

Masculinity and Gender Equality

**A PARTICIPATORY DIAGNOSTIC OF MASCULINITY
INVOLVING BOYS
IN THE CITIES OF BOGOTÁ AND MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA**



Save the Children Canada Report

April 2011

CREDITS

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Save the Children *Reescribamos el Futuro*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Building from past experience
- 1.2. Naming the challenges
- 1.3. Project description

2. THE RESEARCH SETTING

- 2.1. General overview of the context
- 2.2. Bogotá: the locality of Usme
- 2.3. Medellín: communes 6 and 8

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 Basic assumptions
 - 3.1.1. Social reality is a product of human intervention and an organizer of individual realities
 - 3.1.2. Difference based on gender
 - 3.1.2.1 Gender as a social construction
 - 3.1.2.2 Masculinity/ies
- 3.2. Defining the research question
- 3.3. Protagonists of the research
- 3.4. Categories of analysis
 - 3.4.1. Gender roles
 - 3.4.2. Power
 - 3.4.3. Gender equality
 - 3.4.4. Participation
 - 3.4.5. Mass media

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

- 4.1. Research techniques
 - 4.1.1. Surveys of qualitative nature
 - 4.1.2. Life stories
 - 4.1.3. In depth interviews
- 4.2. Description of the process

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1. Input categories

- 5.1.1. Gender roles
- 5.1.2. Power
- 5.1.3. Gender equality
- 5.1.4. Participation
- 5.1.5. Mass media

5.2. Emerging categories

- 5.2.1. Nature of the discourse
- 5.2.2. Imaginary role
- 5.2.3. Prevailing feelings
- 5.2.4. Female images and male images
- 5.2.5. Impact of education environments
- 5.2.6. Socialisation dynamics
- 5.2.7. Father and mother figures

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

6.2. Conclusions

6.3 Recommendations

6.4 Young men evaluate their experience

6.4.1. Introductory note

6.4.2. Evaluative comments

6.4.2.1. The best about the process

6.4.2.2. The least appreciated about the process

6.4.2.3 What could be improved

6.4.2.4. Changes in my life

6.4.3. Recommendations for the future

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

8. ANNEX. LIFE HISTORY OF “PALOMO”, BY CORPORATION CEDECIS

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There are many people to thank in the production of this study. First, the boys associated with the on-going work of the Corporation SIEMBRA in the district of Usme in the city of Bogotá and of the Corporation CEDECIS in the Communes 6 and 8 in the city of Medellín. Without their patience and their willingness to “let go sufficiently” to be able to engage with preconceived notions of what being a boy and becoming a man are all about in highly conflictive and violent areas of two large cities, we would not be sharing their experience and learning. For reasons of security, their individual names have been omitted, although direct quotes have been included in this text. As will be seen, our universe was relatively small and even then, marked differences between the groups and between the individual boys involved in the study soon became evident.

Second, the teachers and principals in the participating schools in the locality of Usme in Bogotá and in the “Comunas” of Altos de la Torre (Commune 8) and the Commune 6 in Medellín whose support was paramount. They guaranteed “safe spaces” where challenging questions could be posed; they greatly helped to simplify situations requiring logistical support; they eased the time-out-of-class requests that were frequently required; and they assisted boys and young men to feel they were part of an innovative and worthwhile exercise.

Lastly thanks to the staff at CEDECIS and SIEMBRA who worked very hard to reach a common understanding of the purpose of the study, to deepen our appreciation of gender equality and masculinity in a complex country like Colombia and finally helped develop shared categories of analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Save the Children Canada's decision to carry out a participatory research project in Colombia stemmed from a desire to have a grasp of children's and youth's understanding of their own gender identities as well as their relationship with each other. Based on preliminary findings from a 2003-2006 CIDA funded Bilateral Program carried out in Colombia, we realized that there was a need to deepen our understanding of the issue and the gender dynamics at play for youth in complex and challenging contexts such as Colombia, where historical armed conflict, poverty, displacement and at time pandemic violence are all part of a complex set of components that shape young boys and girls' gender identities.

This publication is the result of fruitful collaboration between two Colombian NGOs, CEDECIS and SIEMBRA and Save the Children who together embarked on a journey of collective reflection with youth to think about, analyze and make recommendations as to how together we can begin to change the discourse on gender identity and relations as well as develop new approaches that address issues of power dynamics and the more transformative aspects of gender relationships.

This text is complemented by two annexes. The first is the life history of "Palomo", one of 13 life histories of boys from Medellin who participated in the project. The life history methodology was used by Corporation CEDECIS; the second, is a DVD with a video completed by Corporation SIEMBRA, based on the testimonies and exchanges carried out by participating youth in Bogota.

Working with children and youth offers a unique and untapped opportunity especially the promotion of gender equality as it relates to concepts of masculinities. The challenge for the future will be to define how we, at Save the Children, can continue to work with young boys and girls on more transformative gender equality programming that moves us towards reflecting and hopefully impacting on power relations between the sexes across the many countries in which we work. Engaging young boys and men in this journey is essential if we are to create real long standing change.

Marlen Mondaca, Technical Advisor Gender/Child Protection, Save the Children

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Building from past experience

The decision by Save the Children Canada (SCC) to embark on a participatory research project in Colombia regarding masculinity came after three years of experience with boys and girls, young men and women, male and female teachers, and mothers and fathers, related to a CIDA funded education and peacebuilding project in Colombia that took place between 2003 and 2006. The promotion of gender equality was an important project component and was coordinated by a women's organization in Medellín that provided on-going training, feed-back, and evaluation to our NGO partners, teachers, and girls, boys and youth. During this process, many lessons were learned. But in the end, progress in making a dent in consciousness and gender awareness and especially in the transformation of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding gender roles among our partners and beneficiaries, was quite uneven. While it was true that many project participants of all ages were more able to use the words and discourse of gender equality, there remained many doubts about whether anything had really changed.

On the one hand, among adults, it was the female teachers, mothers, and women NGO workers who showed interest, while their male counterparts consistently took a back seat. In mixed-sex NGO partner organizations, all but one led by males, and with no one specifically charged with overseeing gender equity work, initial interest and subsequent transformation was difficult to document. On occasions, there seemed to be outright hostility to insisting on the inclusion of gender equality discussion in all spheres of work- "concepts imposed by funding

agencies from the North", we were told. There seemed to be a certain weariness and "deja-vu" with traditional gender equity approaches that focused almost exclusively on females. At the same time, anecdotal evidence seemed to be indicating that attitudes and roles among young girls and boys, especially in urban areas, were changing and required more nuanced discourse and attention. During the project no specific work was done with boys on the construction of masculinity but it was clear that both girls and boys, and female and male adolescents were keen to participate in discussions and activities related especially to discussion about gender relations and sexuality.

In order to advance institutional thinking on gender equality and the relationship between the public and private worlds of boys and girls, and to better understand the construction of male identity and the socialization of young boys, it was decided to include a study of masculinity in CIDA funded Education project) implemented in Colombia between 2007 and 2010,

1.2. Naming the challenges

During the past fifty years, feminist scholars and activists have denounced the explicit conditions that perpetuate the subordination of women in all spheres of life, both private and public while at the same time increasing awareness concerning the inequalities faced by girls, and women in patriarchal societies where boys and men are honored and valued in the public sphere while girls and women are silenced and hidden in the private realm and where often their accomplishments in the public sphere go unnoticed. Furthermore, feminists developed the analytical category of "gender" to provide evidence that the so-called "appropriate" roles assigned to males and females are social creations that vary over time and space and that are not immutable and "natural" to human beings.

However the use of the categories of gender analysis and gender equality with males has been a challenge. The very fact that men are expressly associated with the factors of power that permit the continuing asymmetry between the sexes has made it difficult for men to recognize the asymmetry. Men are either oblivious or choose to keep silent about the many privileges they become accustomed to, that seem “natural” to them in patriarchal societies. Therefore, in most practical work to promote gender equality until recently, the concept did not include an explicit focus on males as subjects of transformation. It was generally assumed that their roles within patriarchy, which are likewise socially constructed, were much less of a priority because of their natural advantages within the existing asymmetry and that the real challenge was to empower women. Enhancing women’s and girl’s autonomy, it was thought, would reduce levels of all types of violence, since, it is their subordination by and to males that guarantees the status quo.

Over the last two decades new paradigms have emerged that allow for a more holistic approach to promoting gender equality and to understanding what it means to be a man and a woman in a patriarchal society. Publications regarding the current “crisis of masculinity”, recognition of the existence of different representations of masculinity, as well as the growing sense of displacement of especially urban males by women moving into political, economic and social places and spaces they had not previously occupied have also emerged. In this context and based, on some of Save the Children’s past experience of working in educational programs in schools, it was felt that it would be important to observe, document and understand how some previously unsanctioned behaviours among urban boys and girls were changing and that an effort to deconstruct the “naturalness” of male power as a fixed construct was needed.

In the Colombian context of on-going internal conflict; a culture of “anything goes” fostered by

the fast pace and consumerism associated with a vibrant drug trade; the dramatic levels of gender-based violence; and the continuing impunity related to sexual violence against women, it seemed men and boys needed to be brought into the picture if we were someday to move beyond a mere description of the prevalence and effects of violence in society, and on women and girls in particular, to context-specific understandings of the causes of the different types of violence.

1.3. Project description

SCC with financial support from CIDA, decided to design and implement a project of participatory, exploratory, and applied research related to the theme of masculinity and gender equality, in direct collaboration with two well-known partners in the cities of Medellín and Bogotá: the SIEMBRA Corporation working with schools in the locality of Usme in Bogotá and the CEDECIS Corporation working with schools and youth groups in Communes 6 and 8 in Medellín. In addition to the partner organizations, teachers, parents, and boys and girls and male and female young people would be encouraged to explore issues of masculinity and the social construction of male identity. Boys were to be front and centre, especially those school boys who had finished six years of primary schooling, generally boys between the ages of 11 and 18 as well as some out-of-school boys in Medellín up to the age of 21. The terms “boys”, “young men”, and “male youth” therefore refers to this age group. We were motivated by the desire to better understand the relationship between maleness and violence, between violence and power, and power and gender, topics that we hoped would be systematically opened up and documented during the research. Participating schools would provide the main venues for undertaking research activities and the two NGO (CEDECIS and SIEMBRA), along with teachers and principals, would designate the individual male youth who were to become the active subjects. The long-term goal, promoted by the project was the following:

Project goal

Boys and girls, young men and young women understand and positively transform socially-constructed asymmetrical gender roles and contribute to the construction of peaceful schools and communities.

Purpose of research

To enhance SCC's and partners' conceptual understanding of, and practical interventions with the transformation of socially constructed male identities and the promotion of gender equality, through participatory research with young men and young women, teachers and parents, in contexts of violence.

In the initial stage the following outcomes were considered:

- Published research results contribute conceptually and practically to addressing issues affecting the construction of young male identity, the transformation of asymmetrical gender roles, and the reduction of violence in schools.
- Young peoples' (male and female) understanding of how boys are socialized and how destructive behaviours can be transformed is enhanced.
- SCC and research participants have enhanced their knowledge of, and acquired the skills to include the construction of masculinity and male identity in their gender equity training with young people.

2. THE RESEARCH SETTING

2.1. General overview of the context



Colombia is a country where armed conflict, in its many forms, has continued unabated for over fifty years, and makes a particularly relevant case for the study of the relationship between masculinity and power and the use of violence. Although our study was not designed to unearth the multiple causes and modalities of young male violence, we wanted to understand how young boys understand and live out their male identities in order to eventually recommend ways to build more peaceful families, schools and communities.

It is difficult to think about Colombia without thinking about violence. Macho warrior images of guerilla insurgents, mutilated bodies from anti-personal mines exploding without warning, soldiers with painted faces to camouflage their identities, tanks and road-blocks, and bloody paramilitary massacres have been superimposed on society and accepted consciously and subconsciously as “normal”, as “part of the culture”. The mass media, violent video games, authoritarian political figures, the influence of one of the more conservative Catholic Church hierarchies in the Americas, the historical

acceptance of the authoritarian, or by contrast, absent father, increasing poverty and exclusion, and violence as entertainment, accentuate war images and discourse.

Although the number of violent deaths and massacres related directly to the internal armed conflict has decreased over the past five years in most parts of the country, it is generally recognized that threats of violence, armed social and territorial control, forced displacement, and sexual violence against women have not diminished. As in other parts of the world, most homicides are committed by young men against other young men, while over 90% of sexual violence is perpetrated by males, mostly against females. According to the World Health Organization, boys and men constitute the overwhelming majority of perpetrators in acts involving the use of violence- well above 90%. It is therefore legitimate to treat violence as a phenomenon which is largely, albeit not exclusively, a problem involving males and related to prevailing male gender roles and role models. Bringing to light some of the cultural factors related to the causal relationship between males and violence rather than merely reporting the facts, describing the consequences, or condemning men outright is essential, if unequal gender relations are to be transformed and rates of violence lessened. It is essential to understand the ways young men assume their male identity within a patriarchal society and become relatively “comfortable” with “the way things are”.

At the same time, we were also very clear from the outset that the majority of boys, adolescents, and men in the world do not engage in outright acts of extreme violence or exert overt sexual violence against girls and women. We also need to learn from them. Nevertheless, the continuum of violence ranging from acts of war to homicides to sexual violence to psychological pressure used against women and girls in the family, home and community needs to be seen holistically rather than as “fragmented stories of violence”. It is not enough to talk only about the most virulent forms of physical violence used

by boys and men; we need to understand how boys and young men are socialized into such behavior. At the same time, we need to discover and bring to light the factors that protect or assist boys and young men in rejecting socially-sanctioned violent behavior and gender-based violence. How can their experience be validated and replicated with other vulnerable boys? How can they be assisted to acquire the confidence to speak out about possible transformations in male behavior without feeling attacked by their male counterparts?

In our initial deliberations, we also touched on the important multiplier effect of the inter-generational transmission of violence. Studies have shown that individuals who were victims or witnesses of violence as children are strongly over represented among school dropouts, drug addicts, criminals, perpetrators of sexual abuse, etc. We needed to reach young men and to get them to talk sincerely about the issues they fear and face in assuming a defined male identity. This we knew required the creation of safe and intimate talking spaces over considerable periods of time. Teenage boys are notoriously silent on the subject of their lives and their feelings in large groups, and as we learned during this study, questions are dodged and curt answers mumbled. Through the use of the life histories methodology, we discovered that boys have deep and complex feelings about everything from family to girls to politics to violence; that they want to be understood; and they want to have the opportunity to tell their own stories.

A recent publication titled *Study of Social and Institutional Tolerance towards Gender-Based Violence in Colombia* (Programa Integral contra Violencias de Género, 2010), supported by the United Nations, provides valuable information for understanding the contexts in which young men mature and develop a sense of themselves as males as well as highlighting that despite the fact that women have gained access to education and the labour force, and their social status has increased during the last half century, it is also true that both sexes

maintain intact the view of their assigned historical roles. "The report states that although several important advances have been achieved in exposing gender-based violence (GBV) in Colombia, it is essential to recognize that this type of violence (GBV) understood in this case as violence exercised by males against women and girls, is a generalized phenomenon. While it may be true that in the poorer social strata (1, 2, and 3 in Colombia) men tend to use more punching and slapping of women and girls, it is also true that psychological abuse is common in strata 4, 5 and 6, says the report. It was clear that both men and women contributed to these conclusions, and therefore, both need to be part of the solution, say the authors. The study concludes by insisting that the institutions that could most advance the cause of gender equality and violence reduction, namely health and educational institutions, are precisely those that most lend credence to beliefs and attitudes that negatively affect transformation in this regard. For the purposes of our study and for future gender equality work by Save the Children, this observation is important and timely.

2.2. Bogotá: the locality of Usme



The area of Usme, Administrative Zone 5 of the capital city of Bogotá, is connected to the easternmost range of the Andes Mountains and the rural area known as Sumapaz, formerly one of the most



Credit: Save the Children

important strongholds of the FARC¹ insurgency. A distinguishing feature of Usme, therefore, is its rural and urban composition; it includes 17 high-altitude peasant communities as well as a large area of urban expansion currently made up of densely-populated neighborhoods divided into seven Zonal Planning Units that have developed progressively over time, some of them in terrain of difficult access. Administratively and for tax purposes, Bogotá has been stratified from Strata One, the poorest areas of the city and those most lacking in public services, to Strata Six representing the wealthiest areas of the city, barely distinguishable from sophisticated neighborhoods in Europe and North America.. Usme, administratively, economically, and culturally responds principally to Strata Two, while a small percent of the population, especially that bordering on rural areas, corresponds to Strata One. According to the latest statistics, Usme has 252,817 inhabitants, of which 59% is under 18 years of age. Of every 100 persons within the age-range of income earning capacity, 59 are dependents.

Usme is the fourth locality in Bogotá in terms of reception of families forcefully displaced by the internal armed conflict. Its proximity to a one-time rural stronghold of the historic insurgent organization, the FARC, and its strategic geographic position as a major corridor into the heart of Bogotá has resulted in moments of intense militarization over the years. As in almost all marginalized areas of the city, the presence of armed gangs related to micro-level drug trafficking and extortion of local businesses has caused an increasing number of casualties among the local population and disrupted students' lives both within and outside schools. Indeed, in 2009, the Secretary of Education for the city of Bogotá warned that students' lives were at risk as they travelled to and from school due to the presence of organized gangs. A study by Los Andes University revealed that 50% of students had been victims of robbery or attacks on their way to and from school in Bogotá. A city councilor denounced that "members of armed gangs who wait for children and youth to exit their schools often have their own young informants inside.

1. FARC refers to the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia.

They intimidate students to hand over something of value from their homes when there is nothing left to be taken off their bodies.”²

Over the years, traditional community organizing combined with solidarity activities undertaken by several NGO's has managed to weave diverse social networks in the area of Usme. However, recent violence perpetrated by numerous gangs in order to monopolize illicit economic activities related to drug trafficking has severely weakened the social fabric. The culture of “anything goes” and the fast pace associated with drug profits have disrupted organizational processes, limited the formation of others, and increased levels of fear among inhabitants who formerly might have been inclined to become involved in community affairs. A high level of sexual and family violence has been documented by local authorities and human rights organizations in recent years; indeed one of the most serious problems reported by the Usme teachers refers to violence suffered by their students in their homes.

Schools and masculinity

The recent tendency in Colombia to build huge mega schools in major cities responds to the increasing demand for educational services and the need to meet State coverage targets. In the case of Usme, this has certainly been the case, and is a factor which had direct repercussions in the development of this study. Contrary to the participating schools in Medellín, which tended to be small, poorly equipped, and over-crowded, but where many teachers, with the direct support of CEDECIS, had developed concerned, caring, and consistent relationships with students and their families, participating schools in Usme were mammoth and distant from community dynamics. Here despite the fact that SIEMBRA has worked for many years in the schools implementing innovative and alternative pedagogical programs, the distance between teachers and students, between schools and the community, and among the students themselves was clear.

2. Martha Ordoñez, member of Bogotá City Council, reported in *El Tiempo* newspaper, June 16, 2009.

2.3. Medellín: Communes Six and Eight

Since the 1980's, entire areas of the city of Medellín have been subjected to the social and territorial control of a variety of illegal actors employing intimidation, extortion, threats, assassination, forced recruitment of youth, and forced displacement to ensure domination. In the period of the late 80's and early 90's, the most relevant actors



in the conflict were the urban militias and groups serving drug trafficking interests. Later, guerrilla organizations and paramilitary groups were at the center of the struggle for territorial control until the year 2003 when the Armed Forces staged a massive intervention in a particularly violent area of the city followed by the controversial³ demobilization of paramilitary groups involving more than 30,000 fighters. Several of the main paramilitary leaders were extradited to the United States on drug charges, and later fractured remnants of these paramilitary, explicitly linked to drug trafficking, assumed control over delinquent activities in the city. Due to the level of control exercised, the homicide

3. The demobilization of the paramilitary was governed by the Justice and Peace Law which generated intense criticism from Human Rights organizations who claimed that victims' rights under the Law were ignored.

rate decreased dramatically. However, in 2007, the dominant group, known as the Office of Envigado, unravelled and lost control over illegal activities, resulting in a reorganization of the criminal world, new struggles for control, and souring human rights violations. The consequences were particularly evident during 2009: “effective deterioration in the human security situation was evident from higher homicide rates, an increased number of attacks against property, and a series of other high-impact criminal activity. This worsening of the situation fed the resurgence of phantasms of the worst violence of the past, sharpening peoples’ perceptions that all is not well.”⁴ “The areas that have suffered the most are those with limited public spaces, greatest poverty, high unemployment, lack of education, housing deficits, and difficulties in accessing formal justice [...]”⁵

In Medellín, our research was conducted with male high school students (Commune 6) and boys and young men from a community organization (Commune 8) in hilly and marginalized upper edges of the city bordering on essentially rural settlements. Migratory and resettlement processes, which began during the 1930’s in the Commune 6, resulted from political violence in the countryside and the need to locate employment opportunities in urban centers. However, it was during the 1980’s, with the worsening political and social violence in rural areas that this Commune began to take on its current configuration due to increased forced displacement.

The Commune 6 is composed of 12 neighbourhoods or “barrios”, representing 8.58% of the total population of the city of Medellín. The population density is 525 people per hectare, a number considerably higher than the city average, and constituting the highest population density in Medellín. Only half

of the children who register in primary school go on to secondary (Grades 6 to 11) and of these only 25% graduate from high school, meaning that the number of unemployed and underemployed young people is a major social challenge. The lack of economic resources is cited as the most significant reason for leaving school (41%) and the second reason is the lack of interest (11.7%).⁶ In the upper reaches of the Commune especially, where the schools involved in this project are located, young people and their families, forcefully displaced from the countryside, form a significant part of the population. The upper edges of the Commune 6 have been incorporated into the Territorial Organizational Plan, but paradoxically, their inclusion in city statistics disguises the fact that many people still have limited access to domestic public services, dignified housing, adequate education facilities, and health care. It is no secret that from the 1980’s onwards, young people in the Commune Six were viewed as dangerous and forcefully displaced adolescents, even more so, as permanent confrontation involving a significant number of youth, not necessarily from the area, worsened.

Part of the on-going violence in the Commune 6 has been related to its strategic position as a corridor for drug shipments to the west and north of the department of Antioquia. “Currently, confrontation between competing gangs has caused the death of many young men, school drop-outs, the utilization of boys, girls, and adolescents by armed actors, forced urban displacement, and generalized fear and panic among community members due to indiscriminate attacks and limitations on movement due to the establishment of unmarked territorial borders defined by the different armed groups”.⁷

4. From CEDECIS final report: “La violencia en Medellín”, editorial in *El Espectador newspaper*, April 21, 2009.

5. Jiménez Morales, Germán. “Violencia en Medellín equivale a borrar del mapa un municipio” in *El Colombiano newspaper*, May 6, 2002; from CEDECIS final report.

6. Mayor’s Office of Medellín & Picacho con Futuro. (2009). Characterization of youth in situation of displacement in the Commune 6 Doce de Octubre. Medellín: Mayor’s Office of Medellín & Picacho con Futuro.

7. Personería de Medellín: Special Report No. 2; Commune 6: *New focus of territorial dispute by illegal groups*; taken from CEDECIS final report.

The presence of paramilitary groups since the 1990's has been responsible, first of all, for periods of confrontation with insurgent-supported militias and subsequently among delinquent gangs for control over territory, illicit economic activities associated with micro level drug sales, and extortion of local businesses such as urban transport, car wash establishments and small commercial enterprises.

Altos de la Torre and Pacífico (Commune 8) were established more recently during the 1990's by families forcefully displaced by the violence in the western part of Antioquia and in the area of Urabá in the north. Human settlements constituted illegally outside areas of formal jurisdiction means they lack State recognition. As a result, public services, basic infrastructure, adequate education and health services, investment in sanitation, and decent housing are unavailable. This is the case of Altos de la Torre (Commune 8), and even today the community continues to struggle to gain legal recognition. The illiteracy rate in this area is higher than the average for the city; unemployment is proportionally higher and the few existing jobs are related to seasonal and part-time work in the recycling, construction, domestic services, private security, street vending, and generally informal sectors. For inhabitants of Altos de la Torre, this lack of legal recognition severely limits their capacity to demand basic rights.

The age of the population in both project areas is proportionally younger than in the rest of the city. In Altos de la Torre, for example, half of the inhabitants are under 18 years of age.⁸ In both Communes, Six and Eight, the greatest asset has been community organizational capacity-. People have struggled to promote and protect their rights, resulting in a significant number of youth, social, and community groups with an important presence in

both areas. At the same time, however, these are communities that have suffered and continue to suffer inordinately from the impact of the armed conflict, especially, the Commune 6 which was seriously compromised by the intensification of the conflict towards the end of 2007 and continuing into 2010. There is a common story shared by the young men, their families, and communities in these two areas: they have been part of an intense migratory dynamic; all are sons and daughters, or grandsons and granddaughters of peasants who abandoned rural areas due to violence or the search for opportunities. While Altos de la Torre and Pacífico are relatively recent settlements struggling to be fully recognized as part of the city, the edges of the Commune 6 are older, having passed through a similar stage. At the margins of society, these communities have learned to work together in order to confront difficult situations; however, to be at the margins also facilitates the entry of illicit activities and illegal armed actors who use violence to get what they want.

8. Mesa de Trabajo por la Infancia (CEDECIS, ACDI, Save the Children). (2009 July). Censo Comunitario Altos de la Torre y Pacífico, zona 3-comuna 8. Proceso participativo de auto-reconocimiento de las condiciones de vida para la exigibilidad de derechos. Medellín: Mesa de Trabajo por la Infancia.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to get started on the research, Save the Children, CEDECIS, and SIEMBRA first needed to define shared assumptions, agree to a common research question, and develop a shared understanding of the categories of analysis. The development of the definitive Conceptual Framework was a “round-about” process, involving several discussions by email, site visits, and direct encounters among the staff of each organization. Taking into account none of us were academic research experts, nor experts in masculinity; that the participating partner NGO’s were located in different cities; and that the contexts in each case, although similar, demonstrated significant differences, the challenge was to narrow our overly-ambitious and somewhat ambiguous original proposal to a more manageable size. None of us could work full-time on the research, so the hiring of two young male psychologists to coordinate activities in Bogotá and Medellín on a half-time basis proved to be a valuable investment. The time spent clarifying concepts was extremely rich, as we shared relevant secondary sources of information, exchanged written discussion documents, held face-to-face meetings, and on occasions consulted with outside experts. We were determined from the outset that the process would be participatory and that we were not interested in experts who could whip up a few workshops, apply some questionnaires, and write the conclusions. Although we were consistently concerned about the quality of our work, we also wanted to own it and to engage young men in a respectful and participatory manner. The process itself would turn out to be as important as the conclusions.

3.1. Basic assumptions

To move ahead with the research we needed to clarify and reach consensus on some of our basic assumptions. Although the search for answers was frequently long we agreed to the following:

3.1.1. Social reality is a product of human intervention and an organizer of individual realities

Human beings experience social reality as a series of routines that go beyond their individual will and influence all aspects of their life’s (i.e.: language, meaning, behaviour, interests, beliefs, and attitudes). This “reality” is superimposed on our consciousness and the notion that we share it with others becomes a fact. With the passage of time the permanent repetition of certain behaviours may be regarded as legitimate. When this happens they become routines and norms and the actors’ that incur in them, role models.⁹ When individuals adopt a social reality in particular they internalize the roles, institutions and knowledge that make sense in their world. However, it should be highlighted that this reality is reversible and that we always maintain the capacity to approve and disapprove the categories constructed (i.e.: young men growing up in the conditions described above tend to view their reality as “natural”; however, in specific situations they are also able to question their confinement).

3.1.2. Difference based on gender

In daily life, males and females establish social relations, access resources, and exercise power differently; these differences are regarded as “natural” attributes (i.e.: women are generally relegated to the private sphere of the home and usually receive no economic benefit for the tasks they perform whereas men: tend to concentrate on making money (they usually earn more money than women), benefit from their superior physical force and social mobility and assume the role of providers. Likewise, women are generally viewed as victims of violence in public and private spheres and men are made responsible for the violence in

9. Idea from Berger & Luckmann (2005: 34-50). Quoted by Carlos Galvis in the final report from CEDECIS on the masculinity study.

both (though sometimes they can be regarded as victims of violence in the public domain as well)

Such generalizations of course need to be nuanced, especially in areas where modernizing elites have opened spaces that include women in politics, academia, corporate board rooms, and high-level management positions, partly as a result of decades of feminist struggle and partly because this simply makes good economic sense. Therefore, over the years, transformations in economic productive systems and the influence of the global women's movement have helped modify existing assumptions. As a result, men are slowly being obliged to re-think their roles and place in society and to re-conceptualize masculinity, especially hegemonic masculinity and what it means to be a man.

3.1.2.1 Gender as a social construction

Feminists argue that the historic origin of the inequality between men and women is based on a social construction of gender; analysis category that explains the different roles assigned to human beings according to their sex. In other words, depending on where you are born you are taught how to "be a man" or "a woman" and to behave accordingly.

Within this logic, gender is a form of social ordering that integrates ideas, institutions and roles, and situates individuals within a binary system of relationships based on their biological sex. However, masculinity and femininity can change over time. While the relationship between men, authority and hegemonic power, and the association between women, exclusion from power, and care of children and family have been constants in the history of the western world, it is also true that they have slowly changed in the last few decades as men and women broaden their understanding of gender.

This study, assumes that gender roles are the sum of many things (i.e.: behaviours, attitudes, activities, norms, obligations, and expectations assigned and

requested by societies and cultures depending on the sex of a person). However, to understand the cultural factors that determine a young man's identity is to understand that they learn their gender roles as they are growing, that they adopt them from their culture, parents, peers, school systems, media, customs, rules of the market, religion, etc. and that they can be modified.

Frequently "gender" is used indiscriminately and incorrectly to mean only "women"; too often we hear that a gender analysis or a gender focus is directed only to the empowerment of women. In our case, the empowerment of girls and women continues to be a priority; but, to generate conditions of gender equity and finally equality, the study takes for granted that men need to become actors in the process. Gender equality and gender equity are also sometimes used indiscriminately. According to most gender researchers, gender equity, should explain how equality is achieved (i.e.: gender equity proposals include specific measures directed to favor women and girls as a compensation until social equality is achieved). At the same time, in the social sciences, there are tensions between the principle of equality and the right to claim difference; individual and collective rights; and public responsibilities and respect for privacy and intimacy.

3.1.2.2. Masculinities

In the gender system women are generally subordinated to men (this concept is known as patriarchy and it is based on core concepts related to masculinity). Gender relations are therefore about the power relations between the sexes where the power of men is linked to their capacity to control women physically, financially, politically, emotionally, or intellectually.

Masculinity is a bond that glues men to the patriarchal world. By incorporating the forms of masculinity associated to their class, race, nationality, era, sexual orientation, and religion, men gain real benefits and an individual sense of self-worth. When growing up, they are granted a fantasy, in spite of

the powerlessness of their childhood they realize that they are part of that half of humanity with social power; their ability to incorporate the roles and grasp onto that power (even if, at first it exists only in their imagination and play) is central to the development of their personality.¹⁰

The concept of masculinity is located within a system of gender relations that considers only two sexes and cuts across all our social frameworks. Males are forced to do, achieve, act, repress their emotions and deny any feminine characteristics. Rational thought is imposed on them as the superior form of intelligence, and sexuality as the principal way of demonstrating manhood. However, assuming this “masculine” role is not easy because they have to “struggle all the time for the big prize” and they are subjected to fear and danger.

It is impossible that men consistently and successfully assume this patriarchal and hegemonic masculine role in its entirety that is why we talk about masculinities. Our research with young men recognizes this system of power, but we also looked for other less visible forms that would help us understand how male identities are built; our research was designed to draw out the underlying dynamics because we were convinced that it would help us find ways to involve young men in the construction of gender equality. As Kaufman points out, the existence of different masculinities means that there are different relationships to patriarchy, and just as patriarchy oppresses women, it also oppresses men. Researchers such as Robert Connell have also explored the existence of other masculinities structured between those that are hegemonic and those that are subordinate. However, we have to remember men (and women) are not homogeneous groups, even though part of what keeps men in favor of the status quo is the power and privilege they have.

3.2 Defining the research question

The original proposal was developed by Save the Children; however, our partners CEDECIS and SIEMBRA, helped redefine the research question, analytical categories and methodologies. The question investigated was: What are the main cultural factors identified by the young people involved that shape the identity of young men in contexts of marginalization and violence?

Given that identity is an experience of dynamic self knowledge creation, crisscrossed by moments of crisis that oblige individuals to adapt to changes, the impact of displacement and socio-political violence, as was the case for many of our research subjects, for example, placed a defining limit on their capacities. In these situations, young men are obliged to draw on all their personal resources to overcome what are frequently devastating situations. With a limited sense of autonomy, the rupture of personal histories and life projects, and with the unraveling of the “social fabric” that sustained their knowledge of self, individuals and communities affected by socio-political violence are obliged “to begin again” in contexts sometimes overtly hostile to them. Children and youth are especially affected; they are more vulnerable at the moment of confronting a disaster. On the one hand, since they are still developing their socialization skills they are unable to understand what has happened. Likewise, their ability to confront adverse situations is at an incipient stage. Boys and girls are sensitive to the effects of violence on their parents, and the resulting family and social disorganization, presents a major challenge for them. As a consequence, young people, and especially young men, become vulnerable to the reproduction of violent and authoritarian practices that become familiar and “natural” in contexts of socio-political violence and upheaval.

Furthermore, the scars of social and political violence reinforce certain patriarchal characteristics

10. Kaufman, Michael (2003).

such as forced silence, the justification of violent and authoritarian behavior, aggressiveness, and the exacerbation of habits related to the use of power in order to show who is strongest.

3.3. Protagonists of the research

Once the research question and main assumptions were identified, we constructed a generic definition of the young males living in targeted neighborhoods in two cities. Although conditions in Usme in Bogotá and in Communes 6 and 8 in Medellín are not identical, we felt the characteristics were sufficiently common to generalize findings:

- The contexts of marginalization and violence were almost the same in the schools identified and the subjects were clearly young men living in poverty and violence.
- In Medellín, many came originally from rural areas, forced to migrate with their families to the city, displaced by the violence or in search of increased earning capacity and improved living conditions.
- In Usme, fewer young men were actual migrants from rural Colombia, but all were conscious of the issue of forced displacement due to the conflict, and in fact, Usme was one of the main reception centers in Bogotá for the forcefully displaced.
- They all lived in contexts of limited possibilities of being included in modern urban life and where the use of different forms of violence in order to carve out a space, was sanctioned.
- The young men selected to participate in the project in Usme were between 12 and 18 years and in Medellín between 13 and 23 years old.



Credit: Corporation CEDECIS

3.4. Categories of analysis

Four categories of analysis were selected, each of the participating organizations dealing with the first three, and the fourth an option between masculinity and consensus-building participation (CEDECIS) and the role of the mass media in the construction of masculinity among young men (SIEMBRA).

3.4.1. Gender roles: what are the norms, behaviors and discourse expected of individuals biologically defined as men?

We understood gender roles as a system of norms, conventions, behaviors, and functions attributable to those who possess determined biological characteristics in a given social structure. This research, makes specific reference to the expectations of young men in Communes 6 and 8 (Medellín) and Usme (Bogotá). The category of "gender role" would look at the part these young men played within their social networks as well as their individual and collective imaginings.

3.4.2. Power: how do young men direct their own actions and those of others? To whom and where are they directed?

Power is at the very centre of the masculine role, it is the freedom to do what he wants, when he wants, and how he wants; it is the tie that binds the soft and hard masculine positions. It is the first step towards the adoption of the male role. It is from this conception of power that symmetrical relations are generated between men, and asymmetrical relations between men and women. While men tend to mutually recognize each other as valid interlocutors, they place women in an inferior position. When women develop their own understanding or assume atti-

tudes that situate them as valid interlocutors, vis-à-vis males, they feel threatened and avoid such situations so the status quo is not disturbed.

3.4.3. Gender equality: what are the perceptions of the young men involved in the research regarding equality and difference?

We understood gender equality to mean the existence of social, political, cultural, and economic conditions which guarantee that males and females have equal access to rights and responsibilities without being subjected to and limited by stereotypes or prejudices associated with gender. Gender equality implies profound transformations of those aspects that sustain inequitable relationships traditionally established between men and women. We would examine how young men in the study act individually and collectively according to their particular interests and their perceptions regarding the possibility of equal access to rights and responsibilities in each context, for women and for men. Does the fact that you are a young woman or a young man imply you receive different treatment in the context of your daily life (family, school, community, peer group)? In what way? As a young woman or a young man, what rights are you not allowed to exercise and why do you think this is so? What rights denied to you, as a young man or as a young woman, would you like to be able to exercise? Who are more responsible, young men or young women, for the existence of unequal relations between the sexes? Why?

3.4.4. For CEDECIS: Participation: how do young men negotiate with other social actors to construct consensus in their various communities?

We understood participation to refer to the process that occurs among different individuals or organizations in a specific context of formulating,

discussing, and adopting consensus. Participation implies a communicative and argumentative exercise in which interaction occurs among the particular interests of each actor in order to define a course of action. During the investigation we wanted to look at the communicative and argumentative capacities of young men in constructing consensus. As a young man, explain to us why participation is important to you? What spaces (home, school, community, peer groups, youth organizations, cultural groups, church for example) do you participate in and why? What kinds of decisions are taken in these spaces and who takes these decisions? What participatory spaces are denied to you, as a young man? Why are you not allowed to participate in these spaces? Name spaces/places in which you would like to participate and are not currently doing so, and tell us why.

Although men “by nature” possess the authority to exercise control in all spheres of society, not all men have access to this possibility. In order to exercise control, and therefore, to transform social conditions, certain conditions are required. In the contexts of our young men, such conditions are enshrined with the “guys” (“muchachos”) and the politicians. Since not all men fall within these parameters, young men tend to restrict themselves to small neighborhood groups where they feel they really can have some influence among their peers. The possibility of transforming their apathy requires the confidence that other possibilities ex-



Credit: Save the Children

ist and for some, they will find ways to become involved in social movements, to get academic training, or to develop artistic capacities.

A few general questions related to the four categories were kept in mind during the research process and asked indirectly of participants, as follows:

- How do young men understand and deal with the fact that they have assumed an assigned role that ensures advantages, but at the same time generates problems?
- What is it like for young men to be in a position of domination or power from which it is complicated to resign and to which they hang on to through authoritarian behaviours that limit democratic practices?
- What are the conditions that make the relation between young men and the use of violence a “natural” one? Under what circumstances do such relations break down? Are our assumptions more predictable in cases where youth live in contexts affected by violence and poverty?
- How do young men deal with those behaviours, attitudes, actions, and beliefs that are not generally associated with the male role?
- How is power conceived and used by male and female teachers, mothers and fathers in school and home settings?
- What are some of the perceived changes occurring in traditionally accepted asymmetrical gender roles/behaviour among young women and men in the research sites?
- How can we describe the comfort levels of boys with their ascribed roles?
- What are the positive factors in many adolescent boys’ lives that prevent them from using or becoming involved in different types of violence?

3.4.5. For SIEMBRA: how do mass media messages, aesthetics, and symbols affect the construction of identity among young men?

If one understands the present time from a media-based perspective as governed and influenced by different communication forms that permeate and influence the minds and the realities that each individual constructs builds, an analysis of the relationship between the media and the construction of male role models is of paramount importance. As Umberto Eco described in his book of essays "Travels in Higher Reality" the media addresses subjects from two different standpoints. Firstly, there is a negative (apocalyptic) relationship with those that belong in the past, have the need for authority and an imposed truth, are not creative and believe that the only truth is the truth taught by the media as a symbol of a counterculture and are not willing to accept any changes. An entire generation of individuals would belong to this first group. Secondly, there is a more positive relationship with (integrated) individuals who regard the media as a liberating, emancipating element. These are more critical, less alienated individuals that could be called 'digital natives', as they admit the messages sent by new technologies with pleasure and acceptance.

Understanding this twofold position requires that young males should be classified in the integrated individuals category since they are subjects who have grown up with the facts created by new technologies such as television set, since the day they were born. This is the result of the advertising displayed on TV, the possibility of communicating with anyone at any time by means of mobile phones, and the ability to own and play video games online and other new technologies.

As a young man, how would you describe the types of images used by the media (television, internet, and video games) to portray roles or representations of men and women? How do macho war-

rior images in Colombia affect the construction of gender identity? What images? Who creates them? How are they viewed? What purpose do they serve? Which images to you relate to positively and why? Which cause you discomfort and why? What importance do you feel the media plays in the construction of male identity? In the construction of gender relations? How has the media influenced your sense of your own identity? How has the media made you perceive yourself or behave, differently?

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research was based on concepts of Participatory Action Research and Popular Education, in the sense that the research subjects, namely the young men, as well as members of the partner organizations, were involved in developing the assumptions, definitions, and categories relative to the project; in analyzing the information gathered and providing feedback; for transforming and improving the process; and in assuming responsibility for final results. Early on in the process, we confirmed that the project was of an exploratory nature and bound by concepts of qualitative-interpretative participatory research. Knowledge production was viewed as a constructivist-interpretative process meaning it was not merely the summation of facts or happenings. The researcher him or herself was also a subject in the process and was involved in reconstructing and integrating the information received. The process was interactive and the relations between the researcher and the researched took on a communicational aspect.

The information gathered was mainly qualitative in nature, although SIEMBRA attempted to quantify data from individual surveys completed by a select group of boys, in addition to developing a qualitative narrative based on the same data. In both cases, i.e., that of SIEMBRA and CEDECIS, quantitative techniques were used early on in the process to draw out general perceptions about gender equality and masculinity in workshops, including boys and girls, while qualitative techniques were used to reach into specific lived experiences among smaller groups of young men.

Qualitative research, therefore, takes distance from the idea of objective neutrality, in the sense that both the researcher and the participants are subjectively involved with the issues at hand. It is research in which the “results” do not correspond to distanced and controlled observation.

On the contrary, qualitative research involves the joint construction of knowledge in which the researcher and the participants interact and together construct new “zones” of knowledge, new understandings of a common phenomena, and new questions and elaborations.

4.1. Research techniques

4.1.1. Surveys of qualitative nature

Both CEDECIS and SIEMBRA used structured individual questionnaires or surveys with groups of boys and girls that consisted of both open-ended and closed questions in order to collect information of a general nature concerning the concepts and categories of the research initiative and to construct a panorama of the level of awareness among young men and women of the categories of analysis. The application of the questionnaire was individual, either through an interview (in some cases with CEDECIS) or the filling out of a printed questionnaire (in the rest of the cases in CEDECIS and all of the SIEMBRA participants). Although information made available through the application of surveys is generally of a quantitative nature, modifications were introduced in our case that allowed for the collection of qualitative data as well. It was on the basis of the categories of analysis that the surveys were developed in each case, and given the number of open-ended questions, participants had ample opportunity to expand on their individual choices and to explain their opinions.

In the case of CEDECIS, 31 members of the youth organization, Construyendo Futuro, (20 males and 11 females) in the Commune 8, and 29 participants from the Educational Institution, El Picachito, in the Commune 6 (15 boys and 14 girls) filled out the survey. Confidentiality was guaranteed and each survey was marked as male or female for the purpose of systematization of the information.

In the case of SIEMBRA, 36 boys and girls from five educational institutions in Usme and with whom SIEMBRA had been working for several years filled out the initial survey.

4.1.2. Life stories

The methodology of life stories, used extensively by anthropologists in ethnographic research, and in our case, by CEDECIS, is a methodology of autobiographic story creation or, in other words, the subjective testimony of an individual. In order to implement the process of developing the life stories of 13 male youth research protagonists, several “meetings” or “story-telling” training sessions were held with the adult researchers (two members of the CEDECIS team and five school teachers, three of whom were women and two were men) who honed their skills in this particular methodology.

The life story technique does not involve a detailed and faithful biographic recounting of life's events; rather it concentrates on drawing out information from personal experience according to a series of questions developed by the researcher. As a technique, life stories move beyond viewing social actors as mere combinations of data and variables, transforming them into “subjects of complex configurations, as protagonists of social reality”.¹¹ The complexity surrounding individual protagonists is related, on the one hand, to the fact that each is imbued with an “automatic”, learned, and institutionalized discourse which he or she can control. On the other hand, the individual cannot consistently control his or her body language, the organization and rhythm of the discourse, nor the interpretations generated by the story. By emphasizing such elements, the life story methodology allowed the researchers associated with CEDECIS to understand each young man by observing through the cracks of what the informant controlled and did not control; of what each one said and did; of what was really experienced and what was remembered.

In summary, a life history is a first-person narrative elaborated by the researcher once the literal testimony provided by the informant has been organized. The informant is considered co-author of the text and consequently is entitled to introduce modifications in both style and content. In order to construct a life story, the initial phase, known as autobiographic story-telling, consists of the literal documenting of the sessions undertaken with the interviewee. The interviews are open and profound and can involve the use of personal objects and documents. When the phase of autobiographic story-telling is over, the researcher initiates the “construction phase” in which he or she writes up the concrete life story. The information is organized chronologically and thematically, irrelevant material is edited out, the oral story is adjusted to the satisfaction of the informant, and notes that contextualize the life story are introduced, including testimonies of other people within the individual universe of the participant in order to provide additional perspectives on the original testimony. Finally, the interview process is documented and the definitive text is elaborated.

Two CEDECIS staff, with the engagement of the five teachers mentioned previously, chose 13 young men between the ages of 13 and 23 from Commune 6 (7 students from three relatively small schools) and Commune 8 (5 from the Youth Group Construyendo Futuro and one who was studying in the local primary school) to participate in the construction of the life histories.

4.1.3. In depth interviews

In order to draw out testimony of a more subjective nature from young men participating in the research process in Usme (Bogotá), SIEMBRA used a qualitative technique known as personalized, in-depth interviews. The research coordinator drew up a list of tentative questions related to the Categories of Analysis and to the systematized information that had resulted from initial workshops involving both male and female students. These interviews were in reality conversations between the young male par-

11. Pujadas (2000: 127); from CEDECIS Final report

ticipants and the researcher, undertaken without time pressures and allowing for considerable digression if necessary. Each interview was documented and a process of cross-referencing and definition of sub-categories, resulting from the information collected, was completed.

SIEMBRA attempted to quantify the data resulting from the interviews, albeit without the sophisticated rigor of quantitative research techniques. However, the interpretative exercise involving analysis of the huge amount of information generated by the interview process was the basis for SIEMBRA'S qualitative final report pertaining to the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and norms related to four Categories of Analysis. Thirty (30) young male participants were chosen from five educational institutions in the municipality of Usme with which SIEMBRA had developed close working relationships. Although some direct quotes from the interviewed youth were recorded and preserved, they are fewer in number than in the case of the life histories, a methodology that involved the literal transcription of each "interview" session.

Five teachers from participating educational institutions in Usme originally indicated interest in the study and willingness to facilitate parts of the process. They attended one workshop at the beginning of 2009 but their on-going participation was thwarted by onerous bureaucratic processes associated with obtaining permissions in mega schools housing thousands of students and hundreds of teachers. As has been mentioned earlier in this text, relationships between educational administrators and teachers, between teachers and students, and among students is much more complicated in these new gigantic educational structures than in the small community-based supported school evidently becoming a relic of the past.

4.2. Description of the process

The research process can be divided into six stages, described briefly as follows:

- **Phase one**, as has already been mentioned, involved arriving at a common understanding of the long-term goal and purpose of the project proposed originally by Save the Children Canada, followed by a collectively arrived at definition of the Research Question, Assumptions, Categories of Analysis, Participant Universe, Methodology and Research Instruments. During this stage, the circulation and discussion of relevant second-source documentation was a significant step in the process. Assuming responsibility for a study of masculinity, when our experience in working on gender equality had meant essentially empowering women in order to deal with the unequal power relationships, required in depth study and discussion. Bibliographic references were developed during this period and continued to be added to throughout the remainder of the research process. The possibility of actively engaging with boys and young men in gender equality work was an idea received with interest on the part of the two participating partner organizations, notwithstanding warnings issued by feminists that we would be re-directing scarce financial and human resources away from the real victims of patriarchy and gender inequality.

- **Phase two** included initial workshops with relatively large groups of boys and girls in both Medellín and Bogotá in order to, as has been explained, draw out general information of their understanding of the Categories of Analysis. This phase also included the application of questionnaires and surveys to be subsequently filled out confidentially and individually by approximately 60 boys from Medellín and Bogotá. Finally, the systematization of the responses by both girls and boys in the initial workshops and by boys involved in the questionnaire/survey provided the basis for a first formal presentation of partial

findings and results as well as the definition of challenges and modifications required for the following stage.

- **Phase three** involved a workshop held in the town of Mariquita, half way between Bogotá and Medellín, and attended by Save the Children, CEDECIS, and SIEMBRA staff involved in the project as well as by ten teachers from Medellín (schools in the Commune 6) and Bogotá (Usme). The original proposal was reviewed by all and presentations by CEDECIS and SIEMBRA indicated the process and progress to date. Presentations were based on the Categories of Analysis and each organization provided systematized information resulting from the initial workshops and questionnaires/surveys. One of the major decisions taken during the workshop had to do with the research techniques being used. It was clear we needed techniques that would transcend the superficial and stereotypical information provided by the young men regarding gender roles and gender equality. We felt we were not reaching the subjective experiences of the youth and that the answers to the survey questions were, for the most part, predictable and did not touch on the complexities of individual lives. While the main tenets of the original proposal were reaffirmed during the encounter in Mariquita, we agreed that CEDECIS would choose a relatively small number of boys to engage with the life story process and that SIEMBRA would undertake 30 individual in-depth interviews, techniques described previously in this document.

- **Phase four** was an intense ten month period of information collection and data analysis, as CEDECIS proceeded to engage in the life history process, involving first of all training of the research team by a local university professor in the conceptual framework and practical application of the technique, and the realization of over 40 conversational sessions with 13 young men. Likewise, SIEMBRA proceeded to undertake 30 in-depth individual interviews, based on a loosely constructed framework of questions dealing with the Analytical Categories. What followed in both cases was

the systematization of the information, followed by the elaboration of tentative results of the research process.

- **Phase five** involved the hiring of an outside consultant to systematize our experience and to push our thinking as deeply as possible. Carlos Jimenez, a psychologist who has worked extensively with youth and gender-related issues, was charged with coordinating a final workshop with the young men who had been involved in the last phase of the research and for producing a systematization document, representing a detailed “memory” of the process based on the written text of the original project, progress reports prepared along the way, systematizations by CEDECIS and SIEMBRA of the questionnaires used with male and female youth during Phase Two, the memory of the Mariquita workshop and the presentations prepared by SIEMBRA and CEDECIS, each life history produced by CEDECIS, the systematization of the in-depth individual interviews done by SIEMBRA; and finally the contributions from the young men directly as protagonists of the final workshop. This systematization process was crucial in allowing us to understand the richness of the process through new eyes and other lenses.

Our facilitator was clear that his role was to present: i) a narrative synthesis of the research based on the contributions of both the young men and the professionals in charge of the process in CEDECIS and SIEMBRA; ii) the major findings from the point of view of an external consultant; and iii) conclusions and recommendations. The decision to embark on a process of systematization was not intended to be a substitute for final reports from each setting but rather an external “bird’s eye view” of the overall project from its initial to its final stages. Specific additional categories were elaborated by the consultant to systematize information from the final workshop with the young men and this helped to deepen and broaden our thinking beyond the original Categories of Analysis. The categories used by the consultant in the systematization were as follows:



Credit: Corporation SIEMBRA

Nature of the discourse: This section addresses the fact of whether young men's discourses about "being men" are regarded as a natural fact determined by birth or somehow perceived as a socio-cultural construction.

Imaginary roles: This category involves an explicit understanding of three further categories by young subjects: (i) anatomical sexual difference whereby one understands that there are differences between male and female bodies (penis/vagina); (ii) sex, whereby they are taught to understand that there are a number of socio-cultural roles (imaginary meanings) attributed to anatomic sexual differences; and (iii) gender, such being understood as a theoretical/conceptual device whereby individuals construe the various sexual experiences in order to transform them into a landscape where equality prevails. The term 'imaginary role' therefore means that human beings, i.e. males and females all belong to one and the same community,

to a unique history, to a single social order inasmuch as we are assigned/assign ourselves specific, concrete institutions such as family, religion, and sex, amongst others¹².

Prevailing feelings addresses the wide range of "shades" that prevail in young men's feelings about living in this world, as expressed by young subjects of the research, whether said feelings are directly associated with the identified roles involved in "being a man."

Female images and male images: these categories tell us what young males mean when they talk about men and women.

Impact of education environments addresses the wide range of impacts of the various education environments on the configuration of ways to "be a man" as told by both the young men and the reports by partners.

Socialisation dynamics: This category addresses young men's stories about their family relationships and/or those relationships that had a great impact on their socialisation processes.

Father and mother figures: This category addresses young people's perceptions concerning mother and father figures in their socialisation contexts and the relevance of such figures to their own identification.

12. These categories are consistent with the categories introduced in: Santos (2009).

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The core findings of the qualitative research process are discussed below and have been divided into two sections. The first one is based on the entire research methods that were used, as well as on the summarised documents that were prepared by CEDESIS and SIEMBRA, and has been arranged according to the input analysis categories. The second section covers the exercise designed to systematise the entire research process, together with a final workshop with all of the young people and entities that participated in the project and has been arranged according to a number of emerging categories.

Except where strictly necessary, this document will not refer to specific individuals or groups that play a leading role in the imagery and practices described herein for purposes of describing the overall trends that were identified as the basis for constructing and experiencing masculinity.

5.1. Input categories

The input categories that constituted the project's analysis units are taken up again at this stage: gender roles, power plays, gender equality, participation, and mass media

5.1.1. Gender roles

The identified roles are supported by a male predominance pattern based on the premise that women are weak and sensitive whereas strength and initiative are traits peculiar to males: a “soft” stance (“the gentleman”) vis-à-vis a “tough” stance (“the tough guy”). These stances become separated, however, in contexts such as expressing feelings, managing aggressiveness, and acknowledging equality: the “tough” male does not express his feelings; he takes authoritarian –or even violent– stances to exert control over his partner and children and avoids being manipulated –particularly by females. Hence the importance of not falling in love and belonging to a “turf”, i.e. a commitment-free sexual and affective relationship enables the male to avoid the suffering involved in being dependent upon female desire. On the other hand, the “gentlemanly” individual is not aggressive, does



Credit: Corporation CEDECIS

not mistreat women but shows them affection and is ready to acknowledge their abilities instead.

“Tough” males are prone to violence and are therefore inclined to display bad behaviours, i.e. using foul language, commit crimes or injure others. Such behaviour pigeonholes them into specific male categories: “the guys” (illegal armed actors), or “junkies” (controlled-substance users). The pressure brought to bear on males to show their strength and leadership skills has to do with the fact that they are expected to be productive and independent, as opposed to women, who are perceived as unproductive and therefore dependent.

Social advantages and disadvantages of the male role

One of the advantages that young boys find in their roles as males is that they are allowed to stay out until late at night and not get scolded for it. While on the street they are also allowed to do things that women are forbidden from doing, e.g. urinate on the street. Furthermore, they are not required to carry their children as they don't get pregnant. Their word carries a lot of weight within society and they are able to do tough jobs.

Disadvantages include their lack of housework skills, which makes them dependent on females, as well as their need to adopt a “tough” stance, which constrains their emotional expressiveness, thereby making it hard to understand what they feel and think. “Tough” males tend to be reckless and are therefore prone to accidents and injuries, as well as to commit crimes that can seriously affect their interpersonal and family relationships. Moreover, their need for control can overburden them with responsibilities and lead them to exhaustion due to overwork as they are expected to be excellent providers, which in turn deprives them of further personal development opportunities such as going to school.

Permanence and change

The above-mentioned gender roles – “tough” man and “soft” man – are paths that are frequently chosen by males and are dependent on specific contexts.

The former usually gets recognition in schools, neighbourhoods, and conflict-riddled rural and urban settings where many participants have spent their lives. Peers are a significant means of reinforcing such role.

The “tough” guy is very self-conscious of the tone of his voice and his body language (low-pitched voice, well-built, “Yankee”-type body), and loves sports (soccer). He tends to choose tough jobs and/or serving in the armed forces and is aware of his role as head of the household – he is the master, protector, provider and defender of his partner and his children. “Tough” males all have these traits. At the same time, Young males construct their male identity – and shun their feminine side – by openly discriminating homosexuality, as well as effeminate behaviour in males and masculine behaviour in females. Furthermore, their ideal lovers/partners are women who submit to the whim of their men. Whenever a woman tries to break that cliché the male experiences a number of feelings that range from amazement to anger.

The possibility of stepping beyond the boundaries of this role in a feasible, not always consistent fashion depends on a number of factors such as life-threatening conditions or retaliations from “tough” males; close relationships with females; involvement in work or art activities commonly associated with females; and family settings where the role of “soft” males is valued by women heads of households and who provide for their families and with unemployed fathers who avoid their responsibilities or are unable to meet them.

More substantial changes in men require that they go beyond their everyday thoughts about themselves and acknowledge a wider range of potentials – a condition that is not always easy to meet because of their situations as residents of neighbourhoods that are seriously affected by violence and poverty. For many of these young men the changes that took place required a combination of several factors – access to school and community settings, identifying skills and talents, many of which were artistic, and training processes designed to help them to discern new meanings in their lives.

5.1.2. power Female and male power scenarios

Males believe that they hold power “by nature” – for the mere fact of being males. The father’s position within the household is one of power because the “mere fact of being a man” entitles him to order his wife and children around. This usually coincides with the family’s financial dependence on the male.

School directors and teachers have the authority to give orders to their students. The power of males is, however, more evident in schools. Student council members usually have power, as do male students – particularly aggressive, disruptive gang members. As for neighbourhoods, there are two major power actors: “the guys” – members of illegal armed groups – that use weapons to exert

control over an entire neighbourhood, and community-based organisations that undertake actions to benefit the population.

Although subordinated as a result of both tradition and financial dependence, women have power in their own homes as “ladies of the house” and can get power in supportive, group entrepreneurial settings such as women’s organisations. Women who endeavour to get ahead can rise to positions of power in any walk of life. However, they need to improve their self-confidence; believe that they can better themselves without having a man by their side; enforce their rights, dare to speak out, become academically successful, and succeed in traditional, male-dominated settings to demand respect.

Women’s and children’s subordination to men is justified by the fact that they are financially depen-



Credit: Save the Children

dent on men, who have classically held the role of providers. Such subordination often results in abuse and humiliation.

As for the workplace, more men than women are employed and their physical strength enables them to perform heavy tasks. While on the street males feel more powerful because they feel that they are entitled and prepared to experience and enjoy street life. Men also feel that being streetwise gives them the ability to protect themselves from danger.

Freedom is power

Just by being called 'men' these individuals are granted the freedom to do what they want, when they want, how they want. This makes them feel more powerful than women, who supposedly sacrifice their own freedom for men's sake. This results in overestimated "male" behaviours and actions, whilst "female" behaviours and actions are underestimated. Everyday exercise of power by males is perceived as "normal", it's the way things are. However, the extent to which young men identify with these premises varies depending on how they each have made use of their freedom in their lives, as well as on their personal experiences and relationships.

For example, there is a mixture of fear and admiration vis-à-vis "guys", i.e. individuals involved in illegal activities in their neighbourhoods, where they dispense justice by their own hand at their convenience. These individuals live life on the fast lane—substance abuse, easy money, popularity with women, recklessness and the ability to get rid of their enemies all contribute to their behaviour. In fact, communities often empower them to dispense justice and view them as "neighbourhood guards", since the State doesn't seem prepared to take action when immediate action is required. In addition, people who get involved in neighbourhood conflicts usually expect "exemplary" sanctions and "final" solutions that cannot always be legally obtained.

Some young men, however, undertake roles that are contrary to those of "the guys." They are usually highly critical of the abuses of power committed by some men and choose to look beyond "tradition", i.e. they disagree with the common belief that males deserve to have the "predominant" role.

Factors that encourage the emergence of critical stances

Strong bonds with significant people whose well-being is a relevant matter that gives them the chance to make choices.

Identification models that break away from certain elements of the traditional male role and are present in various settings: the home, the school, the workplace, and community-based organisations.

When boys understand that they have abilities that they can use they begin to look for ways to make the best of them—not only on an individual but on a collective basis. This is the reason that many of the young men that were interviewed expressed their interest in higher education, community work and art.

Just as peers can encourage boys' identification with the male role, they can also encourage the relinquishing of said role by establishing affective bonds, sharing social-change ideals, discovering each other's potentials and openly voicing their contempt for the figure of "the guy", which often causes mixed reactions in their own contexts.

5.1.3.

Gender equality

women's rights

According to the perceptions of young males, women's right to freedom of expression is often violated, particularly in male-dominated settings—community life and politics, where they are usually ignored and deprived of the chance to decide



Credit: Corporation CEDECIS

Men's rights

As for violations of men's rights, these are perceived as few or nonexistent as males are regarded as having power and control. However, a number of specific violations of men's rights were identified – their right to life; restricted access to jobs; forced recruitment; and the right to refuse to serve in the armed forces or to participate in community activities for personal appearance or racial origin reasons. Males can also find it hard to become involved in settings that are traditionally associated with women as a result of the long-standing cultural association of such activities with homosexuality.

for themselves. In spite of all this women's involvement in community, social, and political life has been gradually increasing. Furthermore, women's right to free development of personality is often violated as well – specifically their ability to move freely in public settings and establish interpersonal relationships, especially with men. This situation is justified by an ingrained belief that a woman's home is her "natural" place. Moreover, women often find that their right to sexuality is also restricted: social taboos, the exacerbation of women's image as sexual objects and restrictions to their will when they want to have sex which can ultimately turn them into victims of sexual abuse.

Women may find it hard to work away from home when their partners are jealous people. To make things worse, women who work are regarded as "weaker", thereby restricting women's job opportunities. Women are also the victims of violations of other rights such as the right to life, to freedom, to housing and to education.

Other factors that were mentioned were sexual abuse, particularly involving children; limited capacity building as a result of lack of access to education; physical abuse by female partners; restrictions on their rights to parenthood when men are unable to provide for their families; mockery for displaying sadness or affection; and being reproached for having simultaneous love affairs.

Towards gender equality

This goal demands that everyone experiences a number of deep changes. Males believe that women should change some traits inherent in their characters: jealousy, aggressiveness and arrogance (being 'conceited'.) In addition to planning for the future as they usually do, they should also give more thought to the problems at hand.

Men need to get rid of their male chauvinist habits and attitudes, such as the idea that they are the only ones capable of making decisions, that they are better than women or that they own women. Men must

also refrain from ignoring women, treating them disrespectfully and abusing them, and change their irresponsible behaviour, such as spending grocery money on liquor.

Consequently, males should be more respectful of females' opinions and make room for them in all settings. This will enable males to get to know women better as well as discover their qualities, as some men are beginning to do. However, gender equality will not be achieved by merely changing relationships between males and females. It also requires that women are able to fulfil their right to freely develop their personalities and are further provided with equal opportunities in terms of housing, education and jobs.

5.1.4. Participation

Assessment of gender-biased opinions

The research conducted –particularly the qualitative survey– shows a contrast between a reasonable perception that men's and women's opinions are both worthy and the actual subsistence of inequality. In fact, the premise is that men and women are equals, i.e. that they have the same rights and abilities, although descriptions and perceptions concerning the value of such view show that there is still a patriarchal imbalance in that field, which is not homogeneous in the various settings: It is described as negative for women in politics, less negative in the community and even less so in the home – where women are allowed to use their judgement as they please. Note, however, that even in the home women's opinions can be restricted as a result of factors such as shyness, unemployment, financial dependence, and male chauvinist behaviour by close males, which includes control and violence.

Gender-based scenarios

Any male who becomes involved in activities that have been traditionally undertaken by women

can lose social status and have his masculinity questioned as a result of beliefs that there are settings exclusively reserved to women and that men who become involved in those settings tend to become feminine or become homosexuals. Males' presence in such settings can also give rise to two different suspicions – that the presence of males is dictated by a male chauvinist attempt to hinder female autonomy or that it is an attempt to become sexually involved with the females who are present.

On the other hand, females who are involved in sports (soccer, billiards) or in community, political, workplace, business and/or military activities are usually discriminated against under the premise that they want to “be on the same level as men” and deny their female status, which can lead to their being called lesbians or worse yet, derogatory terms such as “dyke” or “tomboy”. On the other hand, women who mostly tend to keep the company of men are labelled as “bitches”, “sluts”, or “whores”.

On the other hand, women's arrival, permanence, and success in these spaces involve their decision to step out of the spaces that have been traditionally assigned to the “weaker sex” and become “tough”, i.e. to take on the challenge of bravely facing countless obstacles.

Mixed scenarios

There is a perceived increase of female involvement in community spaces and, by contrast, males are increasingly becoming apathetic. In school this ‘apathy’ can be explained by the fact that women are respectful of and obey authority and are often involved in situations that lead them to openly show their feelings, whereas men are less willing to yield to authority, they usually offload their responsibilities onto their partners and avoid any situations that require them to express their feelings.

Male involvement

Even though males have more freedom and approval than females when it comes to participating in social settings, not all males are able to make that choice. Participating is difficult because being heard and valued depends on their ability to “do what they want, when they want and how they want.” While there are many ways to channel power, only a few are socially accepted and therefore participation is restricted to just a few.

By way of example, the “guys” are highly overrated in both rural and urban contexts, even though they often threaten those involved in community work in their areas of influence. As a result many young people isolate themselves from any community work in their neighbourhoods and try to form small groups of friends with whom they have established close bonds that promote mutual help, protection, and confidence. Risk can become overwhelming and unless these young people begin to see a solution to change their poverty conditions or the authoritarian facets of power they are likely to become despondent.

Fortunately, when young people become aware that they can make decisions and that their views and actions are significant, the purported immutability of their contexts and the purported ineffectiveness of their actions become revitalised. This is reinforced by a deep understanding of the social and economic conditions that give rise to violence and poverty, as well as by acknowledging the harmful consequences of violence, which in turn opens a window of opportunity for social change and enables them to regard them as goals.

Several young participants stated that the changes that they experienced were associated with the large number of life choices that they found in youth groups or school or community-based organization processes. Some also mentioned weariness, lack of opportunities, or even emotional or existential crises arising out of their status as

“problem kids” in both their schools and their communities, although many said that their role as bullies had earned them the recognition of their classmates and peers. Their stories tell how “problem kids” who chose to renounce their role strengthened their capacities to promote initiatives within institutions, speak in public, and solve conflicts through mediation, whilst improving their academic performance.

5.1.5. Mass media

Most young people feel that the media promote gender stereotypes – Men: hard-working, good providers, male chauvinists. Women: submissive, loving, homemaker, nurturing. Men are domineering and violent: “Some show that men beat up women and yet women stay with their men.” While such stereotypes remain in young males’ perceptions, there are a number of attitudes and behaviours that break away with such stereotypes in practice. It is therefore important to acknowledge that young people are capable of choosing different possibilities and models.

As for boys who recognised that they identified with media characters, such identification is consistent with everyday male behaviour models and patterns. There were others, however, who said that they did not identify with any media characters because they felt unique and authentic and did not need to follow any models to determine one’s character

Representation of sexuality

The young men identified six different perceptions that did not fit the way that the media portray sexuality:

Sexual content: TV news bulletins, drama shows and commercials all contain nudity and sex scenes that are not appropriate for minors. The web was mentioned as a medium that contains too much pornography.

Sexual violence: The media depict aggressiveness and violence rather than sexuality.

Commercial sexualisation: sexuality is turned into a strategy to sell products, which involves the exploitation of the female body.

Expressing equality: sexuality is a demonstration of gender equality since it allows males and females to “show what each can do” and is also a way to “express themselves on an equal basis.”

Sex education: suggestions are made on how to have a healthy couple relationship; information on sexually transmitted diseases is provided. Young people can use the internet to research sex issues that are not addressed in school.

Promoting the bond between couples: Whether in soap operas or the web, sexuality is depicted as a natural part of sentimental relationships based on mutual respect between males and females.

5.2. Emerging categories

Some of the findings concerning the categories that emerged during the systematisation process whose short definitions have already been addressed in the methodology section are shared below: nature of the discourse, imaginary roles, prevailing feelings, images of men/images of women; the impact of education environments; socialisation dynamics; and mother and father figures.

5.2.1. Nature of the discourse

While a natural discourse about “being a man”, i.e. as both an unchangeable condition and a natural product is always present in the life stories, a mainly adulterated discourse seems to burst into the scene, whether it regards this condition as changeable or unchangeable. In the words of one of the young men:

...Many of us refuse to let ourselves be “educated”, i.e. ‘I’m doing do this because it’s the new trend.’ Or, ‘this is what I have to do’. Many people let their lives be dictated by appearances; by what other tell them to do instead of by what they really like (...) Men and

women play different roles within society because they think differently, act differently, have different ways to undertake initiatives and like to do different things.

5.2.2. Imaginary role:

“Be a man”

The distinction proposed in the methodology approach between the categories of anatomic sexual difference, imaginary meanings of such difference and gender enables one to understand the imaginary role mechanisms involved in “being a man”, which usually involve ritual social-recognition devices. The power of imaginary meanings lies in that they grant/deny access to experiences in many possible worlds. Accordingly, being part of the “masculine sex” and “being men” both determine a unique experience – they see life and act “as if” they belonged to the male community. When such role is played it becomes the key to understanding both personal and group experiences.

After being attributed a given sex by the family, it is during a child’s primary socialisation process that both parents act “as if” their baby is a male or a female. This is where the process of “being a man” begins – in child play and later in adolescence and youth. One boy talked about how he and his mates played at being soldiers and guerrilla troops and stated that “when you’re young you start playing war games and the time comes when you can’t find your way out.” Something that begins as a game “as if” ends up becoming a way of life. Children’s games are therefore far from naive – whether they play war games, ‘doctor’, ‘being a man’ or any other games, play dictates what be become to a large extent.

The life stories told by the young men in Medellín show that the imagery involved in ‘becoming a man’ in poor neighbourhoods is dictated by specific feelings and values that create a so-called “male community”. Some outstanding moments experienced by young males have to do with the army, soccer, gangs, the “guys” and, particularly, groups of friends.

These settings have a strong emotional and sentimental component and these groups are characterised by equality among peers and inequality where females are concerned.

5.2.3. Prevailing feelings

The process of building strong friendship, solidarity and complicity ties within the male community also creates feelings of equality between men, which become an equivalent of equals = males, as opposed to inferior beings = non-males = females. By the same token, “masculine” is associated with “being a man”, and therefore anything that is not in line with “masculine” organisation, valuation and emotional parameters is usually labelled as “feminine” and/or “inferior”. The fact is that women are perceived as organically structured beings in the private/domestic environment, whereas men set themselves up as a dominant in the political community sphere and in public environments which demands repeated demonstrations of manliness. Consequently, in some cases young men spend time with the above-mentioned groups trying to “be men” and “demonstrating their finesse” in all such groups.

The life stories that were gathered in Medellín talked about feelings that are hard to deal with –hate, anger, resentment, and desire for revenge–, whose objects can be accurately identified, e.g. an enemy of the entire community, although in general these feelings give no clues as to their motivations.

During a workshop held in Bogotá and Medellín that touched on punishment in various settings –the couple, the family, the neighbourhood, school and friends–, participants talked about everyday feelings such as hate and anger, which they have taught themselves not to express in public. Furthermore, they stated that they cannot express these feelings in their neighbourhoods as it might even put their lives at risk.

On the other hand, young interviewees in Bogotá stated that the emotional factors that lead males to

become violent are anger, envy, humiliation, hate distress, and weariness. Other answers refer to violence, male chauvinism and power as conditions peculiar to men and described males as territory-oriented, domineering, and willing to struggle to command respect.

5.2.4. Female images and male images

As far as females are concerned, tracking some of their life stories in Medellín resulted in the identification of a number of negative perceptions, e.g., sexually promiscuous, financially-driven, and seekers of powerful men, while positive expressions refer to sexless women and good mothers who are regarded as valuable as long as they remain associated with the home and domestic life.

As regards young men from Bogotá, when asked about the power that they exert over their girlfriends most young men state they protect them, make them think things over, give them advice and even make them change their habits. Relationships are based on obedience, control, and the setting of boundaries by the males. They also say that they are often rude as in the event that their girlfriends are unfaithful they will stand their ground and demand respect “as men.”

As for male imagery, while life stories in Medellín somewhat lack thematic consistency they still help to identify the “tough male” role, whereby “men” exert power to subdue others by means of violence and/or force. “Being a man” is also tantamount to not being a woman or not being gay, which may be further construed as not being weak, passive, or more precisely, not being homosexual –an image that involves a stigma. The answer: they need to avoid such stigma no matter what the cost is but it will always be possible to dish it out to others in order to label them as “not manly enough”.

Sometimes a friend will tell me: “Well, well, look at the little woman dancing!” So I answer: “Well, you’re a true

little woman because you like to sing romantic songs” (...). The fact that you like dancing doesn’t mean you’re gay but in the past, whenever I was in a relationship they would tell me: “Hey, that’s women’s stuff” (...). That’s the main reason I stopped dancing. Despite the fact that I liked it I just couldn’t do it. I never behaved like a homosexual or anything like that. I just lived my life. And I did like dancing. It was a way to express myself to the world, my town, my family, and my friends.

Young males in Bogotá know that they must control their feelings and displays of affection – mainly towards other males– because they might come across as homosexuals. Some say that they accept and respect homosexuals “so long as they don’t mess with them.”

Overall, young males from Bogotá say that they feel good and comfortable in their roles as men as a re-

sult of the advantages as compared to females: men are strong, they have freedom and authority, they do what they want, no one tells them what to do, they have more opportunities and do better in life.

5.2.5. Impact of education environments

While life stories in Medellín mention various personal education settings such as the army, the workplace and school, one surprising fact is the low importance that they give school in their lives. Only one subject underscored the importance of school. In his words, “Every day I’m filled with excitement about what I will be able to learn in school”, and yet another stated that in his school both male and female teachers suggest that boys and girls should become integrated in school activities.



Credit: Corporation CEDECIS

On the other hand, young males from Bogotá say that there is in schools a differential treatment based on gender: In some cases female teachers show favouritism towards girls while male teachers seem to like male students, although sometimes it also works the other way around. They also said that they do not identify any role models in school and that school rules have no impact on their lives.

5.2.6. Socialisation dynamics

As regards young people from Medellín, 69.6% of them live in "traditional family" models, of which 46.5% live with their mother and stepfather, and 21.3% live with both parents. As for the remaining 30.4%, they either live with their grandmother, only with their mother, or with different relatives. These young men have very high opinions of their mothers, vis-a-vis their opinions of their fathers and stepfathers.

As far as young men from Bogotá are concerned, 62.6% live under the so-called "traditional family" model. In this context 36.6% live with both parents; and 26% live with their mother and stepfather; 30% live only with the mother; 6.6% live with their grandparents and 3.3% live with their uncles and aunts.

5.2.7. Father and mother figures

The framework of the socialisation dynamics described above becomes a basis for an understanding enabling the review of young men's perceptions on both the father and the mother figures.

The father

Many of the young men from Medellín live (or have lived) with their stepfathers for long periods of time. Some have succeeded in establishing close relationships with them because their stepfathers are respectful of their mother's authority, help care for the younger children and are good providers. Other boys have difficult relationships with their stepfa-

thers. While those who remember having had some sort of contact with their biological fathers say they feel nostalgic, there are others who feel resentful towards their biological fathers for having left them. In some cases, the parents' separation severed significant bonds that had been built over the child's early years. In some cases the fathers had maintained a close, stable relationship with their children for many years and when interviewed some boys said that they got in touch with their fathers from time to time. Through these relationships the fathers have conveyed significant values, images and experiences that have enabled these boys to channel their possibilities for choice and action.

The present father

My dad is a great man. He doesn't say bad words; he doesn't drink or smoke or anything of the kind. He uses his Word and his example to encourage us to be like him, to refrain from using things without asking for permission, to mind our own business. My dad is loving, cheerful and playful. I love it when he sits to chat with us. (...) He tells us: "If you get a girl pregnant, you'd better do right by her or marry her (...). He tells us to be respectful, that you don't mistreat or abuse women, and that if you're in love with one you must treat her kindly and lovingly. (...) Sometimes my brothers and sisters don't obey my mom but when my dad gets home they sure obey him! Because it's my dad who calls the shots. He sets the rules and is in command! Even if he has to get angry once in a while.

The absent father

My relationship with my dad? What relationship? There is no relationship. He hasn't lived with us since I was one year old. I've only seen him twice (...). The first time I was about five. I run into him and he gave me 2,000 pesos. It was a lot of money at the time. The second time was three years ago. He came over for Christmas and gave me a Discman. That's the only present that my dad has ever given me. I love that Discman and you could say that it's my most valuable possession. What has my

dad's influence on my life been like? He's been absent. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if he had supported me more; if perhaps he had given me more opportunities like finishing school for instance. I also believe that I would have been more disciplined because dads are more about being disciplined. And you're more afraid of your dad than you are of your mom.

Young men from Bogotá state that they both fear and respect their parents. In some cases they even feel hostile because they see them as repressive, imposing figures. However, they speak of their parents in ambiguous terms, as though they say that they share the power with them and "care for them by teaching them to be good and responsible", they also stress that they both fathers and mothers.

The mother

In the life stories from Medellín, the mother figure is highly valued. She is in charge of household routine activities such as her children's food, cleanliness and behaviour, as well as of the relationships between them. If the mother is the head of the household she must take on all of the housework by herself. If she lives with a permanent partner her domestic chores remain intact.

The regulation of behaviours is underpinned by strong affection and intimacy bonds that the mother establishes with her children. To that extent such bonds are supported on agreement and exhortation, although at times it can also be exercised by means of shouting or even abuse. Young people agree to this kind of regulation since it is perceived and discussed by young people as a display of love. They value maternal roles and also establish relationships based on gratitude and indebtedness to their mothers because of the sacrifices involved in raising them.

A tough woman has no match because women never get tired. It's as if they had a battery that lasts a lifetime (...) My mother, for instance, works at a cafeteria and she's required to do all kinds of work there: sweep-

ing, mopping floors, clearing tables, washing dishes, do sums, waiting tables, pulling fries from the cooker. (...) She comes home exhausted every night and it's only natural. Yet she comes home dead tired –often with a bad headache– and asks: "How was your day, my children?" That's the reason that you have to care a lot for your mother. No matter how much pain she's in or how tired she is she'll always have time for her family. I can't say anything about single or childless women (...) Their lives are probably not too boring but a woman who is alone sounds rather bad.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

The following conclusions and recommendations from the study on masculinity come from a variety of sources that have been mentioned throughout this report:

Conversations, debates, and concrete life experiences among adults from CEDECIS, SIEMBRA and SCC involved in the study from its inception.

The study of secondary sources reflected in the attached bibliography.

Conceptual documents elaborated by the coordination team as the study progressed in order to increasingly improve the focus.

Reports of initial workshops, questionnaires, and group interviews with adolescent girls and boys.

Life histories implemented with young men in Medellín and in-depth individual interviews with adolescent boys in Bogotá.

The production of an audiovisual dealing with various representations of masculinity written and filmed by young men in Bogotá under the guidance of SIEMBRA.

Systematization of the research process elaborated by outside consultant, Carlos Jimenez.

A final workshop with our young male protagonists who provided definitive input to the categories of analysis and who were asked to comment on the importance of the study in their personal lives and their recommendations for future activities.

6.2. Conclusions

a) Our interpretation of the contributions of the young male subjects participating in the study in-

dicates that the meaning and construction of a masculine identity varies among different groups of boys, adolescents, and men within any particular culture at any particular time. Young men's experiences are structured by class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion and region of the country- the ways of assuming an imagined sense of one's masculinity within the "community of men" is not identical. Although there is no doubt that patriarchy is a dominant parameter for ordering discussion about the roles of men and boys in society, the assuming of a masculine identity is not monolithic, static, and immutable. We received clear evidence that the meaning of masculinity changed over the life course for most boys and men. If the meanings of masculinity are multiple and vary across generations, among men within any one cultural setting, and over their life cycles, then we cannot really speak of masculinity as an identical, constant, and universal identity, expressed and lived equally by all men.

b) While the male sense of shared power and privilege, often assumed unconsciously, associated with belonging to the "community of males" cannot be denied, we also need to recognize varied and changing definitions of masculinity. We must speak therefore of masculinities in the plural and is so doing acknowledge the specificity of men's experience as well as the ties that bind them and imbue them with a sense of power and uniqueness. The complexity of human nature and human behaviours and life projects are rapidly changing in a globalized world; certainly the stories of our interviewees, from relatively similar contexts and of approximately similar ages, reveal the innumerable and mutating factors, besides membership in the "community of males", that shaped their identity. Just as it is not possible to confine women to a single and uniform category, likewise, not all men can be reduced to one category of patriarchs.

c) Several young men do not fit the stereotypes of the macho warrior hero and violent individuals so we need to know what are the factors that favour the emergence of alternative forms of masculinity such as:

- Establishing close relationships with feminine figures or by becoming involved in activities that involve work and art forms frequently associated with women appears to be one of the ways. However, in such cases, as was the case of some young men in our study (two had chosen to become cheerleaders, for example), the social pressure on them for having transgressed “established” gender roles was unrelenting. Boys and young men who choose to develop alternative forms of assuming their masculine identity need to be assisted to “face the consequences” and to ensure their self esteem.
 - Family experiences, where the traditional roles of men and women are turned upside down or modified, can also allow young men to cross the hidden barriers of their “socially assigned” masculine representations; - women heads of households who become the main providers of family needs and men faced with unemployment who either avoid their responsibilities or who, in some cases, take on the role of caring for others. It should also be noted, however, that some adult men, faced with unemployment, may assume undesirable and violent behavior since they are incapable of assimilating the fact that they are incapable of providing for their families while their female partners assume traditional male roles. Such modifications in family relationships affect the ways boys see themselves and shape the manner in which they assume their identity as males.
 - Permanent and consistent affection expressed by adults towards boys and young men generates in them a sense of belonging and obliges them to consider the well being of their loved ones when choosing a life path. For this reason, family ties, falling in love, and the care of a child or other family member can facilitate the positioning of the young man in the “softer” masculine role. At the same time, manifestations of caring and affection may increase his capacity for self-care and may assist him in defining the parameters of what he desires in relation to other males and females whom he loves.
 - A young man’s group of friends can favor identification of a positive masculine role and his future transgression of the norms and standards. In the life stories with our young subjects, it was evident how diverse groups or organizations offered spaces and places where ideals and ideas can be shared and where individual potential can be affirmed. Important links involving affection and caring are established and these spaces offer young men the opportunity to broaden their options of “ways of being men”. The opposite is also true of course, but since we were not dealing with young men involved in cases of extreme violence, the potential negativity of some male groups which also respond to the need to belong were not as evident.
- d) d) The systematization process undertaken by the outside consultant also pointed to similar conclusions. He concluded that diverse versions of imagined visions and practices associated with “being male” were mentioned by the young men who participated in the study as they attempted to construct their identities and occupy a place in the social world in which they lived. However, the manner in which they located themselves in these imagined visions and practices was not uniform. Among the characteristics influencing the way these visions and practices were assumed, the following can be observed:
- Contexts reinforce the roles which form the base for the construction of a masculine identity, especially “tough roles”;
 - Poverty and discrimination, experienced by many of these young men, have created deep wounds, limiting their capacity to make decisions about their lives and to act;
 - Groups of friends are fundamental in the adoption of gender roles since they facilitate the establishment of agreements about what it means to “be male” and at the same time receive recognition when practices responding to the definitions are adopted.

e) In the many habitats where boys and adolescents live out their daily existence, the common identifying element of the masculine role is the idea that the male is the active element in the social system. The difference between the softer and the tougher positions assumed by males is related to what is possible for boys and men to do when they want and how they want. Each young man's subjective experience espouses a gamut of possibilities that include the following, as identified by the context of this study:

- the **“soft or weak male”** : those, for example who consistently provide for and care for their families and avoid involvement in violent incidents;
- the **“swaggering or bravado male”** who is competitive and violent: those adolescents, for example, who, in the school consistently defy the norms and are at the same time apathetic;
- the **“guys”** (“muchachos”): in the context of this study, they are illegal actors who use arms to dominate others and who inspire both resentments and admiration;
- the **“depraved”** (“viciosos”): similar to the “muchachos” but are those who consume illicit drugs other than alcohol and who are subjected to severe social stigmatization.

f) The majority of the young men involved in the research affirmed that males enjoy greater freedom and approval than females regarding issues of participation in public spaces. But this does not imply that all young men find this option open to them. To participate is often difficult since, according to our interviewees, the possibility of being listened to and taken into consideration depends to a great extent on being able to demonstrate their capacity to do what as they want, when they want, and how they want. Our young men's stories showed there were several routes for channeling power; however, only a few of these avenues receive social recognition. In this sense, the possibility of participation in socially recognized spaces is

limited given that the means for doing so are available only to the few. So while males invariably find the public sphere more readily available to them than is the case with females, our interviewees would insist that social and economic factors also play an important role.

g) The practices and world views of families appeared to exert considerable influence in the construction of male identity, especially since behaviors are established from a very early age. As a result, family traditions such as alcohol consumption, association with illegal armed actors, the use of violence to resolve conflicts, and the breakdown of “the sense of family” constituted important factors in the choices made by young men. On the other hand, a united and positive family atmosphere in which the “softer” masculine role is valued (a caring role) can also determine the ways in which young men are able to orient their lives.

h) Several of the young men who had experienced difficult contexts of public order clearly understood the social value attached to those who had taken on the role of “the muchachos”- young men belonging to groups with a paramilitary profile. Such groups place little value on negotiated agreements and instead privilege violent responses in almost any situation of conflict and joining such groups is one of the options open to young men in the neighborhoods of Bogotá and Medellín. At the same time, given this panorama, some young men may prefer to adopt a strategy of apparent indifference and isolation from any group, community or neighborhood organization and to take refuge in small groups of friends with whom links of friendships and intimacy have been established and which favor mutual assistance, protection, and confidence, as some of our subjects talked about. Still others take the decision to limit the formation of social relations in their neighborhoods in order to avoid becoming victims of violence; they prefer to have few friends and to stay away from the street to protect themselves. The point is that a context of social and political violence severely

limits young men's choices, so often what appears to be indifference, isolation, and insolence may be a mechanism of self defense in order to avoid being drawn into organized urban violence of one sort or another. These were some of the choices made by our participants, understanding that none were involved directly with illegal armed actors or gangs during the course of the study, although one young man abandoned the process precisely because he was enticed away by a "muchacho".

i) For many reasons, the possibility of expression, recognition, and advocacy that some young men have experienced in their small groups does not get transferred onto the larger public stage of the community. In the first place, the suffocating way that power is used to control the contexts in which our young male participants live means that any possibility of advocacy is extremely limited. Secondly, avenues that would allow for the transformation of these authoritarian forms of power and conditions of debilitating poverty, affecting the lives of young men, appear to be nowhere on the immediate horizon. When there appear to be no ways forward, interest in looking for and articulating them is transformed into indifference. Indifference favors confirmation of the reality of the context as it now exists: it is better to avoid serious efforts to try to change something that one believes to be unalterable and to assume, in such a context, the role of spectator. In other words, it is better to keep quiet because in a situation where it is thought nothing can change, where everything is inevitable, words are superfluous.

j) Homophobia often emerged as an issue for many of the young participants in the study. However, in the quieter times of in-depth conversations, it could be seen that the performance of exaggerated aggressive forms of masculinity may be driven by fear of being seen as feminine or gay. Homophobia refers not just to violent attitudes and behaviours against gay men, but to men's fears in general about having close intimate contact with other men. Homophobia and stereotypes of gay men as effeminate

also separate men from a deeper and more intimate relationship with each other:- the nurturing and loving part of them that is culturally defined as feminine. And it maintains men's distance from each other in ways that contribute to the dehumanization necessary for the expression of violence.

6.3. Recommendations

a) Develop curriculum for gender studies and gender equality in schools that include the study of masculinity, using a variety of disciplines and innovative learning materials where small transformations can be introduced. But first of all, teachers, both male and female need to be trained and they need to be helped to understand their individual ingrained practices and attitudes. Young people, men and women are interested in discussing issues of sexuality during adolescence and by using relevant and pertinent methodologies such as radio, TV, movies, video games, among others, students can be led to an in-depth study of gender inequality and how both males and females might assume more equalitarian and positive gender roles.

b) Gender equality training programs involving boys need to concretely recognize some implicit uneasiness in adopting the traditional male role and their inherent difficulty in verbalizing deep emotional experiences. Such programs, therefore, need to promote the recognition of the subjective life of boys and young men, so often hidden from view, as an important component of the totality of their experiences. These do not necessarily need to be catalogued as "masculine" or "feminine" so that points of encounter between males and females rather than differences could result.

c) We need to more fully understand the unique positions, needs, and motivations of young men. Instead of categorically blaming and shaming men, or using normative language not connected to men's concrete experiences of both power and vulnerability, we must find effective strategies to engage

with men's subjective experiences. Not all men use violence and those who do not have much to offer in this learning process. We need to clearly identify and understand such factors, identified by young men themselves, that "protect" them from assuming tough macho roles, even in contexts of violence, poverty and marginalization.

d) The allegedly desirable "change" required in males cannot be understood simplistically as a stamping out of traditional gender roles. The new and the old tend to move between poles of opposition and harmony in a permanent flux within the life experiences of each individual and it is likely that, with time, some attitudes will change, and several others will not. But it is likely, that by only aggressively confronting the masculine role, reactions of resistance among boys and young men will result. Therefore, sensitive and consistent dialogue over time with individual boys and young men is required if we wish them to reflect on the danger and damage to others and themselves of assuming overtly exaggerated masculine identities.

e) The issue of power is central in the transformation of masculine roles- power is at the very heart of these roles. The recognition of experiences of male domination and subordination among young men; the consequences of this type of relationship in the lives of those who experience them; and reflections about the "how?" and "for what?" and "by whom?" of power are important concepts to be discussed with males when dealing with issues of gender transformation. From the in-depth interviews and the life histories of this research process, we saw that at different moments in the lives of these young men, power was an issue they did not fully understand and took for granted, albeit recognizing the hardship and pain often caused to others and to themselves. In addition, the exploration of alternatives for enjoying access to power requires attention, among both males and females, recognizing that any process that attempts to question the "natural" relationship between power and masculinity is bound to encounter significant resistance.

However, we feel this is an important way to tackle issues of male violence.

f) There is no doubt that personal reflection regarding masculine identity and power is required to advance conditions of equity between men and women and to reduce violence, but it is not sufficient. Any process that pretends to involve men in the construction of gender equality should offer spaces for their involvement in broad societal scenarios. The identification of common challenges facing males as well as females is fundamental since only in this way will males become allies of females in the construction of gender equality.

g) Apathy is a condition among young men that appeared consistently throughout this study- apathy in the classroom, the family and the community and will undoubtedly appear in pedagogical processes for promoting gender equality. It needs to be understood in all of its ramifications; that is, apathy is more than a simple lack of interest, but rather the conviction that nothing can possibly change in the daily lives of young men in the near future if traditional male role models are held up as the only alternative. Young men who have no access to jobs or dignified living conditions, who are consistently bored at school, who have no dreams of being able to become adequate "providers" for partners and families, and who are confronted by young women who consistently out-achieve them, means they are floundering. They can be assisted to develop alternative interpretations of their male roles and to assume other identities.

h) Our investigation was of an exploratory nature; what we hoped for was a set of preliminary definitions. However, the role of the school, an important backdrop for the research, received scant consideration in terms of how educational institutions contribute to the production or sustainability of the most problematic masculine roles in contexts involving violence. The study demonstrated more precision regarding how different "communities of males" function in scenarios outside the

formal school system than within. The recommendation, as a result, would be to undertake a second corollary study centered in schools, based on preliminary observations attributable to this study and related to complex relations of empathy and sympathy between teachers and students.

i) A further recommendation is related to the wide range of emotions detected during the realization of this study and normally present among young men from popular neighborhoods: rage, anger, hate. However, the recommendation is also related to other emotional dynamics experienced during the research process: for example, the frequently-mentioned pain associated with the “absent father”. Therefore, in follow-up exercises or research activities, a perspective of psycho-social accompaniment should become an integral part of the methodology in order to support young men in dealing with the worst effects of violence and loss. The point is not merely to surface deeply held emotions but to promote appropriate interventions to help young men to re-direct and/or re-interpret difficult and debilitating feelings.

j) Gender as a category of analysis continues to require profound and serene debate. Some of the reflections arising from the systematization of this research go against the grain of commonly-held notions among the general public of male and female roles and among most feminist scholars. Even though the majority of young men participating in the study understood identity construction from a perspective of social construction, rather than a “natural” phenomenon, they do not rush to participate in processes of construction of gender equality!! As a matter of fact, rather than participating in the de-construction of values, social alliances, and sentiments characteristic of male communities, they happily participate in them, when given the chance. After all, it is a “natural” choice. Within the community of males, they come to understand who they are but do not question what they might become if they were to draw some limits. Undoubtedly they would feel they were becoming

feminine, such is the force of social constructs and practice. Therefore, a broader and evolving version of the category of gender is required, one with the capacity to situate conflicts related directly to “being a man” or “being a woman” in contemporary society in a wider conceptual band, taking into account a range of sources of inequality and discrimination. This broader definition is required not only to construct concepts related to masculinity but also to define exit routes from situations in which men and women are currently trapped. What appears to be on the horizon is a world dominated by “singularities”, one in which differences between the sexes would not be suppressed but where the heavy load of social-cultural attributions related to “difference”, including especially those of superiority and inferiority, would be modified.

6.4. young men evaluate their experience

6.4.1. Introductory note

The final activity of the study involved individual and shared exercises regarding what the process had meant to each male participant and what recommendations they might have for the future. It was clear that the experience had been an important one in their lives, for some more than for others, for different reasons, and with different expectations for the future. But most indicated they felt they had changed, a first step, along a much broader, steeper and longer path towards gender equality than the one described here.

6.4.2. Evaluative comments

The following guiding questions were used by Project Coordinators from CEDECIS and SIEMBRA to elicit responses from the young men who had participated throughout the process: i) what did you like best about the whole process of the investiga-

tion? ii) What did you like least? lii) What suggestions do you have for improving the parts you liked least? iv) What has changed in your life after having participated in the research on masculinity?

6.4.2.1. The best about the process

Methodologies:

- The process of elaborating my personal life story was the best; we felt recognized and it was important to have had the opportunity to bring out our past without being judged- we were given a chance to remember and to tell our stories without judgment; it was really great to recreate my life story.
- I would never have thought someone would ask me to tell my personal story; with each interview, events were brought to mind from the past and we remembered things that normally are left behind, and for this reason I really liked the life story methodology; the fact that we were able to share each others' life histories stimulated introspection among us about the paths our lives had taken and the similarities amongst us; my life story is five pages long, five very crude pages..... my father and uncle were killed in a massacre but when I read the stories of other guys, I realize they have lived through similar situations.
- One understands oneself better, and even though he doesn't change right away, at least he knows why he is in bad shape; it helped me to stand back and take another look at things- such as why my mum says certain things.
- The encounters and workshops allowed for an exchange of ideas and experiences; the guys enjoyed these encounters because they allowed us to have fun, build relationships, compare and share points of view, and unburden our minds;
- The best part was making the documentary about masculinity- it was a different way to evaluate what we had learned; the workshops for preparing the documentary meant we had to defend a point of view about different expressions of masculinity and

to develop an argument and write a text; making the documentary opened our eyes more about gender and reflects how we are since it is based in our own experiences; it is a product of our own to show people different attitudes of boys.

- The study was a learning experience that helped me to understand how to improve my behaviour as a man and to know more about gender; I learned that to be a man did not entail being a macho and that being a good man involved taking on certain women's roles; I learned about valuing and respecting women and not being macho; it is necessary to have more harmonious relationships with girls and women in order to have a society freer of stereotypes and more gender equality.
- The whole process provided a more objective way to think about girls.

6.4.2.2. The least appreciated about the process

- The process for the elaboration of the personal life stories was too short- approximately eight months; besides, more encounters would have helped us since they are a space to get to know a lot more about those in my group and for them to know more about me;
- I needed to go even deeper in order to learn more from the other members of the study and about myself;
- Many of us felt they had covered only half the road, that the process had stopped after the first part of a much more extensive journey and we are curious to know what the next chapter of the adventure might bring;
- Some workshops were boring but for the most part we thought it was a great process, but the group was too small and the information we learned should be broadcast massively.

6.4.2.3. What could be improved?

Increasing the participation of the young people in the design and realization of the activities; more encounters among all the research participants; Many said they would not change anything- it was a cool project and really formative.

6.4.2.4 Changes in my life

I learned that some guys have tried to be who they really are in social settings even though they subverted the game of accepted gender roles; they were able to diminish the sense of feeling weird for taking on what girls usually do;

The process allowed us to see roles of masculinity in a more realistic way- it showed us the truth, defects and advantages of being males;

Understand that life can change from one moment to another for better or for worse, without even realizing;

Maybe I was quite macho before- when I began to participate in this process, I had a lot of warrior-type thoughts in my head;

I have changed a little in the way I treat girls- they are amazing human beings; but sometimes one changes only for a few moments and at times you can go backwards because of everything that has happened in one's life; I changed in the way I think about and treat women; I am more aware of the role of women and girls and their influence in men's lives; I learned we can relate to one another without thinking about who owns whom;

I changed my idea about what it means to be male- previously I thought that the strength meant the one with power and that everything got resolved by using violence; now I think that the strongest male is the one who uses his intelligence, who knows how to get things done;

Many expressed the notion that the process had allowed them to increase their capacity for self expression, to nourish their lives with happy events, and to transform mentalities: I wasn't as open before, now I have more positive emotions and feel happier about sharing with others, that they get to

know who I am; I learned I can feel affection for those with tastes different from mine; I learned to speak without being afraid; I am more informed about a lot of terms that were previously unknown to me.

6.4.3. Recommendations for the future

The questions asked included: if it were possible to continue with activities related to the construction of masculine identity among young men, what proposals would you like to make? What type of activities would you prefer to include? What would be your personal objective in continuing with such a program?" What follows is a summary of participant responses.

a) We should involve girls in the activities; we need mixed groups where both sexes can seriously analyze the behavior and attitudes associated with gender in our society; and at the same time, we need to analyze how they are reproduced on a daily basis; we should think about ways to promote dialogue between men and women, and even, about how to bring family members into the reflection; include studies about feminism; undertake a study about based in feminism and its influence on small children;

b) Understand that a handful of young men can make a difference in the world of machismo and so we should multiply the knowledge that was constructed during this process with other young men, under the supervision of the same facilitators;

c) Get to know more young men from other neighborhoods and other parts of the country, since these associations promote mutual learning; include another city; realize the same study in each grade and in other schools in order to share what we have learned;

d) Research “antiquated” forms of masculinity and identify the changes with modern notions of masculinity, the objective being to relate my story with the antiquated forms in order to understand the changes I have experienced;

e) Research how modern music and mass media programs influence the development of identity of each individual;

f) Continue the research and the workshops so I continue to learn how to be a better man; so that we can understand what influence gender roles have in the lives of young children;

It is necessary to undertake more nuanced research to understand and come to grips with violence in contexts of armed conflict. History reveals some of the issues but a deeper understanding of which groups use direct violence, when, against whom and by what means, and who exhibits much lower levels of violence and why, could tell us something about male behavior in different conflict situations, and how to promote less violence.

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8. ANNEX

LIFE HISTORY OF "PALOMO", BY CORPORATION CEDECIS

"The flight of the White Dove" captures the reflections of a young man who turned his life around through his engagement with CEDECIS. Below are "White Dove's memories of his childhood in rural Colombia, his move to Medellín, how he feels about solitude and how and why he turned his life around. These memories were captured through the "life history" methodology/interview.

The flight of the "White Dove"

I think life brings more joy than sadness. I'm 19 years old and I am currently in the 9th grade. My date of birth is September 19, 1988.

(...) They call me "Dove". They began calling me by that name back when I lived in the country because my mommy liked to dress me up in white, to watch me all dressed in white and that's when they started calling me "Little Dove". It's quite normal for people to give other people nicknames when they're very young. That's been my nickname since I was a kid.

My mom and dad came to live in Medellín for a while... I was born here in Medellín. Then they took me to a village and left me there with my mommy. (...) My mom stayed in that village for a while and then returned to Medellín. It was then that she left me and my brother behind ... I must have been 7 or so at the time. My mom used to send us money or some other things.

I lived with my mommy for a while. Back then I had a group of friends and we would all get together and play at night. Always at night. I used to play mini-soccer, billiards... I loved playing billiards and every other traditional game: I'd play marbles, spin-

the-bottle, hide-and-seek, catch... I used to play all these games when I was there... I used to play kit-ball, spin-the-bottle and hide-and-seek with the girls. Men would mostly play billiards and soccer –that is men against men.

My mother came back and stayed for about three years. We would help her pick coffee beans and I think it was then that she made the decision to come live here, once she had moved into a house that her husband helped her get. You see, before that, when we were living in the village my mother lived in many different neighborhoods with my siblings and everywhere she had to pay rent.

By the time I was thirteen or so we left the village and came to live in this neighborhood. One of the saddest times for me was when we arrived here in Medellín because it was sort of a change of environment. After we arrived here I didn't go to school for about a year. Then I went to school and after that my mother moved us to where her husband was working and we started going to school there. That man helped us out a lot.

The manager there gave my mom a job. She'd go there and make maize pancakes. After a while we left that place and my mom got a job. She'd provide for us and herself and me and my siblings didn't feel as if someone was giving us handouts anymore. You see, we never had a father so the only person that supported us was my mom, or someone else who'd want to help us out. So she worked and gave us everything. Even now she's the only one that gives us everything we need.

I know very little about my dad's story. I do know that he left my mom when I was four or five. I know he had to skip town because he got in trouble. You see, there are lots of problems between families over there. Families would kill each other and that hasn't changed ... They kill each other. He also got in trouble with another family –they even killed one of his brothers. They tied him and his brother up but he managed to escape. He had a

gun in his house because his family has always had guns and lots of money. They've been troublemakers; they've all been involved in deals with weapons, with the army and all that. At the time he was a professional soldier. So they tied him up but he managed to escape. They shot at him but missed. They couldn't catch him. So he went inside the house, grabbed his gun and left. Then they beat up his brother badly and killed him. That's the reason my dad left and never went back there.

I know that my dad lived in Medellín for a while. I know that he has another woman and two children. I know that he worked as a security guard at a local bank and that he was in prison for six or four years –I don't know which– because he was an accomplice in a scam against that bank and he got caught.

My relationship with my dad? What relationship!!!? There's no relationship because according to my mom he hasn't lived with us since I was one. He doesn't live with us. I've only seen him twice. I haven't forgotten those times.

Once I was way down in my zone, I was about five. I remember that he was on patrol. I ran into him, he said hello and gave me two thousand pesos. It was a lot of money at the time. It was a hell of a lot of money back then. I went in the house and gave the money to my mother. I didn't feel anything when he said 'hello': I felt normal. I don't know, I can't remember any feelings going through my head.

The second time was about three years ago. It was December... he arrived on the 23rd of December. That day I got home and saw that he was there. I said hello and ... Nothing happened. I went back out. Perhaps he felt ashamed. I felt normal. I don't know... it's strange. It's like running into someone you know is your dad but at the same time... he's been away for so long that you just see him as someone normal, as a regular person ... You sit down and talk to him but that's all. After that I

went to his house to visit. We talked for a while and I came back. That was it.

When he came over in December he gave me a discman. I'm very fond of it ... A discman... it's the only present I ever got from my dad. I'm very fond of that discman. You could say it's my most valuable possession.

What has my father's influence on my life been like? His absence... Sometimes I feel that he should have supported me more or perhaps given me more opportunities, such as completing my education. I also feel that I would have been more disciplined, because dads are more about discipline.

You're more afraid of your father than you are of your mother. I've seen that happen. Then you act differently because you see things differently ... I think that I would have changed if he'd given me the chance to go to school. I would have changed ... My life would have turned out differently if he had. I believe it would have turned out differently! I'd be going to school now. I'd be doing things with discipline, without hesitating so much, without running back and forth ... I believe I would have.

I've never felt anger toward my dad but there's no love lost either. Perhaps when a person is not around you don't pay attention to those things and don't worry about it.

When I was young there was no one to admire. Nobody. It makes perfect sense to admire people like that, people who are... famous people, rich people. Celebrities! The only thing I used to watch was the *Power Rangers*. One person that I used to admire a lot was *Maxwell Smart –Agent 86*: I loved the way he would unveil mysteries. Because when I was there, there were hardly any... people made of flesh and bone that I admired ... As far as I can remember, I've always had a stepfather and since he would beat me up I'd yell at him:

–You big bully! Just you wait and see! You just wait 'til my dad gets here... he's going to kill you! My

dad's going to beat you up! – I'd always threaten my stepfather with my dad. I remember that I felt kind of curious to know him...

When I was a kid I'd bite my crackers at breakfast so that they looked like guns and then I would start shooting – Bang! Bang! My mom would call me "Alcides Pistols."

In my neighborhood I've seen dudes packing guns. There's many of them. They're always kind of mean. They always run in packs... They just let themselves be seen riding their motorcycles, driving fancy cars... I've almost never seen them with women but they do have lots of women.

With their look they tell you who's in charge. And people somehow are dying to be in their circle because in one way or another they're protecting their lives. I've seen them beat up people because they call them names.

I believe that a person sometimes has so many problems that they lose control and get to the point where they don't care about their lives. All they want to do is hurt other people, all because they're bitter because of their situation. Very often when you feel resentment toward others you want to get even. You want to make others feel weak; you want to feel you have the power.

And even though that kind of life sounds real cool, the truth is that people are not aware of how many problems and hassles it causes.

From boy to man – to have or not to have

When you're a child you're always wishing you were a grown-up so that you can have a girlfriend and a job. Yet you can't imagine the kind of responsibility that you're about to face. As you grow up you start looking at life in a different manner and you start thinking about the future – you start feeling strange because you're about to embark on a life of responsibilities. When you were a child you

didn't worry or think about working, about having obligations; you'd see things as fun, just going out to play and hang around...

Responsibility emerges as you grow up and start realizing that there are things that you need to buy for the household, that your mother is doing all the work and that you have to help her. Back when we were living in the country my mom had to pick coffee beans and I had to take care of everything. Then you'd also get paid to work. My mom herself would pay me and tell me:

– Go to work, I'll pay you.

That was fine because you'd have enough Money to... They'd tell you:

– Do you want to play billiards? Well, go on and play because you've got money. Go play, then. If you want to buy something for yourself, go on and do it.

On the other hand, when I was 16 and living in the city all I wanted was to be out on the street. They used to beg me to study but I didn't like it and then I met some people and began doing bad things with them ... (...) shortly after that I wanted out of that life. I began to see that my mother was quite distressed because of that and she asked me to turn my life around. One day, after she grew tired of begging me my mother wouldn't give me anything more and told me:

– You're going to have to work to get your own things. Now you're going to have to fend for yourself. Right then I began wondering what I was going to do with my life... Then I realized that I had to work and started getting my own stuff. I was about 17 and began to think of my own future.

At that time I returned to the village for a visit and noticed that there were differences with my family. Things with my family weren't the same. After what had happened they didn't treat me like they used to before. They began scolding me.

They'd ask me: 'What are you doing?' and they sounded distrustful. They didn't want me to leave the village. They wanted me to stay there for good.

That's when I began to change, to think for myself, for my sake. That's when I began working as a carpenter for one of my cousins. He didn't pay me well –only enough for bus fares. This and an apprentice's job but I didn't learn anything and they wouldn't pay me more. Then I took another job in construction. I began working in construction and did quite well. Then I began helping my mother out. I'd buy my own stuff because I've been buying my own stuff ever since I was 17, always. Ever since I turned 17 nobody has given me anything. Everything I have I've earned by myself. In my opinion, work and money are good because they've allowed me to travel, dress well, do something different such as buying something I like, having the satisfaction to know that I've waited for something for so long and I've finally got it through my own effort.

One day we were at a meeting at CEDECIS. We began talking about money and many were saying that women won't go near a man who doesn't have any money. In terms of money, I haven't seen women act like that. Meeting a selfish woman... well, I'm not saying it can't happen. It didn't happen to me on the street but at home, with my own mother because if I'm working everything seems to go smoothly. Nobody tells you anything when you're working but things change when you have no job. I think that's a drag because everyone starts giving you a hard time.

When I was working I used to get up at 6:00 A.M. to get ready. My sister or my mother would get my food ready –my lunch box as it were. Then I'd get up, get ready and go to work. I used to come home at about 6:00 P.M. Sometimes I'd watch TV. Other times I'd play outside with my friends. Some other times we'd play mini-soccer, or we'd just hang around an empty lot and shoot the breeze or do something in the neighborhood. That was during regular weekdays. On Saturdays we'd throw

a party or watch movies. But it was mostly on Sundays that we'd get together and watch movies or plan some other thing, such as a picnic with a stew of meat and vegetables – I'd take my girlfriend with me. And that was it.

(...) There have been some outbursts of violence at home whenever I argue with my mom because sometimes she'll scold me because I waste things, or she sticks her nose in my business big time. I get very violent with words. I snap at my mother whenever we argue. It doesn't mean that I insult her but I'm a bit rude to her. I answer back and stuff like that. Those moments linger on and on. Whenever there's distressing situations at home or problems with my mom I feel like crying.

When I'm not working I have to be careful not to waste things because they keep telling me: 'You're wasting things... You don't chip in!'

(...) Right now things at home are complicated because my mom doesn't have a job. We're living on her savings. I have no job and my cousin and his family (his wife and son) are staying with us. My room used to be a regular bedroom: a bed, some posters, a TV set, and my chest of drawers. That's where I have pictures... pictures of my girlfriends, my DVD, my discman, my clothes and that's it. Now I no longer have a room because I have to put up my cousin. So that there is another problem because I used to have a large bedroom but now it's full of beds.

Solitude

I don't like to stay at home when I'm not working. I look for every chance to be entertained, to go out and find something to do. I've always known what I like and I don't like solitude ... It's like suffocating, like not having anyone to talk to.

I felt lonely when I was getting rid of the friends I was doing illegal things with. The same thing happened when I joined the group because I didn't speak to many people there. I was alone. I'd sit

in a chair and listen. I didn't speak at all. When I was young I didn't live with my mom. I lived with my aunt. They'd put me to bed by myself in a dark room. I was afraid of the dark and I cried. Also, for example, when you go on a trip for a few days and you're going with a lot of people that you don't know, you talk to them and everything but still you feel that you need someone.

(...) I haven't always felt this way... I've been feeling this way for some time now. Perhaps since I turned 16 or 17 years of age.

When you grow up you start liking women more and you feel the need, the urge to be with them. Having a partner is being able to share with someone, feeling the need to be with that someone, to tell somebody about your problems; having someone to hold, going out with her and sharing good and bad moments in life, but also having someone to quarrel with. Not having a partner makes you feel kind of lonely, although... Sometimes it's good to be alone but other times you feel the need and... I don't know. It's like you get to a point where you become very attached to someone. It hasn't happened to me many times – only twice in my life.

The first time because it was someone I loved very much – I liked her too much. That was my try at going steady. I felt that I wanted to be with her; I wanted to tell her about my life; I wanted to get to know her well. (...)... I'd call her and we'd meet somewhere. When all's said and done, there was never anything between us. One day she told me that she was making up with her boyfriend that we should leave things as they were. I said okay but when I saw her with him it hit me very hard. (...)

We'd always talk after she'd had an argument with him. We didn't kiss until much later... I'd break out in tears... I loved her and she didn't want to be with me because she had a boyfriend.

(...) It doesn't hurt anymore but she was the girl I loved most and the one I fought harder for.

I met her at my cousin's and a few days later I asked her if she wanted to go steady. We gave each other a chance and started going out together and talking. Some strange things happened when I was with her – she had shacked¹³ with a friend of hers and they told me about it. Someone I trust very much told me. So I asked her what was going on and she answered that I trusted my friends more than her. So we left things as they were. After that I didn't want to have anything to do with her and stopped looking for her.

After that I shacked with someone ... You want to have sex with a girl so you have sex with her and that's that. It's only a passing thing.

Sometime later a new girl came into the picture. We'd speak and I liked her. I don't know if I was too childish or if she was too childish but things just wouldn't work out. We were together for one month. Then we didn't talk to each other for two weeks and broke up. After that I decided that I would be alone but one day she showed up.

I met her one day when... she was talking to this guy that was courting her but then she left with me and left this guy behind. That same day we began talking. I asked her:

– So, what's up with your boyfriend?

And she replied:

– I don't have a boyfriend.

From that day on we began talking. I'd go to her house every day. She'd call me and I'd help her out with her homework. That's how we became an item¹⁴. We began going steady at her sister's 15th birthday party. She told me that I was more than just a friend to her. She and I would make out, we'd kiss. She told me that she needed me very much

13 To spend the night at someone's place, sleep in the same bed, and mess around.

14 Item: a couple; someone who is perceived as belonging to their partner.

and I said 'yes, okay', and we got into a more formal relationship.

We went steady through April. We'd argue all the time. She'd be at the gym all the time and that really made me mad because I imagined things... I would dream up this entire movie where she was meeting someone else there. I was so jealous of her because I thought that she was with someone, that she was cheating on me... Yet I never told her that it made me mad... I'd just walk away from things.

Now we're nowhere, we're not even friends because we don't speak to each other. Sometimes we say hello...

(...) I used to cry a lot after we broke up. I made a scene at home and called her on the phone just to speak a lot of nonsense. I couldn't find any other way to be with this girl. (...)

"Going with the flow - moving around in search of what I want to be"

I was very smart when I was in school. I'd get good grades but my behavior was bad. I had discipline problems because I'd get into fights all the time. So I'd always get expelled from schools. I was expelled twice: once from a local school and once from a school that I used to go to where I used to live before.

There was another time when they begged me to study because I didn't like to. I don't know... I didn't like to do much of anything ... It was like ... All I wanted to is be outside doing things I shouldn't be doing such as, for example, well... doing drugs.

I was sixteen then and this went on for about six months. I hung around with some friends for about six months ... I used to see my dogs¹⁵ playing,

hanging, doing this and that... That's what a bad example does: I would see these dudes doing all these things and then I'd want to do them myself. That's influence.

Back then I began to like parties. (...) These people came into my life and I began to become familiar with them. Then I started enjoying that life and every weekend we'd party, party, party! (...) After a while we all became good friends; then new friends joined in and before I knew it I was throwing the parties. Then one of our friends from a different neighborhood asked us if we wanted to try some blow¹⁶. None of us wanted to at first but after a while... I don't know, we felt we should try it and... well, nothing happened.

A few days later we wanted to try it again and we began using once a week. (...)

This went on for about three months. Three months later a guy who used to smoke marijuana asked us if we wanted some and we..., we'd keep him company while he smoked but wouldn't try it. After a while we tried it; we smoked a little and then, well, we'd be smoking every weekend and after that it wasn't every weekend but on weekdays. (...) We'd get together and smoke marijuana. We'd even smoke at parties. That was a heavy scene! Everyone was hooked! I couldn't see a way out: I stopped doing the things I used to do. Before that I used to play, go out, have fun and that was it! But then all I did was get high¹⁷, standing on a corner and watch other people dance. I don't know... That was a very dramatic change that left a mark on me!

Finally, one day... I don't know. I've always believed that I didn't do it because I wanted to but because my friends wanted me to and I didn't want to feel so lonely... (...) I don't know. I'd be there just to go along with them but I really didn't like it. So this situation began to build pressure inside me and I

15
Dogs: Friends of the same sex.

16
Blow: cocaine.

17
Get high: use drugs.

was beginning to seek other paths, other things to do. I'd been wanting to get away from all that for a long time. My mother was in distress and so was my family. They'd tell me:

– *Just look at the life you're living...*

(...) So I began to get this feeling that I wanted out of that life ... That's when I started attending meetings at the center with my baby sister. (...) I became involved with the group at meetings, doing one thing or another, attending workshops ... And I began to like it. (...) The group also organized outings and they would invite you. At first I wouldn't go because I hardly ever had time but after a while I began asking for permission at work and they would give it to me – I'd been working for about a year. So I'd get off work and go to the meetings ...

I didn't participate much at the beginning. I didn't say much because I didn't know what they were doing. However, as time passed I began gaining more knowledge because I'd attend every meeting and every workshop. (...) Then there were some changes in leadership. You'd begin to speak up and make proposals and assumed responsibility for something.

After that, every time there were events such as the Family Parties I'd ask for permission at work and helped out with logistics. And then, when they started putting together the other groups – 'Rising Sun' and 'Recreating' – I joined the 'Recreating' group and then I had more responsibilities with recreation activities, the movies, the outings. You felt very involved in the management... So I liked all that – the children... Because I always dig¹⁸ entertaining children. I've done well at recreation and drama: I've made a great contribution to the group.

I don't know... With the group I started meeting lots of people that make you change your mind

and your life, who make you see things differently. Because when you're on drugs that world is all you see. You don't see what's going on around you at the moment there in your neighborhood, at the corner. That's all you see but you can't see what's going on outside. So when I saw all these new things I fell in love with all these cool things that other people were doing. And so, that's how I started. (...)

What would my life have been like if the youth group hadn't existed? The truth is that I've only asked myself that question a few times because... I don't know. I say that if the youth group hadn't existed I wouldn't have met so many people and perhaps I would have found it harder to change. (...) So I believe that the group helps you a lot to understand what you want your career to be and what you want to become. I think it was a way to build a life Project. If it hadn't been for the group there is no way I could have built what I want to be.



Save the Children

Reescribamos el Futuro