



Purple E-spaces: young people change their views on gender, and are speaking up and influencing others

Voices for Change (V4C) was a five-year DFID-funded programme which aimed to improve the enabling environment for girls and women in Nigeria. V4C focused on three behavioural areas: **violence against women and girls; women in leadership and; women's role in decision-making** and operated at the level of the individual, institutional change and society at large. V4C has been operating at scale across four states in **Nigeria: Enugu, Kaduna, Kano and Lagos with a target audience of young people aged 16–25.**

The development of online platforms or E-spaces was an innovative and cost-effective component of V4C, which enabled the programme to have meaningful engagement with young people and at scale. E-spaces allowed young men and women to interact, challenge gender discrimination and take action against harmful norms, attitudes and practices. By Year 4 of the programme, the cost of delivering the E-Space Purple Academy, was £2 per beneficiary, making it an affordable approach to scale up in low and middle-income settings.

This qualitative study summary describes the changes occurring among young women and men in Lagos and Kano states who were participating in two of the V4C Purple E-spaces – the *I am Purple* website and the *Purple Academy* mobile learning platform. The full findings and further information about the study can be found in the full case study report.¹

The final section of this study sets out key findings on V4C's E-spaces which also draws on other complementary knowledge products from V4C, including the quantitative 'Attitudes, Practices and Social Norms' survey, 'How Change Happens', 'Value for Money' studies and the 'Engaging Men and Boys' legacy product, all of which are available on the V4C website.

What was the situation before V4C intervention?

Although other forms of popular communication² targeting young Nigerians with social messages existed before V4C's intervention, young women and men lacked the spaces in which to explore and discuss gender-related issues concerning them without fear of reprisal or judgement, using content that was tailored specifically to their contexts and needs. Many of the young people interviewed expressed an appetite for change, but were unequipped to take action. Young women interviewed by V4C commonly described themselves as 'lacking

¹ The study took place in June 2017. The findings were based on 20 focus groups and 28 in-depth interviews involving 130 female and male Purple E-spaces users and non-users in Kano and Lagos states. Respondents were selected on the basis of being 'super-users', 'light users' and 'non-users', and being 'in school' and 'out of school'. The research team also interviewed nine key actors who had been involved in developing the Purple E-spaces. The full report can be found here: <http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Final-PES-Case-Study-report.pdf>.

² Such as MTV's *Shuga* and the BBC World Service's *StoryStory*.

in confidence', and 'afraid to speak out' before encountering the Purple E-spaces,³ while young men reported that they had 'little regard for women' and 'a mind-set that it is only men that can make decisions and go to school.' They also said that their social media interaction tended not to be across religious and geographical groupings.

What did V4C do?

V4C applied a branded social marketing approach using the 'Purple' brand to create a coherent set of messages and values that would appeal to the young target audience. 'Purple' infused different communication components, including billboards, TV and radio. The online Purple products included two separate Purple E-spaces that help young women and men take courageous steps towards advocating for change by providing them with the knowledge and skills they need. The platforms have helped to educate, support and engage a critical mass of young people as a means of challenging negative gender norms. The first platform was a website '*I am Purple*', which was designed to function even on the most basic of web-enabled phones, 'feature phones'. Secondly '*Purple Academy*', an online gender course, was created to complement the website and the 'Purple spaces' – physical safe spaces for young women and men established within post-secondary institutions – and to ensure a more cost-effective approach which could go to scale. These key platforms were supported by other online content including Purple Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Both the 'I am Purple' and 'Purple Academy' platforms were designed to appeal to young women and men between the ages of 16 and 25 years old. Particular care was also taken to make the platforms as inclusive as possible, taking into account ethnicity, religious beliefs and appropriate language. Content was designed to be both entertaining and informative, and stimulated discussion and reflection on serious gender topics. Online community moderators were hired to readily relate to young people, keep abreast of their current and rapidly changing interests and needs, and stimulate dialogue and mutual respect.

What happened as a result of V4C's involvement?

Young people are using the online discussion and gender courses to get information, interact and share experiences of gender equality

Young men and women from different backgrounds and in different locations are using the E-spaces to interact and share their experiences of gender equality. The vast majority are accessing the E-spaces with their own phone. A small minority have no phone or use a computer instead. As at the end of June 2017, the E-spaces had had 6,403,675⁴ visitors (cumulative total). Between 2015 and 2017, 119,328 Nigerians (57 per cent male and 43 per cent female) had started the first chapter of the *Purple Academy* and of these, 34,490 were from the target cohort (16–25 year olds in the four key V4C states) with 48 per cent of these being male and 52 per cent female. 75,303 Nigerians in the target cohort registered for the *I am Purple* website between 2014–17, 53.4 per cent male and 46.6 per cent female. The data also show that E-spaces have been accessed by large numbers of Nigerians outside of the target states and the 16–25 age group.

Before Purple came, I had been looking for an avenue like this; youths these days need a lot of back-up [guidance], someone to push them... We need real information; the information that we have are backdated and archaic. I have been looking for an avenue to speak out. (Young woman, Kano)

³ Also referred to in other V4C documentation as the 'digital space.'

⁴ Monitoring report by Every1Mobile.

It is like a forum where people voice out and express their true feelings and through interaction, when people understand the essence of a particular subject, they come to terms. I think it gives you the ability to think about the reality of the current state of the situation, abolish the beliefs of our forefathers and move on. (Young man, Kano)

Young women and men both report increased confidence, self-belief and feeling empowered to speak up

The young people interviewed spoke of the newfound confidence and self-esteem they had gained from participating in the Purple E-spaces. They described three main areas of change: **feeling affirmed, learning to speak up, and having conviction about their potential and their rights**. Many spoke of how Purple Academy, in particular, had helped them to realise that they had the same rights as anyone else, and that they could stand up for their rights, as well as those of others.

I feel very confident, because I now know more about gender equality and the essence of having a voice as a woman. I have seen that as a girl, I can be anything that I want to, as long as I am focused and hard-working. (Young woman, Lagos)

I used to mix them up [sex and gender] in the past. I used to believe that you can't do this because you are a female and you can't do this because you are a male. I later discovered that the society divide these roles for us, not that we cannot do them. (Young woman, Kano)

Respondents explained how their increased confidence had resulted in them speaking up in a range of different environments and situations where hitherto they would have remained silent or felt intimidated. These spanned home, school and workplaces, as well as relationships with parents, siblings, peers and, for the young women, their boyfriends.

Both female and male respondents spoke of how Purple Academy had affirmed their previous thinking on gender equality and that this had made them feel empowered to act. Many said that they now knew that there was a body of knowledge about gender equality 'out there', and that there are many other people with the same ideas as theirs.

Before, I used to think I was the only one going on that site and relating with issues on gender equality, but going through the site I started seeing that it is a global phenomenon, everybody is talking about it. I feel safe knowing that I am not the only person feeling that way, it is a global thing. I really enjoy it, I have the feeling that one day, one time it will bring a lot of changes about the cultural negative practices, those negative thoughts about gender and the rest. (Young woman, Kano)

Last week Tuesday in class, one of our lecturers was holding a discussion on an assignment that had previously been given to us. This was on feminism. He said that he thinks that feminism is a lost cause, but I challenged this standpoint. I countered his points with all I had learnt from Purple, thereby also educating my classmates on the Purple theory. (Young woman, Lagos)

In both states, young women talked of how they had been able to change the power dynamics in their relationships with boyfriends, and sometimes bring the relationship to an end.

Before, I would apologise even if I wasn't wrong, just to let it go, but this time I refused and was making him see his fault, and later I was like: 'Wait, why am I in this

relationship? You are abusive and one day you will abuse me again, so I am done.'
(Young woman, Kano)

I am Purple website users described how the rich discussions on 'real-life' topics, had given them the knowledge and conceptual tools to make a convincing case for something they already believed in, or enabled them to articulate their ideas on girls' and women's empowerment in ways they had previously been unable to express. Some spoke of how they could now confidently use gender concepts and skills to intervene on other people's behalf and stand up for others as well as themselves.

I can now boldly advise people on their relationships through all I have learnt on the E-spaces. For example, I had a friend who was dating a girl. He learned that a male friend visited her at home and he got jealous to the extent of almost beating the girl. I stopped him from beating her and made him see reasons as to why he should not have gotten jealous. I also told him about the negativity of domestic violence against women. Now, he has a better relationship with his girlfriend. (Young man, Lagos)

Young women and men know more about gender equality and have changed their views on gender issues because of the Purple E-spaces

There was abundant evidence from the young people interviewed that their views on gender had changed as a result of their engagement with the Purple E-spaces, and that the Purple E-spaces had given them a framework with which to make sense of many aspects of their lives. The degree of change, however, varied significantly, as did the extent to which this change in understanding had led to changes in behaviour or taking action. For some, the experience had resulted in a radical change in world view, for others it had sown a seed of doubt about their previous view, or confirmed what they believed in already.

[Since I engaged with E-spaces] I think differently.... I have broken free, if I want to be tough, I will be tough, if I want to cry, I will cry! And it has tuned my thinking. A lot of men can equally cook, men can also do what women can do and vice versa.
(Young woman, Kano)

Using the Purple E-spaces to discuss gender issues with their peers and seek advice exposed young women and men to gender equality and helped them to overcome gender discrimination. The study found that the V4C '50:50' concept is broadly understood as relating to gender equality, and was embraced by most Purple E-space users, with nearly all the young women and men interviewed for this study, from both states, saying they agreed with it and perceived it to be a good thing for society to go forward and adopt.

I believe that what is good for the men should be the same for women in the society. That is fair and just. (Young man, Lagos)

Young women and men are reporting that their views on gender have changed

The respondents talked of many ways in which their views had changed. Here are a few:

Views on women in decision-making and leadership roles. Many of the young women interviewed were encouraged by the messages which they said had propelled them to aim higher, believe in themselves more, or given them the impetus to challenge an unfair situation. Conversely, many male users shared such things as how they no longer thought of themselves as superior, or how they held women in greater esteem than they had before.

This isn't all about making one gender more superior than the other. It's about equity, placing a man and a woman on the same platform. (Young woman, Lagos)

I now realise that being a good leader is not about gender, you can have dull men that cannot do anything, but you can have hard-working, good-thinking women. (Young man, Kano)

Views on girls' education. Many male respondents, from Kano in particular, admitted that previously they had not seen the purpose of investing in female education. They now felt that girls had a right to an education and that society as a whole is lessened if half the population are unable to reach their full potential and make their contribution to society.

Before, I don't value girl education. I didn't value it. I have not taken any action, but my mind-set has changed. (Young man, Kano)

Views on violence against women and girls. The clear majority of young women and men expressed disapproval of violence against women and girls (VAWG), and a belief that it was wrong in terms of fundamental human rights. Some of the young people said that the messages they heard through Purple E-spaces made them recall negative experiences and realise that they wanted to speak up more against VAWG, or persuade other men they knew that they needed to stop.

I have learned more about the dangers of domestic violence on Purple. When I was younger, my father at some point wanted to beat my mother. I disliked this on the spot. It actually made my decision [not to allow violence] in my own home stronger. (Young man, Lagos)

I use the discussion forum, more especially the area that focuses on domestic/sexual violence. The topic, 'Who owns your body?' got me captivated because of my horrible sexual violence experience. I was drugged and raped when I was younger by a friend who still went about trying to tarnish my image. But through the Purple E-spaces, I learnt that the said incident was not the end for me. It does not define me. I learnt that I can be more in life. This also strengthened my belief against domestic violence. Rape is wrong and even the Holy Quran condemned it. (Young woman, Lagos)

The Purple E-spaces are helping young women and men to take on more gender-sensitive behaviours and make changes in their personal life

Many of the young women and men using the Purple E-spaces spoke of how their learning on these platforms had made them modify their behaviour towards others. Most said they were now more considerate and mindful of others' rights, and that this had led to improvements in their relationships with siblings, parents and peers at school, as well as their relationships with the opposite sex. They explained how they had become better listeners, as well as more patient, tolerant and understanding. Examples ranged from changing the way they related to their siblings to adjusting the power dynamics in their close relationships:

I was formerly very insulting [sic] and a bully. I also wasn't a good listener. But after Purple, I changed. I am now very patient with people, I avoid useless arguments as much as I can and now listen better. (Young woman, Lagos)

Their changed behaviour had also brought positive feedback from family and friends. Male respondents said that the communication skills they had learned had led to improved relationships, particularly with women, and believed that listening to women and taking their views into account leads to better decision-making more widely. There was an increased understanding of how including girls' and women's views in home and community matters was beneficial to all.

Before...I was like the only person to make decisions, even against her feelings, I don't care. After getting the knowledge, I just learnt that as a human being she has feelings too, or even has a better idea than me. Now I seek her opinion, share my feelings and problems with her, to have her opinion so we can make final decisions together. (Young man, Kano)

Purple E-spaces are helping young people influence the views or position of family and friends

Although it was not always possible to attribute the contribution that the Purple E-spaces had made to the changing views of family and friends, many young women and men said that E-spaces had enabled them to broach sensitive subjects with their families and begin conversations, particularly with parents and siblings about the rights of girls within the family. Young women had asked their mothers to allocate chores more equally among siblings, and several men talked of how their new knowledge had made them realise that they needed to step up and make changes at home, particularly in the gender division of labour.

At home, I used to look at it that if I didn't wake up to sweep the house, if I'm busy, or doing other chores, my brother can't help me because he is a man. But now I tell him that he can help me. There is nothing to it. If they (others) are trying to show me in the house that he is a man, I still tell them that we are all humans. I just had a partial thinking, but when they (Purple) brought the idea, I welcomed it strongly because I think life should be like that. Before, I felt it is my responsibility, he is a man and we can't be equal, because I was not educated in that aspect. (Young woman, Kano)

Purple has changed me in house activities, most especially in house chores. When I am assigned certain chores like cutting onions, washing plates, I will [used to] say 'No, this is for a girl.' (Young man, Kano)

Young women are vying for leadership positions. A good number of the young women and men explained how the Purple E-spaces had helped them to see the benefits to society if leadership roles are allocated on the basis of capacity and ability rather than gender. It was striking that the school environment provides a place where young people can practise their leadership through the many departmental, club and student representative roles:

This 50/50 concept also impacted positively when I decided to aspire for a political position when I was in school. I learnt from it that I can do anything, and my doing well isn't gender-related. I contested for the president of my department and I won! All thanks to my knowledge on the 50/50 concept. (Young woman, Lagos)

Young men are replacing abuse with dialogue. Some men also admitted that their engagement with the Purple E-spaces made them realise that they had to stop both verbal

and physical abuse of women, and that dialogue was an alternative to resolving disagreement:

The lesson I learnt is, being a male should not make me to harass the female. Like when they annoy me, I did take actions like beating them. But now I sit one-on-one and we talk about our differences. (Young man, Kano)

Young women and men also described how they had taken action in a very personal way to advocate for gender equality among the people closest to them. Their new ways of seeing had made them notice inequality and negative behaviours, and made them want to talk with their friends and family about the changes that they believed were necessary and possible. They felt they had influenced both friends, siblings, parents and sometimes spouses, in a number of ways: encouraging them to 'join the movement', explaining gender-related issues, confronting negative behaviours and identifying ways in which they felt their relationships could change for the better.

I believe if my best friend believes in 50/50, he still has a best friend that has a best friend and there would be ripple effect of the 50/50 agenda. (Young man, Kano)

Some young women and men are spreading the Purple message to the external world and taking action independently of support from the Purple E-spaces

There was some evidence of emerging micro-communities of young women and men who believe in gender equality, identify with Purple messages, and have an interest in spreading these messages to the external world. Some have created their own WhatsApp and Facebook groups and their engagement is now independent of the support provided in the Purple E-spaces, although they continue to refer (and refer others) to the *I am Purple* website and *Purple Academy* as a source of support, knowledge and personal development.⁵

What are the reasons for these changes?

The Purple E-spaces have helped to increase the confidence and self-belief of young people by providing:

- **A space to share experience** of gender-related issues without being judged or identified.
- **A space where young people feel understood, connected to others and part of a wider group** of Nigerian young people interested in gender equality and women's empowerment. The spaces have been designed to appeal to young women and men from different cultural and religious backgrounds and raise issues, and use language that resonates with young Nigerians' lives.
- **The Purple Academy**, which has given them a source of reliable knowledge on gender issues in a form they can share easily with others.
- **Information on healthy communication skills and the gender dynamics in relationships**, which has enabled them to understand how they relate with people, the opposite sex in particular, and what they can do to change unhealthy relationships.

⁵ For more information on the diffusion of ideas and actions from V4C, please see the 'How Change Happens': A light-touch study on the Theory of Change' report, 2017.

The response of a person to the Purple E-spaces, the degree to which they accept new knowledge, change their views or use new skills, depends on a number of factors, including:

- **Supportive friends and family:** Some respondents enjoyed solid support from home and friends, others found themselves in highly challenging circumstances, sometimes alone in confronting opposition from people they depend on or care about.
- **Previous personal experience of gender equality and gender-based violence issues:** some respondents (mostly women) had had their rights violated (denied education, marginalised from decision-making at home), others (mostly young men) had watched helplessly as children as their mothers were beaten by their fathers.
- **Exposure to the Purple Spaces:** Those who had previously gone through a Purple Physical Safe Space process and then consolidated it with interactions in the Purple E-spaces were clearly more enthusiastic and equipped to take action.

Evidence from this case study suggests that the young people chose to take action because they:

- realised their behaviour was affecting them and others negatively;
- applied their learning to their own life and saw that they needed to make changes;
- saw the positive impacts when they tried new behaviours;
- encountered a problem or situation, and felt they could be part of the solution;
- felt confident that they could make a difference.

What lessons have been learned about E-spaces?⁶

- Introducing the concept of gender equality with young people requires a **creative approach**. The Purple-branded E-spaces provided a fun, interactive and skills-building approach which enabled young people to engage at scale.
- **Well-moderated and appealing virtual spaces** can positively influence a wide range and a large number of young people and their views. The degree of change depends on many factors, including their upbringing, the support of those around them, their previous experience of gender equality and women's empowerment, and feeling part of a wider movement of change/trend.
- Young Nigerians are generally open to the idea of gender equality, but it is important to recognise that people are at **different points on a journey to change**. Some are ready and wanting to take action, others are listening and yet to make up their mind. A virtual space needs to accommodate all of these.
- Young people first start **to take action among those they are closest to**, such as friends and family. Their peers and younger siblings are often the starting point as they have most influence on them.
- The Engaging Men and Boys study stresses the importance of physical and virtual safe spaces and creating an environment that does **not cast blame or shame men**, and which enables them to take responsibility for their processes of personal and collective transformation, and be accountable to others.
- Findings from the **Value for Money analysis** also demonstrate the importance of this approach in low-income environments. By Year 4, the unit cost of a girl trained in a virtual safe space was £2 per girl trained⁷ and thus has great potential for scale-up.

⁶ Findings draw on case study findings, the 'Attitudes, Practices and Social Norms' survey, 'Value for Money' analysis and legacy products, including 'Engaging Men and Boys'.

⁷ V4C Year 4 Value for Money Analysis, November 2017.

- The themes used on E-spaces such as **fulfilling your potential, success in personal relationships, and contributing to the community** proved appealing to both female and male young Nigerians in the north and south.
- Overall, Purple Academy appealed equally to men and women but poorer beneficiaries and women in the north were less likely to access online platforms than their Southern and better-off peers. This suggests that E-spaces **need to be complemented by other media channels**, including radio, where there are barriers to digital access.
- To assess the magnitude of change of E-spaces, it is important to use **mixed-methods research to capture how new ideas are diffused** through E-spaces and how changes in attitudes translate into actions. Qualitative research can show how changes in attitudes on gender discrimination has prompted young people to take action in their personal relationships and communities (including post-secondary institutions).
- It is important to have **young online community managers** who can relate to the target audience, to help steer discussions, both to sustain engagement and moderate discussions to mitigate the unintended negative impact of harmful and discriminatory views on gender being voiced on online platforms.