GIRLS’ RIGHTS ARE GLOBAL

The UK driving change for adolescent girls globally
Girls have the power to create lasting change in their lives and in the world around them.

But girls everywhere are undervalued, undermined and underestimated. Progress has been made, but across the world girls are still being denied their rights, and in some places progress is going into reverse. Whether it’s child marriage in Malawi, street harassment in the UK or sexual violence in Uganda, adolescent girls face exclusion, exploitation and violence, problems which are exacerbated in times of conflict or crisis. It’s harder for a girl to be safe, to be in school, and to have control over her body. Girls face it all.

The Sustainable Development Goals are the first set of truly universal goals that apply equally in the UK and globally. To achieve the Global Goals, we need to stand up and defend every girl’s right to learn, to live without fear, and to lead. Whether in Lagos, Lima or London, girls have the same rights. Girls’ rights are global.

Standing up for girls’ rights and gender equality is the right thing to do, but it’s also the smart thing to do. It delivers an effective return on taxpayers’ money. When more girls’ voices are included in decision-making, communities and nations thrive and become stronger. It boosts economic growth and helps reduce poverty. It promotes global peace, security and a healthy planet. It is good for girls, for the UK and for the world as a whole.

The UK’s continued leadership on girls’ rights and gender equality is needed more than ever as we strive to meet the Global Goals.
In South Sudan, a country where 72% of children are out of school\(^1\), a girl is more likely to die in childbirth than to complete secondary school\(^2\).

One third of girls in the developing world are married before the age of 18\(^3\).

In the UK, 43% of girls hold back their opinions on social media because they’re afraid of being criticised\(^4\).

In the UK, 2 out of 3 girls have been sexually harassed in public. They’re being catcalled and followed, and 15% are being touched, groped or grabbed every month\(^5\).

Achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health services by 2030 and eliminating unmet need for modern contraception by 2040 would deliver $120 of social and economic benefits for every $1 invested\(^6\).

Improving gender equality in education can decrease the likelihood of violent conflict by as much as 37%, and with women at the negotiating table, peace accords are 35% more likely to last\(^7\).

If women had the same role in labour markets as men, up to an estimated $28 trillion (26%) could be added to global GDP by 2025\(^8\).

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4 Plan International UK (2017) Accessible at: https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/almost-half-of-girls-aged-11-18-have-experienced-harassment-or-bullying-online
7 Apolitical (2017) Accessible at: https://apolitical.co/solution_article/women-negotiating-table-peace-lasts-longer/
THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE UK

The UK is recognised as a global leader on gender equality. In today’s fast-changing world, this leadership is needed more than ever, rooted in solid progress working with and for girls at home. As the UK develops a new vision for its place in the world, firmly cementing girls’ rights and gender equality at the heart of its global offer will deliver a win-win: A win for girls themselves, for the UK Government and for whole societies globally.

We know that by working together we can make a difference. More girls are in school than 15 years ago. Global rates of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage continue to fall. More women and girls have access to modern methods of family planning. The UK has played a key role in these achievements.

But there is still a long way to go and renewed efforts will be needed to meet the 2030 deadline for achieving the Global Goals. We set out below a 10 Point Plan for Adolescent Girls, highlighting some of the key areas for continued energy and attention to accelerate progress towards the Global Goals. This requires dedicated efforts for girls’ rights and gender equality, as well as taking the impact on girls into consideration across all government policies that affect girls’ lives both at home and abroad.

We urge Government and Parliamentarians to continue to work together, in partnership with civil society, businesses and others, to drive forward efforts to make the commitment to girls’ rights a reality.

Girls’ rights are global.
1. Ensure that adolescent girls are listened to and supported to meaningfully participate in important policy decisions that affect their lives. This includes investing in initiatives that build girls’ voice and leadership and equip them to hold decision-makers to account, as well as providing opportunities to engage with the political process.

2. Intensify efforts to combat all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spaces, and support survivors of violence – including intimate partner and domestic violence; sexual violence and exploitation; harmful practices such as child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) and female genital mutilation (FGM); trafficking and modern slavery; and harassment, both in the streets and online.

3. Increase support for adolescent girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights in the UK and around the world. This should include the integration of comprehensive relationships and sex education into curricula – addressing gender and sexuality, puberty and menstruation, healthy relationships, gender-based violence, etc. – as well as support for accessible, youth-friendly health services.

4. Ensure that adolescent girls are equipped with the relevant skills and supported in the transition from school to work. Internationally, this should include continued leadership through the Leave No Girl Behind campaign and associated investments, ensuring the world’s most marginalised girls have access to a full 12 years of quality education.

5. Increase efforts to recognise, reduce, and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of a more equitable distribution of labour within the household.
6. **Explore opportunities to harness the power of mobile and digital technology** to improve girls’ well-being and access to information, while also seeking to ensure girls can engage in online spaces free from harassment and abuse.

7. **Strengthen partnerships with grassroots women’s and girls’ rights organisations** – recognising their key role in driving positive change – and ensure they have improved access to funding. It is also key to engage **men and boys**, supporting them to act as allies, working constructively with girls and women to advance gender equality.

8. **Increase the proportion of government funding going toward programmes that explicitly seek to promote gender equality.** Internationally, this must include as a minimum all overseas aid funding adhering to the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014. Within this, **humanitarian assistance** should take into consideration the unique needs and vulnerabilities of adolescent girls and meet the international benchmarks set by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Gender and Age Marker.

9. **Recognise that ‘adolescent girls’ are not a homogenous group and ensure we leave no one behind.** Deepen consideration and understanding of the ways in which other intersecting axes of identity and marginalisation – including class, disability, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, religious identity, etc – may exacerbate the impacts of gender inequalities.

10. **Invest in research** – including encouraging the collection of data consistently disaggregated by sex and age, as well as other relevant factors – to better understand the challenges facing adolescent girls and inform the design of tailored strategies. Invest equally in building a **more robust evidence base on ‘what works’ for adolescent girls** and identify good practices that can be taken to scale.