

Part 3

Life Stage 3:

Adolescents and youth

15-24 years old



Our focus on the safe transition from childhood to adulthood

Adolescence and youth are a time of great change for young people everywhere. As adolescents become young adults, their social world expands, they assume new roles and responsibilities, develop emotionally and physically, and explore a more individual sense of identity.ⁱ While this transition may be turbulent for some, most adolescents manage to navigate the teenage years successfully.

Unfortunately, for some of the children we support, adolescence is characterized by exposure to abuse, neglect, exploitation and, in particular, **sexual and physical violence**.ⁱⁱ From hazardous labor and trafficking, to child marriage, to forced recruitment into armed groups and gangs, adolescents face a unique set of risks to their safety and welfare.

In many of the communities where we work, the end of primary school and the onset of puberty bring an abrupt end to childhood. This period can be a time of great vulnerability as adolescents demand increased freedoms and explore an adult environment. They may engage in more risky behaviors, for example experimenting with alcohol and drugs and engaging in unprotected sex, which can damage their health and lead to early pregnancies. Poverty and social inequality may exclude them from education and employment opportunities and push them into exploitative situations.

During this stage of life, protection risks and vulnerability become increasingly determined by gender, with girls and boys fulfilling – and being constrained by – more traditional roles.ⁱⁱⁱ Adolescent girls may be expected to marry and raise children within the home, to undergo initiation ceremonies that include genital mutilation/cutting,^{iv} and experience heightened risk of sexual violence.^v Adolescent boys, adopting the social norms of masculinity, are more likely to engage in physically aggressive behavior, join gangs, and become involved in crime. They are at particular risk of physical violence,^{vi} and are more vulnerable to the most physically punishing forms of child labor and forced recruitment into armed combat.^{vii}

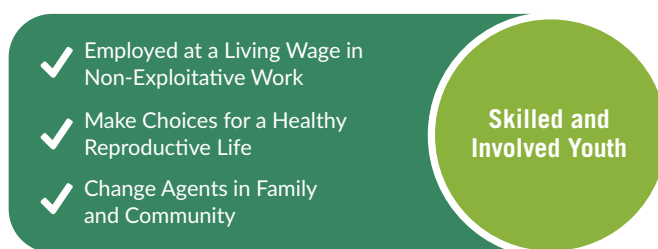
Sexual and physical violence

Adolescents and youth face an increased risk of sexual and physical violence, including homicide, as they transition to adulthood. Around the world:

- Children's mortality rate from violence doubles during their second decade of life
- About 15 million adolescent girls ages 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime
- The global homicide rate for adolescents age 10-19 is four times higher for boys than for girls
- An adolescent is killed by an act of violence every 7 minutes

The impact of this violence on adolescent and youth physical and emotional health, educational achievement, and well-being is extremely serious and can have life-changing consequences including disability, pregnancy, mental illness, and social ostracism. In some countries where we work, homicide (often due to gun crime) and suicide are major causes of death among adolescents and youth.^{viii}

ChildFund's Domains of Change and Core Outcome for Life Stage 3: Adolescents and Youth 15-24 Years Old



At ChildFund we recognize that adolescents and youth are resourceful and resilient. We also know that the transition to adulthood represents a unique and challenging period and that this age group is often overlooked within child welfare programming. If we are to reach our goal of adolescents and youth becoming skilled and involved, we must design specialized, age-appropriate interventions that meet their unique needs. This includes supporting **youth-led safe spaces** and clubs that provide a protective environment for young people as they grow into adulthood.

Youth-led safe spaces and clubs provide safe and protected spaces for youth to make friends, learn critical skills and serve as leaders in their communities.

Our work with adolescents and youth is designed to improve their economic, physical and social well-being. Our wide range of programs – whether they relate to sexual and reproductive health, adolescent life skills, education, job readiness and livelihoods, or youth empowerment – all provide opportunities to mitigate the risks of violence that young people face. For example, through direct action and advocacy we:

- Provide adolescents and youth with social and emotional skills that foster healthy and non-violent relationships.
- Enable adolescents and youth to find work in safe environments, free from physical danger, sexual harassment, and exploitation.
- Provide adolescents and youth access to information about sexual and reproductive health to reduce early pregnancy and prevent the transmission of diseases.
- Address harmful traditional practices including early marriage, female genital cutting/mutilation, and gender-based violence.
- Ensure that marginalized adolescents and youth (e.g. girls, the disabled, LGBTIQ, and minority groups) participate and benefit equally from ChildFund programming.
- Empower adolescents and youth to know their rights and to advocate for themselves and others.

- Build greater community and caregiver understanding of the life stage of adolescence, and the unique needs and experiences of young people.

Our learning about protecting adolescents and youth

This section explores how ChildFund is deepening its knowledge about the factors that perpetuate violence against adolescents and youth, as well as the types of support and services that can protect them. At this stage of life, adolescents and youth are increasingly able to guide ChildFund about the research topics that are relevant to their lives and to design their own advocacy strategies.

Our interventions and studies are already giving us a clearer sense of the concerns of adolescents and youth ages 15 to 24 years and the forms of violence and exploitation they face in the countries where we work:

1 Violence is a reality for many adolescents and youth, and can jeopardize their education, employment and life opportunities:

- In a study by ChildFund in **Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala and Nicaragua**, children and youth suggested that personal safety and limited opportunities for employment or meaningful engagement in their communities were driving young people to migrate away from their homes and countries.^{ix}
- In the **Philippines**, research with indigenous communities revealed that both young men and women ages 15 to 24 years experienced sexual harassment, with women also subject to sexual violence and physical punishment.^x
- An ethnographic mapping of two communities in **Kenya** revealed that teenage pregnancies were sometimes the result of transactional sex, exploitation, and rape by adult men.^{xi}
- In **Uganda**, a *National Survey of Violence Against Children*^{xii} supported by ChildFund highlighted that approximately half of respondents ages 18 to 24 years believe it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife, and roughly 60% believe that a wife should tolerate violence to keep the family together. Meanwhile, one in five young women, and one in three young men, revealed that they had already perpetrated violence. This is significant as the survey also found a correlation between participants' experience of physical violence in childhood and the likelihood that they would commit violence later in life.
- A survey in the **Philippines**^{xiii} found that only 12% of children and youth ages 15 to 24 years with disabilities were attending school and indicated that further education for this group was a "serious challenge."

2 The majority of adolescents and youth know where to report harms to children and would take action to report them. In 2017, as part of our global monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data collection, we asked 88,516 adolescents and youth ages 15 to 24 years from 16 countries about their knowledge of child protection reporting mechanisms and willingness to report violence against children.^{xiv}

We learned that:

- **More than two-thirds (69%) of adolescents and youth said that they knew where to report protection issues and that, if a child was being harmed, would report it.**

Despite this overall positive finding, there is still more work to be done in countries where young people revealed less knowledge and likelihood of reporting violence. Some of our more focused inquiries also tell us that these M&E data may not be reflective of the full picture, demonstrating the need for continuing research in this area.

3 LGBTIQ youth are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence. In the **Philippines**, ChildFund conducted pioneering research with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) youth ages 10 to 24 years to learn more about the violence they face.^{xv} Participatory workshops brought together LGBTIQ youth in three cities and a series of innovative research tools were used to capture information about their lives.

“I wish we were not bullied all the time. I wish people would just accept us.”

-Youth participant

The research findings revealed that:

- Many participants shared **experiences of violence and exclusion on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.**
- LGBTIQ youth predominantly experienced **verbal bullying, emotional abuse, social isolation and physical violence**, mostly from family members and friends, but also from figures of authority such as priests and local government officials.
- Some youth were **deprived of the opportunity to work**, some spoke of **discrimination at the hands of the police and teachers**, and others were **pressured into more acceptable gender roles and behaviors**. A few youth shared stories of sexual abuse.

The harassment and violence that LGBTIQ youth face is perpetuated by cultural and religious norms that stigmatize homosexuality and dictate strict rules about the way men and women should behave. This stigma was often internalized by LGBTIQ youth, who felt that something was wrong with them; they reported feelings of stress, depression and anger as a result of living with discrimination and violence. The lack of LGBTIQ-sensitive services also meant that their psychosocial and health needs often went unmet.

Ultimately, the research broke new ground in the Philippines, helping to draw a picture of the reality for LGBTIQ youth, whose needs had largely been ignored in research and in gender programming. As an initial response, ChildFund identified entry points within its youth advocacy, life skills and school-based child protection work to integrate a focus on LGBTIQ. Longer-term efforts are also underway with communities to transform social norms that stigmatize youth because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

4 Adolescents and youth experiencing early pregnancy face unique risks. In recent years, ChildFund has partnered with leading child welfare organizations to conduct ethnographic mappings of community child protection systems in **Kenya** and **Sierra Leone**. In both countries, these studies identified early pregnancy as a priority welfare issue and informed the design of ChildFund's interventions:

- In **Kenya**, a child protection mapping of two communities indicated that teenage mothers were especially at risk of harming, neglecting or abandoning infants and young children. ChildFund has collaborated with community leaders to develop an action plan for preventing teen pregnancy and supporting young mothers to care for their babies.^{xvi} To this end, the community aims to train adolescents on sexual and reproductive health and provide young mothers with parenting support. ChildFund also plans to engage with identified perpetrators of transactional sex with adolescent girls, including *bodaboda* (commercial motorbike) drivers to educate them about the sexual exploitation of children.
- In **Sierra Leone**, ChildFund provided field support in Bombali, one of two districts studied in an inter-agency research initiative to map the community-based child protection system in 12 villages.^{xvii} Teenage pregnancy was found to have a highly negative impact on adolescent girls, who were often forced to drop out of school and/or to engage in transactional sex to survive. In response, ChildFund developed the *Girls and Young Mothers Urban Livelihood* project, which has provided vocational and livelihood training to 300 young mothers. ChildFund provided them with start-up kits and equipment (such as sewing machines) to launch their work and supported them to raise funds by forming savings groups. In this way, ChildFund aimed to improve the standard of living for young mothers and, in turn, the care and protection of their children.

5 Children engaged in irregular migration are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, human trafficking, and sexual violence on their journeys: In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in unaccompanied children and youth from Central America and Mexico crossing into the United States under irregular and dangerous conditions. Migrating to escape violence at home and to leave behind unemployment and lack of opportunities, these children and youth have been particularly vulnerable to discrimination, human trafficking and sexual violence as they attempt to journey across borders and to settle in the U.S.^{xviii}

In 2017, the ChildFund Alliance launched an ambitious four-year project, *Preventing Irregular Migration in Central America (PICMCA)*,² focused on children and youth in EI

Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua.^{xix} This initiative, called *CONFIO* in Spanish, aims to address the root causes – high levels of crime and violence, limited employment and education opportunities, and lack of awareness about the dangers of irregular migration – that compel young people to leave their countries.

The project will provide at-risk youth with vocational and entrepreneurial training to improve their employment prospects, while empowering them to engage with local and national decision-makers to address irregular migration. At the same time, ChildFund and its partners will work with communities to improve delivery of child protection services and to address violence against children and youth. In this way, the project aims to improve the well-being of children and youth ages 6 to 24 years and to create the conditions that enable them to stay in their communities.

6 Children and youth are important partners in our research and advocacy efforts: Given a chance and some support, young people can be important advocates for their own protection. In the Firozabad district of Uttar Pradesh, ChildFund manages a major child labor initiative, *DISHA*, in an urban slum in India's glass and bangle making industry.^{xx} Children and youth participating in the project asked for the opportunity to map out the types of harm and risks they face in daily life, and the way that communities help them.

Project staff helped children and youth to design the research, and then, over a three-week period, teams of child and youth researchers collected information from children and adults through interviews, focus group discussions and a quantitative survey. This innovative study highlighted a series of risks to children:

- Persistently high levels of **involvement in hazardous labor**.
- **Emotional and physical violence at home and at school** – with 35% of parents indicating that they express their displeasure with their children through emotional or physical violence of varying intensity, and 42% of parents confirming that their child has reported being bullied at school.
- High numbers of girls (40% of those surveyed) reporting that they have experienced **unwanted attention or touch** – which mostly went unreported.

More than three-quarters (77%) of parents were against giving children time to play, citing reasons such as “playing is a waste of time.” The children's study also revealed extremely low awareness of both formal and informal community-based child protection organizations, with family considered to be the primary source of help and protection.

ChildFund India is using these findings to inform the next three-year strategy of the *DISHA* initiative. In response to the study conclusions, project staff will focus on ensuring the children and families know what to do, where to go and who to report to if they experience harm or violence. Alongside this, community-based child protection organizations will be supported to better link children and families to formal government services.

Our response

We are actively working to combat the different forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence that adolescents and youth experience as they move toward adulthood. We now have more information about the circumstances that push young people into potentially harmful situations, and we strive to equip them with the life skills and opportunities they need to keep themselves safe.

We are starting to see some real progress:

- Through our school clubs and youth forums in **Ethiopia**, we have successfully raised awareness about gender-based violence and sexual reproductive health among young people.^{xxi}
- In Madhya Pradesh, **India** we have worked to reduce teenage girls' involvement in marriage by empowering village-level Child Protection Committees and strengthening a community system of protection.^{xxii} A total of 131 potential child marriage cases have been prevented through this system since the start of the *UNMUKT* project in 2016.
- In **Uganda**, 85% of 166 youth who were provided with vocational training by the *Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (DOVCU)* project³ successfully found gainful employment, were able to support siblings with school fees and contributed to basic household costs.^{xxiii}

In the following section, we look in more depth at a selection of program case studies that illustrate the work that ChildFund is undertaking with adolescents and youth in Life Stage 3.





CASE STUDY: Creating opportunities for youth as an alternative to exploitative labor in India

In **India**, ChildFund works with poor rural communities in South Rajasthan to prevent the trafficking and migration of children and youth into exploitative labor in the cotton industry.

Between 2012 and 2015, ChildFund conducted a three-year project, *Combating Child Trafficking Through Sustainable Livelihood Development (Phase II)*,⁴ in 50 villages across Udaipur district to increase awareness of the risks of child labor, and to empower local community and government actors to take coordinated action on child trafficking. Seeking to address the underlying poverty that drives children into the cotton industry, ChildFund conducted **vocational training for 374 youth** (for example, in masonry, mobile phone repairs and tailoring), enabling them to find alternative ways to support themselves and their families.

Each year, thousands of children are trafficked from South Rajasthan to work in cotton fields in the neighboring state of Gujarat.

Seen as a source of cheap labor, children often work long hours for minimal pay with inadequate food and poor shelter, and risk physical and sexual abuse by their employers. Deprived of their right to attend school, they are known to experience

An evaluation highlighted the project's impact: ^{xxiv}

- Cases of child trafficking and exploitative labor significantly decreased in project villages. Data showed that children reported that children who were out of school and involved in child labor decreased from 39% to 12%, and that there was a further decrease (from 33% to 7%) of children engaged in cotton work in all areas.
- Families and communities demonstrated a much higher awareness of child protection laws (from 14% to 88%) and programs (6% to 76%).
- A network of child protection actors teachers, police, lawyers, civil society organizations, as well as community vigilance committees joined forces to respond to cases of child trafficking and labor.
- Many of the trained youth, some of whom had previously worked in the cotton industry, reported that they had since found employment and were earning a decent income.

headaches, convulsions and respiratory conditions due to the adverse working conditions and exposure to pesticides.

Poverty is the major underlying cause of child trafficking and migration. For parents (and children) the journey away from home may be considered an opportunity to earn much needed income— rather than as a violation of their rights.

ChildFund has built on these successes with a second project in Udaipur district that trains young people on **business and entrepreneurial skills** and links them to employment opportunities.

VIDEO: Child Trafficking in India's Cotton Fields





CASE STUDY: Working with youth to prevent female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) in Guinea

ChildFund **Guinea** has been working for over 12 years to develop and strengthen community-based systems of child protection in the prefectures of Kindia and Dabola. Central to these efforts has been engaging with youth and communities to fight the practice of **female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)**.^{xxv}

Using its community approach, ChildFund and partners have mobilized Village Child Protection Committees, youth associations, women's associations, religious leaders and local authorities to work together to protect girls and young women from FGM/C:

FGM/C in Guinea

Although prohibited by law, Guinea has one of the highest rates of FGM/C in Africa, with 97% of girls and women age 15-49 years affected. Complex belief systems about female sexuality underlie the practice, which is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and social norms and continues to be supported by two-thirds (67%) of older girls and women.

- Community associations and local leaders run awareness-raising campaigns against FGM/C to change public perceptions and reduce the social rejection and isolation of uncircumcised girls.
- Community volunteers, including members of youth groups, conduct home visits to counsel families on the long-term, detrimental effects on girls' health and reproduction.
- A community alert system enables community groups to refer incidents of violence against children – including cases of FGM/C – to village Child Protection Committees whose representatives then link vulnerable children to health and social services.

The impact of FGM/C can be devastating. It can cause severe and lasting pain, urinary infection and incontinence, and affect reproduction and childbirth. Girls and women who do not undergo FGM/C may be stigmatized, or rejected for marriage and, as a result, may experience economic hardship.^{xxx}

A particularly innovative feature of the initiative has been the establishment of a dialogue between circumcised and non-circumcised girls and youth, which has helped to break down the social barriers between these girls and to build a sense of solidarity.

Youth and women play a critical role in this work. In an evaluation, youth and women's associations were identified as the front line in community efforts to prevent FGM/C and are seen as instrumental in addressing the stigmatization of uncircumcised girls.^{xxvii}

Women's involvement in village Child Protection Committees increased from 37% of committee members to 45% over the life of the project. This change reflects the importance of these key stakeholders' efforts both to change the social norms that underlie deeply rooted cultural practices and to make choices that potentially affect future generations.





CASE STUDY: Using adolescent and youth experiences of violence in Uganda to inform our advocacy efforts

In **Uganda**, ChildFund has played a lead role in the first *National Survey on Violence Against Children (VAC)*.^{xxviii} Conducted in partnership with the Government of Uganda, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other children's agencies, this large-scale research initiative has shed light on the sexual, physical and emotional violence experienced by Ugandan children and youth across the country.^{xxix}

"We will use these findings to wake people up to reality. We can now go to policy-makers with hard evidence that will help us to make the case for child protection and will persuade them to back up their commitments with resources."

-ChildFund Uganda Child Protection Specialist

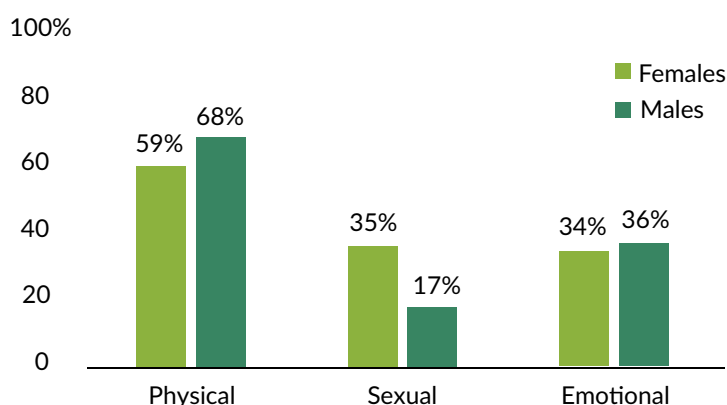
The research highlights the prevalence of different types of violence for Ugandans ages 13 to 17 years and 18 to 24 years, as well as the perpetrators, location, and time of incidents, the impact on youth and adolescents' physical and mental health, and the circumstances in which they receive social services. The analysis goes further to capture information about children's sexual

risk-taking, HIV testing behavior, and attitudes toward gender and interpersonal violence. It is the first VAC survey to provide regional-level data, allowing comparison of (and, eventually, a more nuanced response to) violence across different parts of the country.

The picture that emerges is alarming. The survey indicates that among youth ages 18 to 24 years:

- 35% of female respondents and 17% of male respondents have experienced **sexual violence** during their childhoods, most often in their homes and at school, and at the hands of neighbors and friends.
- The majority of young women (59%) and young men (68%) ages 18 to 24 have experienced childhood **physical violence** – defined as punching, kicking, burning, or striking a child with an object. For these youth, about 20% of young women and 16% of young men experienced their first incident of physical violence at or before age 5.

Experience of Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Violence Experienced in Childhood Among Youth Ages 18-24 Years



Among Ugandans ages 13 to 17 years, 44% of girls and 59% of boys experienced **physical violence** in the 12 months preceding the survey. Emotional violence is also widespread and damaging for both age groups.

Parents, adult relatives and teachers were all cited as perpetrators of violence. The impact on children included: physical health problems, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, mental distress and self-harm, and missed school attendance.

The conclusions of the VAC study have provided the Government of Uganda with compelling evidence about the scale of violence against children and youth – and a unique opportunity to respond. ChildFund has joined forces with the Government of Uganda and partners to disseminate the survey findings across the country and to develop a **National Action Plan** to address violence against children in schools, homes and communities. Moving forward, this evidence will help ChildFund to monitor and support Uganda's progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16.2.



CASE STUDY: The power of youth advocacy in the United States and the Philippines

Youth themselves are often the most powerful advocates in the fight against abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. Below are two examples from ChildFund programs in the **United States of America (USA)** and the **Philippines**, where youth have stood up for their rights and advocated for change.

In the **USA**, nine Youth Ambassadors from the *Youth Civic Engagement and Leadership (YCEL)* project in Jackson, Mississippi, traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in ChildFund's annual Advocacy Day on March 24, 2017.^{xxx} Joining our staff from across the organization, these young people discussed critical issues facing children and youth with members of Congress, including investment in education and putting an end to violence.

VIDEO: Represent (P&G)
Washington DC

Advocacy Day provided the Youth Ambassadors with an opportunity to use the leadership and advocacy skills they had learned through the YCEL project. Hailing from communities characterized by poverty and violence, they had the rare opportunity to experience being listened to by people in power, which helped the young people understand that they could actually make a difference.

The Youth Ambassadors' involvement in Advocacy Day represented a true youth-adult partnership with youth and adults working together as colleagues for a common cause. The experience demonstrated the power of equipping youth with skills, building their confidence, and providing them with opportunities to bring their passion and energy to advocate for change.

"I want to advocate on behalf of children everywhere, not just children in Jackson [Mississippi]. I feel that people everywhere should have the same basic rights."

– Youth Ambassador

"As a recipient and witness of child abuse in the adoption system in the adoption system, [I feel that] what ChildFund is doing could be an example and should definitely be continued because it shows us that children definitely matter and should be protected and cared for."

– Youth Ambassador

Since returning to Jackson, these young people have built on this momentum and have successfully advocated to bring a youth voice to their school boards so that they can weigh in on issues that matter to them.

As part of the *EMBRACE* project ⁵ in the **Philippines**, ChildFund has worked to empower children and youth with disabilities to protect themselves and to take action on matters that affect them. ^{xxxi} A milestone in this initiative was the 2016 **#WeAreIncluded Convention**, organized by ChildFund in Bacolod City. This provided children and youth with disabilities an opportunity to voice concerns about their lack of social inclusion and their vulnerability to violence, in the presence of government, media, and civil society actors.

This Convention culminated in a call to action: children and youth presented the **#WeAreIncluded Manifesto** outlining their demands to be protected from physical abuse and neglect. They demanded appropriate social services and claimed their right to the same opportunities as children and youth without disabilities. In response, participating government agencies and civil society actors committed to an agenda for action and to developing programs and specialist support services.

"All of us share the same feelings of being left out, ignored, neglected, picked on, laughed at and bullied and not being provided the same opportunities as other children and youth without disabilities at home, in the community and at school...we are now coming together to speak out, be heard and advocate for change..."

-Extract from the **#WeAreIncluded Manifesto** written by 57 children and youth with disabilities.

5. Funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through ChildFund Australia

Our future commitment

The data we have collected from our programs and studies highlight a series of protection risks that emerge in adolescence and often continue into early adulthood. This violence is not something that we can overlook if we want to **improve young people's economic, physical and social well-being**, and to help them to become skilled and involved adults.

We are committed to ensuring a safe transition through adolescence so that young people can grow up and lead fulfilling lives. As ChildFund puts its Theory of Change for adolescents and youth into action, we will use our learning to:

- **Create opportunities for all youth:** We will design programs to secure young people's smooth path to adulthood, increasing individual resilience and improving access to safe education, livelihood and employment opportunities. In this way, we build upon young people's skills and resources to contribute to their lives and communities.
- **Combat negative social norms:** We will enlist adolescents and youth in our efforts to combat deeply entrenched social norms that sanction violent practices such as early marriage, FGM/C, gender-based violence, and restrictions on the potential of children with disabilities. We will also combat factors that give rise to toxic ideas of masculinity. Because they are future (and current) parents and potential leaders, involving youth is critical if we are to bring about lasting change, reducing the vulnerability of the next generation of children.
- **Design interventions that reflect the divergence of gender roles and protection challenges:** Our tailored programs will work to reduce the risk of physical violence that adolescent boys disproportionately face, and to provide them with social and emotional skills that foster healthy, non-violent relationships. We will also address the deep-rooted gender inequality that defines the life experiences of girls and young women, advocating for their right to make decisions about their lives (including their education), and working to combat the sexual violence that affects so many of them.
- **Give young people opportunities to advocate for their protection rights – and those of other children.** We will empower adolescents and youth to speak up on the violence that affects them and their communities. In particular, we will make efforts to reach out to marginalized groups such as youth with disabilities, youth from ethnic or religious minorities, and youth who identify with non-traditional gender or sexual identities to ensure that their voices are heard.

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