

Because  
**I am a  
Girl**



# Unleashing Potential

The Because I am a Girl Phase One Report

(2010-2015)



Photo credit: Plan International / Ramon Sanchez Orense



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# INTRODUCTION

Girls are among the most marginalized groups in the world—facing extra barriers to success in almost every country and culture. In too many households, schools, towns, and cities their most basic rights are ignored or trampled. Their health and education are neglected. Their goals and personal safety are minimized. Their time is taken for the care of animals, siblings and husbands. All too often they have no voice in their own destiny.

Examples of this marginalization are found all over the world. A girl in Burkina Faso may have to walk up to 10 miles to attend school in a building with no water or toilets. In the slums of Cairo, nearly half of all girls under age 18 have dropped out of school—many list the dangerous commute to school as the main reason. In Nepal, more than 11,000 girls are trafficked every year. Plan believes this is a travesty and an outrage that must end.

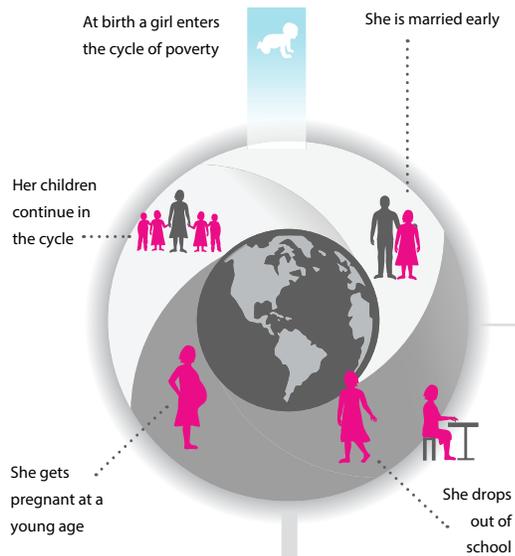
In 2012, Plan launched its Because I am a Girl campaign with the aim of reaching 4 million girls over four years through projects that protect

vulnerable girls living in poverty. Because I am a Girl is a broad community-based strategy aimed at ensuring that marginalized girls have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Research shows that for every additional year of primary education, women experience increased earnings that help break the cycle of poverty for themselves and their children. Educated women also have smaller, healthier families, and they are more likely to educate both their daughters and sons.

Our multi-sectorial programs enable marginalized girls in Burkina Faso, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and Vietnam to realize their own power as they transition to adulthood. The programs were designed to work with the girls, as well as the families, communities, and institutions around them. This report outlines the progress that has been made with your support to create a cycle of opportunity for millions of girls.

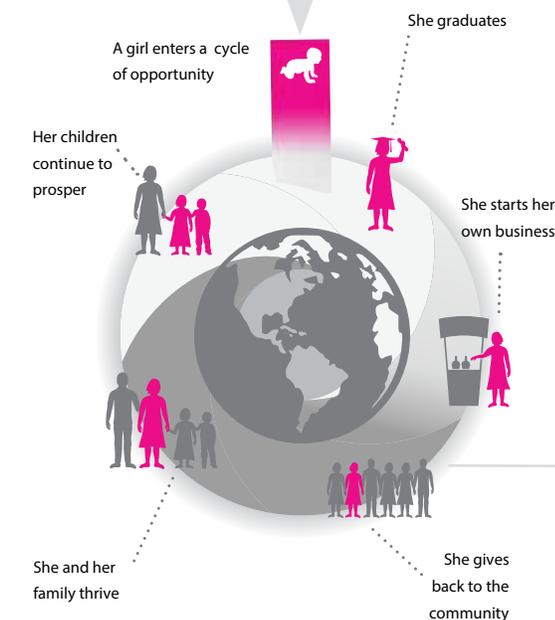
THE  
CYCLE OF POVERTY



THE  
INTERVENTIONS



THE  
CYCLE OF OPPORTUNITY



HOW IT WORKS

GLOBALLY an estimated 65 million girls around the world are not attending school. A girl who is not in school is more likely to be a child bride, live in poverty, and become a single mother whose children follow the same path.

GIRLS ENTER THIS VICIOUS CYCLE OF POVERTY

BECAUSE I AM A GIRL'S multi-sectoral programs enable marginalized girls to realize their own power as they transition to adulthood. As strong, powerful girls and soon-to-be women, they will be able to pass their newfound knowledge to their peers, communities, and, eventually, their own daughters and sons.

OUR PROGRAMS HELP GIRLS REALIZE THEIR POTENTIAL

PLAN provides continued support, with child-centered community development programs that:

- 1 Identify obstacles to progress in the community
- 2 Develop solutions side by side with communities
- 3 Provide education on human rights, access, and accountability
- 4 Enable governments to meet the needs of children and communities
- 5 Monitor local service delivery to ensure access and quality
- 6 Improve government responsiveness and service delivery capacity
- 7 Strengthen communities and governments so that people thrive

PLAN CREATES AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH GIRLS CAN THRIVE

BECAUSE I AM A GIRL'S projects break down barriers that prevent a girl from taking ownership of her life and future. Working within the community structure and systems, our programs deliver a complete package of financial, material, personal, and social assets. A new cycle of opportunity is created by providing a quality education so that a girl can become financially independent, thus uplifting her family and community.

A NEW CYCLE OF OPPORTUNITY ENSURES SUCCESS FOR GIRLS AND THEIR FAMILIES



# BRIGHTER FUTURES IN BURKINA FASO



From 2005 to 2016, Plan International USA worked to improve girls' education in Burkina Faso through two programs: Burkinabé Response to Improve Girls' Chances to Succeed (**BRIGHT**), funded by the U.S. government, and Burkina Response to Increasing the Development of Girls' Education (**BRIDGE**), funded by committed donors like you. Together, BRIGHT and BRIDGE improved the educational outcomes of nearly 40,000 girls and boys.

BRIGHT focused on 132 rural villages in the 10 provinces of the country where girls' elementary school enrollment rates were lowest. BRIGHT constructed primary schools, mobilized communities to support girls' education, and lowered barriers to girls' education outside the classroom through Plan's holistic approach.

These girl-friendly interventions were sustained by government and community investments and included the following: preschools where students were able to take their younger

siblings; sources where students could collect water to take home; gender-segregated latrines; take-home rations for girls with a better-than-90 percent attendance rate; capacity building of Ministry officials; and more female teachers. External evaluations found that BRIGHT raised girls' primary school enrollment 20 percent and improved Math and French test scores for both girls and boys.

Plan implemented BRIDGE to build upon the success of BRIGHT in the Namentenga and Sanmatenga provinces of Burkina Faso from 2012 to 2016. BRIDGE improved both the access to and quality of post-primary schools for 12,967 post-primary aged children, including 6,159 girls.

BRIDGE included the construction and equipment of a junior high school, a girl's dormitory, and 11 school canteens. Interventions targeting girls included the establishment of an education week

for girls in Sanmatenga and the training of 126 supervisors and teachers on gender-sensitive pedagogy.

Both BRIGHT and BRIDGE delivered the outcome central to improving the lives of communities: girls' education.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Namentenga and Sanmatenga provinces had some of the highest rates of both primary and post-primary school dropout in Burkina Faso. However, after the BRIGHT program interventions, the rates of primary school enrollment improved in these provinces, demonstrating the need for an accessible junior high school in order for students to continue their education. BRIDGE was designed to meet that need and build on that success.

Both programs recognized that many barriers to girls' education exist outside the classroom or school, such as a lack of privacy in the latrines and the traditional obligations to care for younger siblings and carry water. Simply improving teacher training or providing learning materials would not reduce these types of barriers. Plan's programs specifically addressed the barriers to continuing education as identified by the girls. BRIGHT was able to increase both enrollment rates and test scores through the use of girl-friendly characteristics. BRIDGE continued Plan's successful girl-friendly approach by carrying out advocacy efforts for girls' education, allocating 300 scholarships to girls on a yearly basis, constructing a girls' dormitory, and organizing camps for girls to further strengthen their knowledge. A total of 550 girls, including scholarship recipients and others vulnerable to hunger, received daily meals from the canteen. The girls were also involved in awareness discussions on child marriage, violence against girls at school, and the heavy domestic workload of girls. These discussions helped girls find a voice to advocate on their own behalf.

## The Story of Aminata

When she was 9, Aminata's father died and the village harvest was poor, which meant there was no money for her to go to school. However, she was determined to get an education. Aminata started to sell sweet potatoes so she could buy her school materials. Then she became a beneficiary of the BRIDGE project, which helped her continue her education to the post-primary level. Her school materials were provided, and she received a midday meal in the school canteen. Not having to worry about where her supplies came from and having at least one meal a day allowed Aminata to concentrate on her education. She now has an overall annual score of 16.33 marks out of 20.

An independent evaluation of BRIDGE found that a remarkable 96 percent of scholarship recipients advanced to the next grade. The study also found that post-primary completion rates for girls in the Namentenga and Sanmatenga provinces increased by 13 and 20 percent respectively.

A follow-up study commissioned by the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation found that BRIGHT's impact continues, even though funding concluded four years ago. Schools continue to be more accessible, have better infrastructure and resources, employ more teachers, provide more grade levels, and sustain girl-friendly characteristics when compared to schools in villages that were not involved in the program. Child marriage is also six percent lower in BRIGHT villages, translating to the prevention of more than 1,500 child marriages. The sustainability of BRIGHT programming generated optimism that BRIDGE's benefits will also continue after Plan's funding ends. The coalition of community leaders, families, girl advocates, and local government agencies brought together by the project is now a force for improving girls' education in the most marginalized areas of Burkina Faso.



# SAFER CITIES FOR GIRLS IN EGYPT



Research by Plan International Egypt found that existing gender norms lead to the segregation of girls and women in public life. Eighty-six percent of young Egyptian men agree that a married woman should obtain her husband's permission for most things; the percentage of girls who practice sports is approximately 29 percent, compared to 57 percent among boys. Young women face social pressure towards early marriage. Sexual harassment reduces the ability of girls and women to access education and employment. Nationally, more than 18 percent of girls drop out of school.

Since 2014, Plan, in collaboration with the local offices of the Egyptian government, has been working in the informal settlement of Ezbet Khairallah located on the outskirts of Cairo to increase girls' safety and access to public spaces, their autonomous mobility in the city, and their access to quality city services, including education. The settlement is filled with dark tunnels, inadequate lighting, poor pavement, lack of supervision from the community and officials,

and harassment in the streets, all of which cause girls to feel unsafe in their own city.

According to data collected by Plan in focus group discussions, only eight percent of the girls in Ezbet Khairallah felt safe in public spaces, six percent on public transportation, and only 10 percent of girls felt valued by their community. In this settlement, 47 percent of girls are not in school – nearly three times the national average. As a result, child labor and early marriage are common.

The [Safer Cities for Girls project](#) addresses the link between gender-based violence and reduced opportunities for girls. Although secondary school may be available for teens to continue their education and break the cycle of poverty, the violence confronting girls on their journey to school can seem like an insurmountable barrier. Since Plan works within both the school and the community to promote girls' education,

## The Obstacles Girls Face

*I remember my neighbor was raped by [drug addict], but she was left living in disgrace, while no one blamed him. They claimed that a young man cannot be held accountable if he is under the effect of the drugs he takes. Although that poor girl was my friend, my family forced me to end my relation with her, claiming that she is a bad girl.*

— Fatma, 17

*Protecting myself from sexual harassment is my daily challenge. On my way to school, I always face verbal or sexual harassment. Near school there are always groups of boys waiting for girls to harass. Sometimes our teachers shout at them, but there are so many boys, they can attack our teachers. I wish there were enough security guards to protect us from those boys.*

— Yassmin, 15

*The current deteriorating political and economic situation is a threat for me. Lack of security, makes me wonder every morning if I will return home safely after the school day or not. I also fear that if the economic situation continues to be bad, my dad would pull me out of school, preferring to educate my brother instead.*

— Nada, 15

*I want girls to insist on education and not drop out of school. Education is their future. If I drop out of school I won't be part of the community. I will only get married and play no role in my country.*

— Dina, 14

this program was able to lower that barrier, opening a lifetime of opportunities and benefits for more Egyptian girls. By engaging adolescent girls throughout the 26 communities in Ezbet Khairallah and utilizing their recommendations,

the Safer Cities for Girls project is creating a safer and more accountable city in which all girls—in school, out of school, working, married, or living with disabilities—are free and able to participate.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Throughout the Safer Cities for Girls project, the needs that were articulated by the girls themselves were put at the forefront and had a meaningful impact on program design. Beginning early in the program, community scorecards were used to gather feedback and gauge the success of Plan's interventions to create safe environments from the girls. Focus groups engaged girls in discussions to understand what changes they would like to see take place in Ezbet Khairallah. Several girls were selected by their peers as Girl Ambassadors and led safety walks within their communities. Girls' clubs were established as accessible and safe places to spend time.

Additional programming, including training sessions and community workshops, influenced more than 200 government stakeholders, local authorities, transit staff, law enforcement, and women's groups to build their capacity to create a safer city. Transit staff were provided with guidelines and regulations prioritizing girls' safety, while government stakeholders were educated on gender equality, gender-based violence, and inclusive urban planning.

Creating a safe environment in Ezbet Khairallah through improvements to public spaces and the transportation system allowed more girls to attend and stay in school. Beneficiaries of the violence prevention efforts included more than 1,000 adolescent girls (ages 13-18), and the safer environment also benefited a wider circle of 1,600 private- and public-sector employees and employers, and 1,000 people in the general public.



# FIERCER CHAMPIONS IN EL SALVADOR



El Salvador is one of the most violent countries in the world. Testimony at a recent U.S. congressional hearing described youth there as facing a choice between “migrating, joining a gang or losing their lives.” Gang violence is rampant. Last year, there were 6,657 homicides in the country, a number higher than any given year during the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992). Salvadoran children and youth trying to maintain a normal life despite gang violence must overcome many obstacles. Girl advocates supported by Plan explained to U.S. government officials that while school is available, fear of gangs and attacks while crossing gang boundaries caused them to drop out.

In 2010, the U.N. Committee for the Rights of the Child concluded that to be a child, adolescent, or a young person in El Salvador means being exposed to serious violence, a constant vulnerability to disasters, and the profound impacts of poverty. Twenty-one percent of youth aged 15-19 and 43 percent of youth aged

20-24 are neither studying nor working. Faced with a lack of opportunities, approximately 9,000 choose to immigrate illegally to the U.S. every year. Many more join gangs or become involved in drugs and arms trafficking or the commercial sex trade. High numbers of youth are incarcerated as a result of the hardline legislation against gangs.

In this context, gender-based violence is a key problem that negatively impacts the quality of life of girls, boys, and their families throughout the country. Of all reported cases of violence, 60 percent are gender-based, affecting girls and women. Plan’s own data indicates that 90 percent of child abuse victims are girls. More than 3,000 children currently live in government protection shelters after being separated from their families due to violence and abuse. In a society where children and their opinions are under-valued, they are provided limited opportunities to genuinely participate in decisions about their lives.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Despite the difficulties, Plan International El Salvador has redoubled efforts to sustain and foster more peaceful relationships. Plan's goals are to strengthen the capabilities for self-protection and violence prevention of 60,000 children and youth and to provide training to 17,000 parents, caregivers, and public service providers to support actions for the protection of children and youth against social and gender violence. The [Girls Promoting Gender Violence Reduction program](#) is part of the strategy to reach these goals.

Girls and boys are taught that the violence surrounding them should not invade their homes as well. For girls, the program focused on developing their awareness of their rights, the fact that domestic abuse is unacceptable and illegal and the power of collective action. In the face of widespread violence in El Salvador, girls and women must find their voices, speak out, and create improvements. Plan's School for the Prevention of Gender Violence educated 1,396 girls, emphasizing their right to be heard. Many found their voices as evidenced by their participation in International Day of the Girl presentations and their advocacy visits with prominent professional women in the country.

When 151 participating girls were identified as needing psychological attention stemming from prior abuse, three professional psychologists were recruited by Plan to augment the program.

Boys are critical actors in fostering a safer environment. The program helped them to understand the issues of masculinity and power and to realize that there are viable alternatives to violence. In highly intensive and skillfully run workshops, 139 boys began to address the domestic and gang violence inflicted upon them, and their desire to break those cycles.

One program participant said the training "helped me identify limits for my peers, when they disrespect and harass me." Another added that the most important thing achieved was the

### The Story of Johana

"I used to think it was normal for a 13 year-old girl to live with an older man. It happens all the time," explains Johana. "He'd threaten [to harm her family], so the girl thinks she has to go live with him. We're taught to put up with it."

After participating in Plan's program, Johana's views changed.

"I'm learning that boys and girls both have value; we are equals. We should work together to make a better life," she says.

Johana also learned that by sticking together, girls have more confidence and power to confront gender discrimination.

"I have a friend who is 15 years old, has a baby, and lives with her boyfriend. He was beating her, and she didn't know what to do," said Johana. "I explained that they have to think about their baby boy. As he grows up he needs good role models; he can't see his father beating his mother, because he'll do that, too."

establishment of community centers "where girls and adolescents can find true support networks, and discuss topics that interest girls."

Veronica was one of those who received psychosocial support. She said, "It helped me change my character. Before I was more aggressive and today I try to put into practice what I learned. I wish they would always give us these workshops."



# BETTER EDUCATED GIRLS IN ETHIOPIA



Ethiopia continues to be one of the poorest countries in the world, lacking many basic services for large portions of the population. While most children begin elementary school, satisfactory completion and graduation is still low nationwide at just 44 percent. This results in a tragically high youth illiteracy rate in Ethiopia with 40 percent of boys and 60 percent of girls unable to read. The lack of literacy significantly limits their opportunities for employment, lifelong learning, community leadership, and the exercise of their rights as citizens.

Overall access to good quality primary education is poor, especially for rural girls, as evidenced by data on academic performance and drop-out and repetition rates. School governance is weak, classrooms are generally deteriorated and overcrowded, and other important school facilities such as safe drinking water and latrines are often limited. Corporal punishment and other forms of violence, particularly against girls, are widely reported. In the later years, sexual harassment

on the way to school, as well as the lack of sanitary pads and privacy in latrines all present additional barriers to girls' education.

Big class sizes limit teachers' ability to provide a better quality learning experience. In 2001, the government set a target to reduce the pupil/classroom ratio to 50. That goal, however, was not met and, by 2008, the average classroom had 60 students. At both government and community levels, limited budgets are a root cause of the poor quality of primary education, contributing to poor facilities, negatively affecting the quality of the classroom experience and academic achievement, and aggravating the high absenteeism and drop-out rates.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Plan International Ethiopia's [Girls' Empowerment through Education \(GETE\) project](#) focused on girls ages 7-14 enrolled in eight primary schools,

teachers, and community and government stakeholders within the Yeka and Akaki Kality sub-cities of the capital, Addis Ababa.

Implemented from April 2012–June 2016, the project goals were to 1) increase girls' access to primary education, and 2) improve the quality of primary education.

One of the key project interventions at the school level was the provision of financial and material support to girls attending the eight schools. The project provided school fee support in the amount of 50-100 birr (around USD\$2-\$5) during the first two years. Girls were also supplied with uniforms, books, supplies, and sanitary materials. In addition, the project gave the schools computers, per the Ministry of Education's standards. By the end of the project:

- 2,100 girls received financial support totaling about \$9,750;
- 1,561 girls received uniforms;
- 6,370 girls and boys received exercise books, pencils and pens; and
- 4,868 girls received sanitary supplies.

A series of trainings on various topics covering child rights and responsibilities; public speaking; leadership and life skills; and reproductive health were given to girls and boys. PTA members attended workshops on gender issues; gender-sensitive teaching methods and classroom management; prevention of violence at school; and participation of girls in student councils. By the end of the project, 1,310 girls had been trained on child rights and responsibilities, and 826 girls and 245 boys had been trained on public speaking, leadership, and life skills.

In the summer of 2016, the GETE program was independently evaluated to develop conclusions about the lasting outcomes of these efforts to improve girls' education in the two sub-cities. Results showed increases in girls' graduation rates and primary school performance. Inspirational activities by girl ambassadors and tutorial support provided to the girls seems to have helped, particularly for Math and English.

School data shows that the graduation rate for girls increased by seven percentage points, and comparison of the scores of the 8th grade national qualifying exam before and at the end of GETE yields a statistically significant improvement.

The evaluation also showed that some aspects of the project were not as sustainable. For example, while 90 percent of girls reported they now have access to girls' only sanitation facilities, most said that water is not always available there. Improvements outside the school boundaries were also more limited with 56 percent of girls reporting they were frequently or sometimes harassed on the walk to school. In addition, no commitment was offered by local officials to sustain project activities. School principals commented that the project did not offer a clear exit strategy with regard to the school-based activities and tackling the issue of high turnover among trained teachers.

Interviews with school principals indicated an increased perception of girls' elevated self-confidence, as demonstrated by greater involvement of girls in school committees and clubs and improvement in girls' academic achievement. This perception was supported by the girls' survey. The principals also noted a positive change in attitude around asking for sanitary supplies at school. Local education officials expressed similar sentiments about the positive changes in girls' involvement and school performance.



# LONGER CHILDHOODS IN INDIA

More than a quarter of India's 440 million children, 136 million, live in poverty. India accounts for 21 percent of all under-5 child deaths and 34 percent of malnourished children globally. Budget analysis shows that just four percent of government resources are allocated for programs that directly benefit children even though they constitute nearly 40 percent of India's total population.

In most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, women typically live five or more years longer than men, but India is one of the few countries in the world where women and men have nearly the same life expectancy. In addition, the practice of targeted female feticide has left the country with 50 million more males than females. The Plan International India Country Strategic Plan states that "girls have less life chances than boys, almost no control over decisions affecting their lives, in particular on education, marriage and economic pursuits. They are at the lowest end

of the power ladder within the family and community."

This relative powerlessness makes girls more vulnerable to hunger, disease, illiteracy, violence, child labor and other ills perpetuated by the cycle of poverty. Education is one of their few paths out into a world of wider opportunity.

Currently, Plan International India is working with more than 600,000 children in families residing in 3,116 communities. Plan's household surveys in these communities found that only 13 percent of girls are enrolled in Class 6 and above, and 23 percent of girls are married before their legal age. Struggling with economic insecurity, households are too often compelled to take steps that have negative implications for children like pulling them from school and resorting to child labor.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Plan's [Combating Child Labor in Andhra Pradesh \(CCLAP\) project](#) was designed to effect change



at three levels: individual, family/community, and government/institution. In the 2001 Indian Census, Andhra Pradesh ranked second, with 1.4 million child laborers. The program took place from 2012-2014, prior to the split of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh, and for the purposes of this report Andhra Pradesh represents the unified, pre-2014 state.

CCLAP identified and worked closely with local NGO partners, government departments, and other stakeholders to address the issue of child labor and to promote holistic development of children, especially girls. The project area covered 75 villages and 75 urban slums across five districts.

In terms of results, the greatest progress was made at the individual and household levels. At the individual level and household levels, CCLAP resulted in:

- 2,037 girls enrolled in school;
- 1,455 boys enrolled in school;
- 347 girls and 60 boys trained in vocational training;
- 9,009 girls participating in child forums; and
- 2,500 households participating in livelihood programs, which indirectly supported the increased enrollment.

At the community level, 307 Community Protection Committees were formed to reduce child marriage and advocate for improvements in education. At the government level, those advocacy efforts resulted in improvements to several school facilities; however, less progress was made in convincing the government to scale-up the program with its own funding.

## Testimonials from Beneficiaries

*I dropped out of school two years back. During my interaction with the project team, I was motivated to join the school again. Now I am studying in intermediate first year. I feel very confident about myself and look forward to achieving great heights.*

— Noori

*When I lost my father, I had to quit school during the 10th grade and support my family by working in the fields. With the support of the project, I learnt various computer applications. I am thankful to Plan India for giving this opportunity to me.*

— Maheshwari

*Two years back, I dropped out of school in 5th grade and went with my parents when they migrated for seasonal work. When I met the project staff, they spoke to my parents and helped me in rejoining the school again in class 5. I thank the project for helping me resume my education.*

— Eshwarama

*Five years back, I had quit school after seventh grade and started working in a printing press. I worked for almost 12 hours a day and earned \$1 per day. I learnt tailoring through the CCLAP project. Now I am self-employed and earn more than I used to.*

— Alekya

*I am studying in 9th grade. Earlier, I didn't have any exposure to the outside world. After joining the child forum, I learnt about child rights and many other things. These days, we girls are given more importance in our school, which makes me really proud.*

— Madhumita



# HEALTHIER MOTHERS IN INDONESIA

Indonesia is a land of contrasts. Over the past few decades Indonesia has shifted from one of the poorest countries in Asia to a middle-income country with a per-capita income of more than USD\$3,000. Indonesia weathered the economic crisis of 2008 well and its economy continues to grow rapidly at more than six percent per year. According to the World Bank, Indonesia is now the 17th largest economy in the world with an annual GNP of USD\$800 billion – on par with the Netherlands or Turkey. This fast growth has also generated huge income inequalities, with the majority of wealth (81 percent of GDP) concentrated in the western parts of the country (Sumatra and Java). These income gaps have been exacerbated by inflation, especially food inflation.

In this broader context of unequal economic progress, Plan has been increasingly focused on the more marginalized parts of the country, including East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) province and West Nusa Tenggara province (NTB). To address the issues of food inflation in NTT and NTB, Plan

has implemented a number of focused programs, including the [Community Action to Improve Maternal and Child Nutrition \(CAIMCN\) project](#). Implemented in 27 villages across the Sikka District of NTT and the Dompu District of NTB, its goal was to reach more than 4,500 children under 5 and more than 2,000 lactating mothers, all while training community volunteers and local government health workers to sustain the program once Plan's funding had ended.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

The following activities anchored the program:

- Prenatal nutrition and breastfeeding classes improved maternal nutrition during pregnancy, raising the birth weights of newborns; promoting the immediate on-set of breastfeeding to support the immune system of neonates; and reducing the

onset of diarrhea, often caused by mixing formula with unsafe water.

- Reproductive health training for adolescent girls in youth centers.
- Mother Support Groups for new mothers and fathers to help successful caregivers convince their neighbors to adopt new practices that improve maternal health and neonatal care. This was reinforced through monthly awareness-raising activities by local government health staff trained by Plan. These classes were held in the Posyandu (community health center).
- Advocacy work with the local government to build support for the project and ensure long-term sustainability within the communities.

The program was independently evaluated in 2016, with very positive results. The evaluation showed that the CAIMCN project has succeeded in significantly improving nutrition for newborns and toddlers. Exclusive breastfeeding in infants under six months rose from 75 percent to 90 percent. Much larger increases in the cultivation and consumption of more nutritious foods shows the program transferred valuable new knowledge and skills to the communities. For example, the percentage of children aged 6-23 months who receive a balanced, nutritious diet rose 50 points, from 27 percent to 77 percent. The percentage of children receiving appropriate food and nutrition during illness quadrupled, rising to 84 percent. These simple changes save lives, build resilience and boost brain development—increasing the lifelong learning potential of these girls and boys.

The project succeeded in creating a conducive environment at the community and health facility levels in Sikka and Dompu districts. All participating villages have applied at least six of the seven steps for creating a mother-friendly community/village; three Puskesmas in Dompu districts have applied 10 steps to successful breastfeeding; and three Puskesmas in Sikka districts have applied nine of the 10 steps. The evaluation noted that “the CAIMCN project

## Testimonials from Beneficiaries

*I am very happy and proud to share my experience and my success in the Mother's Support Group. I had successfully initiated breastfeeding my son within one hour after delivery. I also had successfully breastfed him until he was 6 months old. Having these experiences, I am confidently sharing with the others.*

— Faria Rahmi, Community Health Volunteer,  
Tembalae Village

*On behalf of the government of Sikka, I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to Plan International Indonesia for supporting and in line with the program of government of Sikka.*

— Paulus Nong Suar, Elected Official  
from Sikka

has contributed to the significant decrease in chronic malnutrition prevalence (index of Height/Age, stunting) of children aged 0-59 months in the areas of intervention in Dompu and Sikka districts, respectively 42.60 percent to 28.1 percent (Dompu districts) and from 40.90 percent to 32.9 percent (Sikka districts).”

The consultants concluded that Plan's program is a model to be emulated: “Nutrition programs have been implemented for years in all areas across Indonesia, including NTT and NTB Provinces. However, until 2012, the severity level of chronic malnutrition in both provinces remained unchanged at ‘critical.’ Strategies and approaches used through the CAIMCN project ....should be adopted by the government and replicated in other sub-districts in Dompu and Sikka districts and in other districts in NTB and NTT Provinces.”



# SAFER YOUTH IN NEPAL

According to the U.S. State Department's 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report, "Nepali women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking....Nepali men, women, and children are subjected to forced labor in construction, factories, mines, domestic work, begging, and the adult entertainment industry....Nepali and Indian children are subjected to forced labor in the country, especially in domestic work, brick kilns, and the embroidered textile, or zari, industry. Bonded labor exists in agriculture, brick kilns, the stone-breaking industry, and domestic work. Many Nepalis living in areas affected by an earthquake that struck Nepal in April 2015 are vulnerable to trafficking."

Why are children trafficked? Sometimes girls are lured by false offers of arranged marriages. Sometimes their families willingly sell them. However, in many situations, parents simply do not know that they are giving up their daughters for a life in the sex trade.

In Nepal, Plan has been working to reduce trafficking through the [Fighting Against Child Trafficking \(FACT\) program](#), which uses the [Better Life Options and Opportunities Model \(BLOOM\)](#) and the [Kamlahari Abolition Program \(KAP\)](#). Plan International Nepal is also implementing protection programs in the earthquake-affected areas and refugee camps.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Independent evaluators found that since the launch of FACT, "thousands of adolescents and youth have expanded their opportunities to live healthy, productive lives with the core belief that confidence and high self-esteem are the foundation for personal growth." Through FACT and BLOOM, Plan teaches youth about sexual and reproductive health, nutrition and hygiene, self-esteem and self-reliance, life skills, civic responsibility, and gender relations. These



topics give youth a better understanding of themselves, improving their self-confidence and ability to make positive life decisions. Participants also expand their knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, gender roles, and healthy relationships, helping them build a more supportive social environment for girls and women around them.

Several components of the FACT project promote safe migration, including organizing and training community protection groups; establishing information booths at the District Administration Offices; the presence of vigilance cabins on the Nepal-India border; and counseling in the rescue shelters. All of these efforts raise awareness of the risks, especially for adolescent girls and women, of unregistered migration.

In Bara and Makwanpur, the evaluators confirmed people visit the offices to collect booklets on Safe Migration. Community volunteers monitor the border in Banke and Rautahat, watching for circumstances that suggest girls are being trafficked and intervene by approaching and briefing them about the potential danger of crossing the border; requesting documents; and calling parents and government offices.

Plan is supporting communities fighting bonded labor through the Kamlahari Abolition Project (KAP). The Kamlaharis are girls sold or kidnapped into bonded labor for years at a time. The project's objectives are threefold: ensuring freed Kamlahari enjoy their right to quality education; reducing the economic poverty of freed Kamlahari and their families; and protecting and preventing vulnerable girls from Kamlahari practices and other forms of violence.

The KAP ideology and design meets the needs and priorities of one of the marginalized indigenous communities (the Tharu) and combat one of the worst forms of child labor in Nepalese society. The evaluators reported that, "The effectiveness of the project was obvious as 3,784 Kamlaharis were rescued. Regarding

the knowledge of child rights, 92 percent of the girls from the individual survey said that they knew about child rights, while only about eight percent did not."

The project was highly focused on providing services and advocacy at the local level. Local groups including children's clubs and girls' groups organized rallies, made door-to-door visits, and kept surveillance at the checkpoints from where Kamlaharis were taken. Declaration of Kamlahari Free Villages was one of the examples of village-level advocacy to abolish the Kamlahari system.

The majority of the rescued Kamlahari girls are provided with primary education through scholarships that cover school fees, uniforms, and school supplies. Going to school not only improves their income-generating possibilities, it also shifts their views of themselves. They realize that the life of a bonded laborer deprived them of their basic rights: to live with their parents and get their love, affection, and care; to be educated; and to participate in community activities.

### The Story of Sumitra

Before BLOOM, Sumitra could barely speak in front of others. The sessions empowered her to raise her voice against social evils and harmful practices by providing her with knowledge of her own legal rights.

"I became the chairperson of the [Youth Awareness Club] and had opportunities to participate in different trainings. I learned many things and also had opportunities to travel," explained Sumitra. "[The Plan staff] helped me in furthering my education and gave me opportunities to evolve my leadership qualities."

Sumitra is now a Because I am a Girl Ambassador and organizes different programs, door-to-door visits and street dramas to raise awareness on child rights, and against gender discrimination, child trafficking, child marriage, and other violence.



# BOLDER GIRLS IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone ranks 158th of 169 countries on the U.N.'s Human Development Index and, according to the last census, 53 percent of the population lived below the international poverty line of USD\$1.25 a day and 74 percent on less than USD\$2 a day.

A brutal civil war characterized by large-scale loss of life, child soldiers, brutal gender-based violence, and destruction of economic and physical infrastructure ravaged the country from 1991 to 2002. Its lingering impact can still be felt in the poor economy and low capacity of the government to provide basic services.

In 2014-15, Sierra Leone's already weak health system collapsed under the weight of the Ebola outbreak and thousands died. Like many international organizations, Plan focused all of its resources to help the government and communities control the Ebola outbreak.

Sexual violence in schools is explicitly recognized as a barrier for achieving quality basic education

in Sierra Leone.

Consequently, one of the key objectives of the National Education Sector Plan is to ensure that schools and communities provide a safe environment for all children, particularly with regards to sexual abuse. In Sierra Leone, a very high percentage of girls (27 percent) are married before the age of 15, resulting in early pregnancies, damage to girls' health, and lost opportunities for girls to succeed in school.

Plan is working to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms with linkages to a functioning national child protection system as well as increasing the ability of girls, boys, young women, and men to take the lead in actions for their protection and safety, as well as to access appropriate assistance. In the Western Rural Area, Plan found that the key issues negatively affecting children's protection, education, and participation include: low levels of girls' education; violence in schools; high school fees; sexual

harassment and exploitation from teachers as well as peers; early marriage and teenage pregnancy; and labor/exploitation of children aged between 7-14 years.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

Through the end of 2017, Plan's [Girl Power Project \(GPP\)](#) is working in 10 communities in the country's Western Rural Area to:

- Create an enabling environment where girls participate on issues affecting their lives;
- Establish and improve community-level and governmental mechanisms that protect girls and reduce pregnancy, early marriage, and gender-based violence; and
- Empower girls and women with greater income through Village Savings and Loans.

The project works on multiple levels—the girls, their households, and local government agencies—to change cultural norms that harm girls while providing essential protection services to them.

One local NGO partner, Community Empowerment for Rural Development, is implementing the girls' clubs with a focus on protection. Another partner, Defense for Children International, is implementing the Village Savings and Loans (VSLs) and working to increase prosecution of GBV offenders and strengthen channels of reporting and protection for girls affected by school-based gender violence. A third local partner, One Family People, is undertaking radio program outreach and implementing girls' clubs with a focus on participation, particularly of the most marginalized populations of girls with disabilities.

Recent success stories include girls participating in the establishment of school rules and regulations that helped shape the behavior of pupils and improved the pass rate of girls to new classes. Savings and Loans

groups for girls has encouraged them to grow their savings, which they can use to contribute towards their school fees. By the end of the program, the project should benefit 5,000 girls from the Western Rural Area.

### Testimonials from Beneficiaries

*"I am very impressed with the facilitation and topics because they are actually related to real-life situations in my community."*

— Community Volunteer

*"I always look forward to coming to this room once a week where I know I can express myself freely without feeling intimidated or being shouted at."*

— Participant at School Safe Space Program

*"The fear was in our minds as nobody can be trusted in the midst of Ebola.... I didn't send my kids to school functions because of the risk of being in a crowd, but with the confidence I have built, I can now allow my children to attend functions and encourage them to learn with precaution and without fear."*

— Community Elder Pa Alimany Sesay

*"Safety measures are not only for the pupils, but this training was important for teachers too because we have our own families and homes. We will apply the knowledge gained during these trainings on how to take care of Ebola-related cases both at school and in our homes."*

— Teacher, SDA Primary School



# SMARTER FINANCIAL CHOICES IN VIETNAM



Vietnam has achieved remarkable progress over the last 30 years. Fueled by the adoption of economic reforms in 1986 and the lifting of the international trade embargo in 1994, foreign trade and foreign direct investment have flourished—leading Vietnam to become one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

According to the World Bank, income per capita has risen from US\$220 in 2002 to \$2,100 in 2015, a remarkable 950 percent increase in only 13 years. The Bank reports that the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty has fallen from 58 percent in 1993 to just three percent in 2015. The situation for children has followed a similar pattern with drastic reductions in infant mortality, major increases in school enrollment, and much improved food and economic security. Vietnam also achieved almost all of its Millennium Development Goals.

Despite this remarkable progress, there are still meaningful gaps in Vietnam’s development. At the macroeconomic level, the government has

acknowledged that its current economic growth model is creating unsustainable levels of inequality. In marginalized areas of the country, ethnic minority children and their families still struggle for survival—lacking food, water, access to social services and adequate livelihoods to lift them out of poverty. Pockets of poverty also still exist in booming coastal Vietnam, but the economic growth there means people can more readily lift themselves out of poverty when supported with the skills and capital necessary to create self-employment or small businesses.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

From 2011–2015, Plan International Vietnam’s [Village Savings and Loan \(VSL\) program](#) created a transparent saving scheme for poor rural households, as well as increasing access to financial services. Small, short-term loans at low interest rates, grants, and no-charge loans

for emergency purposes were made available through Plan-supported VSLs. Mandatory end-of-cycle distributions were also made so that savings and profits were shared according to the amount each member had saved. Remarkably, the cumulative savings totaled well over one million dollars (\$ 1,062,000), which nearly 10,000 members used to pay for school fees, health care, agriculture production, small business start-ups, and household expenses like food and maintenance.

Studies have shown that without savings institutions like VSLs, school fees can be a barrier to education—postponing or ending schooling, especially for girls. Health expenses can lead families to sell productive assets like farming implements or resort to local loan sharks charging exorbitant interest rates. The VSLs especially generated savings for women, many for the first time. Without VSLs, funds to start small businesses are very difficult for rural Vietnamese women to acquire since their savings are regularly confiscated by their husbands. The mandatory savings requirements of the VSLs provide a credible reason for the women to retain control of their money. Of the 9,865 members participating in this program from 2011-2015, an overwhelming 89 percent were female (8,785).

In addition to savings generation, Plan's staff built community groups and government partnerships required for the long-term sustainability of the program. VSL workshops were held for commune authorities, village heads, Women's Unions, and mass organizations. Competitions were organized on VSL practices, gender equality, domestic violence prevention and parenting. Communication sessions on water, sanitation, and hygiene; health; parenting; and gender (from other Plan-supported projects) were integrated into VSL groups' regular meetings. Household financial management skills improved. The roles of women in family and community were valued, and VSLs contributed to greater gender equality. Women VSL members say they feel

more confident in public communication and participation in the community's activities.

To build the government's ability to maintain the VSL programs, Plan trained the provincial-, district-, and commune-level staff of the Women's Union. In Vietnam, the Women's Union is a well-established non-governmental organization (founded in 1930) that supports women's development and gender equality. The Women's Union has roughly 15 million members and it is key to sustainable girl-focused work in Vietnam, given its scope and good relations with the government.

### Testimonials from Beneficiaries

*The Village Savings and Loan program is a pioneering approach based on mobilizing people's local resources. I am confident that the program will be sustainable even when the project is finished.*

— Mr. Hieu, head of VSL group in Thuong Hoa commune-Minh Hoa district

*We see that the Village Savings and Loan program supported by Plan is an important resource to support the goals of the Viet Nam Women's Union program.*

— Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thu Thanh - Vice President of Quang Tri provincial Women's Union

*The sessions on parenting integrated into VSL meetings were very useful and interesting. We had the chance to learn and share best practices so we would have the knowledge and skills to look after children and their education. Besides that, we encourage each other and borrow money from the group to buy tables for our children to study at home.*

— Ms. Ho Thi My, 24 years old, in Co Len group-Huc communes



# CONCLUSION

So, What Happens Now? How can we sustain and expand the successes of Plan's Because I am a Girl programs?

Under the Because I am a Girl umbrella, Plan helped girls and their allies learn about their rights and identify their personal resources and power. Awareness about the value of inclusive development and the benefits of opening more opportunities to girls, boys, youth, women, and other excluded people was raised. Through programs and outreach, Plan mobilized entire communities behind the common desire to live better lives.

With the girls' agenda at the center, Plan built people's technical capacity and leadership skills to generate true local ownership. Through advocacy training, Plan increased girls' ability to persuade and monitor their government's decision makers and service providers. At the same time, we prepared the government to be able to respond positively to the girls' agenda.

Evaluations of dozens of Plan programs have found that this approach allows communities to make progress on their own for years after Plan's interventions have ended. We expect that will be the case again with the Because I am a Girl programs.

## THE ROAD AHEAD: NEW PROGRAMS AND RENEWED COMMITMENTS

Building on these foundations, Plan will roll out new field programs and a major partnership in the next phase of Because I am a Girl to ensure progress for girls is measured under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Plan's "Girls 2030 Programs" respond to our latest consultations with girls to reflect their highest priorities. The projects will work to end child marriage, engage boys and men in the fight for gender equality, make cities safer for girls and promote gender equality in schools.

## CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage represents a human rights violation and a huge loss of potential. Girls who are married early are more likely to experience violence, abuse and forced sexual relations. Child marriage adversely affects the education, health and well-being of girls and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Plan's research found some alarming results:

- In Bangladesh, 73 percent of girls were married as children.
- In Indonesia, 62 percent agreed that a girl is ready to be married once she reaches puberty.
- In Tanzania, 61 percent of women with no education were married early, while just five percent of high-school educated women were married early.

Plan's analysis showed the relationship between poverty, the low status of women, and child marriage as enabling and perpetuating each other, often passing these conditions on to the next generation. Plan's deep experience in improving both the access to and quality of education for girls will underpin future work combating child marriage.

## SCHOOL-RELATED, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Girls frequently face school-related, gender-based violence (SRGBV), a human rights violation that causes many to end their education early. The victims often feel trapped. As one Pakistani girl explained to Plan, "My friend fears that teachers will not take her complaint. Similarly, she does not tell her parents because they might stop her from going to school." SRGBV can take various forms including physical and sexual abuse, harassment, and bullying and is perpetuated by both teachers and students. SRGBV undermines girls' participation and achievement, and increases their absenteeism and drop-out rate. Plan's Girls 2030 programs will combat this scourge, so more girls can **learn, lead, decide, and thrive**.

## CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

Plan's Champions of Change program addresses the reality that in many communities boys and men have power over girls and women. The program also recognizes that not all boys and men agree with male dominance, and they can become champions of change. In the program, girls begin their journey by increasing their sense of self-worth. Once they join a group of girls, they start to appreciate strength in unity and recognize gender inequality as something that affects their lives—but it is something that can change. The journey for boys begins with awareness and recognition of the advantages to being a boy. They reflect on the negative consequences and impact of violence in their lives. They can then visualize gender equality and make their own commitment to ever larger changes. So far, these programs have resonated most in Latin America.

## SAFER CITIES FOR GIRLS

As the world rapidly urbanizes, girls in cities contend with the duality of increasing risks alongside greater opportunities. Plan's consultations with girls discovered the depth of fear felt in urban areas: 96 percent of girls in Delhi, India and 98 percent in Lima, Peru said they do not feel safe in their cities. This response was developed together with the UN and Women in Cities International and is based on Plan's successful model of engaging girls, communities, and the government. The first step is to help everyone recognize the problem, mobilize for girls' safety and take accelerating steps at their level to make cities safer for girls. Plan knows that these changes will contribute to sustainable economic, social and institutional change that will benefit everyone in the city.

## COUNTING THE INVISIBLE

As illustrated by the programs above, Plan's investments in research often bring girls' issues to light for the first time. Governments take action in the face of Plan's well-founded, yet shocking, data. Now, seeking to influence governments

around the world, Plan has joined forces with “Equal Measures 2030,” an independent civil society and private sector-led partnership, to measure the world’s progress on the Sustainable Development Goals for girls. Currently, no credible statistics exist worldwide that illustrate how many girls drop out of school due to early marriage, pregnancy, or sexual violence. Nor do statistics show how many girls become mothers before reaching the age of 15. This lack of data means governments are blind to the basic rights denied to girls and can easily dismiss their agenda. “Equal Measures 2030” will help fill that gap and generate the information that girl advocates, civil society, and governments need to build a world fit for girls.

## LET’S CHANGE THE WORLD AGAIN

Plan’s progress and future programs for girls are built on the insight that change happens when the world rises up against injustice, when we come together to demand action. Thanks to your support of the Because I am a Girl initiative, we have created a movement that values and promotes girls’ rights. There is no time to waste. Every day in the communities, Plan sees all too clearly the appalling reality of millions of girls’ lives. Plan and the girls are building a world where more of them will **learn, lead, decide, and thrive**. Please join us for the next phase of this fulfilling journey.



*“You need to hear more from us. You need to know the ground realities. You need to find the reasons behind the reasons. We need more girl-friendly programs. We need all the amazing laws to be implemented. So, today I stand here to ask you to please join with us to build a world where girls are treated as human beings.”*

– Nupur, Plan Girl Advocate from Bangladesh



BECAUSE  
**I am a  
Girl**



## OUR PURPOSE

Founded in 1937, Plan International is a development and humanitarian organization that strives for a just world, advancing children's rights and equality for girls. We work together with children, young people, supporters, and partners to:

- Make vital changes that tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls, exclusion, and vulnerability;
- Drive change in practice and policy at local, national, and global levels through our reach, experience, and knowledge of the realities children face;
- Work with children and communities to prepare for and respond to crises and to overcome adversity;
- Support the safe and successful progression of children from birth to adulthood.

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