

# Because I am a Girl

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2013

In Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters



Because I am a Girl



## Girls' Rights are Human Rights

Each year increasing numbers of people, are affected by disasters and adolescent girls are particularly at risk. Their rights and needs are ignored because they remain largely invisible falling between the two recognised categories of women and children.

In El Salvador, adolescent girls and boys aged 16-20 identified a list of human rights violations that they felt had a greater impact on adolescent girls than on boys of the same age.

### Right to life:

Girls in many communities are at greater risk, as their physical survival skills, the ability to run, climb and swim, are less developed.

### Right to health and mental health:

In an emergency the right to health can be severely affected and everyone forgets that boys and girls may have different problems. Mental health is also an important issue for them before, during and after the event.

### Right to food:

When food is short girls are more likely to eat less, they do not have access to a balanced diet and most of them do not have the average of 3 meals a day.

### Access to information:

Girls and boys lack access to relevant information for personal development. There are issues about health, relationships and sex that schools and families are afraid to talk about but young people worry about on a daily basis.

### Freedom of expression:

Girls and boys are often excluded and their opinion is not asked for or listened to when decisions are being made.

### Sexual and reproductive education:

Lack of information leads to

- Pregnancy at an early age
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- An inability to make the best decisions.



Radio On: Sindy from El Salvador broadcasts on girls rights and disasters

## Why are we talking about adolescent girls in disasters?

The report draws attention to the fact that disasters don't affect everyone in the same way, and in places where gender inequalities already exist between men, women, boys and girls, experiences of disasters can be drastically different for girls.

## Pre-existing gender inequalities are worse in a disaster!

Girls and women are already more confined to the home and less likely to have access to crucial information or to contribute to disaster planning. Also the more elaborate and heavier clothes they wear, as well as a lack of skill, may prevent them from swimming to safety; these become life-threatening inequalities when you add disaster to the mix.



In 2010, a study in Pakistan found that 85% of those displaced by floods were women and children.



Girls' rights are legally defined in many different international legal documents. It is important to remember that girls have rights in times of disaster, just like any other time, and it is vital that these rights are not overlooked before, during or after a disaster.



Our research for the 2013 'Because I am a Girl' report in 6 different African countries found that all young people interviewed stated that girls suffer more from a disaster than boys.



In Niger after the food crisis, research for the 'Because I am a Girl' report found that out of 135 adolescent girls, 64% were already married and 39% had children. The average age of marriage was 14.

## Why Adolescence?

THINK

Adolescent girls are often overlooked and classed as 'women' or 'children', when in fact it is very important that they are recognised as having particular needs in terms of their education, safety, healthcare and participation. When they reach adolescence, girls can come up against pressure to marry, to be involved in sexual relationships, to drop out of school, or to stay at home and care for younger children and support their mothers with housework.

Disasters often bring financial and emotional strain on families; parents may lose their jobs, homes may be destroyed. Adolescent girls are often the first to miss out on schooling, and can find themselves propelled into an early marriage so that their cash-strapped families have one less mouth to feed.

### Why should young people be interested in this topic?

There were 90 disasters a year in the 1970's and almost 450 a year in the last decade; 95% of deaths caused by disasters take place in the developing world. An increasingly youthful population means that children and young people bear the brunt of this and for them the negative effect of disasters can last, if they survive, for the rest of their lives.

As young people, you are in a position to speak out and advocate for your peers. You may have experienced gender inequalities in disasters, or you may be passionate about helping to improve the rights of girls in disasters. Either way, if young people join together and make their voices loud and clear to demand change, the momentum will rise.

### Getting a youth perspective:

Although we have a large dedicated annual report, which this year focuses on adolescent girls and disasters, we are also committed to making sure that we have a youth perspective, which is why we produce a specific report for young people. This year, in addition to primary research with young people in the original report, we spoke to Plan youth groups in the UK, Sierra Leone, Canada, USA, the Philippines, Pakistan and El Salvador to get their views on how girls' rights in disasters might be threatened, and asked them for their ideas on how we might be able to protect and promote these rights.



## Girls Safety and Disasters:

It is widely known that violence increases after a disaster. This means the safety and security of adolescent girls in disasters is threatened.

It may be harder to get hospital treatment, or to have any access to the courts or help from the police when you need it. Because of their age and their sex, girls' vulnerability to violence, sexual harassment and early marriage increases during and after a disaster and at the same time their families and communities are least able to protect them. We know this to be true, which means the international community should be able to predict and prevent threats to girls' safety in disasters.

### The 2013 'Because I am a Girl' report found that:

- Violence against girls increases following a disaster
- Girls and young women are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse during and after a disaster
- Even though girls' vulnerability to gender based violence is recognised, actions to improve the situation are not being put into place
- There are not enough women in disaster response and assessment teams, despite guidelines stating there should be
- Measures like better lighting around toilets, protection around water points and working with men and boys to combat gender based violence is not integrated into humanitarian response enough
- Child marriage is used by families as a coping strategy during and following a disaster– most of the 25 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are considered fragile states, or at high risk of natural disaster. There is international recognition that child marriage is a widespread problem but the link with disasters has not yet been recognised.

## What Did Young People Have to Say About This?

Girls in the **Philippines**, told us that they were frequently less prepared than others to cope with disasters, and often had to stop going to school. They told us that relief centres (where they slept and ate following the disaster) were very over-crowded, had no separate sleeping or washing spaces for males and females, and that they feared rape and other abuse.

Girls in **Pakistan** told us that during flooding emergencies they did not feel relief shelters were safe, and they were harassed. They also told us it was a problem when proper dresses weren't provided.

Girls and boys in **Sierra Leone** said that sexual harassment following a disaster was especially a risk for un-accompanied girls without their parents or relatives.





## Practical Recommendations From Young People:

In Pakistan girls suggested building safe shelters to ensure they were protected, they also said it was very important that their opinions were heard and respected.

Girls in the Philippines said building separate sleeping and washing facilities for males and females would make them feel safer.



“It’s hard, others have nothing to eat, and they embrace being involved in bad acts just to have something to eat, you don’t know what to do or who to talk to when that happens.”

Anna, 13, Philippines, talking about after Typhoon Ondoy, ‘Because I am a Girl’ 2013 Report

### Ask Yourself:

**Q:** In some societies, especially if girls are un-protected or displaced from their families, they may be less likely to report abuse. Why do you think this is?

**A:** In some places (especially where girls and women have lower social status), sexual abuse and violence is a taboo subject, in many societies it may bring shame on the girl herself and she is unable to seek justice.

## Girls’ Sexual and Reproductive Health in Disasters:

“He’s my first child and I didn’t have anyone to give me advice to go to a clinic... I gave birth in the camp because no one told me to go to the hospital. No one helped me but my sister.”

Ellen, 17, living in a tent in a camp in Haiti, lost both her parents in the 2010 earthquake

Following a disaster it is extremely important that girls have the sexual and reproductive knowledge and services that they need. The disruption of family structures and of health services may leave adolescents without access to these. For girls and young women, this is precisely the time when their situation and their age and sex puts them most at risk of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.

In many societies, discussion of contraception, sex and pregnancy is considered taboo for young people who are not married, and even for married women decisions about sex are sometimes made by men. Girls can often feel embarrassed by the lack of sanitary towels for menstruation- sanitary towels are often not distributed in post disaster situations, which means girls resort to using unclean cloths which can result in infections.

## What Did Young People Have to Say About This?

In Pakistan, girls told us that information services about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) for girls was simply not available, even before a disaster.

In El Salvador girls and boys said that there is very little information about sexual and reproductive health, and there is no space within families to talk about it. They felt that parents do not allow teenage girls to have boyfriends and try to prevent it from happening, instead of giving them advice on how to protect themselves. As a result, they talked of girls becoming pregnant at an early age and being forced into abortion by their families, and also facing the risk of contracting STI's. In the context of a disaster this lack of advice and information only gets worse and increases girls' vulnerability.

In Sierra Leone, boys and girls told us that teenage pregnancy is a major problem affecting adolescent girls following a disaster because many parents believe it is not appropriate for them to discuss issues like contraception with their children.

Girls from Eastern Samar in the Philippines created a diagram to show the negative effects that a lack of information and services has on girls in disasters

No separate toilet and wash rooms for girls and boys in evacuation centres

Lack of sanitary towels for girls

Girls are unaware of what to do and information to take care of themselves

There are different types of people in the evacuation centre (ages, sex) and they are all busy

Peeping (invasion of private space)

Sexual abuse

Bullying against girls

Unable to protect children, especially girls

Girls infected with STI's

Unwanted pregnancy

Potentially life-threatening

Unable to go to school

Future is compromised



### DID YOU KNOW THAT

- After the earthquake in 2010, pregnancy rates in Haitian camps were three times higher than the average urban rate previously. Two thirds of these pregnancies were unplanned and unwanted
- Pregnant adolescent girls, particularly those under 16, are at increased risk of obstructed labour, a life-threatening emergency that can develop when the immature pelvis is too small to allow the passage of a baby through the birth canal
- Emergency childbirth services are often unavailable in crisis settings, increasing the risk of adolescent mothers and their babies dying.

#### The 2013 'Because I am a Girl' report found that:

- Adolescent girls have increased need for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care during and following a disaster for example pregnancy rates increase but there is a lack of access to methods of contraception
- Menstrual hygiene facilities are a high priority for girls living in camps, lack of access to sanitary towels and safe washing facilities affects their dignity and acts as a barrier for girls going to school
- Our survey with humanitarian workers in the 2013 "Because I am a Girl" report found that SRH and menstrual hygiene issues that affect adolescent girls are largely ignored
- There are guidelines that encourage consultation with adolescent girls but these are rarely followed.



## Practical Recommendations From Young People:

In Pakistan girls said there must be much more awareness and information on sexual reproductive health (SRH) for them in disasters.

In El Salvador, girls and boys said there should be SRH networks to make information more accessible. They also said that parents and teachers should not be afraid to discuss things.

In the Philippines, girls said they should receive sanitary pads in relief centres and there must be sex separate toilet and washing facilities. They also said there must be an authorised person who is responsible for giving information on adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

“We need help knowing where we can get help. Girls are different from boys, we have different health problems.” Sheila, 16, the Philippines

## Girls’ Participation and Disasters

“I think the worst challenges were that we were not able to speak. The community would not recognize that we had something important to say because we were young and female” Xiomara, 19, El Salvador

In many situations during disaster, girls’ voices are not heard because they are not encouraged, or sometimes not allowed, to participate in discussions even about issues which affect them. Our research this year found that often disaster prevention and response committees are run by men, and women, especially girls, are often excluded. If girls are not present and unable to voice their concerns about their safety, or education or health needs, then how will those in positions of authority be able to respond? It is vital that girls’ needs are communicated and brought to the attention of those who can help make their lives safer, healthier and their futures brighter.



A girl being interviewed at an event on International Disaster Risk Reduction Day.



**Marginalisation** makes it difficult for girls to participate, leading to a lack of awareness around issues affecting girls in particular.

**Result:** if it’s not discussed, it’s not dealt with.

### The 2013 'Because I am a Girl' report found that:

- Girls' participation and consultation is key to an integrated response to disasters – but both are rare; consultation and participation make it much more likely that girls rights are recognised and acted upon
- Education is key to resilience, as is involving girls in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) training in their schools and communities.

## What Did Young People Have to Say About This?

The youth groups we spoke to across 6 countries all felt that girls' participation in disaster prevention and response efforts was vital. Disasters do not affect people equally, so we need participation and involvement from all, so that everyone's rights are understood and respected.

Girls in the Philippines told us that officials do not include girls in decision-making, and that disaster response committees do not encourage girls to join search and rescue or relief operations.

Girls and boys in El Salvador told us that they do not participate in decision making activities or make demands because often they do not know their own rights, and girls added that they often do not have the right to participate even at the family level.

Girls in Pakistan told us that they were not consulted during floods in discussions around potential solutions, and their opinions were ignored and considered un-important.

Girls in the US told us that those involved in disaster prevention and response (such as emergency services) do not have much youth representation.



Girl pointing out disaster danger zones on map of her community in Nicaragua.

### Girls in the Philippines created a diagram to show what happens when girls are not included in planning and decision making

Girls are responsible for domestic chores and child care

Committees in disaster response (such as relief operation and search and rescue) don't encourage girls, it is only for boys

Leadership roles are thought to be for boys only

Girls are not included in disaster preparedness planning

Girls are thought of as being emotionally fragile

The needs of girls are not identified and not prioritised

**“I want someone who I can go to if there are problems. We should be able to tell our government that we need help, that we need shelter, food, jobs, school, places to wash privately. I want a way that I can be heard.”**

Sheila, 16, Philippines, talking about after Typhoon Ondoy, 'Because I am a Girl' 2013 Report



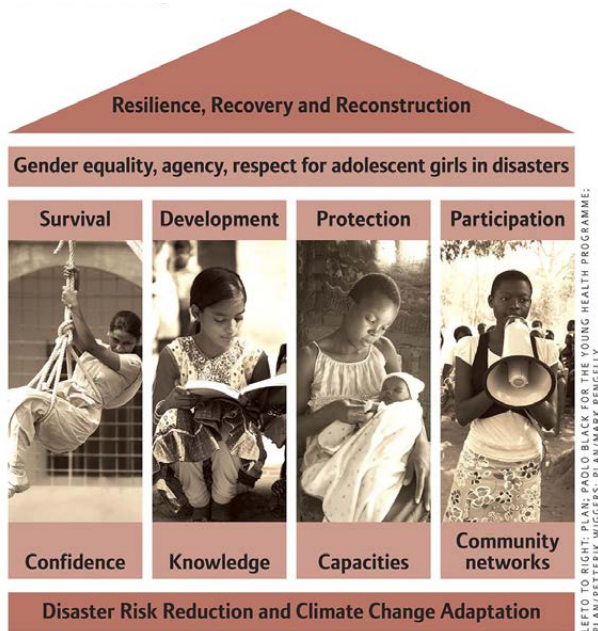
## Participation and DRR:

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is about having early warning systems in place, reducing communities' vulnerability and increasing their ability to respond which is known as resilience.

The link between the role of education and learning about disaster risk reduction and response during school or educational clubs is clear.

Participation in DRR work can give adolescent girls and their communities many benefits: increasing girl's self-esteem, confidence and resilience, improving their communication, negotiation and teamwork skills and allowing girls to build more positive relationships with boys and men which in turn contributes towards greater gender equality.

When men and boys see that girls are capable they have more respect for girls' ideas and their rights.



## Practical Recommendations From Young People:

In the Philippines, girls said that they should be involved in local disaster risk reduction and management committees. They also said girls need to be made aware of their right to participate. They suggested that their should be projects and activities specifically for girls in the camps and evacuation centres which would help boost their self confidence and lead to greater participation.

In Pakistan, girls said they should be consulted in discussions around prevention/response to flooding, and that when they do participate, that their opinions should be respected.

In El Salvador girls and boys said participation should start from the family, and that parents should be encouraged to include girls in decisions affecting their schooling and lives more broadly which would in turn give girls more confidence to speak out about disasters affecting them.

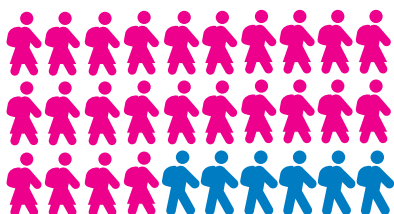




Girls from El Salvador at a Plan youth workshop on adolescent girl's needs and rights in disasters

## Education and Disasters:

The 'Because I am a Girl' report found that disasters can drastically affect whether girls go to school and continue their education. It also found that girls are more unlikely to go to school than boys following a disaster and that education in emergencies is severely underfunded. On a practical level, in El Salvador adolescent girls and boys told us that schools often become emergency shelters during disasters, so they are unable to continue with their schooling during this time.



**24 per cent girls 6 per cent boys**

In Pakistan after the 2010 floods, 24% of girls and 6% of boys in Grade 6 dropped out of school.



### Boys more likely to attend school

In Zimbabwe, 2 in 3 heads of households said boys would be more likely to attend school than girls after a disaster.

Education is vitally important for girls before, during and following a disaster and it is every girl's right to receive this education. It can also provide the following benefits:

- Physical protection (if a girl is in a safe space, she is less likely to be exploited)
- Psychological support, including a sense of normality , helping girls to make sense of what is happening around them by following daily routines, and talking to others experiencing similar things.
- A space to learn more about their rights as girls, and child rights more broadly
- Schools may act as a place where girls receive life-saving messages such as how to access health care and food in an emergency.

*“We need help going to school quickly so that we can be busy and be normal again. Before I went back to school I was sad all the time; I had time to think about the destruction and deaths. When I went back to school I was able to work towards catching up. This was hard, but it gave me determination”*

Amy, 14, Philippines, talking about the effects of Typhoon Ondoy.

## Refugee Camps- A Safe Space for Girls?

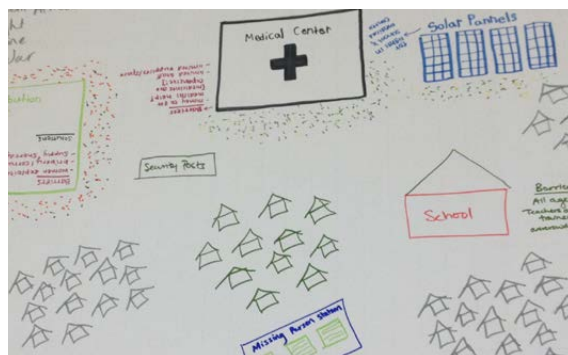
### THINK

#### What would a safe refugee camp look like for adolescent girls?

Plan's UK and US youth groups mapped out a hypothetical refugee camp that would provide safe and supportive environments for girls, by highlighting areas such as separate facilities for unaccompanied children and separated sleeping and washing areas, lighting, easily accessible education and health centres for females and security:

Plan Canada's Because I am a Girl Speakers Bureau suggested other ideas to help make refugee camps safer spaces for girls:

- Have female coordinator staff in the camp to specifically deal with the needs of unaccompanied girls
- Have a separate area in the camp for unaccompanied girls to live and stay together with appropriate staff
- Educate men and boys about the consequences of their actions including sexual abuse and adhere to strict penalties for misconduct in refugee camps
- Ensure 50% of authority figures in the camp are female.



Map by Plan USA's Youth United for Global Action and Awareness group.

#### GOOD IDEA

Plan's youth group in the United States suggested that awareness of disasters needs to be raised amongst young people through mediums such as:

- Social Media
- Setting up action groups
- Provide young people with clear directions as to how they can help during a disaster.

#### GOOD IDEA

Girls from the Philippines said they would ask their government to supply the following to improve the situation of adolescent girls in disasters:

- Provide sanitary towels, soap and similar items during disasters
- Give girls a chance to participate in decision making
- Construct evacuation centres with separate sleeping and washing rooms for girls, as well as study areas and room for people who are unwell.

#### GOOD IDEA

Plan Canada's Because I am a Girl Speakers Bureau also suggested setting up a mentorship programme to pair girls with knowledgeable female community members in disaster situations.

## CALL TO ACTION

1. Consult (talk, listen to) adolescent girls in all stages of disaster preparedness and response
2. Train and organise more women to work in emergency response teams
3. Provide targeted services for adolescent girls in the core areas of education, protection and sexual and reproductive health
4. Include funding for protection against gender-based violence in the first stage of emergency response
5. Collect sex and age disaggregated data (research that is split between male and female and different age groups) to show the needs of adolescent girls and inform programme planning





If Plan and the 'Because I am a Girl' Global Campaign is to deliver its commitments to Girls' Rights through Girls' Education, ending Child Marriage and reducing Gender Based Violence, paying attention to the millions of girls caught up in disasters each year is crucial. Making girls needs and rights visible before, during and after disaster strikes safeguards their future, all young people can and should have a role in this.

Fatema, a young woman who is Director of Tadamon, an organisation working with refugees in Egypt, sums up what can be achieved.

“When we organise people I can be part of the solution, not be there as a victim any more.”

## Further reading:

Here are some links to interesting sites where you can find out more about the issues raised;

- **Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2013 Report:** “In Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters”: [www.plan-international.org/girls/2013report.php](http://www.plan-international.org/girls/2013report.php)
- **UNISDR** – Step Up: Women and Girls The “In”visible Force of Resilience: [www.unisdr.org/2012/iddr/](http://www.unisdr.org/2012/iddr/)
- **Women's Refugee Commission:** their work with adolescent girls can be found at: [www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/adolescent-girls/](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/adolescent-girls/)
- **Youth Climate:** information on related projects and programmes at: [www.youthclimate.org/projects-and-actions/](http://www.youthclimate.org/projects-and-actions/)
- **International Rescue Committee:** [www.rescue.org](http://www.rescue.org)
- **Girls Discovered:** [www.girlsdiscovered.org/create\\_your\\_own\\_map/](http://www.girlsdiscovered.org/create_your_own_map/)
- **The Gender and Disasters Network (GDN):** [www.gdnonline.org/resources.php](http://www.gdnonline.org/resources.php)