

 **GUIDE TO ADVOCACY ON GIRLS' RIGHTS**

Last year we developed a very exciting guide to give young campaigners for gender equality some key ideas and information. It contains some useful advice for you to consider as you plan your campaigns:

- What is advocacy for girls' **rights**?
- What do you want to **change**? (what is your overall goal?)
- The **importance** of knowing your facts
- Setting your **objectives** (what are the specific objectives that you want to see?)
- **Advocacy**, influencing others (who do you need to influence, and how?)
- Get your **messages** straight
- Take it public with **campaigning**
- **Action** planning (learn how to draft an action plan)
- Watch out for risks (importance of **identifying risks** in advance)

Importantly, the guide also provides tips on how to make sure you are using a 'Gender Analysis' in your advocacy and campaigning work – it's important to get this right when advocating for girls' rights and to avoid gender-stereotyped messaging, activities and actions.

The guide is a valuable resource and we would highly recommend taking a look at the Plan website for the full document (in the 2014 Youth Summary) here: bit.ly/1KDcrXj

 **GIRLS SPEAK OUT**

For Plan International's 2015 'Because I am a Girl' report, we spoke to over 4,000 girls in four countries (Zimbabwe, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Pakistan). When asked to think about potential solutions to the challenges many girls face – early marriage, early pregnancy, violence – we found that girls from these four different countries had similar recommendations: education, communication, information, supportive families, communities and governments, and empowered girls.

"I will raise my voice with the help of media not to marry girls at young age. Give them more education, like boys, and give them respect in society."

Girl, Pakistan

"If I had the power to do it, I'd improve safety, make the police patrol the neighbourhoods 24 hours a day and put an officer in post to receive reports of abuse and violence against teenagers."

Girl, Ecuador

"I think the government and community leaders should create places where information and protection can be given to those who have been abused."

Girl, Nicaragua

"I would empower young girls to have an attitude that resists peer pressure."

Girl, Zimbabwe

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Front cover: Youth delegate Humaira, 18, raises her hand to support girls' education.

Because I am a Girl

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2015

THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF
GIRLS' RIGHTS



Plan International first published its annual 'State of the World's Girls' report back in 2007, and since 2009 there has also been a summary report, specially tailored for young people. These annual reports started with the message that being young and being female was a double burden and girls were getting a raw deal.

Over the years, following the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, we have seen a number of issues affecting girls' rights gain more public attention. There has been progress and this year, 2015, the target year for the MDGs, there is cause for celebration:



- Four million child deaths have been prevented over the last four decades, thanks to the global increase in women's education.¹



- There are fewer mothers dying in child birth now than at any other time in history; the rate of maternal mortality has decreased by almost 50% since 1990.²



- Issues affecting adolescent girls, such as female genital mutilation (FGM); child, early and forced marriage; and gender-based violence (GBV) have gained increasing international attention and have a larger presence on the international development agenda.



- Young people, both girls and boys, are more active in campaigning and advocating for gender equality at international policy levels.

Despite these advances, real equality is still a long way off and, all over the world, girls are condemned to a life of poverty and inequality:



- 62 million girls of primary and lower secondary school age are not in school.³



- In many countries, girls are pulled out of school during disasters and are unlikely to return; girls make up 55% of the 28.5 million primary-age children out of school in conflict-affected countries.⁴



- Girls often report they do not feel safe in cities. Plan found that 96% of adolescent girls in Delhi do not feel safe and 45% of girls in Kampala reported sexual harassment when using public transport.⁵



- Globally, maternal mortality is a leading cause of death for 14 to 19-year-old girls.⁶

The spread of the internet and mobile phones has created new opportunities for adolescent girls, as well as risks of online bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation. For example, #BringBackOurGirls was shared five million times in four months and inspired people all over the world to campaign.⁷ However, on the downside, internet child abuse is easy to perpetrate and hard to trace.

Why is youth activism important in challenging gender inequality?

As one youth activist told us in this year's report, 'young people are the leaders of tomorrow, so we must equip them with the knowledge they need to make the right decisions for girls today.'

It is vital to include young people in making decisions that affect them, and in many communities around the world it is girls in particular who are side-lined and silenced in discussions that affect their rights and welfare. When girls' rights issues are being discussed, it is important that girls' voices are heard to bring home the realities of their lives and their priorities.

Boys' voices are needed to support girls' rights too!

As seen in our interviews with young campaigners in this report, boys are very much part of the solution to increasing gender equality. Having equality benefits everyone: boys, girls and the rest of society. Boys can often feel pressure to demonstrate their

masculinity in violent or negative ways. It is important that girls and boys support each other to free themselves from pressure about how they 'should' behave and act towards each other.

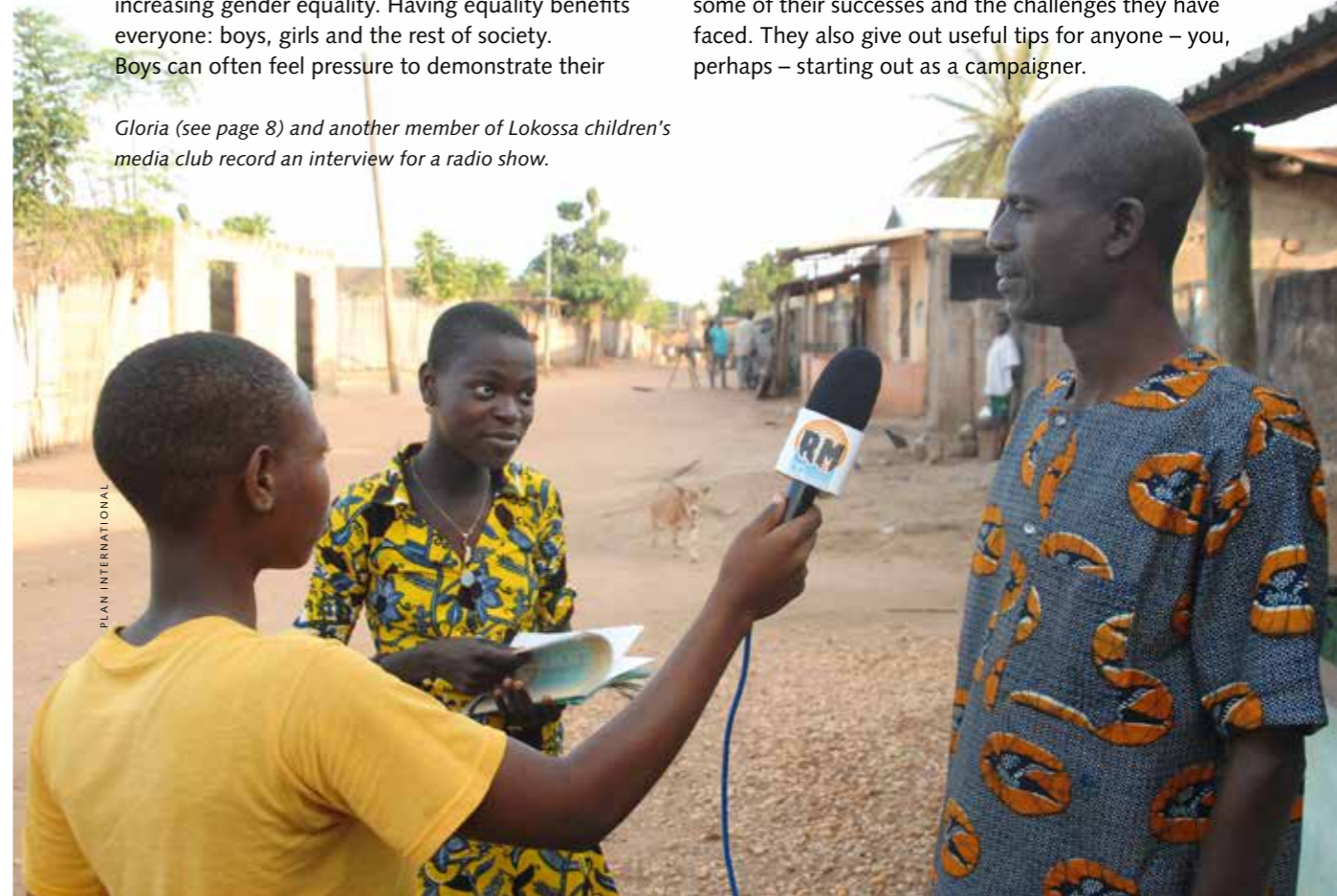
'Society tells us that we should be sexist, tough, aggressive. But that's not right. I told myself I had the power to change.'

Kevin, 16, Guatemala (taking part in Plan's Champions of Change programme)

The unfinished business of girls' rights

This year we have spoken to six youth activists around the world who campaign and advocate for gender equality, and girls' rights in particular. Each activist tells their own story of why and how they became involved in advocating for girls' rights and talks about some of their successes and the challenges they have faced. They also give out useful tips for anyone – you, perhaps – starting out as a campaigner.

Gloria (see page 8) and another member of Lokossa children's media club record an interview for a radio show.



¹ Gakidou, Dr Emmanuela, Krycia Cowling, BS, Prof Rafael Lozano, MD, Prof Christopher JL Murray, MD. 'Increased educational attainment and its effect on child mortality in 175 countries between 1970 and 2009: a systematic analysis.' The Lancet 376 (18 September 2010), [http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PII/S0140-6736\(10\)61257-3.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PII/S0140-6736(10)61257-3.pdf) ² Every Woman Every Child. 'Saving Lives, Protecting Futures: Progress Report on the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health 2010-2015.' Every Woman Every Child, 2015. ³ UNESCO GMR and UIS. 'Progress in getting all children to school stalls but some countries show the way forward.' UNESCO GMR and UIS, Policy Paper 14/ Fact Sheet 28, June 2014. ⁴ UNESCO. 'EFA Global Monitoring Report: Policy Paper 10.' UNESCO, 2013. ⁵ Plan International, Women in Cities International, UN-HABITAT. 'Because I am a Girl: Global Analysis. Findings from the Because I am a Girl Urban Programme Baseline Study in Delhi, Hanoi, and Kampala.' Woking, UK: Plan International, 2015. ⁶ Jones, Nicola and Maria Stavropoulou. 'Off the balance sheet: the impact of the economic crisis on girls and young women: A review of the evidence.' ODI and Plan International, 2013; WHO. 'Fact sheet N°345.' WHO, May 2014 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs345/en/> (accessed 17 June 2015). ⁷ BBC News. '#BBCTrending: What happened to #BringBackOurGirls?' BBC News, 24 September 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-29353137> (accessed 9 February 2015).

'CHANGE BEGINS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE'

Hi, I'm Nafula. I've lived in Nairobi all my life, apart from when I went to boarding school. I live in a place very close to Kibera. I moved here recently because I want to work with young women and girls who live here.

I'd say that, of the challenges facing Kenyan girls, gender-based violence (GBV) is top of my list. We live in such a patriarchal society; growing up, girls are socialised in a specific kind of way, where you learn to accept so many things, and GBV is a big issue. My mum used to run a children's home and shelter in Nairobi. We used to take in girls who had been sexually abused. Growing up as a teenager it caused me to question why there were so many girls being abused. I've always had a strong sense of social justice. I went to a secondary school in Maasai land where there are high rates of female genital mutilation (FGM). Despite seeing the pain and trauma caused by FGM, some of my school friends used to say that they would do the same to their daughter one day. That really shocked me, and that's when I began to form my feminist ideology.

I've also had personal experiences of GBV. Of course, there's street harassment that you go through every day, which you're supposed to get used to and keep quiet about. I went through an assault when I was at university; the experience made me know for sure that I wanted to work in gender activism.

I try very hard to do a lot of research and reading, so that any time someone questions my ideology or beliefs, I have all the right knowledge and can argue from fact. This is very important

NAFULA IS 25 AND FROM NAIROBI, KENYA. SHE FOUNDED THE SEMA INITIATIVE TO HELP KENYAN YOUTH RECOGNISE THEIR POWER TO COMBAT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND ENACT BEHAVIOUR AND POLICY CHANGES TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY. NAFULA ALSO FOUNDED THE KENYAN SHE PROJECT, WHICH OFFERS ENTREPRENEURIAL AND LIFE SKILLS AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRLS.



when approaching people with sexist ideologies. Having the facts has really helped me.

When I first started out I was very worried. I felt like I was leaving a career-oriented path. I was going to be a lawyer, but in my heart of hearts I know I am doing the right thing because I eat, sleep and drink women's rights and social justice. When someone said to me, 'you will never get married!' I went home and really thought about it and wondered if it was true. Why would a person assume that I am different from other young women just because I am a strong feminist? A lot of times I've doubted myself, but I always come back and look at my background and the things that have caused me to think or take the path I



A mural painted by members of SEMA and slum-based graffiti artists Sauti ya Mtaa, following a training session on gender-based violence.

have taken and it gives me strength constantly. So I am very comfortable with what I believe and with my stand. It took some time to get where I am, but if you do your work well and you are passionate about it, then people start to recognise that. This is what has happened with me; more and more I am called to speak, write about issues or attend conferences, which has been really interesting.

All of my work is focused on GBV and youth, in policy, activism and advocacy, because I believe change begins with young people.

Feminists are generally not viewed in a very positive way in Kenya. They are mostly seen as 'women who hate men' or 'women who are too headstrong for their own good'. That's a problem, because every time you open your mouth and speak and they recognise you as a feminist, some people will dismiss you straight away. What they do not realise is feminism is an ideology; it's difficult to separate it from yourself, so any time someone attacks your work it's like they are attacking you as a person.

My advice to other youth activists would be:

- Stick with your message and your beliefs; your ideology is very important because society will always find people who are against you.
- It is very important to involve young people in your activities. You need to include them step by step in your project. Don't just do the project design yourself, for example, and only include them when you implement your project. When they feel involved, it's part of the changing process, and as they work with you that also changes their views and ideologies. A lot of people speak 'at' young people, telling them what to do or how to think, which is not an engaging process.
- If you want to change ideologies, you need to understand people's different viewpoints and perspectives.

'THERE MUST BE OPEN SPACES OF REAL PARTICIPATION FOR GIRLS AND BOYS'



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LUIS IS 22 AND FROM NORTHERN HONDURAS. HE IS STUDYING FOR A DEGREE IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WORKS WITH THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL. HE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND POSITIVE MASCULINITIES FOR ALL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY AND IS PART OF PLAN'S CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE PROGRAMME, WHICH WORKS TO TRANSFORM NEGATIVE MASCULINITIES AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY.

violence that girls and women suffer.

Regarding Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR), there is no opportunity to explore sexuality. This is a big taboo. Girls cannot access information, there is no freedom, and young people have few or limited spaces to speak out about their concerns. In my community, talking about sexuality is a SIN. As young people, we want to talk about sexuality and our right to be informed, to respect and take care of our bodies and make decisions, but there is much resistance from adults.

It is important to understand that our

Hi, I am Luis, I am 22 and I live in a small town in Honduras. I started participating in child and youth groups when I was 13.

In my community, the idea of men always having power over women is strongly and deeply rooted in attitudes and daily practices. It is seen as 'normal'. Since we were little, everyone has been telling us how we must behave as boys and girls; how to be real men, strong, brave and always ready, or to be real women: delicate, subservient and, of course, a mother.

Girls are excluded in their own families, school and community spaces, making it difficult for other people to hear their voices, opinions and ideas. I have seen in many community meetings that when a man speaks he is always 'correct', but when a woman speaks she is certainly 'wrong'.

Girls have fewer opportunities to study and to enjoy their rights. When they get to 12 or 14 years old, their fathers don't let them go to school because of the fear that they will fall pregnant or get married.

Another challenge is the culture of violence. Power over girls and women is very common and it is translated by using violence, not only physical but also psychological and emotional. There is a common saying here: "Dirty clothes are washed inside the house." That means that if it is a family matter, no one from outside can interfere. This only hides the violations and

My advice to future girls' rights advocates and campaigners is:

Change is possible!

- Exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination against girls and women is a social injustice. As young people, we simply cannot, must not, tolerate social injustice.*
 - As young people, we are called to put on the agenda issues that affect us, such as SRR, violence prevention and active citizenship participation.*
 - Young people cannot remain silent, isolated or marginalised. We must read, study and understand our social reality. There are many talented girls and women who can be our representatives. As men we have held power for too long; it is time to open spaces.*
- As young men, we must not reproduce the 'macho culture' in which we live. It will only make us unhappy.*

society is not static. Human beings change. Societies must be based on mutual respect. We need to understand, for example, that the LGBTI community has a lot to contribute, and that girls and women can undertake important leadership roles in our communities and society. At my church, I never shared the

Working with young men in Honduras.



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opinion that "women must obey their men". It always made me uncomfortable, but when I questioned it the answer was always the same: "this is the way it has always been". I knew something was not right!

As men, we need to reflect and leave behind our privileges and take a stand; men do not face the same barriers as girls and women do. For example, girls do not have the right to inheritance: this is unjust. A man is celebrated and encouraged to have as many women as possible, but a woman doing the same thing is considered 'easy' or a 'prostitute'. This is not fair.

My family has always supported me. However, negative reactions have always come from religious and traditional leaders from my community. In the beginning, it was not easy, and sometimes I thought it was crazy that I was the only one talking about these issues! But as I started walking this journey I found both men and women who are committed to the cause and that they shared my vision of equality. And that change is possible. This was a real relief: I am not alone.

Because young people are part of society, we can and must contribute to the development processes in our countries. We must open spaces of real participation for girls and boys. We need to empower ourselves and give firm steps to ensure active participation. We have our own agenda; Honduras is a country with a majority of young people and it is important that governments and adults listen to our demands.

With the help of our local authorities and Plan Honduras, we will soon begin a project on gender and masculinities reaching more than 600 young people (women and men). We planned to develop municipal SRR and gender fairs, so that youth from all communities nearby can participate, ask, reflect, and get involved.

I have learned that change is slow. There is resistance, and most of the time is like going against the flow. Sometimes I feel alone, but then I remember all the people, young women and men, who are committed to this journey and my energy is restored.

'I HAVE THE RIGHT TO DEVELOP AND GROW, AS ALL GIRLS SHOULD'

Hi, I'm Gloria, and I live in Lokossa, an urban area in Benin. In my school, there are child rights violations against the female students and there's sexual harassment (mostly by teachers against female students). This makes me sad because I am a girl, and I need to make sure I am socially involved for girls' rights. It shocks me that this goes on. I think I have the right to develop and grow in a good environment in my country, as all girls should.

What motivated me most is that I live in a community where there is not much equality and too much violence against women and girls. Plan International also motivated me, because there was a training session held in my school about child rights – that was when I first started thinking about girls' rights.

We used to broadcast on our local radio station (as part of the media club) and there came a time when a lot of people came to publicly denounce violence in the area on our show. I saw people come with blood and wounds from their violent injuries, and this really upset me. So I decided to get involved in campaigning to stop violence against women and girls.

When I first started to speak out, my family were really proud of me, because they could hear me on the radio defending girls' rights. They were by my side in fighting against

GLORIA IS 17 AND FROM BENIN. SHE IS COMMITTED TO DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY GIRLS, AND CAMPAIGNS AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE. SHE IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE PLAN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA CLUB IN HER AREA, WHICH USES RADIO TO HIGHLIGHT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS. SHE HAS ALSO BEEN CHOSEN AS A UNICEF JUNIOR REPORTER.

gender inequality and violations against girls.

When I speak out on the radio, other students and people around me are really proud of me, because they feel that we are talking about information that everyone should know about. They appreciate what I'm doing. My friends have also found it really positive.

I think girls are entitled to their rights, and I think that should be known by everyone. So it's important for me as a female to make these rights heard. Some international agreements have been ratified by my country and the time has come for everyone to know that girls have the right to live and play in a non-violent and peaceful environment.

My first big achievement was when I, along with the other members of my club, prevented a lot of children, particularly girls,

from migrating illegally out of Benin, as well as preventing a lot of forced marriages in my community. Many people came onto our radio show to denounce these practices. We also got the local precinct involved and they really helped out – as did the Ministry of Family Justice. We worked with adults as well as young people.

The biggest challenge I've found so far is that when we are doing awareness raising, a lot of people think we are encouraging children to rebel against their parents and families and make them forget their duty to their family. I think there's no use broadcasting if people do not listen to you, so that makes it hard for us sometimes. We try to overcome these challenges by emphasising child duties as well as their rights.

If I was to pass on advice to other young aspiring advocates, I would say:

- *Make your family and those close to you understand clearly why the work is important for all children. Then you will be able to rely on their support.*
- *Tell your parents that girls' rights are a reality and not something that is looked down upon.*
- *Young people should not get tired of speaking out over and over again, telling people about the realities of girls' rights.*
- *Young people can influence powerful decision makers through advocacy. Sometimes we try to meet with power brokers; we write letters, and also attend children's events such as African Children's Day, where we try to talk with them.*

I would like to say to everyone who reads this: girls have rights that must be protected, and their voices must be heard!



GLORIA'S FATHER

'TIMES ARE CHANGING: GIRLS ARE SEEING THERE'S MORE TO LIFE'

ANOKA IS 24 AND COMES FROM SRI LANKA. SHE IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATIONIST, ECO-SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR AND YOUTH POLICY ADVOCATE. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT EDUCATION, GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT. THE YOUNGEST FEMALE RECIPIENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH YOUTH AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENT, ANOKA IS A GLOBAL YOUTH AMBASSADOR WITH THE OFFICE OF THE UN SPECIAL ENVOY ON GLOBAL EDUCATION, AND THE OFFICE OF SARAH AND GORDON BROWN.

Hi! I'm Anoka, and I live near Colombo in Sri Lanka. In general, the communities here are very patriarchal. In our culture, the men are traditionally viewed as breadwinners and the women are engaged in childbearing or looking after the family. It was seen as scandalous a couple of years back for a woman to be working, especially if the woman or girl did not return home by 6pm. But now times are changing, especially with social media; with more women leaders and role models, women and girls are seeing that there's more to life.

I was 13 when I started a community programme on environmental conservation, but along the way I started seeing how women didn't have the time to really engage in something full time because they had children and families to look after. We started advocating for more women to expand their current initiatives in farming and making things, like weaving mats and hats or general handicrafts, into social

enterprises. That was when we realised that it was so important for women and girls to have access to capacity building, training and being able to advocate for their own rights. At the moment we are focusing on sexual harassment, especially in public spaces. We are also looking at general

human rights in the sense of having access to better employment and equal pay. Sri Lanka is currently invested in promoting women leaders in politics because we have a horrible rate of women in our parliament, just three per cent! We are trying to support women leaders in communities and women in general to take more control in politics. Our former minister for women's affairs was a man. He actually said that if a girl was raped, she should get married to the person who raped her, which was horrible!

My family were mostly positive, but when it came to people I knew or society in general, they were asking me, "Why, Anoka? Why are you getting involved with this? This is a grey area, it's not going to bring anything but trouble."

It is satisfying to listen to the success stories from the people who've gone through our programmes. Something that has been successful is recruiting young women from rural areas to work with us. People are more open to working with someone from their own community. They trust the person and they know this person has nothing but goodwill towards them. I think that my biggest achievement was supporting the development of more than 100 rural youth leaders. These young girls are amazing. They come from areas where they probably have never had access to things like a laptop, or even a smartphone, but they are so smart, and they're able to take these messages to their communities to advocate for better electricity or better access to the internet or to basic things like better employment skills.

There have been very difficult situations where it has been hard to get through to some people, especially men. I think once a whole group of young men are put in a group with young women, they get to hash out their beliefs and differences and have better dialogue – which is something we facilitate.

Campaigning and advocating for gender equality is not the easiest task, but if you love it, it can be very rewarding!



UNFPA SRI LANKA

Some of my tips would be:

- Encourage better dialogue; work more at grassroots level and encourage better coordination amongst women's groups so that they can advocate together if they need to.
- Encourage better capacity building and skills training, because it's so important for people to improve their advocacy skills.
- Work closely with stakeholders who can help you (such as human rights commissions, or certain police bodies) because that can help your advocacy and pushing for better policy.
- Lastly, it's really important for you to be able to take criticism. It may be constructive, or it may be harsh, especially when it comes from different generations. You must be able to take it in a constructive, positive way and improve yourself. Do not be swayed by any negative criticism.

'WE CHANGE MIND-SETS BY CREATING SPACES FOR DIALOGUE'

JUDE IS A 27-YEAR-OLD CHEMISTRY TEACHER AND GENDER EQUALITY ACTIVIST FROM CAMEROON. HE WORKS AS THE COUNTRY COORDINATOR FOR THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN YOUTH – CAMEROON. HE IS ALSO A WOMEN DELIVER YOUTH LEADER AND HAS MULTI-LEVEL EXPERIENCE GAINED THROUGH TRAINING, PRACTICE, AND COORDINATING SEVERAL PROJECTS TO BUILD THE CAPACITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME GENDER ADVOCATES, EMPOWER COMMUNITIES AND CHANGE STEREOTYPES.

Hi, I'm Jude. I am a chemistry teacher in Cameroon. Before I taught in schools I was working on youth issues in development. I've been campaigning for girls' rights for six years. I live in southwest Cameroon and have grown up in communities where young girls would stay out of school for days or drop out altogether. There were many teenage girls getting pregnant. Back then, in school, we weren't taught about sex. We saw sex mostly from a biological perspective, not from a rights perspective.

When I started teaching in a secondary school I discovered that a lot of young girls were leaving school, or staying away for long periods, and I wanted to find out why. I discovered that they were dropping out because schools were not catering to their needs. For example, a girl who is in school starts menstruating in class, but she has never received any information about what to do, so she stays away for the period of menstruation. I discovered as well there were young girls who got pregnant and had to leave school. There were other girls who were forced away from school to become child brides. So I asked myself as a teacher, is it just about teaching chemistry or trying to change lives? Let's go the extra mile. So this is how I started, thinking about how girls can be empowered. That's

what got me into advocacy for girls' rights.

When I first started speaking out about girls' rights it wasn't easy. I'm a boy; when I started talking about girls' issues, people were, like, "What?!" I come from a stereotypical community, so it was not easy at all. But I used different approaches to get more results and more people on board. I discovered that a lot of people were not aware of what was going on in their own community. For example, people were not aware that girls were dropping out of school because of pregnancy. I talked about how if you have sex education in school, fewer girls will drop out. There was a lot of doubt; men would say,



JUDE

Jude facilitating a workshop in Cameroon



JUDE

My guidance to other aspiring advocates is this:

- *Understand the communities where you want to work. You don't want to go to a community and explain a situation that has no relevance to them.*
- *Spend time in the community. Do your research, talk to everyone, try to understand what the issues are and how things work there.*
- *Talk to men, women and young people in separate groups to start with. For other young boys and men interested in campaigning for girls' rights, I say to my friends that I want to get married to an empowered woman. I don't want to get married to a woman who feels her place is in the kitchen. I want to get married to a woman who sees herself as a professor, for example, and doesn't depend on me. I want to get married to a woman who identifies as herself, not as 'Mrs Jude'. We need to work together, to make gender personal.*

"you shouldn't be talking about this, you're a man!" We were on the air on a radio talk show discussing girls' education, the need for girls not be violated and why we should avoid gender-based violence (GBV). A boy called in

and said: "An African woman's place is in the kitchen. You have Western concepts and you are changing the way our girls behave to their husbands." So I tried to explain to him, but he wouldn't listen. I asked him one question: "If, for example, your wife is employed at a firm, she is more educated than you, but she doesn't receive the salary she deserves because she is a woman, would you be happy?" And he said, "no, she should be paid what she is due; otherwise that wouldn't be fair." That's how we change mind-sets: we create spaces for dialogue. Using the community radio, we can talk with different community members and help them to understand our point of view.

Young people in different communities around the world are the ones who will be the community leaders of tomorrow. So they need to understand gender issues now, so that when they are in the position to make decisions, they will know about girls' rights. Involving young people is key. If you raise awareness and teach young people, they will then go home, share their knowledge with their parents, and eventually change mind-sets. We must bring young people's views and standpoints on board in solving issues that relate to them; if we leave them out, you might find the wrong solution to the problem.

'EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS THEIR OWN RIGHTS'



ALISHBA IS A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL GROUP YOUTH FOR CHANGE, WHICH IS WORKING TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) AND CHILD, FORCED AND EARLY MARRIAGE. SHE CONDUCTS AWARENESS SESSIONS WITH GIRLS AND HAS BEEN WORKING ON GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION. SHE HAS FACILITATED CONSULTATIONS WITH GIRLS AND HAS PARTICIPATED IN DRAFTING AND PROPOSING RECOMMENDATIONS TO VARIOUS MINISTERS ABOUT GIRLS' EDUCATION, CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF PAKISTAN AT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FORUMS.

When I first started campaigning for girls' rights, my friends would say: "you are completely wasting your time. Don't you have anything better to do?" My teachers said: "just give up your studies and concentrate on your social work." In the very beginning it did create some problems with my family

Hi, I'm Alishba, I'm 21 and I live in Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, in the slum area. I'm doing a Masters degree in English; I have one year left. I work with local and international networks to improve girls' rights in my community – wherever I find myself comfortable and where I can contribute. I also work by myself as a youth volunteer, because if there is no one to help me then I will just get on with it and do what I can.

The situation is changing now. Earlier, girls weren't even allowed to go out; now they are allowed, but there are other risks as well, like harassment, sexual and reproductive health issues and social settings in which you're not allowed to grow. These days, there is less support for girls' education because girls are not trusted. Some girls are doing well at school but others are not trusted to attend or cannot afford to. Some parents marry their daughters off as soon as possible so they can get rid of the economic responsibility; a common misconception is that girls are considered a burden.

I think issues like sexual harassment, lack of mobility for girls and early marriage are having a bad impact on girls' lives and damaging their souls. These challenges are smothering their desires and dreams. In our work we try to give out knowledge and education around girls' rights and sexual and reproductive health rights, and to influence men in the community to develop an environment of sustainability and equality.

as nobody likes their daughter to go to bad, restricted areas or the gossip and scandal that accompanies it.

There have been many challenges, like knocking on people's doors only to have them slam the door in my face; but I keep trying and continue with my work.

Every individual has their own rights. In my society, girls often have to stay at home "in their place", whatever that is, and they are not allowed to speak out. Gender inequality is deeply imbedded in our society and all around us, so we must take a stand because we cannot survive with this system. It's important, because if I speak and my voice is valued then surely my one voice will make a difference. One way or another this will produce change, either minor or major, but at least there will be change. If not in my lifetime, then in the next generation.

Some of the biggest challenges have been people's attitudes or abuse by those who think we are doing something ridiculous by working with communities on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Men would say bad things about us, but so did women. They would tell their daughters not to associate with us when we went into the community to discuss gender

My advice to other youth activists would be:

- Be true to yourself and work hard for others.
- Always try to find something positive in everyone. Don't try to challenge people: challenge their mind-sets! I try to talk with people with a feeling of love. I believe that once the mind-set is changed, actions will automatically change too.
- We must educate girls to understand their own rights and how these rights need to be protected, and to own their own development. We must listen to girls and what they are saying, and then find a way to support them and work with them.

issues. But now, after working with the communities, men and women send their daughters to come along to our talks and they want their daughters to be like us – and it's awesome: times have changed!

Some of my relatives wanted my father to marry off one of my sisters at an early age, but my sisters and I talked to my father, and as a result he decided against the early marriage, and supported us.

Performing at a 'Hear My Voice' event for Plan International's *Because I am a Girl* campaign.

