

Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Welcome

To “**La League – Expanding Horizons**” – addressing gender inequalities through providing space and capacities to girls and young women to play football.



Nicaragua

What is the Project about?

Background

Plan International, in cooperation with other partners, developed a model for empowering adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 12 and 20 to decide for themselves whether, when and whom to marry, and whether, when and with whom to have children. At the heart of this project lies football, encouraging girls to play the game and turn talented players into professional female football heroes, and at the same time encouraging fathers and male role models to support their girls – not only when it comes to football, but also in other more important life choices. Thus, football is used to transform gender norms and raise awareness regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Context

As in other Latin American Countries, many girls in Nicaragua believe that early marriage and pregnancy are the only way to escape poverty and violence at home. However, this often turns out to be a continuation of an already negative cycle of events, as marriage and motherhood tend to limit girls' development even more. La League project aims to empower adolescent girls and their male peers in Nicaragua with a view to preventing teenage pregnancies and delaying marriage. One of the methods used consists of involving fathers and boys in efforts to achieve equal rights and freedoms for girls. This makes football the ideal vehicle for this project, as using a male-dominated arena is exactly what is needed. Football can have a powerful impact in terms of changing gender roles and raising awareness regarding the negative impact of teenage pregnancies and child/ early marriages.

Summary

Theory of change

Through the La League methodology, with its distinctive focus on football, it is possible to influence girls' behavior regarding SRHR, resulting in the prevention of child marriages and teenage pregnancies. When teenage girls are aware of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and they feel empowered and more supported by the influential males, adults in their life, and their community, then they will make more informed decisions about their sexual health to prevent child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

Overall goal

To promote women's football among adolescent girls and young women, through the formation and strengthening of women's football teams in 10 communities in Chinandega, Chontales/Boaco, Madriz, San Rafael del Sur and the Autonomous Region of the Northern Caribbean Coast.

Specific objective(s)

Strengthen female leadership and help challenge traditional gender norms, particularly around sports and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and put an end to harmful practices such as teenage pregnancy and child marriages..

Expected results

- To promote the empowerment of 300 adolescent girls (ages 16-19) over 12 months,
- Engage 100 adolescent males, 200 parents, guardians and community members, and 60 coaches and support staff.
- To strengthen female leadership, promote enjoyment of sports for girls, and challenge gender stereotypes in football, sports and in other areas of life.

Stakeholders

Project partners

The program was implemented by Plan International.

<https://www.plan.ch/de/>

Project primary stakeholders (priority target group(s))

- (Directly) 300 young women between 16 and 19 years
- 100 young men between 16 and 19 years
- 200 mothers, fathers and community leaders
- 60 trainers, referees, staff from Fútbol Sin Fronteras
- (Indirectly) 9000 community members in the zones of intervention.

Project secondary and boundary stakeholders (system actors, duty bearers, service providers etc.)

The Federation of Soccer of Nicaragua FENIFUT
Ministry of Sports



Some key activities

- Football Training Sessions and Football Camps.
- Community, municipal and national tournaments.
- Leadership Training Workshops and Leadership Camps.
- Train the Trainer (TOT) "La League" Manual.
- Sessions with Stakeholders: Engaging with government.
- Intergenerational Dialogue with Parents, Caregivers, and Community Leaders.

Some key challenges:

- The young men and the girls' families showed resistance to the idea that the girls and adolescent women could build a female football team.
- The strategies for improving employability and entrepreneurship did not enough address the administrative capacities and skills needed, thus the business ideas of participants could not be realized.

What did the project do and learn?

Design and Implementation

Key design and implementation features, included:

- The project La League in Nicaragua was designed in a participatory and comprehensive way, starting with a needs assessment and clear definition of goals, emphasizing girls' empowerment and gender equality. This integrated strategy included football training and leadership development, fostering community engagement and stakeholder involvement.
- A structured tournament format, including community, municipal, and national events, was designed to provide a platform for girls to showcase their skills and teamwork.
- Ongoing monitoring and advocacy efforts were incorporated, alongside a sustainability plan, including the "Train the Trainer" component, to ensure the project's long-term impact.
- The project uses football as an entry point to address gender discrimination and broaden the economic perspectives of players and coaches. It combines a variety of methodological approaches to use the sports activities which are dominated by men, to transform gender norms and create awareness on health issues as well as sexual and reproductive rights.
- The project involved girls and young women as well as boys and young men and their families in capacity building processes around gender, sexuality, prevention of sexual violence, machismo and masculinities.

La League also worked with mothers "chaperonas" aimed at sensitizing other parents and ensuring the support for girls and adolescents willing to join the teams and participate in the project.

Key Achievements and Good Practices

- The girls involved could develop new skills that are transferable to other areas of life, such as approaches for problem resolution, self-discipline, teamwork, resilience to challenges and effective communication.
- The workshops on positive masculinity helped families and male peers to recognize and be convinced that girls and women have the right and can build and be part of football teams on their own.
- Various topics were addressed, together with the sports activities, such as sexual health, reproductive health, sexual rights, prevention of pregnancy, early marriages. Transformative changes at level of knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and norms could be observed.
- Women football players from the project were able to go beyond the local team and are team members in the national league now, showing that soccer can even be a strategy for economic survival for women.
- The strategies for improving employability of young soccer players helped build their self-esteem and leadership.



For more on the project, and SDC Gender in LAC experiences

- <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/PGE/Gender/Pages/Toolbox/Knowledge%20sharing/Gender-experiences-from-Latin-America.aspx>



Key Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- Sports and recreational activities are effective instruments to challenge discriminatory gender norms and provide unique opportunities to reflect and address key issues of discrimination.
- Physical activities offer a visible, physical and emotional connection to the realities of life and valuable entry points for addressing the key messages of the project.
- The involvement of a variety of stakeholders (girls and boys, adolescents, their family members, their coaches, community leaders, the National Football Federation and public officials) has allowed addressing the issue of gender roles, masculinity and femininity, in a systemic and sustainable way.
- The strategies for improving employability and entrepreneurship of young football players helped not only build their self-esteem and leadership, but convince family to support them.
- The mothers “chaperonas” play an important role in making the project effective and sustainable. They also accompanied the girls during the matches, ensuring their protection and security.