

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

This summary highlights the key findings and recommendations of Plan International's Participatory Action Research into adolescent girls' access to and completion of secondary education in the Solomon Islands.

### Adolescent girls' experiences of what is pushing them out of school

This ground-breaking report and photograph collection is an important evidence base that highlights what adolescent girls think and feel about the interlinking challenges they face to stay in school, and the change they want to see.

Educating girls and women is a powerful investment that benefits both individuals and society by unlocking the potential to improve health, nutrition, social justice, democracy, human rights, gender equality, social cohesion, and economic prosperity for current and future generations.



### Barriers to secondary education identified by adolescent girls in the Solomon Islands:

- School fees
- Relationships, marriage and early pregnancy
- Travelling to school
- Culture
- Family problems
- Bullying and peer pressure
- Quality education and inclusive infrastructure
- Lack of disability inclusive education

### KEY STATS:

**1 IN 5 GIRLS** COMPLETE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

**7 IN 100** GIRLS COMPLETE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

**1 IN 2** GIRLS DROP OUT DURING SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

### "Leadership" by adolescent girls in West Guadalcanal

"This photo symbolises the potential strength, power and confidence of the many girls in Solomon Islands if we are given the chance to complete our secondary education."

## KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



- The two main individual barriers are school fees and relationships, marriage and pregnancy.
- The number one cross-cutting theme is gender inequality, including the expectations placed on girls to perform certain roles, the prioritisation of boys over girls, and the subsequent lack of support for girls' education.
- Emotional health and wellbeing is another important cross-cutting theme, with family problems, peer pressure, bullying, culture shock, stigma and discrimination causing low self-esteem. This results in girls becoming "distracted, sad and cannot concentrate in class, so [they] drop out of school altogether."
- Two in five (44%) adolescent girls drop out of school due to child, early and forced marriage or teen pregnancy.
- School Rules that expel girls because they are in relationships or pregnant produces deeply ingrained and internalised feelings of guilt and shame in adolescent girls, which in turn can stop a young mother from returning to school even if that opportunity is presented to her.
- Adolescent girls spend 75% more time than boys their age on household chores. These demands either prevent girls from attending secondary school at all, or make it difficult for them to concentrate in class, complete their homework and pass their examinations.



See the full findings by downloading the reports at [planau.me/Solomon-Islands-report](https://planau.me/Solomon-Islands-report)



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Adolescent girls strongly believe that removing the barriers stopping them from completing education will help them achieve, succeed and move forward to a better and brighter future. A future where they are equal, where they are confident and bold, and where they are leaders at all levels.

Some of these recommendations build off current commitments, while others are new. There are complexities related to implementing each of these recommendations. Plan International is committed to working with the relevant stakeholders to explore these complexities in order to achieve the policy and social change that adolescent girls are seeking.



### **The number one recommendation to enable all girls in the Solomon Islands to access and complete secondary education is:**

- The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), with the support of the international donor community, should extend the Fee Free Basic Education Policy to ensure free senior secondary education by 2020. They should also work with and financially support schools to reduce or eliminate gap fees at all levels of education.

#### Additional priority recommendations



#### **MEHRD, together with relevant Education Authorities, should:**

- Provide free school transportation services, e.g. a school bus or truck;
- Support young mothers to continue their education by introducing a second chance policy;
- Take a whole-school approach focusing on student safety and wellbeing, particularly in relation to bullying; and
- Encourage more women teachers into the profession, enabling them to progress in their careers, and to take on leadership positions.



#### **MEHRD, together with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs should:**

- Develop and adopt a Gender Equality in Education policy, in consultation with adolescent girls;
- Support families and educators to embrace children's learning about their bodies, relationships and sexuality from early childhood and particularly throughout adolescence; and
- Work to empower adolescent girls with the skills, knowledge and choices to be agents of change so they know what to do when they are affected by family problems, including gender-based violence.



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#### **The Government, civil society organisations and donors should:**

- Fund and promote trainings for community, religious and political leaders to be allies and supporters for gender equality and girls' right to education;
- Fund and promote programs with adolescent boys and young men to challenge sexism and gender-based violence, and promote respectful relationships;
- Consider the specific needs of adolescent girls in all policies and programs, including consulting directly with adolescent girls; and
- Promote girls' leadership by investing in promoting and developing girls' leadership capabilities and encouraging women in leadership to include girls.



#### **The Government should:**

- Ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



#### **“Stronger Together” by girls from the Settlements, including White River and other areas.**

“This photo symbolises that strong bonds between girls and boys will help encourage girls to continue with their studies. Boys think they have more power than girls and are better than them; but by working together and breaking down the differences, girls will be able to achieve and complete their education.”



#### About the research

This innovative research and advocacy project used feminist participatory action research (FPAR) and Photovoice techniques and methodologies. Beginning with the research question, which they co-designed, adolescent girls in the Solomon Islands brainstormed a number of barriers, which they tested by interviewing up to five of their peers and family members. After participating in training on how to capture reality, symbol and arranged scene photographs, the girls spent up to one week creating the images that appear in the reports. They selected their best images and captioned them, to explain what the photos represent, why they took them and what changes they'd like to see. Three months later, the girls validated the findings and policy recommendations and identified an 'action for change' strategy.