well and doesn’t verbally or physically abuse me.” Nonetheless, women expressed further need for improvement and expected men to be more patient. Adolescent children and community leaders all reported a reduction in domestic quarreling and fighting due to changes among men due to increased self-control of their behaviour, as an adolescent girl shared, “my father has been changed a lot, he was a very ill-tempered before but now is patient and calm.” Men themselves commented upon their improved mood and emotional control, reduced argumentativeness, as one father indicated, “I used to argue with my wife in the house, but now I don’t.” Several opinions shared by adolescent girls and religious leaders suggested that men who beat their wives have reformed. One religious leader said, “yes, it is a positive change. It is indeed surprising, but some men who used to beat their wives now help them with their chores.”

In **Haiti**, violence reduction was readily discussed by women, adolescent girls and boys, and male community leaders but not by Fathers Clubs participants themselves.

WOMAN, GHANA

“He [husband] did not used to see why I must visit the hospital when I was pregnant, but now with the teachings from the Daddies Club he has changed. He rather encourages me to visit hospital and deliver there.”

FATHER, HAITI

“Before I did not know if my wife was pregnant, I should go with her to the antenatal appointment. Now, thanks to the Fathers Clubs, I know how to do it.”

FATHER, NIGERIA

“Even going to hospital, if she (wife) is to see doctor I usually accompany her myself. I want people in the community to learn from me.”

WOMAN, HAITI

“We now enjoy good health because of reduced pressure.”

4.1.3 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Across the four countries’ degree of changes were reported regarding reduction in gender-based violence, though it is not perceived to have ceased.

According to some women, reductions in conflict and violence were a noticeable change in the behaviour of their husbands/partners. One woman in FGD stated, “In my neighborhood, there are couples that used to fight all the time, but since the men started participating in the Fathers Clubs, everything has changed, they do not fight anymore.” Women also indicated that men are now calmer, more understanding, and collaborative than before. Adolescent girls and boys shared that their fathers have reduced or stopped outrightly being violent towards them and their mothers and that the conflicts between their parents have reduced. One girl shared, “my father stopped whipping me”, and one boy remarked that his father was now able to “manage his emotions” – all changes were attributed to the men’s participation in Fathers Clubs. On the other hand, some women also noted that men’s efforts need to improve and that further behavioral changes are desired. A few women indicated that their spouses are still violent and that they would like these behaviours to be changed, as one woman said, “I would like my husband to be less violent and more understanding towards me.”

In **Nigeria** women, adolescent children, men, and community leaders did not directly talk about gender-based violence or a decrease in, it albeit confirming less quarreling among couples. Although most Nigerian men did not broach the subject directly One man shared, “we used to quarrel. In the Fathers Clubs, I have learned about the needs of a pregnant woman. Therefore, I did not disturb her when she was pregnant.” One Nigerian women without talking about gender-based violence confirmed, “I don’t suffer now, unlike the way I suffered before with too much housework, because now he does everything for me.”

**MAN,
BANGLADESH**

“Earlier I quarreled and beat with my wife without any reason but now I always keep passions and talks to my wife very warmly after attending the male group session.”

**ADOLESCENT GIRL,
NIGERIA**

“Before he [father] quarrels over anything that was not done. But, now that he goes for the Fathers Clubs meeting and has become enlightened, he does a lot of things that he was not doing before.”

ADOLESCENT GIRL, HAITI

“Before, my father and my mother quarreled very often. Several times, I watched my father slap my mother. But since my father’s participation in the club they have not quarreled anymore. They become very in love and that makes me happy.”

4.1.4 DECISION-MAKING

Different patterns around decision making have been reported across the four countries that also include trends where men started to consult with their wives before taking a decision or making a joint decision.



In **Bangladesh**, all women indicated their husbands made new efforts to involve them in decision-making processes, mainly through improved consultation before the decision. Women also observed there was now more frequent consultation and shared decision-making, particularly on the use of money and financial resources, such as how to invest money, and decisions on the purchase of household assets, such as land and livestock. Men also spoke about listening to their wives and making joint decisions including ones that involve finances, as one man shared, “every decision has been taken after discussing with my wife and other family members.” Both adolescent boys and girls shared observations of increasing shared decision making in their homes, as well as a general enthusiasm towards the shift in decision-making practices, as their fathers have started to consult them and their mothers, as one adolescent boy said, “Now my father consults with my mother before selling out domestic cows.” Although community leaders broadly reported and appreciated couples making joint decision, some also held onto the patriarchal status quo, with one stating, “in case of decision making and mobility, the wife should take permission from their husband.”

In **Ghana**, there is evidence of improved communication and consultation of fathers with their family members on household decisions, as well as greater societal expectations that men consult women and children in decision-making. Women also observed a greater willingness by their husbands/partners to involve them in decision-making. One woman who spoke of shared decision-making said “We have actually seen positive changes because before the men don’t take advice from their wives but now we sit and discuss and agree on what to be done collectively and the men are happy about that too because of the way we advise them.”

Several men also talked about inviting their family members to participate in decision-making, as one man shared, “I now take decisions together with my wife”, while others were committed to doing so in the future. Community leaders have observed women’s greater involvement in decision-making. Several characterized the change as dramatic, as one community leader indicated, “at first, our men don’t consult women in decision making, but now we are witnessing a tremendous change.”

However, in **Nigeria**, the discussion around joint decision-making did not come out directly, yet several men talked about increased cooperation among husbands and wives, as one man shared, “there is real cooperation between us now, and we do deliberate on every issue with my wife.” Nigerian women’s use of language indicated the male possessiveness and dominance in decision making, that is, a husband ‘allows’ his wife to go to the ANC, a husband ‘gives permission’ – language that is indicative of persistent traditional gender norms and hierarchies in these communities. Not many women’s groups mentioned increased shared decision-making though several did talk about changes among men in discussing matters with their wives. Similarly, most adolescent girls did not mention joint decision making among their parents except one.

Similarly, in **Haiti** women, adolescent girls and boys, and men primarily talked about increased collaboration and consultation among couples, but the subject of joint decision making did not come out clearly.

4.2 EFFECTS OF POSITIVE MASCULINITIES

Improvement in spousal and family relationships has been consistently reported by women, adolescent children, men, and community leaders across the four countries. This has been linked to the positive changes in the behaviours of men that opened the space for communication, involvement, and closeness among the family members.



WOMAN, BANGLADESH

“We had bought a cow after selling the goat. My husband discussed with me and then planning together on using that money.”

WOMAN, GHANA

“There is now much of understanding between us and we make all decisions together.”

MAN, NIGERIA

“Husband and wife now seek each other’s advice when things come up and the best advice is considered.”

ADOLESCENT GIRL, BANGLADESH

“Earlier my father never asks our family members while taking any decisions but now he talks with us and then takes final decisions.”

4.2.1 SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIPS

In **Bangladesh**, men talked about spending time home and improved relationships with their wives/partners, with many indicating their wives were happy. Women from all groups said they were happy with the changes in their husband’s behaviour, one woman said, “we spend more fun time together,” and another said, “(my) husband loves me very much. My husband is the best.” Some also pointed to the room for further improvement, noting that they still desired more loving relationships. The improvement of spousal relationships was echoed by the observations of adolescent children, especially girls, who spoke of improved communication, bonding, and of support their fathers now provide to their mothers; as one girl said, “Their [parents] relationship has improved, and they are happy.” Community leaders likewise generally observed greater caring, love, understanding, and bonding between husbands and wives.

Similarly, in **Ghana**, men and their wives/partners spoke at great length about their feelings as relationships with their intimate partner had improved, as one man said, “the relationship between me and my wife has improved, we are so close!” Both men and women described new qualities including improved communication, mutual respect, and love, as well as more frequent positive interactions as a couple, as one woman said, “I feel so happy that whenever I see him, I want to give a hug.” Women talked at length about novel feelings infusing their intimate relationships, including feeling happy, young, loved, and secure in their relationships. Others spoke of their pride in their husband, of feeling united with their spouse. Some of the reasons given included the quality time their husbands/partners were now spending with them and deeper communication. Men also described their enthusiasm for the new tone in their intimate relationships and attributed these positive changes in their behaviour towards their wives/partners, as one man shared, “She will now love me more and we make more love.” Adolescent children also reported more love among their parents. Both mothers and adolescent girls also drew a link between the presence and quality of engagement of fathers in the home with reduced “womanizing” behaviour. Women and adolescent boys pointed to a fundamental change in behaviour among fathers being their simple presence at home, with repeated comments that “father is home more.”

In **Haiti**, women consulted also noted changes in the attitudes of their husbands/partners and commented substantially on improved intimate partner relationships. They noted that men are calmer, more understanding, and cooperative than they were before the Fathers Clubs sessions. They spoke of better communication, joy, respect, love, and harmony in the family, and the happiness of children, in their homes because of the behaviour changes among their husbands/partners. Men themselves expressed a positive effect since participating in the Fathers Clubs due to their behaviour changes which helped their families to progress. They attributed to these changes a newfound harmony in the home, a feeling of ease, and closer bonds to their family members, as one man said: “my wife loves me more every day.” Some men shared that they have also found confidence in their new abilities to manage conflict in a non-violent way, as well as in new knowledge of how to support household chores and childcare. Adolescent girls and boys also expressed their happiness at the behavioral changes of their fathers.

The same sentiments were also expressed by all men and women in **Nigeria** and widely reported improvement in the marital relationship as an outcome of their changed communication and behaviour. All men reported a definite improvement in the relationship with their wives and children with higher levels of affection and some men even mentioned increased physical intimacy with their wives,

as one man reported, “there are real cooperation and the superb relationship between my wife and me”, another man shared, “my relationship with my wife is cordial I now feel like hugging her all the time.” All women were very enthusiastic about changes, and do not want things to go back to the way they were, as one woman smilingly shared, “now I even call him (husband) darling when I come back home and find he has cooked.” Another woman expressed her joy by sharing, “it has helped increase love and bond between us. When we are working together, we do laugh,” while other women in the group also laughed and agreed.

WOMAN, BANGLADESH

Paraphrase: Husbands are more interested to spend more quality time with their wives.

MAN, GHANA

“I want to eat and bath together with my wife more.”

WOMAN, NIGERIA

“Now there is more understanding between husband and wife. They sit and joke with one another, and children are happy when they see that.”

WOMAN, GHANA

“I feel proud of my husband’s change of behaviour and always want to praise him in the midst of my friends.”

4.2.2 FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Across the four countries, all respondents have been unanimous in confirming the improvement of the father-child relationship. Both adolescent girls and adolescent boys reported improved communication and newfound cherished relationship with their fathers.

In **Bangladesh**, there is resounding evidence of improved relationships between fathers and their adolescent children. While fathers said children are happier and spoke of increased attention to the education of their children, adolescent girls and boys emphasized their happiness with the newfound closeness in their relationships with their fathers; as one adolescent girl shared, “earlier I used to be very sad because my father scolds me and my siblings very much. But now he tries to listen to us, and I feel very good about it.” Boys emphasized the reduced distance between father-son relationships, as one boy shared, “now we can directly talk with my father without having to speak to my mother first.” Fathers repeatedly mentioned the need to treat

girls and boys equally. One adolescent girl in a focus group shared that her father spends more time with her than before. An adolescent boy also stated that his father is now more affectionate towards his daughter, as “my father loves my sister more.” Adolescent boys talked of greater awareness and a less accepting attitude of their fathers towards child marriage. Some fathers also said they knew of some child marriages that had been averted as a result of the changed behaviours of fathers. One Bangladeshi adolescent girl was also quoted as attributing her father’s participation in a Fathers Clubs to her increased life opportunities, “my father did not want me to study after my school. But after Fathers Club, he has admitted me into college now.”

In **Ghana**, all respondents confirmed that the traditional emotional distance between fathers and their children has reduced. Women said their children are happier and linked this to seeing improved peaceful relations between their parents. In addition to uptake of childcare responsibilities for younger children, fathers have been described as more focused on their children, having more time for them, and generally being more approachable. Fathers are keenly aware of the formative impact of the behaviour they model on their children as one father said, “my children are learning from me at home.” The adolescents also described improved communication and relationships with their fathers, characterized by love and respect, as one boy said, “(it) promotes a good relationship between me and my father;” and adolescent girls talked about a newfound ability to share concerns with their fathers, as one girl said: “ I feel free to tell my father all my worries.” These improved father-adolescent child relationships have inspired some adolescents to emulate this positive example, as



one boy said, “I want to be a role model in the community.” Community leaders observed fathers taking a greater interest in their children’s studies; adolescent boys talked about the ability of fathers and children to learn together.

Similar sentiments were also shared by adolescent children, men, and women in **Haiti** confirming improved positive father-child relationships. Adolescent girls and boys expressed their happiness at the positive behavioral changes of their fathers towards them. Both reported feeling more comfortable in communicating with their fathers. Some girls said they enjoy better communication and improved relationships with their fathers. Men have said that their children love them more and that they are proud to model these new behaviours for them, as one man shared, “I refuse to return to my old bad habits, I must provide a good example to my children.” Another man while describing the effects of his positive behaviour said, “we get along well and there is a good relationship between us (family members). The children are more at ease and we work and collaborate well together.” Fathers’ have been encouraging their adolescent boys to adopt positive behaviours at home and enjoying the positive effects of improvement in family relations. Some adolescent boys have noted that their fathers encourage them to adopt these new behaviours for themselves, as one boy shared, “my father told me when I can have a wife, that I have to protect my wife by helping her with housework.”

Similarly, in **Nigeria** all respondent categories reported a new-found positive relationship between fathers and their adolescent children. Both adolescent girls and boys reported increased father-child love and affection due to fathers’ increased interest in their families as they spend more time at home and take interest and participate in their children’s activities. Adolescent girls in all groups confirmed that their fathers have positively changed and now engaged in the lives of their children, which was absent earlier. None of the adolescents wanted their fathers to revert to past habits, as one boy said, “I don’t want him to go to his previous ways.” All women confirmed the emergence of positive relationships between fathers and their children, one woman shared, “they (children) now concentrate more on their studies now,” and other women in the group agreed. Those men who had earlier not enrolled their daughters in school have now changed, as one woman shared, “initially they (husbands) don’t allow women and girls to go to school, but now they do.” Men also spoke about the importance of education, both secular and religious, in the upbringing of their children without any difference between the need for equal discipline and access to education for girls and boys. However, when probed further, some very clear gender differences emerged about the expectations that the fathers hold for their girls and boys as well as in a discriminating parenting approach. One man divulged, “it is good to engage boys in a work that can help them in future while

girls should be trained at home since they will be given out for marriage in future, they need to know how to take care of the house.” Community leaders have also reported that fathers are taking increased interest in their children’s education and upbringing.

ADOLESCENT GIRL, HAITI

“Before, my father was very brutal to me, but now he treats me very gently. I have noticed this since he participated in the Fathers Clubs.”

ADOLESCENT GIRL, NIGERIA

“Before we were not free with father to discuss our worries, needs and even seek his advice. But now, I can freely share everything with him and get both his advice and support.”

ADOLESCENT GIRL, GHANA

“I am no longer afraid of my dad and don’t do things to annoy him.”

ADOLESCENT GIRL, BANGLADESH

“My father now lets me eat a big portion of fish along with my brother.”

4.3 TRIGGERS OF CHANGE AMONG MEN

In **Bangladesh**, men identified that Fathers Clubs sessions had not only made them more aware about their roles and responsibilities in their families but has also shifted their thinking patterns away from stereotypical gender roles. Men unanimously reported that Fathers Clubs sessions triggered changes in their understanding of gender roles and their behaviours and practices in the household behaviour, and peer effect further reinforced men to adopt positive masculinities and become considerate towards their wives and children. One father, while describing how the Fathers Clubs educated him said, “fathers get to know why the household work should be divided between husband and wife.” Several men shared that they had started sharing information received from the Fathers Clubs sessions on gender roles within their family and friends, as one man said, “I shared my stories of change with friends and it has contributed to changes within me as well.” Several men spoke about this ripple effect, as one man shared, “the neighbours have adopted the changes by watching changes in my attitude towards my family,” another man said, “I share my learning (from Fathers Club) with my customers in the shop, which encourages them (to adopt these learning).” Women have also shared that their husbands have learned a great



deal from the Fathers Clubs, specifically citing (a) advantages of participating in domestic chores and (b) taking care of women’s and children’s health. Both adolescent girls and boys confirmed that it was the Fathers Clubs sessions that has caused positive changes in the behaviour and practices of their fathers, as one girl shared, “my father is a member of the male group and his behaviour changes after attending the session.” Community leaders also observed men be appreciative of Fathers Clubs sessions.

Similarly, in **Ghana** men, women, adolescent children and community leaders also identified Fathers Clubs learning helped men to change their thinking and improve their engagement at the household. All men confirmed that participation in the Fathers Clubs has brought positive changes in their behaviour and attitude, as one man shared, “after my second visit to the Fathers Club, I can boldly say, the Fathers Clubs is what has changed my life.” Several men also talked about their desire to become a role model for other men in their community that has also pushed them to adopt good behaviour. Few men said that their children also influenced them to adopt good behaviour. Likewise, women have also acknowledged that it was men’s learning at the Fathers Clubs that initiated changes both in their attitudes and behaviour. Women also identified that their love and respect for their husband also helped them change, while others talked about community sanction, as one woman said, “sanctions meted out to men who abuse their wives and children by the community elders” played its role as well. Adolescent children also recognized the role of Fathers Clubs in changing their roles at the household, while girls also indicated the contribution of peer learning, as one girl said, “men emulated their friends who assist their wives” and it also led men to change. Community leaders also confirmed Fathers Clubs contribution, as one community leader shared, “teaching and learning from the Fathers Clubs have influenced our men to help in doing household chores.”

All research participants in **Haiti** also confirmed that the most important factor for triggering positive change is participation in the Fathers Clubs. Men explained that their participation helped them to develop new positive attitudes, to create new habits, and try out new behaviours at home. One father said, “I participated actively during all of the 20 sessions. I asked questions in every session and participated in the exercises on the man box. Because of the club, I have been able to understand the importance of breastfeeding and understand different forms of violence. My wife is very proud of my participation.” Some even spoke of specific activities in the Fathers Clubs curriculum that impacted them, as one father shared how he has put into practice his learning from the club, “I learned how to live with my wife and get involved in housework. I am very imbued with the issue of gender and sex. I made a lot of effort not to stay in the man box.” Women and adolescent girls from across the study corroborated the primacy of the Fathers Clubs as a factor influencing the positive changes observed.

In **Nigeria**, all respondents universally indicated positive changes among men are because they participated in the Fathers Clubs. Men did not identify anything else except their participation in the Fathers Clubs that motivated them to bring changes in their behaviour at home. Women also unanimously identified Fathers Clubs sessions as the chief reason for the positive changes among the behaviour of men. Adolescent children also agreed that positive changes among fathers were a direct result of their participation in the Fathers Clubs, as one adolescent boy said, “joining the Fathers Clubs is the reason he changed,” and another adolescent girl shared, “honestly it is because of the Fathers

Clubs that there are awareness and enlightenment (among Fathers).” Community leaders also shared similar views and identified engagement of men under the Fathers Clubs for positive changes among them and their engagement with their families.



4.4 SOCIAL SUPPORT AND STIGMA

Societal and familial judgments were repeatedly cited in **Bangladesh** as a barrier that those men intentionally overcome who choose to challenge the norms of traditional masculinity by committing to adopting egalitarian behaviours within their family relationships. As one man said, “earlier people of my surroundings taunted me but now they are also positive with the change.” It is interesting to note that in Bangladesh men themselves spent less time overall discussing social challenges than their partners and children and even community leaders. Women and adolescent girls spoke the most about stigma, potentially revealing a heightened sensitivity to the treatment of their husbands and fathers respectively. Women universally mentioned teasing and ridicule was hurled at who stepped out of stereotypical gender roles, as one woman said, “[my] sister-in-law made fun when the husband was helping me during pregnancy.” However, women also agreed that in the beginning, men faced resistance from across the board when trying out new behaviours and sharing their learning. Chief among those named as disapproving were in-laws and neighbours. Almost all men reported facing resistance from elders and ridicule from the community after they started taking part in household chores. Other male members of the community ridiculed the members of the Fathers Clubs for their new positive gender roles. One man said, “some people taunted and called me ‘Bharua’ (a tease for a man helping wife in household chores).” Community leaders have also confirmed that the community initially did not approve of men taking part in household chores and taking care of children. The men were unanimous that such

FATHER, BANGLADESH

“I liked it the way I was shown the information on female health in the Fathers clubs and as a result I accepted it and changed myself.”

FATHER, HAITI

“I learned how to live with my wife and get involved in housework. I am very imbued with the issue of gender and sex. I made a lot of effort not to stay in the man box.”

MAN, GHANA

“Had it not been the SHOW Project, I wouldn’t have changed! Kudos to the SHOW project.”

MAN, NIGERIA

“If I hadn’t participated in the Fathers Club, I wouldn’t have changed my previous behaviour on my family.”

community disapproval did not hinder them from changing their behaviour and practices to actively engage with their families and do household chores or taking care of children. Nonetheless, the community gradually started to accept new gender roles, as one man said, “earlier the community people did tease but now they realize and support.”

Similarly, men in **Ghana** also had to endure social stigma for their adoption of non-traditional behaviors, as reported by all research respondents. At times, social stigma did become a significant deterrent for men to adopt positive masculine behaviors. Resistance most commonly took the form of ridicule and insults, including name-calling, particularly the name “*salomey*,”¹⁵ a derogatory nickname that was frequently mentioned by all research respondents. One man describing stigma said, “they give us names like *salomey*,” and another man shared, “the extended family (members) are saying I made my wife lazy by supporting her.” Adolescent boys talked about community members calling their fathers foolish or saying the mother has magic power over her husband, as one adolescent boy shared, “they will say my mother has cooked ‘*gbortemi*’¹⁶ for my father.” Nonetheless, men did not pay heed to such social stigma. There were several examples of fathers persisting in behaviour change and winning the support of those around them, as one father shared, “initially some friends of mine did not understand the reason for my change try to mock at me. But I rather explained to them and they now understand the reason for the change, hence their support.” Women said family members developed respect for their partners, as one woman shared, “men have made their minds up and don’t feel discouraged even when family members try to discourage them.” Adolescent children also took pride in their fathers’ decision to take part in household chores despite social stigma, as one boy described that his father “is teaching the community members and [he is] a role model.” Community leaders spoke of a shift in response and people are generally supportive of men adopting positive masculine behaviors, as one said, “there is no more stigmatization or name-calling.”

In contrast, a broadly positive response from the targeted communities in **Haiti** has been reported by all study respondents for men adopting new male roles at the household. Men themselves feel encouraged, and women have noted that positive effects encourage others to want to participate in Fathers Clubs themselves. One man while describing community appreciation, shared, “many people in the community, even in the neighborhood, congratulate me for my new (positive) changes.” A woman also shared similar community response and said, “many people in my community have noticed the [positive] changes [in my



husband] and are very happy because of these changes.” Community leaders have expressed that most people in the communities understand the importance of these changes, but that despite this, some did not support these changes and who strongly believe that only women should do housework. Both women and men have observed the view that club participants are not real men. Some men confirmed being stigmatized or mocked by their peers who do not agree, and one man said, “people in the community say that my wife is doing magic to force me to participate in housework.” However, men expressed not being discouraged by these negative reactions, with some being motivated by their critics to share what they have learned in

WOMAN, GHANA

Those not in the [Fathers] Club tease and call them names. Some say their wives have cast spells on them.”

WOMAN, NIGERIA

“Some don’t want to be called “*mijin me tace*” (a man being controlled by his wife) or even be insulted for doing house chores.”

ADOLESCENT GIRL, BANGLADESH

“Community people call fathers ‘half ladies’ for doing household chores.”

MAN, HAITI

“People in the community say that my wife is doing magic to force me to participate in housework.”

15. A local derogatory term for a man performing “woman’s” tasks.

16. Voodoo/charm to put in food that is meant to get the man do whatever woman desire including household chores

clubs with those who tease them. A father reported, “despite the stereotypes about me I’m not disturbed, and I continue to support my wife in housework and childcare.”

All respondents in **Nigeria** identified social stigma as one of the significant barriers that men had to overcome to adopt positive masculinities and implement their learnings from the Fathers Clubs sessions.



Several women reported that the social stigma or shame, mainly coming from in-laws, was the only barrier for men adopting positive masculinities. “Some say its ‘*hakar turawa*’ (western culture) and feel it’s not their way to help women with housework. They always say it is not a man’s place to be seen doing women’s work; it affects their pride and ego,” shared by one woman and agreed by other women in the group. Almost half of the male respondents noted experiencing persistent resistance and stigma from within their respective communities as a reaction to the changes in their behaviour. One man said, “they (neighbors) stigmatize us and make jest of us in the society, but I am less concerned, and I believe they will later understand,” and another shared, “honestly, some people support me while some frown at my changes.” All men indicated social stigma could not prevent them from making positive changes in their lives, and some even expressed their sense of pride

to resist social stigma, as one man shared, “stigma can’t hinder me in any way.” Another man said, “I don’t bother about what people say or do, I just do the right thing.” At the same time, most men reported having been able to gain the support of their friends and neighbours. While some men were also reportedly spreading their new knowledge of positive masculinities among their peers and acting as role models for other men in their respective communities. Both male and female adolescent children mainly discussed praise their fathers have received for changing their behaviour at home and engaging with their wives and children. One adolescent girl said, “honestly, some of them see it as a good thing while others don’t because that is not how they treat their wives. When people see my father doing such things (in the house), they admire it saying it is good that he is taking care of his family.” Community leaders spoke about mixed community response, as one said, “some people in the community reacted negatively to this change by calling these men names like ‘woman wrapper’ or ‘slave’ just because they chose to assist their wife in the housework. But for those who understand the concept, they praise them.”

4.5 SUSTAINABILITY OF CHANGE

In **Bangladesh**, Fathers Clubs members themselves expressed that seeing changes in other members had helped men to change. Family members and neighbours played a role in influencing some fathers, and some found commitment to improving their children’s future to be a motivating factor. Men repeatedly indicated the “Man Box¹⁷” activity as one that stayed with them. Men expressed happiness with their changed behaviour, as one man said, “I am very happy with my changing attitude and I do not want to go back to the previous days.” Men also indicated their plans to make more progress by doing more household chores and encouraging their wife to take decisions. Women in several focus groups discussed the lasting impact of their partner’s positive behaviour upon the behaviour of their children. Men talked about learning from the past and discussed their increased confidence as a result of the proven positive effects of these new behaviors. One adolescent boy commented on the role model and sustained effect of the Fathers Clubs and said, “the project might be temporary, but the changes are permanent.” One adolescent girl shared: “our fathers’ knowledge from these sessions will not be faded. Even if it fades out, we will make him remember.”

17. This session of the Fathers Clubs modules allowed participants develop a deeper understanding of how gender expectations can trap men in rigid “boxes,” and how power is often used to have control over others.

18. In Ghana, the Queen Mother is the biological mother or close relation to the chief and offers advice and counsel to him. Queen Mothers are well respected in their communities and play several roles including overseeing the welfare of women and children in the community.

Similarly, in **Ghana**, the respondents confirmed that the chain of positive effects observed among members of Fathers Clubs is driving new standards of male behaviour that are considered rewarding to individuals, families, and communities. All respondents consistently spoke about the positive changes that unfolded among families because of male adoption of positive masculine behaviors. Adolescent girls emphasized how newfound honesty, respect, and joy in families are acting as the pull factors driving sustained positive behaviour change, and women agreed “the unity of the family” was a source of encouragement for sustained change. Men explained that the demonstrated positive effect of their new chosen lifestyle drives their commitment to continue this path. Several community traditional leaders such as Queen Mothers¹⁸ and male chiefs explained that men had, to some extent, already internalized this change in a permanent way. Besides, the fear of men being “reprimanded” or becoming “isolated” if they go back to their old self was discussed by adolescent girls. Men talked about neighbours who subsequently joined Fathers Clubs because of the positive changes they observed, and friends and community members who wanted to know the “secret” behind their happy families.

In **Haiti** as well men were of the view that the positive changes among their behaviour will last and become permanent, as they are committed to continue with their newly learned attitudes and behaviors. Men also talked about these changes that have allowed them to maintain good relationships with their families, and some men plan to further share the Fathers Clubs learning with other men in their community – that also promotes sustainability. Many men explained that they think these positive changes among them will last their whole lives, or “until death.” Women, adolescent children, and community leaders all indicated that the changes will continue as long as men continue to see the positive impacts. Women also noted that they have a role to play, that they must continue to expressly appreciate the new positive behaviour of their husbands - suggesting a necessary incentive for the sustainability of positive behaviour among men.

All categories of respondents in **Nigeria** were also unanimous that learning from the Fathers Clubs will last because men themselves have witnessed its positive impact on their household. All men confirmed that they have seen the benefit of these changes and will not revert to former behaviors. “It will surely last even if Plan International is no longer here because we will continue to practice what we are taught and improve our lives and achieve more,” shared by a man. All women groups talked about the fact that men have internalized the Fathers Clubs leaning, and the new-found knowledge will not go away, as one woman shared, “they (men) are doing it wholeheartedly with joy now, and even if the Fathers Clubs is stopped, they will

continue since its (the learning) is now part of them.” At the same time, there was some evidence of feelings of precarity, with several women in different groups expressing that they “hope and pray” that men would continue with their new positive practices at home. Adolescent girls and boys also expressed confidence that their fathers will sustain and continue with their new-found positive changes, as one adolescent girl shared, “with what I have seen, I believe that he will continue with what he is doing till the end of time.” Similarly, community leaders were confident that men’s positive changes in their attitude and behaviour would also transcend to the next generation of men.

**MAN,
NIGERIA**

“It will last by Allah’s will because it’s something that is well planned and even my children will grow up to emulate my actions.”

**MAN,
HAITI**

“I think the changes will last forever, because my kids are happy now with my behaviors. My children asked me to stay as I am now.”

**MAN,
BANGLADESH**

“The behaviour changes will last long because we are practicing in our house and becoming habituated.”

**MAN,
GHANA**

“Of course, I like this change and I don’t think I can go back to my previous ways of doing thing.”



5. CONCLUSIONS

The Fathers Clubs implementation across targeted communities in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, and Nigeria has demonstrated **evidence of positive behaviour change** among most of its members. Fathers Clubs members were empowered to challenge traditional social norms that perpetuate the rigid gender hierarchy and unequal power relations. Consequently, men demonstrating characteristics of positive masculinities, challenging the unwritten stereotypical rules that govern the domains of gender roles and responsibilities in housework, childcare, and decision-making; and more generally, challenged the rules on how husbands and wives/partners, as well as fathers and their female and male children, are expected and permitted to interact.

The learnings from the Fathers Clubs brought about a **change in attitudes** regarding their role(s) as men, husbands, and fathers in the domestic sphere, and encouraged them to break stereotypical gender norms to take up a range of non-traditional domestic roles and responsibilities including cleaning, washing, cooking, and childcare activities. Women have also observed increasing male support for household chores and childcare responsibilities, and articulated feelings of relief, freedom and improved health, while expressing a desire to spend more time enjoying the company of friends and family and getting some rest.

Both men and women have invariably used the word “help” to describe men doing household chores, which are still seen primarily as women’s responsibility and not an equally shared by both partners, underlining the persistence of gendered roles and responsibilities and distribution of labour. It hints at men’s perceived key responsibility being earning a livelihood and as provider for the family rather than being an equal participant in household and care functions. Some women in Bangladesh suggested men need to do more as women also contribute by earning a livelihood in addition to her household responsibilities, underlining the pervasive attitude towards women’s income generation as being supplemental and less valued.

Moreover, across the four countries, there has been a substantial **increase in men’s knowledge and male engagement around the MNCH continuum of care** that has resulted in breaking several stereotypical gender norms, such as men: accompanying their wives during the maternity-related consultations, permitting their wives to visit health center even in their absence, taking care of their nutritional needs, and sharing household chores and childcare responsibilities. Women have also confirmed experiencing men’s care and support during maternity.

However, many women have also indicated that such support is primarily around the time of pregnancy. This further points towards the continuing prevailing norm that household chores fall under women’s responsibility and men are lending her ‘help’ to do her work during pre and post-partum stages given her condition.

Women in the targeted communities of the four countries confirmed **better communication** with their husbands/ partners, as well described feelings of love, peace, and harmony among the couples and the family. All respondents in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Haiti discussed **the issue of gender-based violence and perceived a reduction** in it, linking this to observations of improved self-control, calmer demeanor, and more open communication and peaceful conflict resolution among men. Adolescent children expressed relief because of a reduction in violence among parents and their improved relationship. Nonetheless, some women in Ghana and Haiti very clearly indicated the need for men to do more and be less violent. Men and women in Nigeria confirmed less quarreling and more collaboration among couples than before.

Shifts in decision making patterns were reported both in Bangladesh and Ghana indicating an improved collaboration between husbands and wives: men started to consult with women and even children, jointly making decisions on family assets and income. In Nigeria, the patriarchal norms appeared deep-rooted, and male dominance in decision making was explicit in the language used, indicating the persistence of traditional gender norms in these Nigerian communities. Similarly, in Haiti, more collaboration among couples on family matters was reported but joint decision making did not widely perceive among changes observed.

Improved spousal relationships, bonding, feeling more loved, humor, as well as husbands spending more time in the house or coming home on time were reported by women across all four countries. Similarly, men also reported their newfound joy by spending time with wives that not only improved peace in the house but were also perceived to have improved their intimate relationships.

Father-child relations, communication, and bonding have also improved across the four countries. Men have started taking more interest in the education of their children and spending time with them. Adolescents boys and girls in Bangladesh confirmed fathers are now giving equal treatment to both and investing in girls’ higher education while rejecting child marriage. Equal treatment for boys’ and girls’ education was also reported in Nigeria, but men continue to hold onto to stereotypical gender roles for their girls. It appears that the element of fear and violence has

also diminished or reduced as adolescent girls reported new loving treatment from their fathers, and boys reported healthy father-son communication with the absence of fear.

Participation in the Fathers Clubs have been universally identified (by women, adolescent girls and boys, men and community leaders who took part in the study from all four countries) to have triggered positive changes in the attitudes and behaviour of men about their roles and responsibilities at home. Many men, particularly in Haiti and Nigeria, recalled the “Man Box” activity from the Fathers Clubs curriculum and how it helped them step out of harmful masculinities and change their behaviour with their spouse and children. Many expressed other related motivations for behaviour change, such as a desire to become role models in their community, and the desire to emulate the positive changes that other men adopted in their homes. Men in Bangladesh also talked about the ripple effect as they took pride in their Fathers Clubs learnings and they have started to share those learnings with other men in the community.

Across the four countries, men reportedly have faced social stigma and ridicule from their extended family members and community for breaking traditional gender norms and adopting new roles and responsibilities around household chores hitherto considered in the women’s domain. Men, despite being called derogatory names questioning their

manhood, remained committed to their new-found roles for the welfare and well-being of their spouses and children. They demonstrated continued resilience, disregarding stigmatization, and even championing through personal examples. Their perseverance appears to have succeeded in gradual community acceptance and praise for their new gender roles. It appears that the Fathers Clubs provided men with both a safe space for collective reflection and served as a support network for them to withstand social stigma.

Across the four countries men appear to have internalized learnings from the Fathers Clubs as they have also started to share gender equality messaging with the next generation in their homes as confirmed by women, adolescents, men and community leaders. This points to the potential for intergenerational socialization of gender equality and equitable power relationships and the critical role of men in this formative process. All groups that took part in the study in the four countries have overwhelmingly expressed their belief that the adopted positive behaviours would be sustained. Several men have expressed the intention of making further progress, such as ensuring their wife/partner takes more decisions on their own and encouraging boys to take part in household chores when they grow up. The intent for intergenerational learning favors the sustainability of the changes adopted.



6. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

The lessons learned derived from this qualitative study can be used to inform future gender transformative programming, not only limited to MNCH/SRHR.

- Adult men who were husbands/partners of women of reproductive age/fathers or expectant fathers were specifically targeted for engagement in the Fathers Clubs initiative across all countries using MNCH/SRHR as the entry point, with incremental introduction of gender transformative change towards positive masculinities. This served as a successful strategy in the recruitment and retention of men across the extended period of engagement, underlining that thematic entry points such as health, education, economic empowerment etc. can serve as potent entry points to engage men in broader conversations about gender equality, anchored in non-threatening topics for greater acceptance.
- Despite the gender transformative curriculum, messaging and a highly participatory reflective process of deconstructing notions of masculinity and gender norms, deep-seated attitudes persist evidenced by the perception that men's engagement in household care work is essentially help in what is women's gender role and warranted primarily during pregnancy or if she is unwell or unable to play her role, regardless of the benefits noted by all respondents. There is need for deeper and longer socialization of gender equality with men to address this persistent attitude.
- While SHOW's Gender Equality Strategy worked specifically with women and girls to build their individual and collective agency through a host of tailored initiatives; given entrenched gender socialization, women across countries also echoed men and viewed their engagement as help in their own responsibilities pointing to the need for a parallel initiative for female partners and family members of men participating in Fathers Clubs mirroring the gender transformative curriculum. This would be akin to a family-wide approach, however done separately to ensure safe spaces for both sexes, with intermittent gender synchronized sessions (where contextually appropriate) for dialogue.
- The stigma and shaming experienced by participating men across all four countries could act a deterrent for men and a risk for women, particularly spouses of participating men. However, the evidence suggests that men were able to overcome and/or ignore it effectively. Stigma and shaming appear to decrease as the effects of their behavior change became apparent, often replaced with positive feedback from the communities. Notwithstanding, there is a need for including content and sessions in the Fathers Club curriculum to identify potential stigma in Fathers Clubs and collective actions to address it, along with the awareness raising activities carried out by projects external to the Fathers Clubs such as Social Behaviour Change Communication and broad community mobilization. The role of family elders becomes very salient in creating an enabling social and family environment for men to take on new masculinities successfully. This in turn has implications for the sustainability.
- Given all respondents confirmed the benefits they derived individually and collectively as a family due to men's changed behaviours, which in turn were identified as incentives for sustaining new behaviors by men specifically the desire to act as community role models; there is strong evidence to support a scale up of the Fathers Clubs initiative as a cascading peer-to-peer model where participating men from a club plan for outreach in addition to the sharing they carry out as part of the homework they are assigned. This has the potential to set in motion not only a sustained local movement for gender transformative change but to also address men's desire for demonstrating and modelling their acquired new masculinities and its benefits more broadly.





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