

# A BETTER NORMAL

## GIRLS CALL FOR A REVOLUTIONARY RESET

A youth-led report co-authored by 22 young women leaders from Australia and Viet Nam, amplifying the voices of girls and young women from around the world



The charity for  
girls' equality



This research is important because it has been designed and written by girls and young women themselves. Its data, language and dreams reflect those of hundreds of girls across six regions. In support of Plan International's global commitment to amplify the visions and views of girls in all that we do, these pages do not paraphrase, interpret or intuit how girls might think or feel – but empower them to speak for themselves.

It highlights the pain and inequality that existed in our pre-COVID-19 world, and the ways in which the pandemic has deepened inequalities. As leaders around the world are considering how to build back better, the calls from girls and young women couldn't be clearer: they demand to be heard and included in decision-making processes, have power over the issues that affect their lives and play an active role in creating a more just and sustainable world.

This pandemic presents an opportunity to reimagine the world. If we do not put girls and young women in all their diversity – acknowledging the intersections of age and gender with race, sexuality, ability and socioeconomic background – we will not create lasting change. We might even see recent achievements on gender equality regress.

Amid the uncertainty of the present crisis, this research offers hope to us all. My hope is that this research prompts a new normal – a better normal – of listening to those whom current structures deny agency; of respecting girls' and young women's struggles and visions; and of empowering them to create the structural change they need and desire. A normal of decision makers not just listening to girls, young women and minority groups but giving them a seat at the table.

A report written by girls is needed now more than ever. It is about time that girls and young women were understood to be experts in their own right. As power holders, we hope you will listen to them.

**Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen, CEO, Plan International**

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was written by Plan International Youth Leaders in Australia and Viet Nam. It delves into the issues that COVID-19 exposed in our systems, as well as the ways in which it has already transformed our society into something better, drawing on the views of girls and young women from around the world.

Central to the report is our vision of a new world, which has global support. Six pillars support this larger vision, along with suggested policy changes needed to see each of them become reality.

This report is for power holders everywhere, including governments and policy makers: we ask you to hear our calls for change and engage with us to co-create this better normal.

It is also for girls and young women around the world, as well as our peers, families and communities. We hope this energises you and that you will join us on the journey of co-creating this new reality also!

For further supporting documents, including a research summary and Australia and Viet Nam country summaries, please visit: [planau.me/a-better-normal](http://planau.me/a-better-normal)

Plan International's Youth Leaders are a force to be reckoned with. They are fierce, powerful and feminist, working to amplify the voices of young people to tackle inequality head on.

<p><b>Angelica, 22</b></p> <p>I love being able to hear from other young girls and women in Australia and globally about their passions for creating a just and sustainable world for all, and being able to help make sure each step of the research incorporated a range of thoughts and ideas, with youth voices genuinely at the forefront.</p>	<p><b>Carla, 24</b></p> <p>This research represented the possibility for girls to build a future where they belong. I found it exciting to discover and hear voices of girls who seemed far away but in reality are next to me, fighting with me, building with me; a better today.</p>	<p><b>Dominique, 17</b></p> <p>I loved taking part in this research because I was able to feel less alone in my worries and hopes for the future, as my feelings about the world were validated by young people like me.</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth, 20</b></p> <p>Co-designed research is the way of the future. We should always be designing projects alongside those they seek to represent.</p>	<p><b>Ginette, 25</b></p> <p>I am very excited to involve young women in the development of sustainable and collective alternatives for a better post-pandemic world. It is crucial for the world to have all voices heard when we design the future.</p>	<p><b>Imogen, 18</b></p> <p>This research is important because it is personal, intimate and open – I hope it revitalises your hope for the world, as it has mine, and leads you to act.</p>
<p><b>Kavindhya, 24</b></p> <p>I love that this research demonstrates how passionate and like-minded girls and young women all throughout the world are about the biggest issues facing humanity today.</p>	<p><b>Khanh Linh, 19</b></p> <p>The great things that seemed to belong to the government are now made possible thanks to my small contributions, everything looks like a dream and that dream is coming true.</p>	<p><b>Luy, 15</b></p> <p>This report addressed areas that I or my friends have never or rarely talked about. But these issues are also very important and I think people in my generation should begin to care about these issues.</p>	<p><b>Madhura, 21</b></p> <p>I know this research is important because of the diversity in voices. Young women, especially young women of colour, aren't often heard and this is an opportunity to hear what we have to say.</p>	<p><b>Maya, 18</b></p> <p>Being part of the research was really important for me as it amplified the voices of young women and non-binary folk in times of the most uncertainty. The research has shined a light on what is most concerning to us today and what we need to do to change it for a better and safer future.</p>	<p><b>Mayela, 16</b></p> <p>I love this project because of the inclusive process taken to create it. Taking into consideration different experiences and passions from around the world helps create a more comprehensive report about what we can improve in society.</p>
<p><b>Minh Ngoc, 16</b></p> <p>I totally agree with every statement in the report, especially the "Educated Citizen Of The World". I believe everyone has the right to equally access to education and training resource. Since there are many children in my community that can not go to school, I hope this statement will become reality in near future.</p>	<p><b>Nhung, 15</b></p> <p>The topics people around me talk about will often relate to work or study. People rarely talk about gender equality or climate change, so I was terribly amazed when received this report. I hope in the future, there will be events or training program that help raise public awareness about topic like this.</p>	<p><b>Xa Tam, 17</b></p> <p>It was nice knowing that even girls living in remote areas such as myself could have the opportunities to speak up, and to be heard.</p>	<p><b>Phuong Anh, 21</b></p> <p>This research is an opportunity for girls and young women to stand up against the system that perpetuates inequality and injustice.</p>	<p><b>Quynh Anh, 22</b></p> <p>This is a splendid opportunity to be a part of this global research. It gives us the opportunity to evaluate existing issues and equips us with the tools to develop recommendations for communities, policymakers, decision-makers to help deal with the situations and co-create the "new normal".</p>	<p><b>Thao, 15</b></p> <p>Taking part in the research, I see Covid-19 pandemic in a different perspective. Although there are a lot of drawbacks, there are also things to appreciate. The most important thing is looking on the bright side.</p>
<p><b>Thuy Duong, 17</b></p> <p>Living in the city, I was quite amazed to see the results from my peers in rural areas. I realized that as a city girl, there are many privileges that I've taken for granted, and it encourages me to try and support others whose voices are less likely to be heard.</p>	<p><b>Tino, 20</b></p> <p>Being able to collaborate with other young women and girls to shape our future was powerful especially on a digital platform. It shows that there is strength in numbers, there is work to be done and we are ready to actively change our current situation.</p>	<p><b>Tu Uyen, 15</b></p> <p>This report broadened my understanding of the issues around me that I have not noticed before. I look forward to seeing all the statements become true in the future.</p>	<p><b>Y Hen, 15</b></p> <p>I found that given the opportunity, girls could raise their voices over their most concerned topics that others might have missed. I really appreciate this opportunity and I hope there will be more, not just for me, but all the girls across the world.</p>		

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian authors of this report acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging of this nation. We recognise sovereignty was never ceded and that this land always was and always will be First Nations land. We recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters and community, and we commit to ongoing learning, deep and active listening, and taking action in solidarity.

We also thank all Indigenous girls and young women from around the world who have participated in this research. We are honoured to amplify your voices through this work.

**The pre-COVID-19 world undeniably failed girls and young women, in all our diversities. It failed to protect us, it failed to listen to us, and it failed to empower us.**

These failures have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Girls have been removed from schools, with many unlikely to return. We know too that they are experiencing increasing levels of family and gender-based violence, as well as harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage/unions and female genital mutilation/cutting.

The additional onus on young women and girls to care for family members and complete domestic chores also increases demand and stress. Further, the divide between those with and those without is growing, with the economic recessions emerging from COVID-19 being described as ‘she-cessions’ due to how women – and especially young women – are being disproportionately affected.

COVID-19 is unlike anything we’ve experienced before. It raises questions, challenges and uncertainty; but equally, we believe it presents opportunities for reflection and change.

This report shines a light on the impacts of these system failures and challenges on girls and young women, as well as our dreams for a just, equitable and sustainable future.

Through a dynamic appreciative inquiry process we designed a collective, overarching vision for this ‘better normal’, underpinned by six pillars. These are dreams of safety and freedom, of agency and empowerment, of a life centred around passions and peace, of a sustainable future, and of centring marginalised voices in everything we do. They are validated by over one thousand girls and young women from around the world.

As one of if not the most impacted groups, we want COVID-19 responses and recovery to be informed by what we have to say. To date we have not seen age and gender incorporated in any meaningful way in that agenda, despite these factors being clearly recognised as critical by those studying the impacts of the pandemic. We firmly believe that our visions presented in this report are aspirational, but also achievable and must be included in political and policy responses.

We believe power holders should hear us, because without actively listening to our voices – to girls and young women, who represent the intersection of youth and gender and often fall between the cracks in consultations and representation – we will end up recreating the same world we lived in before; because without an equity lens, you recreate inequalities.

To transform a world and start anew, you must listen to those who have been the most ignored. We invite you to join us in co-creating this new reality.

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## Our approach

This project was underpinned by the recognition that girls and young women have the capacity to understand our context and experience, agency to shape our lives and communities, and the expertise to identify and prioritise our needs.

This centring of youth is vital, not just because we have valuable, passionate and hopeful insights and a right to be consulted in constructing our futures, but also to make sure that the world created is fair and equitable and does not repeat its past mistakes.

All phases of this project were led by a core group of 22 young women from Australia and Viet Nam, aged 15-24.

## The project framework

As a youth-led, feminist participatory action research project, we identified the ‘appreciative inquiry’ methodology as one that best aligned with our goals, because it is a strengths-based, possibility orientated approach.

We followed the 5D appreciative cycle to define our topic of inquiry and identify the positives, challenges and inequalities in our world, to then dream our vision for a new, fairer and more sustainable world. <sup>1</sup>

## A global vision

As part of the ‘Dream’ workshop, we decided that we wanted to see if our collective vision would resonate with girls and young women around the world.

We created an interactive online survey<sup>2</sup> that was open for three weeks in July 2020, engaging over one thousand girls and young women from 99 countries, in the age brackets 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24. The youth leaders in Australia also facilitated four focus group discussions with 16 girls and young women aged 15-24. In Viet Nam, we created workbooks that were completed by 37 girls aged 10-19 from four provinces, who would otherwise have been unable to access the online tools.

Unless otherwise noted, the percentages and findings presented in this report are from our analysis of the ‘deep dive’ data we attained from the 325 detailed survey and focus group responses.

For further information on the Methodology, please see Appendix I.



## A NOTE ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

It should be noted that young people may identify as men/boys, women/girls, other genders, or outside the gender binary, and that their gender identity may or may not reflect the sex that they were assigned at birth. For the online data validation tool, all the participants self-identified as adolescent girls or young women (‘female-identifying’), which is the terminology used throughout this report.

We did not collect data via the online tool regarding other identities, however through the Survey Monkey (173 participants) we reached:



# INTRODUCTION

**COVID-19 is unlike anything we've experienced before. It raises questions, challenges and uncertainty; but equally, we believe it presents opportunities for change.**

This pandemic has also exposed, deepened and created significant cracks in our systems, institutions and leadership. As the world rebuilds in the wake of this crisis, we do not want to simply return to 'normal'.

Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy's essay on how this pandemic presents us with a 'portal' moment, 'a gateway between one world and the next', really inspired us.<sup>4</sup> We can choose to carry the pain of the past world into our future or move forward into a new way of life.

The words of Sonya Renee Taylor, a self-identifying queer African American poet and activist, also resonated with us, as she emphasises that 'normal never was', only that we normalised greed and inequity. She speaks of this moment as an opportunity to collectively 'stitch a new garment'.

If this is a chance for this world to be co-created in an inclusive and transformational way, then we want the response to be just and sustainable and to centre marginalised voices.

In order to ensure this, we believe that the voices, experiences and opinions of girls and young women – in all our diversities – need to be amplified and heard.

This includes taking an intersectional lens, to ensure girls and young women of diverse socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, ability and other marginalising factors are heard.

After all, it is our future being created. Our passion drives us and allows us to imagine a better world, and we demand a seat at the table to co-create it.

## The world now and then

The world pre-COVID-19 was deeply unequal. There was nowhere in the world where girls were equal, and the pandemic has exacerbated much of what was not working.

We know girls are being pushed out of school and are least likely to return once restrictions are lifted; they are also losing work and are the least likely to find secure and stable income, or be paid equally for the work they do.

We know too that they are experiencing increasing levels of family and gender-based violence, as well as harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and unions and female genital mutilation/cutting.

The additional onus on young women and girls to care for family members and complete domestic chores also increases demand and stress.

As a result, we also know that girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to the psycho-social impacts of the pandemic.

Discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, ability and other intersectional factors is commonplace; it is inherent in personal biases, but also embedded through structural elements such as law enforcement, the legal, healthcare, education and other systems, government and other institutions. These further disadvantage communities who have faced years of oppression, exposing them to vulnerabilities no one should ever have to endure.

The age and gender-related impacts of COVID-19, while not in the forefront of response and recovery discussions, are clearly recognised by those studying the impacts of COVID-19, and calls for policy measures to respond to gender equality imperatives are gaining traction.

## The change we want to see

We believe it is crucial that a youth, gender transformative and broader equity lens is applied to the 'new normal', allowing for radical and universal change regarding the rights and equality of young women, girls and non-binary people in order to create a 'better normal'.

Our visions presented in this report are aspirational, but also achievable – we need a systems change, and we have ideas for what that should look like. We have seen through this pandemic how possible it is for governments and other power-holders to enact a reformist agenda without decades of prevaricating.

We want that agenda to be informed by what we have to say, by our ideas and views; because without an equity lens, you recreate inequalities.

## There are over half a billion adolescent girls living on our planet.

### BEFORE COVID-19

- Every year, nearly 12 million girls are married before the age of 18<sup>5</sup>
- One adolescent girl dies as a result of violence every 10 minutes<sup>6</sup>
- More than 130 million girls around the world are not in school<sup>7</sup>
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth is one of the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 globally<sup>8</sup>
- Recent research has found not a single country in the world is on track to meet the global sustainable development goal of gender equality by 2030<sup>9</sup>

### DURING COVID-19

- By 2030, 13 million more girls are estimated to find themselves in child, early and forced marriage as a consequence of the pandemic.<sup>10</sup> Adolescent pregnancy is also likely to increase<sup>11</sup>
- If restrictions continue for six months, 31 million additional gender-based violence cases can be expected. The pandemic is likely to cause a one-third reduction in progress towards ending gender-based violence by 2030<sup>6</sup>
- As of March 2020, 743 million girls were out of school due to closures, including 111 million in the world's least developed countries<sup>12</sup>



We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.

**Sonya Renee Taylor**



**PAST: The World**

*The world we live in is unequal and has many shortcomings. Although we have seen some positives arise from the changes to our lives during this global pandemic, it has also highlighted deep cracks in the system.*

**PRESENT: An Idea**

*We don't want to continue this way or return to those days – we want to go forward from this moment on, envisioning and building a better future – a future that is radically and universally transformed to become more just and sustainable.*

**FUTURE: Building a Vision**

*What do we, adolescent girls and young women, in all our diversities, want to see in our future – and who do we need to work with to co-create this change?*

**Our view of the world pre- and during COVID-19**

The global pandemic changed the way we went about our daily lives, and caused us to re-evaluate the world we live in. In the 'Discover' workshop we mapped out the challenges and inequalities of the world before the pandemic, as well as those that have been created or exacerbated during the pandemic. We also mapped out the things we appreciate.

**The thematic areas we explored are:<sup>13</sup>**

- Education and training
- Health
- Protection
- Family and Community
- Youth Representation
- Climate Change
- Gender Equality
- Livelihoods
- Systems Breakdown<sup>14</sup>

Those that added something new provided an insight into the specific context of their community. This told us that, while we share some of the same experiences, there are nuances among them that must always be considered through contextualised policy and social change responses.

For instance, girls and young women who live in lower socioeconomic areas or countries spoke more of living hand to mouth due to the pandemic and consequent job losses. They also highlighted an increase in child, early and forced marriages and unions in particular.

*"I appreciated TIME. The time for me to bond with my family, the time to reflect on myself, the time to go back and do my hobbies which I cannot do before and the time to be myself again."*

**Girl, 15-19, Philippines**

*"Many have found their peace of mind in this lockdown while some have mentally broken down."*

**Girl, 15-19, Fiji**

For most individuals who are living hand to mouth, there are challenges of the uncertainty of sustainability of the ventures or businesses that had been developed before COVID 19. There is also uncertainty of business funding, continuity of businesses given that most donor countries are the ones that are hit hard by the virus."

**Young woman, 20-24, Uganda**

**When we checked our thinking with girls and young women around the world:**

**55%** felt there was nothing to add, thus affirming the challenges, inequalities and appreciations as they were.

**45%** added comments in the 'anything missing?' box. The vast majority (83%) both affirmed our content and added things they felt were missing. This was particularly true for the areas of Family and Community, Livelihoods, and Health.

Girls take part in writing training class in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia



## APPRECIATION

### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Intercultural communication and being a part of the global community
- Ability to explore more resources and increase skills in utilising technology
- Increased ability to engage and participate
- Ease of access to courses and events
- Empowered to speak up more openly and creatively

## CHALLENGES

- The digital (gender) divide, with a lack of universal internet connectivity
- Disruptions to learning
- Curriculum and teacher skills are not fit for purpose for online learning
- Risk for girls falling behind and dropping out of school
- Increase in online harassment, abuse and spread of misinformation

### HEALTH

- Time to invest in personal and emotional wellbeing: the opportunity to take care of ourselves, to rest, to reflect, and grow in ourselves
- Alternative support pathways available
- Recognition of the importance of medical equipment and the knowledge needed to protect individual and community health
- Mental health highlighted

- Difficulty accessing mental health services; there is a great need for further resources to support young people's mental health
- Isolation increasing risks to those with mental health issues
- Limited access to emergency services (e.g. for sexual and reproductive health)
- Fearful to seek help
- Panic buying increasing period poverty

### PROTECTION

- Highlighting/education of domestic violence as an ingrained issue
- Introduction of hotlines and silent emergency numbers

- Lack of/difficult to find support systems
- Worsening rates of domestic and family violence due to isolation
- Difficulty accessing telehealth services (safety, linguistic backgrounds)
- LGBTIQ+ youth in unsafe/unaccepting homes
- Increase in child, early and forced marriage

### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

- More time to spend with family
- Sharing of duties at home
- Solidarity and unity within the community
- Caring and thoughtful actions
- Slowing down and appreciating the important things in life, including having space to explore new ideas, innovation and collaboration, both within communities and to form solidarity between countries

- Heightened inequality
- Disproportionate roles and responsibilities on girls and women
- Exacerbation of negative norms and stereotypes
- Expectation of productivity in extreme times
- Sense of entitlement to services
- Increased sense of nationalism

### YOUTH REPRESENTATION

- Quick spread of critical information and updates
- Valuing student voices around education in particular

- Overwhelming focus on COVID-19 at the expense of other important stories and news
- Spread of misinformation and exposure to negative stories.
- Impacts on young people lacking in the conversation
- Negative portrayal of young people as scapegoats for COVID-19 spread
- LGBTIQ+ folk, First Nations voices and people with disabilities' voices not amplified in the conversation.
- Difficult to highlight other issues and injustices

## APPRECIATION

### CLIMATE CHANGE

- A collective awakening as we see noticeable positive changes to the environment due to restrictions, particularly air and waterways pollution
- Great to see listening to experts and creation of evidence-based policies for COVID-19 response; need to see this for climate action too
- Discovering long term opportunities to reduce human impact and rebuild sustainably

## CHALLENGES

- Neglect of climate change action plans and critical events postponed
- Blame going to individuals and communities instead of large scale emitters as the real virus to the environment
- Climate change conversation and global action halted as a whole, for instance with COP26 rescheduled to 2021

### GENDER EQUALITY

- Strong feminist leadership
- Less emphasis on 'perfection' on social media and people openly talking about inclusivity
- Feeling safer on the streets with more people in parks/out for exercising<sup>15</sup>

- Increase in domestic, family and gender-based violence world-wide
- Increased risk of child marriage and unwanted/unintended teen pregnancy
- Disproportionate impact on women and girls' livelihoods (essential health workers, increase in unpaid work and duty of care)
- Negative norms and stereotypes reinforced

### LIVELIHOODS

- Recognition of the importance of essential workers
- Understanding there are different ways of working (online, less work travel, work/life balance)
- Increased ease of access to (digital) spaces for people with disabilities
- Increase in financial support for youth and unemployed

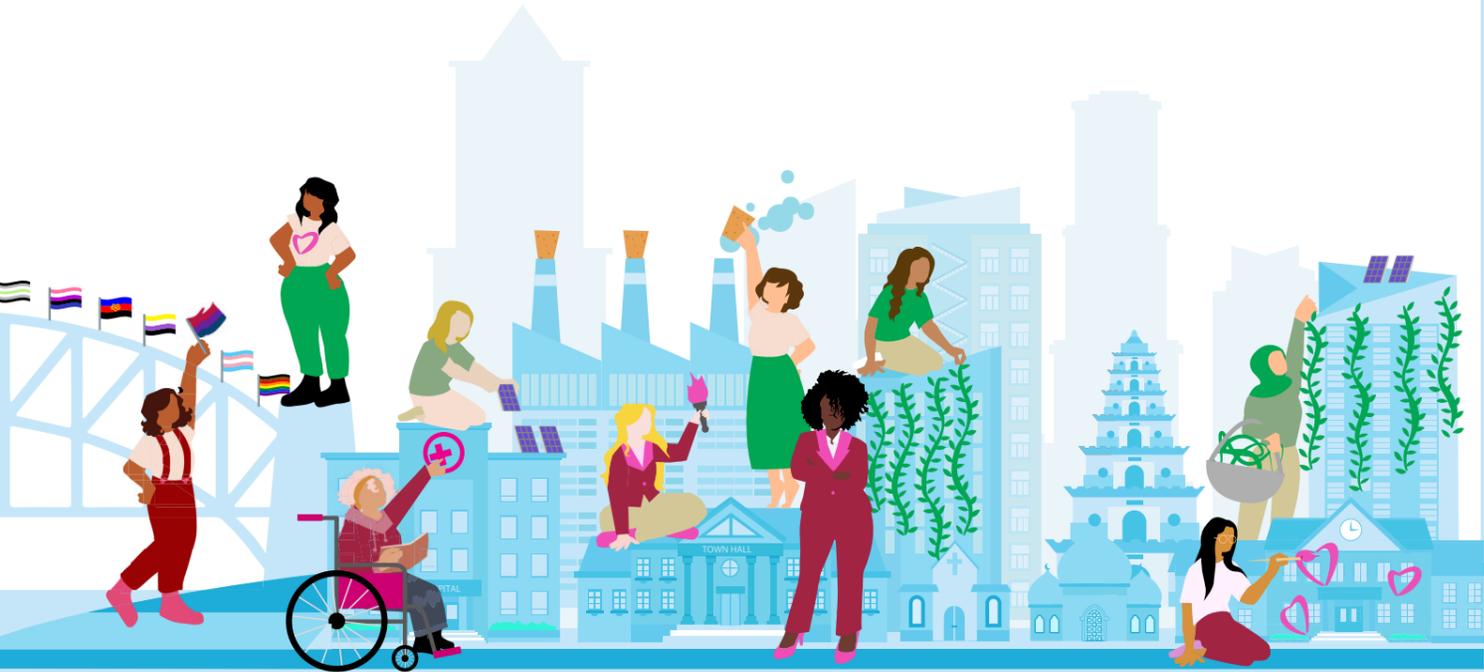
- Loss of job/income and heightened insecurity
- Uncertainty for the future of graduate roles and accessing the job market
- Challenges affording basics, services and rent
- Increase in unpaid work
- Impacts of parents/guardians losing work (family wellbeing, food security)

### SYSTEMS BREAKDOWN

- Some governments utilising multiple outlets to help people e.g. financial support
- Support from aid and humanitarian organisations



- Increase in racism and LGBTIQ+ discrimination, particularly related to the global response to the Black Lives Matter movement in the time of COVID-19, to the blaming of Asian communities for the virus, and to young LGBTIQ+ people being stuck in un-affirming and unsafe homes
- The political world focused on blaming rather than on solutions
- Increased distrust of institutions, including perceived corruption and inequality between power-holders and everyday people
- Ineffective communication and levels of apathy for varying approaches to COVID-19
- Power and privilege: Many having to prioritise going to work over our own health, and others being locked out of education due to lack of ability to connect online, especially in rural communities
- Scepticism towards the media and the spreading of 'fake news'



# CHAPTER 2: OUR DREAM

We envision a world in which everyone constantly strives to create the best world possible.

A world where everyone feels valued and heard, and free to do what they love.

A world surrounded by kindness, peace, opportunity and acceptance for each other, with equality in leadership and the protection of rights.

A transformation of the way society works to truly co-exist with the Earth, leaving an equitable and hopeful place for the generations to come.

Through the 'dream' process, we had the opportunity to envision what the world could look like. We dreamed of a world where our ideas for equality, peace and kindness were a reality.

Dreaming this world, and creating a collective vision for it, was a really powerful process.

As we shared our vision with girls and young women from around the world, we were touched and surprised by the outpouring of support, both online and in the workshops.

Our words, our dreams, resonated with hundreds of girls and young women with hundreds of different life stories and backgrounds – we're proud to be able to amplify their voices through our dreams by putting forward this vision for girls everywhere.

This was overwhelmingly heart-warming, exciting and quite frankly, revolutionary.

## GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR THE VISION

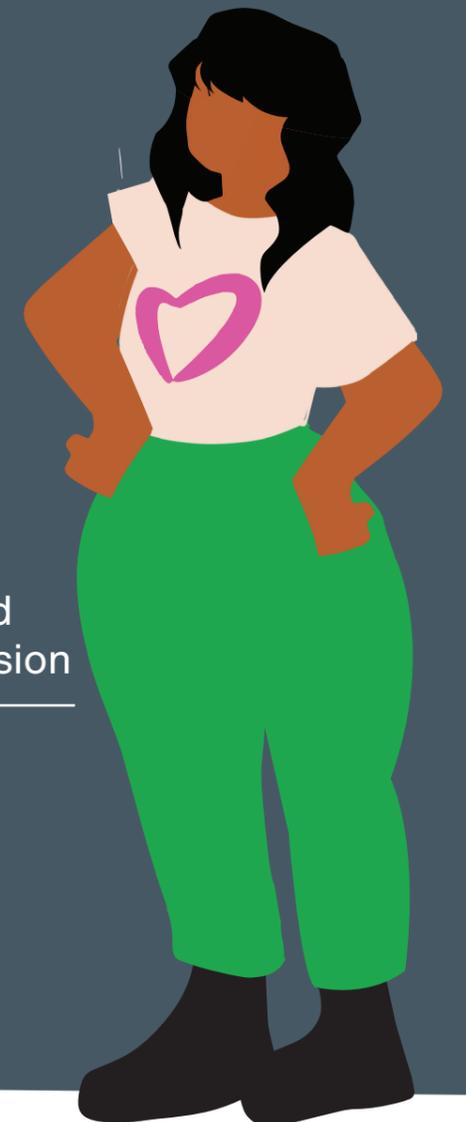
**1K+** girls and young women across  
**99 COUNTRIES** engaged with our vision<sup>16</sup>

**7 in 10** validated our vision<sup>17</sup>

**325** girls and young women, aged 10-24 and across 25 countries covering six regions, provided 'deep dive' responses<sup>18</sup>

**90%** from each region expressed their agreement with the vision

**50-60%** from each age group (10-14, 15-19, 20-24) voted for "Love this!" about the vision



# THE SIX PILLARS

**This is our vision of a just, equitable and sustainable world.**

We understand that there are many facets, experiences, perspectives, structures and paradigms that make up a vision like this, which are needed to support a world that emulates such a vision.

So many areas of our world today must be examined, dismantled and radically transformed to create this vision, to bring about this 'better normal'.

We must have freedom and agency, but also the practical security, support and education to enact such freedom and equality. We also need to inherit a planet that isn't broken beyond repair.

We have broken down these facets into six main pillars, which expand upon our overarching vision to demonstrate how, together, we can co-create our new world.

As part of validating our visions with girls and young women from around the world, we decided to ask them to select their top three priorities. This was to see if any of the thematic visions resonated particularly strongly.

Each vision was selected almost equally - demonstrating how interlinked they are, and how important they all are for achieving our overall vision.

## EDUCATED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD

## GENDER JUSTICE

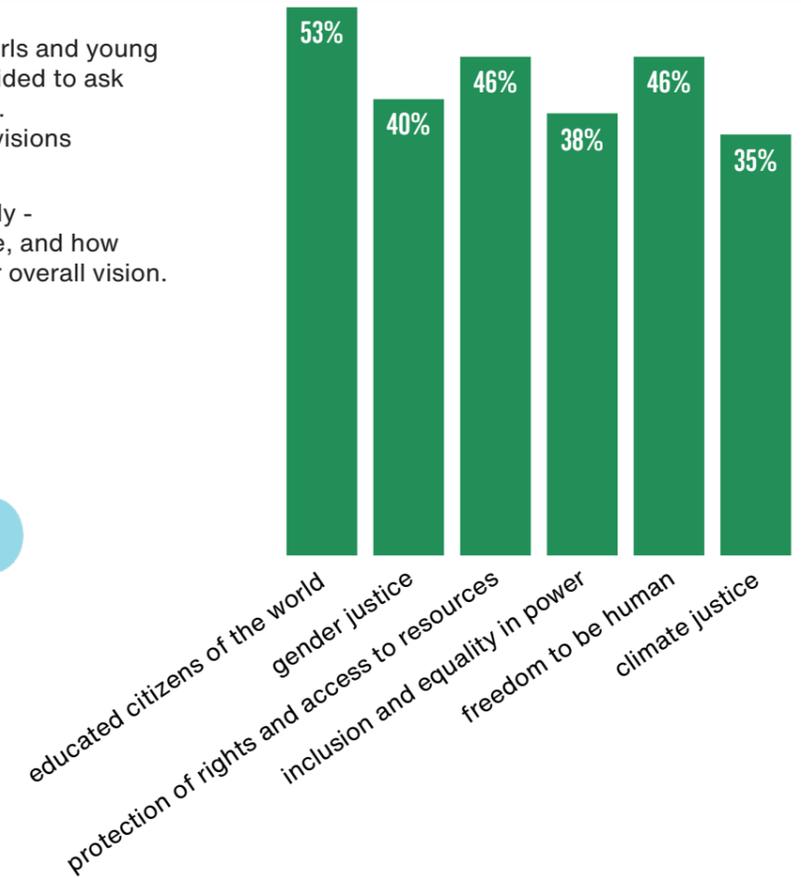
## PROTECTION OF RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES

## INCLUSION AND EQUALITY IN POWER

## FREEDOM TO BE HUMAN

## CLIMATE JUSTICE

# OUR PRIORITIES



## Priorities by age and region

- The percentage of girls and young women across each age group (10-14, 15-19, 20-24) who expressed agreement with each priority was relatively consistent throughout all priorities
- An overwhelming majority of girls and young women expressed strongly agreement or agreement in response to the 'educated citizens of the world' priority, at 90% from the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific, and 60% from Africa and Asia. This was the number one priority globally and by region
- The inclusion and equality in power priority garnered a high rate of strongly agree and agree responses from all regions. Girls and young women from Africa, the Middle East and the Americas expressed the highest rates of agreement, with 80%, 100% and 63% respectively
- The highest rate of agreement with the climate justice priority was expressed by girls and young women from the Americas (75%) and Africa (60%)
- Girls and young from all six regions responded to the protection of rights priority, with high levels of agreement across the board

# EDUCATED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD

**A world of equal access to quality and inclusive education and training resources, teaching compassionate understanding of others beyond the classroom, going hand-in-hand with fundamental and practical knowledge of the world.**

## WHAT GIRLS HAVE TO SAY

**94%** of girls and young women across the world affirmed this vision

Girls and young women from around the world are unanimous in our agreement that education – including vocational training and tertiary education – is our human right and that everyone should have access to it, with a need to secure equal access for people from minority and vulnerable groups in particular.

“All people no matter age, ethnicity, race, gender, etc... Should [not] be refused education because of this. All human beings should be given the opportunity to attend school and be given the same opportunities as everyone else to achieve their dreams. And given the support to do this, including university support and financial support.”

**Girl, 15-19, United Kingdom**

Our vision that education should extend beyond the classroom, with learning happening in the community also, was also affirmed through the comments. We should be encouraged to build skills relevant to the labour market, and all fields of study should be seen as equally important, with freedom to pursue our passions.

Similarly, there is strong support for a transformation of the education system, to see a more holistic education with a focus on gaining critical thinking, empathy and emotional intelligence skills. We also want to be educated in the issues of the world – from climate change through to Indigenous history – so that we can better understand the ways our world is broken and how we can take action as global citizens to help fix it.

“The freedom to pursue your passion or the thing you love and be encouraged to widen your knowledge without the pressure given by the society, would be great.”

**Girl, 15-19, Philippines**



## OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

‘Educated citizens of the world’ gathered the most contributions across the six pillars, underscoring its importance as the top priority for girls and young women globally.

Our ideas for how this would look in our communities were complementary across countries and regions, and included:

- A more compassionate and empathetic classroom, with students looking out for each other, learning about mental health, how to respect and care for each other, and a shift in focus of teachers from results to caring about the wellbeing of their students.
- Hands-on learning opportunities that allow students to create change, develop practical skills, and learn in their own communities.
- Access to learning resources for all. Young women and girls are calling for everyone to have access to the resources they need, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of those in remote and rural areas, of low socio-economic learners, and those with limited access to the internet.
- Learning that encourages and teaches elements of diversity, morals and values. In Australia, there was strong support for all learners to be taught Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture, identities and values, and in particular for colonial history teaching to be addressed. In Uruguay and Indonesia teaching morals and values, alongside other subjects, was deemed extremely important.
- Students’ voices should be listened to when developing the school system, and there should be more opportunities for their voices to be heard.
- Financial challenges should not limit access to education. Girls and young women also want options other than university to be promoted as viable pathways to success. This suggestion existed alongside comments that the school you go to should not hinder your future or create inequalities in access to resources.

“I want to see education which is applicative and adaptable. It seem nowadays that people only learn because of obligation to get an A in their report, I want to see education which also [teaches] people how to be compassionate, having a true meaning in their [life] by learning, and also making academic to their purpose of helping each other to make a great impact in society.”

**Young woman, 20-24, Indonesia**

“I want to add the need for practical education in each and every school in the community. This will entail quarterly internships for the children and students so as to engineer their minds on the working world and ensure that they build their professional skills. This will in the long run reduce unemployment in the rural community.”

**Young woman, 20-24, Uganda**

“People would not have to miss out on education because they do not have an internet connection. I would see a healthier and more knowledgeable community all together.”

**Young woman, 20-24, Sri Lanka**

“I want an education that includes not only general subject but also character education.”

**Young woman, 20-24, Indonesia**

“Freedom of students being heard and their voices being used in a school system to make it better for everyone.”

**Girl, 10-14, Australia**

“STOP current uni fee increases, encourage critical thinking for ALL people. Include these skills at a school level. Encourage liberal arts degrees or a couple of subject for all students. Stop teaching just colonial history, teaching indigenous language and stories in all schools.”

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

**A society with no prejudices; an open-minded community where gender does not limit opportunities, safety, or acceptance.**

**An empathic world where girls and women in all our diversities have a say in the decisions affecting our bodies and quality of life.**

**Each voice is respected and empowered.**

**In this new world, roles and responsibilities – including domestic chores – are shared equally.**

**Girls will live and learn in a world that appreciates them and recognises their true capability.**

**We will no longer be forced into early marriage, but supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and pursue their dreams, free from gender stereotypes.**

**We will be free, safe and equal.**

## WHAT GIRLS HAVE TO SAY

**98%** of girls and young women from around the world felt that the vision we represented resonated well and there was nothing that needed to be added

When we think about creating a 'better normal', girls and young women are clear that there is a need to promote gender justice globally and to strive for true equality for all genders.

Regardless of where girls live in the world, there are still steps that need to be taken to achieve our vision of people of any gender being 'free, safe and equal'.

When we asked girls and young women if there was anything they wanted to add to the vision, two main themes emerged:

Theme 1: The acknowledgement that the nature of gender inequity is based in societal roles, norms and stereotypes; and

Theme 2: The need to include the fair treatment and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the theme of gender justice.

"For gender justice, I would add that there would be fair treatment on LGBTQ+ community and women whenever they apply for a certain job and that they would be respected by their physical appearance they wish to prefer."

**Young woman, 20-24, Philippines**



## OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When envisioning what a society with gender justice would look like, girls and young women answered with a response for their 'dream':

- Eliminate gender norms, i.e. the expectations that people have of someone that is linked to their gender. There was also a desire to overturn gender roles. It is important to note that these responses were gender-neutral, acknowledging that gender justice goes above a gender binary and also that men are negatively affected by gender norms and roles.
- Create a better workplace environment for young women, as well as more leadership opportunities to be open to young women.
- The need for overall respect for girls and young women, and for their fundamental human rights.
- Increasing girls' and young women's safety. This includes stopping domestic, family and intimate partner violence, sexual violence and the overall need for young women and girls to feel safe while participating in public and online spaces.

"I want to see all people able to express themselves regardless of their gender norms."

**Girl, 15-19, Australia**

"More women to be included into senior management roles; these women are often equally capable - if not more capable - than their men counterparts in leading teams and/or organisations."

**Young woman, 20-24, Singapore**

"I want to see women treated with respect - for their intelligence, ideas and as a person. It is important that people understand what is required to create gender equality and that women around the world struggle with basic human rights. I want to see women build each other up in this process and support one another to overcome inequities."

**Girl, 15-19, Australia**

"Make clear that the blame is never the victim and violence in no way should be tolerated, that above all people are able to identify violence and its signs and maintain unconditional support for the person affected"

**Girl, 10-14, El Salvador**

**A world where human rights are protected, respected and upheld, with equitable distribution of resources and opportunity, including financial security and freedom from discrimination or exploitation.**

**This is a world of solidarity, where people support each other, providing all the necessary equipment to thrive in a new world so no one will be left behind.**



## WHAT GIRLS HAVE TO SAY

**96%** of girls and young women from around the world affirmed this vision

When we asked girls and young women if there was anything they wanted to add to the vision, these main themes emerged:

**Theme 1:** Educating everyone on what their rights are

**Theme 2:** The need to specifically uphold and protect the rights of women and other marginalised groups

**Theme 3:** The need for a greater emphasis on eliminating labour and ecosystem exploitation

**Theme 4:** A process for rewriting and updating laws that no longer serve us

## OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When asked what this dream would look like enacted in their community and in the world, girls and young women came up with the following common ideas for change:

- Guarantee that everyone is free from physical harm and abuse, especially girls and young women.
- Ensure the minimum wage is a liveable wage.
- Make the legal system more equitable and inclusive.
- Encourage women and girls throughout their lives to be leaders at all levels, and to go into leadership positions, showing that their voices are heard.
- Governments (at all levels) and community governance structures should ensure that those who are affected by an issue (especially those most vulnerable) are able to debate on the related issue, and that everyone can contribute to policy and law making, so that no one is left out or left behind.

“Yes, i think when many people can live their life with empathy this dream of protection and having a community that support each other isn't only a dream. I hope this view can be spread to many people and bring spirit to make a big step together.”  
**Young woman, 20-24, Indonesia**

“Let people know WHAT their rights are. Although it is the obligation of the institutions to respect the rights of citizens, it is important that citizens know what their rights are from the beginning.”  
**Young woman, 20-24, Mexico**

“If we are protected, respected, supported and have equal access to resources and opportunities, we have many opportunities to learn and demonstrate our best abilities.”  
**Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam**

“Poverty is still a struggle here in our country, that is why these resources are not being divided well, as there are those who take advantage of their position as leaders in our communities. I call for urgent action on this matter at hand.”  
**Girl, 15-19, Philippines**

“I want to hear the voices of those who have had their rights compromised at the decision making table, and policy capturing experience not just statistics.”  
**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

“Be protected, supported, provided access. No discrimination and abuse based on minorities or gender.”  
**Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam**

“Children can go to school, cared for with clothes and food, without fear of having to drop out to work on fields or get into early marriage.”  
**Girl, 10-14, Viet Nam**

**A cycle of leadership which includes minorities and youth as experts in their own right, to ensure policies and laws empower and lend a voice to those they affect.**



## WHAT GIRLS HAVE TO SAY

**94%** of girls and young women from around the world supported this vision

Young women and girls from Nepal, the Philippines, France and Viet Nam in particular strongly affirmed the idea of youth being involved in the decision-making process, with those in Viet Nam also stressing the fact that society should encourage and support all to be involved - from youth to the elderly.

“This is hugely evident in our governmental systems in the Philippines, as legislations are being crafted and enacted without hearing the voices of the minorities which are the ones mostly affected. Laws are still not inclusive enough, that is why our leaders must be aware of that. Women and the minorities are being left behind with their laws that are governing the society.”  
**Girl, 15-19, Philippines**

## OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When envisioning what inclusion and equality of power would look like in the world, these ideas came to the fore:

- Young people and disadvantaged groups should be involved in decision making at all levels, from local right through to global
- The path to politics needs to change, and be less centred around long hours, with an end to silencing the voices that matter, and support for those without useful social connections
- Quotas were also proposed as a practical means to ensure participation from young women, not only in politics but across all fields
- Putting measures in place to stop corruption was a popular response, suggesting this could be done through transparency of decision making and planning

“I want power that doesn’t benefit only few people but power that can bring all of people to be seen as a true human and can [use] their own abilities to empower the world.”

**Young woman, 20-24 Indonesia**

“I’d suggest that better transparency would be added, like the financial provisions, projects, and planned bills be surfaced to the community as well.”  
**Girl, Philippines, 15-19**

**A joyful, caring and peaceful community in which you are empowered to be who you are and do what you love without constraint or prejudice.**

**A world where all are free to slow down, be present and continue to take on life with kindness and excitement.**

## WHAT GIRLS HAVE TO SAY

**95%** of girls and young women from around the world affirmed this vision and felt that there was nothing to add

We want to live without the pressures of societal expectations and structures, especially those that limit our expression of our true selves. We want to be free from these often-invisible barriers.

And we want to be supported to follow our dreams.

This is what we heard, loud and clear, from the girls and young women from around the world who responded to this vision and who added their thoughts and insights.

“When I am free to do what I like, I will dedicate myself to it, so the quality of work will be improved.”  
Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam

## OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When requested to articulate how this vision of freedom to be human could be achieved, two main themes were articulated:

- The need for actively loving and caring communities who support girls and young women, which made up almost half (45%) of the responses.
- The need to have respect and freedom from judgement in regards to girls’ and young women’s decisions, which made up one in four of the responses.

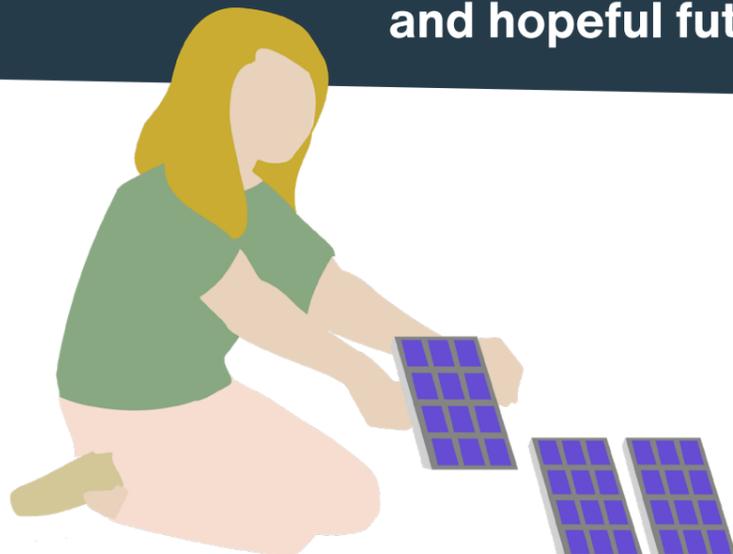
“In the theme freedom to be human, I would like for this to be enacted in a way that there will be no judgements or whatsoever especially in our community. Not all people know that we can be successful too. Only if they let us choose our path for ourselves. We are all human after all. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion and choices”  
Young woman, 20-24, Philippines

“Everyone respects their choices in career and self-development.”  
Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam



**A society in harmony with nature and the planet,  
everybody lives within what our planet can sustain.**

**Accepting the knowledge of experts and Indigenous  
peoples, in which we develop a sustainable  
and hopeful future.**



## WHAT GIRLS HAVE TO SAY

**98%** of girls and young women from around the world affirmed this vision

We already knew that climate justice was important to girls and young women globally, as seen through the phenomenal support for school climate strikes and the advocacy of young women like Greta Thunberg, who is taking a stand for climate action, and Autumn Peltier, a First Nations water protector who is inspiring youth, especially Indigenous youth, to be the change.

We value the need for climate action, and want to see a sustainable and environmentally friendly future.

Given the fact that the need for climate justice transcends borders, and is not an issue that can be tackled by singular nations, the global interest in achieving climate justice is a great indicator of a positive future. We need this to translate to global, urgent, climate action.

## OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

We want to see:

- A more sustainable use of the world's resources, where no individual, company, or government takes more than the Earth can give
- Clean energy solutions being prioritised, leading to a global transition to renewable energy
- More information on climate action we can all take, including waste management and individual use of energy
- Communities living harmoniously with nature and the environment, and in particular avoiding deforestation and other measures that destroy the environment
- Education on climate change and climate action
- Individuals and policymakers listening to experts on climate justice
- Communicate with and learn from Indigenous communities' understanding of the environment

"Government's to attempt to move into renewable energy, stop the coal. If you want a life, you gotta have an earth, and there will be no earth if coal power continues."

**Girl, 15-19, Australia**

"The community should actively work to keep the harmony between human and nature."

**Girl, 10-14, Viet Nam**

"Change to leadership of Indigenous people - not just asking them to fit into our framework of life or social management."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

The following policy recommendations articulate the actions we want decision makers to take, in order to make our visions reality.<sup>19</sup> You have the power to make this happen, as well as to ensure any new or updated policies are implemented in tangible ways, to ensure change truly takes place.

## Addressing gender inequality, and in particular negative norms, attitudes and stereotypes

- Governments** must ensure that COVID-19 response and recovery policies and legislation include women and girls' experiences and needs.
- Governments** must develop, in partnership with civil society organisations, social norm change campaigns that tackle harmful and discriminatory gender norms and biases, which perpetuate toxic masculinity. They should use local and national communication platforms and education curriculum to share awareness messages including:
  - Encouraging all household members to share the burden of family care
  - Raising male emotional awareness and emotional intelligence, with a particular emphasis on awareness of gender normative emotions
  - Addressing issues of harmful gender expectations and norms through comprehensive sexual education both within and out of school settings
  - Facilitating dialogue and programmes with families, communities, traditional and religious leaders to tackle harmful attitudes and bring about gender and social norm change
- Ministries of Education** should implement gender transformative curricula, including comprehensive sexuality education to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes, along with gender-responsive classroom teaching and learning practices, to acknowledge and address issues of inclusion, promote gender equitable learning and help all children and young people challenge traditional gender stereotypes and be empowered to reflect upon themselves.
  - Prioritise education centred around and actively teaching gender equality and inclusion
  - Include comprehensive sexuality education, including menstrual health and hygiene management, as a core component in the curriculum
  - Encourage critical and empathic thinking for students and teachers

## Encouraging young women's leadership

- Governments, communities and workplaces** must adopt concrete measures to ensure more young women enter into positions of power, for instance through:
  - Adoption of quotas
  - Earmarked funding to female identifying candidates,
  - Encouraging and opening up leadership, sporting and STEM opportunities for young women, and
  - Strong prevention and response mechanisms to combat political violence, especially sexual harassment and sexist discriminations

Governments in particular should take measures to ensure an enabling and fear-free environment in every sphere of government (local government to parliament) to encourage more young women to take up leadership positions.
- Governments** must ensure that all young people aged 18 and above are able to vote and to run for and hold public office.

## Protecting our rights and equitable distribution of resources

- Governments** must re-commit to protecting, respecting and upholding human rights, with a particular focus on ensuring freedom from discrimination or exploitation for vulnerable and targeted groups. For instance:
  - Protect against the heightened risks of gender-based violence by ensuring accessibility and availability of gender transformative services, which prevent and respond to violence for all adolescent girls and women and those who identify as LGBTIQ+.
  - All policy and decision makers should be trained in gender justice and issues facing young people and vulnerable groups. These groups should be empowered and meaningfully engaged in designing solutions/ lead the response.
- Governments** should ensure the equitable distribution of resources and opportunity, including financial security, for instance:
  - Ensure the minimum wage is a liveable wage, and all workers - including migrant workers - in all careers are respected and supported.
  - Provide direct financing to community, youth, feminist and women's rights organizations and movements who adequately respond to the needs of their communities.

## Health prevention and promotion for all

- Governments (at all levels), service providers and community organisations** should recognise the unique vulnerabilities of refugees, children and youth with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ individuals and other vulnerable groups in terms of pervasive discrimination, lack of access to and misinformation in healthcare. For instance:
  - Take an intersectional approach and ensure the availability of important information in multiple local languages, including for those with low or no literacy, and people with visual and hearing disabilities. This information should be context-specific and relevant to different groups, including girls and young women.
  - Ensure that essential workers are sensitised to the specific needs of these groups and disseminate this information through established channels with the relevant communities, such as through local civil society organisations or other community structures.
  - Supplement dissemination with radio and social media posts to increase exposure, consulting with girls, young women and young LGBTIQ+ people about where they are accessing information.

Zeynesh, 14, is protected from an early marriage by her mother Ayalnesh, Ethiopia



## Participatory decision-making and law-making

- 1. Decision-makers** must institutionalise participatory processes for girls and young women, in all our diversities, at different levels (local, regional and national), so that our experiences are accurately represented and solutions designed for us are co-designed by us.
  - These processes should have clear and meaningful mandates and adequate resources.
  - They must be accessible to, and inclusive of, all children without discrimination, ensuring that girls and young women are able to participate on an equal basis.
- 2. Governments (at all levels) and community governance structures** should ensure that no one is left out of decision-making processes, that services are youth and gender-responsive, and that non-discriminatory laws and policies are developed.

In particular, policy makers must ensure new laws and policies are co-designed with those who are affected by the issue at hand, especially those most vulnerable.

For instance:

- Support girls and young women to report at national, regional and global levels on key human rights and Sustainable Development Goal mechanisms. This includes shadow reporting to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the High Level Political Forum, and should include assessing government action and COVID reporting mechanisms.
- Children and young people should be given legitimate space in every community and local level accountability program. Feedback mechanisms must be child-friendly, gender-responsive and easily accessible so children can monitor the quality and efficiency of public services.
- Governments should co-design and implement supportive laws and policies to enable girls and women to leverage digital technology to include their voices in public decision making, as well as enabling their direct participation in processes.
- Harassment of girls and young women in digital and online spaces should not be tolerated. Measures to protect and empower children online, with specific actions for girls, young women and women human rights defenders in all their diversity, must be central to laws and policies regulating digital technology and online spaces. Digital platform providers must be accountable for safety online.

e. Governments should encourage girls and young women to take part in collective action and activism at local and national levels, promote their active citizenship and recognise their contribution as drivers of change in societal and political affairs. Governments must ensure legal and policy frameworks do not obstruct their collective action and activism, particularly girls', young women's and women human rights activists'.

- 3. Decision-makers** should champion the ability for everyone to be empowered to be who they are and do what they love without constraint or prejudice by:
  - Adopting and emphasising a zero-tolerance approach in the public sector and wider society to any form of discrimination or stigmatization against any groups in society, including on grounds of gender and sexual identity, age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, migratory status or national origin.
  - Creating safe spaces where populations that experience systemic discrimination can discuss issues that matter to them, so that they can access support and have solidarity with others, as well as have the opportunity to politically engage. Community leaders should work with them to create and co-design safe avenues for their civic and political participation.
- 4. All stakeholders** must create safe online participation for girls, while at the same time investing in inclusive technology for all.
- 5. Governments** should adopt policies and fund public campaigns in partnership with **civil society organisations** that challenge gender and social norms and that promote gender equality and the value of girls, boys and all young people's voices and actions in public and political affairs.

## Transforming education

- 1. Ministries of Education** should work together with **other government departments, donors and relevant stakeholders** to make education accessible for all, for instance by:
  - Ensuring education is inclusive for students with disabilities, girls, ethnic minorities, people from different cultures, and other minority or vulnerable groups.
  - Providing fee free education for all and investing at least 20% of national budgets in public education
  - Closing the digital divide by ensuring free universal access to the internet so everyone can access online learning resources when needed, with a particular focus on closing the digital gender divide that sees fewer girls able to access information online.
  - Ensuring curricula and pedagogy is child-friendly and reflects the interests and lived realities of children and youth.
  - Making tertiary education more accessible for all, for instance by reducing fees, and providing support and services during study.
- 2. Ministries of Education** should transform the education system to one that is participatory and learner-centred, providing opportunities for self-reflection and encouraging children, adolescents and young people to connect what they are learning in the classroom to their wider worlds.
  - Civic education, including environmental issues, should be included in students' learning, with a focus on getting out beyond the school walls and into the community and nature for hands-on learning opportunities.
  - All subjects must be treated as equally important, with funding and resourcing equally distributed.
  - Learners (especially marginalised students) must be taught skills such as financial literacy and vocational skills.
  - Learning resources must be reviewed and be actively anti-racist, for instance by no longer teaching history framed through the lens of colonialism. Indigenous perspectives, lived experiences, languages and stories should be taught in all schools.

- 3. Ministries of Education and Environment** in all countries must integrate climate change into national curricula at all levels and in a variety of subjects. Learning must be relevant and move beyond the science of climate change, to include:

- Knowledge of the causes and consequences of climate change and wider environmental processes including promotion of community-led environmental stewardship;
- Knowledge of local environmental conditions, risks and management strategies;
- Disaster risk reduction;
- Practical knowledge and skills related to environmentally sustainable livelihoods.

Further, content should be:

- Context specific, drawing on both scientific and Indigenous knowledge.
- Integrated within existing curricula taught as local curriculum or explored through extracurricular activities and school projects.
- Age and gender-responsive, and include vocational training and tertiary education (green skills).
- Promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

- 4. Ministries of Education** should ensure comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is accessible for all children, adolescents and young people (CAY), in both formal and non-formal educational settings.

In order to enhance understanding of topics covered in CSE and increase support, this should include:

- Co-curricular activities which complement the formal curriculum
- Parental and community involvement
- Links to gender-responsive, CAY-friendly healthcare and other services.

Further:

- CSE should start in the pre-school years, with the content tailored to the evolving capacities of the child
- Those conducting CSE should be trained and equipped to deliver CSE that is non-discriminatory, inclusive and accessible, non-judgemental, scientifically accurate, rights-based, gender-transformative and effective

**Climate justice**

1. **Governments must listen to, respect and act in accordance with scientific evidence and expert advice, as well as Indigenous knowledge and expertise.** This should include promoting Indigenous peoples' right to meaningfully participate in and ultimately influence climate decisions and actions.
2. **Governments and other relevant actors** should be accountable to young people and future generations to ensure they leave a habitable planet and don't over-exploit the earth's resources, for instance by:
  - a. Committing to actively pursue representative policy to end the depletion of our natural resources
  - b. Listening to, instead of dismissing, the voices of children and young people, including adolescent girls and young women in all our diversities, when we hold you to account

**Blue sky? We don't think so!**

Here's some examples from countries around the world already making our visions reality

- **Climate change accountability:** New legislation in Denmark could make climate change "illegal". Every twelve months parliament will hold the Danish government accountable to its goals<sup>20</sup>
- The UK's new **comprehensive sexuality education** guidance has been recently updated to include:
  - vital information on LGBTIQ+ relationships
  - sex in the age of social media, including sexting and revenge porn
  - informed consent
  - menstrual health management

While parents can apply to opt their children out of some content, the student is able to opt themselves back in three months before their 16th birthday to ensure they receive the information they need to navigate sexual relationships.

It should be noted that this is a positive update of a previous guidance that was 20 years old, however that there is still room for further strengthening it – in particular to incorporate a positive approach to sexual health.<sup>21</sup>

- **Participatory decision-making:**  
Canada's Youth Policy<sup>22</sup> recognises the right of young people to be involved in decision making. The policy:
  - Acknowledges that youth engagement benefits all citizens
  - Prioritises the facilitation of accessible, innovative opportunities for this engagement to happen
  - Centres co-designed priorities such as leadership, climate action, wellness, reconciliation, employment, innovation and learning.

While the policy is largely regarded as a fantastic piece of participatory work, it is important that younger girls aren't left behind with the focus on youth.

Throughout this research study, we have listened to the dreams of girls and young women, in all our diversities.

We are fighting for a new world, a world where we all stand up against the structures and systems that perpetuate injustice and powerlessness.

A world which centres intersectionality and demands a just future for all.

Amplifying our collective voices through this research is the first step.

We will continue to raise these calls to action; we will continue to re-design the decision-making table; and we will continue to work with girls and young women around the world to become power holders themselves, to redistribute power and work towards gender justice for all.

But we can't do this alone – we need you – families, the community, the leaders, the power holders – to help us transform our society and build back better.

To girls and young women everywhere reading this: you are the change. We see you, and we will continue to listen, to make room for you, to respect your voice and your experience, your struggles and your dreams.

We are the future, our 'better normal', and we deserve to be centred in its creation.

**WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

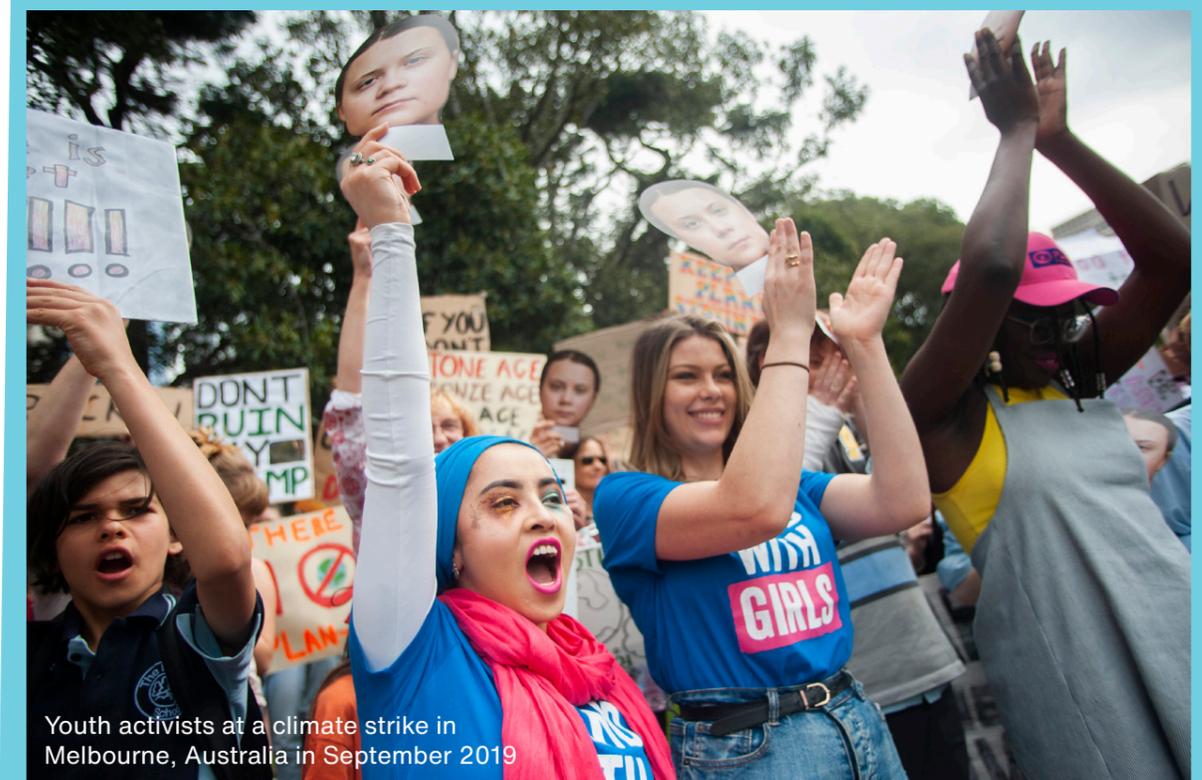
We will be taking this report – girls' dreams and hopes for the 'better normal' – to decision makers around the globe, for instance to the UN General Assembly, Beijing+25, ASEAN, our country governments, and others. If you have ideas for where else we could share it, please let us know!

And if you are a decision maker who would like to understand more – please reach out to us, we'd love to sit and talk with you.

We will also be campaigning and advocating on the various recommendations, both in the immediate aftermath of this report's launch and ongoing.

We invite you to stand with us and follow our journey!

[planau.me/a-better-normal](http://planau.me/a-better-normal)



Youth activists at a climate strike in Melbourne, Australia in September 2019

# APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

## Why youth-led?

Youth were at the centre of every step of this research. The process was underpinned by the recognition that girls and young women, in all their diversities, have the capacity to understand their context and experience, agency to shape their lives and communities, and the expertise to identify and prioritise their needs.

While acknowledging that these girls and young women often face structural barriers in enacting change and achieving these dreams, this research aimed to centre them in real and radical transformations, amplifying their voices and ideas to fight for structures and systems that empower and support them.

This centring of youth is vital, not just because girls and young women have valuable, passionate and hopeful insights and a right to be consulted in constructing their futures, but also in order to ensure that the world created is fair and equitable and does not repeat its past mistakes.

All phases of the research were conducted by a core group of youth leaders from Australia and Viet Nam, aged between 15 and 24 years old.

## Research objectives

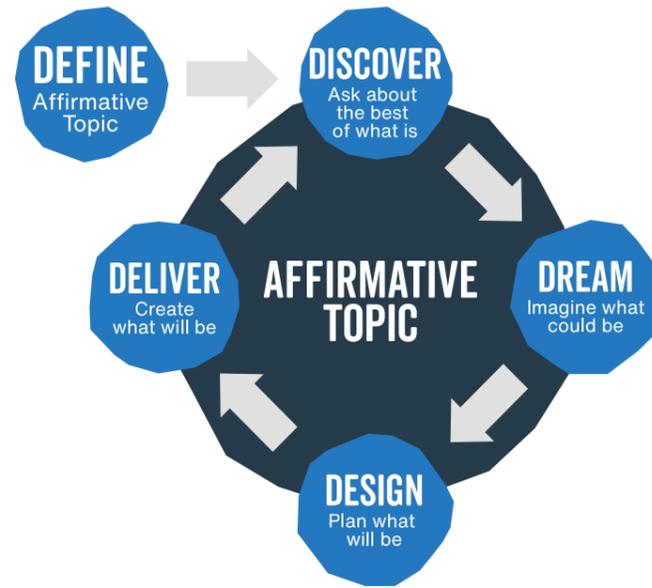
The research aimed to:

1. Empower adolescent girls and young women to articulate the transformational vision they have for a more just and sustainable future in our new world.
2. Equip adolescent girls and young women with the tools to develop recommendations for individuals, communities, humanitarian actors, donors, policy makers and decision makers to help co-create the 'new normal.'
3. Provide a platform for adolescent girls and young women to be powerful advocates for change, connecting them with change and decision makers at a global, regional and national level, with the goal of campaigning and advocating for the implementation of their priority policy, legislation and social change recommendations.

## Concept at the heart of the process

As a youth-led, feminist participatory action research project, we identified the 'appreciative inquiry' methodology as one that best fitted this project, because it is results-orientated, hopeful and confident in its visions.

Appreciative inquiry is a possibility orientated research approach, focusing on strengths and positive attributes in order to reaffirm young people's autonomy and potential for their visions to be realised. We focused on the 'best of what is' in order to facilitate discussion and hope in 'what could be'.



## How we undertook the research

The research followed the 5D appreciative cycle of Define, Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver. A number of workshops and discussions were facilitated with the core group of youth researchers to follow this process.

## Define, Discover and Dream

In this workshop, we:

- Co-designed our research question to **Define** the research process and its aims.
- Dived in to **Discover** the challenges, inequalities and things that we appreciated in a life pre-COVID19 and during the pandemic, in order to form an understanding of the current state of the world
- **Dreamed** of the new world or a better future, envisioning 'what could be' through a guided imagery, personal reflection and collective vision writing

From this, our dreams were transformed into one collective blue-sky vision of the 'better normal', supported by six pillars mapping significant areas for change to achieve this overarching vision.

Once our collective visions were formed, we wanted to validate them with girls and young women around the world (aged between 10 and 24). In order to do this, we developed two approaches:

1. An online interactive platform
  - Accessible globally and available in English, French, Spanish and Vietnamese
  - Also created as a Survey Monkey
2. Deep dive visioning focus group workshops
  - Designed and delivered by the youth leaders in Australia
  - Offline Workbooks were used in Viet Nam to reach people who did not have internet connectivity

These approaches enabled us to go out into the world and collect the thoughts, ideas and visions for the 'better normal' – asking what resonates? Is there anything missing? How would you like to see this enacted in your community? What are your top priorities?

## Design and Deliver

The data collected was then analysed by us all, to understand the global level of support for our vision statements, as well as girls' and young women's additional ideas for this 'better normal'. This data, alongside a literature review and policy analysis carried out by Plan International, was then utilised to **design** and produce policy recommendations for each of the visions.

We then created a report group and a campaign group to look at how we could **deliver** our findings to the world!

## Limitations

The limitations of this research were largely due to COVID-19 restrictions and the inequalities inherent in this pandemic. The majority of the data was collected online, thus the reach of the research was determined by levels of connectivity. The gender digital divide was therefore an important consideration. The use of offline data collection in Viet Nam, through the workbook versions of the validation activity, was implemented in an attempt to reduce this limitation. Additionally, the online nature of the validation surveys means it is possible that other family members or friends who were not our target audience may have completed the survey. We included a margin of error for this, however it is important to note that it is possible that some non-adolescent or young women responses are included.

## Child and youth safeguarding

Conducting youth-led, feminist participatory action research is strongly aligned with Plan International's guiding principles for child protection, programming and advocacy in the best interests of the child, and gender transformative programming and influencing.

A comprehensive risk assessment was completed for each stage of the research process, ensuring both the youth leaders' and broader group of research participants' safety, wellbeing and empowerment.

Informed and ongoing consent is an extremely important element of safeguarding. All youth leaders had a clear understanding of the research process and protocols, and were involved and/or briefed on all decisions and steps. Through each touch point with the research participants, the objectives and uses of the research data were made clear. For those participants under 18, parental/guardian consent was acquired.

Clear referral pathways were also communicated throughout the research. External support organisations were detailed, and/or the participants had the ability to contact the Child Safeguarding Focal Point at Plan International Australia.

In addition, the youth leaders received facilitation training in preparation for conducting peer focus group discussions. This training aided a deep understanding of safeguarding for children and young people – how to create safer spaces, ensure participants felt empowered during their involvement and communicating clear processes for referral.

# APPENDIX II: COUNTRY ANALYSIS

Together we, 22 young leaders from Australia and Viet Nam, co-led this research project with Plan International. Initially we were going to focus on our two countries, however we quickly decided we wanted to see whether our visions for a 'better normal' resonated with girls and young women from across the world.

Given we received a high number of responses from both these countries (in part thanks to our networks and connections), we think it is important to provide an in-depth overview of the findings from each country, alongside our related insights.

## AUSTRALIA

Australian girls and young women could respond to our vision through one of two ways; either completing the online survey (444), or attending a focus group discussion facilitated by the Australian youth leaders (16). In total, we reached 460 girls and young women across the country, including representation across all states and territories and metro, regional, rural and remote areas.<sup>23</sup>

Below is our vision statement, which came about through our dreaming of what the new normal could look like. Read our overarching statement first, then the expanded thematic statements. Let's build a collective vision together. We want to amplify your voices - let us know how you feel about the statements, if you think anything needs to be added, and also how you might want to see this vision implemented within your community! **Note that you only need to type answers where relevant.**

**We envision a world in which everyone constantly strives to create the best world possible. A world where everyone feels valued and heard, and free to do what they love. A world surrounded by kindness, peace, opportunity and acceptance for each other, with equality in leadership and the protection of rights. A transformation of the way society works to truly co-exist with the Earth, leaving an equitable and hopeful place for the generations to come.**

A snapshot of our online survey, which we co-designed and illustrated.

## Appreciations and challenges

In the 'discovery' activity, three key themes emerged from the additional suggestions from Australian girls and young women:

### 1. More inclusive and representative media, plus online safety

"Arts and film is another area as well - BIPOC and women still fave [sic] huge barriers in this industry and it's not taken seriously as a legitimate need in society."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

"Maybe consider the use of media, in which whilst it promotes communication, news reports, and sharing photos, it may also prove harmful with many pedophiles having easy access and communication to young girls' messages."

**Girl, 15-19, Australia**

### 2. Anti-racism and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ young people

"[Another] problem would be to take bullying of POC and people of different genders more seriously."

**Girl, 10-14, Australia**

"I would also like to see trans and non binary people accepted more in the mainstream, and to not be excluded from professions or experiences."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

### 3. Equity and inclusion in accessing services to leave no one behind

"Ensuring people in rural and regional areas are not forgotten and have access to all the same services as people from the city - from DV resources to abortion services."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

"From the mapping exercises, I feel it would be an important problem to tackle would be to give young women and children more access to mental health services, make it normalised [sic] and without guilt."

**Girl, 10-14, Australia**

"Healthcare is not accessible in many places due to remoteness or financial difficulties, and problems with prioritising [sic] careers over personal health due to the need for money"

**Girl, 15-19, Australia**

"Ensuring that regional and rural women and girls are not left behind - particularly BIPOC and LGBTQIA+."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

## Our vision

Our vision for a better normal received a positive response from Australian participants.

# 73%

selected the 'Love this!' option when responding to the overall vision for a better normal. This was the top selected option across each of the age groups.

## Our priorities

For Australian girls and young women, the main notable difference to the global priorities was the reversal of the top and bottom priority pillars, with 'climate justice' the number one in Australia.

For those who selected their top three priorities from the six pillars, 'inclusivity and equality in power', 'protection of rights and access to resources' and 'gender justice' were all closely grouped together as the next band of priorities, followed by 'educated citizens of the world' and 'freedom to be human'.

## 1. CLIMATE JUSTICE: 67%

The plea linked to climate justice was clear: "This planet is our only home."

**Girl, 15-19, Australia**

Australian girls and young women want Australian politicians and companies to take climate change seriously, and to take urgent and ambitious climate action.

They also want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' knowledge of and connection to the land and waterways to be acknowledged and integrated into climate responses.

"Indigenous peoples regain their position as stewards of the land, and be prioritised [sic] as experts of the land. Additionally, I think it is important in Australia to be bringing more native species into the mainstream as a more sustainable and nutritious food source."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

## 2. INCLUSIVITY AND EQUALITY IN POWER: 55%

92% strongly agreed with 'Inclusivity and equality in power' as a priority. They were very clear on the two main actions they want to see taken:

1. Intentional actions towards inclusion, including quotas
2. Breaking up the 'boys club'

"I want to see a path to be involved in politics which does include "paying your dues" as a cover for silenced voices on policy debates, long hours and poor pay."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

## 3. PROTECTION OF RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES: 55%

"I want to hear the voices of those who have had their rights compromised at the decision making table, and policy capturing experience not just statistics."

**Young woman, 20-24, Australia**

## 4. GENDER JUSTICE: 52%

"...even though this will take a lot of time, it will be worth it"

**Adolescent aged 15 - 19 in Australia**

Australian girls and young women highlighted four main themes related to this vision:

1. Respect and equality
2. Safety
3. Breaking free from gender norms
4. Ending everyday sexism

## 5. EDUCATED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD: 46%

The three key themes to emerge from Australian girls and young women responding to this vision pillar were:

1. Decolonising the curriculum
2. Ensuring youth voice is part of curriculum development and education decision making
3. Inclusive, accessible and quality education, to ensure no student is left behind

“Freedom of students being heard and their voices being used in a school system to make it better for everyone.”

**Girl, 10-14, Australia**



Youth activist at a climate strike in Melbourne, Australia in September 2019

## 6. FREEDOM TO BE HUMAN: 30%

Australian girls and young women focused on two main areas related to this vision:

1. Mental Health and
2. Ending discrimination

“...I feel [like] an important problem to tackle would be to give young women and children more access to mental health services, make it normalised and without guilt. A second problem would be to [tackle the] bullying of [people of colour] and people of different genders more seriously”

**Adolescent aged 10-14 in Australia**

## VIET NAM

Girls and young women from Viet Nam could respond to our vision through one of three ways; completing the online survey (46), responding to the survey monkey version of the online survey (52), or completing a Word document version of the survey (workbook) (39). This additional option was important to be able to reach girls and young women in rural areas and places without internet connections. In total, we reached 137 girls and young women across the country, with two thirds (68%) providing in-depth responses.

### Appreciations and challenges

In the ‘discovery’ activity, two clear calls emerged:

1. **For children and young people’s voice to be heard and listened to.**

“A world where children’s opinions are not underestimated.”

**Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam**

1. **For high quality, inclusive and accessible education.**

“Children can go to schools with the right facilities, where none of them have to quit studying to work on the fields or get into early marriage.”

**Girl, 10-14, Viet Nam**

### Our vision

Our vision for a better normal received a positive response from Vietnamese participants.

# 75%

selected the ‘Love this!’ or ‘I could get on board with this’ option when responding to the overall vision for a better normal. Girls aged 15-19 showed the highest level of agreement with the vision statement.

## 1. GENDER JUSTICE: 72%

The overriding theme in response to this pillar was of equality and breaking down gender norms and responsibilities, in order to ensure there is no gender-based discrimination so everyone is free to access equal opportunities.

“Everyone shares the same responsibility without pre-determined roles.”

**Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam**

## 2. EDUCATED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD: 69%

Adolescents aged 10-14 in remote areas emphasized the importance of universal access to education to eradicate illiteracy, and a need to stop child labour and early marriage that interferes with schooling.

Overall, girls and young women want to see inclusive and accessible classrooms and teaching, with everyone treated equally and fairly.

## 3. CLIMATE JUSTICE: 56%

Girls and young women want to see more education on climate change in schools and communities, as well as traditional values and knowledge to be recognised.

“I wish that the traditional values of ethnic minorities are equally respected when it comes to living in harmony with nature”

**Girl, 10-14, Viet Nam**

## 4. FREEDOM TO BE HUMAN: 47%

This pillar attracted strong responses advocating for freedom of expression, individuality, and community support. Vietnamese girls and young women also described this dream world as a place full of love with no sexism and discrimination so that everyone could move forward hand in hand.

## 5. INCLUSIVITY AND EQUALITY IN POWER: 36%

The clear call from responses to this pillar were for youth voices to be heard, recognised and incorporated into policy responses to ensure programs, initiatives and responses are designed by experts and youth, for youth.

“When young people are involved in developing policies, the policy will be more complete when there are many policies suitable for young people.”

**Girl, 15-19, Viet Nam**



Youth co-researcher draws their vision for a better normal

## 6. PROTECTION OF RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES: 22%

Numerous respondents believed that local government bodies should be responsible for making resources accessible to everyone.

The issues of child, early and forced marriage and child labour were mentioned in several of the priority areas, including 'gender justice' and 'educated citizens of the world,' as well as this pillar, which reflects the centrality of these issues to young women and girls.

“Children can go to school, cared for with clothes and food, without fear of having to drop out to work on fields or get into early marriage.”

**Girl, 10-14, Viet Nam**



Two Champions of Change in Hanoi, who are advocates for girls' rights and gender equality

- 1 There are a number of sources that helped us shape our own appreciative inquiry approach, with particular thanks and reference to Sustaining Community, viewed at: <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2013/11/21/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/>
- 2 There was also a Survey Monkey version of this platform.
- 3 First Nations refers to groups of Indigenous peoples, particularly in Canada and the USA, and is increasingly used in Australia and other countries.
- 4 Roy, A. (2020). 'The pandemic is a portal', Financial Times 4 April 2020, viewed online at <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>
- 5 UNICEF global databases (2018) based on DHS, MICS and other national surveys, 2010-2017.
- 6 UNICEF (2014). *A Statistical Snapshot of Violence against Adolescent Girls*, New York, p.1
- 7 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2018), *One in Five Children, Adolescents and Youth is Out of School*, p.2
- 8 WHO (2016). *Global health estimates 2015: deaths by cause, age, sex, by country and by region, 2000–2015*. Geneva: WHO.
- 9 Equal Measures 2030 (2019). *2019 SDG Gender Index*, viewed online at <https://data.em2030.org/em2030-sdg-gender-index/>
- 10 UNFPA (2020). 'Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage', *Interim Technical Note*, viewed online at [www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19\\_impact\\_brief\\_for\\_UNFPA\\_24\\_April\\_2020\\_1.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf)
- 11 Plan International (2020). 'COVID-19: The Impact on Girls', *Influencing Brief*, viewed online at <https://plan-international.org/publications/covid-19-impact-girls>
- 12 UNESCO (2020). 'Covid-19 school closures around the world will hit girls hardest', 31 March 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest>
- 13 These areas were identified by Plan International as key areas impacting on girls and young women, and validated by the youth research team.
- 14 This was originally simply 'other', and through both the original workshops with the research team, and the subsequent validation through the online survey and focus group discussions, it became clear that all the 'other' examples could be categorized as 'systems breakdown'.
- 15 It is important to note that some girls and young women commented on challenges that contrasted the appreciations, for instance that public spaces might not necessarily be safer for young women and girls when there are less people, and that this lack of safety is still present in the new online spaces they engage in, as proper security measures haven't been implemented. The reasons some have experienced a positive change in this space, while others haven't, demonstrates the need for more equitable progress.
- 16 1,060 took the action of visiting the website, including an error margin to account for people outside the target audience.
- 17 720 (68%) across 34 countries took the action to visit the website, and stayed on a session long enough to read through the visions. We realised during the period the online validation tool was open that not everyone was hitting 'submit', which meant their responses were not recorded, so we felt it important to include those who took the time to read through our work. Further, a number of these emailed us asking to remain engaged in the project, so we are able to say with confidence that those who spent time on the page were highly engaged with the visions. We nonetheless applied an error margin to count for anyone who may have been over 25 years of age, male identifying, or simply navigated away from the page because the visions did not resonate with them.
- 18 'Deep dive responses' refers to those who ranked their levels of agreement with the vision(s), and/or provided open field text in the 'anything missing?' text boxes and the 'what would this look like in your community?' boxes under each pillar.
- 19 As part of the 'Design' workshops, we looked at Plan International's policy positions, a literature review that assessed new and emerging ideas for a 'better normal', and the responses we received through the survey. Given the intersecting nature of the pillars, we grouped them by key outcome rather than by the pillar themes.
- 20 Climate for Change, 'Your guide to climate news and action in under two minutes'. Email sent 17 July 2020.
- 21 FPA, 'Relationships and Sex Education: What's changing?', viewed 22 July 2020 at <https://www.fpa.org.uk/news/relationships-and-sex-education-what%E2%80%99s-changing>
- 22 Canadian Government, 'Canada's Youth Policy', viewed online at <https://www.canada.ca/en/youth/programs/policy.html>
- 23 50 of these girls and young women (10%) provided in-depth answers to the survey questions. This is in line with international best practice related to strong levels of survey engagement. The rest indicated their top line validation of our vision.

Thanks to all the adolescent girls and young women in all their diversities, who gave their time to participate in workshops, respond to the online survey or complete the workbook. Thanks also to all the youth networks and organisations who shared the validation tools far and wide. It's been amazing seeing the global reach and being able to represent global youth voices!

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## Photos

Cover page photo : Youth activists at a climate strike in Melbourne, Australia in September 2019

All photos © Plan International

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Our pre-COVID-19 world undeniably failed girls and young women, in all their diversities. It failed to protect them, empower them, and it failed to listen to them.

These failures have been exacerbated by the global pandemic. This report shows young people know this. But they also know what a better world looks like.

Here we share our dreams for a better normal.

This is by and for girls everywhere, and is directed at power holders. We believe you should hear us, because to transform a world you must listen to those whom the last world did not consider. We invite you to join us in co-creating this new reality.

## About Plan International Australia

### WE HAVE A DREAM. SHE HAS A PLAN.

Put simply, we're the charity for girls' equality. We tackle the root causes of poverty, support communities through crisis, campaign for gender equality, and help governments do what's right for children and particularly for girls. We believe a better world is possible. An equal world; a world where all children can live happy and healthy lives, and where girls can take their rightful place as equals.

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