

Child sponsorship through
COVID-19

We're the charity for girls' equality.
But what about boys?

Ending child trafficking

UBUNTU

The Magazine of Plan International Australia

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SHE HAS A PLAN.



PLAN
INTERNATIONAL

The charity for
girls' equality

From the CEO

Hello there!

It's an overused phrase at the moment, but I really do hope that issue #4 of Ubuntu finds you well.

This issue comes at the tail end of a very difficult year for humanity — the COVID-19 pandemic has been nothing short of life-changing — but I'm hopeful that we are nearing the other side.

Plan International has been around for more than 80 years. In that time, we've made incredible strides when it comes to progressing the rights of children and especially girls, but it isn't something we've achieved alone. It has all been possible because we've had people like you standing with us.

COVID-19 has threatened to undo much of the progress the world has made in recent decades in combatting poverty, increasing equality and securing human rights. But thanks to people like you, standing alongside us and alongside the world's most vulnerable, we have been able to forge ahead, carry out our global emergency response to the pandemic (you'll find an update on pg. 5) and continue many of our other critical programs.

On behalf of the Plan International Australia team, and from the most sincere place, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your support. Amidst the challenges of 2020, I've observed a spirit of hope and community like never before. And while all our lives have been altered by the pandemic, the one thing that hasn't changed is this community's commitment to protecting the rights of girls and creating a more equal world for all.

There is still much uncertainty around what the 'other side' will look like and the pandemic has both highlighted, and deepened, the inequalities that existed in our pre-COVID-19 world. But from this new vantage point, we now have a unique opportunity to reimagine our world. Not just for ourselves, but for all of humanity.

It sounds like a daunting task, doesn't it? But who better to imagine this new future than 'the future' — I am of course talking about young people.

'A Better Normal: Girls call for a revolutionary reset' is the youth-led research report we launched in August and presented to the UN General Assembly in September. Written by

Plan International Youth Leaders in Australia and Vietnam, it draws on the views of girls and young women from around the world, presents their vision for a better world, and urges power holders everywhere to hear their calls for change and join young women and girls in co-creating a 'better normal'.

You'll hear more about this inspiring research from Dominique, one of our youth activists on pg. 17, and I hope you find their vision for the future as energising as I do.

With all this talk about the importance of amplifying girls' voices and girls' rights, you might be wondering about the place of boys in our work. In fact, 'what about boys?' was a question we received a number of times in response to our supporter survey back in February. I want to take this opportunity to assure you that boys are still very much a part of Plan International's work.

This is why we've included a special article on pg. 11 dedicated to answering all of your 'what about boys?' questions. It explains how we tackle the inequalities largely faced by girls, by working with both boys and girls, for the benefit of everyone in the community. Because we know, from research and data and more than 80 years in the humanitarian space, that a better now for her means a better future for everyone.

I hope this issue of Ubuntu is a powerful reminder of the incredible work you've made possible in the middle of a global pandemic, and I hope the optimistic and visionary thinking of our youth activists provides some comfort during these difficult times. I, for one, feel that with them the future of our world is truly in good hands.

Until next time,



Susanne Legena
CEO, Plan International Australia

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Find out more:

CHILD PROTECTION plan.org.au/privacy-policy/safeguarding-children-and-young-people-policy

FEEDBACK plan.org.au/privacy-policy/feedback-and-complaints

News



Through her daughter Zainab's involvement in a Plan International supported anti-FGM club, Kadiatu left her career as an FGM practitioner and has become an advocate like her daughter.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING OUR WORK TOWARDS ENDING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

Thanks to your generous support during our end-of-financial year appeal, we were able to raise more than **\$269,810!** This allows us to continue our work to end FGM and

ensure girls feel safe and in charge of their own bodies. Your support has a huge impact in protecting girls from anything that threatens that, including female genital mutilation.

REBUILDING BEIRUT

Since the explosion in Beirut on August 4th, Plan International has been working with our partners in Lebanon to respond to what is now a serious humanitarian crisis.

Thanks to our incredible supporters here in Australia, you've helped us raise \$69,000 towards the relief effort. Thanks to you, we've been able to distribute urgent food supplies to displaced families, set up child-safe spaces to protect children and reconnect missing children with their families. We've also been able to respond to the unique safety concerns facing girls, who we know are at an increased risk of violence and exploitation during emergencies.

Thank you for your support!



Plan International distributing relief aid to people in Beirut's Karantina district, the area closest to the blast.



Jeanette, 20, with her youngest child, 6-month-old Fistan, in Rwanda.

GIFTS OF HOPE

Gifts of Hope represent true change for girls, their families and their communities. By choosing a Gift of Hope, you're not just giving a heartfelt gift to a loved one – you're helping create a world where all children can thrive, and girls can take their rightful place as equals.

COVID-19 has upended the lives of millions, and stopping the spread of the virus has become an integral part of our work. Our new Gifts To End COVID-19 demonstrate the many ways in which we're working to protect girls, health workers and marginalised communities from COVID-19 and address the

unique ways the pandemic impacts girls specifically.

Our COVID-19 Defence Kit includes soap, hand sanitizer, wipes, temperature sensors, masks, and public-health information, and costs as little as \$55.

Head to planau.me/giftsofhope to check out the Gifts of Hope catalogue. Place your order online, or by calling 13 75 26, and we'll send you a lovely card for you to personalise and send on as a gift.

Please order by 4th of December to ensure your gifts arrive in time for Christmas.

FUNDRAISING FOR GIRLS, TREK OR NO TREK

In recent years, we've invited some of our most dedicated and adventure-loving supporters to join us on our Trek for Girls experience. Trek participants get to travel with purpose, taking on a hiking challenge, visiting one of our projects and immersing themselves in the local culture, all while helping to raise vital funds for girls!

We were disappointed that this year's Trek for Girls to Vietnam had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, but we want to take this opportunity to thank all of the incredible supporters who registered. Together they raised an incredible \$14,789, and although the trek couldn't go ahead, their efforts and contribution was still able to have a huge impact for girls and their communities around the globe.

It is still unclear when Trek for Girls will be able to resume, but watch this space!



SAY HELLO TO OUR NEWEST AMBASSADOR, YASMIN POOLE!

We are thrilled to welcome youth advocate and proud intersectional feminist, Yasmin Poole, as our newest ambassador!

Her journey with Plan International began in 2018, when she worked alongside our youth activists to advocate for gender equality with Australian parliamentarians. Yasmin is now among the Australian Financial Review's (AFR) Top 100 Most Influential Women. Focusing on the power of youth and why diversity is necessary to ignite social change, she is a strong voice for the rights of young people and equality for girls. Welcome Yasmin!

“One of the best things about Plan International is that it centres the voices of young women. In society, young women remain under-represented and often unheard. There's a lot of power in recognising these stories and giving youth the space to consider what they want to see changed. That sense of agency creates leadership. It's the first real step to creating a world where young women at the decision-making table is the norm and not the exception.”

“ One of the best things about Plan International is that it centres the voices of young women.”

An update on our pandemic response



A member of the MJ Enterprise team wearing one of the masks they manufacture.

When Plan International declared COVID-19 a red-level emergency in April, there was an urgent need to pivot all of our programs to align with our global humanitarian response.

Here in Australia, despite grappling with the pandemic ourselves, our incredible community of supporters mobilised when we launched an appeal earlier in the year. Thanks to your generosity we raised an incredible \$364,000!

While the impact of this pandemic has been global, for children and families living in vulnerable communities around the world – be it refugee camps, remote regions of Asia and the Pacific or food-insecure countries in southern Africa – the effects of COVID-19 have the potential to be catastrophic.

Having responded to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014,

Plan International was expertly placed to respond to a public-health emergency like COVID-19, we drew on these experiences to develop and strengthen our response to the pandemic.

Your donations have been vital in supporting Plan International's emergency response in the places where we work, and through a coordinated multi-country approach, we've been working with communities, governments and partners to:

- tackle the spread of the virus through disseminating public health information

- promote best hygiene practices and increase water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming
- assist communities to install hand-washing facilities
- scale up our food and nutrition programs
- support and protect those directly affected in refugee and displaced-persons camps in Bangladesh and Southern and Eastern Africa
- step up child-protection measures to ensure children and their families are supported and prepared to deal with the social and economic impacts of the crisis.

Your support during this time has allowed Plan International to pivot our programs, and respond to the COVID-19 crisis as it unfolded.

In Uganda, young women in our Safer Cities 4 Girls program have been developing new ways to raise awareness on the increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV) in lockdown. They're also

distributing sanitary products and hygiene kits, and helping survivors of GBV access the medical and psychosocial support they need.

As part of our COVID-19 response in Bangladesh, Plan International has been providing cash transfers to families of sponsored children in Rangpur, Barisal and Dhaka, along with informative leaflets about COVID-19 and how to prevent its spread.

Through our Urban Resilience programs in Myanmar, the Philippines and Indonesia, we've been distributing hand sanitiser, gloves and facemasks to health care staff, setting up hand-washing stations in public spaces, and providing online training to young people on COVID-19 prevention.

In the Solomon Islands, together with our local partner Live & Learn Environmental Education, we've implemented our New Times, New Targets WASH project across 22 schools in West Guadalcanal Province and in 73 villages in Isabel Province.

In normal circumstances, this project helps schools review their existing WASH status and develop action plans for the improvement of WASH facilities and activities.



A mother and daughter wait for their cash transfer at a school in Bangladesh.

To respond to the pandemic risks here, we disseminated COVID-19 prevention information to schools and communities, and built hand-washing facilities to promote good hygiene behaviors.

And through our Water for Women project we supported Solomon Islands social enterprise and project

partner, MJ Enterprise, to add reusable face masks to its sanitary pad manufacturing business. According to MJ Enterprise founder, Mary Ramosaea, "the facemask business is flourishing", providing work for the female staff-base amid the COVID-19 pandemic, while responding to national shortages in personal protective equipment (PPE).



A girl washes her hands at a school in the Solomon Islands.

COVID-19 has set us all back in countless ways. But for girls in crisis across the world, it's unravelling decades of progress. But your support is helping us to stop the setback.

Thanks to you, we're working to get girls back into school and to support their education through distance learning. We're providing essential health services to girls, and helping the most vulnerable to access basic hygiene. And we're working to protect children from violence and prevent child marriage – two threats we know increase in times of acute stress.

You are the reason we can continue to deliver this important work, and we thank you for always standing with us, especially during these challenging times.



The New Times, New Targets Project is an Australian Aid initiative implemented by Plan International Australia in partnership with Live & Learn Environmental Education on behalf of the Australian Government.

International Day of the Girl 2020

This International Day of the Girl (IDG), we joined girls around the globe as they called on social media companies to improve the ways they respond to reports of abuse and harassment, so that girls can feel safe and supported online.

Every year on October 11th, we shine a light on the unique challenges that girls face globally and celebrate their enormous potential to bring about change.

As the charity for girls' equality, Plan International played a significant role in the United Nation's introduction of International Day of the Girl in 2011 – the day was born from our campaign to see girls on the global agenda.

Online abuse is a serious issue. Every day, everywhere, girls are

physically threatened, racially abused, sexually harassed, and body shamed online. With COVID-19 driving lockdowns around the globe, girls are spending more time online, increasing the risk of online abuse and harassment.

In the week leading up to International Day of the Girl, we launched Plan International's groundbreaking Freedom Online research report. In what was the largest ever survey of its type, we spoke to 14,000 girls across 32

countries about their experiences online. We learnt that more than half have been harassed and abused on social media.

The social media platforms designed to connect us as a global community, are drastically failing girls and young women, and inadequate reporting mechanisms are allowing harmful abuse to slip through the cracks.

Online safety is a particular concern in the Pacific, which has seen a rapid expansion of mobile phone technology over the last decade.

Online Safety in the Pacific, a second report by Plan International Australia launched after IDG in collaboration with ChildFund Australia and Western Sydney University, found that the fear of online harm for girls is much higher than for boys in the Pacific, and a common response is for parents to block girls' access to the internet altogether.

These findings suggest a need for effective programs and strategies that can help children and parents to become informed and active global citizens in a digital world, while also being mindful of and skilled to deal with the risks. Rather than limiting girls' access to the internet because of their perceived vulnerability, solutions need to focus on making the online space safer for girls.

Girls, in all of their diversities, need to know that if they're abused and threatened online, they can report it. They need to know that they'll be listened to, that action will be taken, and that perpetrators will be held accountable.

And so, Youth Activists from around the globe penned an open letter to Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Twitter for International Day of the Girl, calling for these leading social media platforms to work with girls to create stronger reporting mechanisms for violence that meet girls' needs in a way that actually works for them.



Girl using a laptop at school in Cambodia.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL GOES GLOBAL

From webinars and panel discussions, to girls stepping into the roles of power-holders, October saw International Day of the Girl activities taking place around the globe.

In the Dominican Republic, 10-year-old Melany (pictured) stepped into the shoes of the President, and in Finland 16-year-old Aava took on the role of Prime Minister Sanna Marin.

In Cambodia, 17-year-old Mao took over the role of Plan International Country Director, taking part in a WASH-sector event. She also attended a program coordinator meeting and met with Plan International staff members.

And in Kenya, 18-year-old Mary took over the role of Kenyan Cabinet Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communications, and attended a press briefing where she spoke to various media organisations about our open letter to social media platforms to end online harassment.

She called on the government to tackle online harassment to ensure that girls and young women in Kenya are #FreeToBeOnline, and the Ministry committed to working on it.



Melany, 10, Dominican Republic

We were thrilled to see how well the report was received and the global media attention it attracted. Our report and campaign amplified girls' voices across leading TV stations, radio and publications, with our youth activists interviewed by the likes of The Guardian, ABC, SBS, and even making it to the front page of The Age in Australia. On an international level, The Freedom Online report received coverage from Al Jazeera, Forbes, Reuters and BBC.

Throughout the week we received strong support from our ambassadors, partners and sector friends with Benjamin Law, Yasmin Poole, Jan Fran, The Body Shop, CARE, IWDA, Respect Victoria, and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner all sharing our report and campaign across their platforms.

And in addition to our wonderful youth activists and ambassadors, we also received support from a number of high-profile figures who shared the campaign with their networks

through social media, including Ginger Gorman, Jamila Rizvi, Kaz Cooke, Yassmin Abdel-Magied, Jaguar Jonze, Sam Royce and Masterchef Judge Melissa Leong.

Members of Parliament (MPs) also showed their support, among them Penny Wong, Kristina Keneally, Tanya Plibersek, Larissa Waters and Mary-Anne Thomas.

Since the launch of our research into girls' experiences of online abuse and harassment, almost 3,000 Australians and 45,000 people globally have signed the open letter to social media companies. Some of the world's most popular platforms have responded by agreeing to work with girls around the world to address online harassment!

Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp have agreed to work with us and have direct conversations with girl activists through a series of listening sessions. This is an opportunity for girls and young women, in all their diversity, to share their experiences, and for social media companies

to learn how they can better support girls on their platform.

And together with our youth activists, we've also started conversations with TikTok and Twitter, and have met with eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, and Australia's Ambassador for Gender Equality, Julie-Ann Guivarra.

These are huge steps towards making social media platforms safe spaces where girls are free to express themselves without fear. But it's not the end of the work – it's crucial that these listening sessions are followed by real commitments to improve reporting mechanisms.

With your support, there is a chance of real, significant changes to make our online spaces safer for everyone. Sign the open letter now, to stand with girls against online harassment and abuse: plan.org.au/free-to-be-online

Ending child trafficking

We're working to end child trafficking, and support survivors to reclaim their lives.

Child trafficking is a silent epidemic, deeply rooted in societies where globalization, poverty, political instability and conflict are present. It's happening on a global scale and it's often hidden behind false promises of employment and the opportunity of a better future.

UNICEF estimates that 1.8 million children are sex trafficked every year — the vast majority are girls.

Girls from vulnerable communities and families are easy prey for traffickers and predators. Though not unheard of, it's very rare for parents to seek out traffickers and sell their daughters for financial reasons. They are almost always targeted and deceived with promises of a better life for their children.

Once in the hands of traffickers, girls and young women are abused and exploited for labour and sex. They are robbed of their rights and denied the opportunity to choose their own future. It's gender-based violence in action.

Plan International is working with communities, leaders and governments around the globe to prevent and ultimately put an end to trafficking, so that girls and young women can have the freedom and safety they rightly deserve.

In places like Cambodia and Myanmar, our child-protection programs work to strengthen community-based responses and reporting mechanisms, and to identify child trafficking risks.

We support students to identify if they or their friends are at risk of being trafficked or exploited. And we work with governments to enforce laws and protocols that protect children from trafficking and punish offenders.

In the Philippines, we're working with partners in the technology field to make the internet a safer place for children, and with the upsurge of internet and mobile phone usage in the Pacific, we're teaching children how to identify signs of online grooming and exploitation.

OpenCRVS, the ground-breaking open-source civil registration software we developed, is another preventative tool that helps to protect girls and young women from trafficking. By registering children's birth dates through OpenCRVS, children are provided with legal documentation that proves their age and their parents' identities, which can protect them from traffickers who often pretend to be parents or caregivers when transporting children across borders.

Survivors of trafficking need support too, so we're working with local partners to provide rehabilitation and psychosocial support, and connect girls with education and employment opportunities so they can begin to reclaim their lives and their futures.

Every child deserves safety and security, and the freedom to pursue their dreams. Your support can help put an end to the traumatising crime of child trafficking and empower girls all over the world to reclaim their life stories. Donate to our Christmas Appeal now at planau.me/stop-trafficking

MEET SARITA, THE 15-YEAR-OLD CAMPAIGNING TO STOP CHILD TRAFFICKING

The youngest of eight sisters, Sarita is 15 years old and lives in Nepal. She became involved with Plan International after joining a campaigning program to end trafficking.

"I got involved in the program because I've always wanted to prove my capacity to the community and to other children. From the core of my heart, I've always wanted to do something to stop child trafficking."

"Whenever I hear about girls being trafficked, it makes me feel sad. Children are not only the future of our country, but they are the present too. When they are trafficked, I fear my country may never be able to develop or flourish."

"Since being involved in this campaign I have participated in various training sessions on anti-trafficking, child rights and human trafficking. I have given training to many parents and children."

“

I got involved in the program because I've always wanted to prove my capacity to the community and to other children. From the core of my heart, I've always wanted to do something to stop child trafficking.”

Sarita, 15, Nepal.

"I have been involved in awareness-raising programs in the community. I also share my knowledge and learnings in my adolescent girls' group. From that group I have participated in street dramas as well."

"The workshops with parents help them understand there is a risk in trusting unknown people. There are many people who come to take advantage of people's poverty, bad people who lure them for a good job. This campaign has helped parents to understand this."

"The campaign has also helped children and girls to understand what they should do if they are targeted for trafficking and how they can save themselves from this."

"Child trafficking is a denial of their rights. That's why I would like to ask everyone to come together to help stop child trafficking. Our country can only develop and flourish to the fullest if child trafficking is stopped."



We're the charity for girls' equality – but what about boys?

You may have noticed that over the last few years, Plan International has honed its focus on girls' rights, alongside our broader work for child rights. And at times, it may have raised a few questions for you – has Plan International changed? Has this affected the programs you support? And what does this all mean for boys?

In 2019, thanks to the generous support of donors like you, Plan International impacted the lives of approximately 22 million girls and 19 million boys – that's over 40 million children around the globe.

Our mission is to advance the rights of all children, and to achieve equality for girls. We believe a better world is possible. An equal world, one where all children can live happy and healthy lives, and where girls can thrive. And this is the world you are helping us create.

We aim to take a holistic approach in all of our programming, so we can create the most impact for everyone.

Take Plan International's School Feeding program in Cambodia for example; we know that when there are food shortages, girls are often the ones that miss out, or are fed least and last.

Then, too weak and unwell to attend school, they either miss class or are pulled out of school altogether to help with domestic chores while their parents work to scrape enough money together for food. Boys' education, on the other hand, is often prioritised.

Through the School Feeding program, Plan International provides free meals for all students. We do not discriminate based on gender – but because girls face greater barriers to education, the impact of the program ultimately makes the greatest difference to their chances of staying in school during food shortages.

We are the charity for girls' equality but our work encompasses the whole community.

Not only do our programs work directly with boys and girls,

providing access to services that support them through emergencies, conflicts, poverty, violence, abuse, or exploitation – our programs also help to create healthier attitudes and understanding, and to challenge the gender norms that hold everyone back.

We work to bring about change in the way communities view women and girls; in how men and women relate to one another; and to encourage all people to challenge the gender stereotypes and inequalities that prevent them from realising their full potential.

Gender inequality may disproportionately affect women and girls, but it also directly impacts men and boys. No boy should feel he has to live up to a certain image or behaviour, to fulfil the stereotype of what it means to be a man.

OUR COMMITMENT TO GIRLS IS NEVER TO THE EXCLUSION OF BOYS OR MEN. IN FACT, IT'S THE VERY OPPOSITE.

Our work is challenging norms so that everyone is able to pursue their dreams and reach their full potential, regardless of their gender.

Through this approach, the boys and men in our programs don't just understand gender equality as a way to improve the lives of women and girls in their family and communities – they understand that gender equality has positive impacts for them too.

The social norms that discourage men from expressing attitudes or pursuing opportunities that are traditionally viewed as 'feminine', are ultimately harmful to their wellbeing. These norms can also discourage fathers from taking an active role in childcare, and this undermines their ability to develop positive family relationships. Men

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DIVERSE RANGE OF GENDER IDENTITIES AND SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS?

We know that people can experience exclusion and discrimination from multiple factors such as their gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity and age. This is particularly the case, when a person does not fit into the dominant identity groups in society, which can then impact on how they interact with others and how they are perceived in society. **This is why our gender and inclusion work has the wellbeing of all people in mind.**

Lamboud (9) and Duam (11) write a story together at the children's literacy club



HOW YOUR SUPPORT TRANSFORMS COMMUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND FOR BOYS

You might recognise Lamboud and Duam from the survey we sent out earlier this year.

The two siblings are part of the ethnic Khmu community living in the mountains of Laos. As these children don't grow up speaking the Lao language, many in the Khmu community are eventually forced to drop out of Lao-speaking schools. According to Duam, girls also face additional barriers to education.

"Before Plan International arrived in our community, it was different between girls and boys. Teachers were quite focused on boys and they were chosen over girls to do anything at school. I feel that boys are still given more priority than girls in education and social activities. This is sad to me," says Duam.

Since then, life has changed for Lamboud and Duam. Plan International's Children's Literacy Boost program

provides after-school activities for children to improve their Lao language literacy, using storytelling, games, songs and reading. The program also places a huge emphasis on getting girls involved and encouraging boys to view them as equals.

"In the beginning, the other girls and I were too shy to join in with the activities and the boys were always more forward than us..." explains Lamboud. "Now, I feel more confident to join in and sometimes even lead the activities. I have learnt that girls can do the same things as boys if we have the opportunity to achieve our potential."

Lamboud and her brother are both committed to furthering their education, and have a shared dream of using their newfound love of the Lao language to become teachers.

These siblings represent more than the power of education. They show the ways in which your support can teach children that they are all equal, benefiting everyone in the community.

can also be discouraged from expressing emotional vulnerability for fear of appearing 'unmanly' – which can be an isolating experience that compromises their mental health. This is why we're committed to improving the lives of men and boys by supporting them to re-imagine what it means to be a man, so they have every opportunity to reach their full potential.

This kind of programming is complex, but its goal is to create

gender equality for all people around the world. One of the most effective ways to achieve this goal is by addressing the unique barriers and challenges that prevent girls and women from reaching their full potential – and the positive roll-on effects from this have the potential to impact all aspects of international development.

Girls and young women deserve equality in their own right, so they can achieve their full potential.

And when girls are educated, empowered and supported, their entire family and community also benefits, including men and boys. Because a better now for her, means a better future for everyone.

Girls take the lead during COVID-19

Despite being among the hardest hit by COVID-19, girls and young women continue to redefine leadership and strive for a more gender-just world.

Since lockdowns were enforced around the globe to combat the spread of COVID-19, girls and young women have been faced with intensifying risks of violence, abuse and exploitation, particularly in the home.

The everyday inequalities they face have been magnified by the pandemic, however that hasn't stopped girls and young women from being leaders

in the recovery process, and empowering others along the way.

We'd like to introduce you to just a couple of girls Plan International works with, who are leading their communities through the pandemic.

FIGHTING COVID-19 AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Not only are the Guinea Girl Leaders Club supplying their

communities with hygiene kits and information on keeping safe during the pandemic, they are also fighting gender-based violence.

Recognising that misinformation can fuel panic, Fanta and her peers have taken to social media to create a platform of resources on COVID-19 that are accessible and easy to understand.

It was important to Fanta that they use the platform to raise awareness about the secondary gendered impacts of the pandemic too, such as the increased risk of domestic violence and child marriage. And by sharing this information, Fanta has helped stop child marriages in her community, "Sometimes we are criticised," she says, "but there are more people who encourage us than those who are against us."



Fanta and fellow girls' club members.

BECAUSE WE MATTER

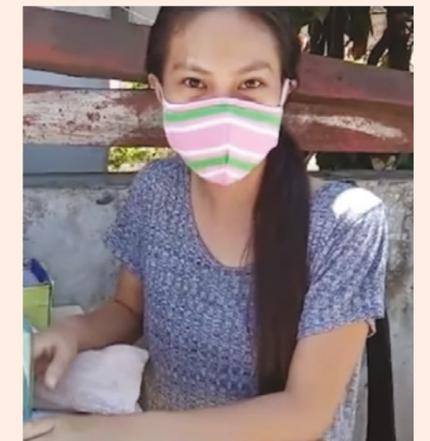
The *Because We Matter* report recommends five key areas of action for governments and regional leaders in the Asia-Pacific region, including:

- Ensuring COVID-19 responses do not compromise or reduce investments in girls' rights
- Preventing the escalation of harmful gender norms
- Ensuring the protection of girls and young women is centred in COVID-19 responses
- Upholding protection services and ensuring there are clear ways to report violence
- Including girls and young women in decision-making processes



As a girl leader I want to show girls and young women that our capabilities are unlimited”

Raquel, 21, Philippines.



SUPPORTING GIRLS WHO FACE THE BURDEN OF DOMESTIC DUTIES DURING LOCKDOWN

Quarantine orders have closed schools and forced many activities to stop. While this is to ensure the safety of children and teachers, for some this also means the increased burden of unpaid and domestic work. This is the case for many girls and young women in the community where Raquel lives in the Philippines.

Noting the gendered impacts of the pandemic, Girls Get Equal leader, Raquel, has been using her platform as a Youth Council Member to frequently meet with girls in her community and offer support for their needs.

“As a girl leader I want to show girls and young women that our capabilities are unlimited,” says Raquel, who also serves her community on the frontline as a checkpoint officer.

While girls like Fanta and Raquel are finding ways to combat the inequalities that girls in their communities are facing during the pandemic, they can't do it alone.

Research from Plan International's latest collaborative report with Save the Children, *Because We Matter*, revealed that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, exposing millions of girls around the globe to the risk of violence, abuse and exploitation during the lockdown and periods of movement restrictions.

The data shows that violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence has intensified during this time. This is why, together with Save the Children, Plan International are calling on leaders and governments to take immediate and decisive action to protect girls and young women.

When girls are empowered to know their rights and lead, they are capable of great things, but they also need the support of leaders and governments to truly enact change around gender inequality.

Child Sponsorship during COVID-19

Right now COVID-19 is the single greatest threat to children’s rights and equality for girls, in both its scale and its severity. That’s why every single one of Plan International’s programs has pivoted to meet the needs of the communities we work with at this time. So what does this mean for the child you sponsor?

Although the necessary restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have meant we are unable to deliver our usual sponsorship programs, the funds from these programs are being redirected to our COVID-19 response, ensuring your sponsored child and their community continues to be supported through this time.

In the same way that our sponsorship model usually functions, rather than financial support going directly to a sponsored child, your contributions are combined with those of other caring sponsors and institutional donors, to provide a steady stream

of funding to all the countries and communities where Plan International works.

Your support also helps us to secure large grants from institutional donors to multiply your contribution and reach many more children, families, and communities.

Our COVID-19 response consists of a number of activities, all aimed at halting the spread of the virus and ensuring the health, safety, rights and wellbeing of children and their families are upheld.

In communities where we already work, we’re training local health staff and raising awareness about

COVID-19 prevention amongst children and their families.

As well as distributing hand washing kits and making sure communities have access to clean water, we’re providing health, hygiene and psychosocial resources that are age and gender appropriate, to keep everyone healthy and safe.

We’re also supporting parents to feed their families by distributing food packages and cash grants, and educating families about the increased risks of domestic violence, gender-based violence, and early or forced marriage during a crisis.

And together with ministries of education, we’re finding innovative ways to support girls to undertake distance education. In the Asia Pacific region alone, more than 153,000 children have been engaged in distance learning with Plan International’s assistance.

These are just some examples of how we’re continuing to work in sponsorship communities during this global health emergency, and as a Plan International supporter, you are instrumental in delivering this vital work.



▲ Like many other girls in Sierra Leone, 15-year-old Jeneba hasn’t been to school since March this year. This is when the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in the West African nation. Jeneba lives in Pujehan district, in the South of Sierra Leone. She should be able to take part in the government’s remote education system: a radio teaching and learning program designed to ensure children still have access to the syllabus, despite schools being closed.

But in Sierra Leone, Plan International found that the majority of households can’t afford a radio, and when they do have one, girls like Jeneba don’t have access to them. So in partnership with Lifeline Energy, a non-profit social enterprise that designs, manufactures and distributes solar-powered radios across the world, Plan International procured 25,000 solar radio sets for girls. Jeneba was one of the first to receive a set.

◀ A woman in Indonesia reads a leaflet on COVID-19 prevention produced by Plan International. In Indonesia’s East Nusa Tenggara Province, we have so far distributed 11,050 hygiene kits and 8,187 posters detailing preventative actions to curb the spread of COVID-19.

▼ As part of a provincial-wide campaign on the prevention of COVID-19, our local teams in Cambodia have been making community visits to raise awareness. Their activities include playing audio messages in different ethnic minority languages, meeting with village community leaders to encourage them to promote good hygiene practices, distributing posters and leaflets and providing soap to some of the most vulnerable households.



A better normal



By Dominique-Dee Jones, a member of our Youth Activist Series for 2020.

We want a just, equitable world – one where the voices of those marginalised are heard loud and clear. To build this world, we presented a new girl-led research project and recommendations in an open letter to the members of the United Nations General Assembly in September.

Girls are experts of their own experience. However, it's clear that the pre-COVID world routinely disregarded our voices. But the COVID-19 pandemic has provided society with the opportunity to build back something better. A better normal.

That's why I, along with my fellow youth activists in Australia and Vietnam, are calling for a revolutionary reset – one that is led by girls, for girls and for everyone. To achieve a better normal, power holders must hear our voices, in all their diversities.

A Better Normal: Girls Call For A Revolutionary Reset is a youth-led report co-authored by 22 inspiring young leaders from Australia and Vietnam between the ages of 15-24. To make sure that we reflected the shared concerns and hopes of girls around the world we validated it with more than 1,000 girls from 99 countries, with over 94% of them affirming each of our research pillars.

THIS IS WHAT GIRLS WORLDWIDE ARE DREAMING OF:

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.

It doesn't just stop there. We don't just want our voices heard. We want to see concrete measures taken to make sure girls aren't left behind in this new post-COVID world.

Under this aspirational – and achievable – vision, six pillars underpinned our research.

- Educated citizens of the world, outlining the need for compassionate and empathetic learning outside the walls of a classroom
- Gender justice, emphasising a respect and empowerment of girls voices without the fear of gender roles and stereotypes
- Protection of rights and access to resources, ensuring a world where resources are equitably distributed whilst ensuring we are supportive of one another
- Inclusion and equality in power, where youth and minority voices are given a platform and are regarded as experts in their own right
- Freedom to be human, highlighting the need for a slowed down world where there are no constraints on who you are
- Climate justice, involving the acceptance of both scientific and Indigenous knowledge to develop a sustainable future for our planet

Our girl-led research not only realises that girls are bearing the brunt of COVID-19, but also that we have a clear, solution-focused vision for a fairer world, one where girls and all people are treated equally.

The report consists of many recommendations, which call on governments, their departments and other policy-makers to take tangible measures to enact our revolutionary reset.

RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Promoting Indigenous people's right to participate in environmental management and decision making
- Ensuring an inclusive and gender-transformative education that promotes critical thinking and provides comprehensive sexuality education
- Institutionalising the participation of girls and young women in all our diversities in decision-making
- Ensuring that policies are youth and gender-responsive as well as non-discriminatory
- Ensuring the equitable distribution of resources through upholding a liveable minimum wage for all
- Recognising the unique vulnerabilities of the marginalised to guide an intersectional approach to healthcare
- Committing to boost the amount of young women into political positions of influence

We stand firm in what we want, and we know how to tackle the systemic inequalities that burden us as young women. We know girls and young women across the world are capable of greatness. Together, we can build the equitable world we want to see.

Plan International Australia's Youth Activist Series empowers incredible young women to campaign and advocate on issues that affect girls around the world. It is supported by The Body Shop Australia, a brand passionate about empowering women and girls.



TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND BEYOND

From leading research and launching their incredible youth-led report, *A Better Normal: Girls' Call for a Revolutionary Reset* in August, to penning an open letter to world leaders with their recommendations for creating a more equal post-COVID world, our youth activists have made waves this year.

So it was no surprise when they were invited to present their work and Plan International's latest research *Halting Lives: the Impact of COVID-19 on Girls and Young Women* at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September.

The event, *An Intergenerational dialogue: Girls' rights in the COVID-19 crisis*, saw young women, including Plan International Australia Youth Activist Mayela, and Phuong Anh, a youth delegate from Vietnam, meet with global leaders to discuss girls' priority agendas and their recommendations for a better normal.

Together, the two reports present the state of the world and the future – *Halting Lives* highlights the challenges and impacts of COVID-19 on girls, and *A Better Normal* provides a vision for a better future, with aspirational recommendations from girls around the globe, that are not only attainable, but critical to creating a just and sustainable future for all.

“

The panel was an incredible opportunity and experience, and reaffirmed our idea that girls' voices must be heard and included in leadership and policy making – centering their voices, experiences and solutions on the issues that affect them. Personally, being chosen to represent these desires of girls globally as well as the open letter to a panel of highly influential and powerful panelists alongside Phong Anh, the Vietnamese youth delegate, was incredible and solidified my hope for change.”

Mayela, Youth Activist Series 2020.

Pass it on

In the spirit of Ubuntu, we ask that you keep the ripples of change alive by passing this magazine on once you've enjoyed it.

Whether you leave it in your local café or staff room or give it to a friend, this small act of sharing will help spread awareness of Plan International and the incredible work your support makes possible.

The power to inspire others is in your hands.

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The charity for
girls' equality