

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Because I am a Girl

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2014

Pathways to Power: Creating Sustainable
Change for Adolescent Girls



BECAUSE I am a
Girl

Pathways to Power: Creating Sustainable Change for Adolescent Girls

“If I was in charge... I would get rid of the stereotype of women having to stay at home, doing the cooking and cleaning, taking care of the kids and not going out to work. I would get everybody to see that... women can do anything and men can do anything, and it won't be seen as improper or disrespectful or wrong.”

Shoeshoe, 16, Lesotho¹

“The biggest challenges that women and girls face... are related to the attitudes, practices and... ideologies that are deeply engrained in the traditions and social norms of each country.”

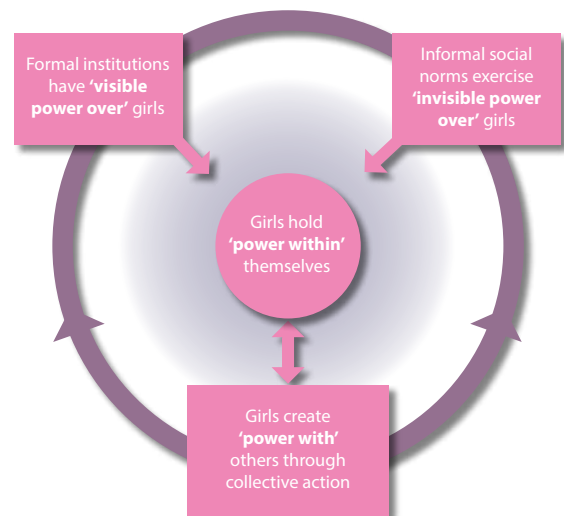
Plan International, research in West Africa for this report²

Power struggles through history – from the early collective action for women's votes to civil rights movements, from disability campaigns to trade union activism – are long and usually painful. The struggle for gender equality and for girls' rights – the carving out of their pathways to power – is no different. Girls' lives continue to be limited by the double jeopardy of their being young and female.

Power doesn't operate in a vacuum; it plays out in a range of institutions that touch all of our lives. Visible and invisible forms of power *over* girls are reproduced and deepened through society's most powerful institutions: households and communities, the market economy, and the state. And it is girls who often pay the price for how power is wielded by parents, community leaders, local government authorities, business practices, and legislative policy.

This report looks at the influence of different forms of power in these public and private spaces, and what this means for the prospects of gender equality and for girls and young women in particular. We analyse the barriers that girls face on their own pathway towards empowerment. And we focus on how to challenge and change these realities of power, with girls' collective action as a crucial part of the solution.

As the world negotiates a new framework for poverty reduction at the end of the Millennium Development Goals after 2015, it is time for a new approach to gender equality; one which addresses the question of power directly, and creates an enabling environment for all women and girls in the 21st century. Otherwise, with every step forward, there may well be two steps backwards.



Knowing their place

In 2007, the first 'Because I am a Girl' report noted that: "Inequality between boys and girls remains deep-rooted and starts early." Despite many changes for the better, this deep-seated structural inequality continues today. Research into adolescent girls and gender justice carried out by the UK's Overseas Development Institute in Uganda noted: "Within the first seven years of life, girls are already indoctrinated into the idea of being subject to men. This starts in the household and is reinforced in the community."³

¹ BBC News. 'Freedom 2014: Does Being a Girl Restrict Your Freedom?' BBC News Online, 21 March 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26664736> [Accessed 22 April 2014]. ² Fox, Leslie M., Fatou Jah, and Andrew John Howe. 'Cross-Country Research Study on: Access of girls and Women to Decision-Making Processes in West Africa and Cameroon.' Research commissioned for the 2014 'Because I am Girl Report.' Plan International West Africa Regional Office, 2014. ³ Bantebya, Grace, Florence Muhanguzi and Carol Watson. 'Good Policies versus Daily Discrimination: Adolescent Girls and Gender Justice in Uganda: Country Briefing.' London: Overseas Development Institute, 2013, <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8649.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 2014].

In most countries, women and girls continue to do the majority of the unpaid work in the home, and it is very easy to underestimate the impact that these domestic responsibilities have on girls' ability to exercise choice or have any power over their own lives.⁴ They are confined by the home and define themselves by their role within it, as their families and communities define them. They may fail to learn the social skills, make the contacts or build the confidence to take them into a more public life and enhance their chances of better paid work. At home, everybody has power over them, which in turn limits the power they have within themselves. Girls in this context will struggle, with no voice, choice or control, to either recognise or realise their potential. Research for this report in 13 countries in West Africa states, "a primary way in which women are held back from attaining positions of autonomy and respect is the daily duties and routines that men rarely face."⁵



PLAN/FINBARR O'REILLY

In the name of culture

There are a number of important areas in many girls' and young women's lives where in theory there is legislation which should uphold their rights, but in practice there are embedded cultural, social and religious rules and behaviours which can conspire to prevent change. Child marriage, despite being illegal in many countries where it is practised, is a prime example.

Fourteen million girls under the age of 18, the official age at which a child becomes an adult under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are married each year.⁶ Child marriage, often to an older man, not only deprives a girl of her childhood, and often of her education, but is the source of countless rights violations for girls, particularly during adolescence.⁷ Becoming pregnant and giving birth before her body is fully mature is a leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19.⁸ In addition, studies have found that because of the power imbalance, such marriages can lead to high levels of domestic violence – for example, a survey in India found that girls married under 18 experienced twice the levels of violence, and younger girls three times the levels of those married when they were older.⁹

Underpinning child marriage is a combination of poverty, gender inequality and a lack of protection for children's rights, frequently compounded by limited access to quality educational and employment opportunities. Girls from the poorest 20 per cent of households are over three times more likely to marry before they are 18 than those from the richest homes.¹⁰ In developing countries, girls in rural areas are twice as likely to be married by 18 as those in urban areas.¹¹

4 United Nations. 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.' United Nations General Assembly, A/68/293, August, 2013, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F68%2F293&Submit=Search&Lang=E [Accessed 16 July, 2014]. 5 Fox, Leslie M., Fatou Jah, and Andrew John Howe. 'Cross-Country Research Study on: Access of girls and Women to Decision-Making Processes in West Africa and Cameroon.' Research commissioned for the 2014 'Because I am Girl Report.' Plan International West Africa Regional Office, 2014. 6 UNFPA. 'Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage.' UNFPA, 2012, <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/12166> [Accessed 22 April 2014] 7 Plan. 'A Girl's Right to Say No To Marriage: Working to End Child Marriage and Keep Girls in School.' Plan International, 2013. 8 Patton, George, Carolyn Coffey, Susan M Sawyer, Russell M Viner, Dogmar M Haller, Krishna Bose, Theo Vos, Jane Ferguson and Colin D Matthers. 'Global Patterns of Mortality in Young People: A Systematic Analysis of Population Health Data.' The Lancet, vol 374, 9693, (2009). 9 Jain, Saranga and Kathleen Kurz. 'New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs.' International Center for Research on Women, 2007, <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/New-Insights-on-Preventing-Child-Marriage.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 2014]. 10 UNICEF. 'Early Marriage: a Harmful Traditional Practice.' UNICEF, 2005, http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Early_Marriage_12.lo.pdf [Accessed 5 June 2014]. 11 UNFPA. 'Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage.' UNFPA, 2012.

Challenging violence against women and girls

Despite years of legislation and campaigns against it, violence against women by men continues to be pervasive, cutting across geography, age class and race. A 2013 report by the World Health Organisation found that more than one in three women around the world has been raped or physically abused, 80 per cent of them by a partner or spouse.¹²

Tolerance of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by men and women in society makes it very difficult to enforce laws against it. Women and girls may be afraid to speak out; men may know that they can get away with beating their wives, partners and children because no one will challenge them.

Although the prevalence of partner violence peaks for women aged 40 to 44, much younger women experience this type of violence with overwhelming frequency. The 2013 World Health Organisation report also found that 29 per cent of adolescent girls and young women aged 15 to 19 who have ever been in a relationship have experienced violence at the hands of a partner – that's over a quarter of girls and women under the age of 20.¹³ A 2014 study in the European Union of 42,000 women found that “just over one in 10 women indicates that they have experienced some form of sexual violence by an adult before they were 15 years old.”¹⁴

Men's use of violence against women is something many girls grow up with. Both a man's use of violence and a women's acceptance of it may be the result of lessons learned as children at home, in the wider community and in the media, but it does come down to a fundamental exercise in *power over*. It may be the only way of feeling powerful that a man has. A UN study in Asia and the Pacific noted that underlying gender inequalities and power imbalances between men and women “are the foundational causes of violence against women”. The report also notes that in the use of violence against women there is no isolated cause but a complex interplay of many factors within an environment of “pervasive gender inequality. Consequently, simply stopping one factor – such as alcohol abuse – will not end violence against women.”¹⁵

This complexity must be taken into account in any attempt to prevent violence against girls and women, as the project below recognises.

PLAN EL SALVADOR: GIRLS PROMOTING REDUCTION OF GENDER VIOLENCE¹⁶

“If she's all bruised, or scraped, they'll ask her how she got scraped and black and blue... and she wouldn't be able to tell them because she's been threatened... that he's going to kill her or, if there's a child, that he'll take it or kill it.”

Adolescent girl, focus group discussion¹⁷

Programmes which aim to prevent and respond to violence against girls must involve the wider community, and aim to intervene at different levels and for a long period of time. Launched in 2012, Plan El Salvador's project focuses on combating gender violence by building girls' empowerment and creating a validating and supportive environment for girls to talk about and report their

¹² WHO, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council. 'Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence.' World Health Organisation, 2013, <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/> [Accessed 24 April 2014].

¹³ WHO, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council. 'Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence.' World Health Organisation, 2013, <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/> [Accessed 24 April 2014].

¹⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 'Violence against Women: an EU-Wide Survey Main Results.' Austria: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014, http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results_en.pdf [Accessed 22 April 2014]. ¹⁵ Fulu, E, X Warner, S Miedema, R Jewkes, T Roselli and J Lang. 'Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Qualitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific.' Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UNWomen and UNV, <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/timor-leste/drive/p4p-report.pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2014]. ¹⁶ Plan. 'Girls Promoting the Reduction of Gender-Based Violence: Marque Project.' Plan International, 2013. Internal Evaluation; and 'Baseline Survey Report for "Girls Promoting Reduction of Gender Violence" (GPRGV).'

Plan International El Salvador and Plan International USA, April 2014. ¹⁷ Taken from a focus group discussion with adolescent girls, part of Plan's 'Girls Promoting Reduction of Gender Violence' project in El Salvador. Plan. 'Baseline Survey Report for "Girls Promoting Reduction of Gender Violence" (GPRGV).'

Plan International El Salvador and Plan International USA, April 2014.

experiences. The project is based in San Salvador, and five districts surrounding the capital that have the highest incidence of violence and the highest need for intervention according to Plan El Salvador's observation. By its close in 2015, the project aims to have directly involved 1,800 girls and 180 boys aged 10 to 18, specifically targeting girls in school, young mothers, and girls in hard-to-reach areas.

A baseline study which established the need to involve both men and community leaders, steered the programme development. As a result, the aims of the project are achieved in part through training boys as peer supporters, and partnering with local and national institutions to raise awareness of girls' rights, as well as establishing peer-counselling groups and more safe spaces for girls.

One of the key strengths of the project is its focus on collective action; it has helped girls to access wider support networks, both as a way of strengthening their ability to advocate, but also to provide them with someone to turn to in the event that they experience violence. Plan El Salvador have also witnessed an increase in the number of boys campaigning against gender-based violence, and reporting it to the police and involving child protection mechanisms following their training.

The importance of education

We saw in the 2012 'Because I am a Girl' report just how important quality education is; and how important it is that child marriage and early pregnancy are not allowed to limit girls' access to this crucial pathway to power. When a girl goes to school it develops her knowledge and skills and allows her to make more choices about her adult life. It is good for boys, too – a study in six countries found that younger men, and those with more education, had more gender-equitable views than their parents.¹⁸



PLAN/WILL BOASE

Opening up to new ideas may mean a change in attitude; especially if the curriculum at school teaches girls and boys about gender equality, building girls' confidence and skills, and also teaching boys about more equitable versions of masculinity. On the other hand, as the United Nations Girls' Education initiative noted, "When girls aren't encouraged to achieve, either by discriminatory treatment in classes, or textbooks and curricula that enforce restrictive gender stereotypes, achievement suffers."¹⁹ In this context, education just reproduces the status quo that keeps girls and young women in their place.

It is also key to change that young women have more control over their reproductive destinies; more education about sex, more choice about becoming sexually active or not, more knowledge about reproduction and fertility, better access to contraception and sexual health services, and more power and confidence, of course, to negotiate their sexual relationships.

¹⁸ Men and Gender Equality Policy Project. 'Evolving Men: Initial Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES).' International Center for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo, 2011, <http://www.promundo.org.br/en/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Evolving-Men-IMAGES-1.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 2014]. ¹⁹ UNGEI. 'Gender Analysis in Education.' UNGEI, 2012.

The state, the law and public policy

In the past decades, the legislative framework for international human rights on gender equality has led to significant changes within the laws in many countries – for example, 139 constitutions now include guarantees of gender equality.²⁰

But laws alone do not necessarily lead to improvements in women's and girls' daily lives. Even in the countries which have signed all the international conventions on women's and children's rights and have robust laws on their statute books, discrimination, abuse and violence against women and girls may still be rife. Lack of enforcement remains a major obstacle, and the reasons for this are many and various:²¹

- In many countries there is no functioning judiciary, and no funding to make sure that laws are implemented and upheld.
- UN Women also identified lack of resources from the state as a key impediment to women's access to justice systems, and cited a World Bank study which found that: "In Kenya, a land claim in an inheritance case can cost up to \$780."²² For many girls and young women, these sums are completely beyond their reach.
- Those responsible for putting the law into practice – politicians, judges, local councillors, police – are often steeped in a mindset that inherently and often blindly discriminates against women and girls. For example, in the Philippines, a national law provides for the police to establish 'women's desks' in local stations and recruit female police officers to deal sensitively with violence against women and girls. However, in practice, male police officers often work on the women's desks and were found to deal insensitively with gender-based violence.
- Despite many programmes aimed at women's legal literacy, a study by the World Bank found that many people had little or no knowledge of the laws relating to women's and girls' rights.²³

Young people tend to be more knowledgeable than their parents or grandparents, probably in part because they have had the opportunity to go to school. Young women in rural Tanzania knew a number of their rights: **"Yes, we all have to go to school. We can inherit property like men. Men should not beat us and, if they do, we can take them to court. We can be politicians."**²⁴ But such confidence on its own is not enough – even if these girls were to take someone to court, they might well face strong repercussions from their family and community.

In some countries, informal justice systems are more influential than formal legislation. For example, in Malawi between 80 and 90 per cent of all disputes are processed through customary justice forums, while in Bangladesh an estimated 60 to 70 per cent of local disputes are solved through the *Salish*.²⁵ The problem comes when these laws are based on more conservative ideas of what girls and women are allowed or not allowed to do. And in many countries, justice systems based on customary law do not recognise the equal rights of both sexes to inherit property or other assets.

Research with the families of Plan's cohort of girls in nine countries confirmed that inheritance was generally seen as something that passed down the male line.²⁶ However, most families seemed unsure about the legal status regarding girls' right to inheritance, stating that 'tradition' or 'customary law' dictate inheritance rights.

²⁰ OECD Development Centre. '2012 SIGI: Social Institutions and Gender Index – Understanding the Drivers of Gender Inequality'. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, <http://www.oecd.org/dev/poverty/50288699.pdf> [Accessed 24 April 2014]. ²¹ Fox, Leslie M., Fatou Jah, and Andrew John Howe. 'Cross-Country Research Study on: Access of girls and Women to Decision-Making Processes in West Africa and Cameroon.' Research commissioned for the 2014 'Because I am Girl Report.' Plan International West Africa Regional Office, 2014. ²² UN Women. '2011-2012 Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice', UN Women, 2011, <http://progress.unwomen.org/pdfs/EN-Report-Progress.pdf> [Accessed 30 April 2014]. ²³ Boudet, Ana María Muñoz, Patti Petesch, and Carolyn Turk. 'On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries'. World Bank Publications, 2013, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1164107274725/On-Norms-Agency-Book.pdf> [Accessed 24 April 2014]. ²⁴ Boudet, Ana María Muñoz, Patti Petesch, and Carolyn Turk. 'On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries'. World Bank Publications, 2013, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1164107274725/On-Norms-Agency-Book.pdf> [Accessed 24 April 2014]. ²⁵ Cited in Wojkowska, Ewa. 'Doing Justice: How Informal Justice Systems can Contribute.' Oslo: UNDP, 2006, <http://equalbeforethelaw.org/sites/default/files/library/2006%20Doing%20Justice%20How%20Informal%20Systems%20Can%20Contribute.pdf> [Accessed 30 April 2014]. ²⁶ Real Choices, Real Lives: Cohort Study Across 9 Countries. Plan International, 2014.

Girl and her brothers, from the Dominican Republic



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‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ update

The ‘Real Choices, Real Lives’ study, now in its eighth year, is following 142 girls living in nine countries around the world – Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines, El Salvador, Brazil and the Dominican Republic. The study uses interviews and focus group discussions with relatives and community members to provide a detailed picture of the reality of the girls’ lives.

The girls taking part in the study are approaching their eighth birthdays. Many of them were able, for the first time, to talk clearly about their own experiences of and ideas about family life, their friends, their schools and their communities.

This year we are looking at middle childhood, the years from five to nine, which is a critical phase in the life cycle of a girl. It is when she enrolls in primary school, when household chores become very much part of her daily routine, and when the people around her may begin to view her as a commodity and sexualise her identity. It is also the period where positive experiences at school have the greatest chance to make an impact on a girl’s social, intellectual and emotional development which will in turn help maximise her potential.²⁷

It is becoming clear that many of the girls understand that there is a difference between how girls and boys spend their time. In Brazil, Sofia told researchers that she resents the fact that her brother does not have the same household obligations and spends all of his free time playing. The fear of being ostracised by those around them is the main reason girls tend not to challenge established norms, but we can see from our research that, from quite an early age, some girls are certainly capable of questioning what they see around them.²⁸ Patricia from Brazil has strong opinions: *“I think men and women can do the same activities in the same way. My dad doesn’t help my mother. I think my father could help my mother.”*

Davy in Cambodia gave an example that clearly demonstrates how limiting attitudes can develop from a young age. Her brother spends his time chopping firewood, carrying water, playing and herding the buffaloes. The tasks for Davy and other girls in her community include washing dishes, cleaning the pots and pans, cooking rice and building the cooking fire. She felt that *“the task of chopping firewood is the task of the man. If the girls do it, we are afraid of cutting our hands or feet”*.

²⁷ Eccles, Jacquelynne S. ‘The Development of Children Ages 6 to 14.’ *The Future of Children*, 9, 2 (1999). ²⁸ Watson, Carol and Caroline Harper. ‘Adolescent Girls and Gender Justice: Lessons Learned and Emerging Issues from Year 1.’ London: ODI, December 2013.



Girl and her siblings, The Philippines

This exchange between Jacel and our researcher in the Philippines further demonstrates this point:

Researcher: What is the game boys play? What is their game?

Jocelyn: *Football!*

Researcher: Do the boys also play with the girls?

Jocelyn: *No, only boys!*

Researcher: Why don't they let you join in?

Jocelyn: *Because we are weak.*

A critical step in ensuring that these ideas are reinforced is the addition of the task of looking after younger siblings. Sharina from the Dominican Republic explained how she now takes on the role of caring for her younger brother: *"My younger brothers cannot do chores at home, only we girls. If my little brother dirties his clothes I wash them."* In Brazil, Sofia is responsible for washing dishes, sweeping the floor and looking after her 16-month-old brother when she returns home from school.

Girls do have more freedom of movement compared to when they were younger but they are still more limited than the boys. Hillary from El Salvador told us, *"Where they don't let me go is to visit a woman called Elsa; she lives too far away. Miguel can go, but I can't because I'm a girl."*

Over the past two years, attending primary school has provided an important opportunity for the majority of girls taking part in the study – and for the boys around them. Critically, when girls attend school, their routines are reasonably similar to boys', whereas their lives tend to diverge sharply outside of school. Despite almost all the girls naming other girls as their closest companions, and some confirming that they are discouraged from playing with boys, they do interact with boys, particularly during lessons but also sometimes during break, when, as Amanda in Brazil explains: *"Our teacher tells us to play cola [catch] with the boys."*

Some studies have shown how teacher-student interactions in classrooms can reinforce existing gender stereotypes, with girls seen as "timid and not as hard-working as boys".²⁹ At this stage of the study, there is no clear evidence of this, and the girls have a positive attitude towards subjects like maths, an area in which girls tend to underperform later in their academic careers.³⁰ Several girls described the sense of freedom and happiness they get from being in school.

"I prefer going to school than staying at home," explains Mony in Cambodia, *"because at school I can learn and get knowledge and am happier than at home."*

The research reveals the strength of the established rules of behaviour that exist, which many families are powerless to resist. But as we continue to track the girls' progress, it is encouraging to see that awareness of these constraints is growing, not least amongst the girls themselves. The analysis this year has helped us to understand better the kinds of interventions – in families, in schools and in communities – that are necessary for supporting girls during and beyond middle girlhood. These include keeping girls in school, sharing domestic work, and encouraging equal voice, status and opportunities, unencumbered by external expectations and by that small internal voice telling girls and boys what they should or shouldn't do. Sharina's unquestioning acceptance that *"girls don't play with cars because they are not male, and boys should not play with dolls or with [kitchen] toys"* needs to be challenged.



Girl, Brazil

²⁹ Stromquist, Nelly P. 'The Gender Socialization Process in Schools: A Cross-National Comparison.' Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2008. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2007. ³⁰ Dweck, Carol S 'Is Math a Gift? Beliefs That Put Females at Risk' in Stephen J. Ceci and Wendy Williams. 'Why Aren't More Women in Science? Top Researchers Debate the Evidence.' Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006.

Paving a path towards equality

“We need leaders who really understand our needs and who understand gender equality. Women leaders in high positions of leadership inspire us. Me personally, when I see them, I know that I can be able to take a decision.”

Adolescent girl from Rwanda³¹

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, illustrated the importance of role models when she told a story that she had heard from a UNESCO representative who visited a school in a remote village and observed a girl running around and playing with the boys in the school yard. The male Principal was appalled and reprimanded her for being rowdy by saying, “you are a little girl; you should be quiet and not running around making so much noise”. The little girl pondered for a few seconds and said quietly: *“Teacher, be careful how you talk to me. Don’t forget our President is a woman.”*

The President reflected how much she felt “heartened and encouraged” by this story and that for her, it meant that her inauguration as the first woman President in Africa “has brought hope to girls in Liberia and throughout Africa.”³²

One of the most hotly contested ways of ensuring that more women are elected is the quota system, whereby a percentage or a proportion of seats – in parliament or on boards – is reserved for women. Twenty out of the 26 countries with the highest number of women in parliament have quota systems in place.³³ Sri Danti Anwar, Secretary of the Ministry for Women’s Empowerment in Indonesia, recognises that quotas are a temporary measure, but she still thinks they are important: “We need quotas because women in politics all over the country are discriminated against... For centuries men have been seen as more valued... and have therefore held most positions of power.”³⁴

There is no magic bullet when it comes to ensuring that the state institutions that control and should protect us are gender equal and accountable. But having laws in place, more women in charge and training girls so that they know their legal rights, are all crucial. Above all, working with women’s and girls’ organisations, both locally and nationally, to demand that laws are actually implemented, is key to building the bridge between legislation and girls’ daily lives.

The power of work

“In the future, I want to be a very successful auto mechanic. I think I am a good role model. Sometimes people in high positions encourage and advise me and tell me I’m a good example. I make them happy as they just cannot believe that a lady can do such things!”

Gloria Joyce, 18, trainee car mechanic at Plan International’s Juba Technical High School, South Sudan³⁵

Decent work and an income can provide young women with the ability to consider their own destinies rather than have their futures decided by dominant family members, as this mother from rural Ethiopia articulates very clearly: “My wish for my daughter is that she should marry after she has become self-



³¹ International Research and Development Actions. ‘Cultural, Social, Political, Educational and Economic Context for Girls: A Power Analysis and Exploration of Gaps Between Legislation and Implementation in Africa: The Case of Rwanda.’ IRDAC, 2013. Research conducted for this report.

³² Sirleaf, Ellen Johnson. ‘Foreword’ in Plan. ‘Because I Am a Girl: the State of the World’s Girls 2008 – Special Focus: In the Shadow of War.’ Plan International, 2008. ³³ Tadros, Mariz. ‘Women Engaging Politically: Beyond Magic Bullets and Motorways.’ Brighton: Pathways of Women’s Empowerment RPC, October 2011, http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/WomenEmp/Policy_Oct_11_Women_engaging.pdf [Accessed 30 April 2014].

³⁴ Interview with Nikki van der Gaag for the 2014 ‘Because I am a Girl’ Report’. ³⁵ Plan. ‘Because I am a Girl: The State of the World’s Girls 2012 – Learning for Life’. Plan International, 2012.

reliant; I wish her to complete her education, then to have her own work and then to marry a person whom she loves and with whom she wants to live.”³⁶ Work can empower and liberate girls so that they do not move from dependency on their fathers to being dependent on a husband. Earning money and controlling assets and wealth is a huge part of power, and a marker for the transition from childhood to adulthood. The danger for girls is that this key step never happens.

Girls – particularly, but not only, those with disabilities, the very poor or those marginalised by ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation or even geography – remain vulnerable, as workers and family members, within a fluctuating global economy which does not support gender equality or girls' rights. This vulnerability has been increased by the impacts of recession on migration, jobs and welfare provision and compounded by discriminatory structures and laws that work against girls and women.³⁷

Research for this report in Kenya found that the economic crisis led to young women selling the only thing left to sell – their bodies: “With the loss and decline in employment opportunities in general the physical body is becoming the site of ‘work’ for women and young girls. The loss of survival and livelihood in the rural areas has also led to migration to the cities, cross-border transfer of women resulting in increasing vulnerability to risky sexual life and contraction of HIV/AIDS.”³⁸



Other hands, other eyes, other voices: the strength of collective action

“To feel that we are not alone is important, that there are other women doing the same work as us. To share spaces together and devise actions together gives us the strength to continue.”

Young woman leader, Central America³⁹

All over the world, girls and young women are creating their own spaces to campaign and lobby for change. They are mobilising in many different kinds of ways – youth groups, student groups, women's groups, informal networks, formal NGOs and as part of social movements. Sometimes this is as young women together, sometimes with young men, sometimes with older generations. “Confidence is contagious,” noted one respondent in research for this report in West Africa. The research also recommended including girls and young women within existing women's groups, because it allows women to pass on confidence and skills and increases the number of voices in a group, which gives it more strength.⁴⁰

FRIDA, the young feminist fund, supports Radio Udayapur in Nepal, a community radio station run by girls and young women. It is campaigning radio, challenging beliefs “that boys should do everything”. Bandana Danuwar, the group leader and station manager, has seen the group's self-belief and credibility in the community grow: “We are broadcasting women's views, perspectives and stories from community

³⁶ Pells, Kirrily. ‘Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives.’ Policy Paper 3, Young Lives, 2011, http://www.younglives.org.uk/files/policy-papers/yl_pp3_poverty-and-gender-inequalities [Accessed 22 April 14]. ³⁷ Stavropoulou, Maria and Nicola Jones. ‘Off the Balance Sheet: the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Girls and Young Women.’ Plan and the Overseas Development Institute, January 2013. ³⁸ International Research and Development Actions. ‘Research Study to Investigate the Cultural, Social, Political, Educational and Economic Context for Girls: A Power analysis and Exploration of Gaps Between Legislation and Implementation in Africa: the Case of Kenya.’ IRDAC, 2014. Research conducted for this report. ³⁹ Casey, Jean. ‘The Lived Reality of Young Organized Central American women: Experiences of Leadership, Empowerment and Access and Control of Economic Resources.’ Nicaragua: Unpublished research for Puntos de Encuentro, 2009. ⁴⁰ Fox, Leslie M., Fatou Jah, and Andrew John Howe. ‘Cross-Country Research Study on: Access of girls and Women to Decision-Making Processes in West Africa and Cameroon.’ Research commissioned for the 2014 ‘Because I am Girl Report.’ Plan International West Africa Regional Office, 2014.

development to political issues on our radio. We are young women under 30 and we believe that if young girls get together to remove patriarchy, they can do it."⁴¹

Girls and young women in many countries are also using social media to shame perpetrators of violence or abuse and offer support to victims. Asri, 16, from Indonesia, explains how she and her friends *"created pages through social media like Twitter and Facebook to campaign about [violence in schools] publicly. Surprisingly, our messages on Facebook and Twitter were read by media and we were invited by one local TV channel in Jakarta to a TV talk show about bullying... We were so happy that we were able to spread the message."*⁴²

However, finding your own voice, let alone moving to action and activism, may be difficult if you are young and female, especially if you are an adolescent. Research by the British Overseas Development Institute in Uganda found that: "Adolescents are neither recognised nor expected to participate, as they are considered too young to contribute to what is considered an adult domain... Particular gender-based limitations on girls' participation arise out of still deeply entrenched ideologies of 'public' and 'private' domains, whereby women and girls are restricted to the latter."⁴³

Girls are not lacking motivation. Many still need skills, knowledge and confidence. They also need girl-only 'safe spaces' where they can share ideas and gain confidence. They need mechanisms in place so that they can share their opinions. And they need the attitudes, policies and the practices from society as a whole that will guarantee access to the same opportunities as their brothers to take their chance to change the world.

Girls' rights are human rights: the way forward

The pathway to power is a long one. But with supportive adults, both women and men, and collective organising, girls and young women are finding a way through. Families, communities and policy makers must acknowledge girls' low status and the barriers and limitations that they experience and enable them to overcome the constraints that disempower them. Policies and programmes can support girls, their families and their communities to bridge the gaps between their aspirations and their actual experiences.

Manal, 15, from Cairo, Egypt, who had been part of a Plan programme training young people, said: *"Nobody can take my rights from me now. These programmes are also changing the behaviour of the families – parents are seeing the difference in their daughters. We used to be silent at home and not say what we thought. We will not be silent any more."*⁴⁴

The current debate around the new MDG framework is a renewed opportunity to create sustainable change for adolescent girls. Tackling gender-based violence and being truly accountable to girls and young women will be crucial if we are to make continuing and irreversible progress towards gender equality.

Girls' empowerment, and the transformative social change that this requires, is one of the greatest challenges of our generation. Girls' rights are human rights and it is time this became a reality in the lives of girls everywhere.

"Parents and [decision makers]... must change the status quo so that girls are not of lower status and not regarded as the weaker sex. They must recognise that girls are important in nation-building. If that happens, girls will be able to realise that the sky is not the limit, that they can reach the moon and stars above."

Janice, 17, the Philippines⁴⁵

⁴¹ Nemcova, Barbora. 'Radio Udayapur: Their Voices, Their Airwaves.' FRIDA: The Young Feminist Fund Blog, 30 April 2014, http://youngfeministfund.org/2014/04/radio_uyapur_nepal_interview/#more-1895 [Accessed 14 May 2014]. ⁴² De Pauw, Lia. 'Girls' Speak Out: Girls' Fast-talk on the Potential of Information and Communication Technologies in Their Empowerment and Development.' Plan International, 2011, <http://www.c4d.undg.org/files/girls-fast-talk-report-final-plan-international> [Accessed 12 May 2014]. ⁴³ Kyomuhendo Bantebya, Grace, Florence Kyoheirwe Muhanguzi and Carol Watson. 'Adolescent Girls and Gender Justice: Understanding Key Capability Domains in Uganda.' ODI, 2013. ⁴⁴ Interview with Nikki van der Gaag, featured in Plan. 'Because I am A Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2010 – Digital and Urban Frontiers.' Plan International, 2010. ⁴⁵ Quoted in Hendricks, Sarah. 'Highlights from the Girls' Fast talk on the Potential of Information Technologies and Communication Technologies in Girls' Empowerment and Development.' Plan International, <http://www.c4d.undg.org/system/files/Ms.%20Sarah%20Hendricks%20Plan%20International.pdf> [Accessed 14 May 2014]. ⁴⁶ Stephens, Paul. 'Why I Helped Start a Nonprofit in Mexico.' Dev Ex, 27 March 2014, https://www.devex.com/news/why-i-helped-start-a-nonprofit-in-mexico-83068?mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWf9wsRonsqvBcu%2FhmjTEU5z17%2BgkUaO3hYkz2EFye%2BLIHETpodcMTcNqML7YDBceJhgyQJxPr3DJNUN0ddxRhbkdQ%3D%3D [Accessed 9 May 2014].

Key Action Points

- 1 Put gender equality at the heart of the post-2015 framework and ensure that the rights and needs of adolescent girls are explicitly addressed.
- 2 Be accountable to women and girls; increase data quality and raise standards on data collection and invest in research and evaluation to find interventions that work.
- 3 Intensify efforts to prevent gender-based violence and increase access to justice for girls and young women.

"You have to raise collective awareness... you have to communicate with other people, because a single person can't change the world. An idea can, certainly, but you need other hands, other eyes, other voices to make it a stronger initiative."

Cecilia Garcia Ruiz, young woman, Mexico⁴⁶

"Ordinary women in South Africa were highly motivated by seeing role models [of other women in positions of power]. That helped us to have women to stand up for themselves. It didn't always solve the problems that we have... we have moved a long way in South Africa but, my God, we have a long way to go still."

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women

This is the eighth in the annual 'Because I am a Girl' report series, published by Plan, which assesses the current state of the world's girls. While women and children are recognised in policy and planning, girls' needs and rights are often ignored. The reports provide evidence, including the voices of girls themselves, as to why they need to be treated differently from boys and adult women. They also use information from primary research, in particular a small study set up in 2006 following 142 girls from nine countries. Past reports have covered education, conflict, economic empowerment, cities and technology, adolescent girls and disasters and how boys and young men can support gender equality. Plan is an international development agency and has been working with children and their communities in 50 countries worldwide for over 75 years.

Take action at: plan-international.org/girls



Young woman
from Timbuktu.

PLAN/BETTINA BAUER