



Canada 

# GHANA: FATHERS CLUBS STUDY FINDINGS

## ENGAGING MEN IN THE MNCH/SRHR CONTINUUM OF CARE

Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) Project

PLAN INTERNATIONAL CANADA – 2020

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the gender-transformative, multi-country Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) Project, Plan International implemented a male-engagement strategy in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal from 2017–19 to promote positive masculinities and engage men in the continuum of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) care and in Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH). In Ghana, Plan International established 478 Fathers Clubs and engaged 6,465 fathers in twenty reflective sessions to broaden their understanding on gender equality, enable them to question what it means to be a man and a father and to promote their equitable involvement at the household level, and provide them with safe space where men can identify and reflect on challenges related to MNCH/SRH and develop solutions within the group.

This brief presents the results of Plan International’s 2019 qualitative study on the effects of Fathers Clubs intervention among the targeted men in Ghana. The study findings revealed positive change among Fathers Clubs participants who began to demonstrate more engagement in the continuum of care and positive masculinities supportive of women and girls’ empowerment. Reports of changed attitudes, new communication styles, uptake of new, non-traditional household care activities, and abandonment of some harmful behaviours were all documented by women, adolescent girls and boys, community leaders and by Fathers Clubs participants themselves.

In Ghana, positive changes among men included their engagement in household work and childcare, increased

attention to the maternal and child health, including support for vaccinations, reports of reduced anger and verbal abuse towards intimate partners and children, combined with improved emotional control and communication and relationships with spouses and children. Progress was made in the area of shared decision-making. Notably, there have been improved family dynamics, fathers are physically more present and more engaged, with reports of reduced tension, improved harmony, respect, and love within the household, between men and women, and between fathers and their children. Barriers to male involvement included economic responsibilities outside the home as well as infidelity, and some women registered concern with the change in gender roles. Women and adolescent girls and boys overwhelmingly expressed the positive changes and knock-on effects of more engaged fathers and husbands.

Men demonstrated positive attitudes towards playing a more active role in the care and household work, though there were indications that these roles still fundamentally belong to women and that their support is considered “help”. Comments by some women registered the need for further progress, as well as concern with the change in gender roles. At the same time, community and family resistance to this shift in gender roles was remarked upon, although participants widely reported their motivation to continue to see the rewards of this change far outweighed this deterrent. Furthermore, many spoke of the social diffusion of these positive practices among community members and between fathers and children. Men, women, adolescent girls and boys and community members all directly attributed these changes to Fathers Clubs and to the importance of sustained groups and networks for continuing to spread this way of living based on gender equality.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the gender-transformative Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) Project, Plan International implemented a male-engagement strategy in Bangladesh from 2017–19 to promote positive masculinities and engage men in sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and the continuum of maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) care. This innovative approach consisted of a curriculum of 20 reflective discussion sessions facilitated by trained local male facilitators, supporting groups of husbands and male partners (Fathers Clubs) to transform attitudes and behaviours that harm women and children and promote gender-equitable relationships between couples. In January 2019, Plan International led a qualitative study to assess the outcomes of the Fathers Clubs interventions. The study findings revealed positive change among Fathers Clubs participants who began to demonstrate more engagement in the continuum of care and positive masculinities supportive of women and girls' empowerment. 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.

## 1.1. SHOW PROJECT

The SHOW Project is a multi-country<sup>1</sup>, multi-year (Jan 2016–Sept 2020) gender-transformative project funded by Global Affairs Canada, with a value of CAD 65 million. 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 and marginalized regions of Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal. In Ghana, the SHOW project is implemented in eight districts with high poverty and vulnerability: Adaklu and Afadzato South in the Volta Region; Afram Plains North and South in the Eastern Region; Karaga, Mamprugu Moaduri, Nanumba North and North Gonja in the Northern Region.

## 1.2. THEORY OF CHANGE

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

### DEMAND

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

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

### SUPPLY

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

To strengthen health governance through gender equitable and inclusive health management committees, and strengthen referrals to be safer and affordable

### ACCOUNTABILITY

Reliable, timely and quality health information (including sex and age disaggregated data) through capacity building and an evidence-based culture that promotes informed and transparent decision-making, and increased efficiency of clinic management and MNCH/SRH budgets

## 1.3. GENDER ANALYSIS – GHANA

The gender analysis was done at the outset of the project established that target communities have an entrenched rigid patriarchal hierarchy at the household level, whereby the husband/father is the head of the family and ultimate decision-maker. There is a broad division of labour along gendered lines, with men responsible for most productive work and women for the reproductive work of housework and child care, which is passed down to children from parents of the same sex. However, women also participate in economic activities. Both men and women also participate in collective community development work. Thus, women's work burden and time poverty are greater than men's. Women do not have independent sources of income, and no income-generating resources, despite their participation in

1. Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria and Senegal

some forms of production. Therefore, due to their economic power in the household and the community, men have the ultimate decision-making power over household income and spending. Women do not have independent sources of income, and no income-generating resources, despite their participation in some forms of production. Women have little decision-making power within their communities and are constrained from speaking in public fora where men are present. Men exert control over family planning through exclusive decision-making power, and by controlling the financial resources to access related services, underpinned by the shared belief that family planning is commonly not practiced; however, women 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. Driving factors of early marriage and pregnancy include traditional marriage exchange practices, lack of educational opportunities, and poverty, though prevailing norms hold girls themselves responsible. Women's and girls' social status is strongly linked to gender ideals of being married, a housewife, a mother, and under the authority of their husbands.

The SHOW baseline survey in the intervention areas asked about support from male family members during pregnancy, and during and after delivery, in terms of accessing family planning services, and breastfeeding. In the intervention areas in Ghana, 46.0 percent of adolescent girls, 59.6 percent of adult women, and 71.1 percent of men reported that the level of male support provided to the women in terms of accessing ANC had been very good. When asked about the level of support in terms of delivery at the facility, 36 percent of adolescent girls, 44.2 percent of adult women and 48.8 percent of men reported that the level of support was very good. 28.8 percent of adolescent girls, 41.6 percent of adult women, and 30.4 percent of men reported that a very good level of support was received by the women in terms of receiving PNC service within two days of delivery. For support in accessing FP methods, 7.2 percent of adolescent girls, 10.4 percent of adult women and 12.4 percent of men responded that the support provided to the women was very good. The level of support was very good in the case of breastfeeding mothers, as responded by 27.3 percent of adolescent girls, 38.5 percent of adult women, and 56.4 percent of men. In Ghana, the amount of male support is lowest for family planning.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.4. GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

From the outset, the SHOW project is implemented through strategic partnerships with the Government of Ghana's Ministry of Health and Ministry of Gender, Children and



Social Protection (MoGCSP). The project formed a deeper collaboration with both the ministries to roll out several interventions. Male engagement in gender equality has not been very pronounced in the government MNCH/SRHR programs, but the positive early results of the approach have generated government support and interest in developing their internal capacity on male engagement through collaboration with the SHOW project.

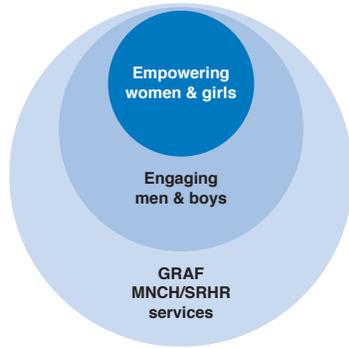
Based on the socio-ecological model, the SHOW Project's comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy has three interconnected pillars targeting the structural and systemic norms upholding the gender inequalities. These pillars were further contextualized to address specific gender barriers as identified in the Ghana gender assessment. As a gender-transformative project, SHOW integrates gender equality considerations into every aspect of its implementation as well as takes targeted gender-specific actions to address unequal power relationships and the root causes of inequalities in the target localities to improve the social status and condition of women and girls. The project's three intersecting gender-transformative strategies, tailored to Haiti's socio-cultural specificities, aimed to mutually reinforce each other are briefly described below:

- **Strategy 1 – Empowering women & girls:** Strengthening the individual and collective agency of women and adolescent girls by increasing their knowledge of their rights, about gender equality, MNCH/SRHR building their leadership roles and capacities, networks and support structures, strengthening their economic capacities and decision-making power within and outside the family for the improved use of MNCH/SRHR services.

2. SHOW Baseline Report, July 2016

• **Strategy 2 – Engaging men & boys:**

Increasing the engagement of men and boys in MNCH/SRHR by fostering positive masculinities targeted male family members' engagement in reflective dialogues and action, Social Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) related interventions, and engagement of male and female community influences such as traditional and religious leaders.



• **Strategy 3 – MNCH/SRH services:**

Strengthening the delivery of Gender Responsive and Adolescent Friendly (GRAF) MNCH/SRH services through health system strengthening and capacity building of community and facility-based health providers.

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. Engaging men is one of the essential components for improving women's and girls' access to and use of MNCH/SRH services. Plan International defines 'men's engagement' in MNCH/SRHR as "the active participation of men in protecting and promoting the health and well-being of their partners and children"<sup>3</sup>. This definition is based on a vision of lasting change in attitudes, 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 of gender equality.

## 2. THE FATHERS CLUBS APPROACH

The SHOW Project's Fathers Clubs approach was jointly conceptualized by Plan International Canada and Promundo US<sup>4</sup> – in Ghana it was referred to as Daddies Clubs. The Fathers Clubs approach enables groups of men to undergo a gender transformative and extended reflective journey

of unlearning harmful gender norms and adopting positive masculinities. The goal of Daddies Clubs is to promote the equitable and non-violent participation of men as partners in MNCH/SRHR. This approach comprised of three components, a) Development of the Fathers Clubs Manual, b) Training/mentoring of community-based male facilitators, and c) recruitment of self-selected male groups that are willing to undergo all sessions. In Ghana, locally developed pictorial were also inserted in the manual for better socialization of messages among the men.

### 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 are intended to gradually gain an understanding of how gender-inequitable norms negatively impact MNCH/SRH outcomes for women and children, as well as men themselves. The small groups, with 15 members average, 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 Fathers 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 to pregnant partner
- Delivery room role
- Pain alleviation
- Fathers and postnatal care
- Importance of breastfeeding

3. Comrie-Thomson L, Mavhu W, Makungu C, Nahar Q, Khan R, Davis J, Luchters S, Hamdani S, and Stillo E. (2015) Men Matter: Engaging Men in MNCH Outcomes. Toronto, Canada: Plan Canada. Page 10

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

## V. RELATIONSHIPS

- Who makes decisions?
- What is violence?
- Healthy relationships

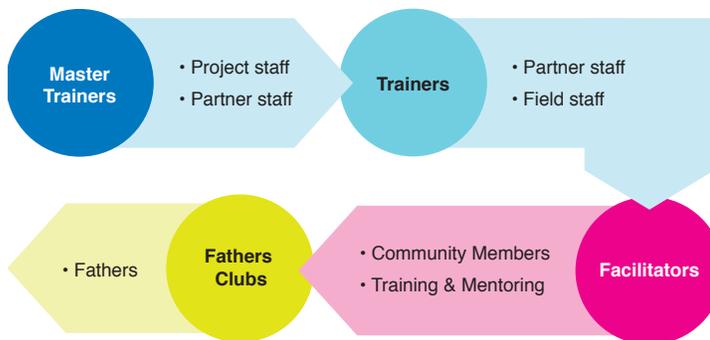
## VI. PLANNING THE FUTURE

- Parents by accident or choice
- Your child's future
- Carlota's 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, and what it means to be a father/spouse 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 were interactive, promoting self-reflection, along with homework assignments to encourage discussions with partners, family members and peers.

## 2.2. GHANA TRAINING ROLL-OUT

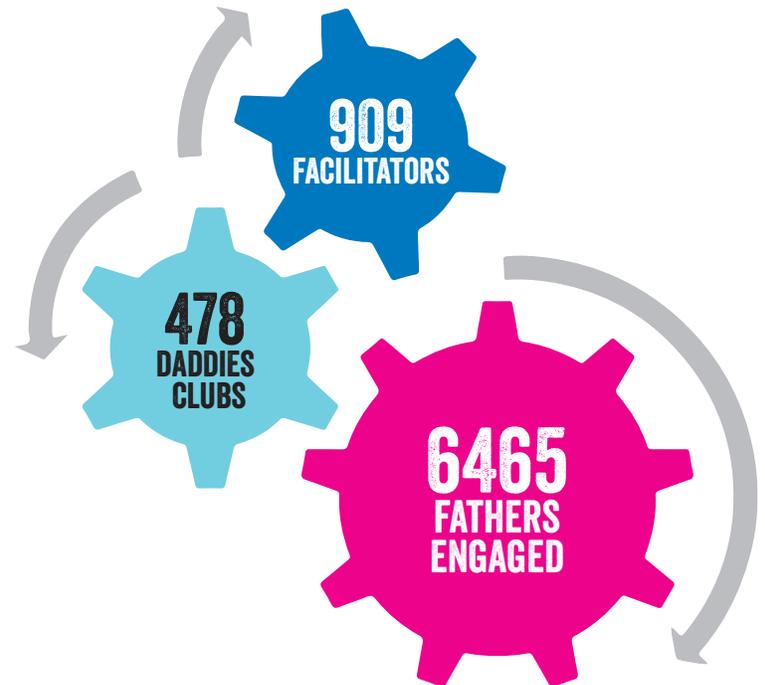
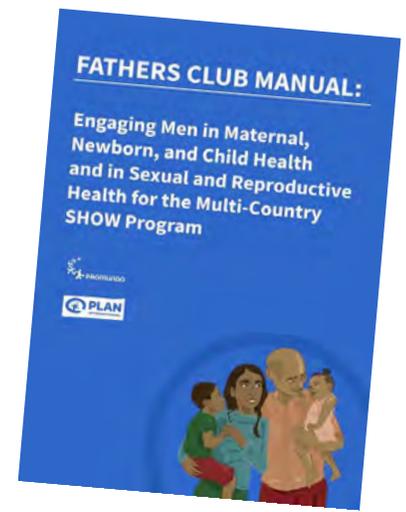
In Ghana, like other countries, training to deliver the Fathers Clubs content was cascaded from master trainers to trainers, to community-based facilitators, and ultimately to the fathers in the target community (see infographic below).



These sessions were organized at a common public venue where men usually gather in the target communities – in Ghana, these were often held at places provided by community elders, health facilities, or a local market shop. The frequency of the 20-Sessions delivery was determined based on the ease and time availability of the participating fathers, at a common public venue. These one-hour sessions were delivered weekly/bi-weekly, with a check-in to help participants recall the previous session and a check-out to assign take-home assignments. Facilitators were trained to

uses various techniques such as role-playing, group discussions, debates, homework and more to appeal to a diversity of men and different learning styles.

SHOW Ghana followed a phased approach for the establishment of Fathers Clubs and the preparation of facilitators. Training used teach-back methodologies for trainers to strengthen facilitation skills and develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum content and the process, eventually trained 909 Fathers Clubs leaders as facilitators in several batches during 2018. The project formed a total 478 Fathers Clubs in eight target districts and 909 community based male facilitators – about two per community. The project succeeded in reaching out to a total of 6,465 men, who self-selected themselves for Fathers Clubs sessions and received full curriculum.



## 3. FATHERS CLUBS STUDY IN GHANA

Plan International Canada in collaboration with Plan Ghana country offices and partners conducted a study to examine stakeholders’<sup>5</sup> experiences of and perspectives on changes in fathers’ household caregiving activities in SHOW intervention communities. This qualitative study was conducted in February 2019 in four SHOW program countries, including in Ghana.

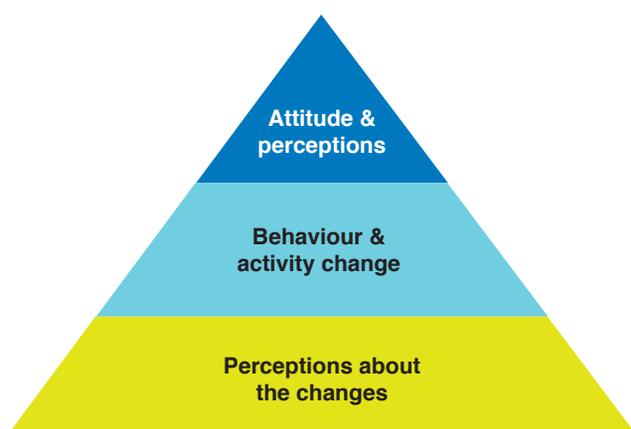
### 3.1. OBJECTIVES

**This impact study has one following objective:**

- To examine stakeholders’ experiences of and perspectives on changes in fathers’ household caregiving.

**The research 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
- Behaviour/activity change of male participants in SHOW Fathers Clubs
- Perceptions about the changes in behaviour and activities



### 3.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology, adapting tools based on the Promundo’s IMAGES survey<sup>6</sup> and Helping Dads Care survey<sup>7</sup>, was developed to reach out to the Fathers

Clubs participants (Fathers), their family members (women, adolescent children) as well as community members (E.g., religious leaders, community health workers, etc.). Field research was conducted in February 2019, wherein data collection methods include In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions. In-depth Interviews (IDI) were carried out 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. The Focus Group Discussion Guides (FGD) were developed for women, adolescent girls and boys to get broader views from respondents and capture any shift, if any, around attitudes, behaviour and perception around masculinities in the community, and to triangulate data. Field researchers were trained on key concepts on Gender Equality, child safeguarding, and integration of Gender Equality and Child and Youth Safeguarding into the research methodology. Analysis of the data was deductive and participatory to test and align responses to the theory of change of the Fathers Clubs.

### 3.3. 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 three remote rural locations of Adaklu Have, Leklebi Kame, and Adaklu Ahunda-Kpodzi during February 2019 in the Volta Region, Ghana.

GHANA SAMPLE SIZE	
Groups	Number of participants
Fathers Clubs members	13
Female partners	55
Adolescent Girls	21
Adolescent Boys	27
Community Leaders	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>

5. Men participating in the Fathers Clubs sessions, their wives/partners, their adolescent children and community leaders

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

7. Helping Dads Care, Promundo US ([https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Promundo-DMC-Helping-Men-Care-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Promundo-DMC-Helping-Men-Care-Report_FINAL.pdf))

## 3.4. LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to the research process and methodology in Ghana. Data collection was only carried out in the Volta Region, and not in the other two project intervention areas of Northern and Eastern Regions. As a result, the findings from this study do not necessarily reflect the context or results in other project intervention areas. In some cases, it was also challenging to get consent forms signed by the parents of adolescents (due to their availability) resulting in some adolescent groups that were smaller than intended.



## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS – EFFECTS OF FATHERS CLUBS SESSIONS

The following sections present the key findings regarding changes in male behaviours as reported by participants of the Fathers Clubs and observed by their wives/partners, adolescent children, and community leaders. The analysis explored reported shifts in male behavior towards positive masculinity while making relevant contrasts with the views of female partners. Moreover, the analysis examined what triggered change among men, the reaction of community members, and the perceived sustainability of changes in men's behaviours and make recommendations.

### 4.1. CHANGES AMONG MEN – POSITIVE MASCULINITIES

#### 4.1.1. HOUSEHOLD WORK AND CHILDCARE

Men in the fathers' FGD were aware of the need to be active participants in the upkeep of the household and talked about their adopted changes in behaviour. Fathers talked about taking on non-traditional domestic chores in support of their households, including washing dishes, sweeping, cooking, fetching water and cleaning. They also talked about taking on childcare activities, including taking care of the baby, bathing and sending the children to school. Some also referenced the “division of labour” and their awareness of its impact on family

dynamics. One father in Adaklu shared: “formerly, I don't support my wife in household chores like cooking, washing, sweeping, cleaning and bathing the children but with the help of the SHOW project, I have the awareness that it is a collective responsibility hence I support her now”

Mothers, adolescent girls and boys and community leaders validated this new uptake of non-traditional activities by men including washing family clothes, fetching water, and sweeping. Both adolescent girls and boys also reported that their fathers increasingly play a role in supporting childcare activities around the house. One adolescent girl indicated, “My father takes care of my younger sibling while my mother carries the load from the farm”; and another shared, “he (father) proudly does the sweeping and want[s] others to see him do it.”

It should be noted that there were also repeated requests for men to continue to increase their support at home. When asked what could be improved, women said men should assist in more household chores, and comments from adolescent girls and boys included that fathers should increase the amount of help they offer to mothers and that fathers should cook more. Community leaders added to the request for men to continue to be more supportive.

Despite praise for changed behaviours and calls for more involvement of men in domestic work, those leaders who were not involved in Fathers Clubs continue to have traditional views on household division of labour with some saying that men are head of household and shouldn't do much housework, and others framing male physical labour for the household as “help” for women – for example, that men should ease a woman's burden if she is pregnant, or if she is cooking.

Several women do not appear to have felt prepared to engage in this more equitable household dynamic and reported that women who do so take advantage of conditions that are favorable to them. They commented on this change of gender roles, citing the arrogance and opportunism of women who “take advantage of the help that men give them and choose not to help at all”.





### MAN, AKORBORTORNU

“I am happy about the changes because it has reduced the burden on my wife.”

### MAN, LEKLEBI KAME

“I don’t want her (wife) to fall sick again as a result of too much stress [if we go back to the way things were].”

### COMMUNITY LEADER, AKORBORTORNU

“Our men just need to be encouraged to continue what they are doing, especially helping in taking children to the hospital.”

Beyond responses that firmly subscribed to the traditional and inequitable gender division of labour (shared in particular by those not involved in Fathers Clubs), there were frequent indications that male engagement in domestic labour is broadly considered by females and males of all ages to be “help” for work that is fundamentally part of the woman’s realm of responsibility, and for she remains in charge and accountable. Four community leaders shared the opinion that men are stronger and therefore should help women, while one dissenting attitude from 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.”

#### 4.1.2. ACCESSING MNCH SERVICES

There is evidence of increased awareness among fathers and their families of the link between male engagement in the household and the overall health of the family, which is being reinforced by the positive results they are seeing. Women made frequent comments valuing the support received. They spoke about the benefits of recent male assistance to their physical and mental wellbeing, including feeling “free and able to move around” and “more relaxed” and “less worried and burdened.” As one woman said: “We now enjoy good health because of reduced pressure.”

New activities fathers mentioned included accompanying their partners and children to health facilities, where they witnessed the weighing of children. Others spoke broadly about the impact of doing housework on the health and wellbeing of their partners. Mothers and adolescent girls frequently mentioned the accompaniment of husbands/spouses in pre-natal and postnatal clinics. Community leaders validated the male support for the health of women and children throughout pregnancy and birth and beyond.

Alcohol abuse was a topic that was discussed by adolescent girls, boys and men. Some men mentioned giving up alcohol as part of their attempts to reform themselves, and both adolescent girls and boys raised the example of reduced alcohol consumption as an example of behaviour change.

#### 4.1.3. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women, adolescent girls, and boys all confirmed reduction in violence, notably a reduction in arguments. Adolescent boys, girls, and community leaders spoke of less frequent arguments, quarreling and fighting in the home as a result of changes originating with men’s control of their behaviour, as on adolescent girl shared, “my father has been changed a lot, he was a very ill-tempered before but now is patient and calm,” Another adolescent boy said, “the neighbours are happy because there is no quarrel in the house again.” Among mothers, there was general agreement that their husbands are more peaceful, less angry, and abusive. Nonetheless, women expressed further need for improvement and expected men to be more patient

Fathers themselves commented upon their improved mood and emotional control, reduced argumentativeness, as one father from Adaklu Ahunda Kpodzi community indicated, “I used to argue with my wife in the house, but now I don’t”, and another Father from Leklebi Kame community shared “there are no quarreling, insulting and disrespect at home now.” One father also remarked that his children no longer fear him.

There were also several opinions shared by adolescent girls and religious leaders 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.”

#### 4.1.4. DECISION MAKING

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. Another woman spoke of shared decision-making flowing from an improved relationship with her husband “There is now much of understanding between us and we make all decisions together.” Although the specific nature of these decisions was not the focus of discussion, one community leader said a key difference was in decisions around “financial management,” to which he attributed other positive changes in the family dynamics and “the community as a whole”.

Several fathers talked about inviting their family members to participate in decision-making or were committed to doing so in the future. One woman further confirmed this change and shared, “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.”



## 4.2. THE EFFECT OF POSITIVE MASCULINITIES

All respondents gave consistent positive feedback on improved spousal and family relationships, stemming from changed behaviours of male heads of households that open space for communication, involvement, and closeness.

### 4.2.1. SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIPS

Men and their wives/partners spoke at greater length about their feeling 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,” and another man said, “my wife now respects me.”

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, as well as the removal of restrictions placed upon the women themselves, as one woman shared, “we now share the Bible, and he now allows me to touch his things.” 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, “I am happy about the change. For instance, if I prepare a meal for my wife, she enjoys it and she says am the

#### MAN, LEKLEBI KAME

“I now make decisions together with my wife.”

#### MAN, ADAKLU AHUNDA KPODZI

“Now I consult my wife and children in decision making.”

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,” and another community leader said, “there is a drastic change, now men and women make decisions for their kids.”





best cook". Some also seemed convinced that continuing in this way would continue to improve the quality of their intimate partner relationships. Community leaders observed positive but atypical interactions between couples, such as men who would normally leave their wives behind waiting to walk together to the farm.

**WOMAN,  
LEKLEBI KAME**

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

**WOMAN,  
AKROBORTORNU**

"I feel united with my husband."

**WOMAN,  
ADAKLU HAVE**

"My husband no longer keeps secrets from me."

**MAN,  
LEKLEBI KAME**

"She will now love me more and we make more love."

**MAN, LEKLEBI KAME**

"I want to eat and bathe together with my wife more."

With slight variations among the different respondents' categories, the positive effects were consistently reported by men, women, adolescent girls, boys, and community leaders. Words including "peace," "unity" and "love" were frequently used to describe the tone of improved relationships at home than in the past. One adolescent girl said, "I feel there is love in the family," another adolescent boy shared, "Formerly, my Dad does not stay at home but now he is always at home spending quality time chatting, interacting with the family."

Women spoke of strengthened family relationships and respect, adolescent boys spoke of togetherness, happiness in the household and social cohesion, community leaders spoke of peace and harmony and love and healthier families and adolescent girls and mothers both remarked upon their feeling that the family was "progressing" as a result. Fathers spoke of the unity of the household and stronger bonds with the family.

**MAN,  
LEKLEBI KAME**

"I now show affection to my family."

**MAN,  
AKROBORTORNU**

"Now I have a good relationship with my wife and children."

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" and that fathers are spending quality time with the family. Adolescent girls and boys talked about the happiness they felt at the changes in their homes. 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. Men themselves talked about communicating and opening emotionally with their families. Community leaders said that the resulting changes, in addition to improving harmony in the household, meant that women now held them in higher regard: "The women now respect the men."



## 4.2.2. FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

According to both men and women, adolescent girls and boys, the traditional emotional distance between fathers and their children have 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.

### ADOLESCENT BOY, AKROBORTORNU

“He [father] is now more open to us.”

### MAN, LEKLEBI KAME

“My children are no more scared of me.”

### ADOLESCENT GIRL, ADAKLU AHUNDA KPODZI

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

### ADOLESCENT BOY, ADAKLU AHUNDA KPODZI

“It promotes a good relationship between me and my father.”

### ADOLESCENT BOY, ADAKLU AHUNDA KPODZI

“I am proud of him.”

Community leaders also observed a new level of involvement by fathers in the community, noticing them openly playing together with their children, and seeing them accompany their children to and from school. The FGDs all remarked upon the reduced fear by children of their fathers, and greater closeness between fathers and their children and the resulting happiness. Adolescent boys and girls described feeling good and inspired by the improved treatment of their mothers by their fathers and the “help” she is now receiving.



The adolescents also described improved communication and relationships with their fathers, characterized by love and respect, as one boy while describing the positive effects of his father change behaviors said, “(it) promotes a good relationship between me and my father,” and adolescent girls talked of the resulting improved “unity” of siblings. 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; 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.” 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.”

## 4.3. SOCIAL SUPPORT AND STIGMA

Stigma as a response to the adoption of positive behaviours by men was discussed by all respondents, and it can become a significant deterrent to the adoption of positive masculine behaviours. Resistance most commonly took the form of ridicule and insults, including name-calling, particularly the name “salomey,”<sup>8</sup> a derogatory nickname that was frequently mentioned by all stakeholders. Negative responses to male adoption of non-traditional behaviours came from community members and extended family, and in some cases, men reported that the wives of men in the Fathers Clubs who are not aware of the project can respond

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

negatively to these changes. One man from the Leklebi Kame community 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.” Women spoke of male fear and shame that family and friends would laugh at them, and talked of some friends, community, and family members becoming angry and no longer wanting to associate, as when one woman said, “those not in the Fathers Clubs tease and call them names. Some say their wives have cast spells on them.”. Adolescent boys talked about community members calling their fathers foolish or saying the mother has magic juju power over her husband, as one adolescent boy shared, “they will say my mother has cooked ‘gbortemi’<sup>9</sup> for my father.” The proximate reasons for the negative reactions were not discussed, but several comments in the study made accusing women of laziness suggest overall insecurity in some about changes in status quo power relations.



However, these negative experiences do not appear to have been lasting or dominant in colouring the experience of men from the Fathers Clubs. There were multiple examples

of fathers persisting in behaviour change and winning the support of those around them. Fathers talked about gaining the admiration of community members for these adopted positive expressions of masculinity and their results, 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 gained respect for their partners, and while some in-laws discouraged men from assisting their wives, others praised them, as one woman shared, “there is no longer any negative reaction or bad influences in the community. Moreover, the men have made their minds up and don't feel discouraged even when family members try to discourage them.”

### **WOMAN, ADAKLU AHUNDA KPODZI**

“People used to tease and give nicknames to the men who assisted their wives but now [with] the involvement of everyone, it has ceased.”

### **FATHER, ADAKLU AHUNDA KPODZI**

“My neighbours are now happy that I am helping my wife in household chores and they are learning from us. The community members congratulate me. For instance, if I carry water on my head, they say, ‘Ayeekoo’ [well done].”

Learning from fathers was another common theme in all FGDs: some community members wanted to find out what brought about the positive changes they were seeing. Fathers, adolescent boys, and girls explained how extended family and community members were learning from them. One adolescent boy shared, “the community sees him as a responsible man,” Another described his father “is teaching the community members and [is] a role model.” One adolescent girl shared, “Others have emulated the good things they saw in my father.” Community leaders spoke of a shift in response to behaviour that used to be socially sanctioned: “In the olden days, any man that helps his wife was given names, for examples ‘salomey’, Mr. Cook,

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

bastard. Now there is general support.” Other community leaders echoed that view that increasingly, people feel good about, and are generally supportive of men adopting positive masculine behaviors, as one said, “there is no more stigmatization or name-calling.”

In addition to stigma, men, women, adolescent girls and boys mentioned livelihood and farm work as factors that commonly deter men from supporting their wives in doing household chores.

### **WOMAN, AKROBORTORNU**

“My husband is over burdened with responsibilities since he has to take care of his younger siblings and this makes it difficult to assist me in household chores because he has to work hard for money.”

### **ADOLESCENT BOY, ADAKLU HAVE**

“The nature of his job. For instance, my father is a mason who works outside the community and travels a lot to other places to mold blocks.”

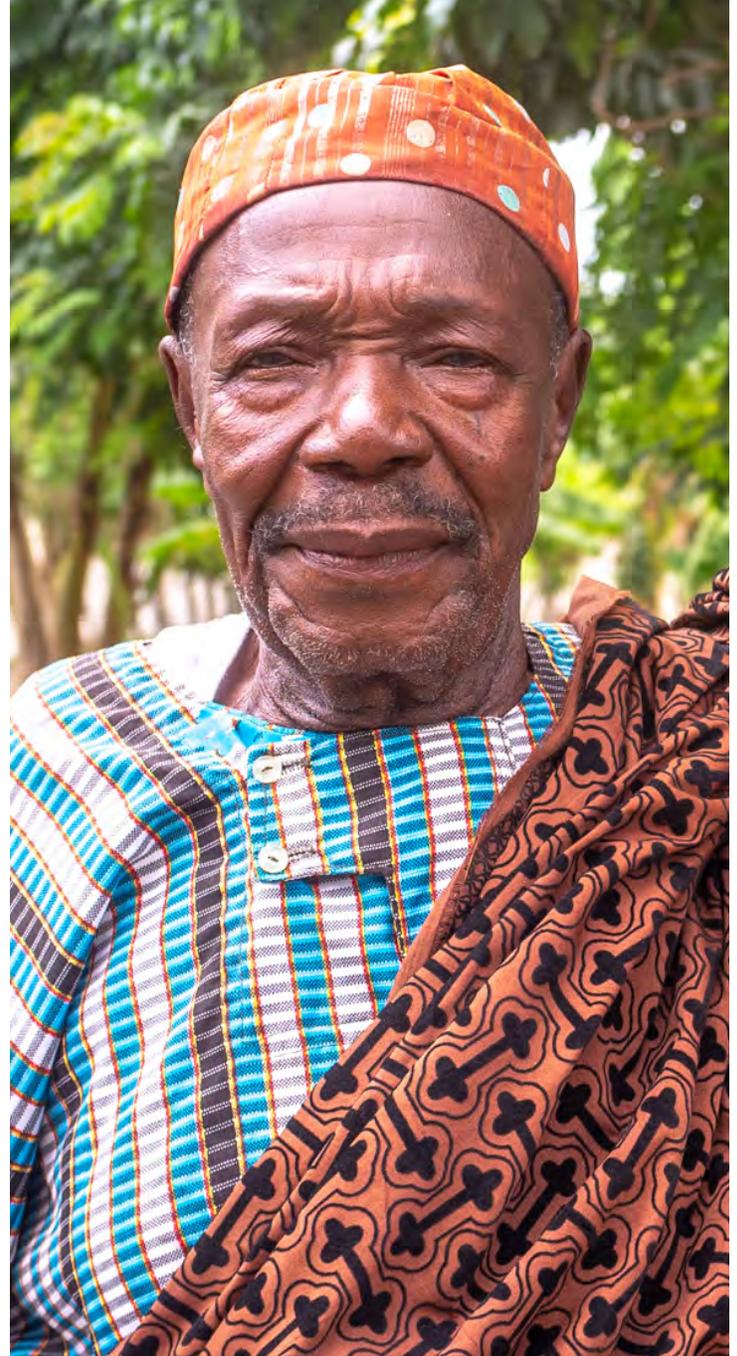
### **WOMAN, ADAKLU HAVE**

“The nature of my husband’s work doesn’t make him come home early to assist in chores.”

### **MAN, AKROBORTORNU**

“The nature of my fishing job in the community could be a barrier.”

Other factors deterring male engagement in the household reflected differing perspectives. Particularly, both women and adolescent girls spoke about the absence and emotional unavailability of men who have extramarital relationships as a common problem, and they spoke more generally about tension and fighting between couples can drive a distance that deters men from taking on domestic chores. Adolescent girls spoke extensively about marital problems which they viewed as an obstacle to male engagement, including lack of honesty between couples combined with the lack of mutual respect, and also mentioned spells and evil spirits. Both adolescent girls and boys mentioned alcohol abuse as a factor stopping men from engaging with their families. Community leaders were the only group to state the pride of the head of the family, combined with what they termed “nagging” and lack of respect from women as explanatory factors.



## **4.4. SUSTAINABILITY OF CHANGES**

Overall, there was a common theme among study participants that the chain of positive effects observed members of Fathers Clubs is driving new standards of male behaviour that are considered rewarding to individuals,

families, and communities. Bearing in mind the impact of barriers to male engagement including livelihood obligations and spousal discord, the value accorded to these positive behaviours because of their impact speaks to the potential for their sustainability. Other factors include a commitment by men themselves and the replication by children and other male community members.

All respondents consistently spoke about the positive changes that unfolded among families because of male adoption of positive masculine behaviours. 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 on this path.



**MAN,  
ADAKLU AHUNDA-KPODZI**

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

**MAN,  
AKROBORTORNU**

“There is no way to go back because of the love.”

**MAN,  
AKROBORTORNU**

“[It will last] because I am also encouraging friends to also support their wives in household chores.”

**MAN,  
ADAKLU HAVE**

“Yes, it will last because it is now part and parcel of me and I will continue to sustain it.”

Several queen mothers 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 showed their awareness of the tendency by their children to mimic their fathers’ behaviours, and accordingly, recognized their responsibility to be role models. There is also an unspoken pressure in being known as a role model that would help these changes to persist through accountability to the community, alluded to by the adolescent boys: “He is now a role model in the community so it will last.”

The promise of a degree of sustained change also stems from the learning and propagation of positive masculine behaviours between community members. Respondents across all FGDs explained how observed positive effects were directly leading to replication by children, as well as by other community members, as one adolescent boy articulated, “it will last because the children will learn from him (father).” 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.

**WOMAN,  
ADAKLU HAVE**

“The children will learn from their parents and grow up with these changes making the cycle continuous.”

**COMMUNITY LEADER,  
AKROBORTORNU**

“[The changes will last] because the change has made them to be role models for their children.”

**MAN,  
ADAKLU AHUNDA-KPODZI**

“The children are always learning from me and they are happy seeing me help their mother.”

**MAN,  
ADAKLU AHUNDA-KPODZI**

“I am proud because the children and the community members are also learning from me.”



Community leaders were generally of the same opinion that these changes among fathers would last. Some attributed this to the immediate observed impacts of positive masculinity, while others indicated the evolution of norms governing the behaviour of male heads of household: a catechist commented, “The change will last. In case the class has been dissolved, there will be no need for the men to go back to their previous lives. It’s like when you are doing a business that brings a lot of money, there will be no need to quit.” A male community chief while talking about cascading effect of Fathers Clubs sessions shared that, “even those fathers who don’t take part in the Fathers Clubs are changing because the air of change is blowing to the extent that a kid could admonish the father to stop drinking since it is a thing of the past and all the men in the community have changed.”

At the same time, there was broad recognition across the different categories of the respondents that continued support for Fathers Clubs is key to the ongoing and sustained nature of this change. Women in a focus group agreed that “The program and the learning from Fathers Clubs and women support groups should continue.” Men recommended improved networking and more frequent training opportunities and visits from partners, to stimulate ongoing learning and support.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the Plan International study show that Fathers Clubs proved an effective approach to transforming unequal gender norms in the targeted communities in Ghana. Across the board, there has been a shift in awareness about the link between the adoption of positive masculine behaviours by male heads of households, and the positive effects on family dynamics, relationships, and overall health and wellbeing. At the time of this study, evidence suggests that a shift in gender roles had taken root. Fathers had adopted a range of non-traditional domestic roles and take up house chores, including housecleaning, cooking and childcare activities. They had changed their interactions with family members, spending more time at home with family members, being more communicative, inviting spouses and children to take part in household decisions, being more communicative about emotions, being more focused on the developmental needs of their children and going against key norms, such as sitting with their adolescent daughters.

Women articulated feelings of relief, freedom and improved health, and a desire to spend more time enjoying the company of friends and family and getting some rest. Women and adolescent girls spoke of greater truthfulness and honesty in relationships. With these changes, conflict and arguments reduced, and reports of respect, love and harmony increased between couples and within households more generally. The enthusiasm with which these changes

were received helped to spread the learning and replication of behaviours, which speaks in favour of their sustainability. At the same time, the deep rootedness of inequitable norms is well noted, and the comments by some men, including community leaders, affirmed a persistent desire to cling to the gender hierarchical status quo.

Nonetheless, all respondents have confirmed men’s participation in Fathers Clubs activities has produced drastic positive changes in men’s behaviour and their increased engagement in household activities, joint decision making, increased love and peace at the household, better spousal communication, decrease in gender-based violence and substance abuse.

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## Plan International Canada Inc.

### National Office

245 Eglinton Avenue East  
Suite 300  
Toronto, ON M4P 0B3  
Canada

### Ottawa Office

130 Slater Street  
Suite 1350  
Ottawa, ON K1P 6E2  
Canada

416 920-1654  
1 800 387-1418  
[info@plancanada.ca](mailto:info@plancanada.ca)  
[plancanada.ca](http://plancanada.ca)



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