

Because they are girls

Mapping Plan's experience in improving the lives of girls



Because **I am a Girl**

About this report

Plan was established in 1937 to care for children orphaned in the Spanish Civil War. Over the years, Plan's focus shifted from wartime relief to long-term community development. However, the rights and well-being of children remained at the centre of Plan's concerns. Today, Plan is one of the largest international child-centred development organisations in the world operating in more than 60 countries.

As Plan developed from a children's charity into a development organisation centred on the rights of children, our awareness grew that gender inequality and discrimination were barriers that had to be overcome in order to create the conditions under which children can realise their rights. In 1995 Plan staff participated in the United Nations World Conference for Women in Beijing. This marked the beginning of the formal and explicit integration of gender equality goals in our work. Ten years later, in 2005, Plan published a report entitled '*Our journey so far*', taking stock of our organisational development on gender equality.

Today, five years later, it is time to take stock again. This time with a desk study that is pushing the question a little bit further. What difference have Plan projects and programmes made to the lives of girls?

Gender equality is, of course, not "just about girls". Gender equality is an issue of social justice and human rights that needs to be pursued by all members in a community or society, male or female. But if our work in promoting greater equality is to show any impact, it has to be in terms of changing the lives of girls in our partner communities. This is the issue explored in this report.

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Photo: Plan / Danielle Pattiasina.
Girls learning at school in Pha Oudom, Bokeo Province, Laos.

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Summary

This publication is the report of a desk study that takes stock of Plan’s efforts to promote gender equality. Fifteen years ago Plan formally adopted the achievement of gender equality as a critical component in its strategy for the elimination of child poverty and the realisation of children’s rights. Many initiatives were undertaken in the first years, including the development and implementation of gender equality strategies and audits by Regional and Country Offices. The desk study examined how this development of policies and concepts found its reflection in programme practice.

The study identified 179 projects that met predefined criteria of “girls’ projects”. The numbers of project inceptions increased each year over the ten-year study period. We identified projects in all Plan regions and programme countries, working with girls, boys and young women as rights holders and with a wide range of duty bearers, from parents to governments. The projects spanned the full range of Plan’s activities but were most numerous in two programme areas: the promotion of the right to education and of the right to protection from violence and harm.

To gain insight into the effectiveness of Plan’s gender equality programmes, we conducted an in-depth qualitative review of 34 projects that were assessed by Plan field staff to be particularly promising and innovative.

The results of the study indicate that things are changing. Numerous quotes and case histories collected throughout the study demonstrate how Plan’s work with girls, their families, their communities and their governments has contributed to increasing their ability to realise their rights. The projects have helped reduce gender discrimination and harm to girls and women, they have opened the doors for girls to gain new opportunities and new skills, and they have triggered transformations in belief systems that blocked progress towards gender equality.

The study identifies Plan as an organisation that takes the rights of girls seriously, that has increasingly integrated girls’ rights in its programme activities, and that is continuously looking for new ways and opportunities to advance the achievement of gender equality and of girls’ rights.

The study resulted in the formulation of a number of recommendations, some of which are already being acted on. The main foci of these recommendations are an increased institutionalisation of gender equality in Plan’s work, and increased communication and staff capacity development to continue Plan’s very promising growth integrating gender equality across its programme impact areas.

Because they are girls

Children have rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by 192 governments. But most children in this world do not realise their rights. Too many children die of preventable diseases, too many children are left without education, too many children work to survive, too many children are physically or mentally abused, too many children are excluded from active participation in the decisions of their family and community. The violations of children's rights are omnipresent, but for some children more than for others. Some children are subjected to greater violations of their rights because they are girls.

"Because I am a girl: the state of the world's girls" is the title of an annual report launched by Plan in 2007. Each year it explores the challenges and ways that gender discrimination affects girls' lives across the globe. In 2008, *Because I am a Girl* examined the experience of girls in times of war. In 2009 it focused on the barriers that girls have to overcome to fully participate in the global economy. The 2010 report looks at how the lives of girls are affected by urbanisation and by the growth of information and communication technology, two phenomena that are marking profound social changes at the start of the 21st century.

With the launch of the annual report in 2007, Plan initiated a long-term cohort study under the title *"Real choices, real lives"*. On the day of their birth in 2007, we enrolled 142 girls in nine countries¹ to be followed until their ninth birthday in 2015. In 2010, only 130 girls remain in the cohort. Five have died and seven have moved with their families. Lack of adequate nutrition and health care are already leaving a noticeable mark on this group. With the annual report and the annual update of the international cohort, Plan is telling a story that needs to be told.

But what are we doing about it? Plan is an international organisation dedicated to the rights of children. It is, using a term of the human rights movement, a *"duty bearer"*. Plan has a duty to act. This publication is the result of a stocktaking exercise. How is Plan performing as a duty bearer? What is Plan doing for children whose rights are violated because they are girls? Where? How much? How well?

Gender Equity (Plan Egypt)

"I feel very happy that I succeeded in saving myself from being a weak person unable to take a decision related to my life. I am happy to share what I have learned during the training with my family. When I get married and have girls, I will do my best to protect them from the discrimination and bad feelings based on their gender." (14 year-old girl)

¹ Brazil, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam

Why Girls?

Plan recognises that discrimination against girls and women is one of the main underlying causes of child poverty. Girls and boys have the same entitlements to human rights, but they face different challenges in accessing them. Girls are less likely to be enrolled in school, have less access to medical care, and are more likely to be deprived of food. They experience more violence and sexual harassment and are expected to work hard on domestic chores limiting their ability to develop their intellectual potential. This lack of opportunity and care is unfair and unjust. Yet we know that investing in girls and young women has a disproportionately beneficial effect on alleviating poverty; not only for the girls themselves but for their families, their communities and their country. Everyone benefits, including boys and men. Social justice, equality of opportunity and developmental impact are three reasons why Plan has made the 'Because I am a Girl' campaign one of its flagship priorities.²

Mapping Plan's programmes for gender equality

Gender inequality is a main cause of child rights violations, of poverty and of exclusion. In many societies girls and women have a lower social status than boys and men. They have less control over their lives, less power of decision-making, less access to resources. This gender-based discrimination contributes to intergenerational cycles of poverty. Disadvantaged girls grow up to become poor women who will give birth to children unable to reach their full potential. Because of the interconnected nature of the rights of children and those of women, Plan has adopted an approach that combines the promotion of child rights and gender equality in its programmes.

In 2009, Plan conducted an auto-evaluation asking the following questions:

- What have we done to improve the lives of girls through our programming?
- Which of our initiatives are especially promising, innovative and likely to achieve lasting results in the lives of girls?
- What are important elements to consider in future programming in order to build on what we have done well?
- What are the projects that best exemplify directions for future programming to improve the lives of girls?

The result of this desk study is presented in this publication. It is a map of the status of Plan's programmes promoting the rights of girls.



Photo: Plan / Shreeram KC.
Plan programmes in Utharjhitkaiya helped Premlata, she has successfully passed her school leaving certificate, Nepal.

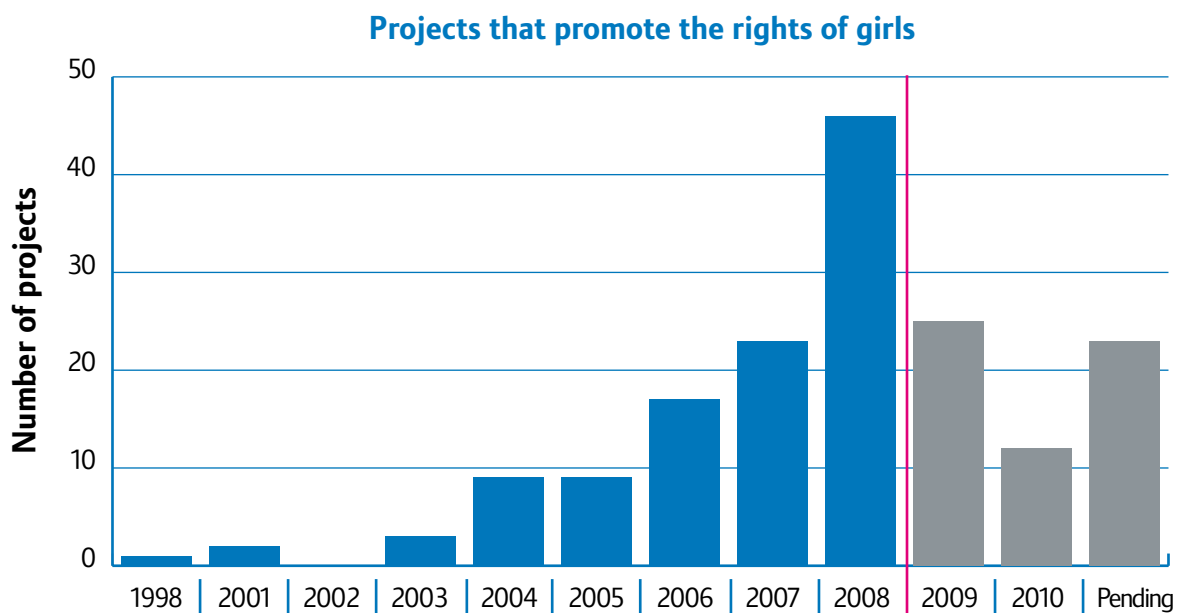
² Further information on Plan's 'Because I am a Girl' report and campaign can be obtained at www.plan-international.org/girls

The profile of Plan's work for gender equality

The programme portfolio

In September 2009, we identified all Plan projects that were explicit in their intention to improve the lives of girls. The sources of information were the Plan Intranet, Plan Country Progress Reports and lists of projects provided by Country Offices, Regional Offices and the Global Gender Equality Advisor.

Our search included projects that had been completed, projects currently implemented, projects awaiting start-up in 2009/10 and projects awaiting funding with uncertain start-up dates. In all, we identified 179 projects: 51 completed, 81 current and 47 that had not yet started.



In 2004/05 something changed in Plan: the rights of girls started to move towards the top of our agenda. In 2004, nine projects were initiated that aimed at improving the lives of girls, in 2008 it was 46. The trend was set to continue with a growing list of planned projects for 2009 and 2010.

My Body, My Right (Plan Sudan)

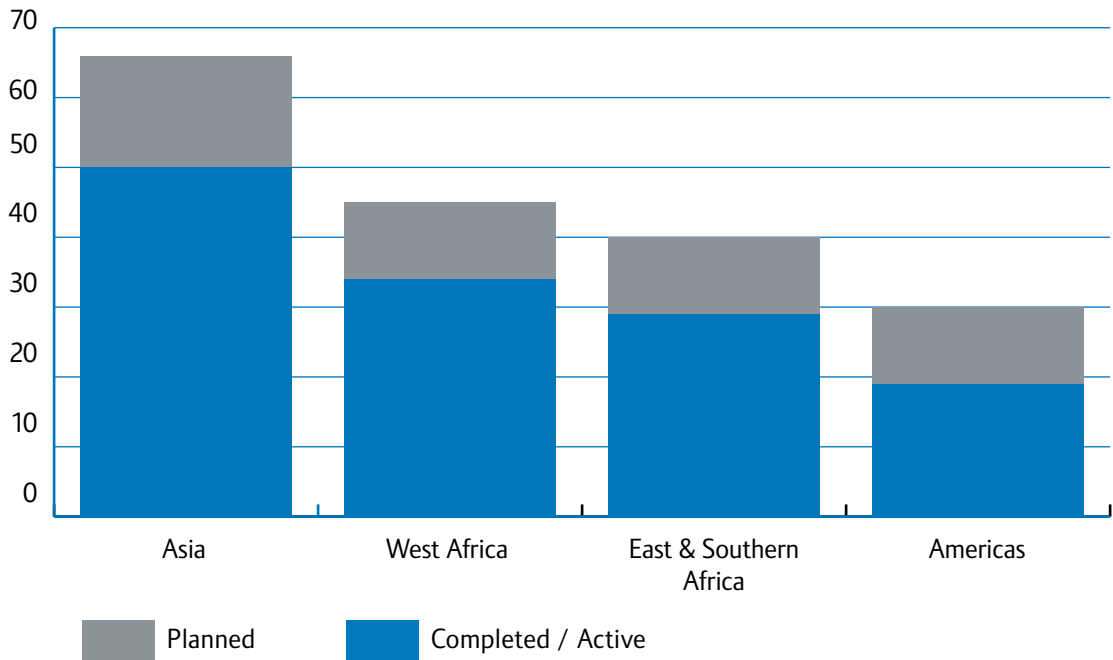
“We are happy that our parents, elders, community and religious leaders have started to realise the harm that Khitan can create for the girl children. We have to continue our community dialogue on this issue. We are glad to be part of this awareness initiative.” (13 year old girl)

Girls' projects

For the purpose of the desk study, a “girls’ project” was defined as a project that included the improvement of the lives of girls as an explicit statement in its goals or objectives. This definition included projects working directly with girls as well as projects working with other rights holders and duty bearers in order to create an environment in which girls’ rights are fulfilled and in which they may reach their full potential. Counting the number of projects is, of course, only a crude proxy measure for the level of engagement in promoting gender equality. It is useful for monitoring trends over time, but does not allow comparisons of the level of effort between countries or regions. Project volume, duration, and the degree of gender mainstreaming are additional parameters that would need to be considered in such a comparison. It is important to note that the mapping aimed to capture a sufficient representation of Plan’s work on girls’ rights, however the results are not comprehensive in nature, nor do they represent the full extent of Plan’s investment in improving the lives of girls across all regions.

Of Plan’s 49 Country Offices, all but two reported projects that focused on the rights of girls.¹ Most of the projects were in the Asia Region.

Projects by region



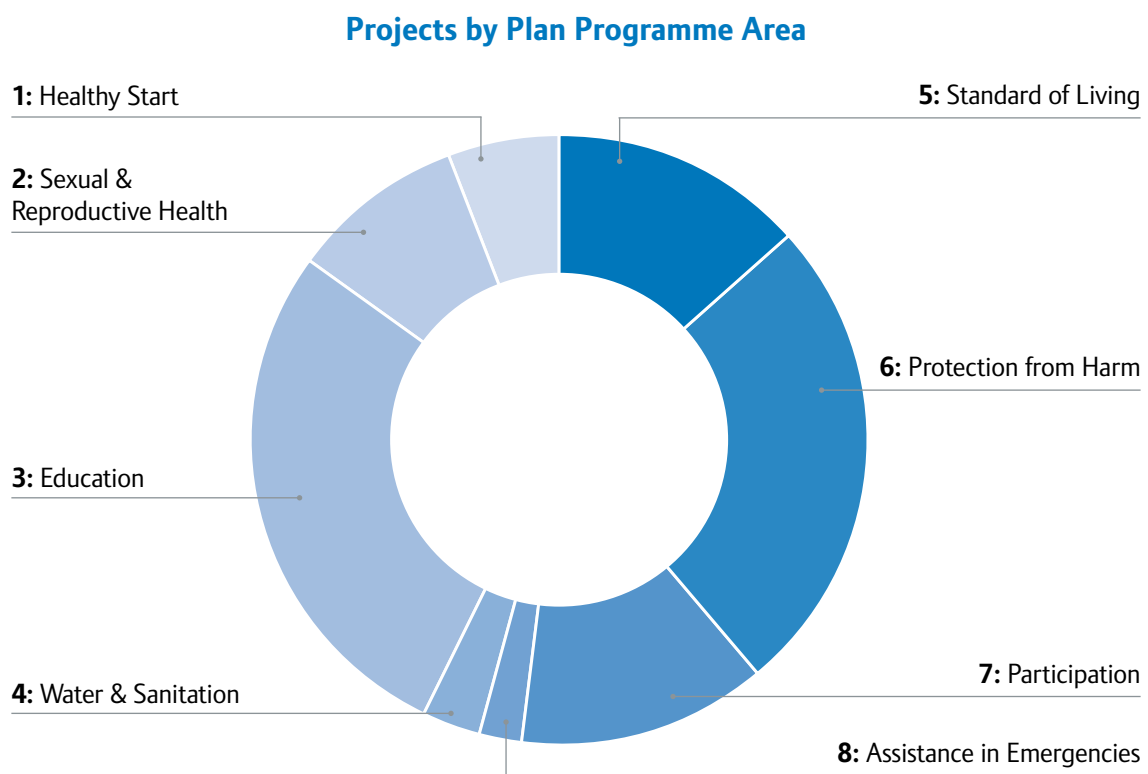
¹ The Country Offices reporting projects (including regional projects) were: Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Laos, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor Leste, Togo, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

The programme framework

Based on an analysis of the issues that most affect children, the Plan Programme Guide (2010) identifies eight programme areas in which Plan has the capacity to effectively contribute to the promotion of child rights.

1. The right to a healthy start in life
2. The right to sexual and reproductive health
3. The right to education
4. The right to water and improved sanitation
5. The right to an adequate standard of living
6. The right to protection from all forms of violence and harm
7. The right to participate as citizens
8. The right to protection and assistance in emergency situations

The promotion of gender equality is not a programme area; it is a principle applied to all programmes and projects. Many of the projects identified in the mapping exercise address more than one programme area. The right to education (area 3) and the right to protection from violence and harm (area 6) are the most common.



Girls' Empowerment through Education (Plan Liberia)

“My parents almost took me out of school last year before Plan came in to support our school with scholarships and improvements. If not for the project, I should have been at home doing nothing.” (girl in 5th grade)

The importance accorded to girls' right to education is related to Plan's organisational profile and to international priorities. Under the Millennium Development Goals, international targets have been established to achieve universal primary education without gender disparity by 2015. Plan is committed to deliver its contribution to this achievement.

Second in frequency is the area of protection from violence and harm. For Plan this is a priority advocacy issue. It gained major international prominence when the United Nations Secretary-General's Report on Violence against Children was tabled in the UN General Assembly of November 2006.

The programming areas identified least frequently were area 1 (right to a healthy start in life), area 4 (right to water and improved sanitation) and area 8 (right to protection and assistance in emergency situations). Area 1 includes mostly child survival and early childhood development programmes. Most of the gender equality issues addressed in these programmes are related to parenting roles, for instance the participation of fathers in ante-natal care and in raising children. They would not have been captured by the search criteria of our study. Initiatives to stop the practice of selective abortion of female foetuses are captured, but they are limited to the countries in Asia where this practice exists. They are often part of projects that have a wider scope under the programme area of protection from harm. Activities in the area of water and sanitation that specifically aim at improving the lives of girls include the construction of safe school latrines for girls. They were not always captured in our search because they are included in general education programmes.



Photo: © Plan / Alf Berg.
Girls learning English at an informal afternoon class taught by a volunteer teacher, Cambodia.

Access to and Quality of Education at Basic, Primary and Middle School Levels with a Focus on Female Education (Plan Pakistan) Zahida, a 28 year-old mother

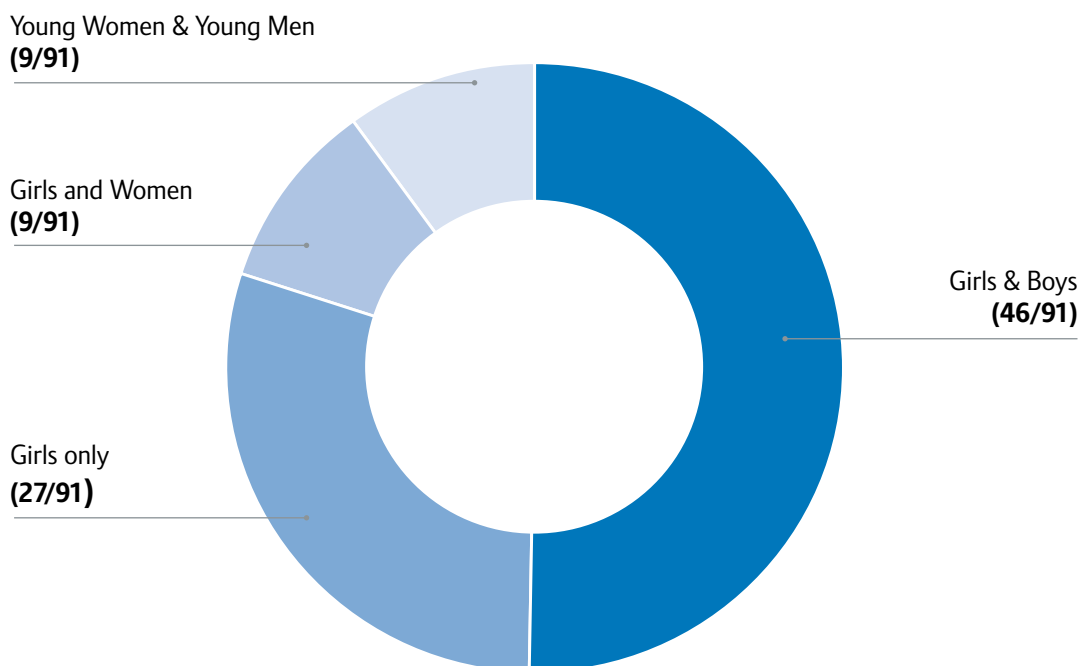
“When my children started attending school I faced difficulty teaching and guiding them. My husband advised me to get proper schooling and I enrolled myself at the Plan Non-Formal Education Centre. I improved in English language and am able to help my children with their work and read messages on the cell phone. My desire is to complete Middle School (8th grade) and reach out to others.” (28 year-old mother)

Participation and partnerships

Child Centred Community Development (CCCD) is Plan's rights-based approach to programming. It provides for children, youth, families and communities as active and leading participants in their own development. Key elements of this approach are participation and partnerships with children as rights holders and with parents, communities, service providers, civil society organisations, companies and governments as duty bearers.

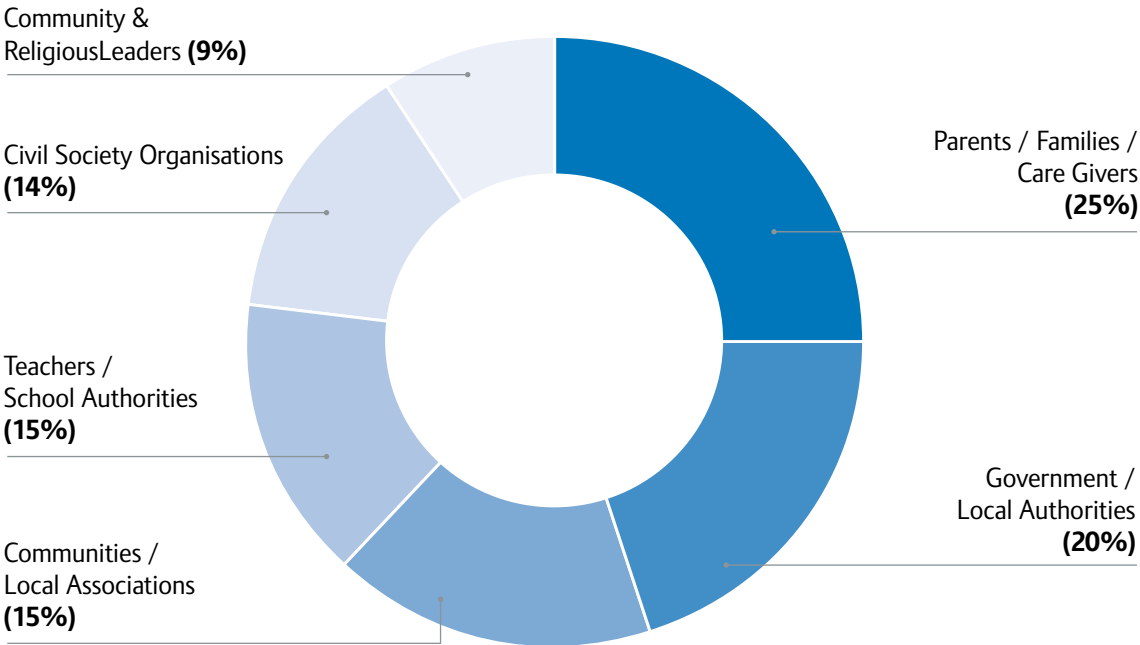
In order to generate positive changes in the lives of girls, their rights must be promoted at different levels. The main rights holders are girls, but initiatives for girls' rights may be embedded in projects with a wider programmatic scope. Of the 179 projects identified in our search, 91 provided information about rights holders. Most of them worked with girls and boys but nevertheless retained the objective of improving the lives of girls. The duty bearers, the persons, organisations and institutions whose duty it is to assure that girls are able to realise their rights, include parents, teachers, community and religious leaders, civil society organisations, government institutions, policy makers, the judicial system, the media, and the private sector. Most initiatives work at multiple levels, in partnership and with the participation of several categories of duty bearers. Among the 179 selected projects, 100 provided this information. The most immediate duty bearers for children, the parents, care givers and families, were the most frequently identified.

Working with Rights-Holders



Effective promotion of girls’ rights also requires strategic partnerships and alliances for programme implementation. The identified projects listed a large number of implementing partnerships summarised in this table.

Working with Duty-Bearers



Implementing partnerships	
Government institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministries, national councils and national commissions for education, health, social welfare, rural development, social solidarity, youth, children, family and gender; • The Judiciary system including courts, judges, police forces, public defenders and the Attorney General; • Municipal and Local Government authorities
Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national women’s organisations; • Local, national and international NGOs; • Community development associations, youth clubs, school committees, religious institutions, football leagues; • Professional associations of lawyers or health workers; • Companies and banks
United Nations agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Labour Organisation, World Food Program, UNICEF, UNIFEM, Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO)

The content of Plan's work for gender equality

The desk review of the 179 projects provided a perspective on how Plan addresses gender issues in each of its strategic programme areas. It illustrated the breadth of Plan's development work. Programmes are built on context-specific analyses and address priorities established by local Plan offices in consultation with children and with other key stakeholders.

The causes of gender inequalities are found at many levels, from systemic gender discrimination in national legislation to gender biases reflected in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of individual girls and boys. Effective programming to eliminate gender inequalities therefore needs to act simultaneously at many different levels.

In Programme Area 6, for instance, Plan addresses the right of girls to protection from violence and harm. Activities include work with survivors of violence, providing medical treatment and psychological support, assisting in recovery and in reintegration. Other activities address behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that underlie the harm done to girls. They include intergenerational and community dialogues on female genital cutting, and dialogues with boys and young men about sexual violence. Further upstream are prevention programmes such as the promotion of universal birth registration (UBR) as an instrument to detect and prevent the practice of selective abortion of female foetuses. Many projects aim at building the capacity of local duty bearers to understand and respond to gender-based violence. They include the training of health workers and the police in dealing with survivors of violence, financial and technical assistance for the establishment of local support networks, and capacity building of local civil society organisation for raising public awareness and conducting advocacy for policy changes to end all forms of gender-based violence.

The following tables illustrate the range of activities identified in the 179 Plan projects included in our survey.

Programme Area 1: The right to a healthy start in life	Nutrition camps, food for education programs for girls
	Education and training activities for girls regarding health and hygiene
	Awareness raising on girls' health issues (use of street theatre, posters, etc.)

Programme Area 2: The right to sexual and reproductive health	Sensitisation on sexual and reproductive health issues
	Training of health personnel
	Procurement of drugs and medical supplies
	Production of information material on sexual and reproductive health issues
	Awareness raising for HIV prevention
	Training and support of peer education networks on reproductive health
	Promotion and access to condoms
	Counselling and referral services / Youth friendly health services

Programme Area 3: The right to education	Reform of the school curriculum to be more gender-inclusive
	Provision of school material to girls (e.g. textbooks, uniforms)
	Provision of materials for teachers and libraries that focus on girls' education
	Training of teachers on gender-related issues
	Infrastructure development for creation of gender-friendly school environments. (e.g. proximity, separate latrines, safe environment)
	Advocacy for leveraging of resources for girls' education
	Community awareness-raising of girls' rights to education
	Building capacity of community groups to support girls' education
	Creation of networks to promote girls' education
	Sensitisation and education of parents and care-givers on the importance of girls' education
	Support of mentors and counsellors that follow up on girls' school performance
	Alternative learning centres that cater to the needs of out-of-school adolescent girls
	Early childhood care and development / provision of day-care facilities
	Remedial classes and 'bridging courses' to allow girls who are out of school to continue their education
	Provision of life skills training
	Support of girls' education through school management committees
Scholarships for girls, including financial support for school supplies, transportation, and sometimes housing.	

Programme Area 4: The right to water and improved sanitation	Construction of gender-friendly water and sanitation facilities, e.g. separate school latrines for girls and boys, safe water supplies close to home and schools, water supply to ensure gender-specific hygiene needs.
	Including the concerns and priorities of girls in the support of community water user and water management groups

Programme Area 5: The right to an adequate standard of living	Financial support (e.g. microfinance loans / support to needy families while girls receive training)
	Vocational education training for girls/adolescents/young women
	Skills training (e.g. marketing, life skills)
	Entrepreneurship development (e.g. training on start-up enterprise)
	Advocacy for support to life skills for girls and young women
	Provision of tools and equipment

Programme Area 6: The right to protection from all forms of violence and harm	Public awareness/information/advocacy campaigns
	Community education on violence against children and women or how to seek assistance
	Training workshops on gender-related issues (girls' rights, gender analysis, gender based violence)
	Intergenerational dialogue to change attitudes and behaviours related to violence
	Establishment of systems or mechanisms to protect girls from harm (e.g. birth registration, reporting and monitoring mechanisms for cases of child marriages, community committees to stop female genital cutting)
	Establishment or improvement of protection services (e.g. help lines, crisis centres, mobile psychological support units, medical and psychological support, legal and paralegal services)
	Community protection groups and support networks
	Rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors (e.g. educational assistance to survivors of trafficking or forced labour, support to livelihood activities)
	Institutional support of community-based organisations working on gender-related issues
	Creation and support of networks to combat gender-based-violence
	Research on gender issues affecting girls
	Development of tools to combat gender-based-violence
	Training of government and civil society actors in dealing with survivors of violence (peer educators, health personnel, police)
	Working with boys and men to overcome aggression towards girls and women
Advocacy for policy changes towards greater protection of girls from violence	

Programme Area 7:

The right to participate as citizens

- Raising awareness on child rights and on the rights of participation
- Training sessions/workshops on gender equality for community-based organisations
- Development of materials and dissemination of information on gender equality and girls' rights
- Institutional capacity building on gender equality issues in governmental and civil society organisations
- Training for community leaders or decision makers in gender equality and girls' rights
- Advocacy for gender equality at the government level
- Establishment and support of girls football teams
- Institutional, financial and material support of children's clubs, child-to-child activities, girls' groups, children's fora
- Participation of girls in the design and implementation of projects

Programme Area 8:

The right to protection and assistance in emergency situations

- Capacity building at local level for emergency response
- Support for disaster drills
- Provision of primary health care services for displaced populations
- Training of health workers in gender-differentiated needs during emergencies
- Promotion of birth registration for internally displaced refugee population



Photo: Plan / Leanne Nicolle.
Children learning in a temporary classroom in Jacmel, Haiti.

The results of Plan's work for gender equality

In order to explore the results of Plan's work, we selected 34 promising and innovative projects based on the assessment of our field staff. The selection was validated by Plan Country and Regional Offices and by an advisory group of senior international staff.

The selected projects met the following criteria:

- they demonstrated progress towards directly improving the lives of girls through gender-specific programming or through effectively mainstreaming the goal of gender equality in the overall project design;
- they showed potential for replication;
- they made use of innovative practices.

In addition, we considered the geographic and thematic balance in making the selection. Together, these 34 projects demonstrate the full range of changes that Plan considers to be key results of effective programming. Plan defines programme effectiveness as the extent to which programmes contribute to strengthening the capacity of rights holders and duty bearers to create a lasting environment in which the rights of children are respected, protected and fulfilled. The expected results are changes among different actors at different levels of programming.¹ For the 34 projects we reviewed in the context of the study we considered three critical levels with five key results to obtained at each level:

Improvements in the lives of girls	Girls are more aware of their rights
	Girls and women participate in community discussions and decisions
	Girls have better access to resources and skills
	Girls are better protected from harm
	Men and boys are more aware of gender discrimination and act as allies for girls' rights
Improvements in family and community support for girls' rights	Communities are more aware of the rights of girls
	Communities are better able to support girls in realising their rights
	Communities have developed positive attitudes towards the rights of girls and women
	Communities have reduced barriers for girls' access to services and resources
	Communities have increased their protection of girls and their rights

¹ For further reference please consult Plan's Programme Guide www.plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/about-plans-work/promoting-child-rights-to-end-child-poverty-1

Improvements in the institutional support of girls' rights

- Government authorities are openly committed to the protection of girls from violence and harm
- Governments have adopted legislation and committed resources to support girls' rights
- Support services to protect girls and their rights are strengthened
- Women and girls have more space to participate in decision-making
- Partnerships and alliances are created to promote gender equality and to improve the lives of girls

The following is a list of examples drawn from the 34 projects that illustrate how the expected results have been achieved.

1. Improvements in the lives of girls

1.1. Girls are more aware of their rights

- The **Kamalari Abolition** project in Nepal supports child protection committees and children and youth clubs that are raising the awareness among children on the harm done to young indigenous girls who are being sent to serve as domestic workers (called Kamalari) in rich households.
- The **Girls' Empowerment through Education Project** in Liberia provides a platform to build awareness about child rights through a girls' media club linked to a regional Plan radio project entitled "I am a child but I have my rights too".

1.2. Girls and women participate in community discussions and decisions

- The **Girls Football** project in Togo reinforced the social position of girls in their community through increased opportunities for participation of girls in meetings with their peers discussing problems, rights, responsibilities and needs; as referees of games who must take decisions; in speaking publicly, and without shame about the sport on radio stations; as players of a game that was formerly seen to be the exclusive domain of boys.
- The project entitled **Abandonment of Female Genital Cutting and Enhancement of Reproductive Health** in the Forest Region of Guinea mobilises girls who have not undergone genital cutting and their mothers to become co-trainers and peer educators, creating associations to denounce the practice and to contribute to changing a harmful tradition.

1.3. Girls have better access to resources and skills

- The project **Promotion of Girls in Education** in Cambodia has increased the school retention rate for girls by addressing the issues that cause girls to drop out of school. The project awards scholarships to girls to overcome financial barriers and supports remedial classes for girls at risk of dropping out.
- The **Sidoni Education Committee** in Mali focused on teaching girls basic reading, writing and numerical skills, while at the same time supporting income-generating activities such as soap-making or the conservation and transformation of vegetables.

1.4. Girls are better protected from harm

- The **Early Girl Child Marriage** project in Kenya achieved reduced rates of child marriages and unwanted early pregnancies in the schools where it was implemented. Local support groups continue to monitor children's rights and maintain a community based system to document reported cases of child marriage for referral to legal and health services.
- The **Education Renewal and Advocacy** programme in Sierra Leone increased community members' knowledge of HIV and contributed to a reduction of risky sexual behaviour through awareness-raising campaigns.

1.5. Men and boys are more aware of gender discrimination and act as allies for girls' rights

- **Programme H** in Brazil organised meetings of young men to reflect on the macho culture and on gender inequality. It achieved a reduction in aggression for conflict resolution in social and family settings.

2. Improvements in family and community support for girls' rights

2.1. Communities are more aware of the rights of girls

- The project **My Body my Right** in Sudan saw an increase in the number of communities declaring themselves free of the practices of child marriage and female genital cutting after a series of discussion and education workshops with children, men, women leaders, youth, religious leaders, midwives, health workers, media people and decision makers.
- The **Project to Eradicate Female Foeticide and to Mainstream Reliable Birth System in the State of Bihar** in India supported district committees and used street theatre and village meetings to increase community awareness on the rights of girls.

2.2. Communities are better able to support girls in realising their rights

- The project **Gender Equity** in Egypt strengthened the capacity of community-based organisations to design and implement activities that reflect the needs and priorities of both women and men. It resulted in increased advocacy for gender equality and girls' rights by local civil society organisations.

2.3. Communities have developed positive attitudes towards the rights of girls and women

- The **Education, Advocacy and Community Empowerment** project in Malawi worked with parents to create awareness of gender issues and positive attitudes towards girls. As a result, there was a significant increase in school enrolment of girls and the retention of older girls in school.
- The project **Reduction of Female Genital Mutilation** in Egypt has seen an increase in the number of families and community leaders who publicly declared that they are against the practice of female genital cutting.

2.4. Communities have reduced barriers for girls' access to services and resources

- The ***San Augustin Reading Centre*** in the Philippines created a venue for girls to come together and discuss common concerns. The Centre also provides girls with learning materials to improve their performance in school.
- The ***Education, Advocacy and Community Empowerment*** project in Malawi included the construction of separate school latrines for girls and boys, reducing an important obstacle to girls' access to education.

2.5. Communities have increased their protection of girls and their rights

- The Fighting Against Child Trafficking project in Nepal supported community protection groups that joined in a federation at district level into an effective lobby for the implementation of the existing laws against the trafficking of girls. The groups are active in the communities, raising awareness, preventing girls from being trafficked and protecting them from other forms of violence and abuse.

3. Improvements in the institutional support of girls' rights

3.1. Government authorities are openly committed to the protection of girls from violence and harm

- The project ***KOPAL II: A Campaign to End Female Foeticide*** in India led to the Jharkhand State government declaring the year 2008 as "Save the Girl Child Year" in order to eradicate female foeticide.
- The project Boys, ***Girls and Adolescents Growing up without Gender Violence*** in El Salvador led to public statements by mayors and parliamentarians against sexual harassment and child abuse and to pledges to strengthen the country's legislation on these issues.

3.2. Governments have adopted legislation and committed resources to support girls' rights

- The ***Reduction of Female Genital Mutilation*** project in Egypt created and supported NGO networks that entered into a successful cooperation with the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood for a national media campaign. This contributed to the establishment of a ministerial decree and legislation against female genital cutting.

3.3. Support services to protect girls and their rights are strengthened

- The project ***Empowering Communities Through Child Protection*** in the Philippines supports Women and Child Protection Units that provide “one stop” services to children in need of protection and to battered women in the project areas.
- The project ***Strengthening Local Capacities for Eradication of Violence against the Girl Child*** in Kenya strengthened government mechanisms for monitoring and dealing with cases of violence against girls at district, divisional, and sub-location levels.

3.4. Women and girls have more space to participate in decision-making

- The project ***Girls in Education in Khanshama*** in Bangladesh included the training of all stakeholders on gender issues. Women became more actively involved in education, participating in the recruitment of staff, in mobilising resources and in general decision making.

3.5. Partnerships and alliances are created to promote gender equality and to improve the lives of girls

- The project ***Boys, Girls and Adolescents Growing up without Gender Violence*** in El Salvador supported the successful coordination of activities against gender violence among different sectors of Government including the Ministry of Health, the Attorney General’s Office and the Ministry of Education.



Photo: Plan / Shona Hamilton.
Jessica from the Nicaragua team.
The Street Child World Cup held in South Africa in March 2010 gave these forgotten children a voice and a platform to campaign for their rights, South Africa.

Girls’ Football (Plan Ghana)

“Until I joined the football team I did not know any other town apart from my community and Asewewa. I now know Ghana is a big place. I saw Koforidua, Accra and Tema. I would like to be like one of the women I met in Parliament House, that is to be a lawyer.” (football team member)

The challenges of Plan's work for gender equality

Overcoming resistance to change

As part of our survey we asked Plan staff to list the challenges they faced in the implementation of projects to support the rights of girls. Among the 34 responses we received, the most frequent reply can be broadly categorised as “resistance to change”.

These are four examples one from each of the regions where Plan works:

- ***Kamalari Abolition Project (Nepal)***

The biggest challenge to the success of this project came from local elites that employed Kamalari (girl domestic workers) themselves or had sent them to relatives in other cities. They dissuaded parents from engaging with Plan staff, claiming that the aims of the project were not in their best interest. This challenge was overcome by forming child protection committees, children's and youth clubs, and through continuous lobbying of parents to bring their children back and to stop the practice.

- ***Girls' Football Project (Brazil)***

Prejudices and long-held ideas of what girls should and should not do were obstacles faced by Plan staff to win parents' permission for girls' participation in the football (soccer) team. Numerous meetings and discussions between staff and parents were necessary to win their approval and enlist their support.

- ***Project for the Fight against Female Genital Mutilation (Mali)***

The biggest challenge was resistance of religious leaders who exerted pressure on local authorities and on communities not to support the project. This resulted in weak national engagement and the lack of political will to implement policy against the practice of excision. Misinformation campaigns organised by religious leaders were diffused through private and public media to reinforce the belief that excision is a religious practice. Plan Mali adopted an approach dubbed “working with allies without forgetting enemies”. It consisted in identifying and collaborating with influential leaders that were open to dialogue. Together information campaigns against excision were mounted; exchange forums for religious leaders were organized; the Ministry for Women, Children and Family Promotion and other partners collaborated in holding a religious conference on excision.

- ***Strengthening Local Capacities for Eradication of Violence against the Girl Child (Kenya)***

Plan Kenya found community attitudes and cultural practices to be formidable challenges for the eradication of violence against girls. Harmful practices, such as early marriages are considered normal and incidences of rape are often ‘solved’ by marrying the victim off to the perpetrator of the crime. Plan Kenya works on changing attitudes through increasing awareness on the rights of girls within the community, and on strengthening community mechanisms that encourage monitoring and reporting of cases of violence through collaboration with community based paralegals.

Resistance against improving the lives of girls is the manifestation of gender discrimination. It has its roots in value systems, culture and tradition and works its way up into societal systems that reflect these values and beliefs. Initiatives to increase gender equality are encountering gender discrimination at all levels of society, from relationships within families to organised religion.

In many countries where Plan works parents do not support the schooling of their daughters, sometimes at the primary level and more often at secondary or tertiary levels. Obstacles for girls to realise their right to education are found on many levels. They include the higher status of sons in family hierarchies, customary practices such as child marriage, and an education system that does not accommodate young girls after marriage and childbirth. Offering bursaries for girls may help overcome some obstacles in the short run, but it will not lead to sustainable changes in the lives of girls if the attitudes and beliefs that underlie the value system do not change.

The resistance to change encountered by Plan field staff should therefore not be a surprise. It is difficult to address gender discrimination that is rooted in culture and tradition, that may be supported with interpretations of organised religion, and that helps consolidate the existing power structure of communities. The four examples from the four Plan regions reveal a pattern on how Plan works to overcome the resistance. It is based on identifying potential allies within families, within communities, within governments and within religious bodies and strengthening their position without ever discounting the power of those who want to maintain the status quo.

Plan's approach is to promote the rights of girls and to eliminate gender inequality and gender-based discrimination from within social structures. The strategy is not without risks. It has to be applied carefully in order not to expose potential allies to a backlash by those who are resisting change. Being able to assess and to manage this risk is one of the strengths of Plan through its long-standing relationship with communities and the high level of trust that has been built up over years of community development work.

Meeting the challenges: Institutionalising gender equality in Plan's work

The desk review of Plan's projects to improve the lives of girls shows that Plan has solid experience in programmes to overcome gender discrimination in many countries. Experimentation has resulted in the development of innovative practices to address some of the most difficult challenges faced by girls and women to realise their rights.

The following recommendations are based on suggestions and comments by Plan staff on how to use this experience to strengthen the institutional profile of Plan as an effective agent of change for achieving gender equality.

1. Articulate a gender equality policy that spells out Plans vision on gender equality and girls' rights with clear links to Plan's rights-based child-centred community development approach.¹

Revise Plan's Gender Equality Protocol of 2004 by creating a stronger and more specific policy document that identifies the issues of gender equality in the areas of Plan's work, lays out a clear vision of the role of Plan in addressing these issues, defines principles and commitments to guide this work, and outlines the mechanisms for accountability. A draft gender equality policy outlining a clear vision, consistent message and coordinated approach on gender equality has been developed, and will become an official policy of Plan by April 2011.

Plan's draft Gender Equality Policy:

Plan believes that gender equality is central to achieving our vision for change: a world in which all children, both girls and boys, realize their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity. Girls and boys have the same rights but face different obstacles in accessing them. Through our daily work, we see the negative impacts of gender-based discrimination, stereotypes and unequal power relations between sexes. In order to realize the equal rights of girls and boys, Plan will reduce gender gaps, transform gender relations and address the unique needs of all children. Therefore, Plan will tackle gender inequality head on, at many different levels, from the individual to the level of institutions and policy.

The purpose of this global policy is to set out our core position and explicit commitments on gender equality, so that a gender lens is central to who we are and what we do as an organization dedicated to children's rights. In so doing, Plan will actively promote and practice gender equality in every sphere of our programmes, partnerships and organizational culture.

¹ See page 11 (Participation and partnerships). Child Centred Community Development describes the programme approach based on child rights pursued by Plan since the mid 1990s. For further reference please consult Plan's Programme Guide www.plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/about-plans-work/promoting-child-rights-to-end-child-poverty-1

2. Develop a results-based programme effectiveness framework for Plan’s work on gender equality and girls’ rights.

The desk review demonstrated that the method of monitoring changes of the Plan Programme Effectiveness Framework can be readily applied to gender equality programming in Plan. This analytical work should be further strengthened by using it as a basis to develop a conceptual framework that is specific to monitoring the effectiveness of Plan’s engagement in improving the lives of girls.

3. Develop operational plans for implementing the gender equality policy

Based on Plan’s vision, knowledge and experience, Plan should translate its gender equality policy into a cycle of time-bound operational plans linked to results and targets, specifying the resources needed for implementation. These plans should be directly linked to a broad operational strategy on gender equality to guide the organisation on the modalities of implementing its gender equality policy.

4. Develop a business plan linked to the operational plan

The business plan should identify the funds needed to achieve the results listed in the operational plans, as well as the potential sources of funding. It should include a communication strategy directed to potential financial donors based on a portfolio of achievements by past or current projects to improve the lives of girls.

5. Develop guides for Plan staff on how to implement the gender equality policy and provide training on effective integration of gender equality into Plan’s programmes.

This includes the development of practical tools for integrating gender equality into Plan’s programme areas using the Child Centred Community Development approach. It also includes training in the use of gender analysis to identify gender issues related to Plan’s programming areas. Web-based as well as face-to-face delivery of this training should be developed to allow widespread use across Plan offices and with partners. Work on this has already started.

6. Communicate clearly why and how Plan supports and integrates gender equality and girls’ rights into its work and promote exchange of knowledge on the subject.

The annual “Because I am a Girl” reports provide an excellent knowledge base on issues and actions regarding girls’ rights. Although our desk study revealed that practically all Plan offices are engaged in work for gender equality, the links between the “Because I am a Girl” reports and Plan’s programmes at the country level are not always strong. Plan should engage in an internal communication effort linking the knowledge about gender issues imparted by the report to the practice of working for the rights of girls at the country and community level.

Fighting against Child Trafficking (Plan Nepal)

Sobha, a survivor of sexual exploitation and trafficking was rescued by Plan’s local partner. The project provided counselling to help her overcome the negative social stigma bestowed upon her by the community due to her past. She also received training through the project and opened a tailor shop with a micro finance loan. She is now married, earns an income and provides sewing training to 8-10 girls that are at risk of being trafficked.

Annex:

List of 34 projects included in the qualitative review of effectiveness

COUNTRY	PROJECT TITLE	STATUS
Bangladesh	Girls in Education in Khanshama	Completed
Bolivia	Sasito Programme in Bolivia	Current
Bolivia	Food Security and Nutrition	Current
Brazil	Girls Football	Current
Brazil	Programme H	Completed
Burkina Faso	Burkinabe Response to Improve Girls' Chances to Succeed	Completed
Cambodia	Promotion of Girls in Education	Current
China	Child Legal Support and Protection	Current
Egypt	Gender Equity in Plan Egypt	Completed
Egypt	Reduction of Female Genital Mutilation	Current
El Salvador	Boys, Girls and Adolescents Growing up without Gender Violence	Completed
Ghana	Girls Football	Current
Guinea	Abandonment of Female Genital Cutting and Enhancement of Reproductive Health in Guinea Forest Region	Current
India	Eradication of Female Foeticide in the State of Bihar	Completed
India	KOPAL II: A Campaign to End Female Foeticide	Completed
Kenya	Early Girl Child Marriage	Completed
Kenya	Strengthening Local Capacities for the Eradication of Violence against Girls	Current
Liberia	Girls Empowerment Through Education	Current
Malawi	Education, Advocacy and Community Empowerment: School Improvement Pilot Program 03-05	Completed
Mali	Project for the Fight against Female Genital Mutilation	Completed
Mali	Education Committee in Sidoni	Completed
Nepal	Fighting Against Child Trafficking	Completed
Nepal	Better Life Options	Completed
Nepal	Kamalari ¹ Abolition	Current
Pakistan	Access to and Quality of Education at Basic, Primary and Middle School Levels with Focus on Females	Completed
Philippines	Empowering Communities Through Child Protection	Current
Philippines	Community Empowerment for the Prevention of Trafficking and the Reintegration of Trafficked Persons	Current
Philippines	San Agustin Reading Centre	Current
Sierra Leone	Education Renewal Programme and Advocacy in Bombali and Port Loko	Completed
Sudan	My Body my Right	Completed
Thailand	Education Funds	Current
Togo	Girls First!	Completed
Togo	Girls Football	Current
Vietnam	Enhancing Girls' and Young Women's Status and Participation in the Development of Hanoi	Current

¹ Domestic child labour

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