

Because We are Girls



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'Real Choices, Real Lives' Cohort Study Update

"I hope she is not stupid like me and that she studies. I hope she is 'someone' tomorrow."

The mother of three year-old Dariana from the Dominican Republic

The 'Real Choices, Real Lives' cohort study was set up in 2007 to follow 142 girls from birth until their ninth birthday, in 2015 – the target year, set by world leaders, for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Over time the aim of the study is to build a picture of how the fact that they are girls impacts on their lives.

Now in its third year, the study continues to follow the lives of 134 girls and their families living in nine countries across the world – Brazil, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines and Vietnam.

Plan initially set up the study in order to bring to life the analysis and statistics being presented in our 'Because I am a Girl: the State of the World's Girls' report series. Each year, community researchers visit the girls and their families to find out how the girls are getting on.

As Plan's 2007 and 2008 reports have shown, discrimination against girls and young women remains deeply entrenched and widely tolerated throughout the world. Many of the challenges girls will face start from the moment they are born. This study offers a unique opportunity to examine closely what happens in the lives of girls during their first nine years – the choices that are made on their behalf, how they are fed, how they are educated. Plan has been interviewing the families taking part for three years now, resulting in some significant information about the daily experiences of these girls. So far, researchers have gathered baseline data, and monitored health indicators, the household division of labour and daily diaries of the girls' lives. They have also had revealing discussions with families

about how girls' lives a generation or two ago differed from the lives of girls today. The graphs throughout this section show some of the issues that have been monitored so far.

Who is in the sample?

The study is following a core group of girls from nine countries. Each country has a cohort of between 13 and 22 girls (see map for more details). The majority of the girls live either in rural settings or on the outskirts of large towns. Many will not have easy access to a secondary school or to a major hospital. Most are from farming families, and some families supplement their income by small-scale trading – particularly those in El Salvador, Dominican Republic and Brazil. Others have taken to seasonal migration for work, as in the case of families in Benin and Togo.

'Real Choices, Real Lives' is a relatively small cohort study. Its size allows our researchers to examine, in detail, a range of issues that affect girls by using qualitative research methods. In the first two years of the study, baseline information was gathered through structured interviews. By year three, researchers began to explore the families' lives further through semi-structured interviews with the girls' parents, grandparents and other relatives.

There are some practical challenges to running this kind of study. Individual family members or whole families may move to other regions, providing little or no information about their whereabouts. In fact, five of the girls are already reported to have moved. Families may also decide they do not want to be interviewed each year. However, only one family has chosen to leave the study so far. The intrusion into family life has to be carefully considered.

This year, in addition to the annual questionnaire, Plan's researchers visited the Philippines and Uganda to find out in greater detail about the health, education and daily lives of Darna, Mahalia, Justine and Joy.

Girls in focus

The Philippines

The Philippines is an archipelago of over 7,000 islands separating the South China Sea from the Pacific Ocean, although most of its 88 million people live on just 11 of them. It has the highest birth rate in Asia, with the population predicted to double in the next 30 years. It is also a poor country, with tens of millions of people living below the poverty line – almost 60 per cent live on under \$2 a day – and an economy which is heavily reliant on the money sent back by overseas Filipino workers, many of whom are women. Manila, the capital city, is a draw for millions of migrants seeking a living and an escape from impoverished rural areas. As a result it has become one of the most crowded cities on earth. The Philippines ranks 90 out of 177 countries in the United Nations Development Index.

Darna, Philippines

Darna's favourite place in the house is the kitchen, where there is a little swing. She is an active and healthy child who climbs and plays ball with her older brothers. She is a good eater and her favourite food is instant noodles. The house Darna lives in has its own well in the backyard and its own latrine.

Darna lives with her father and grandmother and hasn't seen her mother since she went to Manila to work. Darna's father says that his wife left because they fought a lot, usually over money. He farms part of his mother's and, growing and harvesting coconut trees three times a



year and earning extra money by giving people lifts on his motorbike.

Darna is not yet old enough to go to school but her brother is doing well and is on the school honours list. Her other brother, aged six, will go to school next year and then it will be Darna's turn. Darna's grandmother, who pays for her grandchildren's education from farming her land but who herself dropped out of school early, considers that there are more opportunities for girls to learn than in her day: "I was married at 16 and had my first child at 18." For Darna's father, educating his children is an investment for getting work. He wasn't able to finish school because he left at 17 to marry Darna's mother. For him, "it is more important for girls to finish than for boys because they cannot work on the farm or in construction, so if they are not educated they end up doing domestic work where they can easily be exploited".

Darna's grandmother doesn't mind what her grandchildren do for a living but her father would like Darna to have more options than he did, by completing her studies and getting married later. "But it depends what she wants," he says.

Mahalia, Philippines

Mahalia is the youngest of 10 and the house is noisy with the sounds of children running in and out. Both 43, her mother and father come from big families, and have been married since they were 17. It is a treasure to have so many children. "But Mahalia is my last," her mother says with a wry smile.

The house has a concrete floor and three partitions that divide it into kitchen, living area and raised sleeping area. There is a large courtyard outside with a tree giving shade. The courtyard contains their own latrine, but they share the well with 10 other families. Mahalia's mother collects water for the family's daily needs, but individual family members wanting a bath have to fetch their own water. With no electricity in the house the children must also fetch the firewood to cook on.

Underweight for her age, Mahalia has been unwell and her parents have treated her themselves with herbal remedies and paracetamol. They are entitled to some free medicines but say that they are not enough.



Girl with her mother, Cambodia

Mahalia's father is the caretaker of a fish farm and gets 15 per cent of the harvest, which if they have a good one averages around 25,000 pesos (\$525) every four months. With Mahalia's mother looking after the children full time the family relies on Mahalia's father's income, which he supplements with farm labouring. Mahalia's father is particularly vocal about the importance of sending children to school, having been denied the chance by his father who forced him to leave and go to work at a young age. "Now it is the responsibility of parents to send their children – both boys and girls – to school," he says. Both of Mahalia's parents are keen to see Mahalia and all of their children better educated than they were. Their hopes for Mahalia are that she could become a nurse and take care of them when they are old. However, it seems that some careers are out of bounds. Another daughter wanted to study criminology but they said they dissuaded her "because she was a girl".

Uganda

Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa, stretching along the equator between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya. Uganda's economy is predominantly rural, with about four-fifths of the population living off farming. Eighty-five per cent of people subsist on less than \$1 a day. Life expectancy is just 46 years and Uganda is ranked 154 out of 177 in the United Nations Development Index.

Despite significant progress in several areas, including the control of HIV and AIDS and in the numbers of children in primary school, 85 per cent still do not attend secondary school and the under-five mortality rate remains high. Malaria, respiratory infections, diarrhoea and HIV and AIDS mean that one in seven children dies before reaching their fifth birthday.

Justine, Uganda

Justine is the youngest of eight children living together in one room with their parents and grandfather on the family's smallholding. Justine is an early riser and is up at 5.30am every day, opening the door to wake everyone up. Justine works with her mother in the garden, helping to hoe the ground and do other jobs alongside her family. At midday, she returns to the house and helps her mother prepare a lunch of jack fruit, oranges, fish and maize bread (known as 'posho'). Justine "likes pretending to cook and she does everything I do. If I peel, she has to peel," says her mother.



Girl, East Africa

In the afternoon, Justine helps her mother with the washing and then often has a nap before her brothers and sisters return from school – playing with them until the family goes to bed at 10pm.

Fortunately, Justine has been a healthy child and the fact that the family have mosquito nets means that, so far, she has avoided contracting malaria. A bright and independent little girl, Justine wants to dress up like mum, constantly changing her clothes and wearing her mother's shoes! Next year, when Justine is four, she will go to primary school. To do so she will have to walk four kilometres there and back every day with her brothers and sisters. However, her parents are already concerned for her welfare because boys make sexual advances to girls as they walk.

According to her grandfather, the future for Justine and other girls is brighter than it has been in the past: "Things have changed. Back then, they [women] did not have rights and they could not decide to work. It is good that women should have rights."

Justine's father also thinks that things should change for women: "We should have high expectations of girls so that when they excel they will come back and help us." Her father hopes that one day Justine will become a midwife.

Joy, Uganda

Joy starts her day with milky tea and a chapatti. She attends a kindergarten in the morning which allows her mother to work until she picks her up at midday. At 2pm the family gathers to eat yesterday's leftovers. Joy spends the afternoon playing. Although she is an only child she is never lonely as there are lots of playmates in the village. Like many girls, she likes pretending to cook and helps her mother with washing dishes and sweeping. On the whole, Joy is a fairly well child, but has already had malaria as the family have no sleeping nets to protect them from mosquitoes. One major incident happened when Joy was four months old: she suffered a fall and almost lost her tongue.



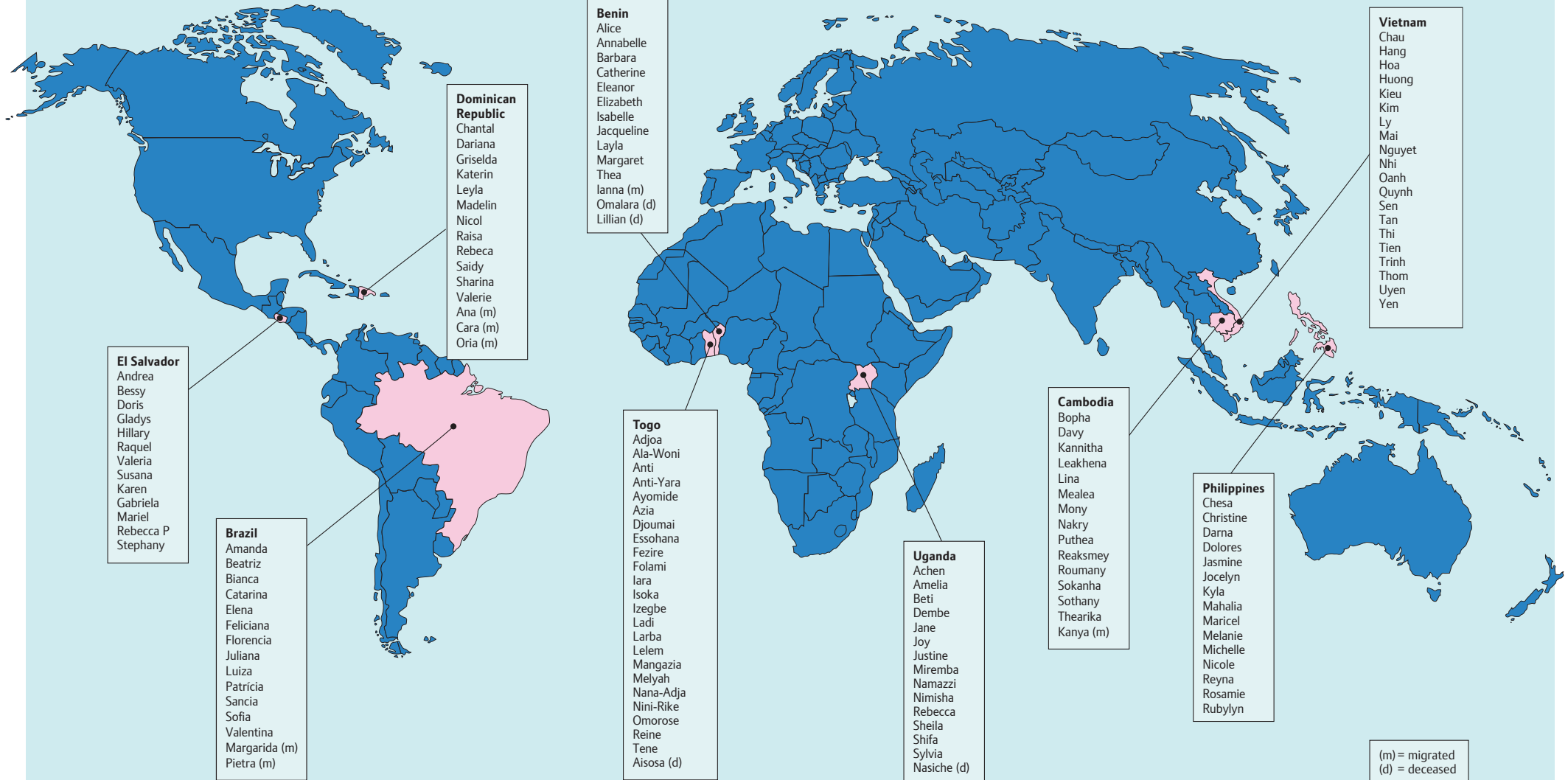
Girl and her family, East Africa

Incredibly, her tongue was saved after a desperate seven-kilometre cycle to the nearest hospital and her only scar is a small lisp when she speaks.

Joy's village has a pre-school supported by Plan, and her parents are keen for Joy to attend. "I want Joy to grow up into someone educated," says her mother. "I would like her to go to school and get a better life and an education," chimes Joy's dad. However, even with Plan's support, Joy's parents are unsure how they would be able to earn the 10,000 Ugandan shillings (about \$5) to send her to pre-school. Their meagre earnings from agriculture and pottery leaves no spare cash for school fees or uniform costs, although they hope to make the extra money from a pig they have just bought.

Because We are Girls

Real Choices, Real Lives Cohort Study Update



This is how we support ourselves

Life is tough for many of the families taking part in the study. Most are living a subsistence existence – eking out a living from the land that surrounds them. In Vietnam, two of the families taking part report a regular annual shortage of food for three months of the year. Even a small change in their circumstances, or one bad harvest, can have major implications for families who have little choice but to live in this way. The majority of the girls' parents are poorly educated; most of them have only completed a basic education.

In Cambodia, the country's civil war of the 1970s had a major impact on the educational chances of the girls' mothers. Almost a quarter did not attend school at all. The Cambodian families in the study each have a small rice paddy plot and some also grow vegetables for their subsistence. When the harvest is good, the extra rice crop is sold for cash to pay for their children's education, to purchase essential goods and occasionally to buy meat and other protein products.

The main income of the Cambodian families in the study is from rice and cassava cultivation. Last year, net income was approximately \$1,500, mainly from selling the cassava crop. However, this year the price of cassava has dropped. In the last harvest the families also reaped 2,400 kilos of rice. In general, the families can support themselves through farming and can even sometimes save money for improving their home. However, they are not sure whether, in the coming year, their income will meet even their basic needs.

Many families combine several economic activities to make ends meet and even at the age of three, the girls are beginning to play an important role in this aspect of their families' lives. Little Dariana in the Dominican Republic accompanies her grandmother to sell sweets at the school door. If they have the means to do so, older children or adults move to nearby towns or capital cities. The mother of Andrea in

El Salvador has gone to Italy to find work to support her family. Migration is often seasonal, but for some families a more permanent separation will have a profound effect on those left behind.

Juggling financial responsibilities

Jasmine, Philippines

Jasmine's father shares a boat with their neighbour and whatever they catch will be divided into three: two shares for the owner of the boat, one share for Jasmine's father. The owner sometimes buys Jasmine's father's share for 25 pesos per kilo. Ireneo also helps his own father on their farm and earns 1,000 pesos (\$20) to 1,500 pesos a month this way. Jasmine's mother, in addition to taking care of her four children, helps her husband by collecting firewood. Her mother-in-law takes care of Jasmine when she goes to the nearby mountain to collect the wood, or she takes Jasmine with her when no one is available to look after her.

Reine, Togo

The family lives from agriculture, but the harvest was poor this year due to heavy rainfall. Therefore, Reine's mother has travelled to another part of Togo to look for work in order to support her family.

Valerie, Dominican Republic

"At the moment making a living is difficult. I go very early to the hill to



Girl with her family, Latin America

tend the land and monitor what I have planted. You need money to go to the market. To get money you need to sell your produce. I have very little to sell: some pumpkins that I have planted and some left-over corn. We nearly always eat pumpkins because this is what we have... I have a son that lives in the capital and he sends me about RD\$2,000 per month (about \$57). We can survive on this," says Valerie's mother.

Anti-Yara, Togo

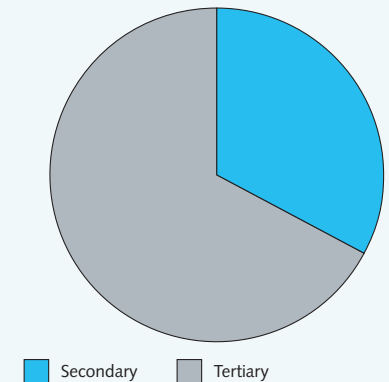
The family makes its living by selling salt. The older children help out on the family farm outside of school hours. Anti-Yara's mother is lucky to have a brother who lives in the capital of Togo, Lome, who sometimes sends the family small amounts of money to supplement their meagre income.

Mahalia, Philippines

Mahalia's father looks after a fish farm and gets 15 per cent of the harvest. If they have a good harvest his income averages around 25,000 pesos (\$525) every four months. One year, there was no harvest because of disease. Luckily, he was still given 1,300 pesos a month by the owner of the fish farm. Mahalia's father also works as a seasonal farm labourer. The family owned a cow but sold it to help buy a motorbike for their eldest son, who uses it to earn money by ferrying people around. They say three of their children are working and help the family when they can. Mahalia's mother does not work because she has to look after her 10 children.

In Brazil, the government offers a national social programme – called Bolsa Familia – to support the poorest families. It takes the form of a monthly grant of \$40 per child and is given on the condition that families send their children to school and ensure that they are vaccinated. Social programmes like this can have a positive effect on girls' lives, particularly as girls are first to drop out of school when family finances are stretched. Two of the families in the cohort study – Bianca's and Feliciano's – are receiving the Bolsa Familia.

Desired educational attainment



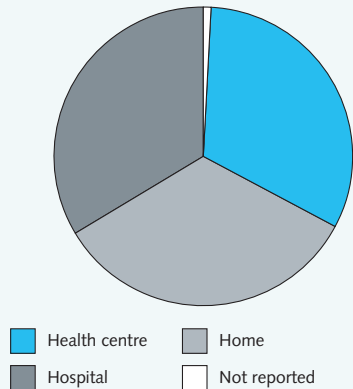
Despite the economic challenges they face, the families tend to have high aspirations for their children. More than half would like to see their daughters pursue careers that involve further education and training to become midwives, nurses and teachers. In future years, we will explore whether parental aspirations for sons differ from their aspirations for daughters, whether the aspirations of mothers and fathers differ and the impact this has on girls.

This year, community researchers interviewed the grandparents of many of the girls. In the Dominican Republic, they spoke at length about how much life had changed in their communities over a generation or two. Griselda's grandmother commented:

"Before, everything was difficult. There weren't the same opportunities for making money that there are today. Before, we had to exchange one product for another. Now, if you make money, you can buy what you like."

Sharina's grandmother observed that although "the cost of living is higher it is easier to get things. [When I was younger], you had to get water at its source and travel using animals. Now we have water 10 steps away from the house. It makes a big difference. Now it's easier to make money, and children play more. Before, we had to start working at the farm at a very early age."

Place of Birth

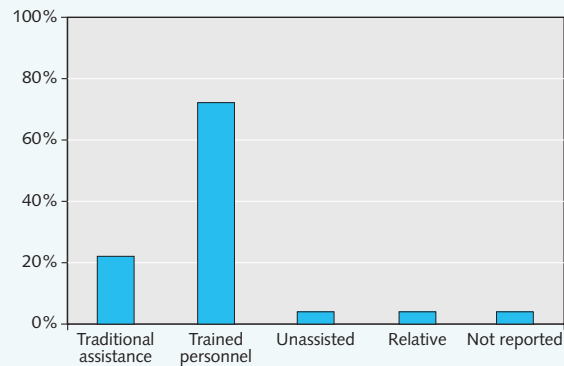


Let's start at the very beginning

When we first visited the girls, they were infants. The majority of them were born either at home or in a local health centre. In most cases, their births were attended by trained personnel – a midwife, a trained birth attendant or, in the case of the Brazilian girls only, a doctor. However, almost a quarter of their births were attended by a traditional assistant or someone untrained in the case of a medical emergency. More than half a million girls and women worldwide die every year due to unnecessary complications from pregnancy and childbirth.

Many of the mothers of the girls we are following were children themselves when they gave birth. All of the El Salvadorian mothers were teenagers when they gave

Birth Assistance

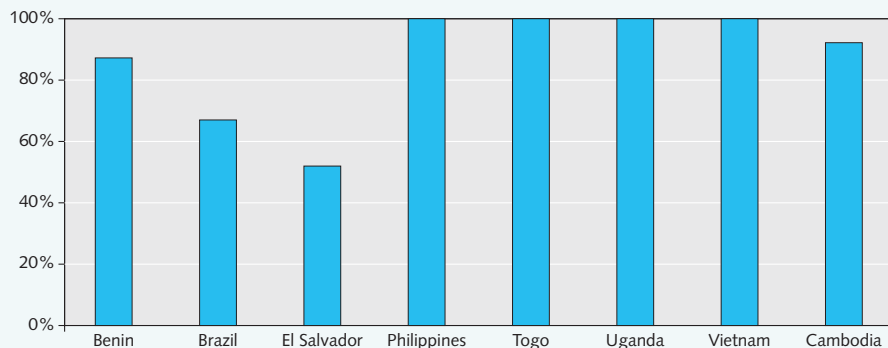


birth. For many a mother, the girl in the cohort study is not her first child. For example, Hillary's mother, age 19, already has three children and she and her husband are looking forward to having more. Many of the young mothers have stated that they do not use family planning; the majority are single parents.

Looking after the health of our daughters

The vast majority of the initial cohort of 142 girls – 87 per cent over eight countries – were breastfed during the first six months of life. But there were variations – only half of the Salvadorian girls and 66 per cent of the Brazilian girls were breastfed. By the time community researchers had made their

Percentage of Girls Breastfed from Birth



Girl and her family, East Africa

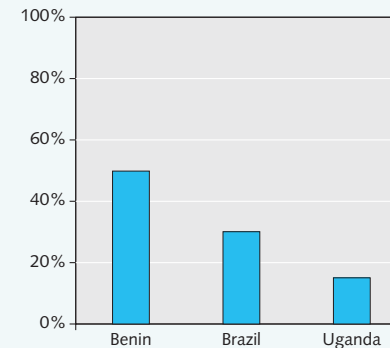
second visit, the babies were being introduced to solid food, and most were eating enthusiastically. By the time of the third visit, most of the baby girls were enjoying a range of foods. We are monitoring their growth progress and will report on this in more detail in 2011.

Worldwide, girls under the age of five are slightly more likely to be malnourished than boys of the same age.⁵²⁵ All of the families taking part in the study have stated that girls eat the same as boys, and that there is no distinction

between what adults and children eat for their main meals. Still, there are reports of visible malnutrition and inadequate diets in the Philippines, El Salvador and Brazil. Plan staff and local health staff are following up these reports.

When we first visited the girls before their first birthday, the vast majority of them were in good health. There were some exceptions, though, as malaria is endemic in parts of Uganda, Togo and Benin, and some of the girls from these countries had been ill almost from birth. By our third visit, families across the study were reporting a range of health concerns – from serious illnesses like malaria, dysentery and dengue fever, to persistent chest complaints and observed malnutrition.

Percentage of Girls Breastfed at 6 months



UNDER-FIVE MORTALITY

In many of the countries we are studying, infant mortality rates – the number of babies who die before their first birthday – are high. In Benin, infant mortality rates are 148 per 1,000 live births – in Britain this figure is just 5 per 1,000.⁵²⁶

Despite surviving their first birthday, four girls in the study have subsequently died – Lillian and Omalara from Benin, Aisosa in Togo, and Resty from Uganda.

Lillian died in a fire in her home and Aisosa also died from a home-based accident. Omalara showed no signs of illness but died suddenly from a fit. She was taken to hospital but could not be saved. Nasiche died from malaria.

Almost all of the girls in the Ugandan cohort have suffered from malaria in their short lives. Malaria is a serious childhood disease and their parents do their best to treat an illness which is endemic to this region of Uganda. Even with treatment, malaria can leave children with ongoing anaemia, as has already been reported by the parents of Namazzi, another of the Ugandan girls. The girls' families are able to get free treatment at the local health centre on some occasions. However, several of them reported having to travel up to 10 kilometres by bicycle or taxi to see a doctor in a hospital. The use of mosquito nets is vital in the fight against malaria, as is spreading information about how the disease is transmitted. Justine is the only girl in the Ugandan group who has not had malaria, and her family is the only one that reported using mosquito nets.

Although governments do not routinely report on child mortality according to gender, we suspect that globally larger numbers of girls die before the age of five than boys. Boys tend to receive better care. Later in the Real Choices, Real Lives study, we will be comparing the care the girls receive compared with their brothers or other male relatives.

Many of the girls in the Cambodian cohort contracted dengue fever, a disease which affected large areas of South East Asia in 2008. Small children with poor immune

systems are the most likely to contract an illness like dengue fever. For a poor family, paying \$125 to visit a private doctor can have an unimaginable impact on a family's fortunes. Take Mealea's family in Cambodia: Mealea had become seriously ill and needed to be transported 70 kilometres by motorbike to a private clinic. There was no doctor in her village who could treat her for dengue fever. She also contracted typhoid fever. These are two serious illnesses, from which a small child could easily die. The family had to borrow the \$125 needed to treat Mealea. She is now well again.

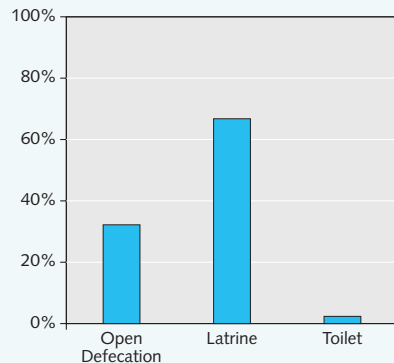
In the Dominican Republic, Leyla's grandmother explains how she does her best to ensure that her granddaughter gets the best medical care she can access: "There is a clinic quite close to here, but because there are never medicines there, I go to the hospital where medicines are free. Medicines are free in the clinic as well but the stock is always finished [at which point the family will have to pay]. Besides there are only trainee [doctors] at the clinic and I don't like that." Saily also lives with her grandmother, who says: "I buy Saily vitamins and anti-parasite medication. She is always healthy and fat." But accessing regular medical care remains a challenge for some families, like Valerie's, where three of the six children have observed health concerns. Valerie herself has a serious skin infection, her brother, a harelip/cleft palate and her younger brother, a protruding stomach, often evident in children

suffering from malnutrition. This family lives in a remote mountainous area and this will doubtless be a factor in their ability to access health-care facilities.

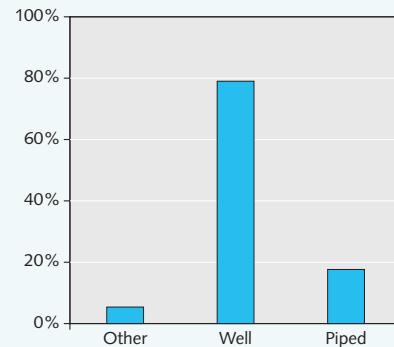
Community researchers have looked at the families' access to clean, running water and their sanitation facilities. Almost 70 per cent of the families taking part in the study have access to a latrine, either in their own or in a neighbouring yard. However, more than 30 per cent have no sanitation whatsoever. This can have a major impact on children's health – the typhoid fever and dysentery reported by some of the families is contracted from water contaminated by faeces.

In the Dominican Republic, Nicol's mother works hard to protect her daughter's health but this can be difficult where the water supply is not suitable for human consumption. "I need to boil the water for five minutes and then put a few malagueta pepper corns to take out the funny taste." However, she recalls that Nicol "got sick many times; with vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, constipation. She had to get treatment a lot. The closest clinic is about two kilometres from here. The service is free, thanks to the 'Social Insurance'." As these girls grow up, the proximity of clean water will have a major impact on their lives. Almost everywhere in the developing world, fetching water is considered female work. In communities where there is no water near the family home, this particular task can take many hours out of a girl's day and have a devastating impact on her education.

Sanitation



Girls' Water Source



Girl, Philippines

At play

The vast majority of the girls we are following spend their days filled with play, in the company of neighbours and friends. They are largely in the care of their mothers, although some are jointly cared for by their grandmothers or by other members of the extended family. Their mothers are certainly their main influence and many of the games that the girls play at this stage involve imitating what they see around them. In Cambodia, for example, the girls play 'baklok baylo', a game played by a group of children using their own home-made toys to imitate adult activities.

Justine, Uganda

"She likes to pretend [to do]cookery and she does everything I do. If I peel, she has to peel."

Elaine, Benin

She likes to spend her time in the courtyard. Sometimes, when her grandmother goes to the fields, Elaine goes along. She likes to play with a set of drums her mother bought her. She also likes to imitate saleswomen by putting boxes and bowls on a platter. She likes to play with her cousins in the house.

Joy, Uganda

Like many little girls, she likes to play pretend cooking but also helps with sweeping and washing the dishes. However, her mother told us that she also

likes to play dodge ball and plays with wooden cars made out of local materials.

There is evidence that by the age of five both girls and boys have already internalised the gender roles that are expected to play – and the status that these roles will or will not give them. Therefore, the influences during this crucial stage really do shape their attitudes. These influences can range from conversations within families and observations of who does what within the household to what the girls hear on the radio. When we visited the girls in Cambodia, the most popular song on the radio was called 'To ask for someone's daughter in marriage', which tells of a man being dissuaded from marrying a particular woman because the price of her dowry is too high. Almost all of the girls' parents noted that the girls enjoy singing along to this song.

Early learning

Girls living in societies where they are particularly disadvantaged can benefit more than boys from interventions that foster their physical, cognitive and emotional development, such as pre-school and community-based facilities. As they grow up, girls need to have the skills and confidence to influence decisions that will affect them. For example: how long should they remain in school? When should they get married?



Girl, Uganda



Girl, Brazil

Our researchers in El Salvador are already reporting that girls in this cohort who will have no local access to pre-school facilities are showing the effects of lack of interaction and stimulation on their ability to communicate. Some of the girls in Uganda, Brazil, Dominican Republic and the Philippines have already started

their formal education journey.

Griselda, Dominican Republic

"Griselda goes to CONANI every day. It's really close, look, just opposite. But it's her father who takes her and collects her each day. She will attend this school until she is six years old, when she will start first grade. The primary school is next door. Griselda loves the bread that CONANI gives for breakfast. She always tells me this. She doesn't like it when the teacher tells her when the classes end and that it's home time."

CONANI is a Dominican initiative of the government's National Advisory Council for Children. The Council is responsible for developing government policy for the protection and treatment of children. One of its best-known functions is to set up learning centres for children under the age of five. In rural areas, any early learning centre is usually called CONANI, whether it is administered by the state or by a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Joy, Uganda

Joy attends pre-school every day until midday. However, her parents expressed their worry about her pre-school fees. While Plan has helped to support the pre-school with training for the staff and play equipment, the parents need to provide school fees and uniform. For three months, this costs 10,000 Ugandan shillings (\$5). Joy's parents are not sure whether they will be able to afford to keep

her at pre-school.

Margaret, Benin

Margaret already attends nursery school, which is 1.5 kilometres away. Her sister, Analie, is in the second year of primary school. Analie goes to school on her own. On her way back she tends to have fun and take her time to return back home. Sometimes she takes up to an hour to come home. Margaret, on the other hand, always makes the trip with her mother.

Namazzi, Uganda

Namazzi will start the local Seventh Day Adventist school when she is five. She is unable to go to a pre-school because it is too far away and it would be a very long walk. She will go to the same school as her brother and sister. It will take one hour and a half to walk [each way]. Her mother told us: "I think someone will have to walk with her each day at first but when she is eight then she can walk to school on her own."

Although many parents have suggested that they would like to send their daughters to a pre-school, in many communities no such facility exists. In others, it is too far away for a young girl to walk to alone. By the age of five or six, the girls will qualify to attend



Girl, Cambodia



Girl, Vietnam

primary school. Some parents are already expressing concerns about the quality of formal education available, stating that the nearest school or the school they can afford does not offer the best education for their girls. Many are worried about the distance their daughters will have to travel. They share the concerns of

parents anywhere in the world with a child about to start school. Will she cross the road safely? Will she like her teachers?

Justine, Uganda

When Justine is four she will go to primary school, although it is four kilometres away. She will have to walk to and from school every day with her brother. Her parents express concern about this, not because of the distance but because boys make sexual advances to girls as they walk.

Mangazia, Togo

The nearest school to Mangazia's family home is about three kilometres away. Mangazia's parents say they will have to enrol her in this school but they wish one were built in their village. It would be better.

Protection

Although the family and the community are meant to feel like havens of safety for children, they are often the places where millions, especially girls, face violence and abuse. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states that all children should be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse, including traditional practices that harm. These rights are echoed in the national laws in all of the countries in our study. However, nearly half of sexual assaults worldwide are against girls aged 15 or younger.

A large proportion of the parents and grandparents we spoke to in the Philippines,

were worried about the increased risk of sexual violence their daughters and granddaughters now face. The increased mobility of girls and young women as they move away from the immediate family to attend school is often seen as contributing to her vulnerability.

Older, powerful relatives often maintain traditional views about gender roles and responsibilities. This is particularly so in relation to practices like forced marriage, dowry and, in some countries, female genital cutting.

Annabelle's grandmother, Benin

"In the past, girls didn't go to school. Marriage was forced and children helped their parents in the fields. Nowadays girls go to school and can choose their husband."

Elaine's Grandmother, Benin

"In the old days, people couldn't visit young girls in the presence of her parents. Young people were respectful. If a boy didn't have a sister, it would be difficult for him to have a wife because the sister served as a bargaining chip with the bride's family. In other words, marriage was forced. Today, girls are free to choose their husband. Men can marry even if they don't have a sister. Girls are no longer ashamed to invite men over."

What is already clear from the cohort study is that despite major changes in recent years, girls living in families unable to escape a cycle of poverty are still particularly vulnerable. The families we are following in El Salvador demonstrate that early pregnancy means dropping out of school early and then having to take low paid or risky work. Families are also being split up due to the need to migrate for work, and many are living in violent neighbourhoods in poor housing. The lack of education of the girls' mothers is reflected in the inadequate diets of their baby daughters. Additionally, the psychological burden of becoming a mother at the age of 13 or 14 is having a knock-on effect on the young girls' own emotional development.

When girls become mothers – El Salvador

We are following 13 girls in El Salvador, all of whose mothers were themselves only children when they gave birth.

Bessy

We highlighted Bessy's story in the 2007 report, when she had just celebrated her first birthday. Bessy's mother was 13 years old when she gave birth to her at home, without the assistance of a midwife or birth attendant. Bessy is her second child. When we visited the family again in 2009, Bessy was coming up to her third birthday. Her mother is now 16. Mother and children live with Bessy's grandparents on the outskirts of a small town. Despite support from her parents, Bessy's mother is trying to earn a living, but she is finding it hard to provide for Bessy. The child's diet consists mainly of bread and coffee, a common practice in the countryside. Early life is proving tough for Bessy and she interacts and communicates little.

Gabriela

Gabriela lives in a small house with her mother, who is 16 years old, her younger sister and her grandparents. Although he no longer lives with them, Gabriela's father supports the family with \$25 a month. Her mother sells food on the local streets and products from a catalogue. But the stress of her separation from Gabriela's father, coupled with the stress of raising two young children, is taking its toll. It is clear that Gabriela's mother's own situation is uncertain.

Gladys

Gladys has had a tumultuous two and a half years of life. A year ago, her 18 year-old mother left her home to move in with an aunt. Now, her mother has confirmed that she is in a new relationship and would like to formalise her living arrangement with her new partner.

Rebecca P

Rebecca P lives with her 16 year-old mother, her grandparents and several aunts and uncles. The family has not said who Rebecca P's father is. Rebecca's mother is not in good physical health and

despite suggesting that she would like to do so, has not returned to school.

Stephany

Stephany is now three and a half years old, and lives with her 18 year-old mother and her 23 year-old father. Her father works hard as a labourer – either as a bricklayer or a gardener, depending on the work he is able to get. Stephany's mother cannot read and write, and never went to school. Plan researchers have suggested to her that it is possible for her to attend adult classes, but she does not appear to be interested.

Hillary

Hillary is Bessy's cousin. She lives just half an hour's walk away with her 19 year-old mother, her 22 year-old father, her five year-old brother, her baby sister and other members of their extended family. The family lives on land owned by Hillary's paternal grandmother and makes its living from farming. Hillary eats well – every day she drinks milk from her bottle and eats chicken at least twice a week. Her parents do not use family planning and are looking forward to having more children.

Participation

One of the most striking revelations in this year's interviews came from the conversations with the grandparents and other older relatives. Across continents, they expressed similar sentiments about a range of issues, and described increasing opportunities for girls. These have arisen largely through the girls' access to education but also through changes in legislation and general attitudes about the role of girls and women in their communities. Across all countries, access to education was stated as the most significant opportunity girls now have.

Davy, Cambodia

Davy's 84 year-old grandfather was also observing the discussion. The interviewer questioned him about social changes. He said that when he was 21 years old, parents did not educate girls due to the lack of a school. Besides, Khmer culture held that the girl would become a man's

wife and take care of home and child.

Education was important for a boy because he would earn money to support the family. Now girls have the same chance as boys to go to school.

In Cambodia, life has changed drastically during the course of just one generation. Almost a quarter of the mothers of the girls we are following have had no formal education, the result of disruption caused by civil war. However, this seems to have strengthened their resolve to educate their own daughters.



Girl and her mother, Cambodia

Leakhena, Cambodia

Leakhena's mother said that many things had changed since she was young, for example health and education programmes. Unfortunately Leakhena's mother did not go to school as she was born during the war. She is committed to supporting all her children through school.

Sokanha, Cambodia

Sokanha's mother said that when she was growing up, many families did not like to send girls to school: "My family was very poor. My mother did not allow me to go school, although she sent all of my brothers."

Parents have high ambitions for their daughters. As the girls grow up, we will examine how and whether they are able to be active participants in the world around them.

Kyla's mother, Philippines

Unlike most of the other mothers in the cohort, Kyla's mother has had more education than her husband. Kyla's mother has a teaching degree and is a graduate of Bible school. Her father reached second year of the same college course. Their home is an old two-room parsonage in which they have lived for just over a year. The family moved due to Kyla's mother's appointment as the pastor in charge of the church. She is the one who brings home a regular income. Kyla's father takes care of the family's one-hectare rice field. He said: "With [my wife's] responsibilities, I share some of the household work such as cooking and taking care of our children

whenever I am here. I also need to make regular visits to our farm." He added that even before his wife became a pastor, they shared responsibilities in their home.

Namazzi's mother, Uganda

"When I was a girl I was only responsible to my parents but now I am responsible for my husband and the family. Some women around here have developed a married women's group and this is good. In church, I am a mobiliser and I help women to come to church. I have also set up a group called 'Friends in Need' where women save money. If someone has a child or someone who died in the family then we can lend a helping hand with some money. We also run a small loan scheme where we lend money to women for three months. They pay interest and it all has to be repaid. In this way, women can sell things like cabbages and tomatoes. The group is now one year old and we are doing well."

We look forward to hearing more of the voices of the girls' mothers and other members of the family as the study progresses. The influence of their grandparents is very important, particularly when extended families share a home. Since the girls spend almost all of their time at this stage of their lives in the shadow of their mothers, we will discuss the attitudes of mothers in more detail and examine the roles they play within the family and in their wider community. A mother's attitudes and the roles she plays will have a profound effect on the girls' lives. The higher a mother's education, the more impact she has in her own household and the greater her ability to realise her own aspirations for her daughters.

Saidy's grandmother, Dominican Republic

"I want Saidy to study and do what she likes. I want her to have a future and be who I couldn't be. It seems as though she will like studying. I want her mum to help her. Her mum is working as a cleaning maid in a hotel in the capital and she wants to study medicine."

For more details of the study and to track the progress of each girl, visit www.becauseiamagirl.org

Photos in this report are not of the cohort girls. The girl's names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Growing up in Uganda – an illustrative tale

This is the imagined story of a young girl in Uganda. It could be any of the little girls we are following – Amelia, Justine, Sheila or Joy. It spells out both the good and the bad things that could happen in her life. She could get the care and investment she needs from her family, community and the state and go on to be a secure and active citizen or she might not. She could fall through the trap door of poor nutrition, lack of education and vulnerability to early pregnancy or HIV and AIDS. These could keep her trapped in poverty – a poverty she will hand on to her own children. As the story tells us, this is not inevitable – investing time, care and money in these young girls is right for them and good for us all.



Age 0-5

A girl is born and everybody celebrates her birth. **ASSET**

Her family goes to register her birth and she now has a legal identity.

She has access to vaccinations and health care that will ensure she survives past the first five years of her life.

Her 'Agogo' proudly leaves a plot of the family land designated just for her in his will.

From the age of three her father takes her every day to an early years learning programme where she'll learn skills that will better prepare her for primary school. If all the girls of her age in Uganda had the opportunity to go to these centres, within 25 years the national net budget saving would bring in an extra \$31 billion.⁵²⁷

Lack of nutrition – a girl dies before she reaches five years of age. **TRAPDOOR**

Age 6-11

Her brother is encouraged to share the responsibility for household chores, leaving her with more time to play with friends and keep up with her school work. After completing an extra year of primary education she will earn 10 to 20 per cent more once she starts working.⁵²⁸

Completing the first five years of primary school means her children's chance of surviving beyond age five will increase by 40 per cent.⁵²⁹

Burdened by household chores – **TRAPDOOR**
She is so busy with household chores she has no time for school and making friends. She spends all day collecting water, gathering wood and taking care of her siblings. She is one of 689,920 Ugandan girls who will never attend school because they have to help at home. Without education these girls will likely never get a job – which would have paid them \$1,200 annually. For all these girls this amounts to a \$828 million loss to the Ugandan economy.⁵³⁰

Age 12-17

She begins puberty and has the freedom and feels safe to go anywhere she wants in the community. She enjoys playing soccer with her friends in the local field after school. She enjoys her classes and hopes to complete secondary school with good grades. She knows all about sexually transmitted infections and how to steer clear of them; because she's gone to secondary school she's three times less likely to be HIV positive.⁵³¹

Because she's going to secondary school she will marry later and have fewer, healthier babies. In fact she will have about four fewer children.⁵³² She will invest more in her children, thereby increasing the quality of Uganda's future workforce.⁵³³ This will increase the overall annual gross national income of Uganda from \$28.46 billion to \$37 billion.⁵³⁴ She learns about spending, saving, managing and budgeting money and opens her own bank account. She has a mobile phone and she uses it to network with friends and to receive support from her peers, who help her work through the challenges of transitioning into adulthood.

Contracts HIV – She never makes it to secondary school and she is four times more likely to be HIV infected than a boy her age. This will shorten her life and cost the Ugandan healthcare system millions of dollars. **TRAPDOOR**

Age 18-24

She uses her birth certificate to get a social security number so she can get a job. She enrolls in a business training course that allows her to identify market opportunities. She uses the land that she inherited from her grandfather to get a loan from the bank and start her own business. As a landowner she finds herself with more influence over the decisions that get made in her household.

Early pregnancy – She gets pregnant and has a baby. With the pressures of childcare she probably won't get a well-paid job and will end up in an informal job on a subsistence wage. She stands very little chance of ever getting out of poverty, and so the cycle continues. When girls lose out so does the entire country. **TRAPDOOR**

She uses her secondary school education in science, maths and technology to become one of 2,000 young women who work in the ICT industry in Uganda.⁵³⁶ Together they will contribute \$240,000 to the Ugandan economy in their first year of work alone.⁵³⁷ Over a lifetime this small cohort of young women will add \$10.8 million to the economy of Uganda.⁵³⁸