

Increased Access to Rights for Young Female Venezuelan Migrants through Empowerment

A case study analysis of the program *Chamas en Acción* in Lima, Peru

Master Thesis

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Abstract

An alarming rise in discriminatory behaviors towards young female migrants has emerged in the city of Lima, leading to persistent violation of their rights. This study employs a case-study analysis to examine the influence of the youth empowerment program Chamas en Acción on its participants and to determine its contribution towards enhancing access to rights. Guided by a theory of change framework, the study examines the program's mechanisms and processes, particularly the role of a safe space in achieving desired outcomes. The findings highlight the role of youth empowerment programs in facilitating access to rights for young female migrants by providing crucial resources. These resources include human capital in the form of knowledge, which enhances self-confidence, social capital through supportive networks, and cultural capital in the form of emotional management skills that aid in navigating challenging circumstances. The participants embark on a process of individual empowerment, recognizing their agency and become catalysts for positive change in supportive environments that value their empowered voices.

Keywords: Children Rights, Resources, Safe Space, Venezuelan Migration, Youth Empowerment.

Introduction

“The program has allowed me to meet other Venezuelan girls and has also made us feel in a safe space to share our experiences. One of the most important things is that they have focused on teaching us the importance of having information and how this helps us to report and learn more about the problems that impact our lives.”¹ –Michelle, participant of *Chamas en Acción*.¹

Globalization can be described as a worldwide interconnectedness phenomenon that has facilitated the global flows of trade, capital, and human mobility (Held & McGrew, 2003). Accordingly, one of the most salient features of globalization is international migration (De Haas et al., 2020). As a result of the increased cross-border movement of people, societies have been confronted with unprecedented levels of diversity (De Haas et al., 2020). However, this diversity has not been universally embraced and has led to conflicts, fueling “deep-seated xenophobia” (Held & McGrew, 2003).

The ongoing political, economic, and social conflict in Venezuela has resulted in widespread cross-border movements and has led to a mass emigration of the population (González, 2021). According to the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), as of January 2023, there were approximately 7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide (R4Va, 2023). Among them, about 1.5 million individuals are currently residing in Peru (R4Va, 2023), with over 1 million concentrated in Lima, the city that hosts the largest population of Venezuelan migrants outside their home country (R4Vb, 2023). Projections indicate that the number of Venezuelans in Peru may increase to 1.6 million this year, with adult women comprising 35 percent and girls about 16 percent of this migrant population, making the female sex the predominant group in this migration (R4Vb).

Within the current landscape of increasing diversity, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by specific demographic groups. The persistence of Peruvian media in depicting migrants as a threat reinforces negative stereotypes, resulting in difficulties for migrants to establish meaningful connections within the host society (Freier & Perez, 2021). “*Teenage girls from Venezuela find themselves triply*

¹ The sentence was translated from Spanish to English by the author. The words of Michelle can be found in the video ‘*Las voces de las #ChamasenAcción 2022*’ that aimed to summarize the experience of the participants in the program. URL https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uf5NFTwffqOA&ab_channel=QuintaOla

discriminated against – for being young, for being women, and for being foreigners” (UNHCR, 2022). In order to provide targeted support and resources to address the distinct obstacles faced by young women in this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) acquire a strategic importance (Castles, 2004) since the Peruvian government has not implemented a comprehensive rights-guaranteeing immigration policy, that protects the rights of Venezuelan migrants (Blouin & Zamora Gómez, 2022).

In 2021, globally, women have access to only 75% of the legal rights granted to men. This gender disparity is compounded by the insufficient representation of women and girls in political and other decision-making processes, limiting their capacity to challenge and rectify these inequalities (UNFPA, 2021).

Quinta Ola, a feminist non-governmental organization with the aim of promoting the exercise of rights and empowering girls, teenagers, and women in their diversity across all areas of life (Quinta Ola, n.d.), has taken action to address the persistent challenges faced by young female migrants through its program, *Chamas en Acción* (in English: Girls in Action). Utilizing a bottom-up approach, the program endeavors to equip female migrant girls and adolescents, refugees, and asylum seekers “*with the necessary tools to lead social change, drawing from their unique experiences as Venezuelan teenagers*” (Quinta Ola, 2021).

The program is offered annually in Lima. This year’s edition had start in May. As part of its continuous improvement, the program undergoes slight adjustments each year to better meet the needs of the girls. In its efforts to strengthen the girls’ capacity to defend their rights and fight against violence, the program places significant emphasis on recognizing the girls as subjects of rights, as well as addressing the structural issues that affect their daily lives, including discrimination in the forms of xenophobia and sexism (Quinta Ola, 2022). A space is also provided for Venezuelans to interact with adolescents from the host community (Peruvian counterparts), fostering integration and promoting learning opportunities. Furthermore, the program strives to contribute to the participants’ individual empowerment processes. As evidenced by Michelle’s words in the beginning of the introduction, the program is providing intangible resources that have a positive impact on the lives of the girls.

Current Challenges

Despite Peru’s commitment to providing universal primary and secondary education to all, irrespective of legal status, migrant children face notable difficulties in accessing

formal education (Selee & Bolter, 2020). These challenges primarily stem from a lack of information about the education system, limited financial resources to cover high entry fees, and restricted availability of consular services required for obtaining essential documentation (UNESCO, 2020). Additionally, Venezuelan women encounter substantial challenges in public spaces, particularly on the streets, which are considered unsafe environments where they face persistent sexual harassment and derogatory remarks targeting their physical appearance, “*veneca, look at that ass*”, reflecting prevalent stereotypes (Freier, Kvietok & Castro Padrón, 2022).

Empowering and giving agency to young female migrants is of utmost importance, “*The more formal education girls and women receive, the more agency they have over their life course*” (UNFPA, 2022) thereby having the possibility of changing and improving their life outcomes.

Problem Statement: Research Objective and Research Question

In this research, I will explain and evaluate the impact of the program *Chamas en Acción* on the lives of its former participants by using the theory of change to map the specific outcomes of the project in the city of Lima. The increasing criminalization of Venezuelan migrants has been deeply affecting their integration experiences (Pérez & Freier, 2023; Freier & Pérez, 2021). Therefore, the safe spaces created by the program provide a unique opportunity for the participants to connect with their peers (Brady, 2005) and acquire information that is not typically taught in schools. These factors led to the following research question:

How does the program Chamas en Acción impact the life of its participants and aim to strengthen their knowledge of their rights and capacities to access them?

Sub-questions

1. What are assumptions of the theory of change?
2. What is the implicit theory of change?
3. How do the girls enter to the program in terms of their knowledge of their rights in Peru, and capabilities to access these rights? Are the outcomes aligned with theory of change?

Academic Relevance

Women migration has been widely studied as care chain migration (Parreñas, 2000; Ambrosini, 2011; Esim & Smith, 2004; Lutz, 2016). Other scholars focus on women in situations of conflict and go deeper in trying to understand the implications of gender migration (Martin & Tirman, 2009) but literature about young female migrants is almost inexistent. In the particular case of Venezuelan migration to Peru, researchers have given some attention to the topic, particularly in relation to xenophobia (Oxfam, 2019; Freier & Pérez, 2021; Blouin & Zamora Gómez, 2022). However, no studies have specifically focused on the experiences, needs, and challenges of young female migrants, also referred in the literature as adolescent girls' migration, especially in 'non-Western' contexts (Temin et al., 2013). This study seeks to address this gap in the literature through qualitative research utilizing in-depth interviews. The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the specific challenges and needs faced by this demographic and to investigate how context-specific empower programs can lead to sustained benefits in their lives over time, ultimately empowering them to become agents of social change.

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge the central role that resources provided by NGOs in countries with weak immigration policies, which historically identified themselves as emigration countries (Busse & Vásquez Luque, 2016), may play in the long-term development of the beneficiaries. These resources are often difficult to obtain through other means, underscoring the critical role that these organizations may play in society (Castles, 2004).

Lastly, the study of this case should serve as an example of a possible approach to address the needs of this specific demographic in the region and an outcome predictor of implementation of target demographics programs by civil society organizations.

Societal Relevance

The Venezuelan crisis constitutes nowadays the second-largest external displacement crisis worldwide (Freier & Parent, 2019) and Peru constitutes the second most common destination for this migrant population right after Colombia (R4Va, 2023). As such, this study aims to serve as a bridge for fostering empathy and understanding between the host community and migrants by raising public awareness of the challenges faced by these young individuals.

Furthermore, this research may serve as a critical tool for the NGO to advocate for the importance of their work and to secure a sustainable source of funding for the continuation of their efforts to address the unique needs of young female migrants.

Theoretical Framework

Rights and Access to Rights

The recognition of children's rights at the international level can present a political dilemma for states, particularly when it comes to acknowledging the rights of non-citizen children within their own territory (Anderson, 2012). This is because the recognition and protection of human rights may potentially limit a state's sovereignty and its ability to regulate the admission of non-citizens (Garcés-Mascreñas, 2019). Unlike citizenship rights, human rights are not confined by national boundaries, which further complicates the issue (Ruhs, 2012). As a result, a pattern often emerges within national borders where the number of immigrants is inversely related to their access to rights (Ruhs, 2013; Ruhs and Martin, 2008). A low number of immigrants is generally associated with a high level of rights, while a high number of immigrants is typically linked to restricted access to rights.

Children's rights encompass a collection of essential human rights that are specifically designed to address the unique needs of children (UNICEF, 2023). These rights are internationally recognized and enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, UN General Assembly, 1989), which came into force in September 1990 and has received extensive ratification from countries worldwide, with the notable exception of the United States of America. The CRC stands as the most widely embraced human rights convention in history (Cowden, 2016; Diers, 2013; Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008).

According to the CRC, children are recognized as legal persons and are entitled to political, civil, social, economic, and cultural rights (Ruck et al., 2016). The CRC promotes the interconnectedness of children's well-being and their ability to make choices for themselves (self-determination), emphasizing that children are not property of any state or their parents (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). In the Convention, a child is defined as an individual under the age of eighteen, and the document outlines a comprehensive set of rights based on four key articles known as "guiding principles" (Bessell & Gal, 2009). These principles include: non-discrimination – no young person

should suffer discrimination of any kind, including by its sex and nationality (Article 2); the best interests of the child – all decisions made by adults should consider what is best for children (Article 3); the right to life, survival, and development (Article 6); and the right to participate – granting children the right to have a voice in matters that affect them (Article 12).

The principle of non-discrimination holds significant relevance within the context of this research. In order to uphold this principle, it is imperative to ensure equitable access to rights for adolescents from minority groups, recognizing and addressing the diverse range of identities within these groups. It is crucial to acknowledge the concept of intersectionality, as some adolescents may belong to multiple minority groups simultaneously (Ruck et al., 2016).

Diers (2013) categorizes the rights outlined in the CRC into three distinct categories: survival and development, protection, and participation rights. The survival and development category encompasses rights that are essential for children to access resources and acquire the necessary skills to flourish and realize their full potential (Ruck et al., 2016). Of particular relevance to this research is the right to access to education (Article 28) and the right to access information and knowledge about their rights (Article 42).

The second category encompasses protection rights, focuses on safeguarding children from violence, abuse, exploitation and harmful work and drugs (Articles 19, 32, 33, 34, 35). These rights hold fundamental importance, as empirical evidence has shown that adolescents belonging to minority groups are particularly vulnerable to specific types of violence and discriminatory treatments (Ruck et al., 2016).

Lastly, the participation rights aim to prepare children to take an active role in society by building their agency and capacities for a full expression of their citizenship (Ruck et al., 2016). This includes the right to freely express their opinions on matters that affect them, as well as the freedom of expression, thought, religion, association, peacefully assembly, right to privacy and access to information (Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). To effectively enable children to exercise their participatory rights, it is crucial to establish inclusive and safe environments (Carlson, Brennan & Earls, 2012), and implement initiatives that facilitate the development of their skills and confidence. These settings and programs should encourage children to freely express their opinions and engage in meaningful dialogue, fostering mutual understanding and active citizenship

(Ruck et al., 2016). As Fortin (2005) argue the rights concede to children reflect the society in where they are growing and the type of childhood they are experiencing.

The table below showcases the relevant rights within their respective categories, specifically pertaining to the intervention under study, *Chamas en Acción* (see appendix A for detailed information on each right):

Table 1: Illustration of children rights according to CRC.

Category of Rights	Rights and Articles
Survival and development	Access to Education (Article 28)
	Everyone must know children’s rights (Article 42)
Protection	Non-discrimination (Article 2)
	Protection from violence (Article 19)
Participation	Respect for children’s views (Article 12)
	Sharing thoughts freely (Article 13)

Source: Diers, 2013; UN General Assembly, 1989

Despite the legal entitlements, the actual access to rights can often be challenging. In the context of survival and development rights, migrant children face significant obstacles in accessing education due to the stigmatizing label of ‘illegality’ attached to their status (Bloch & Zetter, 2009). Even when migrants obtain legal status, they continue to confront discrimination, which acts as a formidable barrier, hindering their access to equal opportunities (O’Connell Davidson and Farrow, 2007). This persistent discrimination perpetuates violations of the principle of non-discrimination. Additionally, when considering participation rights, the role of adults becomes crucial as they can either enable or impede children’s ability to exercise these rights (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008).

Compounding the challenge of accessing rights, migrants in vulnerable situations often struggle to obtain resources, which are key determinants of the social integration process, as noted by Lockwood (1996). If we only consider rights that exist ‘on paper’, we fail to address the pervasive social and economic inequalities that exist. Access to resources is crucial in overcoming the barriers faced by minority groups (Lockwood, 1996).

Resources and Access to Resources

Lockwood (1996) defined moral resources as advantages obtained through social status and networks, possession of information and expertise, and the ability to achieve one's objectives by activating collective moral sentiments. Conversely, material resources were defined as the ability to maximize the benefits of a formally equal right, in other words, an individual with superior access to material resources has greater capacity to express themselves effectively and make optimal choices. Together, they are seen as essential components to claim for rights (Lockwood, 1996). This study will examine resources as forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1976) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of factors that may influence program outcomes.

Firstly, this analysis will focus on the concept of social capital. Social capital refers to the combined set of "*actual or potential resources*" that stem from having an enduring network of interpersonal connections characterized by mutual recognition and familiarity, often with varying degrees of institutionalization (Bourdieu, 1976). One of the most important forms of social capital for comprehending the phenomenon of international migration are social networks (Boyd, 1989), whose have been connecting people across time and space (Giddens, 2003) and tend to decrease the economic, social, and psychological costs of migration (De Haas et al., 2020; Nee & Sanders, 2001). Ryan (2011) has highlighted the importance of two distinct types of relationship, namely bonding and bridging, which will be critical to this study. The former refers to individuals who share important similarities with us and could be important to 'getting by', while the latter pertains to individuals who differ from us in significant ways and could be crucial to 'getting ahead' (Putnam, 2000). Post-1965, family migration has been a dominant pattern, what made the family unit a vital strategic resource for households with limited financial capital. This often means adults working multiple jobs and older children taking on caregiving responsibilities (Nee & Sanders, 2001).

Another form of capital important for migrants is cultural capital, which can be institutionalized: academic credentials; or embodied: "*long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body*" (Bourdieu, 1976; Nee & Sanders, 2001). In this study, the first will be assessed separately, as human capital, due to its importance for the program evaluation. Embodied cultural capital refers to the knowledge, value systems, and language patterns that an individual acquires (Bartee & Brown, 2007).

Human capital refers to the collective investments made in formal academic education that are anticipated to yield returns in the labor market (Bartee & Brown, 2007;

Nee & Sanders, 2001). Bourdieu (1976) has criticized the financial aspect of human capital, as education is a fundamental human right, yet many young migrants continue to encounter obstacles when attempting to access it.

The table below presents a synthesis of the different forms of capital and the corresponding associated resources.

Table 2: Illustration of resources according to its forms of capital

Forms of Capital	Resources
Social Capital	Social Networks; Relationships; Bonding and Bridging; Family
Cultural Capital	Familiarity with host society cultural customs; Values; Religion
Human Capital	Education; Skills

Source: Author's elaboration based on Bourdieu, 1976; Nee, 1990; Nee & Sanders, 2001; Ryan, 2011.

Youth Empowerment Programs

To deepen our understanding of how youth-focused initiatives facilitate positive change by providing resources that facilitate the young female migrant's assertion of rights, a brief analysis of the theory of critical youth empowerment, as proposed by Jennings et al. (2006), will be undertaken. Firstly, it is noteworthy that empowerment is a dynamic process that grants power and enables individuals or groups to exercise agency in decision-making (Kabeer, 1999; Sardenberg, 2008). Jennings et al. (2006) define empowerment as *"a multi-level construct consisting of practical approaches and applications, social action processes, and individual and collective outcomes"*. To attain these individual and collective outcomes, the theory of critical youth empowerment highlights six key dimensions: (1) A welcoming and safe environment; (2) Meaningful participation and engagement; (3) Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults; (4) Engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes; (5) Participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change; and (6) Integrated individual- and community-level empowerment.

The first dimension encompasses the creation of a stereotype-free environment where young people are free to express their emotions without fear of judgment, fostering a sense of belonging within a familial-like community (Heath & McLaughlin, 1991). This space allows for the formation of meaningful and supportive connections enabling the formation of cohesive groups and the cultivation of social capital (Sellman, 2015).

The second dimension emphasizes the importance of meaningful participation and sustained engagement, enabling youth to develop essential skills and knowledge, including participatory skills (Jennings et al., 2006).

The third dimension centers on the gradual transfer of decision-making power to children (Cargo et al., 2003). This dimension will be further explored in this section using Hart’s (1992) framework.

The fourth dimension involves the recognition and critical examination of both visible and invisible systems of oppression that operate within society and institutions, prompting individuals to engage in transformative change. Artistic expressions can play a significant role in facilitating critical reflection (Messias et al., 2005).

The fifth dimension highlights the significance of actively addressing “*the structures, processes, social values, and practices*” that perpetuate oppressive systems as described previously, understanding the causal mechanisms to influence them (Jennings et al., 2006).

Lastly, the sixth dimension highlights the collective benefits that arise from empowering young individuals, extending beyond individual growth. There is evidence that youth engagement in community activities has a positive ripple effect on the broader community (Zeldin et al., 2003).

To examine the dynamics of power sharing between adults and children within empowerment programs and determine the extent of participation rights, Hart’s (1992) “*ladder of participation*” framework provides a valuable structure consisting of eight steps (Figure 1).

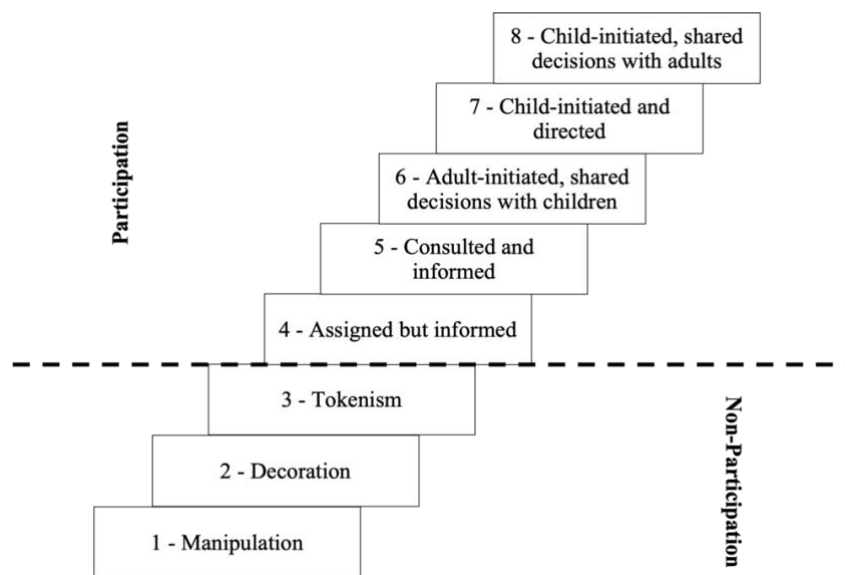


Figure 1 – Ladder of Participation; Source: Hart, 1992

These steps are divided into two different categories: participation and non-participation, recognizing that the ideal level of participation may vary depending on contextual factors to achieve meaningful impact (Bessell & Gal, 2009). Level 5 involves considering children's perspectives, but final decisions are ultimately made by adults. At level 6, children participate in the decision-making process alongside adults. Levels 7 and 8 signify children taking independent action based on their own knowledge and capabilities, occasionally seeking guidance from available adults (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018).

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive evaluation research design utilizing an outcome program evaluation approach in combination with the theory of change. The primary objectives were to comprehensively outline the content of the program, understand the implicit intervention logic, and determine whether the actual outcomes align with the proposed ones and are causally related to the activities of the program.

The fundamental concept of the theory of change posits that each intervention can be expressed as a phased sequence of causes and effects (Weiss, 1997). Thus, utilizing the theory of change provides the researcher with a clear and structured understanding of how the intervention is intended to operate (Mayne, 2015). Through outcome evaluation, the program can be assessed in terms of its contribution to the life of the participants, measuring the changes that occur as a result of the intervention.

Combined, these two approaches allow to access the effectiveness of the program, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and provide recommendations for improvement, if necessary.

Research Approach and Design

A qualitative research approach was chosen to explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to a particular event (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Specifically, this research will examine how the participants of *Chamas en Acción* interpret the influence of the program in their lives.

In terms of the research design, this study utilized a case study design. A detailed and intensive examination of a single case and an in-depth analysis will provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and uniqueness of this particular case (Stake, 1995). This research will focus on the participants of the program *Chamas en Acción*,

particularly in the impact produced by the strategies utilized to strengthening their knowledge and capacities to live a life free from violence and discrimination.

Research Methods

Three different methods were used to perform this research: content analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. By collecting data from multiple sources, a triangulation approach can be employed, which enhances the reliability and internal validity of the findings (Merriam, 1988). Content analysis is employed to gain a preliminary understanding of the structure of the program. This analysis encompasses both public and private documents. The former includes an examination of available information on the organization website: the result report from the first edition of the program, as well as texts produced by previous participants detailing specific challenges affecting their lives, such as xenophobia, sexual harassment, stereotypes, gender-based violence, and the lack of rights. The latter entails an analysis of the methodological proposal, presented by Quinta Ola to its donor, for the second edition of the program, as well as the evaluation reports for each activity.

The use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to validate previous information and obtain a comprehensive understanding of various aspects, including: (1) the contextual factors surrounding the young female migrants in the city of Lima and the challenges they encountered; (2) the range of activities undertaken throughout the duration of the program; (3) the knowledge and competencies acquired by the participants; and (4) the program's impact and outcomes through the personal experiences of the participants.

The third and final method employed in this study was participant observation, which took place during the initial full-day workshop of the 2023 program edition at Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) facilities. Despite the limited opportunity to observe the activities for only one day due to travel schedule, this observation yielded valuable insights into the immediate outcomes of the program's first day.

Data collection

Thirteen semi structured interviews were performed to the target population of this research, ten former participants and three organization members (see appendix B for specifications). Due to the specific context of the city of Lima, time travel between places and potentially danger associate for the participants, all interviews were conducted online

via zoom. At the researcher's request, the organization sent an internal email to all the graduated network, providing the researcher's contact information. This allowed each participant to independently schedule an interview at a convenient time based on their individual availability. As the interviews progressed, snowball sampling was also employed. Based on the expected data saturation after conducting the thirteen interviews, additional data collection would not have yielded new insights or information, therefore the researcher considered to have the adequate sample size to perform the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Analytical strategy

All data was analyzed using a coding process with the assistance of Atlas.ti software. A combination of deductive and inductive approaches was employed, incorporating a pre-existing list with expected themes of interest, as well as an inductive search for new patterns or relationships within the data related to the theory previously analyzed (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). All codes were organized into categories that align with the concepts derived from the theoretical framework.

Limitations

There are three notable limitations to the present study. Firstly, it would have been ideal to observe and track the participants throughout an entire program edition, assessing their initial state and tracing the final impact of the intervention. Unfortunately, due to time constraints within the scope of this thesis research, the researcher's visit to Lima only permitted attendance of activities for a single day, thereby limiting direct observations to the human rights workshop. Although this study partially captures the immediate outcome of this session through interview 9, the long-term impact on these participants will not be included in this research.

Secondly, the duration of the initial edition of the program significantly differs from the subsequent second and ongoing third editions. This variation can be attributed to the availability of funding, which supported the extensive nature of the first program, as well as the diverse interests of the participants, not all of whom had aspirations of becoming activists. While the methodological framework for program development remained consistent, adjustments were made to the number of implemented activities and the timeframe allocated for enhancing adolescent skills. Consequently, the first edition encompassed all dimensions of empowerment whereas the subsequent editions primarily

focused on its formative dimension. This shift in emphasis may result in divergent outcomes. Establishing a clear differentiation between the different editions and their specific impacts poses a challenge. To address the comprehensive scope of empowerment covered in the initial edition, the organization strategically opted to develop complementary programs (see appendix C for detailed information on these programs).

Thirdly, conducting research with adolescents can present unanticipated challenges. Gathering insightful and coherent responses can prove to be arduous, given the propensity for divergent answers influenced by the disparate levels of maturity exhibited by adolescents.

Ethical Considerations

The present-day sees heightened attention being paid to ethical issues in social research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Accordingly, before conducting the interviews, all participants were provided with information about the research. Since the participants were minors, their parents or legal guardian were required to sign the informed consent forms. To protect the privacy of the participants and maintain confidentiality, their names were disassociated from their testimonies (Bryman, 2012), and they were assigned numbers from one to thirteen. Data was securely stored on a computer with restricted access only to the researcher.

It was also essential to ensure that the questions asked during the interview were not revictimizing, especially given the vulnerability of the population. To address this concern, the interview themes were reviewed by the head of the organization and modified as necessary. If any instances of perceived or verbalized emotional distress were observed, participants were referred to the psychosocial support team with whom they had already engaged during the program's activities and the program coordinator would be informed.

Results

In the following section, an analysis of the empirical findings will be conducted. First, the mechanisms of the program will be analyzed through the theory of change. Secondly, the transformative process experienced by the participants in their journey towards accessing to rights will be described.

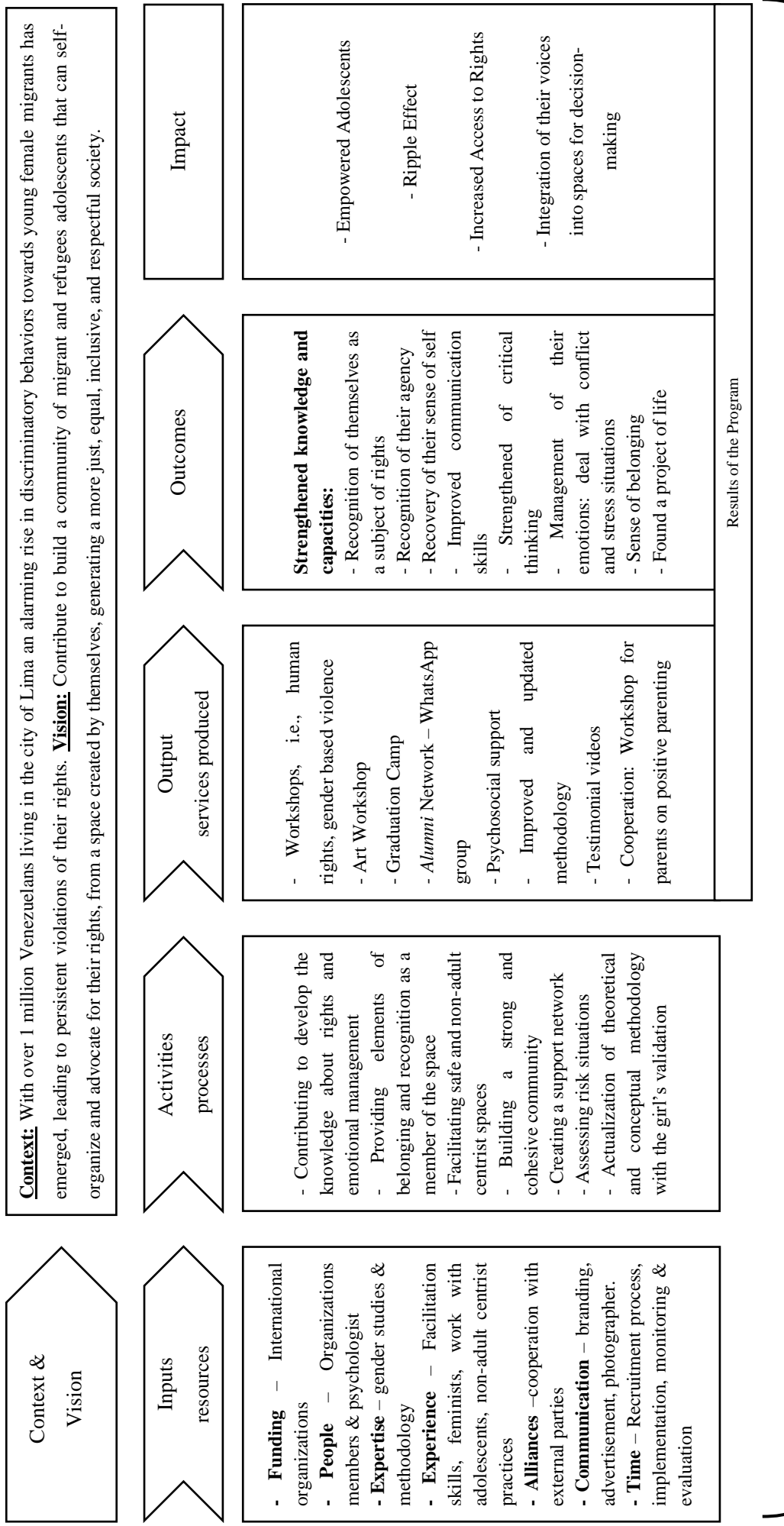


Figure 2 – Author’s formulation of the implicit Theory of Change for the program *Chamas en Acción*.

The Program – *Chamas en Acción*: a detailed analysis

With the intention of providing a comprehensive understanding of the program, its implicit theory of change (Figure 2), presented on the previous page, was formulated based on document analysis and empirical data collected from NGO representatives.

Assumptions

Creating a safe environment is a necessary condition for this program occur. This characteristic is not only theoretically significant, as highlighted in the first dimension of youth empowerment proposed by Jennings et al. (2006), but it is also supported by empirical evidence from both the participants and the program's organizational members. By providing this space, *“they [the adolescents] can share their points of view, their experiences, many of which include experiences of violence and discrimination”* without feeling judged (Interview 13). From the participants side, there is a huge emphasis on the safeness associated to this space (Interview 2,4,5,7), characterizing it as a *“a safe space that I didn't used to have before”* (Interview 2). This safe space becomes particularly significant, as highlight by the last sentence, other environments, such as schools or homes, often fail to fulfill that role: *“I feel that if you start talking about any problem you have there, at your school, or anywhere else, it won't be the same because [...] they don't give it importance”* (Interview 1).

Moreover, it is important that this safe space is characterized by horizontality, and as a non-adult-centric space so the girls start to acknowledge the value of their voices and opinions (Article 12 & 13):

“Instead, they ask for your opinion there, and sometimes they correct you, but they correct you in a good way and always take it into account. In other words, for them what you have to offer is important” (Interview 9).

This horizontality assumes a critical role in facilitating access to participation rights, as it entails a power-sharing dynamic between adults and children that confers to the setting the necessary features for the exercise of these rights (Carlson, Brennan & Earls, 2012). One respondent translates this power-sharing in their own words, stating: *“They make us feel like we're talking to a girl our age”* (Interview 3). This power-sharing correspond to the third dimension of youth empowerment (Jennings et al., 2006) and it can also be analyzed through the lens of Hart's (1992) framework, considering a space in level 6 of

the ladder, where adults initiate the discussions, but children take active decisions on the discussion, and their opinions were taking into account. While levels 7 and 8, namely youth determined and youth directed (Hart, 1992), are considered preferred pathways for the empowerment process (Jennings et al., 2006), the current model of the program does not fully attain these levels. However, participants are provided with the opportunity to access these levels through a complementary program called *Voces Activistas*, offered by the organization. (see appendix C for more information).

The last characteristic of this space that should be taken in consideration within the program's developmental environment is the feminist approach. This characteristic plays a vital role in promoting openness and empowerment among the individuals involved (Interview 12; Quinta Ola, 2022).

In addition to the characteristics in the program's created space, the physical environment utilized for conducting activities, facilitated by a partnership with the PUCP, also embraced the elements of safety and inclusivity. As a university with admirable infrastructure within the Peruvian context, it provided an environment that prioritized the well-being and inclusiveness of all participants (Interview 12).

From outputs to outcomes

The primary objective of the program is “*strengthening the capacities of [migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking] Venezuelan adolescents and the host community, enabling them to defend their rights, particularly the right to a life free from violence*” (Interview 13). To achieve this, the organization employs a working methodology that is updated every year to be aligned with the current context. This methodology is validated and co-created in collaboration with the advisory council of adolescents and youth of Quinta Ola (Interview 12), composed by five Venezuelans and five Peruvians (Interview 2). In this way, youth opinions and thoughts are valued (Article 12 &13), and decision-making is shared between adults and children (Hart, 1992)

The participatory full-day workshops serve as the foundational element of this methodology, with variations in their number and themes across different program editions (Interview 11; Quinta Ola, 2021). While human rights and gender-based violence remain core subjects, the way “*as we address them, it is updated every year*” to ensure relevance (Interview 12). These workshops facilitate active and meaningful participation (Jennings et al., 2006) through various interactive activities, thereby imparting valuable knowledge and education. Consequently, they enhance participants' human capital and

empower them to exercise their rights effectively (Lockwood, 1996). Beyond cognitive learning, the educational component fosters self-discovery, contributing to the participants' empowerment process: *"It was a very enriching and enjoyable experience. Because to be honest, I feel like I learned so much. Firstly, I gained a lot of information, and also learned more about myself"* (Interview 6). For some participants, engagement in these spaces aids in the recovery of their sense of self, which may have been diminished during their migration journey (Interviews 6, 7, 8). In contrast to the survival-focused mindset prompted by vulnerability, the program offers a platform for participants to construct or reconstruct their life projects, empowering them to envision and pursue their aspirations (Interview 11).

There is also a special workshop, the art workshop which is a place where participants explore and express their emotions, providing them with new tools for self-expression and fostering critical reflection (Interview 12; Messias et al., 2005).

The last moment of every edition is a graduation camp where the participants receive an element of recognition of their achievements as a member of the project (Interview 13). Additionally, testimonial videos also serve as a form of recognition and symbol of belonging to the program, providing a stage for participants' voices to be heard.

Furthermore, the program also had a crucial component of psychosocial support that was always available to all participants. This aspect was greatly valued by the participants (Interviews 3,4,5,8,10), as highlighted by one respondent: *"[...] the psychological assistance helped me tremendously, tremendously, you have no idea"* (Interview 8). *"This year we have been able to afford psychosocial support"*, in the past two editions a partnership was made so other grassroots organizations that already gave this support to migrant families could bring support to the participants of the program and map the cases that need attention (Interview 12).

Following their involvement in these various spaces, participants experience a newfound sense of purpose in life, as their active engagement inspires them to pursue further education and strive for personal growth and success (Interviews 5, 10).

The *alumni* network serves as a longstanding support community, providing a sense of belonging and security for the girls to seek assistance in case of any unforeseen circumstances:

"It's a unique experience because even after the program ends, you still maintain contact with the girls, you make friends, and you get to know the teachers. And you

know that you always have their support, if something happens, you can call them, they can help you get in touch with other organizations that you may need” (Interview 10).

Within the program’s safe space, the creation of support and social networks played a pivotal role in cultivating this sense of belonging. These networks not only facilitated meaningful connections but also enhanced the participants’ social capital (Bourdieu, 1976; Boyd, 1989). Initially, participants expressed feelings of isolation and a lack of meaningful relationships with individuals who shared similar characteristics (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10). Their social interactions were primarily limited to immediate family members: “*And coming here and being alone, not going out with anyone, not having friends, not knowing anyone at all, only my family, it was very tough*” (Interview 5). However, as they actively engaged in the program, a notable shift occurred, leading to a sense of belonging within the newly formed community: “*[In Chamas en Accion] I found a welcoming place, an external family, so to speak, here in Peru because I made many friends, established numerous connections, and became part of a supportive community*” (Interview 4).

Furthermore, the participants developed deep connections with individuals from their own nationality who had faced similar challenges and emotions (Ryan, 2011). These bonding relationships, as emphasized by Putnam (2010), are crucial in navigating and coping with the migrant experience, contributing to the participants’ embodied cultural capital:

“It was so comforting to know that I wasn’t alone, that someone else was going through the same thing, and someone understood me. We could talk about how we felt and even cry together” (Interview 2).

The workshops for parents are a crucial step in order to strength participants’ support systems and sustaining their processes of empowerment, that otherwise simply do not occur (Interview 12, 13). In contrast to the first edition, the second and third editions of the program formed alliances with external organizations to provide these workshops, acknowledging their significant importance and the program’s limited capacity to offer this support independently (Interview 12). It is important to note that while the importance

of this variable is acknowledged, the empirical findings did not specifically focus on this particular output.

The intervention demonstrates a cohesive process that effectively links outputs to outcomes. However, it is important to note that no specific empirical evidence was found regarding the improvement of communication skills. The examination of participants' recognition as subjects of rights has purposely been omitted from this section and will be thoroughly examined in the following section.

A transformative journey: from zero to rights

The first step in the participants' journey to accessing rights entails their own acknowledgment as subjects entitled to rights. This recognition is essential for the program's objective of advocating for their rights. The adolescents undergo a transformative journey, starting from a state of unawareness about their rights, progressing to acquiring knowledge about rights, then recognizing instances of rights violations in their own lives or within their surroundings and ultimately raising their voice to defend their rights.

The beginning of this journey started with a lack of resources, highlighted by the statement of Interviewee 1: *"I actually didn't know much about the rights we had, both as adolescents and as adults"*. This sentiment is further reinforced by Interviewee 6, who adds:

"Because to be honest, I feel that before the program, I wasn't at all informed about the rights that migrants have, about the channels through which we could report cases of violence, and similar matters. I believe this is crucial because there is currently a lot of harassment and violence towards women" (Interview 6).

Then, in the workshops on rights, that were highly appreciated by the girls: *"I developed a love for it, believe it or not. I really enjoyed it a lot when they gave us workshops about our rights."* (Interview 5), the young female migrants had the opportunity to acquire knowledge about rights (Article 42). From the following statement, it is clear that they have recognized and acknowledged their entitlement to participation rights (Article 13):

“First and foremost, it has taught me that I have the right to freedom of expression, that at any given moment, I can voice any dissatisfaction or concern because people have to listen to me, they have to listen to us [girls and adolescents]” (Interview 4).

By the participation in the workshops, the participants began to recognize that despite being entitled to universal rights, they faced significant challenges in accessing and enjoying these rights within their migrant experiences:

“And we realized that, I mean, none of us in Lima were really protected. I mean, there were many laws that overlooked the rights of migrants. We started to become aware of this through the information sessions provided by the program. We realized some basic rights: being asked for a valid passport to enroll in a school should not be the case because you are a minor, the law protects you as a minor, and education is a universal basic right that cannot be denied to you” (Interview 2).

In the process of acknowledging these rights violations, it is crucial to initially understand and recognize the diverse range of identities within the migrant experience (Interview 12), particularly as young female migrants. Moreover, it becomes necessary to comprehend the challenges posed by intersectionality in their everyday lives (Ruck et al., 2016). As one participant recognized: “*Obviously, the path for us is always much more difficult because we are migrants, we are women, and we are adolescents, but our voice still deserves to be heard*” (Interview 6). Within the safe, horizontal, and feminist space that was established, participants actively engage in deconstructing systems of oppression based on their own voices and experiences (Interview 12). This process of critical examination and analysis aligns with the fourth dimension of critical youth empowerment (Jennings et al., 2006) ultimately fostering their individual journeys toward empowerment.

As previously mentioned by Bloch & Zetter (2009) the migrant’s access to education (Article 28) constitute a challenge within the Peruvian context:

“My mom had a hard time getting me enrolled in a school because, initially, they wouldn’t accept me due to my lack of documentation. They said that I couldn’t be enrolled with just a passport and a birth certificate. Either that or they claimed they didn’t have any available slots for enrollment” (Interview 6).

Also, the detrimental effects of negative stereotypes on migrants, as outlined by Freier and Perez (2021), manifest even within educational settings. Even when young migrants access to education, they face xenophobic attitudes from their classmates, their parents, and even teachers (Interviews 1, 10), violating their non-discrimination right (Article 2). In fact, one participant revealed that a professor expressed the belief that *“all Venezuelans come here [to Peru] with a single mission, which is to take jobs away from Peruvians. Women come to steal Peruvian women’s husbands, and they come to beg for food”* (Interview 2). Due to the knowledge acquired in the program the migrants were able to identify these violations of their rights, report them, and also help others who were suffering in similar circumstances (Interviews 4, 8, 9).

Another challenge faced by young female migrants regarding their right to non-discrimination was street harassment. As one participant expressed: *“It was horrible, the harassment and all the things they said to you on the street”* (Interview 5). Furthermore, these adolescents come to realize that there were clear violations of their rights in their life experiences that they were previously unaware of:

“Because before the program, things were happening or had happened to me that I didn’t know were serious, or could be considered criminal, or strong things that the program made me realize had consequences for those actions” (Interview 10).

In order to equip participants with the necessary tools to access complaint mechanisms, the program offers essential resources and training to enable them to file complaints in cases of rights violations against girls and adolescents:

“They provided us with tools such as, contact numbers for the Ombudsman Office. They even gave us numbers of municipal personnel, local police numbers from our district, trusted contacts to be able to report incidents” (Interview 5).

However, the program members consider that they do not feel safe going to the reporting services, although they knew how to do it, because the services are not friendly to the migrant community neither in general to the women in Peruvian territory. However, they do consider that *“perhaps now they can feel confident to speak about what they experience with someone they trust, and that is a great step”* (Interview 12). Nevertheless, the adolescents reported feeling a sense of security due to their acquired knowledge in

effectively addressing potential issues (Interview 8). They also emphasized that the program has equipped them with the skills to advocate for themselves (Interview 1).

Finally, as the adolescents progress through the various stages of their journey, they reach a critical phase where they actively acknowledge and assert their rights, which is facilitated by their increased human capital. One participant expresses this transformation by stating: *“I feel that I have learned that my rights as a woman and as a migrant are equally important as those of any other person”* (Interview 6). Another respondent reinforces this sentiment, highlighting: *“[Chamas en Acción allowed me to] fully understand my rights as a migrant woman and adolescent and empowered me to ensure their respect and recognition”* (Interview 3). With this newfound knowledge and confidence, the participants begin to raise their voices and advocate for their rights, as one participant articulates: *“I learned that I have a voice and I can use it to my advantage. I can make myself heard, I can make myself respected”* (Interview 8). This stage represents a crucial milestone in their journey, as it signifies the recognition of themselves as individuals entitled to rights, which is identified as the most significant outcome in the first stage of their empowerment journey, as reported by the organization (Interview 11, 12, & 13).

Impact

The project’s impact appears to extend beyond the individual migrants (Interviews 2, 4). It not only influences the participants themselves, but also has a ripple effect on their families, schools, and civil society organizations that perceive them as agents of change (Interviews 12, 13; Zeldin et al., 2003). This recognition of their capabilities enables the integration of their voices into decision-making spaces. However, it is important to note that not all participants have equal opportunities for such integration, as the program’s impact varies among individuals. The factors contributing to these variations were not explored in this study and warrant further investigation.

An undeniable factor is that the participants’ engagement in the program has contributed to the development of self-assured young girls, who transformed their perceived weaknesses into strengths and have become advocates for their rights. Furthermore, the adolescents started to recognize their agency over their life course through the power of their voices (Interviews 3, 6, 8, 10). Their processes of empowerment were taking place (Kabeer, 1999; Sardenberg, 2008).

Through this youth empowerment program, young female migrants gained access to vital resources that facilitated their ability to claim their rights (Lockwood, 1996). These resources included human capital, in the form of knowledge acquisition; social capital, through the development of supportive social networks; and cultural capital, encompassing emotional management and stress coping skills. This comprehensive approach allowed participants to recognize and fully realize their survival and development, protection and participation rights taking into account the intersection nature of their identities within a safe, horizontal, and feminist space.

In the long run, participants experiment a sense of empower that allows them to recognize the power over their life's outcome, their agency, through the strengthened knowledge where empowerment was used as a goal and as a mean for this recognition. Importantly, the impact of their empowerment extended beyond their individual journeys, as they became catalysts for positive change in environments that welcomed and embraced their empowered voices.

Conclusion

The ongoing political, economic, and social conflict in Venezuela has resulted in a significant forced migration of its people (González, 2021). As a consequence, the city of Lima has become home to over one million Venezuelan migrants, leading to a substantial increase in the city's diversity (R4Va, 2023; De Haas et al., 2020). Young female migrants see themselves triply discriminated. In response to this issue, Quinta Ola, a feminist non-governmental organization, already working towards women's empowerment, has developed a specific youth empowerment program focused in strengthen the knowledge and capacities of young female migrants known as *Chamas en Acción*. This study aimed to examine the mechanisms by which youth empowerment programs facilitate access to rights and generate lasting positive effects on the lives of participants, answering to the following research question: *How does the program Chamas en Acción impact the life of its participants and aim to strengthen their knowledge of their rights and capacities to access them?*

To achieve this goal, a case study analysis of the program *Chamas en Acción* program was conducted. The research utilized content analysis, semi-structured interviews with former participants and organization members, and participant observation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program's mechanisms and its

influence on the lives of participants. A theory of change was developed to provide a clear framework for understanding these mechanisms and the pathways of change within the program's logic.

The findings of this study demonstrated that after their participation in the program, participants effectively utilized their agency and emerged as drivers of positive change within environments that embraced their empowered voices. They actively asserted their rights, ensuring that they were respected, and took proactive measures to report instances of rights violations within their support networks. Their access to rights were increased through activities performed in the program, which provided them with essential resources. These resources encompassed human capital, achieved through the acquisition of knowledge; social capital, fostered by the development of supportive social networks; and embodied cultural capital, which encompassed emotional management. The acquisition of knowledge provided the participants with a sense of self-confidence, enabling them to navigate various challenges. Additionally, the development of social networks reduced the potential negative consequences they might face, creating a support system. Lastly, the cultivation of emotion management skills equipped them with the ability to effectively handle adverse circumstances. Thus, the participants underwent a process of individual empowerment throughout their engagement with the program.

Crucially, the program created safe, horizontal, and feminist spaces that played a vital role in its overall effectiveness. These spaces provided the necessary supportive environment for the adolescent's transformative journey in accessing to rights, transitioning from a state of limited knowledge about their rights to becoming advocates of their rights. Initially, the participants gained knowledge about their rights, equipping them with a deeper understanding of the violations they had experienced as migrants. This newfound understanding was what empowered them to find their voices and take a stand against rights violations in their own lives and their surroundings.

The characteristics of these spaces allowed the participants to have their voices, opinions, and thoughts heard, thereby facilitating the realization of their participatory rights, which were often denied in other settings such as schools or their homes. The girls demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of their right to education and to a life free from discrimination, whether based on their nationality (xenophobia) or their gender (sexual harassment). Importantly, they recognized that as young, female migrants, their voices held equal weight and deserved to be heard, thus acknowledging the

intersectionality of their identities and emphasizing that access to human rights should be available to all, regardless of their background.

Limitations

As previously discussed, the format change from the first edition of the program to the subsequent second and third editions lead to some variations in outcomes. Firstly, the current format of the program does not incorporate initiatives led by adolescents for broader social change, limiting their ability to address larger societal issues that can have an impact on their communities (see appendix C). Currently, the program only addresses the first four dimensions of critical youth empowerment.

Secondly, the absence of clearly defined objectives for this revised program format has hindered the measurement of its impact, leaving the extent of this impact uncertain in terms of the specific knowledge and capacities being targeted for enhancement.

Thirdly, the limited timeframe for participant recruitment could have influenced the selection process, favoring individuals who already had strong connections with the organization and were actively engaged in its activities, as they were readily available for participation.

Fourthly, while the majority of participants in this study were from the first edition, the focus was specifically on portraying outcomes associated with the current model's outputs. As a result, some inspiring achievements of the participants from previous editions were not included in this study.

Another significant limitation arises from context-specific circumstances, particularly in relation to children's access to rights. In some cases, adults hinder their ability to exercise these rights, although this empirical study did not provide evidence of such instances. Additionally, there are institutional responsibilities that often remain unfulfilled. For example, in access to education, schools can present formidable barriers that impede the realization of these rights.

Further Research

This study contributes to the existing literature on youth empowerment programs for migrants in Latin America by examining how these programs enhance access to rights through the provision of resources. The empirical findings provide evidence of the program's positive impact on participants, although the precise measurement of this

impact is limited due to the qualitative nature of the study. It is important to note that the current program format does not effectively foster community benefit or transform adolescents into agents of social change; however, it does sustain their individual processes of empowerment. The methodology employed in the program has been validated and updated through a co-creation process with the adolescents, ensuring its robustness and adaptability for implementation in other locations within the region.

Additionally, this study aimed to provide compelling evidence to international organizations regarding the long-term benefits and increased agency experienced by participants in context-specific programs. These findings should add for this goal.

Further research should analyze an entire edition of the program, from recruitment to one year after the intervention, and include a control group that did not participate. This comprehensive approach would facilitate a specific mapping of outcomes for each edition and enable a comparison of the different editions and their respective outcomes. Building upon the findings of this study, future research should consider the existing theory of change and propose potential improvements.

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Appendix A

Children Rights

Rights	Articles	Description
Survival and development	Access to Education (Article 28)	<i>“Every child has the right to an education [...] Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children’s rights and never use violence”</i>
	Everyone must know children’s rights (Article 42)	<i>“Governments should actively tell children and adults about this Convention so that everyone knows about children’s rights”</i>
Protection	Non-discrimination (Article 2)	<i>“All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason”</i>
	Protection from violence (Article 19)	<i>“Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them”</i>
Participation	Respect for children’s views (Article 12)	<i>“Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously”</i>
	Sharing thoughts freely (Article 13)	<i>“Children have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms other people”</i>

Source: UN General Assembly, 1989

Appendix B

Participants Profile

<i>Interview number</i>	<i>Type of Actor</i>	<i>Edition</i>
Interview 1	Participant	1 st edition
Interview 2	Participant	1 st edition
Interview 3	Participant	2 nd edition
Interview 4	Participant	1 st & 2 nd editions
Interview 5	Participant	1 st edition
Interview 6	Participant	1 st & 2 nd editions
Interview 7	Participant	2 nd edition
Interview 8	Participant	1 st edition
Interview 9	Participant	3 rd edition
Interview 10	Participant	1 st & 2 nd editions
Interview 11	Organization Member	-
Interview 12	Organization Member	-
Interview 13	Organization Member	-

Appendix C

Programs

1st edition (2021) → Chamas en Acción: Hermanas sin fronteras [*Sisters without Borders*]

2nd edition (2022) → Chamas en Acción: Por una Sociedad sin Violencia [*For a Society Without Violence*]

3rd edition (2023) → Chamas en Acción: Lima

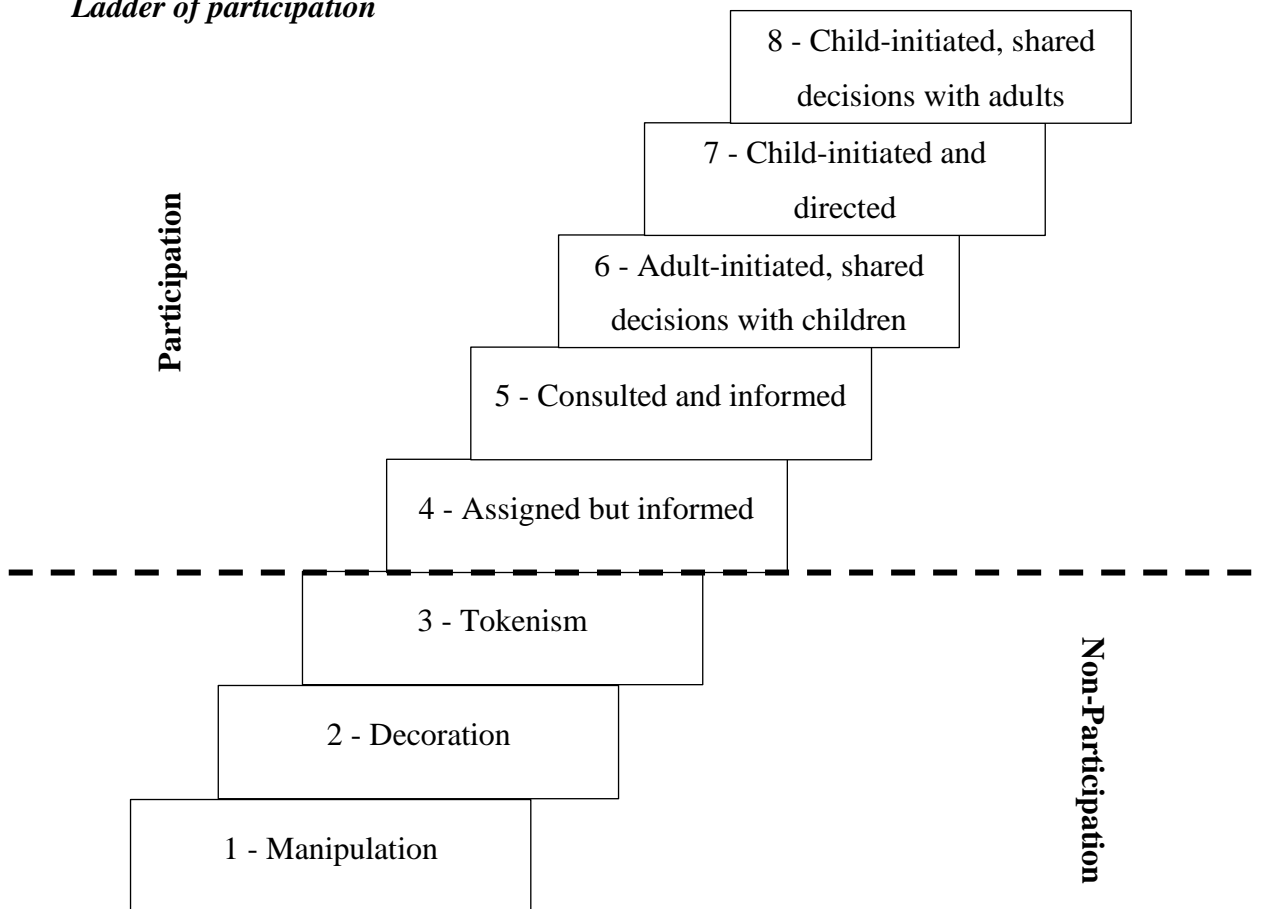
2021 Duration: 8 months	2022 and 2023 Duration: 2 months
<p>Strengthen capacities and provide tools for political empowerment, leadership, and autonomy in Venezuelan girls and adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 residing in Lima, their families, and their host community; from the implementation of spaces for participation, safe and free, where peaceful coexistence, the prevention and reduction of discrimination and xenophobia are promoted, and actions of social change are designed and implemented that impact the exercise of their rights from the migration experience (Quinta Ola, 2021).</p>	<p>With the purpose of strengthening the capacities of Venezuelan migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking adolescents and young women in Lima and Callao, for the defense of their rights and the fight against violence (Quinta Ola, 2022).</p>

Empowerment Process	Projects of Quinta Ola	
1 - Formative Process: initial training program	Chamas en Acción 2022 Chamas en Acción 2023	Girls Gov Perú 2020* Chamas en Acción 2021
2 - Mentoring and activism: strengthening their capacities for activism	Voces Activistas 2022* LALAS 2022*	
3 - Political participation: Strength capacities for public advocacy	(Coming soon)	

*Other programs under the umbrella of Quinta Ola.

Appendix D

Ladder of participation



Source: Hart, 1992