A young girl with short dark hair is standing outdoors, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a white short-sleeved button-down shirt and a bright green pleated skirt. Her hands are on her hips. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a dirt path.

HALF A BILLION REASONS

**How investing in
adolescent girls can
change the world**

Plan International Australia



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Now is Australia's chance to unlock the potential of adolescent girls globally.

This report calls on all Australians – parliamentarians, policy makers, donors and individuals – to recognise that investing in adolescent girls can change the world.

**STAND WITH US.
STAND WITH GIRLS.
STAND FOR EQUALITY.**

FOREWORD



**Susanne Legena, CEO,
Plan International Australia**

There are half a billion adolescent girls in the world. Half a billion reasons why Plan International, one of the world's oldest and largest children's development agencies, has decided to put equality for adolescent girls at the heart of everything we do. This report is for those girls.

It's for Yolinda in Bougainville (featured here), who is fighting for her right to education.

It's for Brisa (page 63), who is going door-to-door in her community in Nicaragua to challenge the harmful gender stereotypes that perpetuate sexual abuse.

It's for Memory (page 25), who led a campaign to make child marriage illegal in Malawi after her 11-year-old sister was forced to marry the older man who got her pregnant.

This report doesn't paint these girls as victims. Rather, it highlights their power to create a better future for themselves and others like them. It shows that when we invest in girls – when we give them the tools to learn, lead, decide and thrive – we can change the world.

The harsh reality is that adolescent girls are still not being prioritised in investments or policies, either in Australia or internationally. The world talks about focusing on 'women and girls' in aid and development, but in practice investments still target adult women or younger children, and adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 fall through the gap.

Whether we are trying to empower girls to further their education, avoid child marriage, access family planning services or escape gender-based violence, we cannot improve girls' realities without first acknowledging that their challenges and needs are unique.

This report is here to do just that. It's here to make girls visible. It's here to show that investing in girls is the key to achieving the sustainable development agenda. And it's here to show how we can all come together – governments, businesses, philanthropists, women, girls, men and boys – to be part of the solution.

Girls. Boys. Equality. There are half a billion reasons to stand with us.



Yolinda, 18 years old, Bougainville

I am eighteen years old. I go to school every day.

When I am not going to school, I take care of my younger siblings, I cook and sometimes I play soccer with my school friends. I love playing soccer. I would love to have more time to play.

Every day I work in a garden. It's sometimes very hard because it's hot and because I am tired. My siblings also work in their gardens. In Bougainville, every girl at the age of 10 gets her own garden to take care of. We work and then my mum goes to market and sells our fruits and vegetables.

I love going to school because I hope that once I finish with school I can get a job. I need to study hard to get a job.

My parents are not supportive of my dream.

They want me to stay at home, take care of my garden and earn money for family. "You need to stay at home and earn some money" - that is what they tell me. Every day.

I am now in grade eight and I need to study for seven more years to become a nurse.

I would love to become a nurse. That is my dream.

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International is one of the world's oldest and largest child rights development agencies. We work in over 70 countries around the world to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice. We strive for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls - working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners to achieve change. Plan International is independent, with no religious affiliation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are close to 600 million adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 living in the world today with 500 million in developing countries.¹

Importantly, more than half the global population of adolescent girls are on our doorstep, growing up in the countries that we provide aid and development to, trade and engage with on foreign policy.

Our neighbours in South Asia host a staggering 340 million adolescent girls and boys, and East Asia and the Pacific are home to 277 million adolescents.² In the Sub-Saharan region, where we provide the most in humanitarian aid, 10 to 19 year olds make up almost one quarter of the region's population.

This means that half a billion adolescent girls in the developing world are our next generation of leaders, workers and mothers.

What opportunities they have, what barriers they face and what they achieve today will set them on a life course that will not only determine their futures, but the future of their families, their communities and their nations.

The evidence is now clear.

When we create the conditions for adolescent girls to fulfil their right to gender equality, to be healthy, educated, safe and economically empowered, they have the power to lift their families out of poverty and transform economies.

The United Nations Population Fund has recognised girls aged 10 as the key group whose potential, if unlocked, will create the economic and social conditions needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Yet the potential of adolescent girls to thrive is limited because they are girls.

All over the world girls are at risk because of their young age and their gender. They are at risk of being married before the age of 18. They are at risk of rape, violence and harassment from men and boys in every space they occupy, including their home, their school, their refugee camp and their city. They are at risk of being denied the opportunity to access a secondary education, to gain the skills and training they need to work and to exercise control over their sexual and reproductive health.

The picture is even bleaker for girls that are the most disadvantaged and discriminated against, such as girls that have a disability, those who are the poorest or live in the most remote communities, girls that are sex workers, girls that belong to a minority indigenous, ethnic or religious group, those who are young mothers, girls who are refugees or migrants or girls who identify as lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Despite the grim reality for millions of adolescent girls globally, there is a solution.

Australia has an opportunity at a political and government level to make adolescent girls visible, for the first time ever, in Australia's agenda on foreign policy, trade, overseas aid and development.

At this moment in time, adolescent girls are virtually invisible.

They barely rate a mention in Australia's new Foreign Policy White Paper. They are an add on "and girls" in the *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy 2015* and the 80 per cent investment target to achieve gender equality shows little benefit to adolescent girls as a beneficiary group.³

We need a concerted effort at a political and government level to catch up.

The United States released its *Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls in 2016*, setting out an ambitious road map for tackling the barriers that keep adolescent girls from reaching their full potential.⁴ The Global Strategy includes an implementation plan for each of the departments responsible for helping girls around the world achieve their full potential.

Now it's Australia's turn.

We can unlock the potential of adolescent girls and fulfil the ambitious agenda of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by developing a stand-alone action plan that sets out Australia's commitment to gender equality for adolescent girls with a clear implementation plan and investment targets.

Only with a clear roadmap for how we will invest in adolescent girls and champion their rights internationally will Australia be able to play a leadership role in unlocking the potential of the half a billion adolescent girls in the developing world.

Adolescent girls can change the world.

However, they can only do so if they are able to fully enjoy their rights, participate as active citizens and leaders and stay safe from harm.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Half a billion reasons paints a picture of the lives of adolescent girls globally. It makes the case for why we need to do more and why we need to act now. It poses a challenge to governments, donors, organisations, communities and individuals to break down the barriers and create the conditions that will bring about transformative change in the lives of girls, their families and their nations.

WHY ADOLESCENT GIRLS?

It is now widely recognised that adolescence is a crucial time in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The expectations, opportunities, risks and needs for girls and boys diverge considerably during adolescence.

Where adolescent boys are offered opportunities to continue their education with the expectation of employment and income, the opportunities for adolescent girls to progress through secondary education (especially upper secondary school) rapidly diminishes, denying future economic opportunities and financial independence. Where the burden of household chores eases for boys as they get older, it only increases for adolescent girls as they take on adult roles of domestic work and caring for family. Where adolescent boys are assuming leadership roles in their families and communities, adolescent girls' freedoms are being curtailed and decisions are made by their families that determine the course of their lives.

Adolescence is a time of rapid and life changing physical and emotional development that has its own unique challenges for adolescent girls. Puberty and evolving sexual maturity places girls at heightened risk of sexual and physical violence in the home, in their relationships and at school. The challenges associated with menstruation; the taboos, lack of sanitary products and toilets at schools can limit girls' freedoms and access to education.

Gendered social and cultural norms and behaviours begin to play a significant role in shaping adolescent girls experiences and can result in child marriage, intimate partner violence and early pregnancy. It can also limit adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services necessary to maintain good health and avoid unintended pregnancies. When adolescent girls experience pregnancy, they are at high risk of maternal and birth related complications – much more so than women over the age of 18.

But with these challenges come enormous opportunities.

Investing in adolescent girls is one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty and inequality. If we, as individuals, donors and governments can create the conditions for adolescent girls to learn, lead, decide and thrive, then we are driving gender equality for generations of women and girls.

Girls aged 10 to 14

Early adolescence is a period of major developmental and social change for girls aged 10 to 14. Focussing on girls aged 10 to 14 presents an opportunity to build on previous investments made in child health, nutrition and primary education. Early adolescence is a time to work with families and communities to challenge harmful gender norms and expectations, address barriers to accessing secondary education and provide sexual and reproductive health information and services designed for that age group. It is also a crucial time to work with girls to build confidence, leadership skills and to equip them with the tools and power to navigate the challenges of adolescence.

Girls aged 15 to 19

Late adolescence is a time when girls transition into adulthood. Girls aged 15 to 19 are at a crossroads in terms of the trajectory of their lives. It is often a time when families make decisions regarding girls' education, marriage and other rights and freedoms. It is also a crucial period in a girls' life where the right interventions and opportunities will equip girls to navigate the complexities of relationships, school and work life. With access to high quality, effective and timely sexual and reproductive health information and services, girls will have control and choice over pregnancy and can prevent sexually transmitted infections. Opportunities to complete higher secondary education and/or vocational training will provide adolescent girls with the bridge that they need to enter the workforce and become economically empowered. Giving girls aged 15 to 19 a platform to be leaders and change makers within their families, communities, schools and workplaces will give girls power and autonomy and help to transform harmful gender norms and behaviours.

Hayat, 14, dreams of becoming a maths teacher and returning home to Syria

THE WAY FORWARD

Gender equality for the world's adolescent girls is achievable but it requires a concerted effort on the part of all governments and donors. Australia, through its foreign affairs, trade, aid and development agenda can take a global leadership role in transforming the lives of adolescent girls across the world.

Political commitments

Change for adolescent girls cannot be achieved without strong political leadership, without parliamentarians from all sides of politics standing alongside girls and committing to championing their rights. The lives of adolescent girls can only be transformed if political parties and parliamentarians recognise that empowering adolescent girls is critical to achieving gender equality and ending inter-generational poverty across the world. A policy platform that includes a clear commitment to achieving gender equality for adolescent girls, as a distinct group, is an important step in positioning Australia as a champion for adolescent girls globally.

Government commitments

There is enormous potential for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to build on its commitment to achieving gender equality globally by developing a stand-alone action plan for adolescent girls, similar to the US Government's 2016 Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. A Departmental action plan provides a clear road map for the future, identifying the key challenges and the evidence based programs and foreign policy interventions that will directly benefit adolescent girls in the countries that Australia engages with and invests in.

The action plan would be a clear statement on how the Australian Government will address the specific challenges facing adolescent girls in order to reduce gender-based violence, promote their sexual and reproductive health, encourage their economic empowerment, ensure access to inclusive and equitable education, enable girls' leadership, and protect adolescent girls during disasters and emergencies.

POLITICAL RECOMMENDATION:

ALL POLITICAL PARTIES COMMIT TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN PARTY POLICY PLATFORMS.

GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION:

THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE DEVELOP A STAND-ALONE ACTION PLAN ON ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS THROUGH AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY, TRADE, AID AND DEVELOPMENT.

Budget commitments

The Government's budget commitment to aid and development is Australia's greatest tool for advancing the rights of adolescent girls globally, providing the foundations of our diplomatic leadership on this agenda. There are clear and specific budget investments that can create real benefit to adolescent girls globally.

Overall, Australia can demonstrate its commitment to ending poverty and advancing gender equality by increasing its overall investment in aid. The renewed global focus, as articulated in the new Foreign Policy White Paper and Australia's seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, places a strong onus on the Government to build its international standing and global reputation on overseas aid and development assistance. To fail to do so will undermine Australia's influence both in the Indo-Pacific region and globally.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy 2016 identifies a number of economic measures to strengthen gender equality and women's economic empowerment in aid and development including the Gender Equality Fund, reporting on aid expenditure where gender is a 'significant' or 'principal' objective and a policy commitment to ensuring that 80 per cent of all aid investments address gender issues. Currently, expenditure falls well short of the stated commitment. According to the Performance of Australian Aid Report 2015-16, only 6 per cent of spending in 2015-16 was committed to investments where gender equality was the 'principal' objective. We recommend a target of at least 20 per cent of the overall aid budget by 2030 be spent on programs that identify gender equality as the 'principal' objective.

Additionally, there is little evidence that Australia's 80 per cent target on gender equality has benefited adolescent girls as a group with unique needs and challenges. The Aid Program Performance Report 2016-17 for the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) identifies the benefits of investments for women however, adolescent girls as a beneficiary group are entirely absent from this reporting.

We believe that in order to ensure that Australia's overseas aid and development assistance contributes to gender equality for the next generation of women, there must be a stand-alone target for adolescent girls to ensure their visibility in aid expenditure and strengthen transparency in reporting. We recommend a target of 15 per cent by 2030 for all investment with a principal or significant objective to achieve gender equality designed with adolescent girls as a primary beneficiary.

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS:

SET A TARGET THAT AT LEAST 15 PER CENT OF ALL INVESTMENTS WITH THE PRINCIPAL OR SIGNIFICANT OBJECTIVE OF ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY, IDENTIFY ADOLESCENT GIRLS AS THE PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES BY 2030.

INCREASE OVERALL INVESTMENT IN INITIATIVES WHERE THE 'PRINCIPAL' OBJECTIVE IS GENDER EQUALITY, FROM 6 PER CENT TO 20 PER CENT BY 2030.

REBUILD THE OVERSEAS AID AND DEVELOPMENT BUDGET BY INCREASING INVESTMENT IN AID EXPENDITURE TO 0.7 PER CENT OF GNI BY 2030.

HOW CAN WE TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS?

Over half a billion adolescent girls live in the developing world.⁵

Protect every adolescent girl's right to be free from gender based violence and harmful practices in their home, in school, online and in public places.

Every 2 seconds a girl becomes a child bride somewhere in the world.⁶

Over 120 million adolescent girls have been subject to sexual violence including rape.⁷

Fight poverty by giving adolescent girls access to high quality, inclusive & equitable secondary education.

Only 18% of adolescent girls in Papua New Guinea attend upper secondary school.¹⁰

In Asia, 1 in 3 girls who experience violence at school will never report the incident.¹¹

In parts of Vanuatu, 75% of girls miss up to three days of school each month because they have their period.¹²

Empower and protect adolescent girls during disasters and emergencies

In conflict-affected countries nearly 90% of adolescent girls are more likely to be out of secondary school than girls in countries not affected by conflict.¹⁵

Every day 507 women and adolescent girls die from pregnancy related causes in countries that are fragile states affected by conflict or disaster.¹⁶

Promote adolescent girls' health, well-being and rights with high quality and age appropriate sexual and reproductive health services & information

Pregnancy related complications are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls aged 15 to 19.⁸

3 in 4 new HIV infections in adolescents aged 15 to 19 are girls in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹

Grow a country's economic prosperity by economically empowering adolescent girls through transformative vocational and entrepreneurship training

Adolescent girls and young women make up 76% of young people around the world who are not in school, training or employment.¹³

23% of young people aged 15 to 24 are employed on less than \$1.25 US a day.¹⁴

Create the conditions for adolescent girls to be change agents and leaders

Globally, only 23% of all national parliamentarians are women.¹⁷

Across 3,000 global companies, women hold only 14% of board seats.¹⁸

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF HALF A BILLION

A university educated young woman is two times more likely to enter the labour market than a less educated (primary level) woman.²⁰

The World Bank has shown that for every year an adolescent girl remains in school after age 11, her risk of unplanned pregnancy declines by 6% throughout secondary school.

When women and girls over 16 earn an income they reinvest 90% of it in their families, compared to men who reinvest only 30% to 40%.

If all the 10-year-old girls who drop out of school or do not attend school in developing countries completed secondary education, they would contribute \$21 billion a year to their economies.¹⁹

If all the unmet contraceptive needs of women and girls were met, unplanned pregnancies and births would fall by 75%.²¹

If women were to participate in the economy at a level comparable to men, global GDP would grow by 26% or \$USD 28 trillion, by 2025.²²

WHAT ADOLESCENT GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD ARE SAYING

"PRESIDENCY IS NOT MEANT FOR GIRLS. PEOPLE SAY THAT A WOMAN CANNOT RULE A MAN. BECAUSE THEY ASSUME WE DON'T HAVE BRAINS THAT CAN TRANSFORM THE COUNTRY."

Adolescent girl, Uganda 10²³

"The government is now giving free books and scholarships, so girls want to be educated. No girls want to be unemployed and stay at home."

Adolescent Girl, Bangladesh²⁴

"At night, I do not feel safe. I don't feel safe in school either, as the boys don't respect us. A girl, my cousin, was raped in daytime in the park. Another cousin also was raped. Girls cannot go out, only in short moments, even in the day, and should go accompanied."

Adolescent Girl, Nicaragua²⁵

"Just because we have a disability doesn't mean we don't comprehend and understand. Our development is the same."

Young woman with a disability in Latin America²⁶

"When women don't have access to modern forms of contraception, they end up having children very frequently, which doesn't give them any opportunity to get skills and have a good economic situation. Women need access to all forms of contraception in order to secure a better future for their family."

Elfia, 19, Timor-Leste²⁷

"If you don't empower a girl that her body is hers....she will get married not because she want to get married but because her society says so, her parents are telling her to do so, so you find that the girls have no say in this particular sense..."

Adolescent girl, Kampala²⁸

"Most of the men feel they are superior to the women because they still provide them with money. But if a woman would have a business of her own, if she would be equipped with the social survival skills, she'd be able to earn as a woman and not to depend on the money coming from her husband..."

Adolescent Girl, Kampala²⁹

"I AM CHANGING THE STEREOTYPE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GIRL. THERE IS NO DEFINITION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GIRL. WHAT A MAN CAN DO, A WOMAN CAN DO, TOO. I BELIEVE LIFE WOULD BE BETTER IF WE DIDN'T HAVE THOSE STEREOTYPES."

Lan, Year 10, Vietnam³⁰

Health club members at school in Tororo, Uganda



Nadira*, 13, dreams of becoming an English teacher, Jordan



Paroti on her wedding day to a boy she has met just once, Bangladesh



Nutan, 15, also wants to work when she is older, India



THE PROMISES AUSTRALIA HAS MADE TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Transforming adolescent girls' lives through the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an ambitious set of goals and targets that 193 countries, including Australia, signed up to in September 2015. The SDGs are a road map to tackle the global challenges that the world faces today such as ending poverty, providing access to education, achieving gender equality, promoting universal health care and saving the environment.

The catch cry of the SDGs is leave no one behind which makes it all the more important that nations prioritise helping the most marginalised and excluded, such as adolescent girls. The SDGs are a tool to hold governments to account, ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable, such as adolescent girls, are front and centre in government policies and investments.

In 2018, Australia will report on its progress towards achieving the SDGs as part of the Voluntary National Review. This, provides an important opportunity for the Australian Government to set a baseline and targets for ensuring that adolescent girls are not left behind in Australia's aid, development, trade and foreign policy investments and programs.

Protecting adolescent girls' rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises that people under the age of 18 years old need special care and protection that adults do not. At its very heart, the CRC preserves every child's right to life, survival, development and non-discrimination and places a responsibility on governments to act in the best interests of children and to respect their views. Given that adolescent girls are routinely denied their rights because of their gender and age and are regularly subject to discrimination, the CRC is a powerful tool for holding governments to account. Australia will be reporting to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2018.

Driving gender equality for adolescent girls with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The Australian Government is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which sets a clear agenda for the achievement of gender equality and non-discrimination for all women and girls. The Convention seeks to end discrimination in all areas of employment, political and public life, marriage and family life. It promotes equal access to education and vocational training at all levels, the reproductive and health rights of women and girls, and participation in all aspects of economic and social life such as sports and cultural activities. CEDAW is a road map for achieving gender equality for adolescent girls.

5 GENDER
EQUALITY



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



PROTECTING EVERY ADOLESCENT GIRL'S RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL PRACTICES

Ratana, 15, thinks that girls and boys are just the same

Tackling gender based violence is one of the single, most powerful interventions that can assist adolescent girls to be healthy, safe and empowered. Adolescent girls experience and are at risk of violence virtually everywhere – in their homes, in their relationships, on the streets, on public transport, in schools, in workplaces and online.

Girls experience violence in ways that are different to adult women. The young age of adolescent girls and the changes that they experience as a result of puberty make them particularly vulnerable to sexual and physical violence. The consequences are life long, disrupting their pathway to adulthood and impacting on their learning, their future choices, their relationships and their emotional and physical well-being.

Over 120 million adolescent girls worldwide have been subject to sexual violence including rape.³²

In three quarters of low- and middle-income countries more than one in five adolescent girls have experienced violence by their partner in the last 12 months.³³ Girls experience violence in school and at the hands of family members. Adolescent girls are more likely to be exposed to harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. They are more vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation, particularly in humanitarian emergencies and when on the move.

Gender based violence in urban spaces, such as large cities, is a growing challenge for adolescent girls. For the first time in history, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas.

Each year, over 20 million adolescent girls move to cities to study and work.³⁴

Girls that are living in and travelling through urban centres are subject to physical violence, sexual harassment and verbal abuse on a daily basis. In turn, this limits their freedom of movement – girls modify their behaviour to stay safe.³⁵

We cannot transform the lives of adolescent girls if we fail to end gender based violence and harmful practices. The link between a girl's experience of violence and her health, development and empowerment is indisputable. Gender based violence has long term and intergenerational consequences, and failing to intervene today will have consequences for generations of children to come.

**EVERY 10 MINUTES,
SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD,
AN ADOLESCENT GIRL DIES AS
A RESULT OF VIOLENCE.³¹**

A global snapshot of the problem

Though there is limited data on adolescent girls' experiences of violence, especially younger adolescent girls (aged 10 to 14), what we do know paints a troubling picture of their lives, particularly for girls that live in parts of the Pacific and South Asia.

Though Papua New Guinea (PNG) is one of the primary recipients of Australia's aid and development, investment has failed to reduce the levels of gender based violence against women and girls. PNG has been described as one of the most dangerous places to be a woman or girl, with sexual and physical violence having reached epidemic levels.³⁷

Over two thirds of PNG women are estimated to have suffered some form of physical or sexual violence and 41 per cent of men admit to having committed rape.³⁸

Women and girls are not only targets in their homes, but experience rape and assault as a result of tribal disputes (where girls from one clan or family are targeted by an opposing clan or family as 'payback') and as result of accusations of sorcery and witchcraft³⁹

Rape and sexual violence against girls is particularly high in the Solomon Islands where a study found that 42 per cent of women surveyed who had their first sexual experience before the age of 15 reported it was forced.⁴⁰ Of those, 36 per cent identified their boyfriend as the perpetrator, 24 per cent identified a stranger and 19 per cent identified a family member as the perpetrator.⁴¹ Of the women who had their first sexual experience between the ages of 15 and 17, 24 per cent reported that it was forced.⁴²

Evidence from South Asian countries such as Indonesia is equally alarming. Indonesia's first nationwide violence against women and girls survey, conducted in 2016, reveals that over 41 per cent of women have experienced physical, sexual, emotional or economic violence in their lifetime and 16 per cent have experienced at least one form of violence in the last 12 months.⁴³

Alongside the physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence that adolescent girls face, they must also endure harmful practices deeply embedded in culture, religion and tradition.

“VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN NEEDS TO STOP. EVERY DAY WE FACE PREJUDICE AND ARE EXCLUDED FROM SOCIETY. IT’S ABOUT TIME OUR VOICES WERE HEARD.” MARIA FERNANDA, 18.³⁶

Child marriage

Child marriage persists as a harmful practice that primarily affects adolescent girls aged 10 to 17 and severely limits their future opportunities to be educated, healthy and economically empowered.

Child marriage is not specific to one region, culture or religion.

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. Of these women, more than 250 million were married before the age of 15.⁴⁴

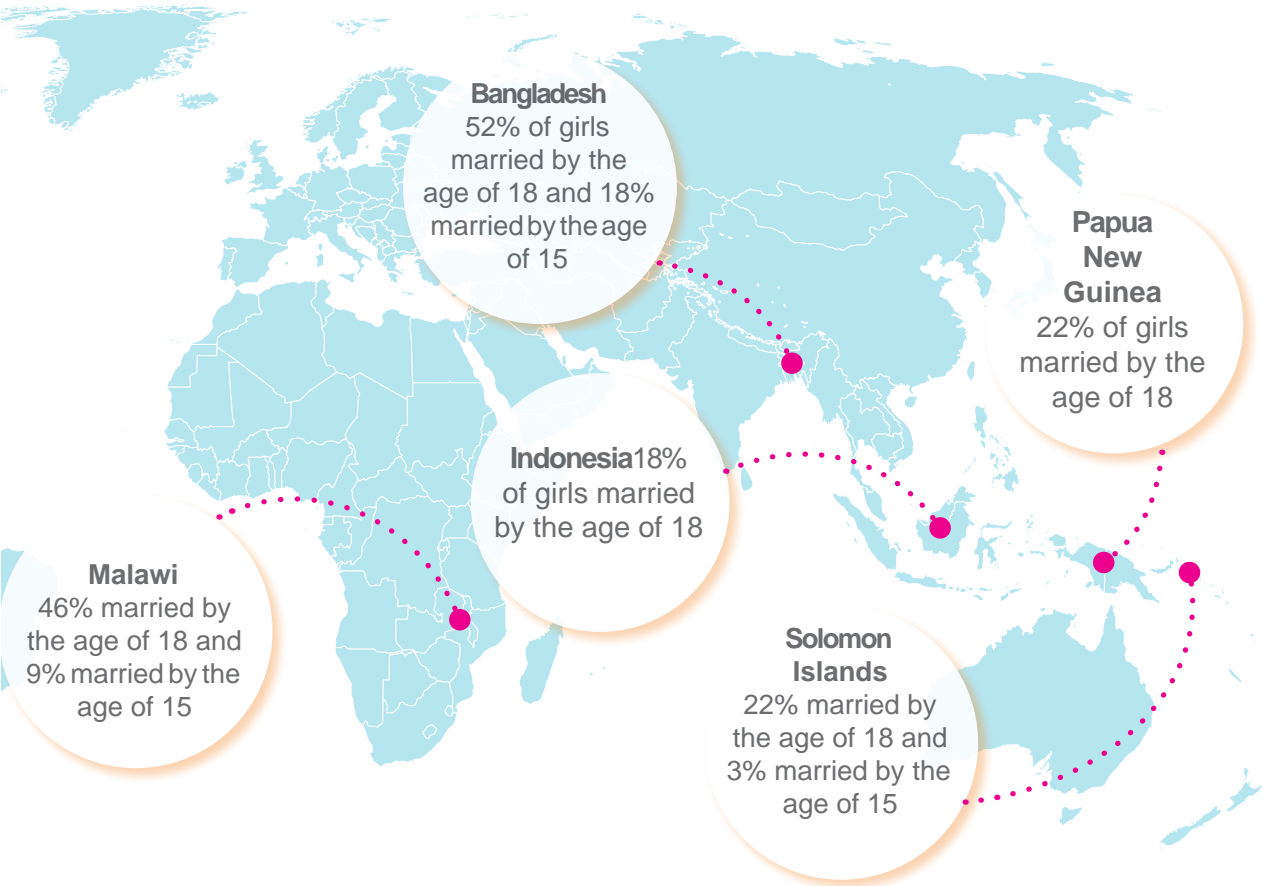
There is no one cause for child marriage. It is fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, traditions, and insecurity.⁴⁶

What we do know is that girls with no education are three times as likely to marry as girls with secondary education, and girls in rural areas are twice as likely to be married by 18 as those in urban areas.⁴⁷ Girls are particularly at risk in fragile states where conflict and insecurity drive decisions to marry girls early – 9 out of 10 countries that have the highest rates of child marriage are fragile.⁴⁸

If there is no reduction in the practice of child marriage, the total number of women married in childhood will grow from more than 700 million today to approximately 950 million by 2030.⁵⁰

“AT THE AGE OF 13/14, POOR PARENTS STARTED THINKING ABOUT MARRIAGE. POOR PARENTS THINK GIRLS ARE DEPENDENT. THEY WILL NOT GET BENEFITS FROM A DAUGHTER. FAMILIES EXPECT MORE FROM BOYS, BOYS WILL FEED THEM.”⁴⁹

Adolescent girls married by 18⁴⁵



For adolescent girls married before the age of 18, being a child bride changes the course of their lives. Girls are more likely to experience poverty, violence and early pregnancy, threatening their lives and their health. It limits their future prospects, denying them access to education and opportunities to gain skilled employment.

Adolescent girls who are married before the age of 18 are significantly more likely to face violence and abuse in their homes, at the hands of their husband and their husband's families.

In Vietnam, girls married before the age of 18 are at nearly double the lifetime risk of intimate partner violence compared to women married at 18 or older.⁵¹ In Eastern and Southern Africa more than one third of married adolescent girls reported violence at the hands of their partner, with even higher rates in Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe where close to 50 per cent of adolescent girls reported partner violence.⁵²

There are dire health consequences for adolescent girls who are child brides. Due to the power imbalance, and in many instances, the large age difference, girls are often unable to effectively negotiate safe sex leading to higher rates of HIV and early pregnancy.⁵³ Girls are less likely to complete formal education if they are married before the age of 18. Families' decisions about their daughters schooling and marriage are ordinarily made at the same time, and a decision to marry a girl before the age of 18 will be made together with the decision that she will not continue her schooling.⁵⁵

IN SOUTH SUDAN, ADOLESCENT GIRLS ARE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE IN CHILDBIRTH THAN TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION.⁵⁴



This is Sharina* aged 14 and Nazir* aged 17 from Bangladesh. Their marriage was arranged by Sharina's father and Nazir's grandfather. Sharina has been married for two years and now has a six-month-old daughter.⁵⁶



Girl taking part in FGM awareness session run by the local community development centre, Egypt

Female genital mutilation

More than 130 million girls and women alive today have been subject to female genital mutilation (FGM) in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East with available data. The three main countries where girls and women have been cut are Egypt, Ethiopia and Indonesia.⁵⁷

Gender inequality is the underlying driver of FGM and in some countries where FGM is practiced it is widely accepted as a social norm. In a recent UNICEF survey, there were high levels of support for the practice by older women (aged 45 to 49) yet the study demonstrated a generational divide with the majority of adolescent girls (aged 15 to 19) supporting the end of FGM. A large proportion of girls said they did not see any benefits or advantages to the practice.⁵⁹

FGM has serious immediate and long term health consequences for adolescent girls. Immediate health complications for girls that undergo the practice include bleeding, delayed or incomplete healing and infections.⁶⁰ Even if girls were cut at a young age, they still face severe health issues in adolescence such as damage to adjacent organs, sterility, recurring urinary tract infections, the formation of dermoid cysts and even death.⁶¹

Adolescent girls who are pregnant and have undergone FGM are at high risk of child-birth complications including difficult delivery, excessive bleeding and caesarean sections. Adolescent girls may also need multiple surgeries in order to have children or for sexual intercourse. Additionally there are serious emotional and psychological consequences of FGM such as depression and low self esteem— especially for adolescent girls who enter into puberty and are navigating the challenges of body image, sexuality and relationships.⁶²

Overall the prevalence of FGM has fallen – the chance of a girl being cut today is one third lower than it was 30 years ago.⁶³ However in some countries, such as Indonesia, rates of FGM remain high.

“ONCE A GIRL IS CIRCUMCISED, THE COMMUNITY ASSUMES THAT SHE IS READY FOR MARRIAGE EVEN IF SHE IS UNDER 18... I REALISED WHAT I HAD LOST AS I WATCHED MY FRIENDS CONTINUE WITH THEIR STUDIES AS I SUFFERED IN MY MARRIAGE.”
JOYCE, TANZANIA⁵⁸

What are the solutions?

Ending gender based violence and harmful practices is possible and girls are at the forefront of making change happen. However, to tackle this complex, multi-dimensional problem requires action at every level, from government, communities, families, schools, individuals and civil society organisations.

Ten ways to tackle gender based violence and harmful practices

1. Empower adolescent girls with the skills, knowledge and choices to be **agents of change**.
2. **Strengthen legal and policy frameworks** to end harmful practices and gender based violence.
3. Ensure that justice, **social welfare and child protection systems** are responsive to adolescent girls' needs.
4. Work with **adolescent boys and young men** to challenge sexism and promote respectful relationships.
5. Transform gendered attitudes and behaviours of **parents, teachers, religious and traditional leaders**.
6. Keep girls in **secondary school or vocational training** and make these safe spaces.
7. Work with **government, local authorities and public transport providers** to tackle public safety for girls.
8. **Address economic inequality** and the financial incentives that drive harmful practices.
9. Enable adolescent girls to access **sexual and reproductive health services and information**.
10. **Collect better data** on adolescent girls aged 10-14 and 15-19 and their experiences of violence.

Ending violence against adolescent girls requires long term work with men and boys, in particular adolescent boys and young men, to challenge gendered beliefs and behaviours. It requires work with families, schools and communities to challenge power structures and the normalisation of gender based violence and harmful practices. It also requires work with institutions and governments to strengthen justice, child protection and social welfare responses to support and protect adolescent girls.

Effectively ending and addressing child marriage and FGM involves an integrated approach that challenges attitudes and focuses on girls' empowerment. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the most effective policy and systemic interventions are those which support girls to stay in schools to receive a quality education, empower girls and mobilise their communities to challenge gendered attitudes and behaviours that support child marriage and FGM, improve reporting and enforcement systems, laws and policies and address poverty and economic insecurity. Working with families as well as religious, traditional and community leaders and elected officials at a provincial and local level is critical in building support for change and identifying champions who will speak out against harmful practices.⁶⁴

How will the world be different if girls are free from gender based violence and harmful practices?

Ending gender based violence for adolescent girls will have a profound effect on their future lives – creating the conditions for girls to reach their full potential.

A world where adolescent girls are free from violence and harmful practices is one where girls enjoy the same rights as their brothers and male peers. Ending violence is intrinsically linked to gender equality in families, schools and communities.

Reducing the rates of violence related deaths has the potential to save the lives of tens of thousands of girls globally and improve the overall health and well-being of adolescent girls. If girls were free from violence and harmful practices, they would have better mental health outcomes, with lower rates of depression and suicide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide and self-harm is the second leading cause of death for adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 years globally.⁶⁶

In the Pacific, a recent study found that women who had experienced family violence were more likely to have had a mother who was beaten and their children were also more likely to experience abuse.⁶⁸ Breaking the cycle of violence has long term impacts across families and communities, benefiting generations of children to come.

There is clear evidence that ending harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM can have economic benefits for families and more broadly, a nation's economy. Ending child marriage can kick-start a country's economy – a 15 country study found that if girls completed higher education and did not marry before the age of 18 they would contribute \$26 billion USD in earnings and productivity.⁶⁹ A decrease in child marriage will also impact a nation's fertility rates – if a woman marries at 18 or later she has 26 per cent fewer children over her lifetime than a girl who marries at 13, placing less pressure on education, health and welfare systems.⁷⁰

Ending gender based violence would have a dramatic effect on girls' access to and success in secondary education, improving attendance, concentration and results. Every year of secondary education reduces the likelihood of child marriage and early pregnancy by 6 per cent.⁷¹ This in turn could lead to an increase in economic growth and more broadly drive progress towards the 2030 SDGs.

“THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AT HOME BECAUSE MY FATHER SAYS THAT I DO NOT HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS MY BROTHERS. I HAVE BEEN TALKING WITH MY DAD AND HE HAS UNDERSTOOD... HE IS LETTING ME DO THE THINGS HE DIDN'T LET ME DO IN THE PAST.”
MARIA, 15 COLOMBIA⁶⁵

CREATING INTERVENTIONS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO BE FREE FROM VIOLENCE IN THEIR HOMES AND RELATIONSHIPS COULD BREAK THE CYCLE OF INTER-GENERATIONAL VIOLENCE.⁶⁷



Image attributed to Equal Playing Field

Levelling the playing field through sport

Around the world, sport has the potential to bring about positive change and transform the lives of young people. In Papua New Guinea, Plan International and Equal Playing Field run programs with secondary school students promoting gender equality and respectful relationships, with the ultimate aim of preventing violence against women and children.

The program engages 13 to 15 year-old girls and boys to take part in a mixed-gender sports competition that combines respectful relationship education with skills development and games. Teams compete in recreational matches where they refine their on-field skills and participate in educational sessions on different topics relating to gender, respect and relationships. This has transformed the understanding of these adolescent girls and boys around violence and abuse. It has helped them develop support networks, know where to seek help, develop empathy for others and manage their own anger and stress.



Memory, 19, and Rosby, 18, present petition to first lady of Malawi

Girl-led campaign to end child marriage in Malawi

Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with approximately half of all girls married by the age of 18.* Memory Banda's sister was just 11 when she was forced to marry the man who got her pregnant: *"At the time, I was young and thought this was normal. But I quickly realised the devastating impact it had on her when she was further abused in marriage."*

Memory and other young campaigners presented the First Lady of Malawi with a petition of 42,000 signatures rejecting the practice.

As evidence of the power of young people to drive change in their countries, thanks to the work of Memory and her fellow campaigners, in February 2017, the Malawian government amended the law to ban all instances of marriage for girls under 18 - even where there is parental consent.

5 GENDER
EQUALITY



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



PROMOTING HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND RIGHTS THROUGH ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INFORMATION AND SERVICES

Charlienne, 17, sits with her baby son at their home in Brazil

When adolescent girls are able to exercise control over their own sexual and reproductive health they are in the best position possible to begin their journey into adulthood.

Investments in adolescent focussed sexual and reproductive health services and education are powerful vehicles for promoting economically empowered individuals, families and communities. Adolescent girls that can access contraception and can choose when and how many children they have are more likely to be educated and economically empowered, lifting themselves and their families out of poverty.

Sadly, there are millions of girls around the world who do not have access to contraception, condoms, family planning and maternal health services, and the information that will keep them safe, healthy and empowered. Their rights are limited by unfair laws and policies that stop girls from accessing family planning services because they are not adults or they are unmarried. Girls' rights are limited by the cultural and religious taboos in families, communities and schools that view sexual activity of adolescents as wrong, resulting in a failure to provide the education that can help girls prevent unplanned pregnancy and HIV. Their rights are limited by the lack of investment by governments in adolescent centred sexual and reproductive health education and services.

Girls that face intersecting discrimination and marginalisation, such as girls with disabilities, are even less likely to be able to realise their rights to good sexual and reproductive health.

Placing the health of adolescent girls at the centre of aid and development has benefits that can change the course of a girl's life and a nation's economy, reducing her risk of poverty and inequality and unlocking the demographic dividend that can accelerate a country's economic growth.

"I WENT TO THE GYNAECOLOGIST ONCE BUT SHE WOULD NOT TALK TO ME BECAUSE SHE SAID SHE DOESN'T WORK WITH 'ABNORMAL' PEOPLE." YOUNG WOMAN WITH A DISABILITY IN LATIN AMERICA.⁷²

A global snapshot of the problem

All over the world the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls are being wound back. This can mean life or death for girls.

All over the world, girls are struggling to access contraception and family planning services, in some instances due to policies that discriminate against them because of their age or their unmarried status. In Timor-Leste, in early 2017, a draft family planning policy proposed to limit family planning services to ‘married women’ only, despite the high rates of teenage pregnancy in that country. In PNG, parental consent to access family planning services is required for girls under the age of 18.

The United States Government has reinstated a federal ban on funding for international organisations that counsel women and girls on family planning options including abortion. The ‘Mexico City’ policy places restrictions on all global health funding provided by the US, potentially affecting millions of women and girls in the developing world and the services they rely on, including family planning, HIV and maternal and child health services.

Australia’s commitment to funding sexual and reproductive health services and education for girls and young women is limited. Prior to 2017, Australia’s funding for family planning had halved over three years, from \$46 million in 2013/14 to \$23 million in 2015/16.

There is overwhelming evidence that when adolescent girls have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services it can be life-saving.

Pregnancy and birth related complications are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls aged 15 to 19.⁷³ Bearing children at such a young age places both mother and child at risk of serious health complications. Babies that are born to adolescent mothers are at a much higher risk of dying than those born to women aged 20 to 24.⁷⁴

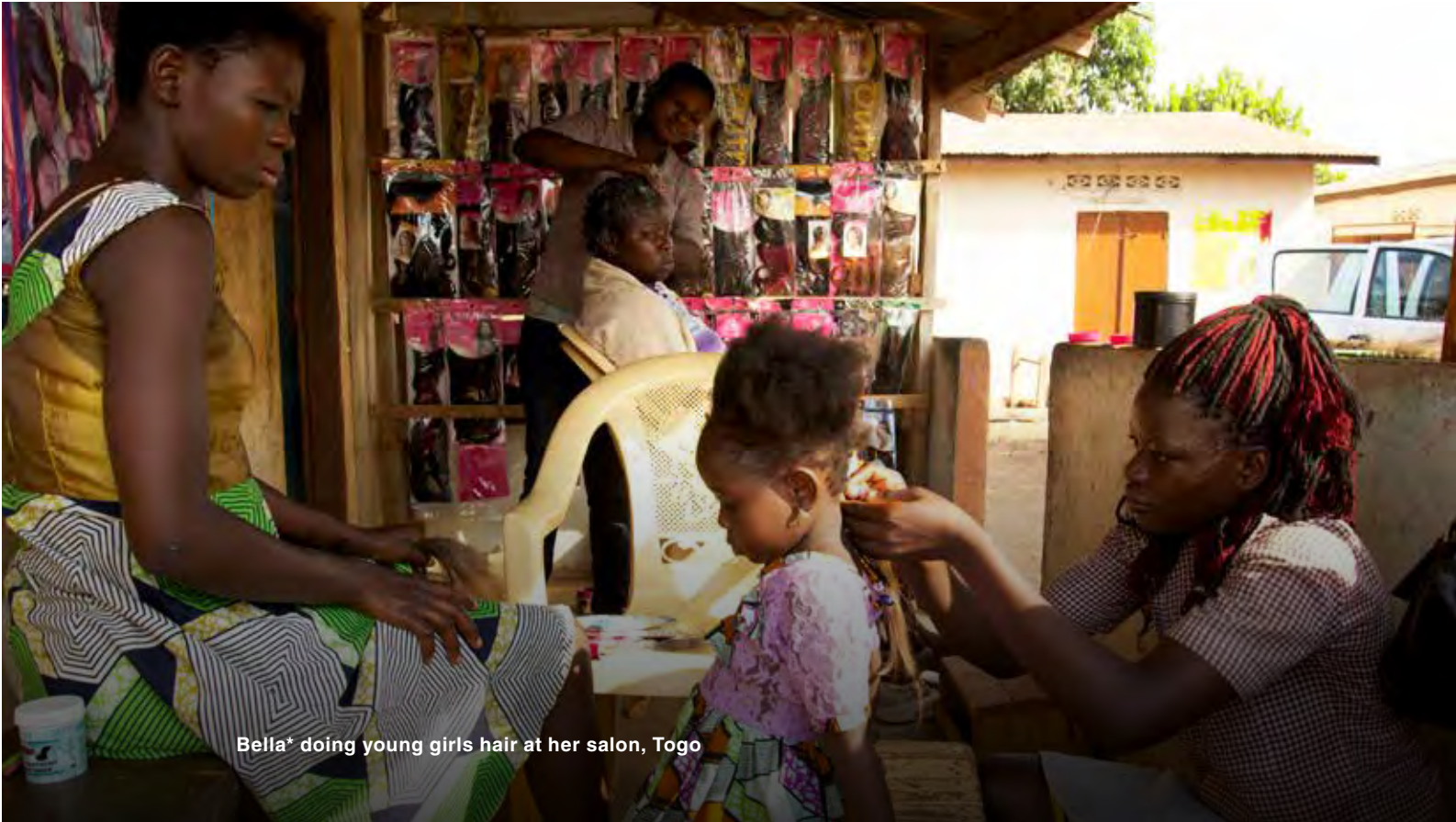
PREGNANCY AND BIRTH RELATED COMPLICATIONS ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AGED 15 TO 19 IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD.

Access to condoms and education on sexually transmitted diseases are crucial to prevent girls from dying. Alarminglly, cases of HIV infection are increasing most rapidly amongst young people in the developing world. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region most heavily affected by HIV, three in four newly infected adolescents aged 15–19 are girls.⁷⁵ These worrying statistics indicate that adolescent girls are contracting HIV more rapidly than any other group in the developing world.

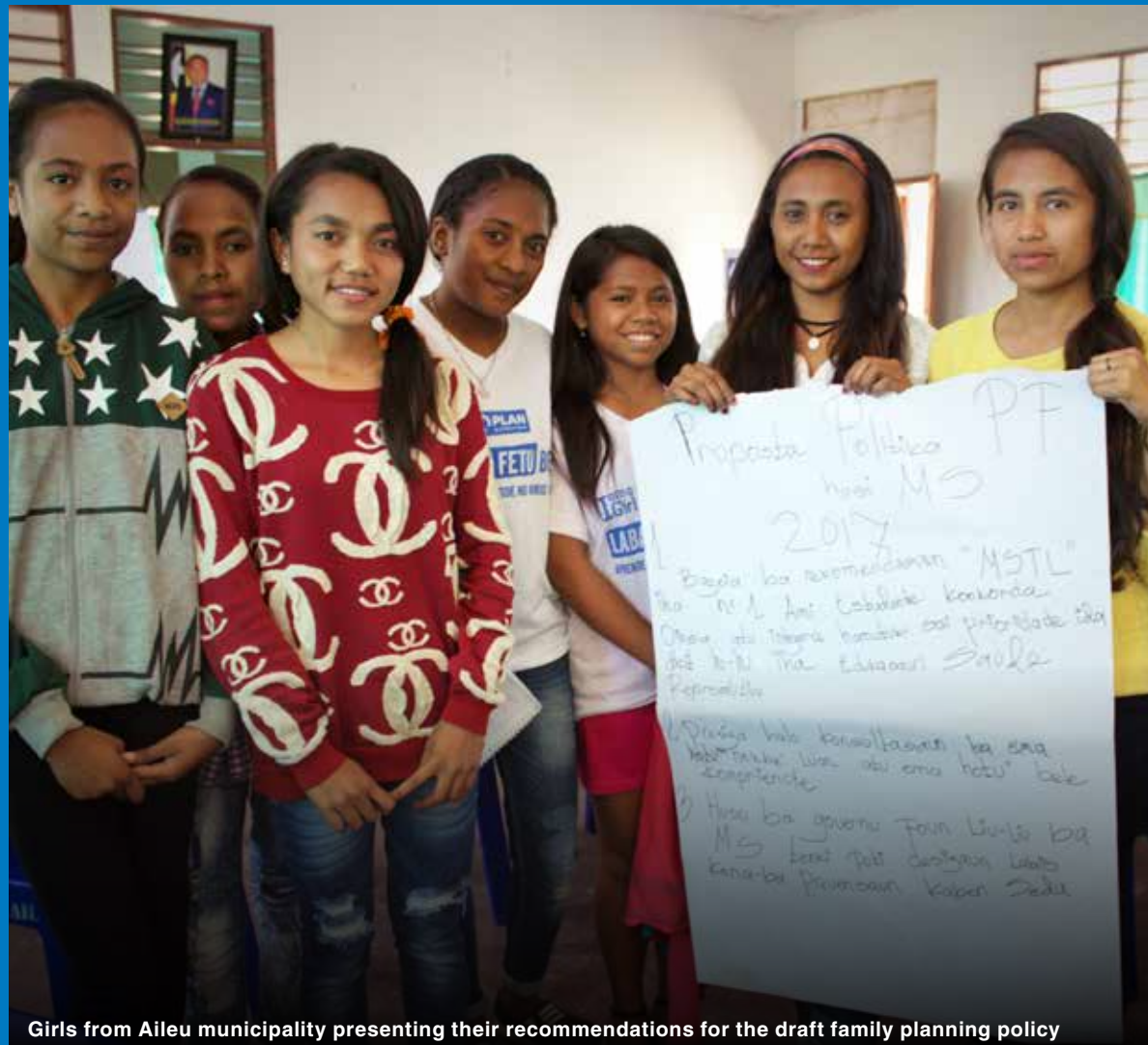
Sexually active adolescent girls who have HIV and other sexually transmitted infections face barriers in accessing care in health facilities because of privacy concerns, the need for parental consent or age restrictions on accessing services and limited knowledge of the services available. Untreated sexually transmitted infections can increase the risk of birth complications and maternal mortality.

Every year, more than 3 million girls undergo unsafe abortions, often driven underground by laws and policies that criminalise abortion or restrict access to unmarried women.⁷⁶

Access to family planning services, contraception and advice can be life saving. However discussing these issues is often taboo, and information about sexual and reproductive health is not provided either at home or in school at the age when it might be useful and potentially protective for young women. Finding non-threatening contexts for young people to learn and to speak about their sexual and reproductive health with their peers can provide one solution to this challenge.



Bella* doing young girls hair at her salon, Togo



Girls from Aileu municipality presenting their recommendations for the draft family planning policy

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT – TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste is a tough place to be an adolescent girl. Girls possess little or no voice in terms of their own future and rights in one of the poorest nations in our region.

“Our culture is very patriarchal and very traditional, so women and girls do not have power to make decisions for their own self. For their health, for their body, their participation, their voice, their education. As well, even though the comprehensive sexuality education curriculum is there, often the teacher is not confident to deliver the information, and it is not something they feel comfortable to talk about. They feel they cannot introduce these ideas to children, it is only for those who are married. They tell me, when they get to this topic, they rip the pages of the textbook out,” says Lala Soares, Women and Girls Empowerment Program Manager for Plan International in Timor-Leste.⁷⁷

Alarmingly, almost one quarter of all teenage girls in Timor-Leste will fall pregnant and have a baby by the time they are 20 years old. In addition, some 19 per cent are married by the time they are aged 19, indicating a deep stigma and shame around early pregnancy. Of all 15-19 year old women with children, half of these young women already have more than one child.

A new report released in May 2017 by Plan International Timor Leste and UNFPA - ‘Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage in Timor Leste’ captures the challenges for girls who are unable to access contraception and sex education, and the reality that it leads to high rates of early pregnancy and child marriage and the increased incidences of domestic violence and girls discontinuing their education.⁷⁸

In early 2017 a draft family planning policy issued by the Ministry of Health made access to contraception for girls even more difficult by limiting family planning services to ‘married women’ only. In August 2017, Timorese girls from Aileu municipality gathered together as part of a workshop hosted by Plan International and issued a statement calling on the government to revise the policy.

“We need an action plan from the new government to tackle teenage pregnancy. This must start with listening to our recommendations and revising this draft policy.” Odelia, 18,

What are the solutions?

First and foremost adolescent girls, particularly those who are most marginalised, must be central to the solution –playing a role in informing the design and delivery of programs as well as acting as change agents and peer educators.

Comprehensive sexuality information and education works. It is crucial that adolescent girls and boys have access to comprehensive, age-appropriate and inclusive sexuality information and education in school and outside of school. Education and information should be considered for girls and boys as young as ten and continue to be offered until they reach adulthood. Comprehensive education and information can delay the debut of sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners and increase the use of protection against unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.⁷⁹

Evidence also suggests that rights based and gender sensitive sexuality education and information can strengthen gender equality and reduce the risk of gender based violence amongst adolescents. Working with teachers and parents to break down taboos regarding sexuality education is a key aspect of ensuring that girls and boys have access to high quality education and information.

Creating leadership and life skills programs for adolescent girls to have a safe forum where they can ask questions that are considered taboo and to learn skills to increase their personal agency and bargaining power in their relationships with sexual partners.⁸⁰ **High quality, youth friendly sexual and reproductive health services** can encourage more adolescent girls to access health services at an early stage of pregnancy or when they first become sexually active.⁸¹ Youth friendly services must respect girls’ rights to confidentiality, privacy and informed consent. It is also critical that **national and local laws and policies** that limit girls’ access to family planning and criminalise abortion are challenged and removed, and that service providers on the ground are aware of these change and make adjustments in practice, to improve girls’ access to services.



Health club member from Tororo, Uganda

How will the world be different if girls have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services?

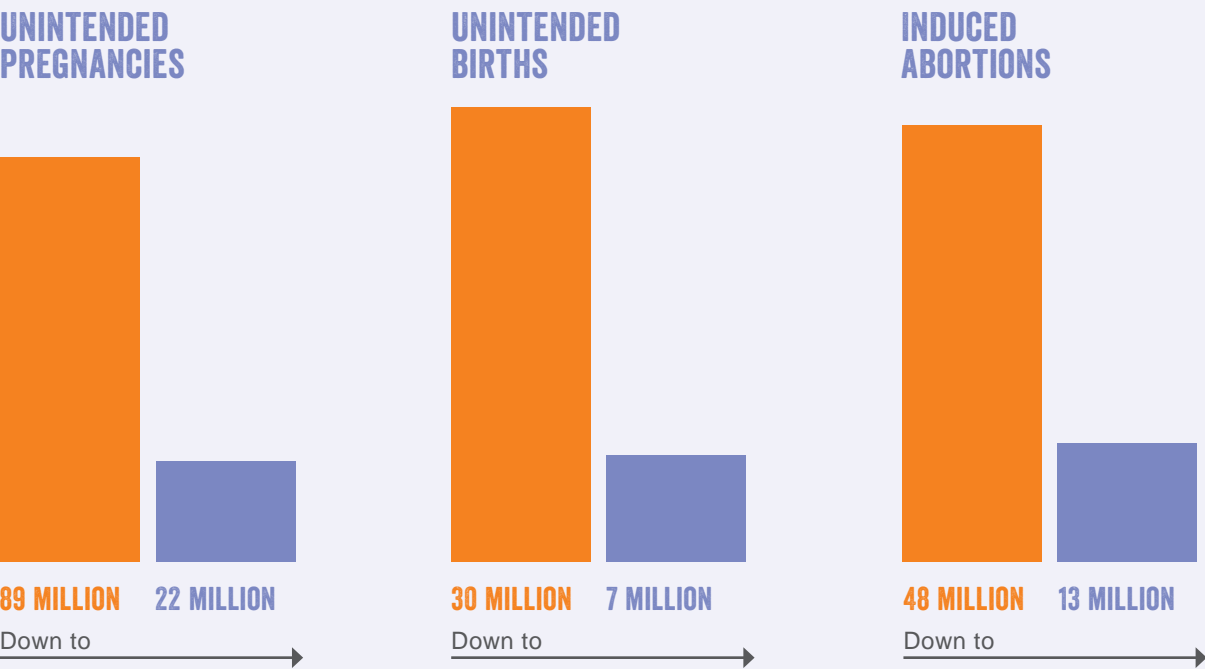
When adolescent girls around the globe are able to make choices about when they get pregnant, when they are able to protect themselves from HIV and sexually transmitted infections, and when they are able to stay safe and healthy during their pregnancy and child birth, they have the best chance of transition to adulthood as happy, healthy and empowered young women.

Age appropriate and youth friendly sexual and reproductive health education and services can give adolescent girls the tools and the confidence to safely and effectively negotiate when they first have sex and to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. It is widely recognised that promoting the sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescent girls and young women in Africa is the key to preventing new HIV infections on the continent; importantly the right investments have the potential to fast track the end of AIDs amongst African women and girls by 2030.⁸²

We know that mortality rates and poor health outcomes are higher for adolescent girls that give birth than for women over the age of 18. Imagine then, if adolescent girls across the globe were able to have access to effective contraception – it would save the lives of millions of girls and their babies.

More broadly if girls could realise their rights to sexual and reproductive health, the results would transform nations. If all unmet need for modern contraception were satisfied in developing regions the impact would be remarkable. Meeting all unmet need for contraception would result in a three-quarters decline in unintended pregnancies (from the current 89 million to 22 million per year), unplanned births (from 30 million to seven million per year) and induced abortions (from 48 million to 13 million per year)⁸³. Slower population growth cuts the cost of social services and eases demand for water, food, education, health care, housing, transportation, and jobs. Family planning programs create conditions that ultimately result in a healthier, more qualified labour force and progress towards poverty reduction and other national development goals.

If all unmet need for contraception was met



Disabled girl at a Plan-supported school in Makeni, Sierra Leone

Let Me Decide and Thrive

Plan International, together with the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Catalina Devandas Aguilar, has released damning research on the specific challenges faced by girls and young women with disabilities in realising their sexual and reproductive health rights globally. Our interviews with girls and young women with disabilities in Asia, Africa and Latin America shine a light on the grave human rights violations that girls face every day of their lives.

Girls with disabilities are systematically robbed of their agency and control over their own bodies, too often forced to undergo sterilisation, abortion or other extreme measures that result in lifelong and irreversible damage.

“They [parents] do not allow us to have children because they think we are not normal.”
Young African woman with a disability

The research highlights the deep and systemic discrimination that girls with disabilities face and how this leads to a denial of their rights to access basic sexual and reproductive health services. Profound prejudice and stigma can lead to girls being unable to access comprehensive sexuality education.

“Just because we have a disability doesn’t mean we don’t comprehend and understand. Our development is the same.” Young woman with a disability in Latin America

Menstruation and menstrual hygiene poses specific challenges for girls with disabilities. A lack of access to toilets and sanitary pads makes it particularly difficult for girls to manage their period and can limit girls’ mobility and their attendance at school. In extreme cases, it can lead to attacks on their bodily integrity, with forced use of contraception or forced hysterectomies.

Plan International and the UN Special Rapporteur have together called for urgent action by governments to criminalise all harmful and forced practices related to sexual and reproductive health, provide comprehensive, tailored sexuality education to all girls with disabilities, provide training for parents and educators and empowering girls with disabilities to become advocates and agents of change locally, nationally and globally.



FIGHTING POVERTY BY GIVING ADOLESCENT GIRLS ACCESS TO QUALITY, INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION

Sofia, 15, attends a boarding school built by Plan International, Mozambique

Educating girls has been described as the world's best investment.

Every year of secondary education that an adolescent girl can access and complete, yields greater returns for herself, her family and the nation's productivity and economic growth.⁸⁴ There has been important progress, globally, in increasing girls' enrolment in primary education, but this alone will not provide the conditions necessary to create economic prosperity.

Education is a fundamental right of all children and young people as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A quality, inclusive secondary education can place adolescent girls on a path towards employment and financial stability. Adolescent girls who are in secondary school are less likely to be at risk of child marriage and early pregnancy and more likely to achieve gender equity at home and in their relationship.

If governments are serious about unlocking the potential of the millions of adolescent girls in the world, there must be a global effort to break down the barriers that stop adolescent girls from accessing inclusive, equitable and quality secondary education. Adolescent girls that face additional layers of disadvantage face even more barriers to accessing education.

Creating an action plan on adolescent girls requires an understanding of the barriers that are specific to girls' age, gender and the intersectional issues that lend to further marginalise them. With the onset of puberty adolescent girls face unique challenges such as limited access to school toilets and sanitary pads during menstruation, the risk of gender based violence in travelling to and from school and at school, and the gendered norms and circumstances that lead to girls dropping out of secondary school - such as child marriage, early and unplanned pregnancies and the expectation and burden of domestic work.

"THE BEST THING ABOUT SCHOOL IS LEARNING. I REALLY LIKE ALL SUBJECTS BUT IF I HAD TO CHOOSE MY FAVOURITES, THEY WOULD BE MATHEMATICS AND LANGUAGES - PORTUGUESE, ENGLISH AND FRENCH. I WANT TO CONTINUE MY STUDIES, EVEN AFTER SECONDARY SCHOOL, SO I CAN BECOME A NURSE."
ZEFA, 14, MOZAMBIQUE⁸⁵



Rose, 13, wants to be a journalist when she grows up, Benin

A global snapshot of the problem

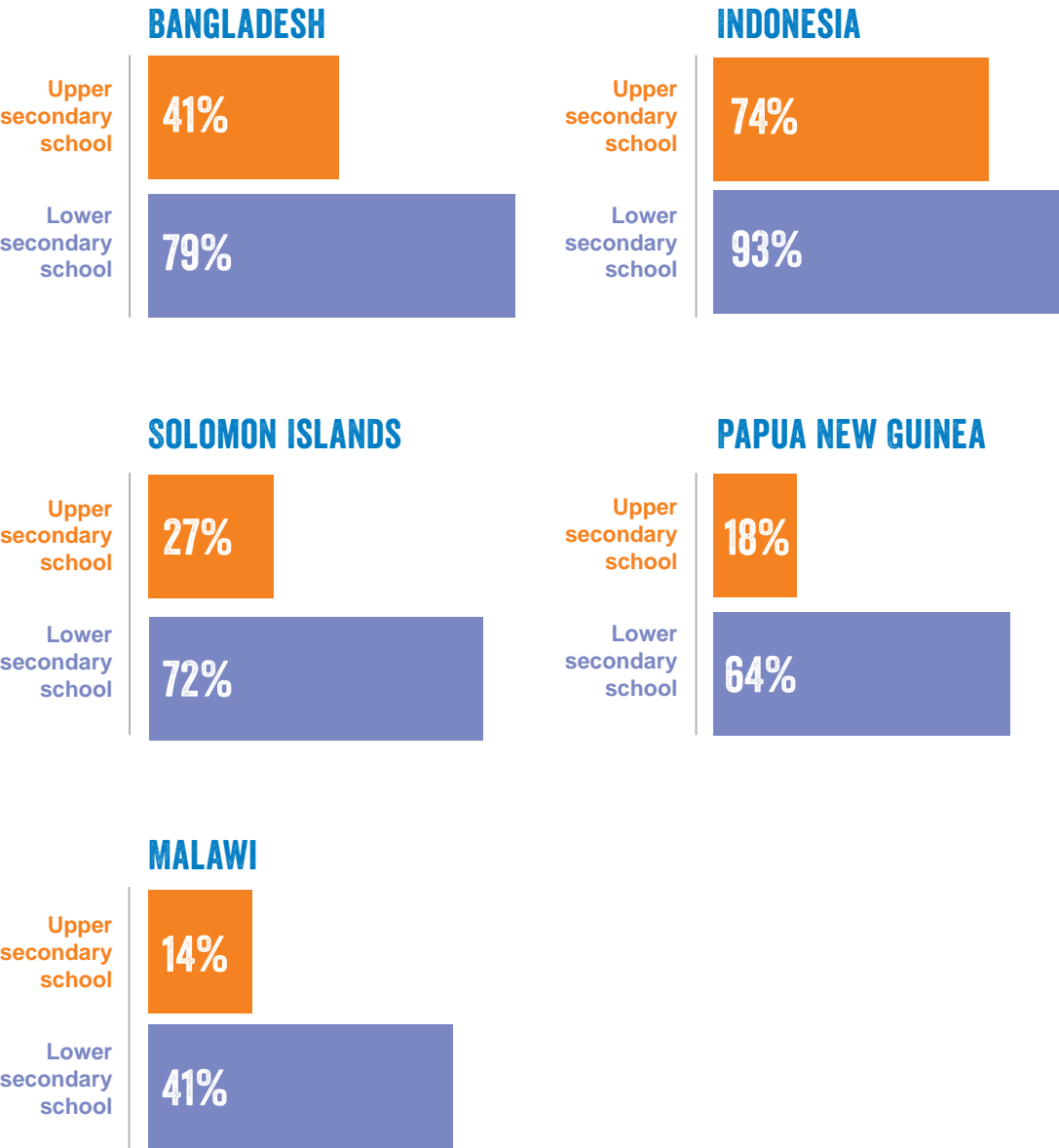
Despite the overwhelming evidence that educating girls can end poverty, girls are being excluded from secondary education at alarming rates.

The statistics show a troubling downward trend of adolescent girls not continuing with their higher secondary education. It's a startling reminder that as girls move into late adolescence (from ages 15 to 19), the pressure of child marriage, early pregnancy, gender expectations, the preferential treatment of boys' education, the burden of domestic chores and the lack of access to quality, safe and inclusive education drives girls out of the school system denying them their right to learn and thrive.

Ten barriers to secondary education for adolescent girls

- 1. Child marriage
- 2. Early pregnancy and child-birth
- 3. Low status of girls and women = preferential treatment for boys' education
- 4. Gender based violence going to and from school, at school and at home
- 5. The burden of domestic chores
- 6. Lack of female teachers
- 7. Poor quality, gendered school curriculum and learning material
- 8. Poor investment in secondary schools and safe facilities for girls
- 9. Menstruation - poor toilet facilities, lack of sanitary pads and period taboos
- 10. Humanitarian disasters, climate change and conflict

Girls enrolled in lower and upper secondary school ⁸⁶



Snapshots of the barriers

PERIODS

As girls reach puberty one of the key issues that impact on girls' attendance at school is menstruation. In parts of Vanuatu, 75 per cent of girls miss up to three days of school each month because they have their period.⁸⁷ It is estimated that one in ten girls in Sub-Saharan Africa miss school during their period.⁸⁸ A recent report commissioned by DFAT, The Last Taboo, found that adolescent girls in the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea faced considerable challenges in attending school during their period due to inadequate hygiene facilities and gender specific toilets, teasing at school and teachers lacking the confidence to educate and support students on the issue.⁸⁹ Cultural norms and taboos also play a part in stigmatising girls and stopping them from taking part in day to day activities such as attending church or playing sport.

“WHEN I HAVE MY PERIOD, I HAVE TO GO HOME TO CHANGE MY SANITARY PAD AS WE DON'T HAVE THE FACILITIES I NEED AT SCHOOL. LUCKILY, MY HOME IS NOT FAR FROM SCHOOL, BUT OTHERS AREN'T SO FORTUNATE. SOME CHILDREN'S HOUSES ARE VERY FAR, SO THEY DON'T BOTHER COMING BACK TO SCHOOL.”
TREM, 14, CAMBODIA⁹⁰

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Adolescent girls face significant challenges in accessing education due to the high rates of school related gender based violence, both at school and travelling to and from schools. Girls experience sexual harassment and abuse, bullying and physical violence which drives up the rates of girls being absent from and dropping out of school. A comprehensive study conducted by Plan International in 2015 (where 9,000 students aged 12 to 17 were surveyed across five countries in Asia) found that one in three girls who experience violence at school will never report the incident.⁹¹ The study found that inequitable gender attitudes of students and teachers and gender stereotyping were key drivers of violence.⁹²

GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

The picture for adolescent girls with disabilities is even bleaker. In developing countries, 90 per cent of children with disabilities are not enrolled in school.⁹³ It is estimated that only 1 per cent of women with disabilities is literate.⁹⁴ There are many barriers to adolescent girls with disabilities receiving a quality and inclusive education. In schools, teachers may lack the skills to adapt their teaching styles or may hold discriminatory attitudes that exclude girls from classrooms.⁹⁵ Many schools are unable to offer the assistive technology and special education services appropriate to meet adolescent girls learning needs.⁹⁶ The stigma, shame and fear of families can also stop them from enrolling and sending their adolescent girls to school. Girls with disabilities who have their periods are particularly disadvantaged – often having little information and support to manage periods in school.

SEXUAL IDENTITY

There is a growing understanding of the violence and bullying that adolescent girls' face in schools due to their sexual identity. Studies suggest that girls face bullying, harassment and violence in schools as a result of stigma and discrimination based on their sexual identity as well as their gender.⁹⁷

What are the solutions?

A gender transformative, inclusive education system is key to improving educational outcomes for adolescent girls. A gender transformative and inclusive approach to education creates opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promotes positions of influence for all children, and particularly girls that experience the most disadvantaged such as girls with disabilities, encourages equality of opportunity and addresses power inequities.⁹⁸ This also means increasing the numbers of female teacher and training all teachers in gender equality and inclusion.

Tackling taboos and access to good menstrual hygiene is essential to helping girls stay in school. This means providing safe and appropriate toilet facilities in schools, building the capacity of teachers to teach and discuss menstruation in class, increasing girls' understanding of their sexual and reproductive health, removing the social stigma which leads to schools based teasing and harassment and good practice in managing their period and providing affordable and sustainable solutions for sanitary pads and tampons.

Measures to promote safety and security provide adolescent girls with a learning environment that allows them to thrive. This includes developing school policies to address violence, teacher training and a curriculum to promote gender equality, inclusion and tolerance and respectful relationships.

Strengthening support for LGBTIQ students both in school through policies, education and teacher training and outside of school through youth led LGBTIQ support and advocacy services.

Challenging gendered norms and behaviours in families and in particular with parents, from early on in the lives of their children will help in dismantling the gendered attitudes that preference boys' education and burden girls with the majority of the domestic chores.



Admira, 17, with her newborn daughter Anaclea outside the house she shares with her in-laws

How will the world be different if all girls have access to secondary education?

Secondary education is truly transformational for girls.

When girls have access to high quality, inclusive and accessible secondary education all around the world and the opportunities to translate their education into productive employment, they have the potential to lift themselves, their families and their communities out of poverty.

In Pakistan, working women with good literacy skills earn 95 per cent more than women with weak literacy skills. In Jordan, 25 per cent of women with only primary education who live in rural areas work for no pay, compared with 7 per cent of those with secondary education.¹⁰⁰ Women with more education report having more decision making power over their own earnings whether it is alone or with someone else.

Girls that are educated are less likely to be married before they turn 18. Every year of secondary education reduces the likelihood of child marriage by 5 per cent or more.¹⁰¹ Girls that remain in secondary education have fewer children and do so later in life.

Girls who access secondary education are less likely to carry the burden of domestic household work and are more likely to experience gender equality in their homes.¹⁰²

When girls can complete secondary education the health benefit for themselves and their families are dramatic. Women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to be educated on the topic of HIV and AIDS, and are thereby equipped with the knowledge to practice safer sex and prevent infection. Education is one of the most powerful ways of improving children's health. Educated mothers are better informed about specific diseases, so they can take measures to prevent them. They can recognise signs of illness early, seek advice and act on it.¹⁰³

FOR EVERY EXTRA YEAR A GIRL REMAINS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL HER FUTURE WAGE INCREASES BY 15-25 PER CENT.⁹⁹



Girls from a primary school in Ende District, who have recently taken part in lesson to learn about menstrual hygiene

Helping girls stay in school by challenging menstrual hygiene taboos

Plan International Indonesia and local partners are working with school students and their parents to challenge the taboos around menstrual hygiene across five schools in Ende district, Indonesia. Many students in Indonesia have limited knowledge and understanding about menstruation and reproductive health. This is particularly the case for female students in fourth to sixth grade, who are lacking the knowledge to deal with – and prepare for – their first menstruation. A lack of knowledge and a combination of anxiety and shame has led to a high number of girls who skip class during their monthly menstruation.

“I am happy to receive this knowledge. When it happens to me, I do not need to be afraid as menstruation is normal for a girl. Now I know how to deal with the situation,” explains 11-year-old Putri. “My male friends are also happy. Now they understand what is happening, so if any of the girls are having their period, nobody is allowed to mock us. Even the boys need to help us if we are having difficulties.”

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



GROWING A COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY BY ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERING GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

One of the girls taking part in #GirlsTakeover activity at school in Paraguay

Adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24¹⁰⁴ hold the key to unlocking a country's economic prosperity.

They make up an astonishing 76 per cent of young people around the world that are not in education, training or employment.¹⁰⁵

Providing opportunities for these girls and young women to transition from unemployment or education into productive employment and business could make the difference needed to lift their families out of poverty and to accelerate a country's economic growth.

This is a global challenge for governments that must be addressed with urgency.

Global youth unemployment has been recognised by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as a crisis requiring the highest global priority.¹⁰⁶ In the countries where Australia invests the most in aid and development, female youth unemployment is at crisis levels.

In the Solomon Islands, 50 per cent of girls and young women aged 15 to 24 are unemployed. In Fiji, 25 per cent of girls and young women are unemployed and in Indonesia it is 20 per cent.

Despite the universal right to decent work, girls face enormous barriers to gaining employment and when they do, they are most likely to be in jobs that are dangerous, unstable and poorly paid.¹⁰⁸ It is estimated that 23 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 are currently employed on less than \$1.25 US a day.¹⁰⁹

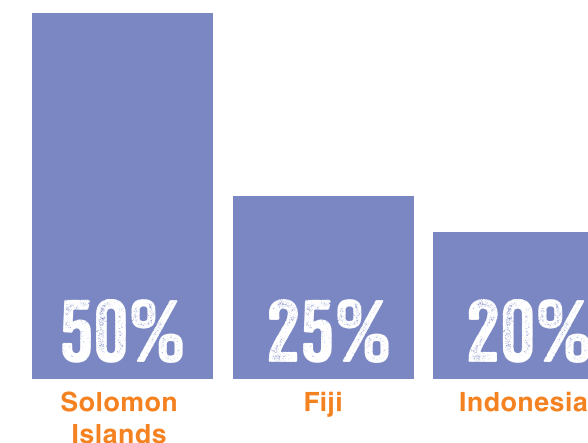
There are many reasons why economic empowerment is beyond the reach of so many adolescent girls and young women. Prevailing cultural and religious attitudes, the absence of gender transformative training and entrepreneurship programs, ready for work job schemes and the devaluing of women's economic contributions limit the potential of girls and young women; denying them opportunities and, in some cases, funnelling them into lower paid, lower skilled jobs.

Apart from transforming economies, creating economic opportunities for girls and young women also empowers them for life.

It sets girls and young women on a pathway out of poverty and lays the foundation for future financial stability. It strengthens their rights – providing income, independence and choice. It can reduce the risk of early and forced marriage and strengthen their leadership and decision making status in communities and families.

When girls and young women are not economically empowered, they are likely to be victims of poverty and discrimination. For girls and young women who face intersecting levels of discrimination there are significantly fewer economic opportunities and they face a far greater risk of exploitation and abuse. These girls and young women must be central to initiatives funded by Governments and organisations.

Percentage of young women aged 15 to 24 who are unemployed¹⁰⁷



A global snapshot of the problem

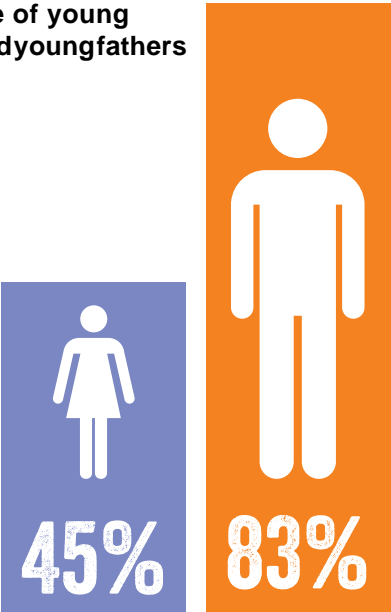
Adolescent girls and young women in developing countries are experiencing a growing gender gap as they try to enter the workforce.

The ILO has estimated that **youth unemployment is once again on the rise with more than 71 million young people aged 15 to 24 unemployed in 2016.**¹¹⁰ There is a marked gender disparity between young men and young women entering the labour force. Globally, the average difference in employment between young men and young women is 16 per cent but in developing regions the difference is much starker – in Southern Asia it is 33 per cent and in Northern Africa it is 30 per cent. Having children can increase employment for young men but has the opposite impact for young women. Less than one in two (45 per cent) young mothers work compared to more than four in five (83 per cent) young fathers.¹¹¹

Girls and young women face particular gender related barriers that limit their ability to access vocational and entrepreneurial training and decent work. Gendered cultural norms and stereotypes continue to play an important role in limiting opportunities for girls and young women. Families, communities and schools can discourage girls from moving into male dominated areas of work that pay well and have pathways to progress, instead encouraging girls and young women to choose traditionally female jobs such as textile making, domestic work and hairdressing which offer lower pay and are valued less.¹¹² Families and parents, in particular, may fear for girls’ safety and limit their freedom of movement, making it more difficult for girls to take up opportunities for training and work.

In the Pacific, the majority of the population live in rural areas with poor infrastructure and limited formal employment opportunities.

Percentage of young mothers and young fathers who work



Adolescent girls and young women move to urban areas to find employment, but are vulnerable to abuse from extended family and others, and increased expectations for them to perform domestic duties that limit their capacity to access work outside the home.

Though gender parity for girls and boys in primary education has been reached in many developing countries, girls are less likely to complete secondary education, particularly higher secondary education in large parts of South Asia, the Pacific and Africa.¹¹³ This is a barrier to girls going on to tertiary education and skilled employment that offer higher wages and more opportunities to thrive.

Existing programs fail to take into account the gendered barriers that make it difficult for girls to participate - such as the lack of security in neighbourhoods and limited safe public transport options, lack of child care, restrictions on their freedom of movement, the expectation and burden of household chores and the lack of female trainers and mentors.¹¹⁴ In the field of entrepreneurship, girls and young women also struggle to access the finance and support they need to establish a business and are limited by gendered stereotypes regarding the nature and size of the businesses they run.

Once in work, girls and young women are faced with barriers that make it difficult to continue in employment; gendered norms, sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse and violence and lack of opportunity to progress and take up leadership roles.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN STRUGGLE TO ACCESS EXISTING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS AS MOST FAIL TO BE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE.



Image from Youth@Work Program Evaluation, Case Study, February 2016

Youth@Work – Solomon Islands¹¹⁵

Youth@Work has been a catalyst for youth development in the Solomon Islands and is making a difference in the lives of thousands of young people. A youth led initiative, with young women in senior roles in the organisation, it helps young people find work or start their own business, offering internships, mentoring support, skills and cross-cutting values training and micro-enterprise development assistance.

The internship program offers weekly training involving CV writing, financial literacy, workplace ethics, gender, peace building and other topics for 20 weeks. Young people are placed as interns with government departments, private businesses and enterprises around Honiara and training is offered throughout the internship.

Youth@Work ensures that there are equal or more numbers of young women taking part in the program and recognises the need to adapt and respond to the needs of female participants. It has also taken an active lead in promoting disability-inclusiveness, adapting the program to specifically engage young people with disabilities.

The program is funded by the Australian Government and Pacific Leadership Programme.

What are the solutions?

Gender transformative, youth economic empowerment programs can mobilise and unlock the potential of millions of adolescent girls and young women that are currently not in education, training or employment.

A multi-pronged approach is necessary to enable girls to gain vocational and entrepreneurship skills and to secure pathways into decent work.

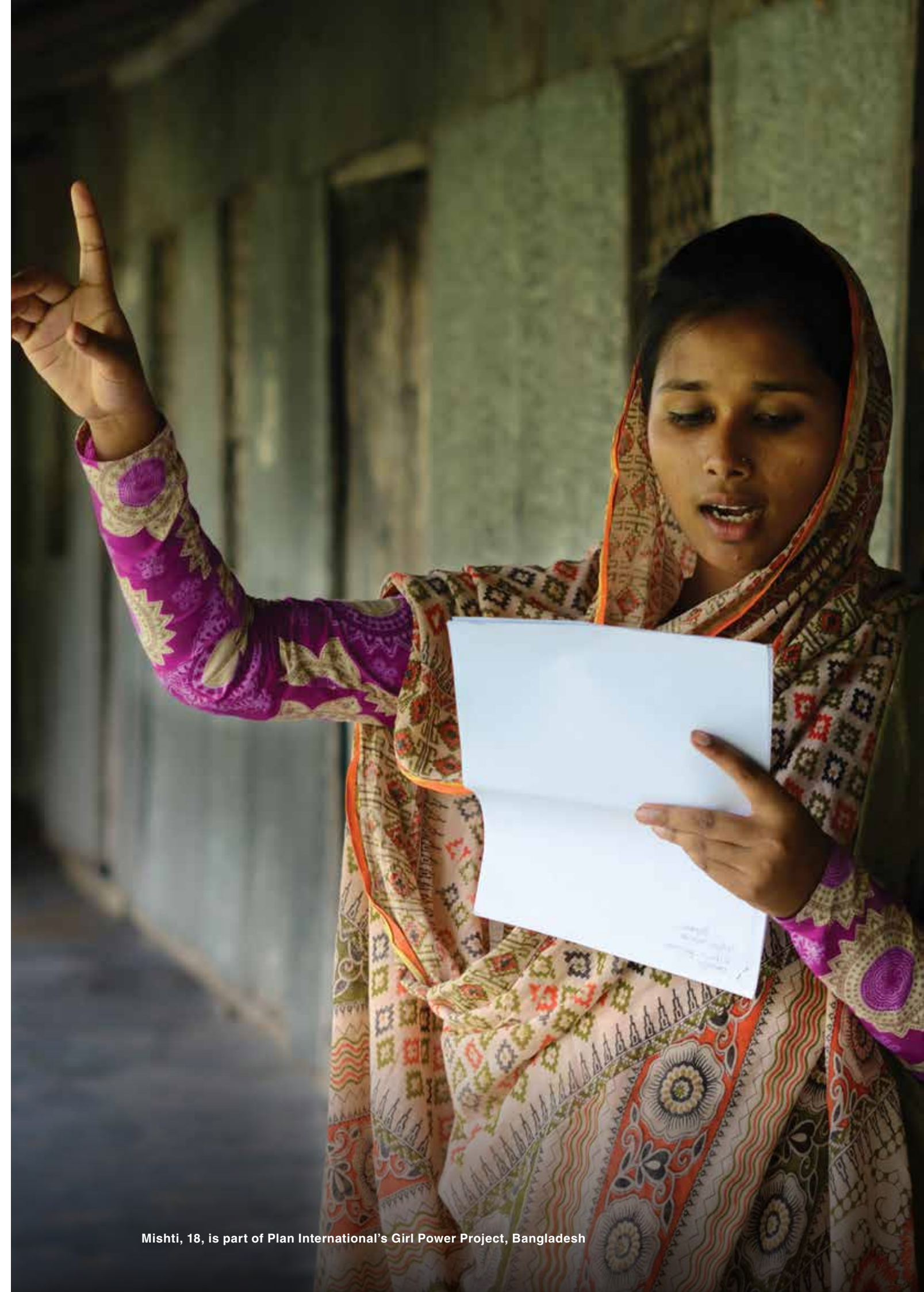
It is essential to develop and support strategic partnerships and alliances with business, civil society and government. Partnerships can address structural barriers and create training and work opportunities that are gender transformative.

Youth economic empowerment programs must be designed with a strong gender and inclusion lens to ensure the most marginalised girls and young women are able to access training and job opportunities. Such program can support girls and young women establishing businesses, with access to micro-credit, loan guarantee funds, a diversity of funding sources and control of assets and resources.¹¹⁶ Alongside this, programs can remove barriers to participation by creating grants to cover childcare and transport expenses.¹¹⁷ Training programs can also be more targeted, providing skills training to girls and young women in 'in-demand' professions in the labour market.

The need to tackle gender norms within families and communities cannot be overlooked in a multi-pronged approach. Working with parents and communities to challenge the gender stereotypes and behaviours that hold girls back from fully participating in training and work is essential.¹¹⁸

Given that girls bear the burden of working in the most dangerous, poorly paid work conditions it is critical that there is work done with governments, labour associations, small businesses and industry to strengthen labour markets in developing countries, ensuring decent salaries, working hours and working conditions, laws against workplace discrimination and sexual harassment, access to maternity leave and gender equity in pay.

"LATER ON, I'D LIKE TO BE A WELL-KNOWN MECHANIC. I THINK I'LL BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL. SOMETIMES, SOME HIGH LEVEL PEOPLE ENCOURAGE ME; THEY GIVE ME ADVICE AND TELL ME THAT I'M A GOOD EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW. I SURPRISE THEM AND THEY ARE HAPPY TO SEE THAT A WOMAN CAN DO THIS KIND OF JOB!"
GLORIA JOYCE 18,
SOUTH SUDAN¹¹⁹



Mishti, 18, is part of Plan International's Girl Power Project, Bangladesh



Shrijana has learnt how to rebuild her community through Plan Internationala masonry training, Nepal

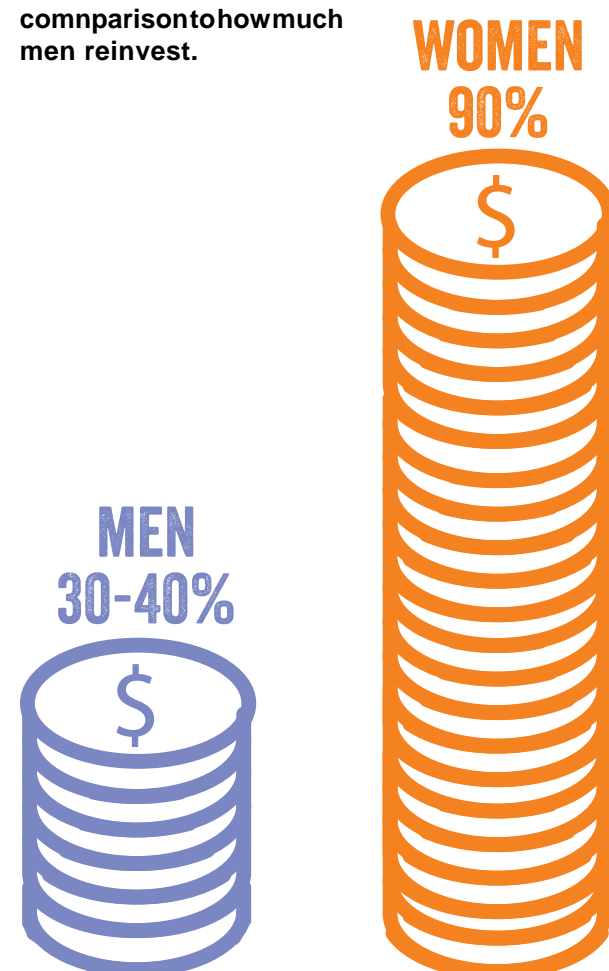
How will the world be different if girls and young women are economically empowered?

The personal transformation for girls and young women realising their right to work is powerful and life changing.

Economically empowered girls and young women are less likely to be child brides and give birth before they reach the age of 18. They are more likely to be free from poverty and are more likely to lift their families out of poverty. When women and girls over the age of 16 earn an income, they reinvest 90 per cent of it in their families, compared to men who reinvest only 30 per cent to 40 per cent.¹²⁰

At a national and global level, harnessing the power and productive capacity of girls can accelerate a nation's economic growth. In South Asia, the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa, home to the largest number of young people, building the productive capacity of girls and young women can unlock a nation's 'demographic dividend'.¹²¹ If the millions of girls and young women that are currently out of education, training and work across the globe, were given the opportunity to join the labour market, over the course of a person's working life, the gains in income and productivity could translate into billions of dollars for a country's economy.¹²²

Percentage of women and girls over the age of 16 who reinvest their income back into their families in comparison to how much men reinvest.



Nipa Akter (18) runs her motorcycle grips business out of her home in Bangladesh

Girl led business enterprise in Bangladesh

Nipa (18) began running her business out of her home in Munshiganj District, Dhaka, Bangladesh when she was just 17. Through her business, which has been producing motorcycle grips for 1.5 years, Nipa is able to employ and financially support herself and her family. Her father, mother and siblings work throughout the day playing their part in the manufacturing process.

Nipa received initial support to establish her business through Plan International's partner B'Yeah (Bangladesh Youth Enterprise Advice and Help Centre) through business training support and a mentoring scheme to help improve her business. Nipa is hoping to expand her business into a bigger location, employ more staff and go back to school.

2

ZERO
HUNGER3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING4 QUALITY
EDUCATION5 GENDER
EQUALITY6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION

EMPOWERING AND PROTECTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS DURING DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES

Laila, 18, carried her grandmother on her back from Myanmar to Bangladesh

In a world where we are witnessing some of the greatest humanitarian challenges of our time – with famine and food insecurity ravaging parts of Africa, climate change related extreme weather events sweeping across Asia and the Pacific, protracted conflict and fragility in places such as Yemen, Lake Chad Basin, South Sudan, Syria and Myanmar displacing millions of people and driving them across borders and seas – it is more important than ever to ensure that humanitarian responses protect and promote the rights of adolescent girls.

Conflict, displacement and fragility have a disproportionate impact on adolescent girls as cultural norms, the intersecting issues of age and all the dimensions of pervasive gender inequality and other forms of discrimination are amplified and exacerbated.¹²⁴ However, if girls are listened to and their needs are met, they can go on to play a critical role before, during and after emergencies.

Humanitarian emergencies bring new and renewed risks and dangers that are greater for adolescent girls compared to other population groups; abuse, early marriage, early pregnancy, abduction and isolation. Research into adolescent girls in emergencies suggest that emergency responses do not account for the unique risks faced, and how their routines, roles and assets shape their abilities to safely access vital resources.¹²⁵

Adolescent girls can be rendered invisible, forced to take on roles and responsibilities that restrict their mobility and visibility; yet girls that are able to gather together in safe spaces can provide a strong and cohesive social network, essential in times of crises. This isolation limits their access to adolescent-friendly information and services, including health and reproductive health services, shelter, food rations and education.¹²⁶ Girls that are able to access education during times of crisis are less likely to be at risk of child marriage, trafficking and gender based violence. Adolescent girls are also essential in supporting their families and their communities to prepare for disasters. Girls are transformative agents, playing a role in educating their families and communities of the risks of climate change and leading risk reduction and adaptation activities.¹²⁷

It is critical that the needs and unique challenges of adolescent girls are not overlooked in humanitarian responses.

Adolescent girls, both early adolescence (10-14) and late adolescence (15-19), are rarely categorised as stand-alone groups. Instead, they are included in a blanket category of either 'women', 'vulnerable children' or 'girls', generally overlooking their age, specific vulnerabilities and evolving capacities.¹²⁸

Now is the time to focus on adolescent girls and redress a major gap in humanitarian and development programming. Girls whose needs are not considered face consequences that may affect them for the rest of their lives.

“ADOLESCENT GIRLS ARE AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE IN ALMOST EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD. THEY REPRESENT HOPE, OPPORTUNITY AND CHANGE. YET, WHEN CONFLICT AND DISASTER STRIKE, THEIR PROMISE AND POTENTIAL ARE OFTEN THE FIRST TO BE SACRIFICED AND THE LAST TO BE RESTORED.”¹²³

A global snapshot of the problem

Humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises are rapidly eroding the rights of adolescent girls and the majority of humanitarian responses fail to take a girl-focussed approach. Disasters overwhelmingly affect the countries that can least afford to deal with them – 9 out of 10 take place in the developing world where girls' rights are grossly violated even during times of stability. As communities fracture and state structures and services are disrupted, girls' human rights are even more at threat.

Though all adolescent girls are at risk during emergencies and crises, there are groups of girls that are more vulnerable than others including girls that are pregnant, who are marginalised due to HIV or disability, who have lost parents and are caring for younger siblings and girls who have survived sexual and gender based violence.¹²⁹ Younger adolescent girls are also particularly vulnerable due to their maturity and age.

There are multiple dimensions of gender based violence that adolescent girls experience in times of emergency and crises. Rape and sexual violence are weapons of war and girls are often the first victims of conflict (in their villages and homes) and while on the move. Of the tens of thousands of Rohingya women and girls that have sought safety in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, many have horrific and unimaginable stories of rape and sexual violence, committed in their homes and their villages or as they walked to the border.¹³⁰

During conflict girls are at risk of being abducted and used as child soldiers and sex slaves by armed groups.

It is estimated that 300,000 children are today fighting as child soldiers in over 20 countries worldwide. Up to 40 per cent of them are girls.¹³¹

Girls abducted by Boko Haram faced abhorrent treatment as sex slaves; repeatedly raped in captivity, falling pregnant and giving birth without any medical care.¹³² Girls struggle, post conflict, to be accepted back into their communities and families, facing stigma and rejection.

“SOMEBODY TOUCHED ME WITH BAD INTENTION DURING NIGHT TIME, OFFERING ME FOOD. SOMEONE WANTED TO TAKE ME AWAY AND TEMPTED ME, OFFERING MONEY AND RELIEF. I COULD NOT SHARE ALL THIS WITH MY PARENTS AS THEY WERE ALSO STRESSED.” SHIULY, 16, BANGLADESH¹³⁵

Once girls arrive at internally displaced person camps and refugee camps, these camps pose their own dangers, where girls face threats within their families, from fellow residents, soldiers and criminal networks of traffickers and gangs.¹³³ This is a particularly high risk time for younger and unaccompanied adolescent girls who are targeted by criminals that are offering 'domestic jobs' which are in fact prostitution rings or cash or food in exchange for sex.¹³⁴

In some instances girls are most at risk outside of the camps, walking to fetch water or firewood or go to the toilet.¹³⁶

As community and family structures break down, violence within the home escalates and girls face abuse by family members and intimate partners. There is a growing body of evidence showing increases in domestic violence after humanitarian emergencies.¹³⁷

Child marriage is a grave threat to girls' rights in humanitarian settings. Child marriage of Syrian girls in Jordan nearly doubled in the two years between 2012 and 2014.¹³⁸ While gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage, often in times of crisis families resort to child marriage as a strategy to cope with economic hardship or to protect girls from violence and abuse.

Conflict and emergencies greatly exacerbate the existing struggles that adolescent girls have in realising their rights to sexual and reproductive health. The UNFPA estimates that there are 26 million women and adolescent girls in their childbearing years in need of humanitarian assistance around the world. Of the 830 women and adolescent girls who die from pregnancy related causes every day, 507 die in countries that are fragile states due to conflict or disaster.¹³⁹

There is a critical need to have help available for adolescent girls who have experienced rape and sexual violence, as soon as girls arrive at camp or experience violence. Early identification and age appropriate psychosocial responses are critical for adolescent girls who are already survivors.

Yet humanitarian responses regularly fail to adequately screen adolescent girls arriving in camps, fail to offer safe spaces for adolescent girls to confidentially disclose and fail to offer services that are age appropriate.

Often women or child friendly spaces are established which fail to recognise the cultural and age related barriers for adolescent girls. The fact that girls' movements are restricted in camps – due to parents concerns and cultural or religious norms – create barriers to girls accessing services that are available.

An adolescent girl's right to learn and access quality education is one of the first rights that girls lose when an emergency strikes. There are 39 million out of school children and adolescents living in conflict and disaster affected countries.¹⁴⁰

Staggeringly, nearly 90 per cent of adolescent girls are more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict.¹⁴¹

Moreover, because emergencies often render schools inaccessible and structurally unsound, and those that are operational often do not provide sufficient sanitation facilities for menstrual hygiene management, many girls drop out of school during crises never to return. There are also dangers for girls in schools in conflict situations, for example, the disproportionate targeting of girls' schools during the Afghanistan war or the kidnapping of 200 Nigerian schoolgirls in April 2014.¹⁴²

DESPITE THE OVERWHELMING WORLDWIDE NEED, LESS THAN 2 PER CENT OF HUMANITARIAN AID GOES TO EDUCATION.¹⁴³





Girls carry home water canisters on their backs in Amhara Region, Ethiopia

CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GLOBAL THREAT TO GENDER EQUALITY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

“Climate change and local environmental change may destroy all my dreams and aspirations.” Girl, 15, Philippines.¹⁴⁴

The gender dimension of climate change is gaining a greater profile in the global debate. Yet the double jeopardy brought by gender and age remains largely ignored.¹⁴⁵ Climate change can disproportionately affect adolescent girls, exposing them to very specific risks related to their age and gender.

As crops and livelihoods are destroyed by climate change related droughts and flood, girls are at a heightened risk of child marriage. The connection between climate change and poverty is increasingly understood to be a powerful driver of child marriage in countries such as Malawi, Mozambique and Bangladesh.¹⁴⁶

Climate change can increase the burden of domestic chores for adolescent girls. When there is drought or little rain fall over shorter periods of time, or when water sources are contaminated or wells are flooded, girls have to walk longer distances to collect clean drinking water.¹⁴⁷ This also increases their risk of gender based violence as girls are isolated and alone:

“I know two girls who were raped going to fetch water. When you go far and there are not many people around, it happens.” Endager, 16 year old, girl, Lasta District, Ethiopia.¹⁴⁸

A lack of clean water can impact the ability of girls to maintain good menstrual hygiene, forcing girls to drop out of school or be absent during their period.

Climate change is driving displacement and migration and girls are at greater risk of trafficking and other challenges associated with displacement, for example vulnerability to violence, exploitation and poor working and living conditions.

“The cyclones are creating another dimension – migration – which creates its own problems such as trafficking. After Cyclones Sidr and Aila, there was a lot more trafficking due to economic problems. It’s a crisis period after cyclones. Indeed most of the sex workers in Dhaka come from this part of Bangladesh.”

Addressing these challenges requires adolescent girls to be part of the solution, active in decision making and political processes. Given the space and voice, girls can be leaders and take actions that will protect themselves and their communities. Gender transformative climate change adaptation programs are essential to addressing the root causes of inequality that increase girls’ vulnerability to climate change.

The commitment to developing a Gender Action Plan at the 2017 Conference of Parties is an important starting point for the international climate discussions, but a strong “adolescent girls lens” is needed, especially at the national and local level, to ensure that their specific needs and challenges are not overlooked.

What are the solutions?

Traditionally adolescent girls in humanitarian crises have been assisted through either responses for children or responses for women. New evidence suggest that this ‘one size fits all’ approach fails to address the specific needs of adolescent girls during emergencies and protracted crises, and girls fall through the cracks.¹⁴⁹

Instead, a comprehensive, multi-sectoral and gender transformative approach is needed that places adolescent girls at the centre of investment, design and delivery. With donors, UN agencies and Non Government Organisations (NGOs) working together to find a better way to address girls’ rights and needs as ‘core business,’ rather than an add-on to programs targeted at other groups.¹⁵⁰

Meeting with adolescent girls to gain their views on their needs, fears and protection concerns is an important first step and can be useful in recording vital information, skills and assets they need to overcome the negative consequences of displacement and to mitigate their risks of experiencing violence.¹⁵¹

Mobile clinics and mobile outreach teams can reach girls who are isolated and whose freedom of movement is restricted – providing girls with ‘dignity kits,’ contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health services that they would not otherwise be able to access.¹⁵²

Creating **gender and age specific safe spaces** for adolescent girls can support girls to build their networks and connections, provide essential age appropriate psychosocial counselling and sexual and reproductive health information. Safe spaces can be used to provide adolescent girls with **access to education, life skills and vocational training** and other economic empowerment measures that will assist them in the transition after an emergency.¹⁵³

Providing security for women and girls at the camps and ensuring that the law enforcement agencies tasked with responding to incidents of sexual violence receive the necessary training to respond appropriately to reported cases of sexual violence and provide the necessary security to the camps, such as the lighting of bathroom facilities and latrines.

Increasing adolescent girls’ agency and leadership in climate change related initiatives can have a life changing effect for adolescent girls before, during and after crises. With climate change related disasters increasing in frequency and impact, it is critical that programs and policies recognise the different ways in which adolescent girls are affected by climate change.¹⁵⁴ Climate change adaptation programs must not only tackle the root causes of gender inequality but empower girls to play an active role in driving their community’s efforts to prepare for disaster and when disaster strikes.¹⁵⁵

AT THE HEART OF THE RESPONSE MUST BE ADOLESCENT GIRLS – AS FIRST RESPONDERS, CHANGES AGENTS AND LEADERS WHO ARE CONSULTED WITH AND ENGAGED IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSES.



Girl watching Clowns without Borders perform at refugee camp in Tanzania

How will the world be different with girl-focussed humanitarian responses?

When adolescent girls' views, experiences and needs are placed at the centre of humanitarian responses, we can create the conditions for girls to thrive both during and after emergencies. With nearly 90 per cent of adolescent girls more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict, investing in education and vocational training for girls can unlock girls' potential, providing them with the skills that they need to gain financial independence and economic stability.¹⁵⁶

Effective, adolescent girl targeted humanitarian responses can create an environment where adolescent girls are confident, safe and active members of their communities.

A three country study by the Women's Refugee Commission in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda found that adolescent girl safe spaces, where targeted interventions were provided to strengthen girls skills and confidence, had real impacts; increasing girls' confidence, safety planning and skills.¹⁵⁷

An interim evaluation found that in as little as ten months, over 80 per cent of girls in Tanzania felt they could make a positive impact in their community and 78 per cent of girls had safety plans, demonstrating that girls had gained critical skills in navigating safety routes around their communities and increased strategies to protect themselves.¹⁵⁸

Adolescent girls can be catalysts for change if they are at the centre of climate change initiatives. Providing adolescent girls with the opportunity to learn new climate resilience skills and technologies and granting them a greater role in efforts towards community-based disaster risk reduction and the protection of natural resources will provide adolescent girls with leadership opportunities – transforming gendered and cultural norms in families and communities.



Senowara, 18, and her friend Monira, 18, are concerned for their safety in camp, Bangladesh

Are my daughters safe in this camp?

Senowara's father died in a road accident in Myanmar and when the violence broke out, she and her mother Jaheda, 35, and sister Zohara, 10, were forced to flee with her uncle's family to Bangladesh, arriving in Balukhali Camp, Cox's Bazar in September 2017.

Camp life is very difficult for Senowara who never imagined she would find herself living in such difficult circumstances.

"There is no toilet here and no open places, so you have to go to the loo in front of people. The tube-well doesn't work, the water is stinky and there is nowhere to get washed." Senowara says quietly.

"During menstruation, I sit in the same place for 6 or 7 days because we don't have any sanitary pads, cotton or clothes. At night, I go to the bushes and my mother wraps a tarpaulin around me so I can change my clothes."

Senowara's mother Jaheda fears for her daughter's safety in the camp. *"I am always scared about my daughter's security. They are growing up and people always stare at them. I fear something bad will happen to my daughters in the camp. My worries never end."*

Plan International have been working with adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar, meeting their health and hygiene needs by constructing over 200 bathing spaces for 20,000 women and girls, running menstrual hygiene sessions, distributing 11,000 dignity kits and 10,000 hygiene kits.¹⁵⁹



CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO BE CHANGE AGENTS AND LEADERS

Adolescent girls can be powerful agents of social change. They have the desire and the capacity to transform the world and are looking for opportunities to do so. In fact, young people have played an important role in every social movement in modern history.¹⁶⁰

Providing adolescent girls with the opportunities to be leaders and change agents is essential to accelerating progress towards achieving gender equality. Adolescent girls can be leaders in their homes, their communities, their schools, through business and work, in peace and security and at a national and global level through political and public life.

Despite this potential, women and girls continue to be invisible in places of power. Globally, only 23 per cent of all national parliamentarians are women.¹⁶¹ The Asia and Pacific regions, where Australia invests the most in aid and development, have some of the lowest representation of women in Parliament in the world, women make up 18 per cent of representative in both houses of Parliament in the Pacific and they are only 19 per cent of Parliamentary representatives in Asia.¹⁶²

We need to do more to bridge the gender gap in leadership and it starts with adolescent girls. Traditionally Australia's overseas aid and development program has focussed on strengthening women's movements and women's leadership. When girls have a political voice, they can demand action to strengthen and protect their human rights. Empowerment is not enough: we need a political and social revolution that places girls front and centre of Australia's approach to gender equality.

"GIRLS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN DECISION MAKING. THE COMMUNITY BELIEVES WOMEN DON'T HAVE GOOD IDEAS; RATHER THEY ARE GOOD AT HOUSEKEEPING. BOYS PARTICIPATE FULLY IN DECISION MAKING, THEY ALSO PLAY A ROLE IN INFLUENCING DECISIONS BECAUSE THE COMMUNITY VALUES THE BOYS' IDEAS [MORE] COMPARED TO THAT OF A GIRL."¹⁶³



Globally, **ONLY 23%** of all national parliamentarians are women



Women make up **ONLY 18%** of Parliamentarians in the Pacific

Women make up **ONLY 19%** of Parliamentarians in the Asia region

A global snapshot of the problem

Around the world, girls are held back from being change agents and leaders because of gendered attitudes and norms of behaviour and patriarchal power structures which they encounter in their homes, their schools, their communities, in business and in politics. These attitudes and behaviours can hold girls back by limiting their control over all aspects of their lives – limiting their choice of when and who they marry, their access to education, their freedom of movement and their ability to participate fully in decision making.

The absence of female role models can have a detrimental impact on girls' aspirations of leadership. Adolescent girls need female role models at all levels of society in order for them to see themselves as leaders and change agents. A study of the effect of female political leadership on adolescent girls in India found the presence of women on village councils, through affirmative action measures, had a positive influence on girls' career aspirations and educational attainment.¹⁶⁴ Mentorship is a key part of strengthening girls and young women's motivation to participate and lead in areas such as business and innovation.¹⁶⁵

Australia's *Gender Equality Strategy* focuses on strengthening women led organisations and coalitions in countries where women's formal participation is low, however there is no mention of the importance of strengthening adolescent girl movements in these countries, particularly amongst communities that are most disadvantaged.

The Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance Dialogue Series identified that leadership opportunities were often limited to the 'elite' classes of well educated and well connected girls in the Pacific.¹⁶⁶ Girls that faced intersectional discrimination due to poverty, disability, sexual orientation or other barriers were not able to take part in decision making or leadership opportunities.¹⁶⁷

Adolescent girls are often excluded from conflict prevention, peace negotiations and peace-building and are rarely invited to participate in such forums. In situations of conflict and fragility adolescent girls are powerful change agents yet do not have an opportunity to contribute to efforts to build a more lasting peace.

“A YOUNG WOMAN WITH A DEGREE OR HIGHLY PAID WORK IS MORE LIKELY TO BE PART OF A DECISION MAKING BODY, WHEREAS A YOUNG LBT [LESBIAN, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDER] WOMAN WHO IS A HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AND HAS NO FORM OF WORK EXPERIENCE WILL BE DISREGARDED.”¹⁶⁸



Karen, 18, learning at school in Zambia

What are the solutions?

Adolescent girls, if given the tools, the opportunities and the confidence to lead, can be powerful agents of social and political change.

Adolescent girls' individual and collective leadership can progressively challenge discriminatory gender norms.¹⁶⁹

As a starting point, adolescent girls must be recognised as a priority target group that can drive change in communities and at a systemic level in aid and development policy and practice. Building girls' power requires them to be involved in the design and development of programs in communities.

Adolescent girls should have opportunities and the skills training to be leaders, trainers and peer educators delivering programs and achieving change.

Supporting girls' leadership is essential to foster women leaders. A

supportive family environment, the presence of role models and formal education are important interventions.¹⁷⁰

Leadership skills, such as decision making and negotiation equip girls with the knowledge that allows them to confidently express their views, negotiate power dynamics and influence and motivate others. Working with girls to strengthen their voices is crucial to unlocking their potential.

Girl led hubs and networks have also proven to be an important part of strengthening girls' power. These networks are spaces where girls can share their views and their experiences, learn new skills and collectively identify

approaches to solve the problems they identify.

Girl Support Networks

Plan International Netherland's Girl Power Programme is encouraging girls in Moyamaba, Sierra Leone, to form their own girl led support networks. These groups provide a safe environment where girls can share experiences which help protect them from violence and discrimination.

Christiana*, now 17, underwent female genital mutilation and was married at the age of 14. As a result, she was forced to drop out of school and has suffered from violence. The Girl Power Programme helped her get back into school, where she was voted president of the Girl Power group. She is using her position to help others reach their potential.

"I feel confident that women can achieve all the things that men do"



Christiana* with the girls group at a school in Moyamba raising their hands, Sierra Leone

If we fostered girls' leadership the world would be different

Girls are our next generation of women leaders. If the world is serious about achieving gender equality across public, private and political spheres, we must be working with adolescent girls now so that they can be leaders and change agents.

There is growing evidence that communities, business and economies reap the benefits of women and girls taking active part in leadership and decision making at all levels.¹⁷¹ Women in leadership roles are more likely than men to champion issues of gender equality and drive reforms to tackle gender based violence, paid parental leave and electoral reform.¹⁷² Similar evidence exists in business. A recent study found that companies that had strong female leadership generated a return on equity of 10 per cent per year versus 7.4 per cent for those without women leaders.¹⁷³ It also found that companies that lacked board diversity suffered more governance-related controversies than average.¹⁷⁴ In India, research on local councils (panchayats) has found that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women led councils was 62 per cent higher than those in male led councils.¹⁷⁵



Girl taking part in IDG celebrations in Peru



Brisa, 16, learning in class at her school in indigenous Miskito community

Indigenous girls leading change

At 16, Brisa has already made up her mind about her future.

"I want to change my community," she said. "I want to change the lives of indigenous girls."

An indigenous Miskito, Brisa is all too familiar with the extreme challenges girls face in the Miskito communities dotted all along the Atlantic coast in Nicaragua's North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region.

Marked by acute poverty and low levels of development, the region is home to the indigenous Miskito people an Afro-descendent groups grappling with economic and social marginalisation. Abject poverty and generational exclusion have combined in the region as indigenous communities find themselves beset with challenges ranging from disaffected youth and the narco-trade, to violence, drug addiction, human trafficking, and widespread sexual violence.

Brisa, however, is determined the status quo can't continue. Supported by Plan International, she is championing girls' rights in Miskito communities and challenging gender stereotypes.

"I go door to door in my community and speak to teenage girls and boys about sexual abuse, teenage pregnancies, and many other issues," she said. "We have now formed a small youth group and hold regular informal discussions with young men on how to treat girls with respect and how to act responsibly."

Brisa knows this effort alone is not enough.

Encouraged by the response and the impact she has had in her community, she has now hit the radio waves. She now presents a dedicated program targeting youth on a local radio station hugely popular among local indigenous communities.

"From teen pregnancy to domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual and reproductive health – the show tackles a range of social issues affecting my people and community," she said.

"We strongly feel that youth advocates like Brisa can reach and inspire other young people beyond their community," said Pilar Mueller, Plan's program unit manager in Brisa's region. "Brisa can inspire a disaffected generation, and radio was the best way to overcome the distance barrier and reach out to Miskito youth across the region."

The impact is all evident. Brisa's program is listened to by thousands of young people.

For a Miskito girl, Brisa's success is nothing short of a miracle. From a shy introverted girl growing up among nine siblings in a hostile community, Brisa has transformed into a forceful champion of girls' rights. Brisa knows she has set a monumental goal for herself, but she is confident she will achieve it.

"I want a change in the lives of indigenous girls," she said. "I want them to have the power to say no and to decide for themselves."



CONCLUSION

We know that between the ages of 10 and 19, girls' lives are marked with extraordinary challenges. Precisely because they are girls, they are abused, mistreated, denied an education, stigmatised and left behind. Responses designed to reach adult women or younger children simply do not take account of the specific and unique needs of adolescent girls in these vital years.

But there's another side to this story. One of hope and optimism. By investing in adolescent girls, we can change the world.

By protecting every girl's right to be free from gender based violence and harmful practices,

By promoting health, well-being and rights through access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services,

By fighting poverty by giving adolescent girls access to quality, inclusive and equitable education,

By unlocking the economic power of adolescent girls and young women,

By empowering and protecting adolescent girls affected by humanitarian emergencies and climate change,

And by recognising that adolescent girls are change agents and our future leaders.

We can positively transform the lives of girls, boys and entire communities. We can unlock countries' economic prosperity. We can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for all. And we can build a world where every girl grows up with equality, justice and full access to her rights.

The positive news is that girls are already leading this change. In their homes, their classrooms, their communities and their countries, girls are taking on power structures, demanding an education, challenging harmful practices and proving that they can do anything. It's time for all of us to stand with girls and help them succeed in this revolution.

To individuals, we call on you to stand with girls. To call out injustice and inequality wherever it occurs. To lend your voice to girls, so that they can be heard loud and clear by those with the power to create change. We call on you to ask your friends and family, women and men, girls and boys, to join us as allies.

To donors, we call on you to invest in girls. To help us unlock their extraordinary potential. To recognise that as supporters, businesses, philanthropists and institutions, you have the power to end inequality, violence and fear, and replace them with education, safety and economic empowerment for the world's next generation of leaders.

To parliamentarians from all parties, we call on you to promote gender equality for adolescent girls in Australia's aid, trade and foreign policy. To work across parties and help keep the Government on course. To ensure your party platform prioritises adolescent girls in overseas aid and development.

To the Australian Government, we call on you to turn your commitment to gender equality into real change for girls, particularly in our region where adolescent girls continue to face some of the world's highest rates of violence, inequality and disadvantage. We call on you to develop a standalone Adolescent Girls Strategy that sets out your action plan for increasing investment in girls and championing their rights internationally.

And to girls across the world, we call on you to stand strong, to keep learning and leading and fighting for a better future. Together, we will change the world.

**STAND WITH US.
STAND WITH GIRLS.
STAND FOR EQUALITY.**

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