

### Why Girls?

Plan, drawing on more than 70 years' experience of international development in over 60 countries, recognises that discrimination against girls and women is one of the main underlying causes of child poverty. Girls and boys have the same entitlements to human rights, but they face different challenges in accessing them. Girls are more likely to be pulled out of school, have less access to medical care, and are often fed less. They experience more violence and sexual harassment just because they are girls and are expected to work hard on domestic chores which make it more difficult for them to study. This lack of opportunity and care is unfair and unjust. Yet we know that investing in girls and young women has a disproportionately beneficial effect in alleviating poverty for everyone; not only the girls themselves but their families, communities and entire countries. Everyone benefits, including boys and men. That argument chimes with the issues of justice and equality of opportunity, and is another reason why Plan is making its 'Because I am a Girl' campaign one of its flagship priorities in the years ahead.



# Because I am a Girl

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals?  
Real Choices, Real Lives

[plan-international.org](http://plan-international.org)



*Girl and her cousin, Brazil*  
FRONT COVER: CLAUDIA CANUTO



# Millennium Development Goals



**Goal 1:**  
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger



**Goal 5:**  
Improve maternal health



**Goal 2:**  
Achieve universal primary education



**Goal 6:**  
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases



**Goal 3:**  
Promote gender equality and empower women



**Goal 7:**  
Ensure environmental sustainability



**Goal 4:**  
Reduce child mortality



**Goal 8:**  
Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Eight goals set by the United Nations in an attempt to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015. They were adopted by 189 nations at the Millennium Summit in September 2000.

# Because I am a Girl Real Choices, Real Lives

The 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study was set up in 2007 to follow 142 girls from birth until their 9th birthday in 2015. It is featured every year in "Because I am a Girl", Plan's annual report on the State of the World's Girls. Now in its 4th year, it continues to follow 130 girls in nine different countries across the world – Brazil, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Benin, Togo, Uganda, Cambodia, Philippines and Vietnam.

This year we have assessed their progress – looking at their lives and the experiences of their families and the communities they are part of – in the light of the Millennium Development Goals.

*"I want her to be a good person and I want her mother and her to prepare and have a career. It is the only way to overcome poverty in the honest way."*

Saidy's grandmother,  
Dominican Republic

What do the lives of the girls in the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study tell us about our ability to meet the MDGs in 2015? Are they and their families being equipped to overcome poverty, will these rising five year olds be able to have the career which Saidy's grandmother, quoted above, says is the only way forward? Will they achieve equality with their brothers?

As some of the most powerful people in the world gather in New York with the primary objective of accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, 'Real

Choices, Real Lives' provides the everyday detail of what is happening to these girls and their families. It supplements the many reviews that have been conducted, and the statistics that sometimes mask stark inequalities. It gives us a greater insight into the importance of redoubling our efforts to eradicate poverty and disease, to reduce mortality rates, secure quality education, to work in partnership and to create equality for men and women.

## Where we are

Ten years on from the original adoption of the goals at the 2000 Millennium Summit we are some way from reaching the targets that have been set, despite some remarkable progress. This year's MDG review estimates,



Girls in Vietnam

for example, that the number of people living under the international poverty line is already half of the 1990 number. Enrolment rates for primary school in sub-Saharan Africa are up from 58% in 1990 to 76% in 2008. But poverty and gender inequality remain the biggest barrier to education. In the poorest 20% of households, 39% of girls are out of school. There has also been progress in MDG 4; the mortality rate for children under five has dropped by 25% in developing countries. In 2008 10,000 fewer children died each day than in 1990.

These achievements demonstrate what is possible, but the pace of change in the lives of the poorest is still too slow. The MDGs are achievable, but there is an urgent need to address challenges, acknowledge failures and come together to overcome the obstacles that are impeding progress. It was the rich and powerful who made the commitment in 2000 but it is the poor and marginalised who bear the brunt of failure. The decisions made at this September's summit will directly affect the future of the 130 girls whose families have given us detailed information about their daughters' lives, and their hopes and fears for them. The reality revealed is that girls do not have the assets they need – the health, education, or skills – to thrive, and the effect of this failure will be felt by their children and their children's children. Girls are doubly disadvantaged by both age and sex. The MDG tracking system ignores them, little data is collected and the particular impact of poverty on the lives of girls goes unrecognised and unrecorded. Evidence from the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study shows how a consistent failure of governments to invest in targeted programmes that address the challenges faced by the world's poorest girls is having a real and detrimental impact on the lives of this small group of girls from nine countries around the world. Next year the girls in the study will be five years old. Reaching five is a real landmark. Despite progress made in reducing infant mortality rates, a handful of treatable diseases, including diarrhoea, measles and malaria, underpinned by malnutrition, mean that millions of children in some of the poorest countries in the world still die before their fifth birthday. For the families in our study this is a lived reality.



### A matter of life and death

This year's research shows that many of the families taking part in the cohort study still face a daily struggle to ensure their daughters' very survival. Over the four years of the study, five of the little girls have died. In Togo this year, Izegbe sadly died before she could get to a healthcare centre, while Essohana's life was only saved because she had speedy and free access to a local health worker. As we will see in the case of girls from the cohorts in Benin, Togo and Uganda in particular, the lack of adequate healthcare and nutrition is already making its mark.

Researchers working with our cohort study in El Salvador have expressed concerns that girls have no access to a pre-school programme and are not being adequately nourished or stimulated at home. The effects of poverty on under-five year olds are often irreversible. Hunger and disease can lead to the stunting of girls' physical and intellectual growth and last year the World Bank estimated that a further 30,000 to 50,000 infant deaths could be attributed to the economic crisis, to the poor getting poorer, and that of these most would be girls. In times of financial crisis, the study concluded, families invest in their boys.

With only five years remaining before the MDGs should be met, the reality for the girls taking part in our study – who will

be between 9 and 10 years old in 2015 – is that time is running out.

### Family life

This year, we examined the choices families are making. How do they feed and educate their families? What are the pressures around migration and family members working away from home? How do they make money, and what do they spend it on? We explored the attitudes of the girls' parents towards education, towards keeping their girls safe, and we talked with them about their hopes for the future. We also examined the views of the girls' teenage relatives and neighbours, and analysed these interviews alongside the earlier interviews with the girls' grandparents. The in-depth interviews across three generations revealed largely positive and progressive views on girls' education. These positive attitudes should help deliver the Millennium Development Goals, but they break down in the face of poverty – families

will still choose to invest in a son's schooling ahead of a daughter's.

### Getting back on track

The lack of investment in girls by their families, but crucially also by governments in key areas such as girls' education and healthcare provision, has ultimately meant that progress towards meeting the goals is off-track.

Indeed, one of the crucial targets affecting girls – to reach gender parity in primary school enrolment – should have been met by 2005. Several of the MDGs are directly at threat through lack of investment in girls, starting with MDG 1. Crucial investments are also needed in access to healthcare to stop more girls dying (MDG 4); to prevent girls from missing out on school because of persistent illness (MDG 6); and to establish pre-school education so that girls and their families become more engaged in their education (MDG 2 and 3).

The critical moment for these girls is now.

### WHO IS IN THE SAMPLE?

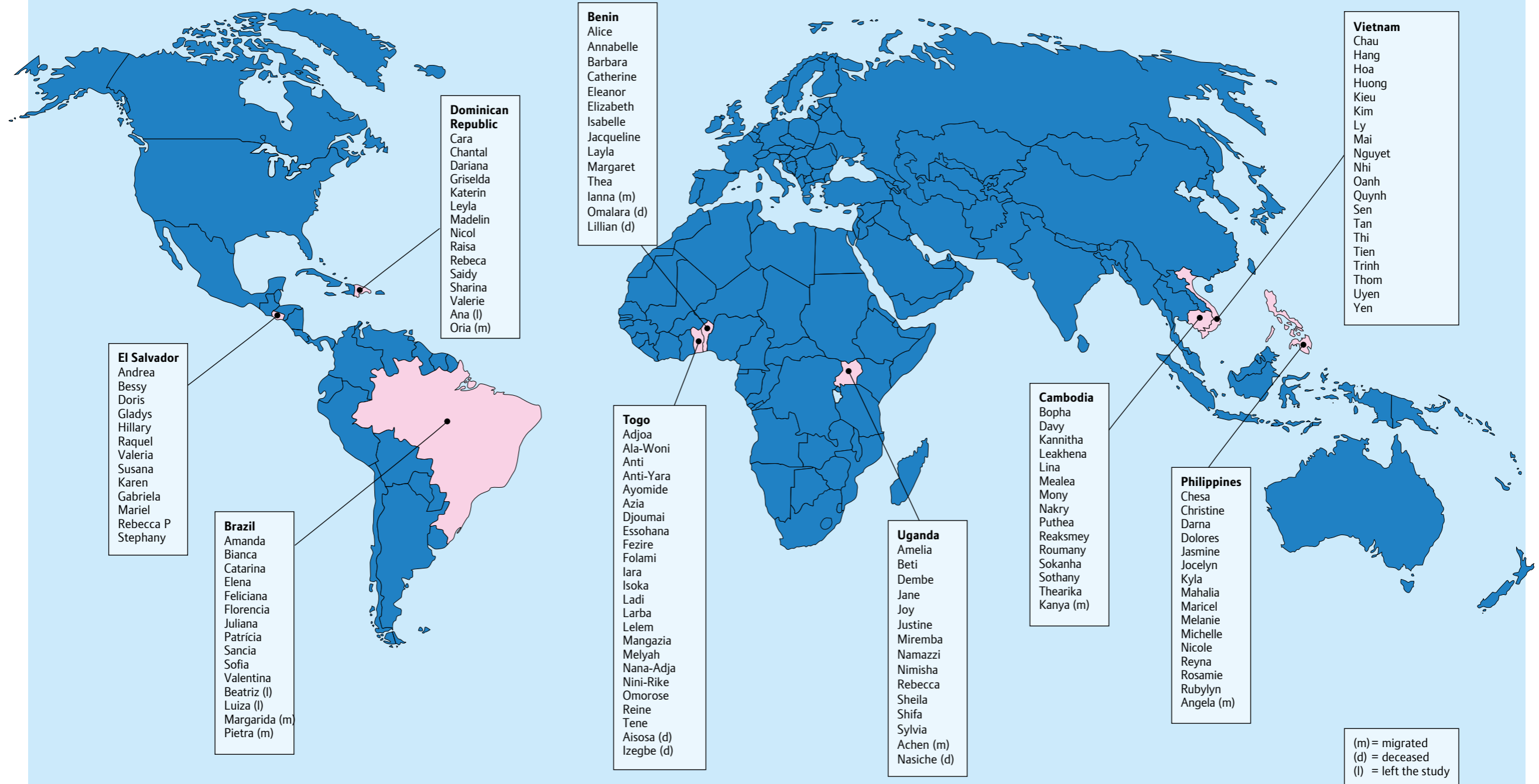
The study is following a core group of 130 largely randomly selected girls from nine countries. From the original group of 142 families, some have left the study due to migration and, sadly, five girls have died. Each country has a cohort of between 15 and 22 girls (see map on next page for more details). 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. The majority are from farming families, and some supplement their income by petty trading, particularly in El Salvador, Dominican Republic and Brazil. Others have taken to seasonal migration for work, for example in Benin and Togo.

The 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study is a relatively small sample study which allows Plan's researchers to examine, in detail, a range of issues affecting girls by using in-depth interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. The lives of the girls, now four years old, are largely represented through the voices of their families and friends, though this will change as they get older, and through the observations of the researchers. 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. In year four, the researchers focused on progress towards meeting the MDGs by examining how families generate an income and feed their families, choices they make about migration and the reality of trying to ensure their daughters' access to quality education. In addition to interviews with the older siblings, cousins and neighbours of the cohort families, we also held a series of discussions with a wider group of teenage girls and boys in Brazil, El Salvador, Philippines, Togo and Uganda to understand their view of the changing world around them.

There are some practical challenges to running this kind of study in a developing country. Individual family members or whole families may move to other regions, to larger towns or cities, providing little information about their whereabouts. In fact, eight of the girls are already reported as having moved away. Where literacy rates are low, it can be challenging to communicate the value of the families' continued involvement in a study like this one. Families may choose not to continue to be interviewed every year as a result – four families have chosen to leave the study so far and this year returns in two countries, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, were low. The intrusion into family life has also to be carefully considered.

# Because We are Girls

'Real Choices, Real Lives' Cohort Study Update





**Key targets:** Reduce by half the number of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015; and reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015

Seventy per cent of the world's poorest people are women and girls. The reality of the female face of poverty has not been fully factored into the indicators and targets of the MDGs. Progress towards reducing income poverty is being measured, but without a full analysis of the gender component of poverty reduction.

A closer look at how the families taking part in the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' study spend their meagre household incomes shows the impact of poverty on long-term decisions they can make, and how these decisions affect their daughters. Several



Girl in Cambodia

families have already mentioned cost as a factor in their decision not to send their daughters to pre-school. The poorer the family, the larger the proportion of their income that is spent on food – more than 90 per cent is spent by the families in Benin and Togo. We also asked families to explain what they would do if there was an unexpected expenditure, such as a family member requiring medical treatment. More than 50 per cent of families in the seven countries where this data was gathered said they would have to borrow the money, either from a relative, a money lender or a credit union, indicating that their incomes are not sufficient for families to have savings.

Several families taking part in the study in Cambodia, Philippines and Brazil receive a small monthly grant from their governments to supplement their income, usually with the proviso that their children will be enrolled in school or will be vaccinated. This type of investment can make a big difference to the girls themselves, and can play a large part towards reducing the number of people suffering from hunger. The Brazilian government, for example, provides a package of social security allowances for low-income families. The foundation of this social security programme is called *Bolsa Familiar* (Family Package) – an allowance of about \$40 a month per child, granted on condition that parents send their children to school and have them vaccinated. The government also provides a *Bolsa de PETI* (an ending child labour allowance) of \$15 a month per child, to encourage children who are at risk of dropping out of school in order to work to remain in education.

#### Bianca, Brazil

Our researchers have met Bianca's mother and her four brothers several times now. They live in a rural area in the north east of Brazil. Bianca's father works as a poorly paid agricultural labourer. The family qualifies for the Brazilian government's *Bolsa Familia* scheme, and receives a grant of \$70 each month. Although they grow vegetables in their garden, almost 90 per cent of this family's income is spent on food.

#### Coping with poverty – migration to cities

One response to poverty is for family members – or sometimes whole families – to migrate to the nearest town, city or even to a city in another country. Although the vast majority of the girls taking part in our cohort study and their families currently live in rural areas, the dramatic changes described in this year's 'Because I am a Girl' report are certainly impacting on their families. Migration to cities is impacting on the lives of the families in Latin America (Brazil, Dominican Republic and El Salvador) and in West Africa (Benin and Togo) in particular. In Benin, for example, a third of all the families taking part in the study are separated by seasonal or long-term migration to nearby or capital cities.

The views of the mothers of the girls taking part in the cohort study in El Salvador capture this ambition for a better economic life. Most of them would like to migrate abroad to make a better life for themselves and their children. "The dream of everyone is to travel [migrate] to the United States." At home in El Salvador, work is seasonal and poorly paid. Those who can secure a permanent job are paid slightly more – between \$2.50 and \$3.00 per day.

Research from across West Africa confirms that the departure of girls and young women to cities can be perceived both as a 'relief' and as an extra source of income for the family.<sup>1</sup> And as one Brazilian mother says: "When our daughters leave home to move to cities, it is always for a better life... [they are] searching for new work or study opportunities, which will provide them with a better, more comfortable life."

#### FOR A BETTER LIFE

The teenagers we interviewed in Uganda were motivated to move to cities and gave the following reasons:

- Lack of employment in their communities of origin
- To send money back home and support their elderly parents
- To live a more exciting life than they have in the village

- To reduce family expenditure at home
- To raise money in order to build a house in their village of origin
- To pay school fees of their siblings
- Ultimately to help other family members to get jobs in the city/town.

In the Philippines, teenagers we interviewed explained that the majority of those who move away to work are mothers, and that they have observed that when mothers move away, their daughters tend to marry soon after graduating from secondary school. The majority of the Brazilian teenagers felt that migration to cities had a negative impact on family members who remained. In El Salvador, two of the girls taking part in the study are being raised by their grandmothers, as their parents have migrated to the United States and to Italy. Others are being raised only by their mothers because their fathers have migrated to cities abroad. "In my case, my husband moved to the United States leaving me alone with six small creatures [children]," one mother told us.

In Brazil, at least half of the parents interviewed were considering moving to a city, and 75 per cent of the girls indicated that their fathers had left home at various times, seeking work opportunities. One girl gave this account:

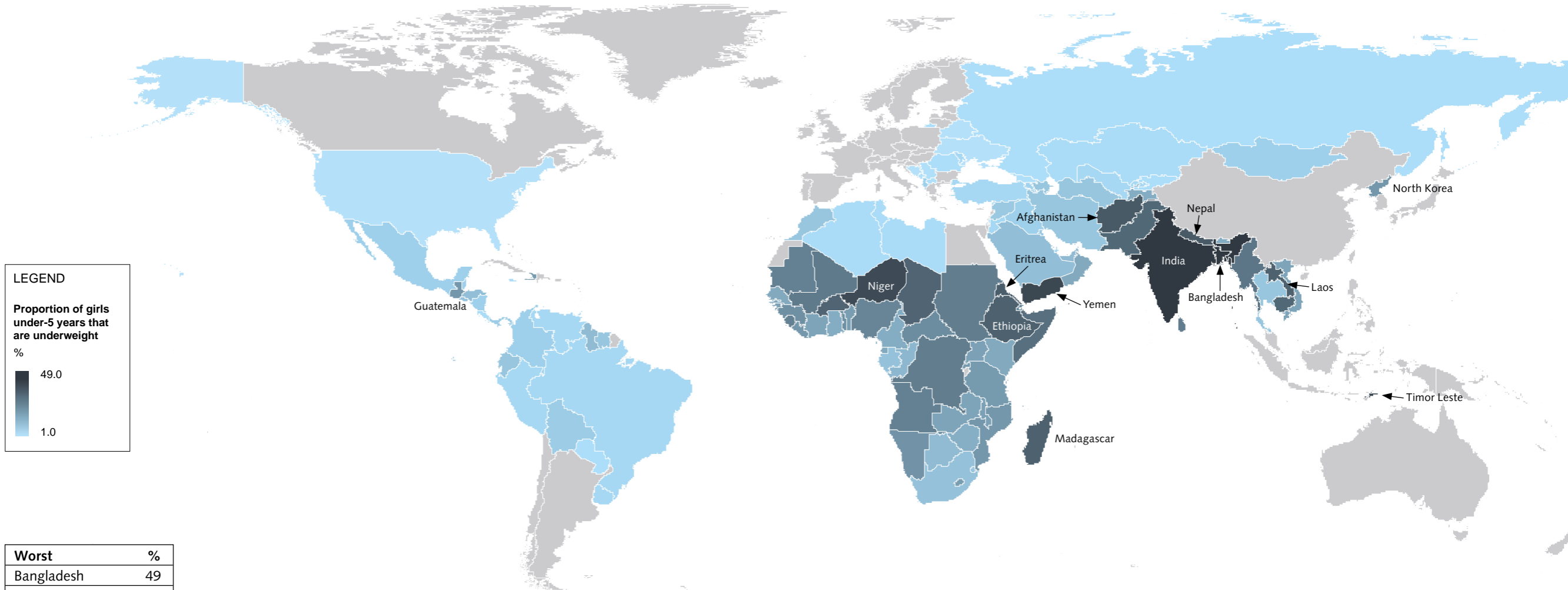
*"My father left. He spent three years away from home to work. The family was sad; he didn't even see my brother when he was born, and when my brother died, my father couldn't even come home to see him..."*



Girls collect water in Southeast Asia



# Proportion of girls under-5 years that are underweight



**LEGEND**

Proportion of girls under-5 years that are underweight %

49.0

1.0

Worst	%
Bangladesh	49
India	49
Timor Leste	45
Yemen	45
Niger	45
Afghanistan	40
Nepal	40
Eritrea	39
Ethiopia	38
Laos	30

MDG maps courtesy of Maplecroft and Girls Discover.org



**Key target:** Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary education by 2015

Achieving MDG 2 is largely reliant on real progress being made on the MDG 3 target to ensure gender parity in education enrolment. This target should have been met by 2005. But of the 113 countries that failed to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrolment by the target date of 2005, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015. Progress is slow and increased investment in specific initiatives that encourage girls both to enrol and to remain in school are crucial. These should include investing in pre-school facilities, as evidence from various studies shows that participation in quality early childhood care and development programmes, including pre-school, can have a positive effect on how girls and their families engage with primary education and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

Our study shows that despite a major shift in attitudes towards the importance of girls' education in all of the countries taking part, parents still face immense economic difficulty when it comes to providing for their families and investing in their children's education. Combined with attitudes that determine strict boundaries around gender roles and responsibilities in the home, it is as yet unclear how much progress the girls taking part



Girl and her father, Latin America



Girl in Uganda

in the study will actually make. The study shows that girls are expected to combine a heavy domestic workload together with their schoolwork, whereas boys have more time to study and to socialise.

Almost half of the girls – 46 per cent across the seven countries where this has been reported – have already started to attend pre-school. Rubylyn's mother from the Philippines explains: "[Rubylyn's older sister] is now in grade 3, [her middle sister] is in grade 1, while Rubylyn is enrolled in the day care centre. Education of my children is very important so that they will have a bright future ahead..."

Mai's mother in Vietnam explains her motivation for enrolling her daughter in school: "Education enables her to know the right things... she has to be educated to be able to work, not like us farmers."

#### Sokanha, Cambodia

Sokanha has been enrolled in the community pre-school in her village, as part of an early childhood care and development programme supported by Plan. Sessions run from 7am to 10am and include a cooked breakfast. Her



Girls in East Africa

mother explained the immediate benefits for Sokanha: "She is braver than before. She knows how to respect people, especially older people. She knows many friends. She can sing songs and she likes singing and dancing very much."

#### Sylvia, Uganda

Sylvia is attending a nursery school. She also meets regularly with her local play group. In the group, Sylvia likes singing songs. All of her older siblings are in school. Sylvia's mother explains: "Girls are good at bringing about change in society and, if educated, they can transform their family as well as their community." She goes on: "It's good to educate a girl because nowadays women are taking up leadership positions in politics." She cites an example of the deputy speaker of the Ugandan parliament, Rebecca Kadaga.

#### Michelle, Philippines

Michelle attends the local day care centre from 7am to 9am. The centre is in the village, a 10-minute walk from Michelle's home. All of Michelle's siblings, except for her younger sister, are in school. Her mother explains: "It is important for all of them to finish their studies. Girls need to be educated because the time will come when they will have their own families and they need to get a good job."

However, parents cite the various difficulties they already face in securing a place for their daughters in a local pre-school. Many families simply do not have a pre-school facility nearby – this is particularly so for the families living in the most rural areas in the poorest countries.

Most of the families taking part in the study in Togo cited distance from the nearest pre-school as the reason for not enrolling their daughters. Here, only 10 per cent of the study's girls are enrolled in a pre-school. In the case of four year-old Mangazia, the nearest pre-school facility is five kilometres away from her home, which is too great a distance to travel every day. The most disadvantaged children, who would benefit most from a pre-school facility, often have the least access.

#### Dembe, Uganda

There is no pre-school in Dembe's community, and the nearest primary school is three kilometres away. Although Dembe's mother is not pleased with the performance of this school, she said it was the only one the family could afford. "I wanted so much for Dembe to first join a nursery school, but my husband couldn't secure the money needed. As a result, she will go straight to primary school [when she is six]."

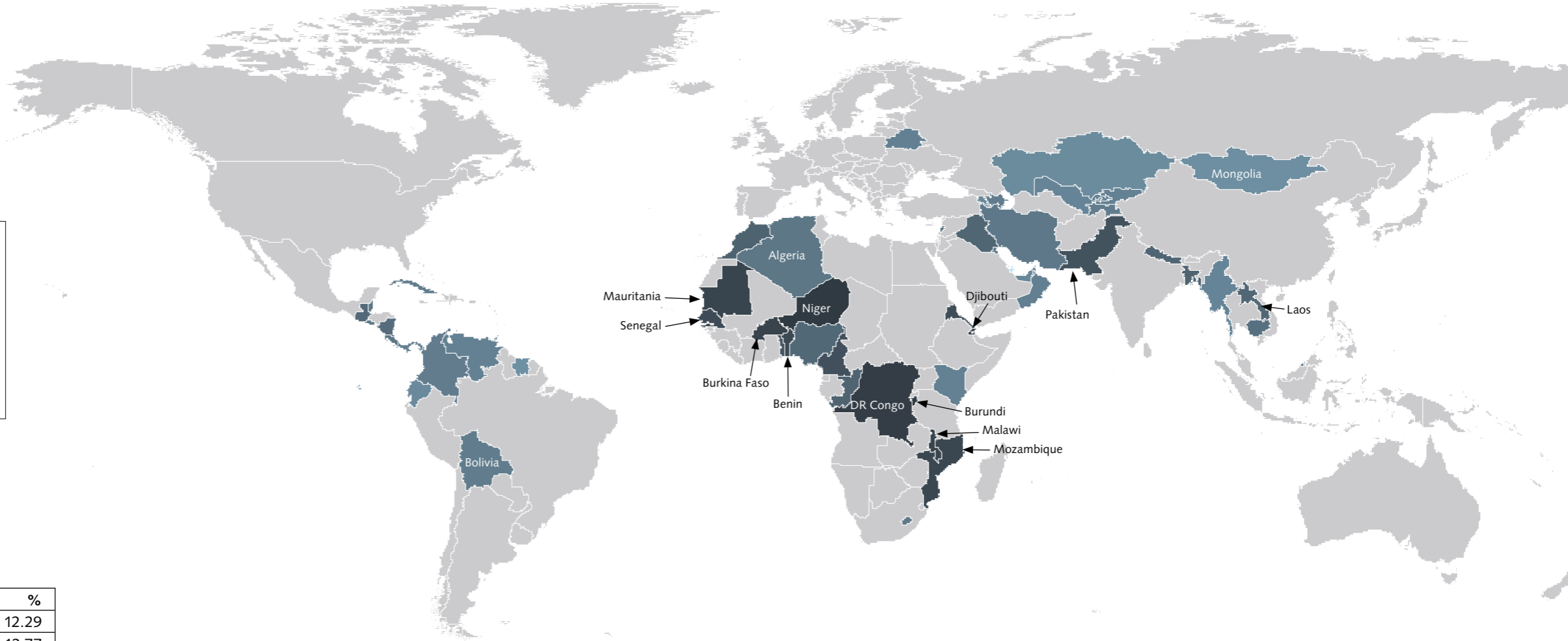
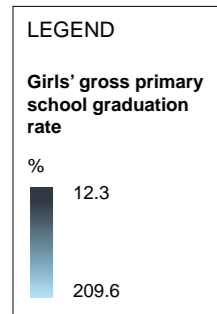
The interviews with the families in the study demonstrate that they understand that their daughters, as well as their sons, have the right to a good basic education; studies show that it takes 9-10 years to acquire the skills you need. The comment from Sylvia's mother reveals that they are also aware that the better the education the more the girls will contribute to their families and the wider economy. They understand that investing in girls is the smart thing to do, that girls need to be better equipped in order to get better jobs, but the barriers to access remain in many countries, in both primary and secondary education.



Girl and her family, Vietnam



## Girls' gross primary school graduation rate



Worst	%
Burundi	12.29
Niger	12.77
DR Congo	16.68
Burkina Faso	21.91
Djibouti	22.68
Malawi	23.40
Mauritania	24.10
Mozambique	27.30
Benin	30.20
Senegal	33.10

Gross primary school graduation rate: the number of children graduating from primary school in any one year divided by the number of children in the age group at which primary school completion should occur.





**Key target:** *Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015*

Despite significant progress worldwide in enrolling increasing numbers of girls into primary schools, secondary education remains an unattainable goal for millions of adolescent girls. Targeted government action is needed, particularly for girls from poor and marginalised families living in rural areas. Although the girls taking part in our study are not yet in primary school, many of their parents are already expressing concerns about whether their daughters will access quality secondary education, as they live in largely rural communities without facilities. Attitudes to educating girls are positive across the countries taking part in the study, with parents and carers expressing confidence in girls' abilities as well as affirming the importance of investing in both girls and boys.

Nicole's mother in the Philippines explained that for her, "education is important because it is the only gift that I can give to my child. I have no wealth she can inherit other than education. Although I have only one child, I still believe that girls and boys deserve an equal opportunity for education. It is their right to be educated."

Kyla's mother, also from the Philippines, stated: "Whether girl or boy, education is important. Especially nowadays, it will be very difficult for someone who has not completed school. They are left behind and victimised."

Mahalia's mother's beliefs are firm: "Of course it is important for girls to be able to study and complete school. That's to help her family later." She explains why: "I cannot help my husband because I wasn't able to finish anything. Education is important for both girls and boys. That's for their future."

In a departure from prevailing attitudes towards investing in girls, several families interviewed in Vietnam said that the fact that young women marry and move away from

the family home gives their parents more of an incentive to invest in them. A mother in Vietnam stated, "[Both] our daughter and our son are our offering. Besides, our daughter will get married and will not live with us after that; therefore, we have to care for her more."

Yet, despite positive affirmations of the importance of realising girls' rights to education and investing in them, the study is unearthing that these girls are growing up surrounded by a series of other attitudes that will do little to encourage them as they reach adulthood.

### DISCUSSING GENDER ROLES WITH BRAZILIAN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

As part of the study this year, 24 mothers and 20 teenage girls, neighbours and relatives of the cohort group, took part in several group discussions held in north-east Brazil.

Only 20 per cent of the parents interviewed confirmed that they aim to bring up their sons and daughters equally. The women who took part in our discussion in Brazil believe that boys and girls themselves view education differently, despite recognising that educational opportunities should be equal. "The boys leave school earlier because they want to travel. The girls have more opportunities to study because they want to have a good job in the future, and are more dominated by their parents."

The women admit that they "treat the children differently, without meaning to". But they said that this is due mainly to the fact that girls are more vulnerable and need greater protection. They felt that the difference in treatment given by fathers to girls and boys is due mainly to sexism.

The majority of the girls said that they felt that they should be treated differently from boys and that girls need additional protection. They also acknowledged the influence of their upbringing on their attitudes. "Girls are more fragile, and this kind of upbringing has been passed from parents to children."

All of them acknowledged that girls and boys are treated differently and felt that boys benefit more from this, particularly in relation to the amount of time boys have to socialise. "At home, the girls have

to sweep the floor and do the washing while the boys watch television. Boys don't help with the chores at home, and go out to play football." Such attitudes are encouraged by the adults around them. "My brother doesn't want to help with anything in the house and my father protects him," said one girl. This year we met the older cousin of Bianca, one of the four year olds in the study. She spoke at length with researchers about how the predominant 'macho' culture gives boys more free time than girls, as well as more time to focus on their studies.

Another of the teenagers, a 17 year-old girl, agrees with Bianca's cousin:

*"At home, my sister and I are responsible for washing the dishes, cleaning up the house, and preparing the food. Our brothers work and sometimes they wash their clothes. Boys have more freedom to hang out with their friends and have fun; we can see that by our brothers."*

According to the women, men in their communities largely believe that girls "have to learn only enough to sign her name and go to the supermarket". Bianca's mother disagrees: "The opportunities for education have to be the same for everyone, because the world is offering equality of opportunities for both genders. The person just needs to be qualified."

The mother of Juliana – another of the four year olds in the study – added that education starts in the home and that, "by studying they will learn more and have further knowledge. Studying today means a better future." She went on: "Being educated is the best thing in the world."

Nonetheless, here is clear evidence that parents are making discriminatory choices in how they actually invest in their children. "If the money isn't enough for both [children], then the boys end up taking the course," remarked one Brazilian girl we interviewed.

More than half of the families taking part in the 'Real Choices, Real Lives' cohort study would like to see their daughters pursue careers that involve further education and training to become midwives, nurses and teachers. However, post-secondary

education is not widely available in the rural villages in which most of the families live. Therefore parents' aspirations for their daughters will inform the decisions they make about moving to cities. In Brazil, at least half of the families interviewed already have older daughters who have left home, the vast majority either to improve their educational prospects or to work. The sister of one of the girls taking part in the study explains: "I want to finish high school to work, and maybe go to the university, and here in Codo there isn't one..."

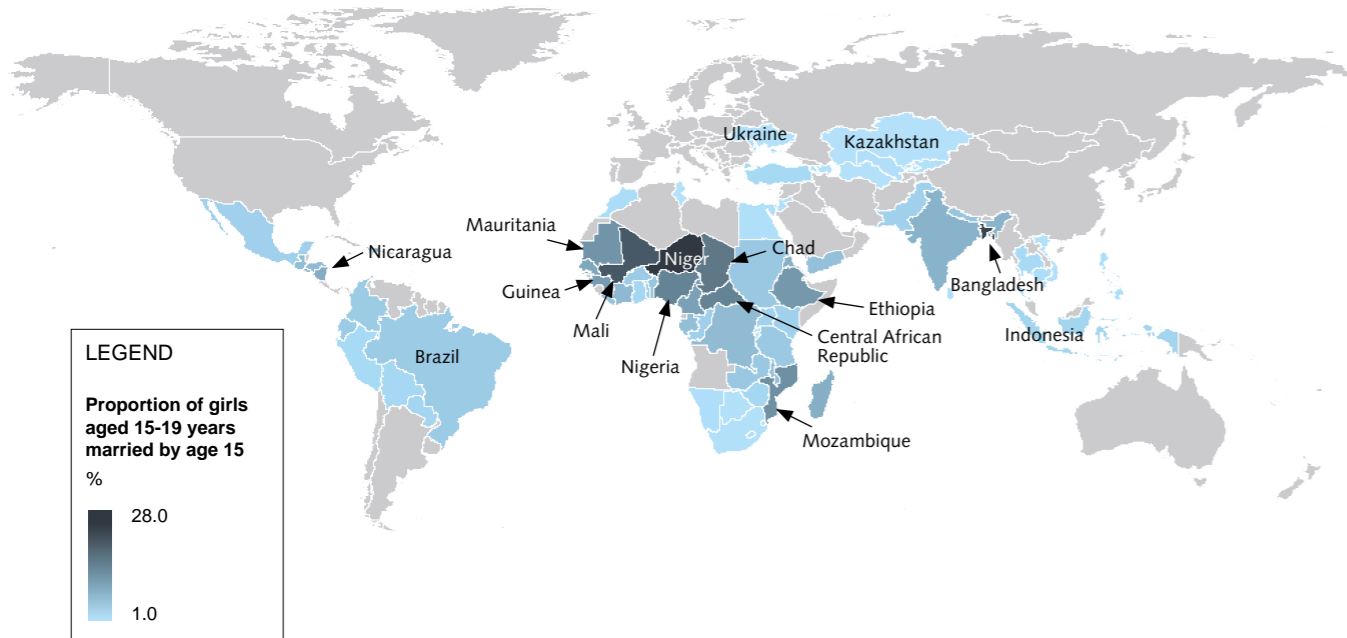
Girls are much more likely to go to school if they live in a city – school attendance for girls from 10 to 14 is 18.4 per cent higher in urban than in rural areas, and 37.5 per cent higher for young women between 15 and 19.<sup>3</sup> There are many reasons for this – schools may be more plentiful and closer to home in urban areas. As is the case of families taking part in the cohort study, many girls and young women move to cities specifically to improve their chances of continuing with their education. There may also be less household work to do in the city – there is probably no land to work on – and education may be seen as more of a norm for girls and worth investing in.

Critics of the MDG framework have outlined how a series of measurable targets such as the MDGs can do little to track changing attitudes within families about gender issues, and that understanding the way attitudes change is vital for achieving gender equality.<sup>4</sup> What is clear from our study is that attitudes to gender roles and responsibilities can change over time. When we interviewed grandparents last year, we discovered that there had been a large generational shift in their attitude, particularly in relation to participation of girls and women in public spaces, and as a result, in relation to girls' education. The grandmother of Saidy from the Dominican Republic speaks for many: "I want Saidy to study and do what she likes. I want her to have a future and be who I couldn't be."

The vast majority of parents and grandparents have positive attitudes regarding their daughters' and granddaughters' futures, with high ambitions for their careers, and ambitions for their social mobility. It will, however, take a great deal of investment from both inside and outside the families for these high hopes to be realised.

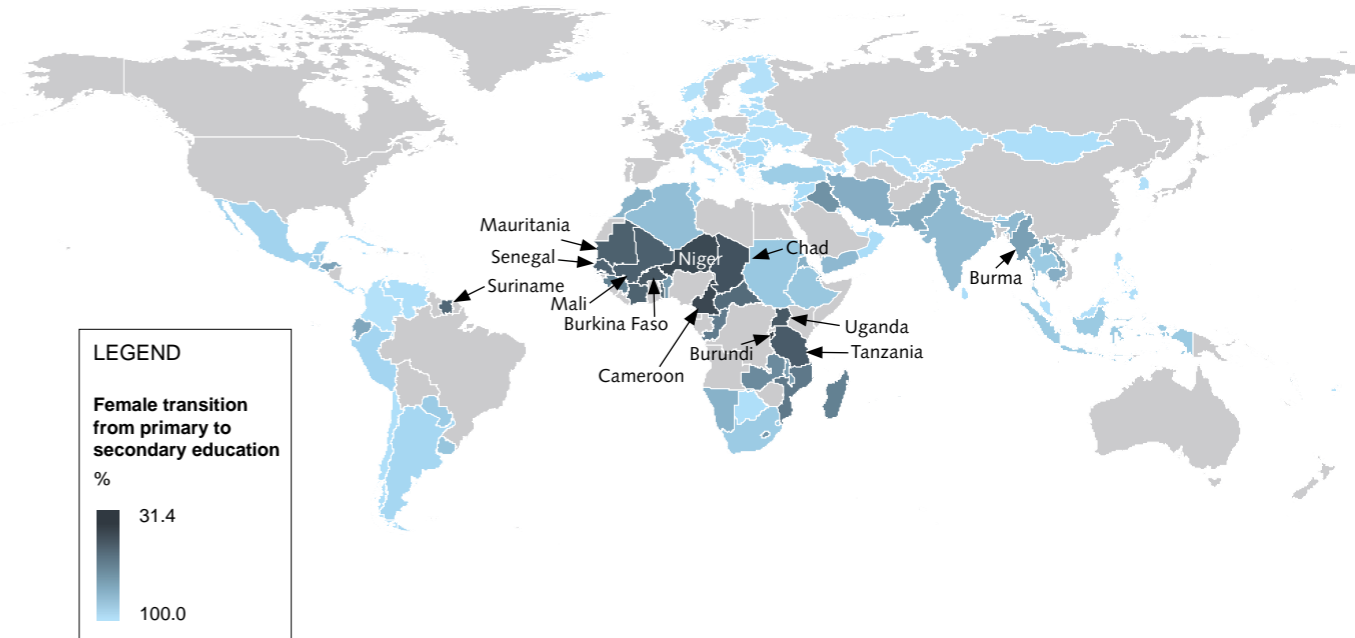


## Proportion of girls aged 15-19 years married by age 15



Highest	%
Niger	28
Bangladesh	26.3
Mali	22.8
Chad	17.9
Central African Republic	16.1
Nigeria	16.1
Mozambique	14
Mauritania	13.4
Ethiopia	12.7
Guinea	12.2

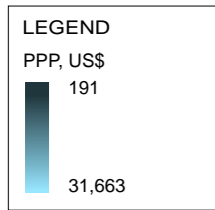
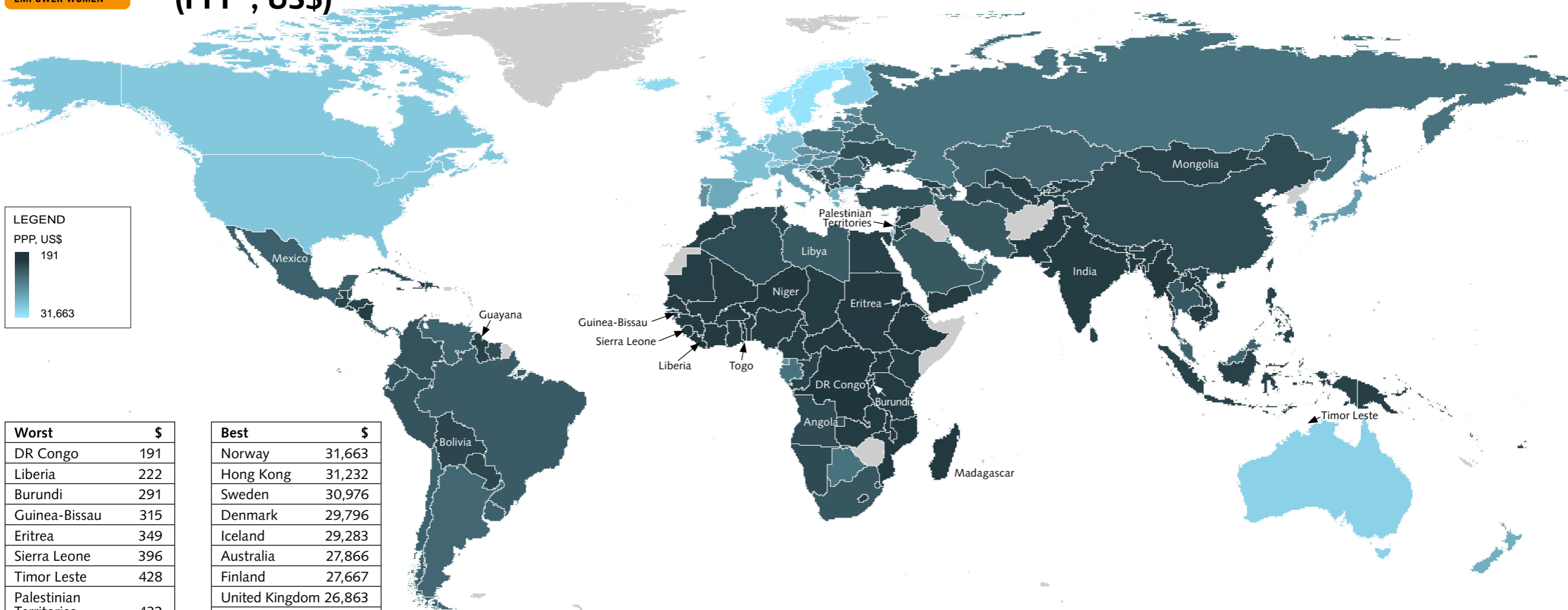
## Female transition from primary to secondary education



Worst	%
Burundi	31.39
Cameroon	36.77
Niger	37.48
Chad	41.81
Uganda	43.30
Burkina Faso	43.60
Tanzania	45.20
Mali	46.80
Mauritania	47.20
Senegal	47.70



## Estimated female earned income (PPP\*, US\$)



Worst	\$
DR Congo	191
Liberia	222
Burundi	291
Guinea-Bissau	315
Eritrea	349
Sierra Leone	396
Timor Leste	428
Palestinian Territories	432
Niger	437
Togo	478
Central African Republic	517
Malawi	596
Mozambique	663
Rwanda	696
Madagascar	723
Uganda	735
Cote d'Ivoire	787

Best	\$
Norway	31,663
Hong Kong	31,232
Sweden	30,976
Denmark	29,796
Iceland	29,283
Australia	27,866
Finland	27,667
United Kingdom	26,863
Switzerland	26,278
Netherlands	26,207
Canada	26,055
USA	25,613
France	24,529
Ireland	23,295
Greece	21,181
Spain	20,174
Israel	19,653

\*PPP is the cost of buying a similar basket of goods (such as a Big Mac) in different countries, calculated in local currency and expressed in US dollars using purchasing power parity.



**Key target:** Reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds by 2015

In many parts of the world more girls than boys die before the age of five. An important factor here is that the birth preference for boys is a major concern in the two most populous countries on earth, China and India.

As our study shows, despite their families' best attempts, girls in the world's poorest countries are continuing to die from preventable diseases. Five girls, from Togo, Benin and Uganda, have died since the study began four years ago. Despite a natural biological advantage that sees more girls than boys born, survival rates to age five are higher for boys. Unless urgent action is taken to address the reasons why more girls are dying, the target to reduce child mortality will not be met. Izegbe, from Togo, a country with one of the highest child mortality rates in the world, died earlier this year. Her family reported that she had lost consciousness after a brief, undiagnosed illness. It is probable that she died from malaria, but the family was unable to tell us more about the cause of her tragic death. The story of Essohana, also from Togo, illustrates how investment in healthcare can make all the difference.



Essohana too suffered from malaria but her life was saved because her mother was able to take her to a trained healthcare worker, who was both local and free.

Our study is showing that the ongoing challenge for the poorest families is how to secure the health and basic survival of their daughters. Families across the study have reported a range of health concerns, from serious illnesses like malaria, dysentery and dengue fever, to persistent respiratory illnesses and observed malnutrition. These are all preventable diseases, and are largely caused by the lack of basic infrastructure, such as clean water and sanitation facilities. Girls will continue to die when, like Izegbe, they have no access to a health centre or hospital nearby.

#### **Nakry, Cambodia**

Nakry's mother told researchers that her four year-old daughter's health has been poor over the past year – she would sometimes have convulsions at the community pre-school she attended. Nakry was taken to Siem Reap Children Hospital, 50 kilometres from her home, where she was diagnosed with multiple infections – meningitis, dengue fever, and acute respiratory infection. Although she is now better, Nakry is still being treated at the hospital. Her mother needs to hire a motor taxi at a cost of \$5 per trip, and she now owes her boss \$50 as she requested a salary advance during Nakry's illness; this salary advance probably saved Nakry's life.



**Key target:** Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

It is widely acknowledged that children who face nutritional deficiencies in early childhood also face learning difficulties, leading to lower educational attainment.<sup>5</sup> We can already see from our questionnaires that illness has kept Ayomide and Ala-Woni, in Togo from what would have been their first year in school, and caused Nakry in Cambodia to miss the formal school enrolment date, and therefore an entire school year. As the study progresses we will be looking more closely at the impact of persistent illness and poor nutrition on the girls taking part in the study.

In the countries with the lowest health indicators taking part in our study – Togo, Benin and Uganda – the girls are not only facing a daily challenge of poor nutrition, but they are also battling a constant onslaught of illness and disease. Despite a high proportion of the girls receiving both first and second round basic immunisations – across six countries where it was reported, all of the girls were immunised as babies and 94 per cent have received their second round of immunisations – many still face persistent illness. Malaria, for example, continues to be



a problem for the cohort in Uganda, Togo and Benin, with the majority of the girls being treated at various times over the year either at the local health centre or the nearest hospital. The call for governments to increase their investment in preventing and treating diseases like malaria cannot be louder.

#### **Amelia, Uganda**

In the last year, Amelia fell sick with malaria and was taken to the local government hospital for treatment. The hospital is four kilometres away from Amelia's home – her mother carried her there on her back. Amelia has made a full recovery.

#### **Justine, Uganda**

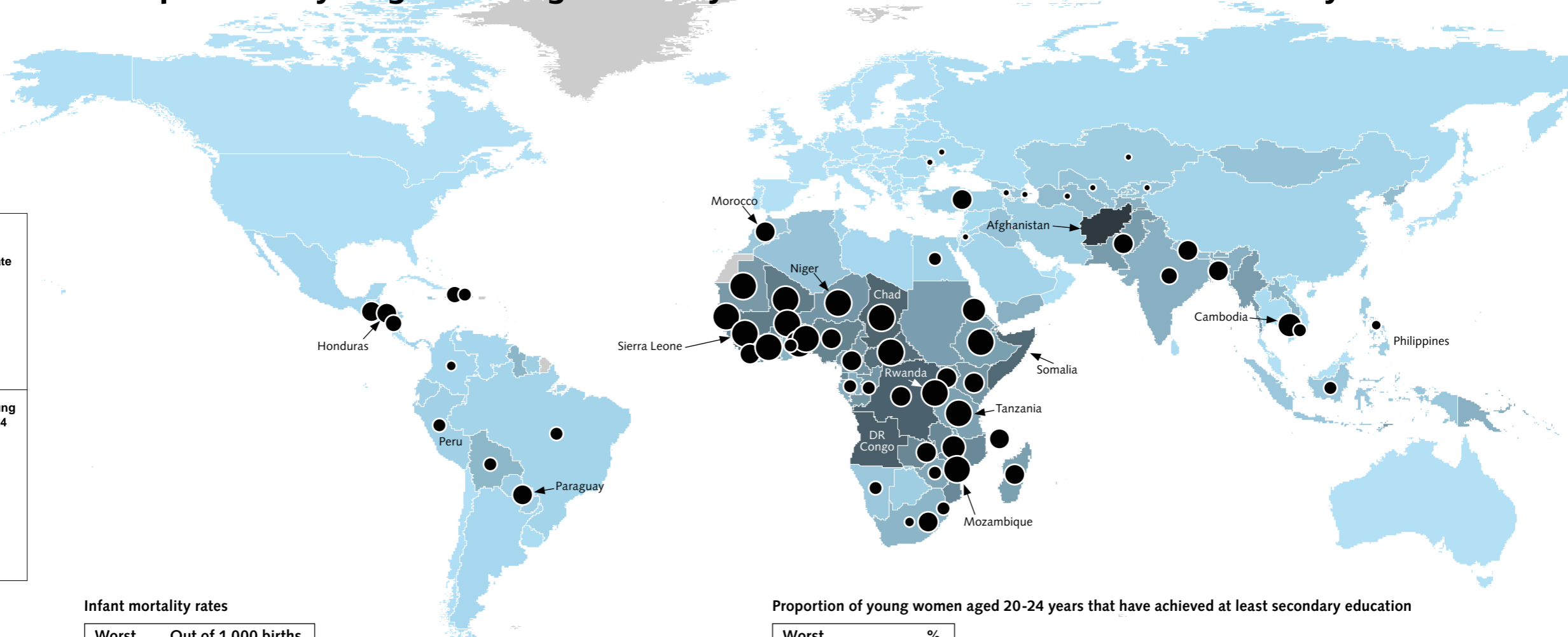
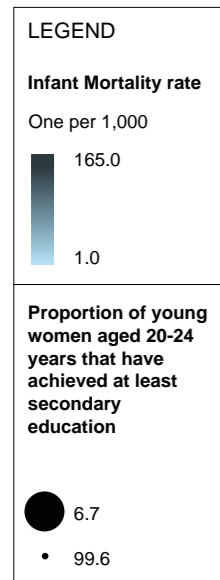
Justine was also treated at Kamuli government hospital, where she was put on a drip after being diagnosed with malaria. The family took her to the local government hospital on a motorbike, a three-kilometre journey. Justine has also made a full recovery.

#### **Nimisha, Uganda**

Nimisha sometimes suffers from convulsive malaria. Her parents took her to the nearest hospital, where they made a note of the drugs she was prescribed. Whenever she shows the same symptoms, they purchase the drugs locally as the nearest health centre does not always have supplies.



# Infant mortality rates / Proportion of young women aged 20-24 years that have achieved at least secondary education



**Infant mortality rates**

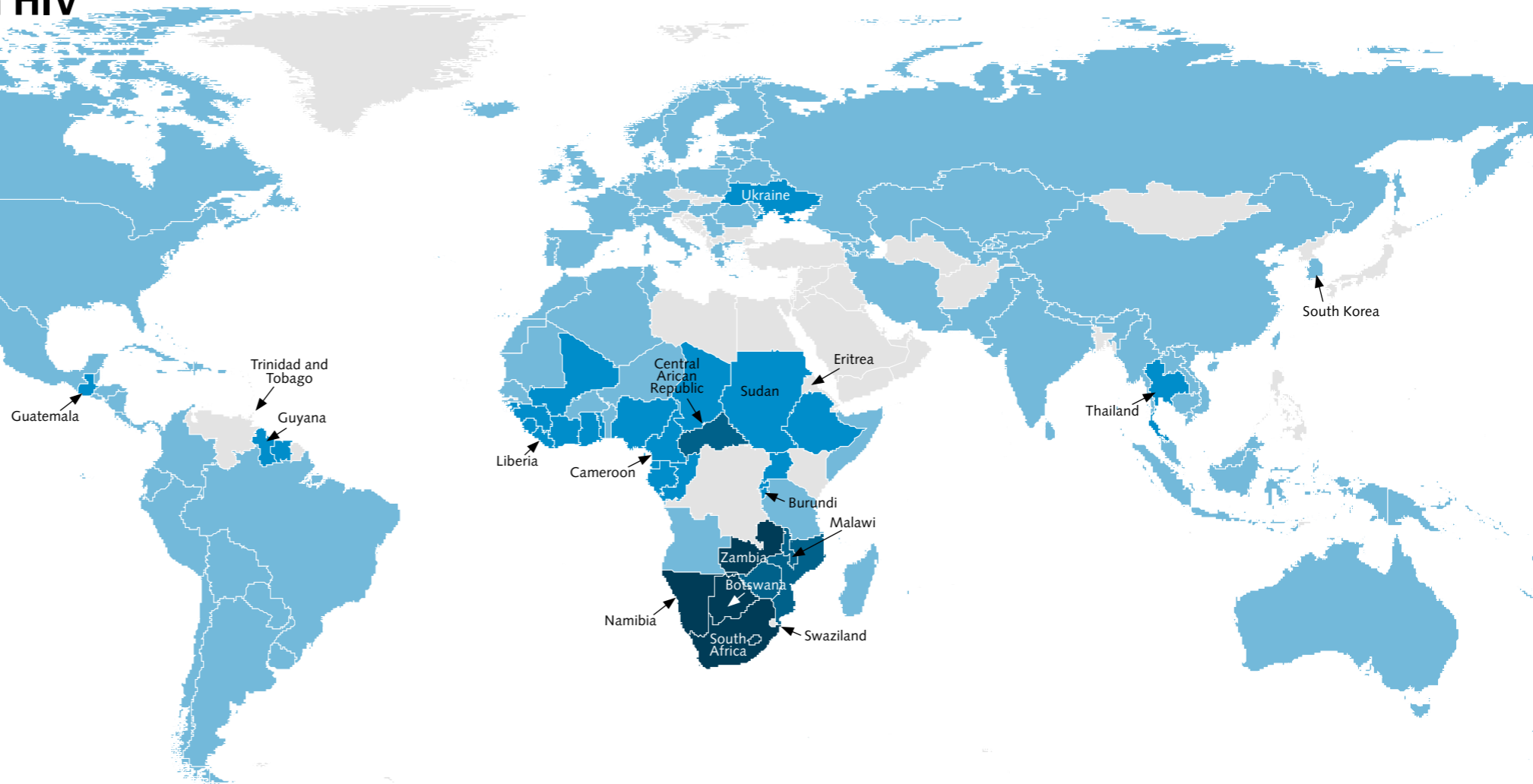
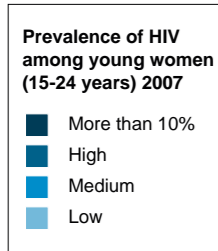
Worst	Out of 1,000 births
Afghanistan	165
Democratic Republic of Congo	126
Chad	124
Sierra Leone	123
Somalia	119
Guinea Bissau	117
Central African Republic	115
Mali	103
Liberia	100

**Proportion of young women aged 20-24 years that have achieved at least secondary education**

Worst	%
Niger	6.7
Chad	9.2
Tanzania	10.4
Mozambique	10.6
Rwanda	10.7
Burkina Faso	12.3
Mali	12.8
Senegal	14.8
Guinea	15.6
Ethiopia	17.3



## Ratio of young women to young men living with HIV



Ratio of young women to young men living with HIV

Countries with the greatest imbalance	Ratio Women	Men
Central African Republic	5	1
Swaziland	3.9	1
Cameroon	3.6	1
Malawi	3.5	1
Guyana	3.4	1
Sudan	3.3	1
Trinidad and Tobago	3.3	1
Burundi	3.3	1
Ghana	3.3	1
Liberia	3.3	1
Eritrea	3.3	1

## Conclusion

### Towards 2015

Izegbe and Essohana's story of death and survival sheds light on the immediate investments required to make a difference in the lives, not only of the girls taking part in the study, but of the millions of girls facing 21st century challenges. The experiences of these two four year olds illustrate the sheer urgency of the need to increase investments in basic services and girls' access to these services. The lives of Justine, Essohana, Nakry, Jasmine and all the other girls we have got to know are effectively in the hands of the international decision makers who must make good the promise of the Millennium Declaration. Again the world's richer communities will determine if those living in poverty will be able to achieve a better life for their children.

In the next five years there is a lot to do if the girls in our survey and their families are to make real progress and achieve the goals that they have talked to us about. The current rate of progress towards meeting the MDGs is simply too slow for a four year old in 2010.



Girl, Vietnam

*"As the society is more and more developed, girls and boys have equal opportunities, so, they deserve equal educational opportunities. I would like my daughter to be a teacher."*

Girl's mother, Vietnam

# Plan's Because I am a Girl campaign

The Because I am a Girl campaign is Plan's campaign to promote girls' rights and lift millions of girls out of poverty. Across the world, girls face double discrimination due to their gender and age, leaving them at the bottom of the social ladder. For example, research has shown that girls are more likely to suffer from malnutrition; be forced into an early marriage; be subject to violence or intimidation; be trafficked, sold or coerced into the sex trade; or become infected with HIV. The 'State of the World's Girls' annual reports provide and will provide year after year tangible proof of the inequalities which still exist between boys and girls and will support the campaign with specific girl-oriented data.

The Because I am a Girl campaign will be geared towards equipping, enabling and engaging girls of all ages to acquire the assets, skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in life.

For more information visit:  
[www.plan-international.org/girls](http://www.plan-international.org/girls)

*Still in secondary school, Moyamba, Sierra Leone.*



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## About Plan International

Founded over 70 years ago, Plan is one of the oldest and largest international development agencies in the world. We work in 48 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Plan directly supports more than 1.5 million children and their families, and indirectly supports an estimated further 9 million people who live in communities that are working with Plan. We make long-term commitments to children in poverty and assist as many children as possible, by working in partnerships and alliance with them, their families, communities, civil society and government, building productive relationships and enabling their voices to be heard and recognised in issues that affect them. Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations.

### Our vision

Plan's vision is of a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity.

### Our mission

Plan aims to achieve lasting improvements in the quality of life of deprived children in developing countries, through a process that unites people across cultures and adds meaning and value to their lives, by:

- enabling deprived children, their families and their communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in and benefit from their societies;
- building relationships to increase understanding and unity among peoples of different cultures and countries;
- promoting the rights and interests of the world's children.

[www.plan-international.org](http://www.plan-international.org)



*Getting an education in a Ghana school.*



*Girls names have been changed. Pictures in this report are not of the cohort girls*