SUMMARY

Hear Our Voices

Do adolescent girls' issues *really* matter?



Plan

Because I am a Girl



About this study

Plan International spoke directly with over 7,000 adolescent girls and boys (aged 12-16) in 11 countries across four regions.

The 11 countries involved in the study are:

Asia	Central and South America	Eastern and Southern Africa	West Africa
Bangladesh	Ecuador	Egypt	Benin
Pakistan	Nicaragua	Uganda	Cameroon
	Paraguay	Zimbabwe	Liberia

This is one of the largest studies of adolescent girls' rights and empowerment that any organisation in the development sector has ever undertaken.

The purpose of the study was to help girls, communities and Plan to understand the key issues that adolescent girls face today – in their own words.

This unique and innovative study puts adolescent girls' and boys' voices at the centre of the Because I am a Girl campaign and Plan's work – a core belief that underpins strong development programming.

Cover image and photo p.7 © Plan / Zackary Canepari

The girl is from the **'Hear Our Voices' photo series** featuring actors and is purely representative. This girl and all other children featured in the photos of this report are no relation to the 7,179 young girls and boys featured in the report.

Wherever we report statistics within this report, we are referring to the responses from the 7,179 adolescent girls and boys who participated in this study.

These findings reflect the views of specific groups of girls and boys across the 11 countries. They are not nationally representative.

This summary can be downloaded from here

The technical report can be downloaded from here

The stark reality for girls

The study's results bring the daily realities that girls face into vivid colour. They provide consistent, disturbing illustrations of the most pressing concerns for adolescent girls, giving powerful insights into the issues facing them, in their own words. This is evidence that policy makers and practitioners cannot ignore.

"[Girls] feel valued because their parents speak on their behalf when there are problems."

Adolescent girl, Liberia

The findings reveal that there is much work to be done to ensure that adolescent girls live in a world that supports them to fulfil their potential. While there are important variations across regions, adolescent girls in all countries essentially do not see themselves as having rights. Girls are not aware of their power and rights to make decisions about their own lives. People around them in society consistently reinforce and recreate this perception, as a result of established – and often unexamined – ideas about what it means to be a 'good girl' and to prepare to be a 'good woman'. We recognise that this requires urgent action to address long-term change, in ways that are rooted in different societies and cultures.

Ultimately, the study results are a call to action, with adolescent girls and boys as central, strong advocates for change. Unacceptable violations and denials of adolescent girls' rights must not be allowed to continue. They are the result of inequitable social norms that influence girls' perceptions of their own capacities as much as others' expectations. Girls can only flourish when social norms are addressed in serious ways through intentional action, over the long term. Girls and boys seek change and want a more enabling environment for girls' empowerment and gender equality at schools.

Plan will continue working towards change at three levels for adolescent girls' rights, including with:

1) girls as rights holders

2) family and community leaders to strengthen their support for girls' rights

3) government and other principal duty bearers to achieve changes in institutional support for girls' rights.

What we want now:

Advocates

Advocates everywhere will be armed with fresh insights into the plight of girls. The findings in this study present evidence that policy makers cannot ignore.

Programming

Plan commits to using the findings and tools from this study to continue to deliver the best programme work to create long-term change for girls and boys.

Join the campaign

Inspired, worried, concerned by what you read here? Make a difference, join adolescent girls in creating the future they want and have a right to.

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Speaking up

1 in 3 girls

reported that they **never speak up** and say what they think around boys

Pregnancy

1 in 3 girls

said they **never decide** if they become pregnant

Marriage

Only

26%

of girls said that they **always decide** if they marry

School

In Central and South America

44%

of girls **always or often completed at least 9 years of school**

Safety

In West Africa

30%

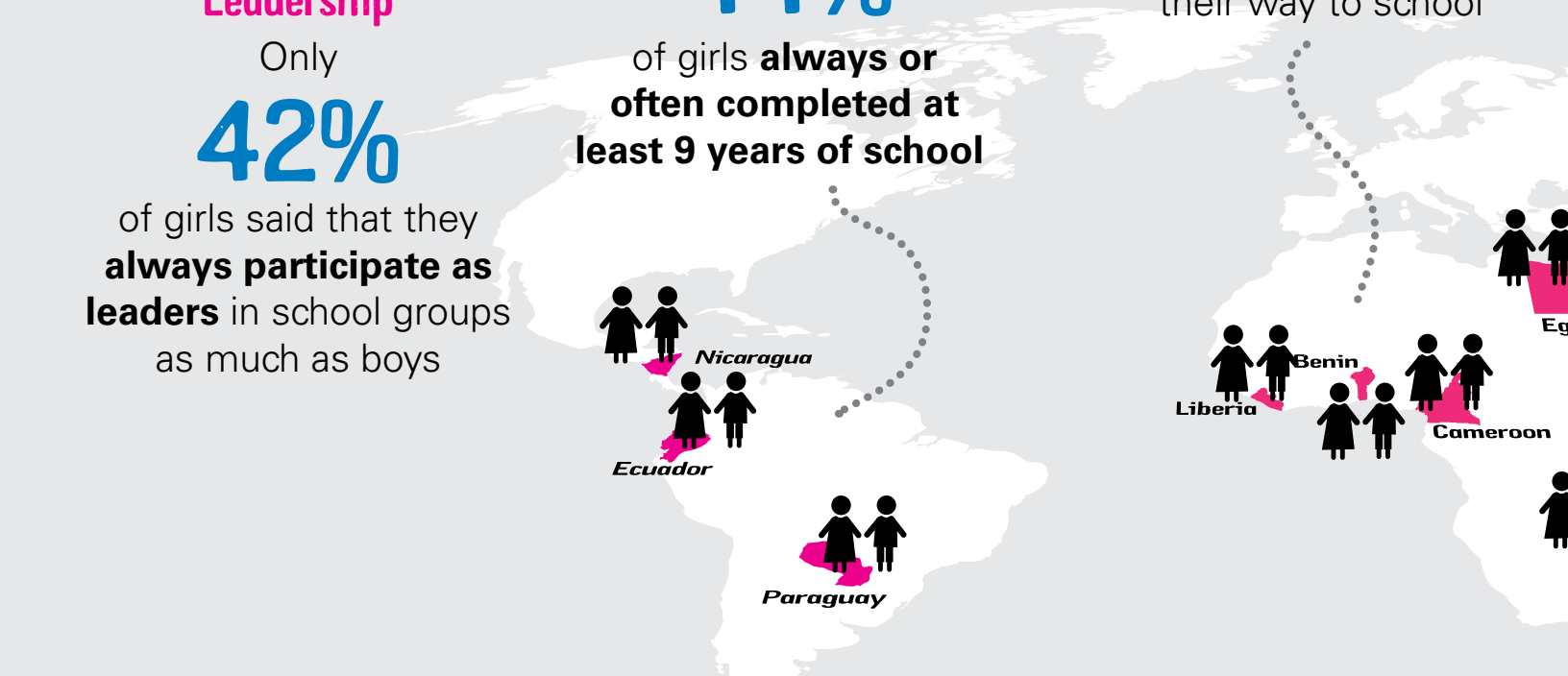
of girls said that they **never or seldom feel as safe as boys** on their way to school

Leadership

Only

42%

of girls said that they **always participate as leaders** in school groups as much as boys



Hear Our Voices

School latrines

1 in 4 girls

reported that they **never feel comfortable** using school latrine

Class participation

Only **49%** of girls said they **always participate** in class as much as boys

Encouragement

In East and Southern Africa

69%

of girls said that they are **always encouraged to succeed at school** as much as boys

Household work

In Asia

just **5%** of girls said girls and boys **always share household work equally**

Chore burden at school

Over a third of girls and boys

in all regions reported they **always share equally** the chore burden at school



We listened to **7,179** adolescent girls and boys across 4 regions

#ListenToGirls

The truth about being a girl

The layering of statistics and quotes from the girls and boys gives amazing vibrancy and helps us understand the reality of girls' lives.

Things are getting better for girls, albeit slowly in many areas. Many girls are now able to dream of completing school and having a better future, beyond being wives and mothers. Girls are working every day to help themselves, improve their lives and create a better future. They are striving to keep themselves safe, learn and grow.

Girls described how they need support from many different people in their lives in order to flourish. Sometimes their families and teachers provide this support, sometimes they don't. Girls also revealed that they are constantly limited, constrained and subjected to injustices that stunt their opportunities in life.

While many of these findings are not new, we cannot ignore the level of injustice described in this study. The situation of girls can only truly improve when everyone in society values girls as much as boys.

Want more detail? Click here to download the technical report for results findings of:

- the highest and lowest dimensions of girls' empowerment across the 11 countries
- the highest and lowest levels of gender equality at school for girls from the opinions of girls and boys

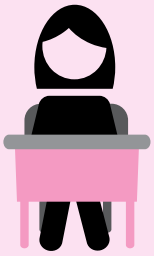


38% of girls reported they always or often decide if they marry

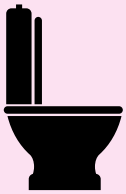


Over half of girls said that girls never or seldom decide if they become pregnant

2 in 5 girls say they always or often complete 9 years of school



38% of girls never or seldom feel comfortable using school latrines





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Voices of adolescent girls and boys

The voices of adolescent girls and boys form the epicentre of this study. Their voices paint a vivid picture of the opportunities and constraints that girls so often face.

The evidence shows that the social norms which underpin gender inequality are changing for the better for adolescent girls, but this progress is unjustifiably slow in many areas. Girls around the world are working every day to improve their lives and create a better future for themselves and their families. For example, less than half (41 per cent) of the adolescent girls said that girls ‘always’ or ‘often’ complete at least nine years of school in their communities.

A darker story also emerged from this research process which shows the shocking truth about girls’ lives around the world. Through this study, girls revealed that they are constantly limited, constrained and subjected to injustices that stunt their opportunities in life. These findings were reinforced by the perspectives of their male peers. For example, both girls and boys highlighted how many adolescent girls drop-out of school due to early pregnancy, early marriage or poverty.

The evidence from this study shows how girls in the poorest regions of the world are among the most disadvantaged people on the planet. They face unique barriers to survival and development, simply because they are girls. This lack of opportunity and care is unfair and unjust.

Marriage



"Parents don't want what happened to them to happen with their girls."

Adolescent girl, Egypt

Marriage was rated one of the highest dimensions of girls' empowerment – 38 per cent of girls said they 'always' or 'often' decide if they marry. This was most prevalent in **Central and South America** and **East and Southern Africa**. In **Central and South America**, over half (53 per cent) of girls claimed they 'always' or 'often' decide when they marry.[1] Some girls explained they hope to get married only after they have finished school, and others have older sisters who set a good example and finished secondary school first before marrying.

Girls in **East and Southern Africa** also felt empowered around deciding when to marry (53 per cent of girls reported 'always' or 'often' deciding when to marry). This was most prevalent in Egypt where 75 per cent of girls reported they 'always' decide if they marry. Adolescent girls in this region, for the most part, felt supported by their families to control if and when to marry, and mothers who were forced into early marriage often did not want the same fate for their daughters.

"Some parents use their girl children to settle debts, thereby forcing them to get married to people they don't love."

Adolescent girl, Cameroon

On the other hand, many other girls involved in the study also reported that they do not feel empowered around decisions relating to marriage – 39 per cent of girls claimed that girls 'never' or 'seldom' decide over their own marriage. Girls in **Asia** and **West Africa** felt least empowered about deciding when to marry – over two-thirds (69 per cent) of girls in **Asia** and over half (52 per cent) of girls in **West Africa** said they 'never' or 'seldom' control decisions about their marriage. Many girls are forced into marriage due to poverty, economic exploitation, sexual harassment and abuse, and many girls seldom have the ability to decide if, when and whom to marry.

"Our marriages are arranged with the choice of our parents."

Adolescent girl, Pakistan

In **Asia**, some parents believe that girls are not able to make the right decisions regarding marriage. Many girls' mothers and sisters have also experienced early and forced marriage making it more commonplace to arrange marriages for their daughters. Girls said parents see themselves as more experienced and better decision-makers, especially fathers who girls said see themselves as knowing better than women and girls.

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1. All percentages reported are weighted average percentages based upon data from selected participants, communities, schools, programme units, countries and regions. For full details, please see the technical report.



Pregnancy

"How nice it would be for women to have a child when they are prepared."

Adolescent boy, Paraguay

One of the key themes that came across most powerfully in the study is pregnancy, showing how adolescent girls across diverse contexts are often unable to claim their rights to control their own body, negotiate sexual relations, or make decisions about their reproductive health. Over half (53 per cent) of girls across the 11 countries claimed that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' decide if they become pregnant.

Girls rated pregnancy as the lowest dimension of girls' empowerment across all four regions – 71 per cent of girls in **West Africa**, 55 per cent of girls in **Asia**, 48 per cent of girls in **East and Southern Africa**, and 42 per cent of girls in **Central and South America** reported they 'never' or 'seldom' decide if they get pregnant. Girls across all regions said they are not educated about safe sex nor do they know how to prevent pregnancy. Some girls become sexually active at a young age or their parents force them into early marriage. Sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse are all drivers of early pregnancy for many girls involved in the study.

This data is all the more disturbing when understood in light of the reality that complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 years.[2]

In the study, early pregnancy was also identified as a large contributing factor to girls dropping out of school. Adolescent girls and boys interviewed across all four regions felt that early pregnancy was the lowest dimension of gender equality at school for girls. Fifty-eight per cent of girls and 61 per cent of boys reported that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' continue to attend school after having a baby.

This was most prevalent in **Asia** where 84 per cent of girls and 82 per cent of boys reported that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' return to school after having a baby – in one programme area in Pakistan, 94 per cent of participants said that adolescent girls 'never' return to school after becoming a mother.

In **West Africa**, over half of all girls (56 per cent) and boys (55 per cent) involved in the study said that girls 'never' or 'seldom' return to school after having a baby, yet boys claimed they are often able to return after having a baby.

In **Central and South America**, half of girls (50 per cent) and boys (56 per cent) said girls 'never' or 'seldom' return to school, while in **East and Southern Africa**, nearly half of girls (46 per cent) and over half of boys (58 per cent) reported that girls 'never' or 'seldom' return to school after having a baby.

Early pregnancy in many contexts precedes early marriage. In some contexts, early marriage and early pregnancy are viewed as "compulsory" for girls. Social stigma and unofficial school rules against pregnant girls or young mothers attending classes keep many from continuing their education. Schools do not provide alternative pathways to young mothers for continuing and completing their secondary education, or childcare facilities on-site, which would address the issue of a lack of childcare as a reason why many young mothers do not return to school. Further, girls reported facing gender-based violence on the way to and from school, and at times at school, particularly around school latrines, which sometimes leads to early pregnancy and school dropout.

2. UNFPA (2012), '*Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*', UNFPA: New York, USA.

"Girls do not have decision-making power over pregnancy. The male says to them, You are machines to birth children."

Adolescent girl, Pakistan

"Girls seldom decide whether or when to get pregnant because sometimes their parents push them to ask for money from boys and boys never give money for nothing."

Adolescent girl, Cameroon

Speaking up



"We are embarrassed to speak in the presence of men."
Adolescent girl, Egypt

Adolescent girls have difficulties claiming their rights to express themselves and discuss their concerns in front of men and boys. Over half (51 per cent) of girls involved in the study said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' say what they think when a boy or man is around. On the other hand, some girls claimed that they were supported by their families to speak up and share their concerns.

Speaking up was featured as the third lowest dimension of girls empowerment across all of the 11 countries. This finding was most prevalent in **East and Southern Africa** and **Central and South America** where over half of all girls involved in the study said they 'never' or 'seldom' say what they think when a boy is around (57 per cent and 53 per cent respectively). However, the findings are much higher in certain countries across all regions. For instance, 93 per cent of girls in one area in Ecuador said girls 'never' or 'seldom' say what they think when a boy or man is around, and nearly three-quarters of girls in areas in Uganda (72 per cent) and Pakistan (70 per cent) reported 'never' or 'seldom' speaking up in front of a man.

"My father asks me my opinion and he is not embarrassed to do so because my opinion may be correct."
Adolescent girl, Egypt

"My mother does not speak to my father of what she feels and she needs."
Adolescent girl, Cameroon

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Feeling valued

"[Girls] feel valued because their parents speak on their behalf when there are problems."

Adolescent girl, Liberia

"The girls are like servants of boys and men. Their issues don't really matter."

Adolescent girl, Cameroon

"Our parents give respect to us, they honour us, because in our communities, girls are signs of honour."

Adolescent girl, Pakistan

Girls involved in the study on average felt valued and said their concerns matter in the community. This was most prevalent in **Asia** and **Central and South America**, followed by **West Africa** and **East and Southern Africa**.

However, the findings vary considerably in the regions. For instance, in **East and Southern Africa**, 41-46 per cent of girls in Zimbabwe claimed they 'never' or 'seldom' feel valued, while only 3-12 per cent of girls in Egypt said they 'never' or 'seldom' feel valued in their community. In **West Africa**, girls shared both positive and negative experiences about feeling valued in their community. For instance, in Benin over half (55 per cent) of the girls said that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel valued. On the other hand, in Liberia, more than half (57-64 per cent) of girls who participated in the study said that the concerns of adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' matter in the community and they feel valued by their parents. Other girls expressed concerns that they rarely feel valued in their community.

Other girls claimed that adolescent girls were only appreciated when they conformed to and performed traditional gender roles and responsibilities.



Violence

"I'm scared to go outside home after sunset because there is no security now to protect the girls."

Adolescent girl, Egypt

"I just feel safe with my family, because no one else cares for us. Rape and kidnapping cases are a given."

Adolescent girl, Nicaragua

The findings reveal that violence against girls is frighteningly entrenched – girls expect to be victims of violence, and the levels of violence that they experience are seen as normal. Girls seldom feel free from violence at home, in communities and at school. For instance, 80 per cent of girls in one area in Ecuador and 77 per cent of girls in one area in Bangladesh claimed that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel safe in their community. Adolescent girls experience violence in the form of sexual harassment, rape, sexual and economic exploitation and abuse, forced marriage through blackmailing, and silencing girls through intimidation.[3]

These findings reinforce, at scale, many previous studies on the nature and scope of violence against girls. The evidence provided through the study should send a sobering message that continued action must be taken to eliminate all types of violence against girls.

3. Across the world, over a third of women will experience gender-based violence from an intimate partner. Source: World Health Organisation (2013), *'Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women, Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence'*, World Health Organisation: Geneva.



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Safety in and around school

"Three years back a guy took photo of a girl without her consent on the way to school. Then he attached his photo to hers and started threatening her by saying that, if she didn't agree to have an affair with him then he would show that photo to her family and tell a false story of their relationship. Although not willing, still she had to get involved with him. Some days after [the start of] their love affair he got physically close to her and then left her. Out of shame the girl committed suicide."

Adolescent girl, Bangladesh

Linked to violence, some adolescent girls involved in the study revealed that they often feel safe in their community, however the findings reveal a set of complex realities. For instance, 77 per cent of girls in one area in Bangladesh reported they 'never' or 'seldom' feel safe in their community, while only 33 per cent girls from another area of the country 'never' or 'seldom' feel safe. In Paraguay, 75 per cent of girls in one area 'always' or 'often' feel safe, while only one-third (35 per cent) of girls from another area in the country reported 'always' or 'often' feeling safe in their community.

Some girls in **Asia** claimed that they rarely walk alone in their community because of high levels of crime and violence, and they feel safer when they are with others.

Other girls involved in the study across the regions only feel safe at school because at home they are victims of physical and sexual violence by their family. Sometimes students are victims of abuse from teachers.

Participants also claimed that girls often feel unsafe on their way to and from school – over a quarter (28 per cent) of girls and boys (31 per cent) across the 11 countries claimed that girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel safe on their way to school. Adolescent boys often felt they were safer than girls when travelling to and from school. However, the findings are complex. For instance, in **Central and South America**, over a quarter of girls (28 per cent) and boys (31 per cent) involved in the study said girls are 'never' or 'seldom' as safe as boys when travelling to school. Yet in Nicaragua, a considerably larger number of girls (42 per cent) and boys (50 per cent) reported that girls are 'never' or 'seldom' as safe as boys on the way to school.

In **Asia**, both girls and boys rated safety going to school as one of the lowest dimensions of gender equality at school for girls, claiming that girls are often victims of violence and harassment.

"At home, we are sometimes sexually harassed by our relatives whom we can never report as they will be our guardians."

Adolescent girl, Zimbabwe

However, in one area in Pakistan, 78 per cent of girls and 63 per cent of boys said that adolescent girls are 'always' or 'often' as safe as boys on their way to and from school, yet in another area in the country, only a third of girls (33 per cent) and boys (30 per cent) said that adolescent girls are 'always' or 'often' as safe as boys when travelling to and from school. Participants in Pakistan revealed that adolescent girls rarely walk to school alone because of safety risks, and that girls are often accompanied by a male family member or walk in groups with other girls to make them feel safer.

The impact of low levels of safety for girls when travelling to and from school can result in them missing class or even dropping out of school.

School

"My parents like education because they are both uneducated and they want us to be the best and to be highly educated."

Adolescent girl, Egypt

School was rated the second highest dimension of girls' empowerment. Across 11 countries in the study, 41 per cent of girls reported they 'always' or 'often' complete at least nine years of school. This was most prevalent in **Asia** where half of girls said they 'always' or 'often' complete at least nine years of school.

In **Asia**, girls rated school as the highest dimension of girls' empowerment. The finding may be attributed to the sample encompassing adolescent girls who live in communities where Plan has implemented rights-based approaches to child-centred community development over many years. In Bangladesh, adolescent girls explained that many more girls are now going to school because of scholarships and free books from the government, and that there are now more girls than boys in school. Adolescent girls said that more parents are aware of the value of girls' education as a result of these government programmes. Girls in Pakistan shared the view that literacy and education for girls are expected to make an entire family more literate.

Girls involved in the study across all countries claimed that their fathers and mothers support girls' education. While often more educated fathers are the ones to support girls' education, even some who did not complete their schooling want a better life for their girls. Girls and boys also revealed that they are often supported and treated equally by teachers. On the other hand, the study also revealed that girls have challenges completing school and sometimes have to drop out due to early pregnancy, early marriage, or poverty.



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"There is no discrimination between boys and girls in [the] classroom. Teachers give equal importance to both boys and girls."

Adolescent boy, Bangladesh

"The government is now giving free books and scholarships, so girls want to be educated. No girls want to be unemployed and stay at home."

Adolescent girl, Bangladesh

"We have [the] chance to go to school when we have baby, but not girls."

Adolescent boy, Liberia



School latrines

Linked to the findings on the above issue of safety is the area of school latrines. Many adolescent girls involved in the study reported they only sometimes have access to safe, clean, single-sex, sanitation facilities at school. Many teachers and students share the same latrines, and girls said that school latrines are often health hazards and crime zones. Over a third (38 per cent) of girls reported that adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel comfortable using latrines at schools. This was most prevalent in **West Africa**, yet there was significant variability across all regions and schools in the study. Boys' responses suggested slightly different views, with 31 per cent saying that they think adolescent girls 'never' or 'seldom' have a latrine at school they feel comfortable using.

In **West Africa**, both girls and boys involved in the study rated school latrines as one of the lowest dimensions of gender equality at school for girls – 62 per cent of girls and 47 per cent of boys reported that there are 'never' or 'seldom' toilets at school that adolescent girls feel comfortable using. In Benin, the percentage is much higher, with 86 per cent of girls reporting there are 'never' or 'seldom' toilets at school that girls can use.

In **Central and South America**, 30 per cent of girls and 28 per cent of boys claimed girls 'never' or 'seldom' feel comfortable using school latrines. The findings in Nicaragua were much higher though, with nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of all girls and boys in one area reporting they 'never' or 'seldom' can use school toilets. Many adolescent girls voiced issues of latrines being dirty, not having doors and not functioning. Many girls are afraid of contracting diseases from using a dirty latrine, and some girls feel they "suffocate" from the odour of dirty and poorly functioning latrines. Some latrines have doors, however the doors have holes in them through which others can see inside. Issues of boys spying on girls, locking girls inside latrines, and sexually harassing girls around latrines all emerged as pressing concerns in Nicaragua.

Yet, in another area of Nicaragua, 72 per cent of girls reported they 'always' or 'often' feel comfortable using the latrines at school.

"We do not go to the bathroom when the boys spy by putting a cell phone in a shoe and take video and see everything. They also lift our skirts when we walk by."

Adolescent girl, Nicaragua

"The toilets are away from the classrooms and have become a 'crime area'. This is where girls are brutalised and raped and it is equally where boys and girls have their rendezvous."

Adolescent girl, Cameroon

"Girls never feel comfortable using the existing latrines because they are cracked and in poor condition, so they are afraid to use them. They also worry that boys will walk in on them, because the latrines are shared."

Adolescent girl, Benin

Class participation

"Girls can participate in class freely like boys, because the teacher has treated boys and girls equally in the class. Girls also can share their problem with their female teacher."
Adolescent girl, Bangladesh

"We participate more in class [than boys]."
Adolescent girl, Paraguay

The findings reveal a link between encouragement and class participation. Adolescent girls and boys involved in the study felt that class participation was the second highest dimension of gender equality at school for girls. Seventy per cent of girls and 69 per cent of boys reported that adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' participate in class as often as boys. This was most prevalent in communities in **Central and South America**, **East and Southern Africa**, and **Asia**. Seventy-eight per cent of girls and boys involved in the study in **Central and South America** reported girls 'always' or 'often' participate as often as boys in class. Three-quarters of girls (76 per cent) and boys (74 per cent) in **East and Southern Africa** said that girls 'always' or 'often' participate in class as equally as boys. And in **Asia**, 69 per cent of girls and 82 per cent of boys claimed that girls 'always' or 'often' participate in class as much as boys.

On the other hand, girls involved in the study explained that societal norms in their context sometimes prohibit them from directly addressing adult males (this was evident in **Asia**). This becomes an issue concerning girls seeking help at school where there is a majority of male teachers. Also, some teachers, whether women or men, sometimes favour boys' concerns and participation where their behaviours seem more dominant.

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Encouragement

"Due to Plan policies like equality ... girls are encouraged to succeed academically for future equality."

Adolescent boy, Uganda

Across all four regions, encouragement was the highest rated dimension of school equality by both adolescent girls and boys. Of girls interviewed, 73 per cent said that adolescent girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged to succeed in their schoolwork as much as boys. Similarly, 71 per cent of adolescent boys said that girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged academically as much as boys in the classroom.

This was most prevalent in **East and Southern Africa**, **Asia**, and **Central and South America**. In **East and Southern Africa**, 80 per cent of girls and 78 per cent of boys said girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged to succeed in their schoolwork as much as boys – 95 per cent of boys in one area in Zimbabwe reported that girls are 'always' or 'often' encouraged equally. Some boys in Uganda referred to Plan's programmes and policies that promote girls' education as being a contributing factor.

In **Asia**, 77 per cent of girls and 82 per cent of boys reported girls 'always' or 'often' being encouraged to succeed as much as boys – in one area in Bangladesh, 94 per cent of girls said they are 'always' or 'often' as encouraged as boys.

In **Central and South America**, 76 per cent of girls and 79 per cent of boys claimed that girls 'always' or 'often are encouraged to succeed in their schoolwork as often as boys – in one area in Paraguay, 90 per cent of girls 'always' or 'often' felt encouraged as much as boys.

The research findings in **Central and South America** suggest a link between encouragement and class participation (this was evident in Ecuador) and encouragement and leadership (as was found in Nicaragua). Girls who feel encouraged in class also tend to feel empowered to participate in class and take a leadership role in school.

Although most girls and boys reiterated common themes that they are equally encouraged to succeed academically, some adolescent girls noted that they feel some male teachers listen to boys more, or take them more seriously. Some girls feel shamed or ridiculed by boys, and in some cases the teacher, if they raise their hand and give an incorrect answer. Girls from poorer households and pregnant girls reported receiving less academic encouragement.

Household work

"We are burdened with all household tasks. After marriage, we work even more."

Adolescent girl, Egypt

Nearly half (48 per cent) of all adolescent girls involved in the study said that girls and boys 'never' or 'seldom' share household chores. These findings were most prevalent in **West Africa** and **East and Southern Africa** where 52 per cent and 56 per cent of girls respectively reported they 'never' or 'seldom' share household work equally with boys.

The findings were much starker in some countries in these regions. For instance, nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of girls in Egypt said they 'never' or 'seldom' share household chores.

Over one-third of girls (47 per cent) in **Asia** and **Central and South America** (35 per cent) reported they 'never' or 'seldom' share household work equally. However, this was much higher in certain areas in some countries in **Asia** – for instance, 59 per cent of girls in one area in Pakistan and 54 per cent of girls in one area in Bangladesh reported that girls and boys 'never' or 'seldom' share household work.

Being responsible for household chores takes time away from their studies.[4] Household work is also related to early marriage and pregnancy. Poverty drives early marriage as parents seek to reduce financial constraints on the household. Early marriage increases adolescent girls' already heavy household work burdens. Early pregnancy results in early school dropout, and further adds to girls' caregiving responsibilities.

4. n every country and region of the world, women perform the majority of unpaid care work – and work longer hours than men overall. The 2012 World Development Report found that globally women devote 1 to 3 hours more a day to housework than men; 2 to 10 times the amount of time a day to care (of children, elderly, and the sick), and 1 to 4 hours less a day to market activities. Source: World Bank (2012), '*World Development Report 2012: Overview Gender Equality and Development*', The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank: Washington.



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Chore burden at school

"Boys do not perform nearly any cleaning tasks at school."

Adolescent girl, Paraguay

Over half of girls (53 per cent) and boys (56 per cent) involved in the study across the regions reported that girls 'always' or 'often' spend the same amount of time doing chores at school as boys. Girls and boys revealed mixed findings pertaining to chore burden at school. On average, boys felt that this area of school equality was higher for girls than girls did themselves. For instance, in **Central and South America**, 70 per cent of boys and only 52 per cent of girls said that girls and boys 'always' or 'often' share chore burden responsibilities at school equally.

In **Asia**, over half of all girls (55 per cent) and boys (61 per cent) reported that they 'always' or 'often' equally share chores at school and that chore burden was a high dimension of gender equality at school for girls. For instance, in one programme area in Pakistan, 84 per cent girls and 81 per cent of boys said that adolescent girls 'always' or 'often' spend the same amount of time doing chores at school as boys. One explanation is the use of a rotating schedule of chores involving boys as much as girls helping to promote gender equality in chore burden in the classroom.

This is a unique example across the regions in the study and it could be considered as a model practice to replicate in other schools and countries.

"[Girls and boys] participate equally because there is a cleaning role that we do together."

Adolescent boy, Nicaragua

"Children do participate in the cleanliness of the room regularly. There is a turn for every two students per day and almost all the students take their turn. Those who have the turn to clean the classroom environment would come earlier than the school time and would do their task."

Adolescent boy, Pakistan

How we did this

To put girls' voices at the centre of its work, Plan developed participatory research methods based on current theory and practice which provide a new way of involving girls and boys to reflect on their experiences of gender equality and child rights. Through the study presented in this report, Plan spoke directly with over 7,000 adolescent girls and boys in 11 countries across four regions. Collectively this is one of the largest studies of adolescent girls' rights and empowerment ever undertaken in the development sector.

This method builds on Plan's core approach to development work, Child Centred Community Development (CCCD). CCCD articulates how Plan supports children, youth, families and communities to be active and leading participants in their own development. The concepts of empowerment and participation underpin CCCD. So the methodology is consistent with CCCD and actively reinforces it.

The purpose of the study was to help girls, communities and Plan to understand the key issues that adolescent girls face today – in their own words. The study had three objectives:

1) To empower adolescent girls and boys.
2) To help Plan's field staff learn more from adolescent girls and boys about the issues and improvements needed to directly benefit these youth.
3) To report data and analysis about adolescent girls' and boys' perceptions of their own empowerment in order to provide senior decision makers with credible information to impact change.

The research process aimed to combine social action with social research, by placing explicit value on girls' and boys' views. It focused on girls and boys themselves as valuable social actors whose opinions and aspirations matter. In so doing, the methodology builds on emerging good practice from across the development sector.

In order to achieve the three study objectives, the methodology used structured participatory methods to generate a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative data allowed participants' perceptions to be easily summarised and compared (within strict limits). The qualitative data, generated through participatory focus group discussions of findings from the quantitative tools, provided detailed insight into how participants viewed the issues on a personal level and the underlying factors beneath their perceptions to contextualise the findings from the quantitative study.

The research process yielded substantive results across all three objectives, notwithstanding inherent challenges. Notably, the research process created safe spaces for adolescent girls and boys to share their views on girls' empowerment and gender equality at school. The study demonstrated that actively listening to girls and boys opened up critical opportunities for them to take more charge of their own development. The study generated findings that can be analysed at local, national and international levels, and can inform strategic decision-making by development agencies, including Plan. There is great potential to influence programme practice: the findings show great promise to empower field managers to respond with greater focus to the most pressing issues of adolescent girls localised at community level.

The study participants were girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 16 from the 11 countries who lived in identified communities or schools, and had some level of participation in Plan's on-going activity. Due to this purposive approach to sampling, different findings might be generated if the study was repeated with adolescent girls and boys who live in more remote rural areas than those targeted in the study, or do not attend school, or do not participate in Plan development projects. The findings of this study cannot be taken as representative of any wider population.

Click here to see a breakdown of the participants

Research tools

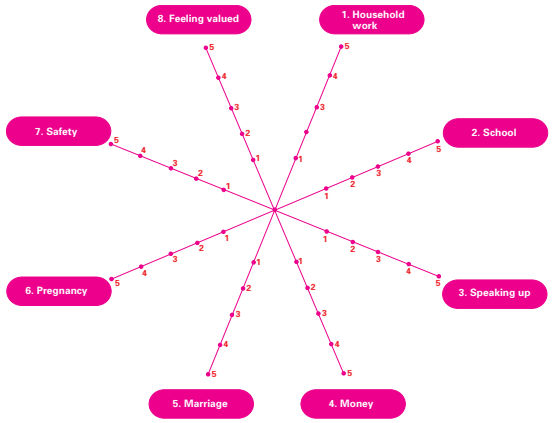
Plan created two innovative and participatory research tools for this study: the Girls Empowerment Star and the School Equality Scorecard.

The **Girls Empowerment Star** investigates eight dimensions of adolescent girls' empowerment, as experienced by adolescent girls themselves. The eight areas include: household work, school, speaking up, money, marriage, pregnancy, safety, and feeling valued. A key question is presented for each area of empowerment and adolescent girls answer the question using a five-point scale: 1-'never', 2-'seldom', 3-'sometimes', 4-'often', and 5-'always'. It was designed to be relevant to many different girls in many different contexts.

The **School Equality Scorecard** investigates ten different areas of gender equality at school for girls, as experienced by both adolescent girls and boys. The ten areas of school equality include: sports participation, class participation, chore burden, latrines, seeking help, leadership, encouragement, safety going to school, safety at school, and early pregnancy. A key question is presented for each area of school equality, and girls and boys provide responses based on the same five-point scale as the Girls Empowerment Star.

Girls Empowerment Star

Plan because I am a Girl



Issue	Key Question	Response (circle)				
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. **Household work**	Do girls and boys share household work equally, including childcare?	1	2	3	4	5
2. **School**	Do girls complete at least nine years of school?	1	2	3	4	5
3. **Speaking up**	Do girls say what matters to them in front of an adult male?	1	2	3	4	5
4. **Money**	Do girls help decide what to spend money on?	1	2	3	4	5
5. **Marriage**	Do girls decide when they marry?	1	2	3	4	5
6. **Pregnancy**	Do girls decide if they get pregnant?	1	2	3	4	5
7. **Safety**	Do girls feel safe in this community?	1	2	3	4	5
8. **Feeling valued**	Do girls' concerns matter in this community?	1	2	3	4	5

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School Equality Scorecard

Plan because I am a Girl

SCHOOL EQUALITY SCORECARD Girl_____ Boy_____ Age:_____	**Please circle one response per question.**				
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. **Sports participation**: Do girls participate in sports activities as much as boys?	1	2	3	4	5
2. **Class participation**: Do girls participate in class as often as boys?	1	2	3	4	5
3. **Chore burden**: Do girls spend the same amount of time doing chores (tidying, sweeping, cleaning) at school as boys?	1	2	3	4	5
4. **Latrines**: Are there toilets at school that girls feel comfortable to use?	1	2	3	4	5
5. **Seeking help**: Do girls talk to teachers about their concerns as much as boys?	1	2	3	4	5
6. **Leadership**: Do girls participate as leaders of student groups as much as boys?	1	2	3	4	5
7. **Encouragement**: Are girls encouraged to succeed in their schoolwork as much as boys?	1	2	3	4	5
8. **Safety going to school**: Are girls as safe as boys on their way to and from school?	1	2	3	4	5
9. **Safety at school**: Are girls as safe as boys when they are at school?	1	2	3	4	5
10. **Early pregnancy**: Do girls continue to attend school after having a baby?	1	2	3	4	5

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11 October 2012 marked the very first United Nations International Day of the Girl Child. This key moment reflected the increasing focus and momentum on girls' rights by governments, private sector companies and NGOs across the globe. At the same moment, Plan International officially launched a global initiative on girls' rights, the Because I am a Girl campaign.

Because I am a Girl was founded on the basis that discrimination against girls and women is one of the main causes and consequences of child poverty, globally. Plan believes that girls and boys have the same entitlements to human rights, but face very different challenges in accessing them. Plan has committed to better understand girls' daily realities, and to amplify the voices of girls themselves as a core part of this campaign.

Join the campaign

Inspired, worried, concerned by what you read here? Make a difference, join adolescent girls in creating the future they want and have a right to.

facebook.com/plangirls

@planglobal

plan-international.org/girls

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