

Because I am a Girl

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2011

So, what about boys?



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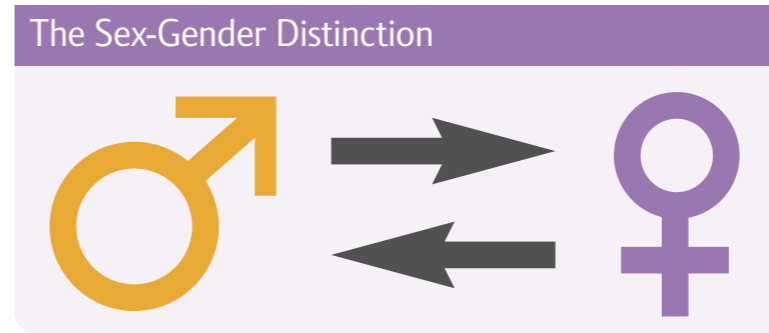


Despite some efforts and improvements worldwide to make sure that all boys and girls, women and men, are being treated equally and get a fair chance in life, there is still a long way to go. In most societies and families, traditional ideas about what it means to be male or female place women and girls at a disadvantage – at home, in communities, at school and in the workplace. This is not right, it's not fair, and it is not economically smart. We want to change this, and we think that working with men and boys to improve their attitudes and practices towards girls and women is an important place to start.

The Basics

What	What does it mean?
Sex	The biological (physical) differences between males and females.
Gender	How society (our families, communities, friends, governments, the media) creates assumptions about what men and boys should do, and what women and girls should do.
Gender Equality	The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys.

Cover photo: Plan



Gender roles

Gender roles are the practices, activities and responsibilities that we adopt on the basis of what society expects from us. These are assumptions, or expectations, about what men and boys should do, and what women and girls should do at home and in society. Gender roles influence people's behaviour, responsibilities, life choices and chances.

Expectations on how we should behave start from a young age. This happens by watching how the adults at home and around us interact with each other, as well as from watching television and other media, and our wider communities.

Children in the United Kingdom were asked to attribute words they associated with being stereotypically 'female' or 'male'. This shows that the divide between the sexes starts very early on in children's lives.

Boys and girls in the UK were asked to attribute words that are stereotypically associated with being 'male' or 'female'

Male

- Higher expectations
- Bossy
- Strong
- Forceful
- Highly respected
- Violent
- Educated
- Aggressive
- Protector of female relatives
- Proud
- Stubborn
- Immature
- Egotistic
- Father
- Competitive
- Breadwinner
- I.T. literate

Female

- Follower
- Vulnerable
- Pretty
- Shy
- Barbie
- Weak
- Stays-at-home
- Cares for the family
- Cooks
- Cleans
- Responsible
- Maternal
- Dependent
- Disadvantaged at work
- Expect less
- Someone's wife
- Restricted

So, what about boys?

“Boys should understand that we have the same rights”

Girls, 12 to 14, Nyakayaga, Rwanda

Are you aware of your rights?

Gender equality is a principle that is enshrined and protected by international human rights law, and aims to ensure that all children, both girls and boys, everywhere around the world, can access their rights.

What does this mean?

This means that legally all children should have equal access to schooling, health and protection, whatever their sex! So equality between girls and boys is a basic right, and it is the responsibility of your government to

**RESPECT,
PROTECT,
FULFILL and,
PROMOTE your rights.**

Girls are losing out

Girls are still getting a raw deal at home and at school simply because they are girls.

- **The burden of care:** Girls continue to be raised in households where they are expected to shoulder the burden of household labour alongside their mothers: they spend between 33 and 85 per cent more time on unpaid care work than boys.
- **Forced/Early Marriage:** Thousands of girls marry at a very young age, before their bodies are fully formed and early pregnancy and childbirth is detrimental to their health. For example, in Bangladesh, the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea and Niger over 60 per cent of girls marry before they are 18 years old.
- **HIV/AIDS:** Globally, young women aged 15 to 24 account for 64 per cent of HIV infections among young people. In sub-Saharan Africa young women aged 15 to 24 are more than twice as likely to be infected as young men in the same age group.
- **Education:** There are 75 million girls worldwide out of primary and lower secondary school.



Photo: Plan

If we want to change these negative statistics, then we need to work with all members of society – men, women, girls and boys

Why is gender equality difficult for some to accept?

Working on gender issues is complex. It questions who we think we are and how we see the way that others think about us. It is about social change, which is never easy and can often involve conflict along the way. Work with men and boys on masculinity and gender equality challenges the perceptions that they may have of the world and even questions their sense of self. This may change their thoughts and ideas, in contrast to their families, peers, teachers, the community, the media, and even schools and the government, which can present an additional challenge.

“My attitude towards girls has changed. In the beginning families did not allow girls and boys to work together. Now we have learned how to deal with each other and we are a team.”

Mohammed, 14, Egypt



Photo: Fabrice Boulais

Everyone gains with more equality

It is widely acknowledged that gender equality benefits all members of the community. Investing money and time in girls' and women's education, health, protection and future can also improve whole economies, both big and small, as well as ensuring women's financial security. Most experts believe that investment in girls, particularly in education, is one of the most effective ways to lift whole communities out of poverty.

- If every child (male and female) received a complete primary education, at least 7 million new cases of HIV could be prevented in a decade.
- An extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 to 20 per cent and an extra year of secondary school by 15 to 25 per cent.
- According to some estimates a 1 per cent increase in the level of women's education generates 0.3 per cent in additional economic growth (in a country).
- When a girl in the developing world receives seven or more years of education, she marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.
- Research in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, and Mexico suggested that 84 to 98 per cent of men believe that a father's involvement in a child's life leads to a better relationship later on.

So, why are we talking about boys?

The 'Because I am a Girl' report is still primarily a report about girls, and will continue to be about girls, but this year we are looking at why it is so important for men and boys to be a part of the solution in achieving gender equality. In many places support for equal opportunities for boys and girls does not exist. Men and boys are still the main decision makers in relationships, families, communities, businesses and governments. If projects and programmes throughout the world only work with women and girls we will struggle to make a difference.

So, what about boys?

Harmful ideas about what it means to be a boy/man

Working with boys and men for increased gender equality is in their own best interest. Accepted gender norms and stereotypes create unreasonable expectations and behaviour demands from boys and men, such as being aggressive or violent, or being exclusively responsible for the economic security of the family, which the society they live in may lead them to adopt. These demands and expectations have a very harmful impact not only on men and boys but also, by extension and more obviously, on girls and women.

“The only way to achieve true equality in an unequal world is to work with both boys and girls. By working together and learning from each other we can open new doors and do away with prejudice. By getting to the core of the issue we can do much more than just change statistics.”

Sarah, 17, Plan UK Youth Advisory Panel Member

Gender equality is not just a ‘women’s issue’. It has benefits for us all. If we are going to tackle issues which threaten gender equality, such as female genital cutting, early and forced marriage, and gender-based violence, then working with men and boys is essential. Men may be in a better position to convince the communities in which they live about the importance of halting harmful practices against girls, and the importance of gender equality. **So by working with boys, young and adult men, violence against girls and women can be prevented before it happens.**

“Having more equality makes me happy. I am a better friend, with closer friendships with both boys and girls, and better conversations.”

Luis, 21, El Salvador

The boy who campaigns for girls to go to school

Nixon Otieno Odoyo, 16, lives in Nairobi. His campaign, ‘Keeping Girls in School’, is aimed at providing schoolgirls in Kenya with free sanitary towels. He explains how important this is:

Our father abandoned us when I was three, which was one of the things that made me want to help girls stay in school. (My mother) never went to school and when my father left she had no money to look after us and she became stressed.

My older sister has not been to school either; she married when she was 15 and now has four children. I think that girls should have the chance to go to school so that they can earn the money to look after their families if they need to.

We decided to write a letter to the people who founded the Teens’ Watch group, the Daretti Youth Network, to suggest some ideas for fundraising so we could help. Some of the group suggested a music festival or doing a drama. I said that maybe we could do a football tournament: it would attract lots of

villages to get involved and we could invite plenty of parents and teachers to donate money. This was a great success and we were able to raise 50,000 Kenyan shillings (£418).

With the money we bought 1,000 sets of sanitary towels which we supplied to 500 girls over 10 schools in the slums across Nairobi. In the future I want to have a programme so that 5,000 girls in 50 schools in Nairobi can get free sanitary towels every month. I have to start small and then if I can support them well enough I can begin to help more.

It is hard to get my voice heard by older people – they do not listen much to youngsters where I live – that’s why we have the Teens’ Watch group, because we can work more effectively together to arrange projects.

Do you think that if we **only** talked to girls and women about gender equality anything would change?

Boys and girls all over the world are beginning to question the roles they play in their own homes, and are working to behave in more gender-equal ways, such as sharing household chores. Research for this year’s ‘Because I am a Girl’ report has found that young people in many countries are questioning what they learnt as small children. Boys like these from Gasange in Rwanda, who say that: **‘Parents should play a greater role in showing their children that they are equal both in the home and outside’**. Or girls like Lana, aged 16, from Brazil, who says: **‘If I were President I would enact a law for equal rights, a law saying that women and men could do the same things. If she cleans the house, he can do it too; and if she can cook, he can do it too!’**. These young people believe that they can do better than their parents’ generation in building a more equal world.

This year Plan carried out research with over 4,000 young people to draw out some of the differences in attitudes and behaviours spanning across a variety of countries and cultures. Here are the key research findings:

- 65 per cent of young people from India and Rwanda totally or partially agreed with the statement: ‘A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together’ and 43 per cent even agreed that ‘There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.’
- 66 per cent of children in Rwanda and 74 per cent in India thought that: ‘A woman’s most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family’ whilst only 11 per cent of children in the UK thought this was the case.

But most importantly...

the survey revealed that although young people may live in households where there is not much equality between the sexes, they actually feel happier when they see their parents sharing household responsibilities – when fathers cook and do the laundry, for example, or where both parents make decisions, and mothers spend their time both in and outside of the home.



Photo: Jane Hahn

Gender Equality In the Home

In Plan projects in the Philippines, we are working with men to help them recognise that women are doing an unfair share of the household work, while also giving them the opportunity to become more involved fathers and better husbands with parental training for men, by men. This increased involvement of fathers benefits everyone in the family and sets a good example to the children.

Do you think your parents take on an equal share of looking after the children in your home?



Photo: Plan

Do you have different chores in your home because you are a boy/girl? Why do you think this is?

In this year's 'Because I am a Girl' report we examine how those boys who have had positive male role models in their lives, and who display respectful and equal attitudes as a consequence, are less likely to use violence against women or to take part in risky behaviour.

We tend to hear much more about young mothers than young fathers. This could be because there are more young mothers, and girls are more likely to marry older men, but it could also mean that young fathers choose not to be involved in the lives of their children. This means young fathers are often seen in quite a negative light.

And yet many young fathers do want to support their partners and children! In Brazil, Cameroon, Jamaica, Sweden, Uganda and elsewhere, initiatives have been set up to promote greater participation by fathers, and future fathers, in caring for their children. But young men themselves need support to take part in childcare and domestic chores to ease the care duties carried out by teenage mothers. This is not easy, and they may face teasing and even hostility from their peers for helping at home.

“Imagine my girlfriend and I had a child. Do I have the right to change its diapers? I can already picture the looks on my friends' faces if they saw me with a dirty nappy in my hand. They'll make fun of me. Still, that is how I'd want to relate to my child. I want to be a caring dad. For most of my friends, that's worth a good belly laugh.”

Dikitso, 23, Botswana

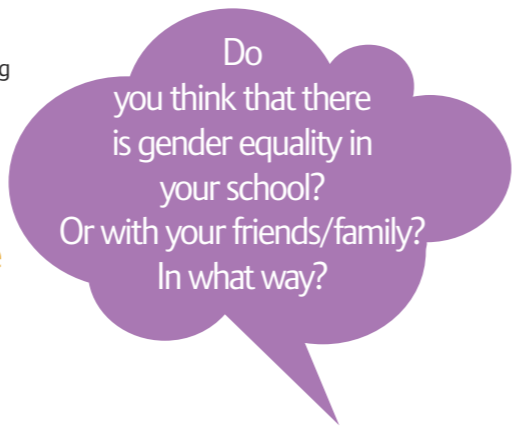


Photo: Plan

So, what about boys?

Gender equality – what’s in it for boys?

Aside from the satisfaction of helping their mothers, sisters and girlfriends to be treated fairly and have equal access to their human rights, there are also other incentives for boys to embrace gender equality. Creating new perspectives on gender roles could help to free boys from the pressures that they face regarding traditional views of masculinity, such as being tough, not being encouraged to express their emotions or sometimes limiting their creativity.



“With training on gender...we can learn to show affection and to feel close to our friends. I can see the difference between us and those who don’t know about gender equality-their relationships with young women are completely different.”

Christian, 20, El Salvador

The costs of inequality:

Girls

Less likely to go to school to begin with as their education is not valued. Globally 75 million girls of primary and lower secondary age were out of school in 2008.

Harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting and early and forced marriage specifically target girls to control their sexuality. One in every three girls in the developing world is married by the age of 18, and around 70 million girls and women aged 15 to 49 in 27 countries in Africa and the Middle East are estimated to have undergone genital mutilation or cutting.

Violence against women and girls aged 15 to 44 causes as much ill health and death as cancer, and more ill health than malaria and traffic accidents combined.

150 million girls under 18 have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact.

Girls in sub-Saharan Africa are more likely to be HIV positive than boys. In sub-Saharan Africa, 3.2 million young people are living with HIV and three young women are infected for every one young man (in some countries the ratio is 6 to 1).

Boys

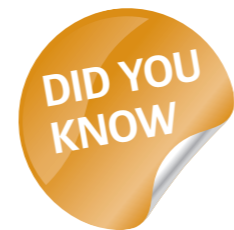
More likely in some regions to drop out of school. For example in the economically wealthy countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, boys are now dropping out of school at a faster rate than girls. They are also doing less well academically. For example, in the US, the average grade-point average in high school is 3.09 for girls and 2.86 for boys.

Pressure to conform to stereotypes leads boys to act in violent ways, including increased substance abuse and homicide. Young men have among the highest rates of death by traffic accidents, suicide and violence.

Rigid norms of masculinity can lead to violent policing of boys who are seen as deviating from the norm.

Traditional masculine behaviour prevents fathers from taking an active part in raising their children.

Men and boys are less likely to seek healthcare provision and support, which leads to high incidences of sexually transmitted diseases – this can affect their partners when combined with risky sexual behaviour such as not using protection during sex. 60 per cent of men and boys aged 15 to 24 do not have accurate and comprehensive knowledge about HIV and how to avoid transmission.



In 1991 a group of young men in Canada started the White Ribbon Campaign to speak out against violence against women. The White Ribbon Campaign is now worldwide.

Hopes For the Future – What is Plan doing?

We will be working hard to try and influence governments and communities to:

- Start young – pre-school education should promote equality between girls and boys and involve parents and teachers.
- Transform school curricula to challenge stereotypes and acknowledge difference.
- Support girls’ and boys’ participation in the creation of policies to improve sex education.
- Make schools safe for girls and boys.
- Launch campaigns that challenge discrimination and engage men and boys, such as the ‘Because I am a Girl’ campaign.
- Pass laws that enable both parents to take an active part in raising their children.
- Enforce legislation to end violence against women and girls.
- Legislate for equal opportunities.

What can you do?

For girls’ rights to be fulfilled, all of us – girls and boys, women and men – need to challenge the underlying causes of inequality at all levels of society. Change is possible and it’s already happening in homes, schools, governments, workplaces and within health provision.



Photo: Plan

So, what about boys?

Take Part

Read our 'Because I am a Girl' reports, and connect to the social media sites below to contribute your opinion on gender issues, gender equality and girls' rights! Check out the 'Because I am a Girl' campaign websites in your own country to campaign for a more gender-equal and fair society. You could also do this by contacting your schools, community leaders, members of parliament and, above all, speak to your friends to spread the word and take action!

Gender equality through social media

- Get involved with 'Because I am a Girl' campaign: www.plan-international.org/girls/
- Look at the negative masculine stereotypes boys can pick up from early ages: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLix4QPL3tY What did you think about Alex in this video? Why do you think being 'masculine' is often seen as being violent? And being 'Feminine' is often seen as being helpless and needing protection?
- Instituto Promundo, 'Once Upon A Girl' www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nhzaP0wweQ and 'Once Upon A Boy' www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzG4re-Ja0I
- 'Miss Representation' trailer: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gkliV6konY
- Check out the Interagency Youth Working Group (IYWG) website which provides global technical leadership to advance the reproductive health and HIV/AIDS outcomes of young people ages 10-24 in developing countries here: www.iywg.org/youth/about
- Take a look at these projects where girls and boys are working together for gender equality: The ICRW Parivartan Cricket project, promotes sport amongst boys to tackle attitudes about violence against women and girls: www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-B1tfV-xZE&feature=related
- Boys Unite to End Violence Against Women: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVOegWhTH5k
- UNHCR, International Women's Day 2009- Men and Women Unite for Gender Equality: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uTIDOO_OfA
- Visit The White Ribbon Campaign website at: <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/>

This youth summary is based on the facts and findings of the 2011 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' report. **The full version can be accessed here: <http://plan-international.org/girls/resources/publications.php>**