



**ADOLESCENT  
GIRLS IN THE  
CLIMATE CRISIS:  
VOICES FROM ZAMBIA  
AND ZIMBABWE**

September 2021

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary report details the key findings from Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) on how climate change impacts on adolescent girls' and young women's access to education in Zambia and Zimbabwe. The research is centred on and carried out by young women researchers and, while this report is the result of the collective efforts of all those involved in the study, it is the 16 young women researchers, from Zambia and Zimbabwe, who participated throughout the entire process, who are the primary authors. This research would also not be possible without the 160 adolescent girls in the communities who actively engaged with the young women researchers: participating in climate change activities and sharing their opinions and thoughts on how climate change is affecting them and their communities.

*“ WE WERE WELL PREPARED FOR THE RESEARCH AND THE DATA WE GATHERED GAVE US AN IDEA OF HOW PEOPLE LIVE THEIR LIVES, AND IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO KNOW THAT PEOPLE OUT THERE HAVE PLANS TO ADAPT TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE. ”*

IDAHA SALIMU, 24, CHIPEMBI, ZAMBIA

For the young women involved, and for the project as a whole, their individual experiences and analysis of the research process were as important as its findings. They were actively engaged throughout the FPAR process - research design, data collection, analysis and writing - sharing their experiences and learning from each other. The training emphasized throughout that **the focus of the research was on the young women as generators of knowledge and not subjects of research.** It is about their stories, their experiences and how they interpret the reality that they live in and witness.

*“ I FELT VERY EMPOWERED BY LEADING THIS RESEARCH USING THE UNIQUE TOOLS AND METHODOLOGY SO THAT IT WAS EASY FOR PEOPLE TO UNPACK CLIMATE CHANGE WHICH I THOUGHT WAS VERY COMPLEX. ”*

FAITH MANDUZANA 25, CHIREZI, ZIMBABWE

As researchers they aimed to build an evidence base that furthers understanding of how climate change is reshaping the lives and futures of adolescent girls and young women. Is it acting as a barrier to quality education and, if so, in what way? The research also sought to find out their views on how quality education might help them, and their communities, tackle the urgent climate-related challenges they are facing.

During the different workshops they attended the young women got an understanding of the key principles of feminism, how to relate them to their own lives and how to interpret and analyse power in the world around them. FPAR is rooted in feminist analysis and in the idea that knowledge production is never neutral. The research approach empowered the young women to look critically at the attitudes and issues that determine their lives, as well as increasing their understanding of the gendered impacts of climate change.

*“ I FEEL SO HAPPY, I NEVER KNEW THAT SOMEONE LIKE ME CAN DO RESEARCH AND NOW I UNDERSTAND BETTER ISSUES OF CLIMATE CHANGE. ”*

ANNIE NKONDE, 24, CHEMBE, ZAMBIA

## OUR DREAMS

At the beginning of the research process, we, the young women researchers, undertook a visioning exercise adapted from Just Associates ([www.justassociates.org](http://www.justassociates.org)). This helped us to outline our aspirations and was designed to generate a common goal, inspire hope and encouragement, and give us a sense of control.

Based on our visioning exercise, we want:



# THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The research made us very aware that climate change is affecting girls' lives in many ways: threatening our ability to make our dreams, and those of other young women in our communities, come true. Two of the most common impacts are school dropouts and an increase in child, early and forced marriages and unions, as families marry off their daughters in order to reduce the financial pressures they are experiencing. The communities we come from depend largely on rain-fed agriculture to make a living and drought and floods, the result of climate change, mean families generate less and less income. Adolescent girls and young women are rarely consulted when families make decisions affecting their lives and their overall access to information is limited as they may not have easy access to the internet or television.

For young women and adolescent girls, climate change has made gender inequality worse and increased their risk of sexual violence:

- Girls are tasked with fetching water from long distances.
- Extreme weather conditions such as floods mean schools are often inaccessible for adolescent girls, who are particularly at risk on long journeys.
- The risk of physical and sexual abuse increases when, for example, homes are destroyed and girls forced to shelter in unsafe places.
- School attendance suffers because parents prioritize boys' education when money is short.
- Girls are often married off when resources are scarce which often means also dropping out of school.
- There are limited opportunities of redress for survivors of physical and sexual violence as resources become increasingly limited.

**“AS GIRLS, WHEN THE RAINS DESTROY OUR HOUSES, OUR PARENTS SEEK SHELTER ON OUR BEHALF IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD. WHILE THERE, WE ARE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF BY BOYS AND MEN LIVING IN THAT HOUSE WHERE WE WILL BE SHELTERED.”**

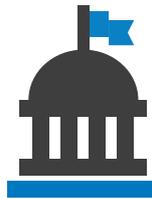
GIRL DURING PARTICIPATORY ACTIVITY, CENTRAL PROVINCE, ZAMBIA

# WHAT CAN BE DONE?

More young people need to learn, understand, and act on climate change in their communities. As we gathered information from colleagues in different communities in Zambia and Zimbabwe the research led us towards some key recommendations.



**Communities** should take action to address the looming challenges of climate change, and this includes changing behaviours and practices and ensuring that they adopt better ways of managing the environment.



**Governments** must mitigate the impacts that are faced by girls and young women especially those that affect their access to and attendance in schools. They need to build more schools, change the school calendars to accommodate for altered seasons and establish satellite schools, as well as including climate change in the school curriculum.



**Communities and families** must not, when faced with climate induced crises, sacrifice the education and welfare of girls and young women by marrying them off.



**Civil society organisations** and other players including the **private sector**, must set up programmes that enhance the community's resilience to climate change and support the creation of alternative climate resilient livelihoods.

**“THE RESEARCH WAS WELL RECEIVED FROM STAKEHOLDERS, MOTHERS AND GIRLS WERE HAPPY THAT THE PROGRAMME ALLOWED THEM TO TALK ABOUT GENDER ISSUES AS THEY RELATE TO CLIMATE CHANGE SINCE MOST INTERVENTIONS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE GENDER BLIND.”**

PATRICIA LISIMATI, 27, CHIREZDI, ZIMBABWE.

# WHAT IS NEXT?

The young women researchers are determined that their research and knowledge will be put to good use. They have developed detailed advocacy plans (featured in our full reports) and these will be put into practice over the coming months. Plan International is looking forward to sharing and supporting their progress as they continue their work to address and mitigate the impact of climate change in their communities.



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### About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

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