

Peer educators helping
to end child marriage

From Classroom to Crisis

Finding hope during
the global hunger crisis

UBUNTU

The Magazine of Plan International Australia

Issue 09 – Autumn 2023

TOWARDS A BETTER TOMORROW



The charity for
girls' equality

The origins of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a Zulu word that means ‘I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours.’ There is no word in English that encompasses this sentiment of interconnectedness.

In the modern world we too often see ourselves as individuals but Ubuntu reminds us that we are part of a greater whole. What we do affects others, and when we do well, the ripples are felt by all of humanity.

Our work with girls and with all children is, first and foremost, for them, but it is also for the good of all human beings. Together, we bring about change that benefits all humankind and that is the spirit of Ubuntu, for we cannot be human alone.

.....

Plan International Australia acknowledges and pays respect to Elders past and present 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.

.....

From the CEO



Hello and welcome to the ninth edition of Ubuntu!

If you’ve been supporting Plan International Australia for a while, you’ll be familiar with our reason for being – put simply, we are here to move humanity towards a better tomorrow for girls and communities globally.

Actually making it happen, however, is complex, especially in the face of recent setbacks – the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, hunger and the climate crisis, just to name a few. In fact, according to the World Economic Forum we are currently a whopping 136 years away from closing the global gender gap. So how on earth do we get there?

Addressing this disparity will require collaborative global efforts – to advocate for the rights of women and girls, to meet their unique needs and to change hearts, minds and attitudes, because we know that a more inclusive and gender equal world is better for everyone.

This important work also asks that we apply an intersectional lens to our efforts, and understand that the progress we’ve made so far hasn’t been equal – women of colour, women with disabilities, and queer and trans women all face unique challenges compounded by their intersecting identities. We still have a long way to go until we are all truly equal, and that is why the work of organisations like ours is so important.

Most institutions agree that investing in girls’ education is an essential component to achieving gender equality and eradicating poverty. Education is life-changing for girls themselves but the ripple effect it can have for entire communities and countries is truly transformative for the world as a whole. Educating girls leads to improved economic outcomes and employment opportunities, it reduces the prevalence of child marriage and early pregnancy, it sees more children surviving infancy and growing up healthy and it even has mitigating effects on climate change.

This issue you’ll gain some insight into how recent

humanitarian crises are impacting girls’ access to education (pg. 11) and learn how improved water, sanitation and hygiene facilities (WASH) in schools are increasing attendance rates for girls in the Solomon Islands (pg. 14).

You’ll also be hearing directly from girls and young people in this issue. You’ll meet 13-year-old Fethia on pg. 09, a peer educator in Ethiopia’s Amhara region who is working to change attitudes towards gender equality and child marriage in her community. On pg. 19 we’re introducing our next inspiring cohort of youth activists hailing from all around Australia – the first time we’ve opened applications nationally!

You can turn to pg. 13 for some guidance on how to approach conversations about gender equality in your own life, as detailed by alumni of our Youth Activist Series and on pg. 15 you’ll hear from some of the young men that recently attended our event on gender equality and youth representation, Represent Us.

I also recommend checking out our explainer on loss and damage financing on pg. 17 – it’s one way we can support communities already facing the irreversible and life-changing impacts of climate change, and is something we’ll be talking more about in the near future alongside our continued focus on mitigation and adaptation strategies.

I want to thank you for your support thus far, and I hope this issue leaves you feeling inspired and equipped to keep fighting the good fight for gender equality. Plan International Australia is having an impact and you are an integral part of making it possible.

Until next time,

Susanne Legena
CEO, Plan International Australia

Cover image:
Adolescent girls in Somalia

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Find out more:

CHILD PROTECTION planau.me/child-protection-policy
FEEDBACK planau.me/feedback

Disaster Risk expert Sara Sinada on Sudan

"On April 15th people woke up to the sounds of bombs detonating and stray bullets killing people in the safety of their own homes."



Plan International Australia's Sara Sinada was recently invited to appear on ABC News Breakfast and The Drum to discuss the war in Sudan, in particular, escalating conflict and catastrophic damage to infrastructure in Khartoum, Darfur and El-Obeid that is endangering lives and displacing thousands of people.

Speaking not only in her capacity as a Disaster Risk Management expert, but also from her very personal connection as a Sudanese Australian, Sara painted a harrowing image of the current situation in the country. "My family has been caught in this crossfire. My brother, he was telling me, 'we're all under our beds, under dining tables trying to stay away from stray bullets flying into people's windows'.

The conflict has also catalysed a number of other challenges, from electricity outages to hospitals, supermarkets and other services being completely shut down. "We're dealing with a myriad of issues, first and foremost, the lack of medical supplies and the lack of access to food and water," explained Sara. "These are basic life saving interventions that need to get to Sudan as soon as possible. People who are fleeing to the borders are mainly people who are unable to access hospitals and unable to get basic medications from their pharmacies – people who need cancer treatment, people who need dialysis. And what's happening is that these people are dying everyday by the borders, trying to flee this warzone."

While acknowledging the severity of the conflict – described by The Guardian as 'a power struggle between military factions' – Sara emphasised that public sentiment remains hopeful and united, "As dire as the situation is, Sudanese people are very highly aware that this is not our fight, this is not our war, it's not a civil war. It's a fight between two war-mongers."

And within the Sudanese community, an uplifting display of collective action and camaraderie in the face of this crisis has been heartening for Sara as she watches from afar, "The ray of hope is that we are seeing a lot of incredibly inspiring action," she shared. "Local actors coming together, risking their lives to provide support to those who need it. We're seeing local actors at the neighbourhood levels in

Khartoum and Darfur also coming together to provide food and water to families who need it, in a very organised way."

More stories of community resilience have been relayed by Sara's family in Khartoum – "In my own neighbourhood, my aunt was telling me, one of our neighbours was delivering a baby and in need of a midwife. Through youth neighbourhood groups they were able to put together a database and make sure that she was able to deliver safely, in the safety of her own home, in the middle of a war. There's a lot of hope, and this also presents itself as a very strong opportunity for Australian nonprofits and the international community to work directly with these actors on the ground to deliver this assistance that is needed in a timely manner."

Plan International is currently preparing to mount a humanitarian response to the crisis to help the most vulnerable and those most affected, particularly the influx of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. Together with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and a consortium of NGOs, we are working to find ways to establish humanitarian corridors within Sudan that would allow us to deliver humanitarian assistance where it is needed most.

And from Sara's intersecting perspectives as a humanitarian and a Sudanese Australian, she says she is quite hopeful following a meeting with the Assistant Foreign Minister and representatives from the Department of Home Affairs. "That was an amazing precedent that really shows the good will of the Australian Government and their willingness to listen and act on it. I also have a lot of faith in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Time and time again, we've seen crises erupt all over the world, and time and time again, Australia as a nation provides resources to support those in need."

And Sara's call to action for our supporters? "The urgency of what is happening in Sudan is something that cannot be overlooked, so I'm urging the public to speak up on the issue and reach out to their MPs to push for more urgent action to take place," she told the Drum, "There's a lot that we can do, we're not helpless."

Help provide life-saving aid to children and families fleeing violence in Sudan



News



\$40 MILLION TO HELP FIGHT FAMINE!

Recently, the Australian Government announced an additional \$25 million emergency assistance package to support famine affected communities in the Horn of Africa, Yemen and Pakistan. This comes on top of a preliminarily \$15 million announced in October, taking the total to \$40 million since we joined the #HelpFightFamine campaign.

The funds will go towards providing food, water and other essential support, however we continue to advocate for the \$150 million needed for urgent famine relief, as the scale of the hunger crisis grows. **Show your support by emailing your MP now!**



“Asking women just to log off... is asking women to remove themselves from another aspect of public life.”

- Imogen Senior

Imogen Senior, one of our inspiring Youth Activist Series alumni, appeared as a panellist on ABC's Q&A in February, alongside tennis champion Jelena Dokic and journalist Narelda Jacobs to discuss trolling, social media and how we can make the internet a safer space for all. **Watch now:**



YOUR IMPACT SURVEY

We are currently working through all your responses to our annual Impact Survey. We are so grateful to our wider Plan International family for taking the time to provide your thoughts and encouragement. Your support and feedback will help us deliver long-lasting change for children and their families across the world.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Over the festive season, you helped raise \$229,000 to help girls hold on to their education. This will help us invest in removing the roadblocks to girls' education around the world.

And when Türkiye and Syria were rocked by earthquakes in February, you were quick to respond with urgent support.

With a generous \$325,000 raised, through our partners, Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and International Medical Corps (IMC), we were able to reach 100,000 children and families with life-saving items including food, medicine, blankets, hygiene kits, solar lamps and more. We were also able to meet the specific needs of women and girls, including protections against violence and exploitation and sexual and reproductive health needs.



“The urgency of what is happening in Sudan is something that cannot be overlooked... I'm urging the public to speak up on the issue and reach out to their MPs to push for more urgent action to take place. There's a lot that we can do, we're not helpless.”

- Sara Sinada

Plan International Australia's Sara Sinada was recently invited to appear on ABC News Breakfast and The Drum to discuss the war in Sudan, in particular, escalating conflict and catastrophic damage to infrastructure in Khartoum, Darfur and El-Obeid that is endangering lives and displacing thousands of people. **Watch the episode (aired on Monday 1/5/2023) now:**



FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: SURVIVING IN SOMALIA

Back in March we worked with the ABC's Foreign Correspondent team to amplify awareness and provide a powerful and harrowing insight into the reality of the hunger crisis in Somalia as told by those living there. The episode also featured Hinda, an adolescent girl supported by Plan International, and her family. **Watch a recording now:**



EDUCATION CANNOT WAIT

222 million children are missing out on an education because of armed conflicts, forced displacement, climate-induced disasters and protracted crises.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is the United Nations global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. They support and protect every child's right to access an education.

This fund kickstarted its replenishment in February. Will you call on our government to make a contribution to the Education Cannot Wait fund?

TAKE ACTION



Your Impact

Finding Hope During the Global Hunger Crisis

Fuelled by conflict, economic inequality and climate shocks, the global hunger crisis has left 349 million people across 82 countries facing acute food insecurity, and 50 million on the brink of starvation.

Plan International is one of many humanitarian organisations around the globe pouring efforts into responding to people’s immediate needs, advocating for much-needed funding and pushing for solutions to hunger.

There is a poem by Rebecca Solnit in her book *Hope in the Dark* that speaks of hope being ‘*an axe you break down doors with in an emergency*’ – put simply, action is an essential ingredient for hope. And it was with hope and action in mind that we brought together an audience of our wonderful supporters from around Australia for a very special online event in February, ‘Your Impact – Finding Hope During the Global Hunger Crisis’.

Hosted by our CEO, Susanne Legena, the webinar featured three members of our Australian team

along with Sadia Allin, the Head of Mission for Plan International in Somalia and a tireless advocate for her community.

Sadia gave a deeply emotional, harrowing and passionate personal account of the situation on the ground – “Today it is our choice, a moral choice, because unless we act starvation will kill - just as surely as bullets and bombs kill in Ukraine. My appeal to the audience today, is will you prioritise the hunger crisis in your personal and professional life? Inaction today will cost one life every 40 seconds, and will be an unforgiven scar on humanity.”

The event was also an opportunity to reflect on the incredible impact that the Plan International Australia community achieved together in 2022, and hopefully provided the motivation needed to tackle the many challenges that still remain. Now, more than ever, your support is crucial to saving the lives of thousands of children and their families – and protecting every girl’s human right to education.

PANELLISTS:



SADIA ALLIN
Head of Mission,
Plan International
Somalia



DAVE HUSY
Deputy CEO
of Impact, Plan
International
Australia



BERHE TEWOLDEBERHAN
Disaster Risk
expert, Plan
International
Australia



ROSIE SHIDIAK
Business
Development
Officer, Plan
International
Australia

Recently returned from
deployment in South
Sudan



YOUR IMPACT:

In Somalia, we supported:

- **33,816 people** with multi-purpose cash assistance
- **19,984 people** with emergency WASH supplies including water
- **5 schools** with WASH, teacher training, learning materials and child protection

In South Sudan, we supported:

- **130,000 people** through general food distribution
- **73,000 children** with food through our school feeding programs
- At risk groups, including **32,797 women and children** with supplementary nutrition in addition to general food parcels.

Here's what some of our webinar attendees had to say:



Sadia was incredible - very moving.



This was very helpful in understanding just how dire the situation is on the ground....



Thank you to everyone at Plan. That was a very emotional and powerful presentation. I hope that everyone that is in a position to help will find a way to do so.



Very powerful and informative... can we share the recording so as to alert others and educate them?

You can watch a recording of the webinar by scanning the QR code. We will be hosting more events throughout the year, so please keep an eye out for further opportunities to engage with us.



Peer educators helping to end child marriage



“Girls face various problems because of the communities attitude toward gender equality and child marriage.”

- Fethia, 13 years old, Ethiopia

When it comes to reducing the prevalence of child marriage, Ethiopia has seen significant progress in recent decades – between the 1980's and 2015, the percentage of girls married by the age of 18 has fallen from 75 percent to 40 percent – but the current drought is derailing efforts to end the practice.

When food is scarce, the risk of child marriage increases. Desperate parents struggling to provide for their children often see the dowry paid by the husband's family as a way to ease the burden on their own family.

13-year old Fethia is a grade seven student in Ethiopia's Amhara region, where the rate of child marriage is five times that of the capital city. Plan International has been working with girls in Amhara and Sidama regions to increase their access to

sexual and reproductive health services and enable them to make their own decisions about when and who to marry.

As a peer educator with Plan International's *My Choice For My Life* project, Fethia leads discussions at her school on topics including gender equality, child marriage and sexual reproductive health. The five-year project supports gender equality, adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights and child protection by engaging adolescent girls and women to become Champions of Change and working with boys and men to become partners of change.

“Girls face various problems because of the communities attitude toward gender equality and child marriage,” shares Fethia. “A lot of girls



Fethia delivers a workshop in her community

“There has been a noticeable difference in the community since the *My Choice for My Life* project began. Today, a lot of parents give both girls and boys equal opportunities.”

dropout of high school because they are pressured into getting married. When girls are married off at an early age they are exposed to sexual and reproductive health issues. I personally know a girl who struggled with health issues as a result of her early marriage and childbirth.

“Girls in our community are expected to do all the housework. They mainly spend their time fetching water, cleaning the house and cooking meals. Because they don't have many domestic duties, boys spend their free time in the town.

“There has been a noticeable difference in the community since the *My Choice For My Life* project began. Today, a lot of parents give both girls and boys equal opportunities. For instance, my parents treat my brother and me equally and we both do household tasks. My brother cleans the house as I make breakfast.

“Due to the peer-to-peer sessions we facilitate,

child marriage is declining at our school. In the past, more than 20 students would drop out of school each year due to early marriage, but now relatively few students do so. Every time we hold a meeting, students are excited and eager to take part.

“Girls today feel able to talk about themselves or whatever challenges they may be experiencing. If their parents are pressuring them into getting married, they tell us, the facilitators, or their teachers. We all know that forcing girls into marriage against their will is illegal and punishable by law, so if, for instance, my parents decide to push me into a marriage with someone else, I will know where to complain and what steps to take.

“In our school, we have regular discussions about early marriage, sexual and reproductive health, and gender equality. We learn a lot from these conversations, and both my friends and I have changed our attitudes as a result.”

You can help girls free themselves from child marriage.

Your support will help:

- train case workers who can intervene in suspected cases of forced child marriage
- create safe spaces, education and support networks so girls are supported to refuse marriage and build their own lives
- provide medical treatment and counselling to help girls recover from child marriages
- boost Plan International's bold 5-year campaign to end forced and child marriage in the Asia-Pacific region.

Donate by June 30 to help end child marriage in our lifetime:



From Crisis to Classroom

Understanding the effects of disasters on girls' access to education

Education is a fundamental right, yet in times of conflict and disaster it is often significantly disrupted, denying millions of children the opportunity to have a quality, safe education.

Each year, globally, it's estimated that 37 million children have their education disrupted due to a natural disaster or humanitarian crisis. For adolescent girls in particular, the impacts of conflict and crisis are devastating and compound the barriers they already face in accessing primary and secondary education, exacerbating pre-existing

gender discrimination and harmful practices such as early marriage and early pregnancy, which have lifelong consequences.

Our latest report *From Crisis to Classroom: Understanding the effects of disasters on girls' access to education* aims to highlight the impact of emergencies and protracted crises on children and young people's education, spanning several countries, continents and regions, including the Pacific.

UKRAINE:

- The **education of over 70% of children has been impacted** since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022.
- **2,631 education facilities had been damaged and 420 destroyed** by the end of January 2023

THE HORN OF AFRICA:

- As families face mounting food insecurity pressure, girls are increasingly called upon to care for younger siblings so parents can work or seek food, forcing them to miss or drop out of school.
- In **Somalia, 2.4 million school-aged children** are affected by drought. **1.7 million have dropped out** of school and at least 720,000 children who were enrolled in school in 2021/22 are now at risk of not returning to class.

CENTRAL MOZAMBIQUE AND MALAWI:

- **Almost 500,000 primary and secondary school aged children are currently not receiving an education**, as 230 schools have been transformed into temporary accommodation in the aftermath of tropical cyclone Freddy in March 2023.

NORTH-WEST SYRIA AND SOUTH-EASTERN TÜRKİYE:

- **2,143 schools sustained damage** as a result of the two devastating earthquakes that struck in February 2023, and of those remaining, **99 are now being used as shelters** for those who have lost their homes
- **More than 535,000 children are not able to continue their education.**



THE PACIFIC:

- **3.8 million school aged children (5-19 years)** – which includes 1.85 million girls – are **at risk of natural disasters that threaten their access to education** and learning.
- In April 2020, Tropical Cyclone Harold **disrupted the education of 47,500 children** across four Pacific Island countries.
- Tropical Cyclone Gita in 2018 **damaged 109 out of the 150 schools** (72% of all schools) on the main island of Tongatapu.



INDONESIA:

- A 5.6 magnitude earthquake in November 2022 **damaged around 142 schools** in Cianjur, West Java, forcing children to continue learning online.

How can the Australian Government support girls' to access their education during humanitarian crises?

The UN Global Fund, Education Cannot Wait, is the global fund supporting children to access quality and inclusive education during emergencies and protracted crises. They support and protect every child's right to access an education.

Over the past year, through the Education Cannot Wait fund, our global entity, Plan International, and other child-focused partners launched new investments responding to the conflict in Ukraine and Moldova, as well as in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and for refugees in Bangladesh. ECW and its partners have also continued to fight for girls' right to an education in Afghanistan.

This fund kick-started its replenishment in February 2023. It needs \$1.5 billion to ensure that an

additional 20 million children and young people affected by crises – including 12 million girls – receive an education over the next four years.

By committing to contribute to Education Cannot Wait, the Australian Government can help protect the right of girls to an education, particularly when it is disrupted by circumstances outside of their control.

Through your donations, Plan International Australia is already supporting every child's right to access an education, however it is critical that we call on the Australian Government to also play its role in the global community, and support young people's right to learn.

Read the full report:



Talking about gender equality: A guide

'Gender Equality'... it's big, it's scary, and it can be tricky to know how to approach it. Simply put, gender equality is about individuals having the same rights, freedoms, and opportunities regardless of their gender identity.

Plan International Australia are at the forefront of the gender equality movement, tackling root causes of discrimination, reshaping unequal power relations, and supporting individuals of all genders to step up and take action.

Whether you are a determined changemaker, supportive activist, or just starting to dip your toes in the water, here are some tips on how you can engage in a productive and inclusive conversation about gender equality:

- 1 Embrace new ideas and perspectives, and be willing to grow and change. Applying a gender-responsive lens to our discussions can be difficult and uncomfortable because it requires us to challenge our thoughts and worldviews. But with persistence and openness, it will get easier and more gratifying.
- 2 Identify the limitations of your knowledge, expertise, and experiences, and avoid comparing or dismissing others because their experiences differ from yours – all feelings and experiences are valid.
- 3 Reflect on how gender identities intersect with other identities (e.g., race, disability, age, ethnicity), how these intersections produce distinct patterns of prejudice and discrimination, and how our society often views people with higher intersectionality as helpless and dependent on others.
- 4 If you are committed to challenging the everyday manifestations of outdated ideas about gender, collaborating with others is an excellent way to spark change and provide mutual support. This is especially effective in the workplace, where males are frequently overrepresented in leadership positions and more likely to be promoted. This could include forming a Diversity and Inclusion group with employees to provide a mechanism for everyone to have their say on how to lead change in the workplace, reviewing HR policies and suggesting initiatives to address existing gender discrimination (e.g., providing women opportunities to upskill in technical areas), or it could be as simple as organising 'fireside chats' as an informal way to discuss the experiences and perspectives of employees regarding gender discrimination in the workplace.
- 5 When more sensitive topics are raised, including domestic and sexual violence, strive to highlight the strength and agency of survivors, and be cautious to speak on behalf of others. It is always best to consult an individual on how they want to be portrayed, to avoid demeaning and victimising them.
- 6 Our language must be modified to reflect inclusiveness: avoid descriptions of gender where it is not necessary; use gender inclusive terms (especially in group settings); and replace gendered nouns such as mankind with humankind, or fireman with firefighter. Socially constructed ideas of gender inculcate our vocabularies, and small shifts in our language can have a huge impact. This is particularly relevant for children, whose concepts of gender and identity are still being formed.



By Youth Activist Series alumni
Kayshini Logeswaran and Olivia Causer

Water for education



Evita uses a handwashing station at her school

“I wash my hands at the WASH station. I use soap to wash my hands. I first wet it, then I soap it, scrub it, wash it again, then dry it.”

It sounds simple, but the handwashing process explained by 13-year-old Evita from Guadalcanal Province in Solomon Islands has not been commonplace in her school. In the past, a lack of water has even led to her school being closed and Evita being sent home.

“There was no water, so we didn't continue with opening the school, we sent the children home. The toilet needs water, drinking, handwashing and everything needs water but there was no more water,” explains Head Teacher Stephanie Biliki.

March 22nd marked World Water Day, with the theme in 2023 being Accelerating Change. The world is currently well behind targets to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goal of water and sanitation for all by 2030, with many people around the world still lacking basic WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) services. This includes Solomon Islands, which has some of the most challenging WASH statistics in the world. According to the latest UN Water statistics, 64% of schools in Solomon Islands have no or limited access

to drinking water, 63% have no sanitation facilities and 75% lack any access to hygiene services.

Through the Australian Government's Water for Women program, Plan International and our partner Live & Learn Environmental Education are working in Solomon Islands' Guadalcanal Province to support improved WASH facilities in rural communities and health clinics and strengthen WASH outcomes in schools. The initial New Times, New Targets project ran from 2018 to 2022 and has recently been extended for a further two years.

Head Teacher Stephanie has noticed big changes at her primary school. “Live & Learn came and improved the water supply system. The existing one wasn't working properly, so they came and improved it. They provide tanks used to collect rainwater. Also, standpipes and improvement of the ablution block. We have showers in there for the girls to use.” And the effect on school attendance has been dramatic. “It encourages the students to come to school because at home, some places

don't have a proper toilet or proper water supply, so they enjoy coming to school now every day.”

Alongside the improvements to WASH infrastructure, Plan International and Live & Learn have been conducting training and awareness raising on the importance of handwashing and menstrual health and hygiene. “They learn these things through art. They do drawing, colouring, and discussions. This helps them to grasp knowledge especially looking into handwashing and other hygienic practices.” explains Stephanie.

Menstrual health and hygiene classes have particularly impressed teacher Maria Gau, who has seen more girls in her class as a result. “When girls started to menstruate, the students would stay home. But since the awareness and facilities to support our girls in school, it helped them understand that it is part of life, and they can continue with their learning. As well as boys. They always accept it. And no more bullying or teasing of girls.”

The new facilities and training have seen handwashing adopted as a daily routine, and Stephanie is proud of the school's achievements. “The projects, they have really boosted the learning for the school community. The changes in the children are noticed; their hygiene, they look clean, neat and smart because these things are available here.”

But for Evita, it is really only about one thing. “I enjoy playing games with my friends. I also enjoy washing my hands at the WASH station.”

Building a youth agenda

Climate change, mental health and domestic violence – these are some of the issues most affecting young people in 2023, as voted by attendees at Represent Us, a very special youth event we hosted at Federation Square’s The Edge in March.

Bringing together leading activists, artists and thought-leaders, Represent Us set out to imagine how democracy in Australia can better deliver for young people.

The event opened with a very special Welcome to Country by Lyn-al Young, a proud descendant of the Gunnai, Wiradjuri, Gunditjmara and Yorta Yorta nations. The panel then discussed their own motivations for pursuing social change and the advice they would give to young people wanting to be heard in decision-making spaces.

GUEST SPEAKERS:



TARANG CHAWLA

Multicultural Commissioner



SASHI PERERA

Comedian and writer



KIRA PURU

Musician



ABIOLA AJETOMOBI

Former Director of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's Innovation Hub



SHANI CAIN

Former CEO of Oaktree



LYN-AL YOUNG

Gunnai, Wiradjuri, Gunditjmara and Yorta Yorta fashion designer



“ This experience was very eye opening for me because I knew that inequality was an issue, just not to this extent. I now know what some women must go through to do almost anything in their lives. Women or anyone should not face abuse because of the colour of their skin nor because of their gender.”

- Oliver

The panel was followed by a musical performance by Liyah Knight, and a poignant keynote speech delivered by Tarang Chawla, in which he spoke about Not One More Niki, the campaign he co-founded to end violence against women and children, named in honour of his younger sister Nikita who was murdered in 2015 by her partner. With a large proportion of young men in the audience, the impact

of Tarang’s very personal story was palpable and highlighted the responsibility of the entire community in shifting attitudes and promoting gender equality.

Overall, the day was a thought provoking and inspiring starting point for Plan International Australia, as we build a youth-led agenda to guide the work of our new government.

“ This experience taught me about how I need to make sure the women in my life are treated right and respected by myself and others. This experience will always stay with me because it is very important for every man to respect women and treat them like equals rather than just an object because women are also human and no different to us.”

- Ashton



LIYAH KNIGHT

Sydney-based songwriter and musician

The cost of climate change



People cross a damaged bridge in the Southern Region of Malawi, in search of food, water and shelter following widespread devastation caused by Cyclone Freddy. Densely-populated communities living in brick and mud houses were hardest-hit, with homes crumbling into flood waters, and others swept away entirely.

When it comes to climate change, the stakes are incredibly high for today's youth.

Extreme weather events – from floods and storms, to droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires – are becoming more frequent and severe every year. One billion children face extremely elevated risks due to the impacts of climate change, especially in low-income countries where communities are experiencing the most severe negative impacts of the climate crisis daily.

Some of these impacts can be mitigated through stronger targets to reduce emissions, and with the right support and funding, some of these impacts can be adapted to, for example, planting mangroves

or trees to protect coasts from floods and storms, or planting vegetable gardens at schools using climate-resilient seeds.

When climate is discussed on our TVs and around decision making tables, it's often in terms of how we can accelerate the transition to net zero emissions and whether Australia's climate targets are ambitious enough. These conversations are important, as it's critical that the Australian Government does its part to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

We hear less, however, about the irreversible and life-changing impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided through mitigation or adaptation, and how governments can address those impacts and adapt to climate related events that are yet to occur. That's where loss and damage finance comes in.

What is Loss and Damage?

Loss and damage focuses on the costs that have already been incurred from climate fuelled weather extremes – consequences that people cannot adapt to, and that are already affecting millions of lives, particularly girls and women.

Loss refers to the things that cannot be brought back – ranging from loss of life, land, biodiversity, cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge. **Damage refers to the things that can be restored or repaired** – think schools, houses, hospitals, roads and bridges.

The consequences of loss and damage are experienced by children and young people everyday, in the form of growing inequality, hunger, lack of access to education and health services, threats to livelihoods, risks of gender-based violence, child, early and forced marriage, and the loss of loved ones.

And while the human costs of loss and damage are incalculable, the estimated economic cost is staggering. The financial cost of loss and damage for low-income countries is estimated to reach between \$290-580 billion (USD) annually by 2030, \$1-1.8 trillion (USD) annually by 2050.

So what can we do about it?

Loss and damage finance is one solution. By allocating funding to address the devastating impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided, governments can support the vulnerable communities on the front lines who have contributed the least to climate change, but are often most affected and don't have the resources to respond.

This funding would be used to provide emergency food and shelter, to rebuild damaged infrastructure and to compensate those suffering non-economic losses that impact their health and wellbeing.

Following decades of pressure from countries most vulnerable to climate change, the United Nations Climate Conference (COP 27) in 2022, saw the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund, and seven countries including New Zealand, Germany and Scotland, have already committed to loss and damage finance.

Going forward, Plan International Australia will be calling on our government to invest in a loss and damage finance mechanism to support communities facing the irreversible and life-changing impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided through mitigation or adaptation.



Meet our 2023 Youth Activists

The Youth Activist Series (YAS) is Plan International Australia's 12-month training program for young people who are passionate about fighting for gender justice. Our 2023 Youth Activists are dedicated, enthusiastic individuals who are passionate about a fairer world for children and girls.

Get to know our Youth Activists for 2023 on our website:



Youth Activist alumni: Where are they now?

To celebrate International Women's Day in March, we caught up with some of our incredible Youth Activist Series (YAS) alumni to find out what they've been up to since taking part in the program – from studying, to graduating, to continuing their youth advocacy work. We can't wait to see what they do next!



MAYA GHASSALI

After being part of our YAS program in 2020, Maya has gone on to work at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the peak body for young people in the state. Here, she advocates for young people's rights and inclusion in decision-making processes on the issues they care about.

What did you enjoy most about the program?

There were a lot of aspects of the YAS that I enjoyed, but the media opportunities that we had access to particularly stand out. On International Women's Day, we had the pleasure of featuring on many Australian news outlets, like the ABC and The Age. I loved getting to share a bit about my story and my passions with the Australian public, whilst raising awareness of the importance of gender equality at the same time.

What did you do after YAS and what are you doing now?

After YAS, I went on to work at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the peak body for young people in the state. There, I advocate for young people's rights and inclusion in the decision-making processes on the issues they care about. I also became more active in my

university, joining clubs and social sports teams. I am now in my final semester of my Politics, Philosophy and Economics degree, and hope to do more study and work overseas in the near future.

What advice would you give to another young person wanting to become involved in youth advocacy and activism?

The one piece of advice is just to go for it. Put in your application, because you never know where it might take you. You might think to yourself that you don't have enough experience to be an activist, but if your passion shines through, then that's all that really matters. I saw the YAS application pop up on my instagram. I submitted the application and didn't really think anything would come from it, but it did and I got to meet like-minded people and push myself outside of my comfort zone, and you should too!

“I loved getting to share a bit about my story and my passions with the Australian public, whilst raising awareness of the importance of gender equality at the same time.”

The YAS is a 12-month training program for young people who are passionate about fighting for gender justice. Learn more: <https://www.plan.org.au/you-can-help/youth-activist-series-yas/>



JAZMIN WRIGHT

Since being part of our YAS in 2021, Jazmin graduated from university and has pursued opportunities in various youth international relations and foreign affairs organisations. She's also continued her activism with a particular focus on global health.

What did you enjoy most about the program?

I really enjoyed having the opportunity to engage in different areas relating to young people, ranging from the importance of girls' education, climate resilience, and online safety. It allowed me to explore the various challenges facing young people, which has rendered me a more passionate activist.

What training has been most valuable in your life and career since?

The media training [over the course of the program] was the most valuable part of the training I received as a Youth Activist. Being able to effectively communicate to various

audiences has been a skill that I have used in almost every opportunity post-YAS, both in my personal and professional life.

What advice would you give to another young person wanting to become involved in youth advocacy and activism?

The advice I would give to a young person getting involved in youth activism is to become passionate about an issue and understand why you are interested in this. While it is easy to become jaded or discouraged during your activism journey, reminding yourself of what you are passionate about and your motivations for being an activist can make your activism journey easier.



OLIVIA CAUSER

Olivia was part of our 2021 cohort. Now in her third year of university, Olivia remains heavily involved in our YAS program as an alumnus. She aspires to continue to advocate for individuals within the legal realm, and contribute to the greater movement of human rights protection.

What did you do after YAS and what are you doing now?

When I was in the program, I was starting my first year of university. I'm still studying, but am now in my third year (which is wild..) of my degree (Bachelor Laws/Arts - Politics and International Relations; Global Development). I have remained involved with Plan International and the YAS program as an alumni, which continues to provide such incredible experiences and opportunities to further develop my skills and advocate for issues which I feel passionate about. Also, I got a dog... his name is Spencer, and I am 100% a crazy dog mum.

Where do you see yourself in the future/what would you like to be doing?

Though I'm not completely certain what I will

end up pursuing, I would like to think it will involve activism, advocating for individuals within the legal realm, and contributing to the greater movement of human rights protection.

What advice would you give to another young person wanting to become involved in youth advocacy and activism?

Just jump in! It can be daunting at first but there is no better time than now. There is no 'right' way to be involved in the youth advocacy and activism space – staying informed and educating yourself on issues you are passionate about, connecting with like-minded people, and discovering your own strengths as an activist are just three things to help guide you... but don't over complicate it! Trust your gut, follow your instincts, and take care of yourself.

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