

# Because I am a Girl

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2010

Girls in a Changing Landscape: Urban and Digital Frontiers



Growing up in the 21st century can be a challenge. Are you living in a big city? Do you spend many hours a day online and on your mobile phone?

This year the 'Because I am a Girl' report focuses on two areas of dramatic change that present both tremendous opportunities and unique dangers - cities and technologies.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- A girl is 37% more likely to go to school if she lives in a city
- A girl living in a city is 87% more likely to use a condom
- A girl living in a city stands a 25% chance of being married off early – compared with a 50% chance for a girl living in a rural area

Living in a city can offer girls the chance for a bright future. We estimate that by 2030 at least 1.5 billion adolescent girls will be living in cities. This could prove to be the single most effective way to reduce poverty – and it's happening right now.



### DID YOU KNOW?

- 1 in 6 people in the world live in a slum. 70% of slum dwellers are women and girls
- We estimate that there are 30 million girls living on the streets in developing countries

We need to think about where cities are working for girls, and where cities are failing girls. We must invest in girls now, to stop them falling through the trapdoors of poverty!



### DID YOU KNOW?

A survey conducted by the 'Because I am a Girl' report in Brazil found that:

- 84% of girls have a mobile phone
- 82% have used the internet
- 60% say they know about online dangers
- 27% say that they are always online

Part of growing up in the 21st century means having a mobile phone and spending time online. These are things we take for granted. How do these technologies change the way we see the world? And how can we make sure girls aren't left behind by social restrictions and poverty?

## Hidden in plain view: girls on the streets

**Think!** What comes to mind when you think about your home?



So, girls and boys who end up on the street lose all the things that make a home – home.

But for girls, it's even worse. Why? Because on the streets they are more in danger of sexual violence and abuse from boys and older men.



Photo: Kamrul, aged 13, Street Child Photography Project, Bangladesh.

“The government don’t do anything for children on the street, they don’t even think about them, when they see those children they do not even make a case for them. They should take them by the hand and say: I am going to support you, I am going to help you, you are not alone.”

**Jessica, street girl, 17, Nicaragua**



Photo: Plan

**Jessica from the Nicaragua team**  
The Street Child World Cup held in South Africa in March 2010 gave street children a voice and a platform to campaign for their rights. Street children from eight countries came together to play in the Cup. Each national team had to include at least one girl.

## The Street Girls’ Manifesto\*

**We the street girls have the following rights and we want them respected:**

- The Right to live in a shelter and home
- The Right to have a family
- The Right to be safe
- The Right to be protected from sexual abuse
- The Right to go to school and get free education
- The Right to good health and access to free health services
- The Right to be heard
- The Right to belong
- The Right to be treated with respect and decency
- The Right to be treated as equal to boys
- The Right to be allowed to grow normally

\*This Manifesto was drafted by girls taking part in the Street Child World Cup. It is based on their experiences of living on the streets.

Girls living on the streets know what needs to be done to support them – now it’s up to us to make governments sit up and take notice! If you want to start making a difference today, go to the back page or simply share the stories in this summary with your friends, teachers and family.

### GIRLS' RIGHTS! RIGHT?

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which 189 countries in the world have signed into law, all girls and boys should enjoy a basic level of HUMAN DIGNITY.

#### Girls who end up on the street have the following rights, among others, violated everyday:



**Article 16:** Children have the right to privacy and the law should protect them against attacks on their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes. *“I have been beaten in the past by strangers, the street boys punched me. I am not happy living here – there is no privacy, everything is an open space.”* Trina, 17, Zambia.



**Article 24:** Children have the right to good quality health care, to clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this. *“I sleep on top of a toilet roof. During the weekends, we have no places to go and bath. At times you are raided by police, you get sick and the money is very little, some girls disappear and at times get killed.”* Girl 17, living on streets of Harare, Zimbabwe.



**Article 27:** Children have a right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. *“We just put down some newspaper sheets and sleep. Here in Mahim (Mumbai train station), boys come and harass us.”* Rukshana, 15, from India lives on the street with her 11 year old sister Deepa.



**Article 37:** Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly. *“I’ve been taken to the police station many times. There was a jar in the cell in which we could go to the bathroom. There were three other girls in the cell with me. There was only one big bed, so we all shared it. There were no blankets. While I was there, the police handcuffed me and put a hat over my head so I couldn’t see anything, and started beating me with a chain.”* Antonia, market beggar from Bulgaria.



**Article 34:** The government should protect children from sexual abuse. *“Some sugar daddies (older men who are sexually involved with girls for money) are our clients because they have the money to give us. I know it sounds scary, but just think of yourself in the same situation: what would you do if you were a street kid with the chance to make Z\$20,000 (\$3) just for having sex with someone?”* Tanya, 14, Zimbabwe.



**Article 31:** All children have the right to relax and play. *“All I wish for is that my parents stop making me beg on the streets everyday.”* Iman, 11, Egypt.



**Article 28:** Children have a right to an education. *“I am intelligent but sometimes I feel very bad about myself because I stopped school at an early age...which makes me feel worthless. I hope that one day, given the chance, I can go back to school.”* Trina, 17, Zambia.

The more we talk about the issues affecting girls, the harder it becomes for people to ignore them!

## The digital revolution and the digital divide

### Girls in the USA say:

“In sixth grade, I think girls are a lot better at technology than boys, because the boys just want the gory stuff – most of the boys do that – they’d rather be outside playing sports or attacking people with fake swords. Girls are really good at cell phones, like I know a lot of guys, who can’t do [it]. I mean, they have cell phones... they know how to call people, and that’s about it.”

### Boys in the USA say:

“(Girls) don’t waste their time trying to figure out – ‘oh, how does this work, how does that work, how does this get through there’. They just go, ‘Oh, that’s there, that’s there – that’s fine’.”

Technology, namely mobile phones and computers, have completely changed what we know and how fast we can find out new things. They have even changed the way we grow up. Today, millions of young people all over the world, even in the poorest countries, have access to mobile phones and sometimes to the internet. This means:

- We can talk to other young people on the other side of the world easily, quickly and cheaply
- We can share our thoughts with everyone through social media sites
- We can explore websites with information about a lot of issues, including sexual health
- We can pretend to be someone else, even for a little while, when we are online



Photo: Tariq and Stan Thekaekara

“I feel that it’s important for teens to advocate for online safety because the internet is an amazing thing! It is a useful and fun tool, and more and more kids are using it all the time... By teaching teens and their parents about dangers online, and how to deal with them, we can help teens to enjoy the internet safely and responsibly.”

Ada, 14 years old, USA

**But, the first step to enjoying these opportunities is gaining access to technologies.**

### So what stops girls from using technology?

1. **Discrimination** - Girls are still viewed as second-class citizens in many societies.
2. **Numbers** - Boys both outnumber girls and tend to dominate access to computers.
3. **Confidence** - Because they don't have equal access at school, girls may be less confident than boys when it comes to going into IT jobs because they don't feel they have the same skills and knowledge as the young men competing for the same jobs.
4. **Language** - In order to use these technologies, English is usually a requirement, and for girls with only basic literacy in their own language, this is a major barrier.
5. **Time** - Girls' domestic roles like taking care of siblings, cooking and cleaning, even at a young age, mean they have less free time than boys to explore and experiment with new technologies.
6. **Money** - Girls are less likely than their brothers to have the financial resources to pay for, say, a mobile phone and its running costs, or access to the web in an internet café.



Photo: Plan

### Why is technology good for girls?

**When girls do manage to access technology there are real benefits! Here are seven specific reasons why technologies are important to adolescent girls:**

1. **To keep in touch with others, reducing the feeling of isolation.**  
"The internet is a safe partner with whom we can communicate discreetly, a partner that can provide us with the information we need to adapt to this modern world. Such information cannot be given to us by our mothers, who cannot break the rules of our traditional society."  
Girl from Mauritania
2. **To further their education.** "Literacy now is not just learning to read and write but learning how to use a computer." Rana, 16, from Egypt
3. **To take an active part in their communities and countries.** "People now take us seriously. Also, the officials were able to see the problems in our community and how it is affecting us so it encourages them to take action,"  
Girl from Egypt, part of a youth media project
4. **To have the skills to find work.** "I thought you had to be a geek to work here, but this camp changed my mind."  
Girl from USA taking part in Microsoft's DigiGirlz camp.
5. **To find information they might otherwise not know about, such as HIV and AIDS.** "I was not computer literate when I started using the internet on my mobile phone so it was quite an eye-opener. Now I want to learn everything. My uncle bought a computer two months ago and his wife has been teaching me some basics." Patience, a young refugee from Zimbabwe living in South Africa
6. **To build self-esteem.** "Our self esteem has really improved because of the programme. Now we can rub shoulders with boys that want to step on our toes." Girl from Senegal, part of a technology project
7. **Last but definitely not least, in order to keep safe.** Sending someone a text or calling the police for help is easy when you have a mobile phone.

## The dark side of cyberspace

ASK YOURSELF! Have you ever felt unsafe online? Have you ever been bullied or threatened online by someone you don't know or by a person from school? What would you do?

### FACT FILE – daily diary of girls in the UK\*\*

8 AM	Wake up, check my email (hotmail)
9 AM – 3 PM	At school, check email on mobile phone, check BBC News, Facebook, Twitter
4 PM	Update blog, check Facebook, Messenger, Skype
5 PM	Check out music and videos on YouTube
6 PM – 8PM	Googling stuff, checking Facebook, Twitter, MSN, watch TV on iPlayer

\*\*Compiled from a number of diaries from Plan's Youth Advisory Panel

We spend most of the day online – connecting with information and with other people through social media sites. For girls, who are going through the trials of puberty and suddenly being sexualized by everyone around them, being online can be really dangerous.

Girls and boys need to know how to negotiate the dangers that online media presents, while being able to take full advantage of the opportunities cyberspace provides. Here are our 10 points for **staying safe online**:

1. No personal details
2. Don't send pictures
3. Don't hand out your password
4. Never arrange to meet anyone in person
5. Never hang around in a chat room if someone says or writes something that makes you uncomfortable or worried
6. Never respond to nasty, suggestive or rude emails
7. Never believe junk or spam email
8. Don't open files from people you don't know
9. Always report it when you see bad language or distasteful pictures
10. Always be yourself
11. What is posted online becomes public and cannot always be removed. Think before you post!



Photo: Plan

“I couldn’t do what I can do now. Now they listen to me as well and treat me the same as my brothers. I am the secretary of the school parliament. I want to be a child doctor. I want to distribute all the experience and knowledge I have to other girls around the world.”

Asalaa, 12 year old, from Alexandria, Egypt, took part in an urban training programme

## Make a Difference! Girls’ Rights are Human Rights

**Regardless of where exploitation takes place, whether on the street or online, girls have a basic right to be protected, to survive and thrive.**

There are many actions you can take today to change the course of someone’s life. You can lend your support, your voice, your talent and your passion to ensure girls from every corner of the earth get a chance to live their life free from violence and abuse.

### **Make yourself heard:**

Sign a petition or write a letter to a member of your government – tell them they need to do more for girls’ rights!

### **Spread the word:**

Tell your friends, family and classmates all about girls’ right to a life free from poverty and violence. Tell them about the life girls lead once they end up on the street and how scary it can be to be a girl online. Then ask them to tell everyone they know too.

### **Find out more:**

Find out more about the issue of discrimination and about human rights! And discover what young people like you are doing to promote girls’ rights.

For more ideas on how to make a difference go to:

**<http://plan-international.org/girls>**

This youth summary is based on the facts and findings of the 2010 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' report. **The full version can be accessed here: <http://plan-international.org/girls/resources/publications.php>**