Bangladesh's Quality Inclusive Education and Skills Development Programme.
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EDITORIAL

This edition of OPENPlan brings to you an interesting and varied selection of recently published research and evaluation reports conducted by offices from across Plan International.

The selected reports comprise a mixture of research and final evaluation studies from MEESA, WACA, APAC and one multi-country study, focusing on the thematic area of inclusive quality education (IQE) through different lenses including education in relation to; climate change resilience, disaster risk management, protection from violence and early childhood care and development. The studies showcase strong methodological practice, including good ethical standards, and offer a range of insights and recommendations useful to colleagues across the Plan International family and beyond.

The first study, **Disaster and Gendered Impact in a Changing Climate Towards Girls' Education**, was a research piece undertaken by Plan International Asia-Pacific Hub, Plan International Nepal and Bangladesh. The qualitative study was implemented in the Sunsari district of Nepal and Kurigram district of Bangladesh aiming to promote school-based gender-sensitive disaster risk management and ensure that targeted schools and school officials receive effective risk management support.

The second study, **Education in Crisis: COVID-19 and Adolescents' Education in Fragile Contexts**, was a multi-country research piece undertaken by Plan International United Kingdom involving primary data collection in five countries, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal and Sudan. Using a mixed methods approach, the research intended to shine a light on the impact that the pandemic has had on adolescents' education in low and middle-income countries to help shape and inform efforts to turn the tide on the global education crisis which has intensified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third study, **Evaluation finale du projet Wondiyey Ma Zada/ Final evaluation of the Wondiyey Ma Zada project**, was an evaluation undertaken by Plan International Niger and supported by Plan International Belgium. The project was conducted in the Tillabéri region, in Niger, over 30 months and aimed to prevent gender-based violence in schools, and also to ensure that girls can develop in an enabling and resilient environment. The purpose of the final evaluation was to generate lessons learned from the project, to provide valuable recommendations and improve future interventions, whilst also being accountable to programme beneficiaries and the donor. The final evaluation was conducted alongside an impact evaluation which was used to complement the findings in relation to lessons learned.

The final study, **End Term Evaluation for the Enhanced Household Incomes to Support Children's Access to Quality Education Project**, was a final evaluation undertaken by Plan International Zimbabwe. The project aimed to enhance households' capacity to manage and promote access to inclusive and quality early childhood care and development for both boys and girls in Mutasa and Mutare districts of Zimbabwe by 2020. The final evaluation used a mixed methods approach to assess the extent to which the project achieved its goal and objectives using the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender and inclusion.

We hope you find this issue of OPENPlan insightful! Please see our noticeboard on page 24 for details on how to get in touch to collaborate on future editions of OPENPlan, as well as details on the new Research and Evaluation Agenda Package and Ethics and Safeguarding in Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL).

Sponsored children in Nepal.
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DISASTER AND GENDERED IMPACT IN A CHANGING CLIMATE TOWARDS GIRL'S EDUCATION

Full report written by Bun Peuvchenda, Dr. Dhruba Gautam (Nepal), and Zakia Haque (Bangladesh), and Tamara Curtis, for Plan International Asia-Pacific Hub, Plan International Nepal and Bangladesh.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

The countries of Nepal and Bangladesh are among the world's most vulnerable to the impacts of disaster and climate risks. Bangladesh is a low-lying country in South Asia that experiences frequent cyclones, flooding and monsoonal storms that leave its population vulnerable, especially women and girls. During a normal monsoon, floods can cover about 20% of the country, disrupting life and causing deaths. Similarly, Nepal is located along the southern slopes of the Himalayan Mountain ranges, exposing its inhabitants to a wide range of natural and human-induced risks. Over 80% of the total population of Nepal is at risk from natural hazards, such as floods, landslides, windstorms, hailstorms, fires, earthquakes, and glacial lake outburst floods. Sunsari district of Nepal and Kurigram district of Bangladesh are among the districts most prone to hazards and are the target of the Strengthening Community Resilience to Disaster through School Safety Initiative (SCRSSI) Project's Disaster and Gendered Impact initiative.

In both research areas (Sunsari district of Nepal and Kurigram district of Bangladesh) gender stereotypes remain deeply ingrained in the society, social norms, and traditions. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in the mindset of many parents and the wider community, with some parents of the view that their sons should be given opportunities for education and learning, whilst girls are believed to be more suited to managing the household. These gender norms and stereotypes have a direct impact on educational continuity and attainment of children, especially girls. Both research areas are highly vulnerable to disasters and prone to multiple hazards such as floods, cyclones, drought, and currently the COVID-19 pandemic, among others. In the context of increasing disaster and climate risks, the research findings evidence that the impacts of disaster and climate change pose significant risks to the physical wellbeing and educational attainment of boys and girls, but impact girls disproportionately.

PURPOSE

This study aimed to promote school-based gender-sensitive disaster risk management and ensure that targeted schools and school officials receive effective risk management support. The research set out to review the extent to which a gender transformative approach had been integrated and adopted into the relevant regulatory frameworks on disaster risk management, climate resilience, and school-centred disaster risk management at the international, and national level, and to understand the existing gender norms and stereotypes that exacerbate the impacts of disaster and climate risks on girls and boys, their educational continuity and attainment. The report also aimed to understand the broader social and historical contexts of the two districts where Plan International Asia-Pacific Regional Hub and the Plan Country Offices have been supporting school-based Disaster Risk Management initiatives.

The objectives of the research were to:

1 Capture the actual and gendered impacts of disasters and climate crisis on girls and boys, including on educational continuity and attainment.

2 Map out existing factors that compound and exacerbate natural hazard risks of marginalised children, especially girls and youth in target areas of both countries, with particular attention to harmful gender norms and stereotypes.

3 Explore international and national regulatory frameworks on gender sensitive disaster risk management, climate resilience, and school-centred disaster risk management, not only in identifying the gaps but considering how to leverage current frameworks.

4 Generate more reliable evidence specific to the gendered impacts of natural hazards and climate crisis on children and young people.

METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodology

This report undertook a variety of qualitative data collection methods, such as Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and field observation. Due to limitations posed by the COVID-19 restrictions in both countries, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select six target schools (three schools in each country) to participate in the research. A total of 407 children, teachers, parents, and community leaders contributed their experiences to the research. Of the respondents, 46% were children (22% boys; 24% girls) and 54% were adults (26% men; 28% women). The research methodologies included:

- **Desk Review:** Consisting of a review of secondary data that included the current global, regional and national regulatory policies/frameworks/ guidelines on disaster risk management, climate resilience, and school-centred disaster risk management. Additional review was done on relevant Plan International CCDRR and CCA initiatives in the Asia region as well as existing studies/research on gender norms and stereotypes in Bangladesh and Nepal.

- **Inception Report Development:** Including methodology, questionnaires and field visit schedules.

- **Field Data Collection:**
  - FGDs with teachers', Parent Teacher Associations, community members, parents, children in school, children not in school and children participating in school-based clubs.
  - IDIs with children in school, children not in school and children participating in school-based clubs.
  - KIIs with community and government leaders, NGOs/CBOs working on child-related issues, gender working groups, the Ministry of Education at the national level and the Ministry of Social Welfare.

- **Data Analysis and Reporting:** Qualitative data from FGDs, IDIs, and KIIs were translated into English, then classified by research question, stakeholder, and response themes using the content analysis method. Data triangulation was accomplished by examining the key findings across information sources and linking core findings to the key research objectives. Research Associates produced reports on each country summarising the data analysis results. These results were then consolidated into the research report.

Limitations

- **COVID-19 pandemic:** The research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, with limits placed on the number of participants in the FGDs as per health protocols in each country.

  Mitigation measures: The associate researchers in the two countries practiced safe measures including wearing masks, carrying hand sanitisers and maintaining social distancing during the FGDs and KIIs to ensure the safety of participants in the research. The associate researcher made efforts to ensure the responses from children would be representative of the whole context of the areas.

- **There were no FGDs with out-of-school children conducted in Nepal:** In Nepal, the research team did not find any out-of-school children from the project target communities; Salbani, Marchiya and Chatara. It was said that the provision of "midday meal at school" from the government encouraged parents to send their children (age 6-12 years) to school.

  Mitigation measures: The associate researcher in Nepal compared the findings with other studies before formulating the research conclusions.

- **Limited women in KIIs and FGDs:** In both countries, there was limited women in various positions including community leaders, school teachers, school head teachers, and representatives from government ministries who were the key stakeholders for KIIs and FGDs. In some schools, there were less female teachers than male teachers. Therefore, the associate researcher could not manage to have equal participation of men and women in the FGDs.

  Mitigation measures: The associate researchers in the two countries conducted KIIs with more women to ensure the meaningful and equal participations between men and women in the research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from Plan International's Ethics Review Team, ensuring the study was in line with Plan International's [MERL Policy], [MERL Standards], the [Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People], as well as key ethical principles outlined in the [Framework for Ethical MER].

Interviewers ensured that ethical measures were in place by collecting the informed consent of each participant and disclosing how personal and sensitive data would be handled and kept confidential. The child safeguarding focal point of the country office in Bangladesh and Nepal also conducted child safeguarding training with the research team including enumerators before commencement of the fieldwork. COVID-19 and health protocols including physical distancing, hand sanitiser and face masks were applied during face-to-face data collection to ensure the safety of participants and data collectors.

KEY FINDINGS

Existing gender norms and stereotypes in the Sunsari district of Nepal and Kurigram district of Bangladesh

The concepts of patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal male-domination shape the perceptions and practices of Bangladeshi and Nepalese society in general. The scale and magnitude of gender stereotypes and discrimination is even more pronounced in the two research locations of Sunsari and Kurigram districts in comparison to the national context. The local population in the research locations of these two countries are living in very remote areas, and the traditional gender norms and stereotypes are strongly entrenched. Parents and the wider community in these two research locations are generally of the view that sons will take care of them in their old age and should be given a good education while girls are perceived as weak and in need of protection, more suitable to engaging in unpaid work, such as household chores. Therefore, investing in girls' education is not considered a priority in both research locations. Most of the girls interviewed for this research are of the view that even when their parents are educated on and aware of gender equality principles, their actions are sometimes guided by social pressure rooted in patrilineal and patriarchal beliefs and traditions.

Impact of gender norms and stereotypes on educational continuity and attainment

Based on the findings from both countries, it is confirmed that the gender norms and stereotypes in the Bangladeshi and Nepalese society have a direct impact on educational continuity and attainment of children, especially girls. Gender norms and stereotypes impact drop-out rates, school attendance, study time, participation in extra-curricular activities, and the continuation of higher education. In both countries, a girl's education is disrupted when families face financial crisis, climate and disaster risks, or shocks which increases difficulties for girls to access education. In Kurigram district of Bangladesh, poor families most affected by floods and other shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, were found to marry off their daughters before they complete secondary school as one way to cope with these shocks. In Sunsari district of Nepal, the same practice was observed, especially during the 2017 flood and more recently in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Poor families affected by shocks (secondary impacts of natural hazards) reduced the financial share for their daughter's education considering their limited options. Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) is one of the negative

coping strategies adopted in a financial crisis, particularly in some marginalised Nepalese communities. Stakeholders shared that many girls permanently drop out of formal education following a disaster.

Compounded impact due to gender norms, stereotypes, disaster and climate risks:

Gender norms and stereotypes also shape the different roles and responsibilities of boys and girls across the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) cycle. In the research locations of the two countries, girls play important roles in disaster preparedness, response and recovery (post-disaster) and these roles are different to those undertaken by boys. Girls have limited engagement in the construction phase (as per findings in Nepal) and continue to be responsible for household chores throughout the entire cycle of DRM. The burden of work for both boys and girls more than doubles during the response and post-disaster phases when children (boys and girls) must support in the repair of damaged houses and assets, drying of wet seeds and grains, managing damaged crops and any livestock, and are involved in income earning with their family members if required. In such a situation, education is a low priority. During a disaster, the support role of girls is less visible and recognized as their work is in the private domain, as opposed to the public domain that boys engage in. From the in-depth interviews with out-of-school children in Bangladesh, it was confirmed that the girls along with their mothers perform the role of providers of food and water and household managers and caregivers. During and after the disaster the burden of household chores falls on the girls and their mothers, starting with the collection of dry foods to gathering cattle or furniture for the shelter. Caregiving responsibilities double or even triple their workloads during a crisis. Due to their lack of financial resources, girls and mothers in this locality find themselves in particularly dire circumstances during and after disasters. Boys along with their fathers work outside the homes by choosing a safe place for evacuation, boat procurement, shelter management, and other public domain activities. The relegation of girls to the private domain during or immediately after an emergency can put them in danger. For example, the reluctance to send girls to shelters because of concerns about their personal safety or the lack of appropriate facilities, sees girls remain in dangerous conditions.

Gendered barriers preventing participation in school-based disaster risk management

Schools, especially those that are being supported by different I/NGOs, organize many School-Based Disaster Risk Management (SBDRM) activities to increase resilience and

Girls taking part in the the GEMS programme to learn about their rights in Bangladesh.
(© Plan International)

improve children's risk management capacity. During the study, many girls were found to be participating in SBDRM activities which were implemented by different I/NGOs. Girls in both research locations of the two countries explained that although the school encouraged them to take part in such activities there were many barriers to their meaningful participation. This included commuting constraints because of safety concerns about girls travelling any distance from the home, workload at home, and low self-confidence. These barriers were less observed among boys and resulted in boys having more opportunities and in turn, greater skills and awareness about school-based DRM. The COVID-19 pandemic is another barrier preventing free participation of girls and boys in community meetings/gatherings that include SBDRM activities.

Findings from both countries indicate that the boys and girls themselves, parents, family members, neighbours, religious and social/political leaders, community people and local authorities including teachers and school head teachers play important roles in reducing societal factors that shape gender barriers. These actors can play an important role in promoting gender equality in the communities researched.

Specific context for girls and boys from marginalised backgrounds, including those with disability and LGBTIQ+

In the Kurigram district of Bangladesh, children from poor families, children with disabilities and children from the Hindu religion as a minority population in the area, were found to be the most marginalised. In Sunsari district of Nepal, children from Motey, Urab, Musahar, Mochey, and Khatje families (lower castes as per the Hindu caste system), LGBTIQ+ children, children with disabilities, children belonging to conservative families with no or low levels of education, and children from poor families are more vulnerable than others in disaster and climate risks. Children identifying as LGBTIQ+ have specific struggles and hindrances in accessing quality education, and inclusion in disaster risk management, and the lack of knowledge about this marginalised group warrants further study. In Nepal, rural societies are still not welcoming of persons identifying as LGBTQ+, leaving little opportunity for them to express their issues and concerns publicly. In Kurigram district of Bangladesh, communities are not accepting of the LGBTIQ+ identity, and these children are hidden, highly stigmatized and face a myriad of sexuality and rights issues. They do not 'come out' about their sexual identity or sexuality within the family or in the society, as there is little understanding about LGBTIQ+ issues, and they are at risk of discrimination and isolation.

Recommendations

Plan International, the national governments of Bangladesh and Nepal, and development partners (donor agencies) all play an important role in promoting gender equality in the two countries included in this study. Specific recommendations to address gender norms and stereotypes that exacerbate the impacts of disaster and climate risks on girls and boys, their educational continuity, and attainment are as follows:

RECOMMENDATION 1: FOR PLAN INTERNATIONAL

- Design and conduct an awareness raising program on gender norms and stereotypes and how these deepen the impact of disasters and climate crisis on marginalised groups, especially girls.
- Understand and address how gender norms influence children throughout the DRM cycle.
- Include indicators to measure the knowledge and skills of girls and young women in leadership positions for building disaster and climate resilient schools and communities.
- Define indicators that measure positive behaviour changes of target boys, and young men to promote gender equality in building disaster resilient schools and communities.
- Improve the conditions (daily needs) and social position (value or status) of girls and young women in building disaster resilient schools and communities.
- Foster an enabling environment where all stakeholders work together to support children and youth on their journey in building disaster resilient schools and communities through capacity building, advocacy and campaigning.

RECOMMENDATION 2: FOR THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS OF BANGLADESH AND NEPAL

- Mainstream gender equality in education policies and systems to support the educational continuity of adolescents.
- Promote continuity of boys and girls in education while tackling poverty reduction interventions.
- Allocate a gender responsive budget for implementing gender transformative CSS interventions.

RECOMMENDATION 3: FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

- Promote knowledge management and build capacity of national governments for ensuring the continuity of adolescent girls' education.

- Facilitate the design of a practice-based hands-on training curricula and impart life skills trainings to boys and girls based on their group-specific vulnerabilities, local needs and context alongside the priorities of local governments in coordination with national governments and development partners.

USE OF FINDINGS

Since this report was finalised, the findings and recommendations have been used in a number of ways. Primarily, they have fed into a new multi-country project, the Gender Responsive School and Community Safety Initiative, which commenced in July 2021. The project incorporated concrete outcomes which were set up to directly respond to research findings and recommendations, including to:

1. Strengthen safer and gender responsive school environments aligning with the Comprehensive School Safety framework.
2. Enhance community DRM capacities that are gender responsive, inclusive and integrated with school preparedness initiatives.
3. Create gender-responsive safe school initiatives promoted by government and CSO partners at local, provincial, national, and regional levels.

The research findings have also been used by the project countries to develop their management responses to take forward the recommendations in their other funding supported Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaption (CCA) work or projects. Finally, the findings and recommendations have been shared in global workshops by the Asia-Pacific DRM Team to ensure more practitioners can join in building DRR and CCA work that is more gender responsive and inclusive.

CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL REPORT

For any questions on this article, please contact:

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Girls wear face masks at their school to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Nepal.
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EDUCATION IN CRISIS: COVID-19 AND ADOLESCENTS' EDUCATION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Full report written by Adrienne Monteath-van Dok and Nicholas Frost from Bloem Consulting and Anthony Davis, for Plan International United Kingdom.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Quality, equitable and inclusive education has the ability to transform lives, improve nutrition, reduce child, early and forced marriage, lead to more equitable and open societies and is crucial for achieving gender justice, peace, stability and climate resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has caused an education emergency at a scale unprecedented in recent history, affecting 94% of students worldwide and threatening irreversible harm to a generation of children's education, wellbeing, prospects, and crucially, has the potential to roll back gains made on girls' education since the advent of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. More than 1.5 billion learners – 90% of those worldwide – have seen their education interrupted. Schools have been shut for a full year for more than 168 million children globally. Whilst swift and wide-ranging attempts were made to reach girls and boys through remote learning, nearly a third (463 million) were not able to access it – often lacking the necessary technological assets at home. It is estimated that at least 100 million more girls and boys will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading. This year of lost learning will have a damaging effect on the futures of millions of people. The ripple effects also extend well beyond the ability of girls and boys to learn. The closure of schools has prevented access to protective spaces and critical services such as school meals, menstrual hygiene kits, child protection mechanisms, health services, and mental health and psychosocial support services.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing barriers to education, with girls and young women, children with disabilities, refugee children, and children living in humanitarian settings having experienced the most catastrophic impacts. The experience of this has been heavily gendered, through increased exposure to child, early and forced marriage, trafficking and sexual exploitation, unintended or unwanted adolescent pregnancy, gender-based violence, having to take on gendered burden of care work, and limited access to laptops, computers or smartphones needed for education.

Urgent and substantive action is necessary to turn the tide on the global education crisis, this report also highlights the imperative to learn from the pandemic and ensure schools are inclusive, accessible and resilient to future shocks and crises.

Purpose

The research intended to inform and help shape efforts to turn the tide on the global education crisis that has intensified because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It shines a light on the impact of the pandemic on adolescents' education in low and middle-income countries by bringing together quantitative and qualitative data to help understand how adolescents, and particularly adolescent girls, have or have not been able to continue their education during the pandemic.

The report intended to explore:

- The ability of adolescents to access education during the pandemic.
- The quality of education received by those who were able to continue their learning.
- The availability and use of home-learning materials, teaching capacity, and teacher interaction with students during periods of school closure.
- Home-learning environments and the level of support adolescents received for their learning.
- The impact remote learning had on adolescents' mental health and well-being.
- The extent to which adolescents have been involved in decision making, as part of the COVID-19 response.
- Challenges and successes of returning to education after lockdowns.

METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods approach using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies for primary data collection to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on adolescents' education in low and middle-income countries, particularly for girls, supplemented by secondary data analysis.

The **literature review** explored both grey and peer-reviewed literature. A total of 283 documents were reviewed using pre-defined search terms and included a process of citation chaining/ reference mining. The results were used to answer the main research question (please see page 9) and to triangulate the primary research.

The primary research engaged over 1,900 adolescents, parents and teachers in five countries, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal and Sudan.

Quantitative data was collected through an online survey consisting of open and closed questions. Different surveys were developed for adolescents (aged 14-19), parents and teachers and were available in English, Spanish, Arabic and Nepali. The data was collected in two phases; with surveys conducted in Guatemala, Honduras, Nepal and Sudan between March and April 2021, and data collection in Kenya taking place in June 2021. Collection methods varied between countries, ranging from entirely online in Nepal, to WhatsApp texts and phone calls in Guatemala and Honduras. Some interviews were conducted in person in Sudan and Kenya, in line with COVID-19 safety protocols, where connectivity or access to electric devices was less feasible.

Qualitative research was carried out in Nepal and Sudan through 134 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with adolescent girls and boys, parents, teachers and local leaders. An additional 51 adolescents (aged 10-19) in Nepal and Sudan participated in a 'photovoice diary', a participatory research methodology, that allowed participants to express their views, perspectives and feelings on how COVID-19 had affected their education through taking photographs that were then discussed collectively. 58 images were chosen by the adolescents with accompanying quotations, 22 of which were included in the report. The data was analysed using an inductive approach against a coding frame and used to triangulate quantitative findings.

Main research question:

- What is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's education in low and middle-income countries, particularly for adolescent girls?

Sub-questions:

- Who have been able to access quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic? And who have not?

- What are the barriers that young people have faced/face to access quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic? And is this different depending on sex, age, ethnicity or ability?

- How did/do social norms and practices affect access to quality education for young people during the COVID-19 pandemic? And is this different depending on sex, age, ethnicity or ability?

- Do pre-existing marginalisation factors (for example, household poverty) exacerbate the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of adolescent girls to access education? And if so, in what way?

- What are the barriers that young people face in returning to in-person education? And is this different depending on sex, age, ethnicity or ability?

- How have young people been consulted in their local COVID-19 response?

- What can be the expected medium and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent girls?

Limitations

There are several limitations noted in relation to the methodology:

- Data was only collected in areas Plan International works, the data is therefore not representative for any of the countries or regions.

- Online surveys do not reach the most marginalised populations- partly mitigated through data also being gathered through in-person and telephone-based data collection.

- Due to the focus on adolescent girls, most (72%) of the adolescent survey respondents were female, and a comparative gender analysis could not be carried out.

- Additional data collection in Kenya was conducted in person through a large team of research assistants. While it was therefore possible to collect data from many more respondents than those in other countries, this can skew the data towards Kenya for some of the questions. Therefore, data has been presented by country throughout the report, with notable variations highlighted in the text.

- Due to the limited uptake of the online survey in Nepal (where in-person or telephone-based data collection was not undertaken), it was not possible to collect adequate comparable quantitative data from parents or teachers, and therefore this data was not included in the analysis for these groups.

- In Dafur, Sudan, quantitative and qualitative data collection was limited due to the resurgence of violence during the period of data collection. This meant it was not possible to collect data from refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Sudan, as was originally intended.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was sought from Plan International's Ethics Review Team (ERT). Researchers were required to adhere to strict codes of conduct, including Plan International's and Plan International UK's child protection and safeguarding policies. Data was collected anonymously. Quantitative data was extracted for analysis as respondent numbers. For the qualitative data, collectors assigned a code to each interviewee, corresponding to the consent form, which were included in transcriptions. The research complied with the 2018 Data Protection Act of the United Kingdom and follows the data protection guidance of the Social Research Association (SRA). Written and/or verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants in this research. Consent forms were stored securely by the Plan International Nepal and Sudan offices. Research participants were given the option to leave email addresses so they could receive a copy of the final research report.

Girl washes her hands at her school to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Nepal.
(© Plan International)

KEY FINDINGS

The findings present wide ranging impacts of COVID-19 on adolescents' education, focusing on access to education, quality of education, home learning environments, well-being and returning to education. Due to the detail and depth of this report, only a summary of findings have been included, we encourage you for further details to review the full report here.

- Already weak and overstretched education systems failed to adapt and cope with the sudden shift to remote learning.
- A lack of electronic devices, digital infrastructure and electricity meant most adolescents – particularly those in rural locations – were unable to access any education.
- The existing inequalities in the education system were worsened by the pandemic, particularly for girls, who face challenges unique to their intersecting experiences of gender and age.
- The home environment was generally not conducive to learning, with adolescents feeling easily distracted, unsupported, and limited in study time due to competing demands such as increased household chores.
- The social and economic impacts of the pandemic, isolation, concerns about the future, and stressful home-learning environments placed additional burdens on students, parents and caregivers. Adolescents reported significant negative impacts on their mental health and well-being.
- Reduced numbers of adolescents have returned to school. The reasons why include fear of catching the virus or some deciding, or being forced, to enter marriage or find work. Others did not return because they felt they had missed so much education they were unable to catch up.
- While half (48%) of adolescents had been engaged in decisions about the COVID-19 response, nine out of 10 wanted greater and more meaningful involvement in decisions about their education and how to respond to the pandemic in their community.

Between March 2020 and March 2021, within the countries where research was conducted, school closures and partial closures occurred due to the pandemic.

In **Guatemala** and **Honduras** schools were fully closed for 35 and 37 weeks.

Schools in **Nepal** were completely closed for 26 weeks and partially closed for a further 26 weeks.

Schools in **Kenya** were shut for 28 weeks and partially open for nine weeks.

In **Sudan**, schools were fully closed at the national level for an average of 15 weeks, although each state could evaluate the local health conditions and adjust accordingly.

Access to education

The findings covered a broad array of aspects which comprehensively investigated access to education including states school closures compared with non-state schools, schools/student communication during lockdown, access to devices and the internet, teachers' online access, radio and TV lessons, disability, and poverty and child labour.

- **State school closures compared with non-state schools:** Eighty-three per cent of the adolescent survey respondents attended a state school. On average, 90% mentioned that their schools closed due to the pandemic. However, non-state schools (also referred to as private schools) remained open more often than state schools.

- **Schools/student communication during lockdown:** Only 54% of adolescents reported that their school had been in touch with them during the school closures, although there are strong differences between countries. Eighty-four per cent of the adolescents in Sudan reported little or no communication from school, compared with 68% of adolescents in Kenya and 30% in Nepal. In Guatemala and Honduras, however, over 90% of adolescents reported hearing from their school. State schools were more often in touch with their students compared with non-state schools.

- **Access to devices and the internet:** Eight in ten parents (78%) reported that their children were unable to study on an electronic device. Of those who did have a device, only 40% reported having access to the internet. Home internet access by adolescents varies widely in the sample. Of the five countries included in this research, respondents from Kenya reported the lowest access (55%), followed by Nepal, where 53% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the survey statement on access to the internet at home. Lack of connectivity also featured strongly in the qualitative data.

- **Teachers' online access:** Of the 425 teachers that responded to the survey, 77% had not been able to teach remotely due either to a lack of devices or their students' lack of access to devices. For those that were able to teach remotely, only half had access to an electronic device and even fewer had consistent access to the internet when they needed it. Teachers in Kenya were the least likely to be able teach lessons remotely (93%), followed by Sudan (85%) and Guatemala (60%).

- **Radio and TV lessons:** 61% of adolescents in this study agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to access radio or TV learning. Of these, 75% reported learning new things and 76% thought these lessons were useful.

- **Disability:** Of the 655 adolescents who responded to this survey, 44 (7%) self-identified as having a disability. While the numbers are relatively low, the available data does show that before the pandemic there was already a higher proportion of adolescents with disabilities who were not going to school compared with their peers. One fifth (20%) of respondents with a disability reported not attending school before the pandemic, compared with 6% of adolescents without a disability.

Quality of education

Many children were unable to access education during the pandemic, for those that had access to remote learning there were also problems raised around its quality. In considering this, the findings looked at teacher training, home-learning materials and parental support.

- **Teacher training:** Out of 425 teachers surveyed, 346 were unable to teach remotely. Of those that could, 31 (only 7% of the total number of teachers surveyed) reported receiving training on remote teaching. Most of these (81%) confirmed it helped improve their online lessons.
- **Home learning materials:** Having materials to study at home became even more important for those children for whom online learning was not available. While 50% of adolescents agreed their school provided materials for home learning, this provision was inconsistent and often insufficient to make effective learning possible. In Sudan, 84% of adolescent respondents reported not receiving any home-learning materials, compared with 53% in Nepal, 48% in Kenya, 41% in Honduras and 22% in Guatemala.
- **Parental support:** Parents were asked if they felt able to support their child's learning needs. More than half (53%) did not, a similar proportion to when adolescents were asked the same question. When asked why not, the most common reason was they felt they lacked the ability or knowledge due to their own limited education. Time and work commitments were also mentioned as a constraint, but less so.

Home-learning environment

To understand more about the home-learning environment, adolescents were asked about their ability to concentrate at home, whether they had enough time for learning, and whether they felt they had everything needed to learn effectively from home.

- **Ability to concentrate at home**: Parents reported that their children were unable to concentrate at home more often than adolescents themselves. Only 34% of parents thought their children were able to concentrate on their learning at home, compared with 48% of adolescents. An inability to concentrate at home was reported

more frequently in Sudan, where 58% of adolescents reported concerns.
- **Time for learning:** On average, 41% felt they did not have enough time to learn from home, with particularly negative responses in Sudan (57%) and Kenya (56%).
- **Unpaid chores and care burdens:** Household chores increased significantly for both girls and boys, with 62% of adolescents experiencing an increased unpaid care burden, but more so for girls. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that they also had less time to study.

Well-being

Mental health and well-being, motivation to learn at home, and online safety were considered in respect of well-being.

- **Mental health and well-being:** When adolescents were asked what worried them most about school closures and remote learning, academic performance, falling behind and the impact this might have on their future was the most frequently reported concern (47%). This was followed by worries around missing friends and teachers (17%) and concerns over the loss of motivation for education and the potential for this to lead to negative or harmful behaviour (10%).
- **Motivation to learn at home:** The psychosocial impacts of the pandemic also affected adolescents' motivation to learn remotely. In this study, only 46% of adolescents reported enjoying learning from home and 53% were motivated to learn remotely.
- **Online safety:** Adolescents who had access to devices – whether for all or part of the time – were asked if they felt safe online. Most of them did, and their parents agreed, although it should be noted that the response rate to this question was low due to the high number of respondents who did not have electronic devices.

Plan International staff member uses childfriendly COVID-19 book to teach children about the disease, Honduras.
(© Plan International)

Returning to education

The impact of lost learning through the pandemic, dropping out of school, child, early and forced marriage were all considered in relation to returning to education.

- The survey shows that 33% of students had not fully returned to in-person education, compared with 67% whose schools had fully re-opened. Like the students, not all teachers had returned to teaching, as lockdowns and school closures continue. However, adolescents who had returned to school were happy to be back.
- **The impact of lost learning through the pandemic:** When analysing the age of the adolescents and their education level in this survey, 38% of 15-year-olds and 32% of 16-year-olds reported being in primary education. These lags are likely to increase with the gaps in learning

provision because of the pandemic, with only 23% of adolescents reporting they learned as much remotely as they would have done being in school. Nearly 9 in 10 (86%) teachers that responded to the survey believed the year of lost learning would have a negative impact on their students' futures.

- **Child, early and forced marriage:** For adolescent girls that participated in this research in the Asia-Pacific region, child, early and forced marriage was highlighted as one of the biggest concerns during the pandemic. In Nepal, where the legal age of marriage is 20, it was also reported that child marriages increased as the pandemic intensified drivers such as a lack of education, economic hardship, parental death, and early pregnancy. While the research did not directly address child, early and forced marriage, some respondents to the research raised this as an impact of the pandemic that is keeping adolescent girls from returning to school.

A girl from Guatamala studies at home.
(© Plan International)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Calling for global solidarity, the report highlights the urgency of finding viable solutions to adapt to, and strengthen, the resilience of education systems to ensure continuity of learning during future climate crises, economic shocks and disruptions. Girls and women must be central to this, with access to decision-making spaces and leadership positions to help shape a just and equitable recovery.

The report suggests the need for a transformative agenda, which prioritises the incorporation of lessons learned and experiences from the pandemic, in order to inform efforts to build back better in an equitable, inclusive, and resilient way. The recommendations call on donors, national governments, humanitarian actors and education providers to work together, and in partnership with, adolescents to:

1 Urgently increase and sustain financial support to meet the education needs of adolescent girls and boys, including those living through conflict and humanitarian crises, so every girl can lead, learn, decide and thrive.

2 Work in partnership with women and girls, men and boys, in all their diversity, to eliminate the systemic and gendered barriers preventing adolescent girls from accessing and completing a quality education.

3 Support quality inclusive learning environments, through a focus on the well-being of teachers and learners and a whole-school approach. teachers per school to ensure MHM expertise remains at a school.

4 Strengthen the resilience of education systems to protect learning during the ongoing pandemic and be prepared to respond to future pandemics, climate-related shocks, insecurity, and other crises, incorporating the capacity to shift safely and effectively between face-to-face and distance learning as required.

5 Promote health and COVID-19- prevention measures, including equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and safe and effective vaccines, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

USE OF FINDINGS

The report was used to influence outcomes of the G7 and the UK Global Education Summit. It was launched online and shared with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), encouraging G7 countries to get behind and endorse the G7 girl's education declaration, which they unanimously did.

The research was also presented during an FCDO CSO symposium in the lead up to the COP Summit. The presentation focussed on recommendations around protecting against future shocks and crises, in the wake of COVID-19.

The findings have further been used during the UK Campaign, 'All My Friends Need Teachers'. The research findings were heavily referenced in the policy report, as were quotations from the teachers. Gender responsive recommendations on teachers formed recommendations for the campaign.

The research continues to be used to shape FCDO priorities for the upcoming Transforming Education Summit and are also used as evidence to promote youth leadership and participation in COVID-19 recovery and education at the Summit.

CLICK HERE TO READ **THE FULL REPORT**

For any questions on this article, please contact:

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Girls learning in speed school in Tillaberi region.
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FINAL EVALUATION OF THE WONDIYEY MA ZADA PROJECT

Full report written by Susanne Alldén and Dominique Vidale-Plaza from ETS Vidale-Plaza, for Plan International Niger supported by Plan International Belgium.

BACKGROUND/ CONTEXT

The Wondiyey Ma Zada (WMZ) 'Let the girls prosper!' project was implemented in January 2019 by Plan International Niger and its local partners, with technical and financial support from Plan International Belgium. The project was conducted in the Tillabéri region over 30 months and aimed to prevent gender-based violence in schools, and also to ensure that girls can develop in an enabling and resilient environment.

Girls' education and women's full participation in socio-economic, political and cultural life remain areas with many challenges in Niger. Limited access to quality education, training or employment opportunities, combined with harmful social norms have created additional barriers for women and girls, and continue to impede the countries progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender-based violence is also described as a widespread phenomenon in school environments and constitutes a leading factor responsible for pushing girls out of education. Psychological violence, harassment and sexual violence are discussed as commonplace, with as many as 50% of pupils and nearly 90% of teachers reporting being at risk of sexual violence. The complexity of understanding and measuring the extent of the gender-based violence has resulted in a lack of prevention and care strategies across public institutions including schools. By addressing gender-based violence the project aimed to have a sustainable impact on the barriers to girls' development and empowerment, through changing norms and attitudes towards them within the school and by extension, within communities and society.

Purpose

The purpose of the final evaluation was to generate lessons learned from the project, to provide valuable recommendations and improve future interventions, whilst also being accountable to programme beneficiaries and the donor. The final evaluation was conducted alongside an impact evaluation which was used to amplify the findings in relation to lessons learned. The two evaluations were different but complementary, with the impact evaluation being used to determine the impact of the project using a time-based comparison as well as a comparison with a control group. The final evaluation integrates reflections from the impact evaluation with a view to presenting the results and perceived changes linked to the implementation of the project. It also integrates data from progress reports produced in the framework of the project implementation, as well as interviews with the implementing partners and some project staff to assess the project implementation process according to the evaluation criteria and research questions.

The final evaluation aimed to:

1. Assess project performance comprehensively and independently based on the following evaluation criteria: effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, impact, and children's rights, gender and inclusion.

2. Document the lessons learned in both the design and implementation of the project by providing the main lessons and good practices learned in both municipalities.

3. Formulate relevant recommendations for follow-up actions in similar future interventions.

The evaluation also aimed to answer questions relating to the overall approach of the project, specific technical areas and cross-cutting themes, implementation of activities, partnerships and management. It therefore addressed the following questions:

FINAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

1. In each strategy and among the cross-cutting activities within the project: how has the project implemented the cross-cutting activities (gender, environment, governance, digitalisation, etc.)?

2. How effective is the monitoring and evaluation system in place for this project? To what extent does it generate evidence to measure project indicators and support timely decision-making and learning?

3. How can project management and implementation be improved in case the strategies need to be continued and modified/corrected for follow-up actions in similar future interventions?

A girl learning at a speed school in Tillaberi.
(© Plan International)

METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodology

The final evaluation used a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Data collection was conducted over fourteen days in May 2021 across three communes: Karma, Kourtheye and Tillabéri. The mixed methods approach included: a survey with pupils; a psychological well-being self-inventory with pupils aged 13-18 using the John Hopkins Symptoms Checklist 10; focus group discussions with pupils disaggregated by sex and age; semi-structured interviews with pupils in secondary schools; and interviews with other key informants such as parents; school, community and protection actors; project partners; and Plan International staff in Niger and Belgium.

Quantitative data was collected through tablets and/or smartphones, using the software KoboCollect. A short survey was conducted with pupils aged 8-12 and 13-18 years old, comprised of closed questions. The raw quantitative data was cleaned in Excel, before analysis and visualisation of the data was carried out using R software.

Qualitative data was collected using dictaphones for interviews and focus group discussions. The recordings were transcribed, using note-taking templates which acted as the basis for qualitative analysis. The notes were saved and encrypted before being coded and analysed against a coding framework, Atlas software was also used for qualitative analysis.

Limitations

- Limited availability of actors and schools due to holidays had an impact on the data collection process.

- Due to time constraints, the national team were not able to directly observe key activities on the ground.

- The relative unavailability of partners due to timing constraints and other communication concerns limited the data/responses that could be collected from these actors.

- The qualitative data was not very detailed (also noted in the impact assessment).

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with Plan International's Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People, including the code of conduct related to safeguarding and the various roles and responsibilities of Plan International associates. Humanitarian and ethical principles of "Do No Harm" were central to the studies, with particular consideration to conflict and the mitigation of trauma risks for children, victims

Children from Diffa region wave at camera.
(© Plan International)

of gender-based violence and other vulnerable groups. Ethical approval was sought by Plan International's Ethical Review Team prior to data collection.

The tools were developed in a sensitive way with a particular attention to the formulation of the questions in order not to provoke testimonies of traumatic events or reactions of trauma.

Research assistants were carefully selected to ensure that their profile, skills and abilities were suitable for the type of assessment with children and adolescents, some also had backgrounds with basic psychosocial training and were experienced in conducting sensitive interviews with vulnerable groups. Training was provided to ensure that research assistants understood and could apply the principles related to safeguarding and protection, and that they were equipped with the necessary information to refer protection cases that may be reported during interviews or focus group discussions. Training also highlighted that consent is an ongoing process and how to detect potential signs of discomfort in participants, especially minors.

The collection team obtained written consent for participation in interviews and focus groups, and verbal consent for participation in the survey and self-inventory (psychological well-being scale), which were recorded on the particular tool sheet on the tablets.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and the data was stored and retained in line with Plan International policies.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings were presented against the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria relating to; effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, impact, as well as gender and inclusion and monitoring and evaluation, and lessons learned from the final evaluation process.[1]

Effectiveness: Despite contextual challenges in relation to COVID-19 and security, the majority of the project's package of activities were completed. The evaluation highlighted that awareness-raising and training activities were among the main ways in which participants accessed information about the project and key issues- for most interviewees, awareness-raising and training were the most important activities in achieving the project's objectives.

Relevance: The quantitative and qualitative data affirmed the relevance of the WMZ project to the lived realities of all participants including students, teachers, community stakeholders and others.
The project seemed to meet a critical need in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion or change of gender norms in schools.

> *'In my opinion, the activity is relevant because it's so that we have a better life and our parents stop discriminating between genders.'* (Cfr. Interview, Student, Boy)

> *'It's about gender equality. The activity is relevant to our realities. I enjoy it because it taught us about discrimination and I put it into practice.'* (Cfr. Interview, Student, Girl)

> *'Yes, it is relevant because it has been proven that abuse that we don't give a great deal of importance can be considered as violence.'* (Cfr. Interview, Parent)

Efficiency: Whilst some activities needed to be postponed or adapted due to COVID-19 implications, participants nearly unanimously agreed that the objectives of the project were realistic, and despite challenges the project achieved the vast majority of the planned results.

Sustainability: A significant majority of respondents at all levels emphasised the need to strengthen the implementation of the project's achievements, in order to ensure its sustainability. Respondents highlighted that resources to support the implementation of action plans and to strengthen or extend the scope of awareness raising, particularly around the codes of conduct and principles central to the project, would be essential to ensure its

Girls learning in speed school in Tillaberi region.
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long-term sustainability. Overall, however, participants were very positive in their perceptions of the sustainability of the initiative, adding that Plan International's continued support at this stage is an important precondition for strengthening this sustainability in the future.

> *'Even if the project goes away, we will continue this activity.'* (Cfr. Interview, School Actor)

> *'I hope so, it depends on the partner. But there is a need to reach out to more schools and support initiatives to implement the knowledge gained.'* (Cfr. Interview, School Actor)

> *'I prefer that these activities continue because I benefit from them. In order for this activity to continue, Plan must assist us whenever they are called upon, as they often need to be sensitised.'* (Cfr. Interview, Student, Girl)

Impact: In general, the results of the impact evaluation were positive, indicating changes in the knowledge, attitudes and practices of project participants, including students, teachers and other stakeholders. Positive effects were further evident in relation to perceptions on gender, gender-based violence and the safety risks faced by girls in schools. Teachers also saw changes to the dynamics between students, and in some cases this even extended to their own attitudes towards students.

> *'Yes, the activity had a particular effect on the participants because since the activity there have been fewer problems between the students and the professional body, and also between the students themselves.'* (Cfr. Interview, Teacher)

Gender and inclusion: The final evaluation confirmed how the project integrated gender, child protection and other sensitivities into the project, including the application of Plan International's overall policies, training of partners and support from relevant internal specialists.

Monitoring and evaluation: The project integrated monitoring and evaluation tools into its management cycle and framework, for example tools such as attendance lists and registers helped to ensure this monitoring, as did field visits. Project participants, however, suggested that 'monitoring' was more specific to post-activity actions.

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1. This project used the 1991 OECD/DAC evaluation criteria instead of the updated criteria released in 2021. It is important to note that in the 1991 criteria, coherence was not among the principles included in the normative framework.

The below table presents an overview of the key results and activities of the WMZ project and the number of beneficiaries reached by the project:

KEY EXPECTED RESULTS	KEY ACTIVITIES	NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES REACHED
THE CAPACITIES OF GIRLS AND BOYS, STUDENTS FROM 12 PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND 14 SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE STRENGTHENED TO ADVOCATE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, GIRL'S RIGHTS AND TO FIGHT AGAINST GBV.	➡ Training of field workers and general secretaries of ECVCs on gender equality, child rights and protection, and prevention and control of GBV ➡ Identifying and training students to be Champions of Change within colleges ➡ Organisation of awareness-raising and training session for School Governments (SGs) on gender equality, prevention and the fight against GBV; support the development of action plans to improve safety in schools ➡ Development of education content for teachers on GBV and child protection ➡ Awareness raising on GBV and safe schools ➡ Construction/ rehabilitation of separate latrines in schools	➡ 355 boys and 357 girls participated in the General Assemblies to identify CoCs ➡ 94 CoCs were identified and trained ➡ The staff follow-up missions reached 140 actors, including 55 women ➡ The work of the community relays made it possible to reach a total of 10597 people, including 2253 men, 3686 women, 1887 boys and 2761 girls
THE CAPACITIES OF TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AND COMMUNITY SCHOOL SUPPORT STRUCTURES ARE STRENGTHENED IN THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS.	➡ VBGMS in formal teacher training modules ➡ Teacher training on gender equality, child rights and protection, GBVMS ➡ Strengthening of CGDES/COGES, AME and APE on gender equality, child rights and protection, GBV ➡ Supporting school structures to implement preventive measures and management of abuse cases at school level	➡ Designing content for teachers ➡ Training of 410 teachers on GBV, gender, child protection, positive discipline and code of conduct ➡ The formation of 84 members of school governments ➡ Training of 904 members of the APE, AME and CGDES on GBV, gender and child protectio; ➡ Holding a brainstorming session on the role of communal and community leaders in the care of child victims of violenc; ➡ The construction of 8 blocks of 3 and 10 blocks of 2 school latrines in 8 schools in two communes
THE LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY TEXTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF GIRLS AGAINST ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE ARE POPULARISED AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ARE IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMUNITIES AND COMPETENT AUTHORITIES.	➡ Training of community radio hosts on gender equality, child rights and protection, and the prevention and fight against GBV ➡ Organisation of community dialogues between CVPEs, CGDES/COGES, APEs, AMEs, Watch Committees, GS community and religious leaders, in order to identify priorities and strategies to improve the safety of girls in school, on the way to school and within their community ➡ Organisation of inter-community exchange ➡ Awareness-raising and reflection workshop with local elected officials and traditional and religious leaders on their roles in the protectionof child victims of GBV ➡ Advocacy sessions with the relevant ministries,regional, departmental and communalauthorities on the application of laws to fight GBV	➡ The organisation of a community dialogue on GBV, gender and child protection ➡ The organisation of two campaigns/ advocacy sessions with the relevant ministries, regional and departmental authorities on the application of texts on the fight against violence

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations suggested in the report focus on the process of project implementation rather than programmatic recommendations that appear in the project impact assessment. The below recommendations, therefore, are primarily for consideration by Plan International Niger and Belgium.

1 Clarify with the project participants, including the beneficiaries themselves, the monitoring and evaluation system, including the roles of each actor involved, the frequency of monitoring, the purpose of the monitoring activities as well as the results.

2 As suggested by one student, and in connection with the previous recommendation - it might be interesting to consider a follow-up unit (i.e. the follow-up of recommendations or other actions after training or awareness-raising activities) at the level of the schools targeted by the project. Further recommendations included entrusting certain follow-up tasks to the technical services involved in the project, and the importance of further involving school managements, in order to strengthen the monitoring and more specifically, the implementation of the project's achievements. A decentralised approach could thereby strengthen the ownership of the project by the schools and participants directly.

3 The "full participation" of participants in the project should also be included. This full participation could take many forms, but could be taken to mean the participation of participants (direct and indirect) in the design of the project and its activities, and at all levels.

4 Take into account the potentially negative unintended effects, including the reactions of some parents and community members towards children (or others) who begin to advocate or lead discussions on gender or gender-based violence. This consideration should be included in the updated risk analysis and could be a research topic for future evaluations. Participants additionally suggested including broader community members in the awareness-raising activities to aid acceptable of the messages shared by the trainers, awareness-raisers and Champions of Change.

5 Continue to strengthen the momentum for systematic communication, including with school stakeholders. It may also be important to develop a project-specific communication strategy, which will ensure that pupils, teachers and other stakeholders all have access to information about project activities, results and even strategic issue.

USE OF FINDINGS

The findings of this final evaluation were first presented to the project stakeholders: implementing partners and the project team at Plan International Niger and Plan International Belgium, and were also disseminated to community actors in accordance with the dissemination plan. A management response was then developed and approved by the management team.

The lessons learned from this evaluation, the initiatives promoted by the project, and the recommendations of the management response were followed up and implemented through the development of the DGD 22-26 project (with BNO), for the promotion of gender equality in schools based on the child friendly feedback mechanism (CFFM) and the teacher's code of conduct on gender.

The lessons also fed into the implementation of a five-year programme, the Break Free project, which used a combination of the Champions of Change approach and the 'Youth Health Ambassadors Group'. The project aims to realise the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls in the fight against child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

[CLICK HERE](#) TO READ THE FULL REPORT

Please note that the above summary is based on the report, in conjunction with details from the TOR and ethics application form submitted to Plan International's Ethics Review Team.

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A girl takes her baby to the health centre for a check up.
(© Plan International)

END TERM EVALUATION FOR THE ENHANCED HOUSEHOLD INCOMES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION PROJECT

BACKGROUND/ CONTEXT

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programmes have been found to be central to the successful holistic development and positive future socioeconomic outcomes of young children between the ages of 0 to 8. This is the period of greatest growth and development for children when the brain develops most rapidly. It is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. ECCD programmes have been shown to improve young children's physical and psychosocial wellbeing and support their cognitive gains. However, access to quality ECCD education is limited for children in some countries, particularly for those living in rural communities.
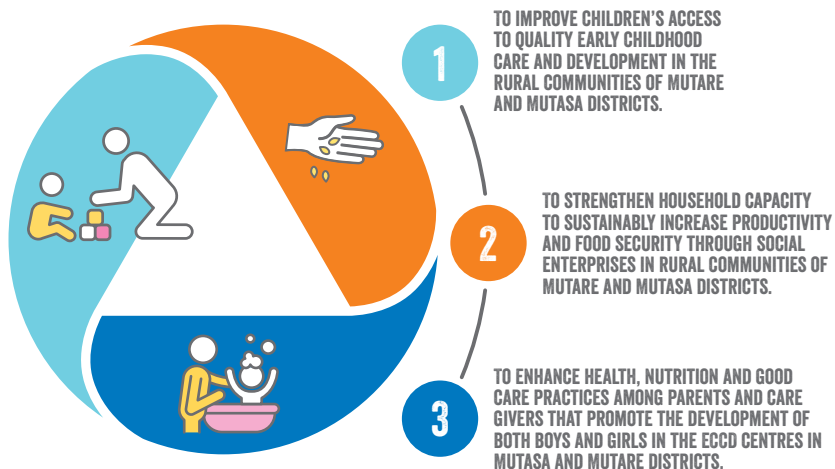
Since the introduction of ECCD education in Zimbabwe, children in rural provinces have faced several challenges in accessing ECCD education. This is due to a number of factors, which include long distances to the nearest learning centres, economic hardships which make it difficult for parents to meet the cost of ECCD education, hunger, and limited awareness on the importance of ECCD education. Persistent droughts also force parents to prioritise food over education in the province.

Purpose

Plan International's Enhanced Household Incomes to Support Children's Access to Quality ECCD Education Project was implemented in Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe over 3 years. It aimed to improve households' capacity to manage and promote access to inclusive and quality early childhood care and development for both boys and girls, and to support village based ECCD centres under the Community Managed Early Childhood Education Model. The project was implemented in Mutasa and Mutare districts, where four communities were targeted to support young children's access to ECCD education, increase household economic security and enhance the health, nutrition and good care practices among parents and care givers. The project was implemented between 2017 and 2020 and reached a total of 14,704 direct and indirect beneficiaries, of which 96% were children aged 3-6 years old. The aim of the end of program evaluation was to assess the extent to which the project achieved its goal and objectives using the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Overall project objective: To contribute to enhanced household capacity to manage and promote access to inclusive and quality early childhood care and development for both boys and girls in Mutasa and Mutare districts of Zimbabwe by 2020.

SPECIFIC PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

1. TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE RURAL COMMUNITIES OF MUTARE AND MUTASA DISTRICTS.

2. TO STRENGTHEN HOUSEHOLD CAPACITY TO SUSTAINABLY INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND FOOD SECURITY THROUGH SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF MUTARE AND MUTASA DISTRICTS.

3. TO ENHANCE HEALTH, NUTRITION AND GOOD CARE PRACTICES AMONG PARENTS AND CARE GIVERS THAT PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS IN THE ECCD CENTRES IN MUTASA AND MUTARE DISTRICTS.

METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Methodology

The evaluation utilised a mixed methods approach, employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Participants from all project communities and ECCD centres in the two districts of Mutasa and Mutare were included in the evaluation. A total of 176 households were interviewed using an evaluation questionnaire (44% of the project's target households). Another 100 interviews were conducted in Mutare district (57% of target households), while 76 were conducted in Mutasa district (43% of target households). The majority of respondents were females (80%) and 20% were males. The gender composition of the respondents reflects the project's focus of empowering women, who bear the main responsibility of taking care of children's needs and welfare.

Key Informant Interviews – Ten key informants were interviewed from relevant government departments and the Plan International staff involved in the project. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the successes and challenges of the programme.

Focus Group Discussions – Sixteen focus groups were conducted with children attending an ECCD centre, children not attending an ECCD centre, childcare workers, and community leaders to solicit their views on how the programme impacted them as individuals.

Most Significant Change Stories – Collected from individuals involved in the programme to gather narratives about how they participated and what changes occurred in their lives as a result of their participation.

Questionnaires and Observation – A total of 176 questionnaires were administered to households with children attending an ECCD centre across the four target communities. During this data collection, enumerators also took pictures of programme-constructed infrastructure to support the evaluation.

Data Analysis – Quantitative data from the evaluation questionnaire was analysed using SPSS software. Specific indicators from the data in SPSS were lined up with the project's results framework indicators. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were generated from the quantitative data. Qualitative data analysis was achieved by arranging data into thematic

categories according to the objectives and outcomes of the project. Content analysis was then used to identify emerging trends and align the trends with the thematic categories. The qualitative results were used to support the quantitative data findings collected through the evaluation questionnaire.

Limitations

The evaluation was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and as such faced certain limitations and restrictions which impacted the evaluation methodology. For example, only 176 household interviews were conducted across the four ECCD communities compared to the planned 400 due to accessibility of the ECCD centres where the activities were carried out. Similarly, the target number of questionnaires were not reached however the evaluation team felt that the sample was sufficient to provide generalisable results, which were corroborated against FGD and KII findings.

Ethical Considerations

The evaluation complied with Plan International's Global Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and the Ethical MERL Framework. Plan International staff lead consultants and community enumerators through a training on Plan International's Safeguarding Policies to ensure requirements were adhered to throughout the evaluation process.

Ethical considerations were upheld through conducting interviews in safe and comfortable environments, gaining verbal informed consent and ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. For children under the age of 18 that participated in the evaluation, assent was obtained from the children themselves while consent was obtained from the parents/guardians of the child before they participated in the evaluation. Strict data security management was employed throughout the evaluation to ensure data was collected and stored safely.

A learner at the SAGE community hub in Mutoko district.
(© Plan International)

KEY FINDINGS

Evaluation Findings

The evaluation findings are assessed against the OECD/DAC criteria which considers projects in terms of Relevance, Effectiveness/Impact, Efficiency and Sustainability in relation to the objectives.[2] The additional criteria of Gender, Child Rights and Inclusion was also included.

Achievement of objectives and desired outcomes

Objective 1: To improve children's access to quality early childhood care and development in the rural communities of Mutare and Mutasa districts.

The project constructed four ECCD centres in Mutasa and Mutare districts to bring early childhood development education closer to target communities. Before this construction, children had to walk far distances to attend school, usually unaccompanied by an adult. As a result of this construction, 73% of the parents and guardians reported that the ECD centres were less than 2km away from their homes. In addition, Plan International partnered with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to conduct trainings for ECCD paraprofessionals. Thirty volunteers were trained on the ECCD syllabus, appropriate and gender sensitive teaching methodologies, conducting routine health checks, production of indoor playing games using local material, as well as other practical sessions. The percentage of ECCD volunteer teachers trained who were able to facilitate child-friendly learning through play increased from 97.7% in Mutare and 76.52% Mutasa at mid-term review to 100% at End Term Evaluation. In relation to the OECD/DAC criteria, this project achieved great effectiveness and impact due to the active engagement of the community and local government. Community members played a key role in the construction of ECD centres and local government officials provided crucial technical support to the initiative. Through the provision of relevant ECD infrastructure and capacity development of paraprofessionals, the programme contributed to an increase in enrolment, improved quality, and improved access to ECCD education in the four targeted communities.

Objective 2: Increased household economic security through entrepreneurial activities and increased support towards children`s access to quality ECCD education.

In the baseline evaluation, families reported that a lack of adequate financial resources was one of the key barriers to accessing ECCD learning for children. To address this challenge, the project aimed to improve household economic security through introducing income-generating activities (IGAs) to the communities. The target communities initiated several income-generating activities such as poultry raising, fish farming, nutrition gardening, and bee keeping. To ensure project relevance in accordance with OECD/DAC criteria, the design of IGAs were flexible and could be adapted based on what the community and local environment supported. The endline survey revealed that the majority of households (69%) had a member who belongs to an IGA group while 31% did not. Another 68% had received training on formation and running of IGA groups. At baseline only 51% of the households had a member belonging to an IGA group. At the time of the evaluation, some of the income-generating projects were still at infancy stage, making it difficult to assess the full impact of these interventions.

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2. This project used the 1991 OECD/DAC evaluation criteria instead of the updated criteria released in 2021. It is important to note that in the 1991 criteria, coherence was not among the principles included in the normative framework.

Objective 3*: To enhance health, nutrition and good care practices among parents and care givers that promote the development of both boys and girls in the ECCD centres in Mutasa and Mutare districts.*

The project sought to enhance the health, nutrition, protection and care practices that support the healthy development of young children through several trainings and initiatives. The trainings and initiatives developed included supplementary feeding programs, the establishment of nutrition centres, and community trainings on good parenting skills. Four groups of community volunteers (16 males, 90 females) were successfully trained by Plan International in collaboration with local health personnel and village health workers. The training focused on school feeding, food preservation and preparation, and on the types of high nutrition value crops for school feeding. Nutrition gardens were also established at all four ECCD centres. These gardens were found to feed 64 children at the endline, ensuring that children from poor families were not disadvantaged by hunger during class activities. In addition, 340 parents and guardians from the four ECCD centres participated in a training about good parenting and gender sensitive skills. The project aimed to achieve efficiency and sustainability in accordance with the OECD/DAC criteria by ensuring all trainings were highly participatory and allowed for community input. Through the high attendance and participation of guardians during these activities, much progress was made in improving the health, nutrition and good care practices of children in the target districts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the evaluation findings as well as challenges encountered during project implementation, the following recommendations are suggested:

INCREASED ACCESS TO ECCD EDUCATION:

Repair infrastructure that has deteriorated to make the structures more durable and long-lasting.

- Invest in conflict management training to enable the conflicts encountered at some of the centres (e.g. Gwata) to be resolved amicably. This will help to ensure the long-term sustainability of the ECCD centres.

INCOME-GENERATING PROJECTS (IGPS):

- Further support for some initiatives (e.g. fish farming and poultry) is needed to ensure that they are sustainable sources of income for communities.
- Consider supporting individual group projects in addition to group projects as there were indications that individuals were more successful compared to groups in running IGPs.

CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD RIGHTS:

- There is need for increased awareness on the importance of obtaining birth certificates for children as the evaluation noted that a significant number of children still do not have birth certificates.

GENDER AND INCLUSIVITY:

- More male engagement strategies need to be deployed to ensure increased participation of men in awareness trainings on child rights and protection and parenting skills as well as in project activities such as IGPs and nutrition for children.
- Make the ECCD structures accessible to children with disabilities by constructing toilet seats to replace the squat holes and make learning materials about different kinds of disabilities accessible to participants.
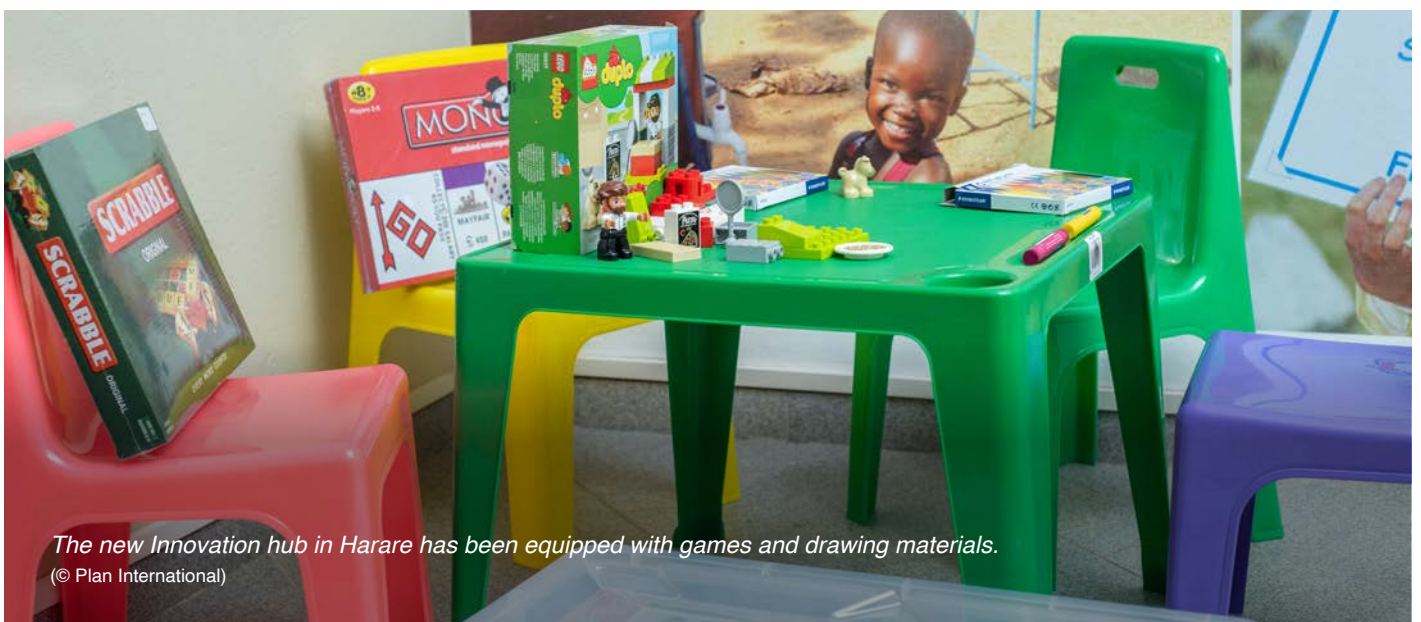
The new Innovation hub in Harare has been equipped with games and drawing materials.
(© Plan International)

USE OF FINDINGS

The findings and recommendations of this study have been used in various ways since the finalisation of the report.

Based on the recommendation regarding a cost extension/no cost extension to wrap up activities derailed by COVID-19 and replicate interventions, permission was granted and activities lagging behind were completed. Additional funding was sought to replicate activities, expanding in neighbouring wards. The IGPs such as fish farming and poultry were also supported through capacity enhancement and trainings as well as ongoing support was provided for initiatives during the cost/no cost extension periods to make sure that they reach levels of sustainability.

The infrastructure that had deteriorated was repaired by the ECCD management committees, who are actively undertaking good care of the outdoor play centres and other facilities within ECCD centres and using skills acquired during trainings. The community based IGPs established continue to play a central role in sustaining ECCD centres.

More male engagement strategies were deployed to ensure increased participation of men in awareness trainings on child rights and protection and parenting skills as well as in project activities such as IGPs and nutrition for children. Plan International continues to work with the Ministry of Women Affairs, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health to ensure that males are engaged. A deliberate effort for male participation during refresher trainings on child rights and protection and parenting skills were implemented during the cost extension period.

Plan International managed to make the ECCD structures more friendly to children with disabilities by constructing toilet seats and making learning materials accessible to different kinds of disabilities.

CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL REPORT

For any questions on this article, please contact:

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NOTICEBOARD

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION AGENDA PACKAGE

Plan International's new Research and Evaluation Agenda was developed to drive forward our research and evaluation work as we move forward into the new Global Strategy period, ensuring that evidence continues to underpin our programming and advocacy work. While led by MERL, this was a collaborative project, which included close collaboration with GTPP and DRM at the Global Hub, plus bringing together experts from different thematic areas and parts of the organisation, to identify strategic priorities for research and evaluation for Plan International.

If you are thinking about commissioning a piece of research or an evaluation, or are responding to a funding opportunity, then do take a look at the resources available on the Research and Evaluation Agenda Package Planet Page. You will find information on:

- **What are the priority research and evaluation topics for Plan International in 2022 and beyond?**

  Experts from across the organisation have identified priority topics for investigation by Plan International, responding to critical evidence gaps that we need to fill to support improvements to our programming and our advocacy work.

- **What research and evaluation is already happening within the organisation?**

  The new R&E Tracker maps out what research and evaluations are currently taking place within Plan International (or have recently been completed).

ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

As a global child-rights organisation we are strongly committed to keeping all participants, and especially children and young people, safe during their participation in Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (MER) initiatives.

In order to support all offices in integrating ethics into their MER initiatives, we have a package of guidelines, templates and trainings available in English, French and Spanish that can be accessed via our Ethics and Safeguarding Planet Page.

Plan International's Ethics Review Team supports offices in gaining ethical approval for their MER initiatives and are also available to help answer any questions you might have or offer guidance and advice.

COLLABORATE ON FUTURE EDITIONS OF OPENPLAN

If you know of any interesting research or evaluation studies being conducted across Plan International that you would like to see featured in future editions, please get in touch through the Global Hub Research email address below.

If you have any questions in relation to OPENPlan, the Research and Evaluation Agenda Package or Ethics and Safeguarding in MER, please contact us at research@plan-international.org