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GIRLS' EDUCATION

Forum 2016: An Equal Right to Education

YOUTH CONSULTATION REPORT

Acknowledgements

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This report was compiled by Bekky Ashmore and Heather Saunders from Plan International UK.

This report reflects the views of the respondents to the survey, not the policy or views of Plan International UK or the Department for International Development.

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GIRLS' EDUCATION REPORT

In the run-up to the **Girls' Education Forum**, Plan International UK and DFID asked 466 girls, boys, young women and young men aged 10 to 30 from 72 countries about their views on girls' education and gender equality. The vast majority (80%) of respondents were female, demonstrating the will and enthusiasm of girls and young women to engage around the subject of education.

This report outlines these young people's views on girls' education, and their personal experiences of schooling. It puts forward their recommendations for ensuring that all girls can access education and have their voices heard on an equal basis with boys in decisions that affect their education.

It is clear from the responses to our survey that young people believe quality education for all girls and boys is important for achieving gender equality. This report outlines their views on the barriers girls face in accessing education, how girls' and boys' voices are heard in schools, the potential of listening to their voices, and their ideas for achieving gender equality and quality education for all, in schools and beyond.

Girls' education and gender equality – the context

Today, more girls are in school around the world than ever before, but the national averages hide huge differences, and progress for the most marginalised girls is slow. Over 63 million girls remain out of school – particularly due to the impact of emergencies and conflict – and millions drop out before they complete their education.

Many girls enrolled in school still struggle to learn the basics due to difficult learning environments. Girls are still under-represented in secondary, technical and vocational education, yet these are important for them to gain the skills needed for future employment.

- 48% of out-of-school girls are likely never to enrol in school, compared with 37% of boys.¹
- If recent trends continue, universal primary completion in sub-Saharan Africa will only be achieved in 2069 for the poorest boys, and in 2086 for the poorest girls.²

Footnote 1: UNESCO (2015) Education for All Global Monitoring Report Gender Summary <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002348/234809E.pdf>

Footnote 2: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/14 Teaching and Learning: achieving quality for all Gender Summary p.1 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002266/226662E.pdf>

Barriers to girls’ education

The young people we spoke to understood the barriers girls face in accessing education, and almost 53% saw gender discrimination and social norms as the most significant. Child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), and families being unable to pay school costs, were considered the next biggest barriers.

Barrier	Percentage of responses identifying barrier within Top 3
Gender discrimination and social norms	74.79%
Child marriage and FGM	49.59%
Families cannot pay the costs for school	48.76%
Early pregnancy	35.12%
Distance to school	24.80%
Gender-based violence at school or on the way to school	24.38%
Teaching does not recognise the different challenges boys and girls face (not gender sensitive)	18.60%
Schools lack safe toilet facilities	14.87%
Not enough female teachers	9.09%

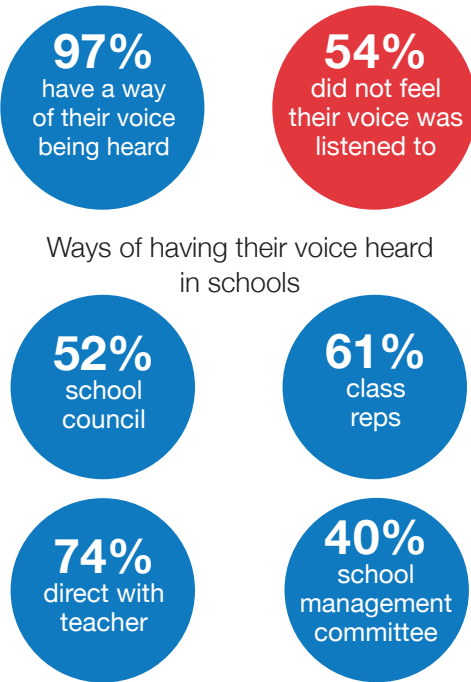
“Not enough has been done to counter the challenges of access to education by girls. This includes campaigns to end FGM and child marriage, and sexual harassment/abuse of girls in schools... If adequately addressed, it will ensure girls’ transition in education so that they don’t drop out of school or miss out on quality education.”

Female, 25-30, Kenya

Meaningful participation is needed

Over half of the respondents said they didn’t think their voice was listened to by their school’s leaders, despite many having methods for their participation, such as the ability to raise problems with teachers, class representatives and school councils.

Throughout the survey, both male and female respondents raised concern that their participation in decision-making processes was tokenistic, because they were not able to influence on a significant scale or were not taken seriously due to their age or gender:



“It wasn’t effective at all... In my school specifically, our ‘Council’ was created to make an illusion of a better institution for the Education Superintendency of our city.”

Female, 15-19, Brazil

“My voice, and the voice of my fellow students, is not heeded by the school’s leaders. They think that what they are doing is completely right and there is no flaw in their methods, even though we believe there is.”

Female, 15-19, Pakistan

“While I was in school, my voice was not heard when I reported to our teachers, so we usually ended up not reporting any case to anyone.”

Female, 25-30, Nigeria

“Uganda is a patriarchal society... Sometimes even when you are listened to, no action is taken.”

Female, 25-30, Uganda

Listening to girls' and boys' voices

Many respondents said it was important for their voices to be listened to because they understand the reality of being a schoolchild today; because they have a unique perspective which adults cannot understand; and because decisions made affect their lives.

It is important for young people to be involved in data collection:

“...because young people know the challenges that they face in society.”
Female, 20-24, Tanzania

“...because young people are the ones living and experiencing education. They know it better than anyone else. Adults often interpret situations or issues through the lens of their adult life.”
Female, 25-30, UK

“...because young people think differently and can provide new ideas and fresh feedback on things.”
Female, 15-19, UK

“...because young people are the ones on the ground. They know exactly what is happening. It helps to come out with the real information [truth] and not estimations, since things are changing every day.”
Male, 20-24, Zambia



Photo: Plan International

Listening to young people can improve girls' education

Girls and boys, young women and young men told us they value the opportunity to influence their school environment. Whether it is their uniform, the toilets, or the content of their lessons, they feel their participation can lead to real change, which benefits their learning and wellbeing.

The respondents felt that being involved in decisions that affect their education is a right, and an important part of their development. They recognised that the skills they develop through these processes are valuable for their future and give them confidence.

“I think this part [change happening] is important, but more important is the right to be heard and the actual democratic participation in the decision-making process of public policies about education.”
Male, 25-30, Mexico

“Young people are the future. If young people get involved now, by the time we are the ones making the decisions, some of these problems can be fixed!”
Female, 20-24, UK

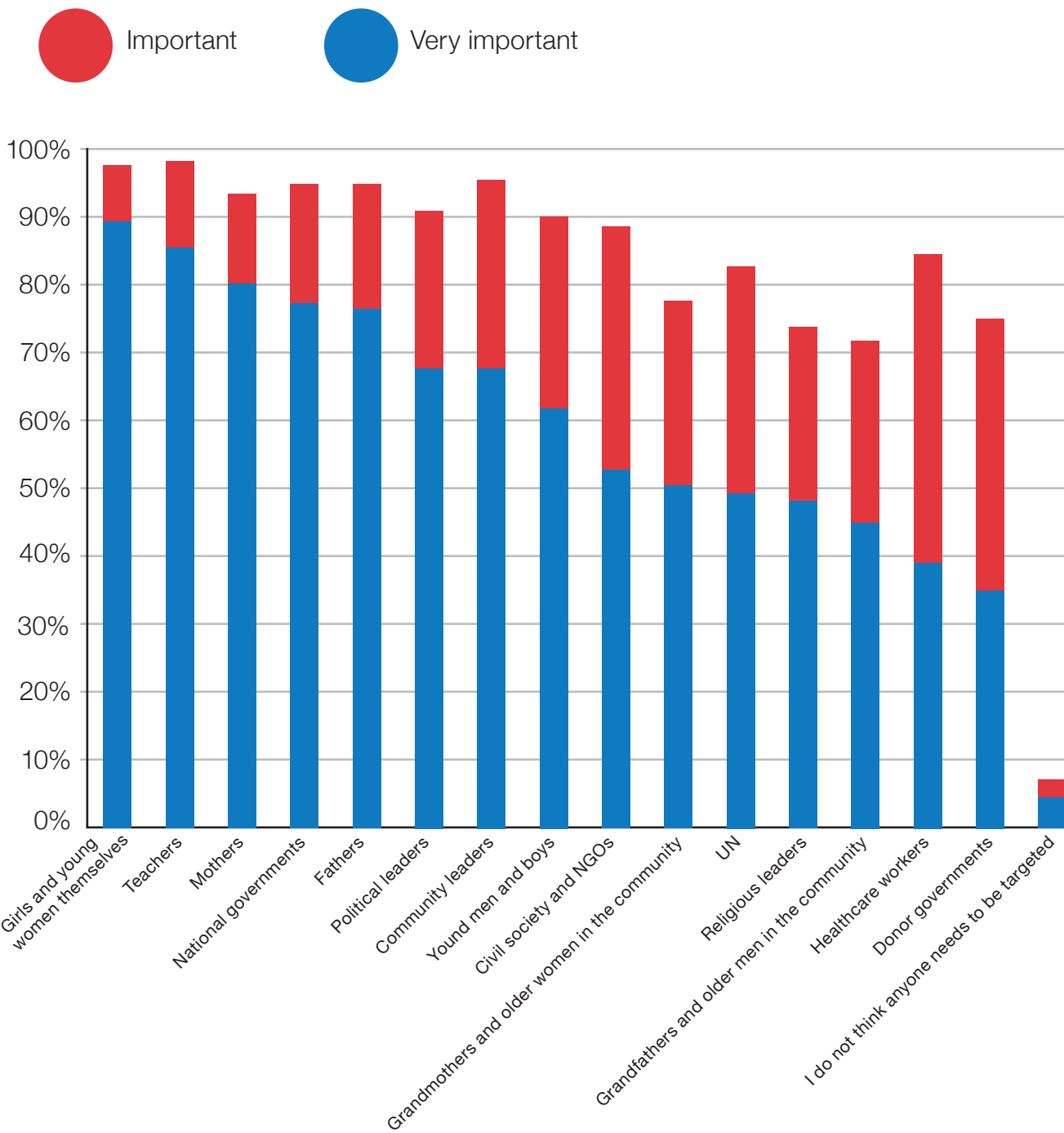
There were some powerful examples of the potential and the need to listen to girls' and boys' voices equally within schools:

“We asked for better sex ed lessons during school council and staff meetings and we received much more comprehensive lessons.”
Female, 15-19, UK

“There were some issues with having safe drinking water for the boarding school. When I reported the problem to school management, it was neglected. But I followed through on it until they renovated the tap and built WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] facilities. After that, I observed that the rate of sickness dropped in the school.”
Male, 25-30, Sierra Leone

Who needs to be involved in action to ensure all girls complete a quality education?

Respondents recognised the importance of engaging a wide range of actors to support girls' education. They prioritised girls and young women, teachers, mothers, national governments and fathers – but these were closely followed by others in the wider community, including leaders and young men and boys (see graph).



Achieving gender equality in education requires female leaders and role models to support and inspire girls and boys

Both girls and boys told us about the need to empower girls and young women and to support them to work with men and boys in networks that challenge gender inequality in their communities and schools.

Sixty-four per cent of those who took part in the survey felt they had a female role model to look up to, and many girls and boys shared stories of female role models who had inspired them throughout their school life. These included teachers, support staff, alumni, other students, and friends.

- One of my teachers is a role model for me. She is a very dignified lady in her manners and understands us students, unlike the other teachers. She is not only a teacher with respect to her subject; she also tells us a great deal about life in general, and believes in us and motivates us.
Female, 15-19, Pakistan
- Many friends of mine were the captains of sport teams. My friends inspired me to be active and take leadership in activities. Thanks to them, I didn't fear to do so.
Female, 15-19, Japan

Others lamented the lack of female leaders and role models in the school leadership and curricula, and called for female leaders to be given more support.

- I would really be inspired if there were women occupying good positions in my school, not just being secretaries and art teachers. Throughout my education, I have had to struggle and fight my way to where I am now, without role models to look up to – except my mother.
Female, 25-30, Uganda
- Women's achievements should be showcased to both young women and young men. The curriculum should also focus on more women in history, literature, art and science. Far too many courses exist without a female name being mentioned.
Female, 20-24, Australia

GIRLS' EDUCATION – ACTION IS NEEDED

The young people who filled in our survey recognised that action on girls’ education is required at many levels: in schools and the community, nationally and globally.

In schools

Girls, boys, young women and young men who completed the survey felt there were several areas for action that should be prioritised within schools. There were gender differences in the responses, with girls and young women focused on reducing the costs of education, whereas boys and young men said the priority should be providing support to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

In countries where girls are missing out on school, what actions do you think are needed in schools to ensure girls complete their education? (Choose Top 3)	Girls & Young Women	Boys & Young Men
Reduce the costs of education – abolish school fees so education is free for all	55.25%	46.15%
Help teachers to promote gender equality and not reinforce gender discrimination in the classroom	50.83%	35.90%
Ensure all schools are child-friendly, equal places which include all girls and boys, including children with disabilities	40.88%	35.90%
Put in place policies and action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in and around school	35.36%	51.28%
Remove gender stereotypes from teaching materials and curricula	28.18%	28.21%
Make more scholarships available for the most marginalised girls to pay for school costs	28.18%	35.90%
Include sex and relationship education in the curriculum	27.07%	28.21%
School clubs to make girls and boys aware of their rights and gender equality	18.78%	17.95%
Train and support more female teachers	15.47%	20.51%

In communities

The respondents prioritised the key actions needed in communities to ensure girls complete their education. Male and female respondents’ joint top recommendation was to empower women and girls as leaders in their communities, with boys and young men also focused on the importance of preventing FGM and early and forced marriage.

In countries where girls are missing out on school, what actions do you think are needed in schools to ensure girls complete their education? (Choose Top 3)	Girls & Young Women	Boys & Young Men
Empower women and girls as leaders in their communities	58.56%	53.85%
Build gender equality and change the discriminatory social norms that prevent girls accessing education	54.70%	51.28%
Prevent early and forced marriage and FGM	51.93%	53.85%
Work with communities and families to increase their support for girls’ education	48.62%	43.59%
Ensure girls and boys are able to take part in making decisions that affect them	32.04%	43.59%
Link together health and child protection interventions to protect girls and women from gender-based violence	22.65%	17.95%
Improve access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services to all boys and girls	16.57%	20.51%
Provide skills and support for youth economic empowerment to tackle poverty	14.92%	15.38%

Recommendations from young people included:

“Creating opportunities for young girls to lead in groups that work for the community, or increasing our interest in how to be more political and in our own meaning as a citizen, would make a huge difference to how girls see themselves, both as individuals and as leaders.”

Female, 15-19, Brazil

Governments

When asked what leaders need to do to ensure girls can access a quality, inclusive education, their responses reflected the complexity of this issue, with equal ranking across a number of areas of action, including:

- Increase aid funding to girls’ education in developing countries
- Make sure existing education aid is spent on improving education and achieving gender equality
- Increase political will to invest in girls’ education among world leaders
- Focus education budgets on reaching the most marginalised groups of girls and children with disabilities, and those living in conflict-affected areas
- Invest in removing the costs of education, like school fees and other contributions

• I think the government should do more on accountability, to ensure that funds set aside for education are used for the intended purpose.

Female, 20-24, Kenya

• [Governments need to ensure] access and affordability to sexual reproductive healthcare without stigma for both men and women.

Female, 25-30, Denmark

• If the government could find a way to ‘persuade’ parents, guardians and community leaders to let their girls go to school and then trade/work after school hours, it would go a long way in boosting the rate of girls in schools.

Female, 20-24, Nigeria



Photo: Plan International

Several respondents also highlighted the importance of the role of youth in holding governments and decision makers to account over decisions that affect their lives.

• I think young people need to be actively involved on issues affecting their wellbeing. Engaging young people in data collection ensures trust, honesty and efficiency, and promotes global citizenship. They are the ones who know their peers so well, and their peers trust them, thereby making the data-collection process less complicated.

Male, 25-50, Cameroon

• Where lack of girls’ education is an issue, governments should work with communities to create youth councils in partnership with official leadership, making sure girls are involved and increasing youth engagement. This would provide a space for young people to advocate for themselves.

Female, 15-19, Canada

SUMMARY

Throughout their responses to the survey, the girls and young women, boys and young men, showed their support for all girls accessing a quality, inclusive education.

Young people called for a comprehensive range of actions at the school, community and national government level to support girls’ education. These include ensuring education is free for all; building gender equality and changing social norms that disadvantage girls; preventing violence against women and girls; and empowering girls and women as leaders in their communities.

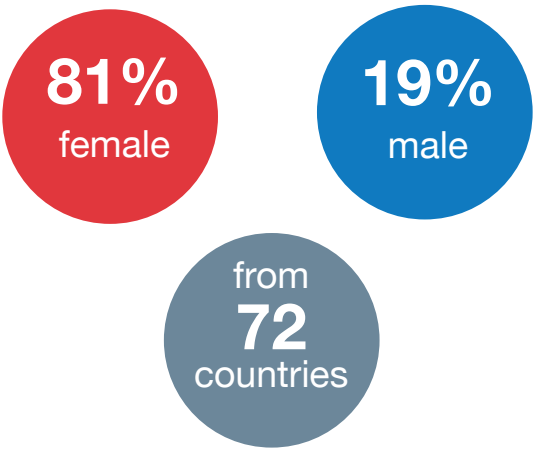
The active participation and engagement of girls and boys in decisions that affect their education emerged as a top priority. It is clear that they feel change needs to, and will only, happen with the full involvement of all girls and boys, especially the most marginalised.

• Change can be only with youth. They are the ones living the current experience of education worldwide, and they have a huge impact on making a difference in this world.

Female, 25-30, Lebanon

Survey respondents

466 young people responded to the survey.



Age	Responses
10-14 years	17
15-19 years	97
20-24 years	164
25-30 years	188

Countries where survey respondents grew up between 5 and 18 years old			
Afghanistan	Gambia, The	Malta	Somalia
Albania	Germany	Mexico	South Africa
Algeria	Ghana	Namibia	Spain
Australia	Guyana	Nepal	Sri Lanka
Bangladesh	Haiti	New Zealand	Sudan
Belarus	Hungary	Nicaragua	Tanzania
Belgium	India	Niger	Thailand
Brazil	Indonesia	Nigeria	Togo
Burma	Italy	Pakistan	Trinidad and Tobago
Cambodia	Jamaica	Panama	Tunisia
Cameroon	Japan	Papua New Guinea	Turkey
Canada	Kazakhstan	Peru	Uganda
China	Kenya	Philippines	Ukraine
Cote d'Ivoire	Kuwait	Portugal	United Arab Emirates
Denmark	Lebanon	Romania	United Kingdom
Ethiopia	Liberia	Rwanda	United States of America
Finland	Malawi	Senegal	Zambia
France	Maldives	Sierra Leone	Zimbabwe



Photo: Plan International

