



Until we are all equal

Plan International



Stories from the Future

Adolescent girls' and young
women's vision for a hopeful future

“I hope that everyone can read and visualise these stories, imagining our voices, that they hear what we want in the future. I hope they can understand that change is now. If we want an inspiring future full of opportunities and equality, then let’s do something now. Politicians have public power to create rules, laws, and policies, improve strategies and implement them. I can only say that I hope to see these desired futures coming true, knowing that our actions are worth it in the reality of our present.”

- Ángela*, age 18, Peru

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Welcome to 2055



Introduction


“Stories from the Future” is a collection of short hopeful fiction stories set in a desirable version of the year 2055. Plan International invited 15 adolescent girls and young women from 11 countries from around the world to imagine a future 30 years from now where governments and policymakers fully adopted the recommendations made by adolescent girls and young people on the occasion of the Beijing+30 celebration. What would the lives of adolescent girls look like in this particular future? What kind of opportunities and possibilities would they have access to that they currently do not? And what kind of new or persistent challenges would they face?

The stories are not utopic. In fact, some of them are quite realistic about the struggles women and girls will probably continue to face in 30 years, despite our best efforts. Still, in all of them, you will find glimmers of hope and inspiration about what the world could look like if only humanity committed to realising young people’s vision for the future, and allowed them to lead movements for change.

In the next pages, you will:

- get to know about the authors’ storytelling process,
- learn more about common patterns in their characters, plots, and the worlds they created, and
- gain some insights on what that might mean for the future of gender equality.

Welcome to 2055!



“If we are advocating for change, we have also to imagine the world we want those girls in the future to live in.”

- Joselyne, age 25, Rwanda

Looking back to look forward

Storytellers reflected on their characters' backstories by identifying positive and negative changes for women and girls since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years ago in 1995. These are the areas the girls and young women believe have changed for the better, remain the same and are worse now than in 1995.

What has changed for the better?

- Gender parity in primary education
- Increased access to secondary and tertiary education
- Improved legislation, strategies and governmental actions to keep girls at school
- More spaces dedicated to women's and girls' empowerment
- Increased freedom and autonomy
- Increased knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Women and girls are allowed to talk about their rights
- Women and girls are more involved in decision-making and occupy more leadership roles
- More women's representation in governments

What remains unchanged since 1995?

- Sexism and machismo are ingrained in social norms
- Sexual harassment
- Gender-based violence and the lack of justice for victims and survivors
- Child, early, and forced marriages
- Period poverty
- Career gender stereotypes
- Gender pay gap
- Workplace glass ceiling
- Tokenism: women's representation in decision-making spaces has yet to be turned into actual, meaningful, and equal participation.



What is worse now in 2025?

- Anti-gender and anti-feminist movements
- Women and girls are more affected by wars and armed conflicts
- Girls are being used as war weapons
- Lack of education in conflict areas
- Disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable groups
- Increased sexual abuse
- Misinformation
- Increased online violence against women and girls (e.g. cyberbullying, online sexual harassment, revenge pornography, etc.)
- Girls' mental health and suicide rates
- Decreased financial support for adolescent girls programmes

How the girls got there...

Combining futures methods¹ and storytelling techniques, we invited the authors to:

- Reflect on advances and setbacks in women's and girls' rights in the past 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Envision a future in 2055 where governments and policymakers have implemented adolescent girls' and young women's recommendations.
- Write speculative fiction stories of adolescent girls and young women living in that future.

¹A set of tools to envision future scenarios and reflect on how to realise our desirable versions of the future.



The year 2055 girls want to see come true

As part of the storytellers' worldbuilding exercise, they discussed what the world would look like if policymakers truly implemented adolescent girls' and young people's recommendations.

Education and Technology

- Girls and young women, in all their diversity, fully access free high-quality education at all levels.
- Schools' curriculums are free from gender stereotypes and include gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education.
- Gender-balanced division of household and care work allows girls enough time for education.
- Girls and young women freely choose professions, are equally present in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), and receive equal pay.

- Clean, accessible, human-centred, and eco-friendly technologies are created by and for women and girls.
- Children and youth with disabilities access inclusive education through technological advancements.
- Technology enables high-quality education, connects remote classrooms with the world, and helps girls and young women access remote jobs.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) increases women's and girls' awareness of their rights.

Gender-Based Violence

- All forms of violence against women and girls are socially unacceptable.
- Harmful gender norms and behaviours are discouraged.

- There is strong legislation that promotes gender equality and protection.
- Women and girls live without fear and more freely.
- All forms of online violence are prevented, regulated, and punished. Women and girls access technology safely.
- Survivors are believed, supported, and provided with physical and mental health services, shelters, protection and justice.
- Perpetrators are held fully accountable.

“**In the future, there will be zero SGBV, and strict justice for victims.**”

- Barikisu, age 21, Ghana

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

- SRHR is included in the school curricula, with government support for comprehensive sexuality education.
- SRHR issues are openly discussed at home and in schools.
- Menstruating girls attend school with clean and safe facilities and free sanitary products.
- There are quality SRHR services, including access to free contraception and safe abortion, are available and accessible to every woman and girl.
- Women and girls make informed choices about their bodies and lives.
- Child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation/cutting are eradicated from the planet.

“**[In the future], sexual and reproductive rights are an important part of education, and the government is not our enemy but our ally, ensuring that Comprehensive Sexuality Education is applied in schools, which is so important for the development of everyone.**”

- Ángela*, age 18, Peru

Girls in Crisis (Armed Conflict and Climate Change)

- Everybody works to protect the planet and those most affected by climate change.
- Women and girls are fully supported to prevent, mitigate, and adapt to the disproportionate impacts of climate change.
- As climate leaders, women and girls create long-lasting positive impacts and stability.
- Armed conflicts are significantly reduced as women lead conflict resolution and peacebuilding, prioritising the needs of most affected communities.

Girls' Leadership

- From a very young age, girls access mentorship and opportunities to grow and put into practice their leadership skills in all sectors.
- Women and girls participate equally and meaningfully in decision-making at all levels, including in politics.
- Women and girls are valued and admired, and people want to vote for them.
- There is gender parity in parliaments and executive positions worldwide.
- Democracies everywhere are strong and vibrant.

“**I hope that in the future there will be massive representation of women and young girls in STEM fields, politics, and leadership positions, breaking down historical barriers and biases.**”

- Adiatu, age 20, Ghana



Adolescent girls and young women from the future

Before developing the stories, the authors created detailed characters. In this collection of 15 stories, each character is quite unique. Still, they carry some similar traits that indicate what the authors think girls in the future will be like.

- Diversity is fully embraced: the protagonists embody different characteristics and identities. There is representation of girls with physical disabilities, neurodivergent girls, Indigenous, Black, rural, nomadic, and LBTQI+ girls.

“ The message I want to share is that everyone should have the same rights regardless of their identities. Everyone should be free to make their own decisions. Diversity is the uniqueness of each of us.”

- Cristina*, age 22, Timor Leste

- Freedom as power: girls have the freedom to pursue and enjoy activities that in the present are still usually associated with boys, such as climbing trees, going on adventures, exploring the external world, playing chess, basketball, and football, coding, and developing and using high technology.
- Natural leaders: all characters demonstrate skills associated with leadership, such as confidence, courage, authenticity, determination, and thoughtfulness, as well as empathy, solidarity, curiosity, and joy. Many of them have journals and notebooks, which symbolises their reflexive nature. Sometimes they struggle with too many responsibilities and expectations on their shoulders. Still, they are never afraid of the challenges they face. Even when discouragement or self-doubt impacts them for a moment, they persist and use their online and offline platforms to speak up.
- Lifelong learners: girls excel in school, including in STEM. The pursuit of tertiary education is common

amongst the characters. They use books, arts, and online resources to keep learning.

- Advocacy as a lifestyle: the girls from the future value justice, respect, inclusion and equality. They are all fully committed to women’s and girls’ rights and actively use their voices to participate in decision-making and lead change.
- Intergenerational awareness: most of the protagonists are walking in the footsteps of previous generations of women activists, and they are intentional regarding the legacy they want to create for future generations of girls.

“ The girls in the future will be very much appreciative of the efforts of today’s gender activists to give them a brighter future. They will occupy spaces irrespective of their gender.”

- Tenneh, age 23, Sierra Leone

- Collective engagement: many characters have roles that involve bringing others together, such as coordinating community centres, tech clubs, societies, non-profit organisations, and developing workshops and programmes for girls.
- Community as a strength: they are close to their friends and families and cherish their communities and cultural identities. This is expressed in the fact that they value traditional clothing styles and spending time together singing, dancing, sharing meals, and engaging in key community decisions.

“I love that our stories show everyone’s involvement in resolving an issue. This is what we lack and what many communities still lack. Standing up and making our voices heard is how we will make things move.”

- G.T. Brielle*, age 18, Togo



What can we learn from the future?

Persistent challenges

In every story, the authors were invited to think about what in storytelling is called an “inciting incident”, an event that sets their protagonist on a journey. It is interesting to learn what authors thought would be persistent gender equality challenges in 2055.

- **Climate Change:** the impacts of climate change are something we will have to deal with for many generations in the future, and Indigenous knowledge seems to be our best adaptation tool.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** all forms of gender-based violence have decreased significantly thanks to governmental measures and activism, but GBV still remains a concerning issue.
- **Social Norms:** deep-rooted social norms seem to be the ultimate obstacle to equality. Many stories

reveal a protagonist caught by surprise when she faces unexpected backlash, usually due to lingering resistance from traditional old male leaders and conservative ideas emerging among young boys. At times, stories reveal a hidden sense within the community that women and girls can only go so far and the need to further work on new masculinities to remove invisible gender barriers.

- **Gender equality, but not yet for everybody:** despite the inspiring advancements in terms of gender equality presented in the stories, some groups are still being left behind, such as girls who do not conform to feminine-coded stereotypes, nomadic girls from traditional tribes, girls who choose to wear hijabs, refugees, girls with autism, and LGBTQI+ individuals. There is a clear message that an intersectional approach to gender equality is more important than ever.

- **Never a done deal:** some stories show that once achievements in women’s and girls’ rights and young people’s access to education and technology are considered a done deal, governmental and societal priorities and investments might change, which can jeopardize gains and negatively impact future generations.



Reaching resolutions

Stories usually reach a point where challenges are resolved or dealt with by the protagonist. It is curious to observe the common patterns in which the storytellers envisioned the resolution of their protagonists’ challenges.

- **Consensus achieved through dialogue:** to reach a resolution, protagonists engage community members and foster conversations, demonstrate their key messages through data, arts, and storytelling, and rely on their public speaking and strong digital communication skills. There is a strong sense that communal understanding and the co-creation of solutions are essential for advancing and sustaining women’s and girls’ rights.
- **Public pressure is key:** once community members are convinced about the need to change or secure what was already achieved, their public engagement in offline and online movements is perceived as an effective way to pressure governments to act.
- **Strong governmental role:** Governments are portrayed as key actors in implementing and scaling up girls’ initiatives and enabling systemic and long-lasting change.



The future of gender equality

In the stories, elements such as the presence of secondary characters, the place where the stories are set, and how the authors chose to structure their stories also bring insightful messages about how gender equality can be achieved.

- **Change takes time:** the overwhelming presence of grandmothers in the stories shows an impressive intergenerational dimension and awareness that change indeed takes time to be fully implemented. It is a beautiful way to honour the generations of women activists who came before them and acknowledge that gender equality cannot be taken for granted. The protagonists have a clear understanding that their own advocacy is key for ensuring long-lasting impacts.
- **From local to global:** most of the characters live in villages and small communities, but that doesn’t limit their national and global influence and leadership. There is a shared perception that local change will inspire global transformations.
- **Not a hero’s journey:** in most stories, resolution is not in the hands of the protagonist alone. It takes the involvement of friends, family, community members, activists, and policymakers to achieve meaningful transformation.

“ [In 2055,] some subtle biases against women still exist. The journey toward true gender equality is ongoing.”

- Reem, age 20, Ethiopia

Back to 2025



As you read this inspiring collection of stories, please bear in mind what authors want you to take with you:

These stories are a small demonstration of how much women and girls can contribute to their communities, countries, and the world when gender barriers are removed, and they are fully supported to thrive.

The future is yet to be created, and together, we have the power to make it even better than the versions pictured in the stories.

It may seem that your role is small in the face of the big challenges we have ahead of us. But look at what these girls achieved in their stories and what the authors are achieving in their communities. Take your responsibility seriously and act now!

Enjoy the reading, and let's create a wonderful future for women and girls together.

Stories





#CodeforChange

By Adiatu, age 20, Ghana

Zainab, 16, dropped off her mom's flying car and stepped onto a fast train in the advanced city of Hohoe as she coded a few more lines from her smartwatch. Wearing one of her usual colourful outfits, which matches her high spirits, Zainab gives a break to her busy programmer's brain and looks out of the window to appreciate the incredibly beautiful green landscape of her city. It is 2055, and Ghana, her country, has changed a lot. Women and girls are making a big difference in every area of society, and Hohoe has become this happy place where basically every young person knows how to code. As a young African, Zainab loves her community and feels lucky to live there. She is proud of her culture and loves eating yummy foods and dancing with her friends.

Like any other day, the train will quickly take her to the community centre, where she learns advanced coding with her friends. After that, she will walk with her peers to school and learn science, maths and more. She cannot wait for the weekly evening virtual reality workshop, where they will deep dive into a new country's culture.

As soon as she enters the community centre, everybody's smartwatches blink at the same time: the coding centres across the country will be shut down for lack of funds. In a live interview, the Minister of Technology says that now that pretty much everyone knows how to code, the government must invest in other priorities. Zainab and her friends cannot believe what they just heard. The centre is much more than a place to learn basic coding, which she agrees could be done online. They are experimenting with such cool things, and these centres have become a safe space for youth to connect in person with each other. And what about the future generations? Didn't they deserve to have the same opportunities? Everyone was so sad, and they felt paralysed by the news.

Not Zainab. The possibility of seeing her friends, community, and girls yet to be born impacted by this measure ignited a fire inside her. She was determined to save the coding centres and ensure that girls like her across generations continued to have access to digital education and opportunities. Faster than she usually already was, she requested the help of her family and friends and used her coding skills. In less than 24

hours, they had an app ready to raise money and save the coding centres throughout the country. However, her strategy didn't go so well. Most of the adult population was actually in favour of using public funds for more relevant issues. They thought young people already had enough support and their coding skills were not really being used for the collective good but much more for personal interests. Zainab felt discouraged and started doubting herself. In the evening, her friends and family tried to cheer her up, making her laugh at silly things. Her parents were certain that she would find a solution. When everybody went to bed, Zainab wrote in her journal about how much her community gave her strength, and that was exactly what she needed to restore for her people: a sense of community.

The next morning, she reprogrammed the app and launched a social media campaign called #CodeForChange. Zainab was inviting everyone in the country to share their dreams for their communities and instigated young programmers to reflect on how they would use their coding skills to make those dreams become reality. Her friends and family helped share the campaign and shortly, lots of people and local businesses, not just in Hohoe but all over Ghana, were sharing their dreams and donating resources for the continuity of the coding centres.

Soon, smartwatches were all blinking as the Minister of Technology started another live on social media praising the campaign and saying that it had shown her and her team that, indeed, young people's coding skills could be used for the collective good. She announced a big governmental investment for all the coding centres interested in developing solutions to make Ghanaians' collective dreams come true.

Zainab is a confident leader who now lives in a country where technology and community walk together. She steps onto a fast train like every morning, and despite her non-stop smartwatch notifications with updates about all the incredible projects they are running at her coding centre, Zainab prefers to use her journey to talk to people who come talk to her and share their dreams. After all, she knows codes can change the world, but the community makes it home.



A Dream Come True

By Thialal, age 20, Senegal

Tracy moves with agility. She dribbles past Céline, Manon, Margot. The crowd roars as she cuts through the lane. Tracy leaps gracefully, extends her arm, and releases the ball just beyond the reach of Sophie's hand. The ball kisses the backboard and drops beautifully through the net —nothing but perfection. Tracy, Tracy, Tracy!!! What a pride for Senegal Basketball.

"Tracy, time to go to school!" her mom shouts from the kitchen.

Tracy is interrupted in the middle of her daydreaming. She gets down from the roof of her house, her favourite spot in the world, to face another hard day. Her short hair had always been a topic of dispute. Dresses and skirts? Not for her. Tracy preferred jeans, shorts, and T-shirts, practical for climbing trees and playing sports. She was criticized for her appearance, energy, and outspokenness everywhere. The girls at her school and even the teachers would judge her for

being "too masculine". Even on the basketball court or the football pitch, she faced prejudice. Some boys found her "too manly," and some girls envied her talent. To make everything worse, Tracy had a big sister, Magatte, who was the opposite of her – flirtatious, vain, concerned about her appearance, and popular with the boys. "Why can't you be like your sister?" her mom constantly asked. Magatte would add: "You should make an effort, Tracy. You are marginalizing yourself. Boys don't like girls like you." The silence of Tracy's dad was just as hurtful.

Tracy was comfortable in her skin. She liked her hairstyle and was a proud talented athlete who loved the feeling of freedom sports gave her. The speed of movement, the team spirit, the competition. Every day, she was proving that girls could play well too, but no one seemed to care. She always allowed herself to go on adventures with the boys from the neighbourhood, exploring the vast streets of her village Nguinaw Rail, and the entire Louga region in Teranga (Senegal),

without bothering about clothes or mannerisms. It was so much fun! She resisted the role imposed on her—that of a sweet, submissive girl. Tracy was a rebel, determined to live on her terms. But, of course, no one likes to be judged and laughed or shouted at. She was tired. Maybe it would be simpler if she had been born a boy. However, Tracy longed for a world where girls were free to choose their own paths without judgment.

One night, Tracy dreamed of an old woman approaching her who looked like her but much older. "Do you want to see the future for girls? Follow me", she said. In an instant, Tracy was floating before landing in a futuristic version of Nguinaw Rail, with greenery-covered buildings. Everything seemed so harmonious, and she couldn't see two people with the same style. Everybody was so unique in their clothing, energy, and expressions. It was a vital and yet serene, equal world. "Welcome to 2055," the woman said. "Here, girls are free to choose their lives, their passions, the way they look, and what they do without constraints."

Tracy was so amazed by everything. It was possible! Deep down in her heart, she had always known that this was possible. Then, the woman took Tracy to the most famous basketball court in Senegal. In front of the court, there was a beautiful statue of her and a plaque that said "Best basketball player. Gender equality champion". Tracy couldn't believe her eyes. "Now you have your answer," the woman said. "Girls' lives will be better in the future, thanks to you." Tracy was about to ask how when a sudden whirlwind swept her away, and she woke up. Her heart was pounding, the dream still vivid in her mind. She ran to her window and looked at her familiar world with new eyes. She now understood she was not alone in her questioning – change was possible.

From that moment, Tracy stopped letting herself be intimidated by derogatory comments. She asserted her right to love sports, wear what she wanted, and dream of a freer future for all girls. Tracy began to share her vision with her family and friends, started a blog, "Free

Girl", to discuss gender inequalities, sexist stereotypes, and violence against women and girls, and found support from other women, in all their diversity, by attending feminist conferences and meetings. Little by little, she could see things changing. When Tracy indeed became the best basketball player in Senegal and the whole African continent, she used her powerful platform to keep advocating for women's and girls' rights.

Now, in 2055, at 46 years old, Tracy is retired from basketball but remains a huge source of inspiration for girls everywhere. She has a successful sports club, which welcomes thousands of girls every year to teach them about sports and gender equality. How wonderful it is to be a girl when you know your worth!



Threads of growth
By Jhussahara, age 20, Peru

In the vibrant village of Pallanchacra, in the region of Pasco, in the highlands of Peru, close to the plaza where kaleidoscopic murals celebrate the groundbreaking work of women in education, agriculture, science and more, lives a 13-year-old girl named Killa. Every day she wakes up, excited to go to school and explore possibilities. Passionate about STEM, Killa has a particular fascination for discovering solutions for seemingly unsolvable problems. That particular morning, though, Killa carried mixed feelings in her heart on her way to school. The Peruvian government had launched a climathon targeting STEM-enthusiastic students hoping to develop better adaptation solutions for the country's present environmental crises. The prize would be participation in the actual implementation of the solution on a large scale – a crucial step since the consequences of climate change were getting out of hand with the current scientific knowledge available. Killa was over

the moon when her teacher Marta approached her and asked her to form a small group to participate, as she thought Killa had a great chance of winning. What's not to like about an opportunity like that? Her increased climate anxiety. Killa was autistic, and the constant disruptions of her routine due to unexpected climate events were already messing up her inner balance. Moreover, the weight of colonialism within her family was already a lingering presence, and her sharp memory – a double-edged sword – traps her constantly in endless loops of hopeless states, climate data and doom-like future projections, making her feel asphyxiated, trapped. Killa felt too much, cared too deeply—an exhaustion that sank into her bones. And worst of all, no one seemed to feel it the way she did. If the problem felt impossible even to her, how could anyone possibly find the right stepping stones forward to a solution?

When Killa arrived at school, to her happy surprise, Marta had prepared a quiet room filled with cushions and some sensory materials to support Killa in regulating herself better and concentrating on the climathon's challenge. In the middle of the room, there was a big and colourful crochet yarn which felt soothing. One by one, the three girls Killa picked for her ultra-smart group arrived in the room. As Killa kept her hands busy with the yarn, she was able to focus and articulate her bad feelings about the future of climate change. What initially felt like venting to clear the air and move on to solutions became a group support dynamic. Also holding the yarn, the other girls shared their fears. Jazmin missed the home her family had to abruptly abandon in Lima due to the sea rise. Suyai's parents were struggling financially with the reduced crops, and she was concerned about having to abandon her optional STEM classes to work or stay home to take care of her younger brother. Alejandra was scared of her dad's new behaviours now that he lost his job in the mines and had been drinking too much.

It was alarming to think that climate change could unfold a future for girls that looked much more like a past than the actual futures they were dreaming about, despite the foundational stones of gender parity education and free STEM programmes for girls everywhere in the country. When Killa looked at their hands entangled with the yarn, she thought of her grandma, Gloria, and her lessons: how their Quechua-Yaru ancestors understood the world, a big web where all life forms, including humans, are interconnected and integral to keep the balance. The girls began to reflect on the knowledge passed down through generations in their communities, recognizing how their people have long adapted to the changing rhythms of nature, including ways to cope with different weather patterns over centuries. Combining these pieces of knowledge with their own experiences, they wrote each solution on a small piece of paper and glued it somewhere in the yarn:

- Increase the use of totorillas (reeds) to purify water and improve water quality in the surrounding local communities.
- Strengthen the communities' capacity to integrate diverse crops in an agroforestry system and ensure food security.
- Monitor changes in animal migration routes to anticipate the needs of human migration before areas are severely impacted.
- Map the specific needs of groups at greater risk, such as girls and people with disabilities, and integrate them across measures.

Grant Pachamama (mother nature) legal rights so life gets prioritised over the economic gains of a few. They mapped a whole web of climate adaptation solutions, and when the climathon judges saw that, they realised that girls' specific experiences with climate change were not necessarily a weakness but a valuable contribution to be seriously considered in the creation of more efficient solutions for all.

This morning, Killa woke up earlier than usual to meet Jazmin, Suyai, and Alejandra. They all wore knitted outfits as they headed to a meeting with the Climate Change Cabinet of the Ministry of the Environment, eager to tackle seemingly unsolvable problems.

- Recruit the unemployed population to replant native forests and restore traditional water canals in the Andes to reduce droughts, while also engaging in "cultivo de agua" (water cultivation).



So it never happens again

By Kadiata, age 23, Guinea

Aïcha, 15, lay awake, struggling to sleep in the intense heat of Guinea. As soon as the house was silent and everyone was asleep, she heard voices of women and girls speaking about injustices she barely understood: “Girls are being sold as brides”. “Female cutting must be forbidden by law”. “Millions of girls are missing school for lack of menstrual products”.

Where were these voices coming from? They didn’t even make sense! In her village, girls attended school daily, with access to free sanitary products and clean and safe facilities. No one practised female genital mutilation /cutting (FGM/C) or forced child marriages – these practices were explicitly forbidden by law.

At first, Aïcha thought she was hearing some kind of haunted spirits, so she tried to talk to the Fulani religious leaders. They didn’t let her speak. “We don’t talk about these atrocities, Aïcha. You shouldn’t be spreading bad ideas around”. She tried to talk to her mother and aunts, asked her teacher about it, and told

friends at school, only to be strongly discouraged from even thinking about this. “Leave the past in the past”, they insisted.

Determined to uncover the truth, when the lights went out, Aïcha stayed up to confront the voices directly. To her astonishment, she traced them to a small wooden doll inherited from her grandmother, who had recently passed away. Inside the hollow doll, she discovered a little digital device set up to play a recording in a loop. It contained a vast archive of photos, videos, testimonials, and reports detailing the horrors endured by women and girls in the past, even among her own Fulani community. That archive was the real heritage Aïcha’s grandmother had left her. Aïcha obviously didn’t sleep a wink that night. “How could the world have been so cruel to girls and women before?” she asked herself. “Can our current generation remain calm and feel safe? Or are we at risk that humanity plunges back into these barbarities?”

She needed to ensure her community knew about the dangers of these harmful practices and the struggles that led to their current freedoms. But simply talking about it would not be enough—she needed a powerful way to open people’s eyes. With the school’s annual student fair approaching, Aïcha saw an opportunity. Each student was responsible for organising a booth with a small exhibition, and the entire village attended. The student fair was a highly anticipated event in Aïcha’s village. Using her technological skills and the extensive archive from her grandmother, she created a virtual museum telling the stories of women and girls impacted by harmful practices. Using augmented reality glasses, visitors could see graphs showing that 30 years ago, more than 200 million girls and women might have been subjected to FGM/C in the name of cultural and religious traditions willing to control their virginity and sexuality. It was possible to watch parents’ testimonials of regret for having forced their daughters to undergo cutting just to be accepted in the community and secure a future marriage, without realising the horrible chronic pain and urinary and sexual problems they were putting their children through. In the child, early, and forced marriage virtual room, visitors could see the negative implications for the girls turned into brides in terms of lower educational levels, social isolation, early pregnancy, higher risks of maternal mortality and sexually transmitted infections, and the perpetuation of gender-based violence.

Because Aïcha knew that showcasing the problem only would end up generating more resistance than dialogue, she also included news media and campaign materials showing how these severe forms of violence against girls got resolved in the past decades. Visitors could see photos and videos of civil society organisations engaging religious and traditional leaders and families, new legislation being adopted in various countries, robust awareness-raising efforts in schools, healthcare facilities, community centres, and online, and the provision of legal, mental and physical healthcare, and educational services for the victims of harmful practices.

The final stop of the virtual route featured survivors asking visitors to preserve these memories as a way to educate future generations about the horrible consequences of gender discrimination, identify early signs of harmful practices and prevent them from escalating and reaffirm the sexual and reproductive rights of all women and girls around the world.

As the fair progressed, more and more villagers lined up to experience Aïcha’s virtual museum. By the evening, her father, the laamiido —the highest leader of their community—approached her, having observed the impact of her project. “Daughter, I’ve been watching you the whole day. My mother would be proud of you. I thought recalling the past only reopened old wounds, but you taught me today that memories help us shape a better future”. We will turn your virtual exhibition into a physical museum for all of Guinea and beyond. So we make sure these atrocities do not ever happen again. That night, Aïcha finally slept in peace, knowing that she had honoured her grandmother’s legacy and safeguarded the future of generations and generations of girls to come.



The school that travels the desert

By Anguach, age 24, Ethiopia

My name is Tesfanesh Bihonage. I am a 20-year-old young woman with a physical disability who belongs to a nomadic community, living in one of the lowland areas of northern Ethiopia, approximately 1.000 km from the capital city, Addis Ababa. I deeply cherish our culture of mutual support through times of joy and sorrow and our strong spiritual connection to the land, the animals that travel with us, the desert and its creatures. On clear sky nights, we sing, dance, and drink camel milk under the stars.

When I was born, most of my community, including my parents, had abandoned their nomadic lifestyle due to the challenges imposed by climate change on their health, food security, and physical safety related to extreme events. Despite this being a huge cultural shock for most of us, an unexpected positive outcome of that shift was that girls began to attend school regularly. In the past, women and girls in our tribe were responsible for fetching water and wood, weaving

tapestry, growing food, and cooking, without much time left for anything else. Studying was a boy's privilege. Even when the families considered it important for girls to learn more than just how to read and write, the long distances to schools and the dangers on the way made parents reluctant to allow girls to enroll in formal education.

So, our temporarily settled life enabled me to attend school and devour book after book, including biographies of global women leaders, such as Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg. They are now in their 50s, but they started fighting for changes at a very young age, and I have always wanted to do the same. Five years ago, when my community partnered with Ethiopian universities and developed tents that could resist higher temperatures and preserve food for longer periods of time, the elders decided it was time to recover our nomadic life, which is a key aspect of our identity.

My friends and I were concerned. As much as we wanted to experience the freedom of movement of our ancestors and reconnect with nature, we were not ready to interrupt our studies. One night, as the community prepared to initiate its first movements after a long time, we sang, danced, drank camel's milk and told stories that have been transmitted across so many generations. That was when I realised that my community held a lot of knowledge and wisdom that was relevant not only to ourselves but also to all Ethiopian people, and these were not being taught at schools. We were masters of land rehabilitation, we knew so much about protecting and regenerating ecosystems with the right native species and increasing carbon sequestration, we had multiple dialects to describe nature with precision, and we knew how to read the subtlest signs in fauna and flora to predict weather changes better than any machine. I was proud to access this incredible knowledge and wished the entire world could do the same.

Before departing, I organised a group of girls, and we went together to speak with the elders and present a detailed proposal of how we intended to honour the most essential aspect of who we were as a community and, at the same time, ensure our continued education, including for persons with disabilities like me. Here is what we proposed and are currently doing:

We have a better division of tasks between girls and boys in such a way that everybody has equal time to study.

Some of our solar-powered tents are dedicated learning hubs with access to the internet and radio waves, where we have video and audio lessons and online mentoring aligned with the national curriculum content, and we often exchange ideas on how to apply the content to our specific reality. Offline versions of the lessons are available for the most remote parts of our route.

- In the beginning, those more advanced in their studies were responsible for teaching the younger generations the content and skills usually taught at schools, such as English, Math and Science. After a while, we managed to secure publicly funded teachers who travel with us.
- The elders remain in charge of transmitting their traditional knowledge, indigenous languages, and Ecology. We are always very impressed with the wide span of elderly women's expertise, from agriculture to medicinal herbs, arts and crafts, and conflict resolution.
- Our exams and evaluations respect our seasonal moves and are mostly competency- and skills-based rather than being very rigid with grades – although most of us have pretty good ones.

Because of our strong sense of collective climate stewardship and environmental protection, and given all the climate events happening around the world in 2055, we also felt the need to share our valuable knowledge with other parts of Ethiopia and the world. And that is how we became famous digital influencers and were later officially integrated into the national school curriculum. Nowadays, we are known in the entire world as a free online school that travels the desert sharing crucial ancestral knowledge for our unprecedented times.



The pearl's wisdom

By Joselyne, age 25, Rwanda

I know what you must be thinking. How come you understand every word I am saying even though you are not literate in SSL (Solaria's Sign Language)? Well, that is how powerful accessibility to technology is in my country. Oh, I almost forgot to introduce myself. My name is Solara, I am 15, and as you probably already noticed, I LOVE technology.

Look at my wheelchair, isn't it cool? It takes me everywhere and is connected with this amazing app that hears your words and transforms them into SSL for me, and vice-versa! I sign, and you can read and hear my words in whatever language you speak. Do you know how much I had to pay for it? Zero! Here in Solaria everybody has free access to their basic needs. I'm really glad about this, especially because I am an orphan and wouldn't be able to provide this level of technology for myself. Here, no one is left behind. At the "Tech School", fully accessible to our youth, I lead a tech club dedicated to discussing the role of young girls in solving the most pressing issues around the world. We receive visitors from every part of the planet. So, I guess one thing no one can say is that I am against technology. But I am here today to alert you about the importance of fostering a human-centred technology.

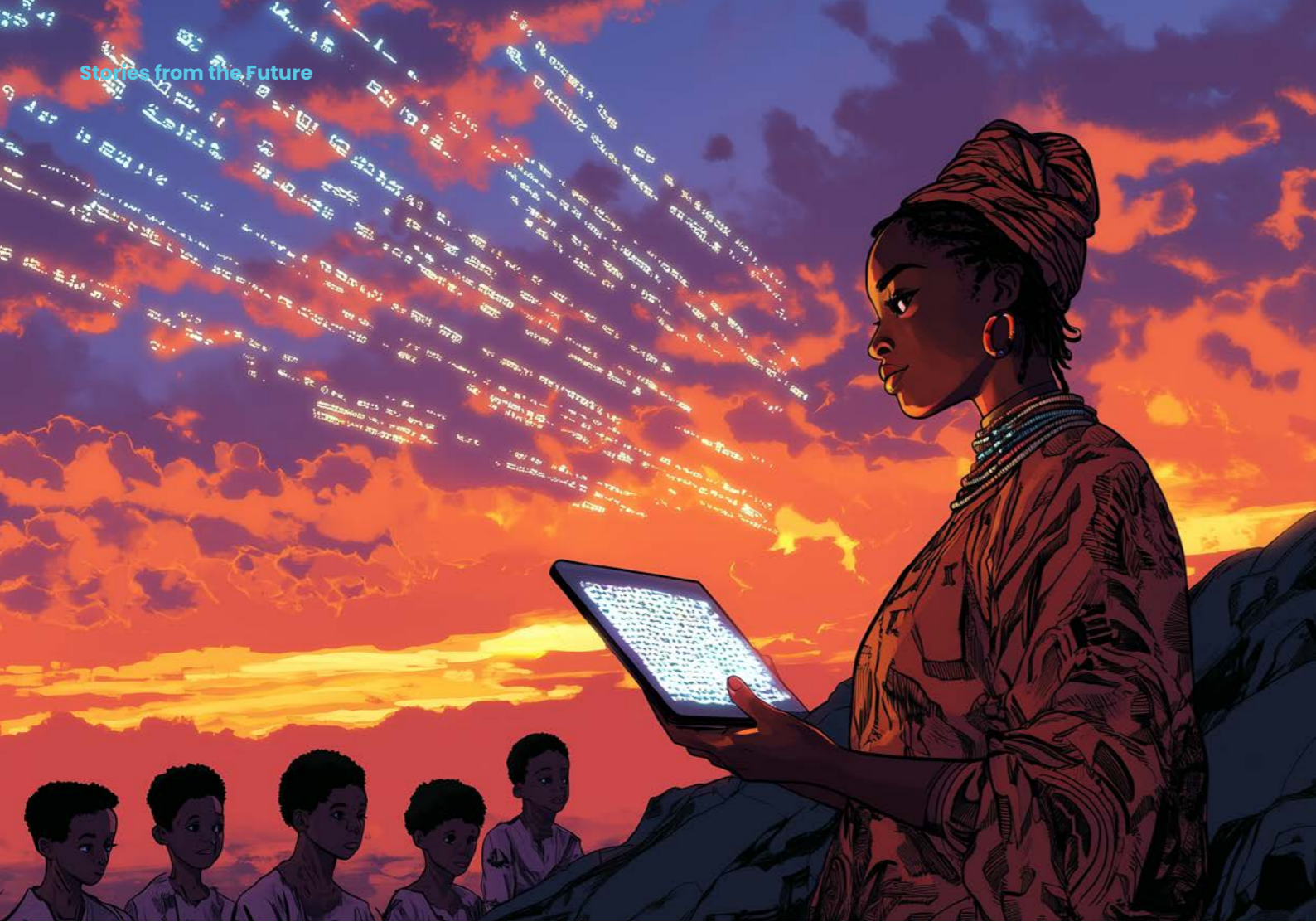
Perhaps you will understand it better if I tell you a story. Do you see this pearl in my hair? It belonged to Nana, my grandma, and before her, to her grandma. It used to mean that women should keep their precious ideas for themselves, like an oyster. But Nana changed its meaning. Despite being taught that she should remain silent and obey her husband, she followed her passion for science. Thanks to her, I am a young scientist. "You are strong. You are loved. You are enough. Your name is Solara. You are meant to shine like the sun and make the world a better place". Nana repeated these words to me every day like a prayer my whole life. One of my favourite moments was sitting with her as she rubbed the pearl in her hair and told stories of how much things have changed for the better in the last decades. A year ago, my Nana died. And I think you would imagine that I was devastated and mourned for a long time. Well, I didn't. I didn't even cry! Isn't that strange?

My peers at the tech club and I thought so. We have read that losing a loved one brings grief. But one by one, we all recalled times when we felt nothing, just a regular calm. We thought something was wrong with our generation. So, we ran a big research project to understand the cause of such behaviours in 98% of young people here in Solaria and found out about a governmental project running since 2040. Every person born at a health centre or hospital in Solaria had an AI implant placed in their brain without parental consent. Why would they do that? To make people more efficient in whatever they do. At this pace of technological innovation in our country, there is no time to waste, being sad or happy.

At first, I felt condemned to a lesser life. Then, rubbing this pearl in my hair, thinking, I remembered Nana's words: make the world a better place. That is how I engaged the girls at the tech club, and we found a way to deactivate the brain implant and let people control their own emotions. Because we found a strong correlation between the implants and the increase in mental health issues among the youth, we convinced the government to stop the project.

We are now adapting to an emotion-informed life. We have created safe spaces in schools and tech clubs where young people can meet and learn to deal with real feelings. The results have been extraordinary. As we gather here today for the 99th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), with thousands in the audience and many more online, I am happy to say that Solaria is entering a new era. Parents and children who once lived like strangers feel love again. Artists inspire us with their creativity. And young girls and boys now know that technology must help humanity, not control it.

I am Solara, granddaughter of Nana, an inhabitant of Solaria. Here, we are all meant to shine like the sun and make this world a better place.



Changing the world, one poem at a time

By G.T. Alia, age 21, Togo

Adjoa tried to text her best friend, Kwame “Got the main prize at the slam competition!!!”, but the message couldn’t be delivered. She searched for Kwame’s profile on several social media platforms and they were all gone. For one second, Adjoa questioned if her friend would have cancelled her, but she couldn’t find a reason for that. So, she decided to go check on Kwame at her house. They didn’t live far from each other in the small village of Codjo, Ghana. When they met, Kwame explained the reason: she had been a victim of some kind of deepfake pornography and, in desperation, erased her entire online existence. There have been several cases in the last 24 hours and many girls were talking about giving up on the online world once and for all.

After calming her friend and completing the necessary reports to the platform, the police, and the governmental agency in charge of cyber crimes, Adjoa

tried to understand why such an old crime was still happening. By 2055, all platforms counted on digital identity verification to avoid anonymous actions and AI moderation to prevent any form of abuse in real time, including gender-based digital violence. After years and years of discussion, global digital guidelines to prevent any form of harassment while ensuring freedom of expression were agreed upon, and implementation was already in progress. Adjoa had thought that gender-informed digital ethics had become common sense by then.

Some days later, the Ghanaian government issued a statement informing that a new technology capable of bypassing all the digital guardrails had been developed by a criminal group, yet to be identified. An investigation was being carried out, and the government was working tirelessly with digital platforms to update systems and improve protections.

It wasn’t the first time that this kind of incident had happened. Adjoa realised that despite all the successful external measures to protect women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence, including online, social norms hadn’t changed at the same speed. She understood that without tackling this root cause, every time a new technological development was made, they would again have to be prepared for a cybercrime. This was exhausting and unfair. She could understand her friends’ impulse to distance themselves from the digital space, but in a world where digital skills were demanded in every single job, they could not afford not to be online and digitally proficient. Additionally, online spaces remained extremely relevant for education and for voicing their opinions in public debates.

Adjoa was feeling helpless when she received a message from the organisers of the slam competition she had won the other day. “Hi, Adjoa! We have grants for slam dissemination and encourage you to apply. We were really impressed by your talent”. She had an idea! She would apply for the grant and use the funds to teach slam techniques to boys and young males and help them develop poetry lines to create new masculinity models that didn’t involve any form of violence against women and girls.

With the funds received, Adjoa travelled the country and became a role model poet to younger generations of boys and girls. Over time, poems and more poems with new social norms regarding healthy relationships and gender liberation fled online platforms, reaching different parts of the world and transforming hearts, minds, and behaviours. After years of working intensely, cyber crimes against women and girls were becoming less and less common. One afternoon, Adjoa turned her digital devices off and climbed a mountain on her own. When she reached the top, she saw the most beautiful sunset and whispered

improvising:

“No screens shall shame,
no words shall bruise.
Love, consent, respect,
that should be no news.
Safe havens for our voices,
Smart spaces of multiple choices.
A place where you belong,
For who you are,
That is what we long for,
Come on, this reality isn’t that far”.

Adjoa smiled and turned on her phone again. She had to post this right now.



The School for Everybody

By Cristina*, age 23, Timor Leste

Lisa couldn't decide if she was happy or sad as she packed her bags to move from a rural area in the south of the Philippines to the capital Manila. At 19, it was time to start a bachelor's degree in Education and pursue her biggest dream: to become a highly qualified teacher and give back to her community all the incredible support she had received throughout her education. This meant that for a good number of years – potentially all the way to her PhD – Lisa would no longer be living with her grandparents or spending much time with the lovely community that was there for her up until now. Her childhood friends were also moving elsewhere to continue their studies, as the Philippines has 80% of its youth enrolled in tertiary education and gender parity at all levels.

As soon as she started university, she bonded with a small group of LGBTQI+ colleagues who were organising a student society to discuss the topic of LGBTQI+ rights on campus. Lisa was unsure about the need to have a specific group about that. She loved

her friends and never had any prejudice towards their sexual orientation or gender identity. But, back home, in her village, it was believed that these were personal issues, and it was even rude to discuss them in public. So, Lisa had never thought about the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals before.

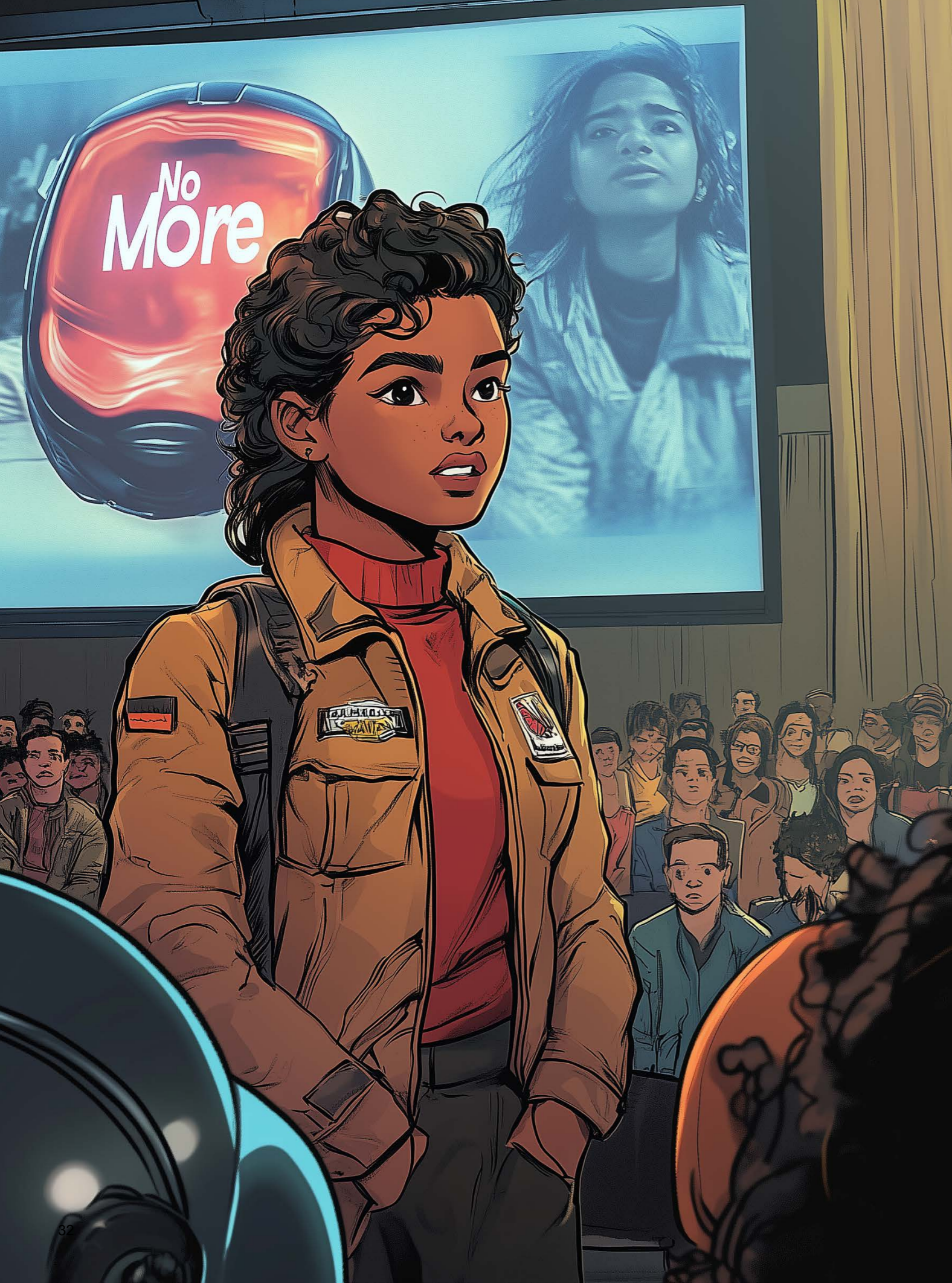
Over the first months, she learned a lot about her friends' experiences. She observed people making faces when they saw a same-sex couple holding hands, her best friend, Joana, having to move out from a shared apartment after disclosing to her flatmates that she was lesbian, and even some colleagues in class excluding Lisa from group assignments because she was a member of the LGBTQI+ society and therefore she must be "one of them". In the beginning, Lisa couldn't understand how a highly educated young population could be so conservative in embracing sexual and gender diversity. One day, Joana asked her:

"How many times during your formal education have you heard anything about sexual orientation or gender identity?" Lisa couldn't remember one single time, and that felt like a big mistake in need of urgent change. Lisa and Joana decided to organise a seminar at the LGBTQI+ society to discuss why the school curriculum didn't include a more comprehensive approach to gender and sexuality. During the panels, they learned that thirty years ago, as the world faced a huge backlash against gender equality, the country's strategy to achieve SDG 4 was to use a universalizing approach, where everyone would have access to quality education, but any mention to gender or sexuality would be removed from the national school curriculum to avoid "distracting discussions" that could put children's education at risk. Clearly, the unintended outcomes of such choice were discrimination and stigma of the LGBTQI+ community and the perpetuation of heteronormative and patriarchal gender norms among younger generations. Lisa proposed the creation of a working group to incorporate comprehensive sexuality education into the national school curriculum.

The idea had repercussions all over the country and divided opinions. In the beginning, Lisa and her friends faced even more hostility at university and were accused of corrupting children's minds with dirty thoughts. They were threatened not to receive their diplomas if they continued disseminating these ideas. It was then that a group of highly successful LGBTQI+ artists, athletes, executives, scientists, and policymakers decided to come out publicly and tell stories of their time at school – how isolating it was, how their self-expression got repressed, and how their sexual and reproductive health issues were not covered in class and they had to figure everything out for themselves. Over time, straight allies also began manifesting their interest in receiving a comprehensive sexuality education to learn more about their own bodies, health, and rights, the experiences, needs and perspectives of others, and the social constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality. After all, they knew

how much a diverse society is capable of overcoming challenges, innovating and thriving together. Thanks to this incredible public commotion, Lisa and Joana managed to arrange an audience with the Education Minister and propose a participatory creative project called "The School for Everybody". Over the course of a year, they would organise seminars at universities and schools across the country and invite children, adolescents, youth, parents, teachers, local leaders, and other community members to imagine together what a school that was truly for everybody should look like in terms of content, infrastructure, and decision making processes.

The year after, they compiled all those imaginary visions and proposed a new national school curriculum that could teach not only quality academic content but also the fundamentals of the diverse and inclusive society the Filipinos aspired to be.



A war that was not theirs in the first place

By Nickolle, age 18, Colombia

Note: this story mentions sexual violence. This story is entirely fictional and does not reflect the personal experiences of the author.

Scarlet, 16, stands before the large audience of adolescent girls and boys with a firm gaze and a voice full of conviction. The youth conference of the El Amanecer Foundation—a peacebuilding non-profit founded a decade ago in 2045—is about to begin. Normally, at this time of the day, Scarlet is driving her motorcycle around Bogotá, Colombia, engaging women and girls in the foundation’s activities. But Mariana, one of her moms, has just invited her to be a co-executive director with her. The staff at El Amanecer thought it would be brilliant for Scarlet to open their youth event as a sign that peacekeeping is a continuous intergenerational effort.

“In 2025, my mother, Mariana, was exactly my age,” Scarlet begins her speech. “Colombia was at the peak of the armed conflict. She lived in a peaceful rural area, but when illegal armed groups re-emerged, no place could be considered really peaceful anymore. One day, as she was coming back from school, armed men arrived at her door and threatened her: ‘Either you go with us or you die.’”

The silence in the room was like a grave. Scarlet closed her eyes for a second, wondering whether retelling those memories was the right thing to do 30 years later. But she wanted to continue.

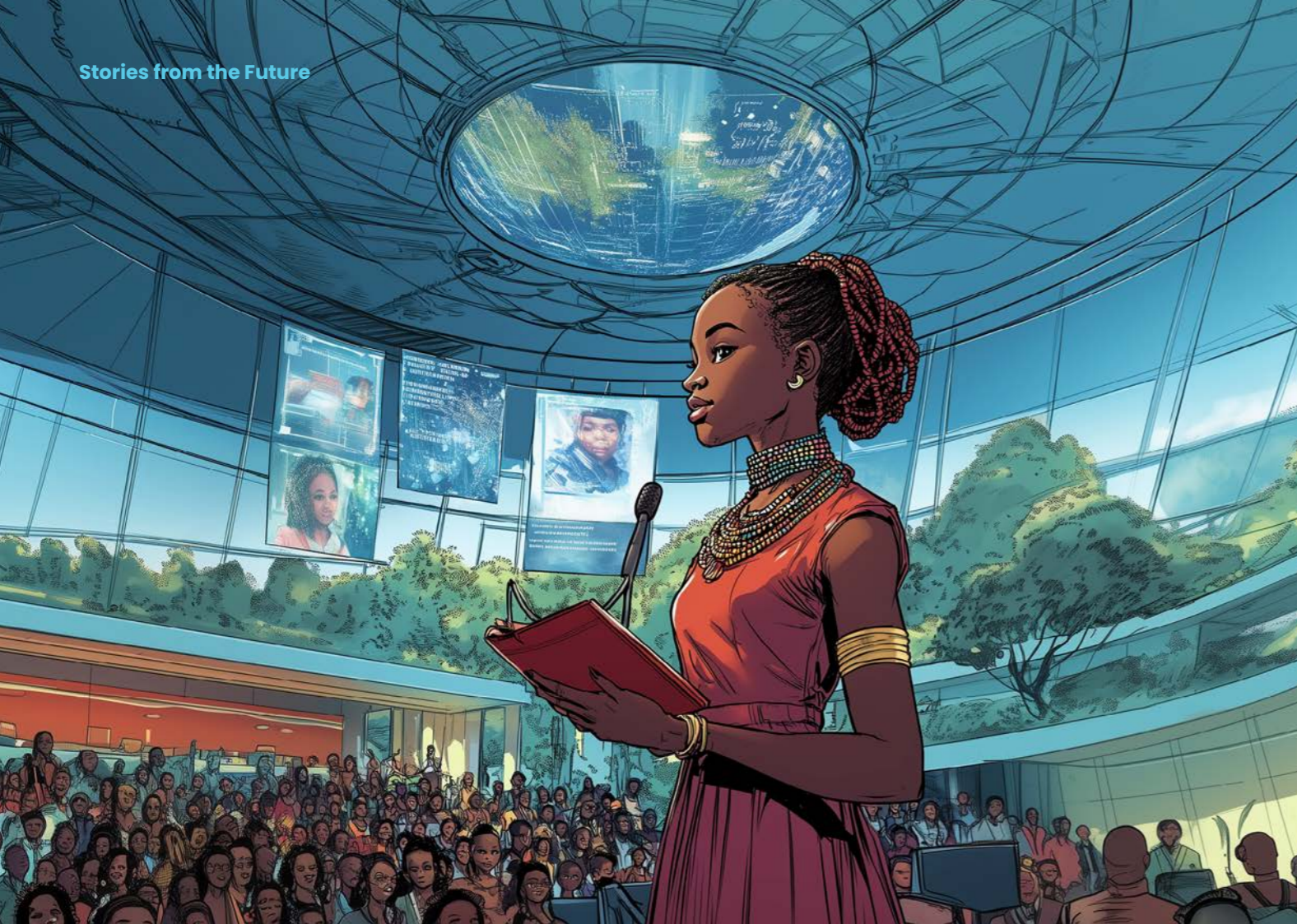
“She didn’t have a choice. They ripped her away from her home and took her to the Amazon jungle. Like her, other adolescent girls and young women were taken that day, and their communities were devastated. Up until recently, women and girls were used as war weapons. My mom faced psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Like other women in war zones around the world, she was denied her most basic rights, including access to food and menstrual products, making her feel even more dehumanized. At some point, she got pregnant and risked her life having an abortion in very unsafe conditions. She could have died so many times, but she didn’t, thanks to a strong community of women who didn’t give up on her.” Scarlet pauses and looks at the audience’s attentive faces, seeking some hope.

“My grandmother and other women who had lost their daughters that day joined forces. They searched for them everywhere, mobilised civil society organisations, arranged meetings with the government, spoke to the media, and organised public campaigns to explain how women and girls were specifically impacted by conflicts. These women were faced with indifference, fear, and disbelief and heard multiple times they should stop searching, as the girls would probably be dead already, and that this kind of movement could attract new trouble to their neighbourhood. Thanks to their tireless efforts, an agreement was settled, and most of the adolescent girls were returned home alive.” Scarlet looks at her mom Mariana in the audience, thankful for her life.

“Unfortunately, new episodes like this continued to happen in the country for fifteen more years. It wasn’t until 2045 that the indignation exploded. Survivors, activists, and pretty much every Colombian woman raised their voices in an unprecedented social outburst and said: ‘No more!’. They took power and became the peace mediators of a war that was not theirs in the first place. With an approach that centred the voices and experiences of women and other marginalised groups, and prioritized dialogue, empathy, and consensus-building, they achieved our longest peace agreement so far. And their efficient recovery strategies have focused on trauma healing, education, community cohesion, economic resilience, and transitional justice.” The murmur of approval grows among the young audience.

“And here we are today, in 2055, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the El Amanecer Foundation, founded by my mother and other survivors. May we have a fruitful day of discussions and a concrete youth-informed action plan to keep ensuring that peace is here to stay and no other woman or girl will be used as a war weapon ever again.”

A thunderous applause filled the room. Scarlet breathed deeply and smiled at Mariana with the certainty that her story and her work as an activist had not been in vain. It set the pathway for a very different reality for younger generations, and Scarlet was ready to continue in her mother’s footsteps.



Nkabom, uniting for young women's leadership

By Barikisu, age 21, Ghana

Her fingers trembled slightly as she adjusted the microphone on the podium. The massive solar-powered dome of the Esom Nyame Community Hall was packed with thousands of faces, all watching her. Adoma Asare, 17, was the youngest speaker ever at the National Women's Leadership Summit. Her speech on "Girls of Tomorrow," the successful girls' leadership program she had founded, was being broadcast in Ghana and across Africa.

Pressing her palm against her tiny red book with a precious collection of quotes from the first women leaders of Ghana, she spoke: "The future is now. Thirty years ago, young people like me demanded a world where leadership wasn't defined by gender or age. We stand in that world today, thanks to the implementation of gender and youth quotas. But have we done enough?"

The room grew silent as Adoma highlighted that a 50-50 world was just the first step and that equal representation should be about much more than having a seat at the table. She lamented that some older leaders were still hesitant to fully share power with the younger generations and pointed out that the girls graduating from her programme were ready for much bigger challenges. Adoma would never have imagined that her words were about to ignite a nationwide backlash.

The next day, Adoma woke up just as the solar panels on her family's rooftop began absorbing the first light of the day. She put her digital glasses on, only to find her name trending. Social media was flooded with reactions. Some claimed she had disrespected older leaders, proving youth were not ready for power. Others asked when "enough would be enough." Many young women, however, voiced their support.

Adoma was in shock. How come someone who people always turned to for advice was now being portrayed as a reckless adolescent girl? And how come Esom Nyame, a thriving town, a model for inclusivity and innovation, where women led in every sector, was now questioning what she thought was an unquestionable speech?

At school, not even the exciting debates on public policies through AI-powered simulations were able to make her stop thinking about the night before. An emergency news alert flashed across the holographic board of her classroom. "Government suspends mandatory quotas for women and youth and shuts down youth councils". Her digital glasses showed shifting perceptions among young women now blaming her for the shutdowns. Even her mentor, Madam Akosua Nkrumah, who now worked in government, had posted a video condemning her.

On the electric bus to the Community Hub, where she ran the "Girls of Tomorrow" programme, she remembered her grandmother, a matriarch and fierce advocate for women's rights in her community. Life was so simple when her granny used to braid her hair with colourful beads of her Akan heritage, quoting women leaders that Adoma happily registered in her tiny red book. Maybe they are right, maybe I am not ready to be a leader, she second-guessed herself. The electric bus broke abruptly, and Adoma's red book fell on the floor, open on a page where she read: "Leadership isn't something you wait for, it is something you step into – and bring others with you."

Her eyes illuminated again, but she was still unsure. She stormed into the community hub, uncertain about the girls' reaction. "We are here for you", they said. "What are we going to do to keep participating in decision-making"? someone questioned. Adoma felt so carried by that group and finally realised that she didn't have to hold the whole world on her shoulders. She felt the energy of *nkabom* (unity)

nurtured by her family lineage run through her veins as the group used AI-powered simulations of the future with and without young women properly represented in decision-making. They quickly spread the simulations into the government's AI news feeds. The simulations spread like wildfire, and citizens could experience each future holographically through their skins. It was clear that young women's leadership was creating a positive transformation for all and would keep doing so. Soon, people were on the streets and on social media asking for the continuity of measures to keep young women participating in public decision-making.

With public pressure mounting, Madam Akosua arranged a meeting for Adoma with the National Leadership Council. Despite her fears, Adoma stood up not only for herself but also for every young girl who would come after her. She thanked the council for past efforts, showed the positive ripple effects of their decisions, and presented the AI simulations for the future. Perhaps due to the overwhelming social media response, or maybe because Adoma embraced *nkabom* (unity) rather than antagonism, the council not only reinstated the quotas but also adopted further improvements for women and youth meaningful participation, recommended by the Girls of Tomorrow. The following year, when Adoma walked onto the stage of the National Women's Leadership Summit and began to speak, a group of five braided 10-year-old girls in the audience opened their tiny red books and took careful notes of what Adoma was saying.



The Wind at Her Back

By B. *, age 22, Jordan

Amal was about to turn 18 years old. She was a girl full of life, always searching for light in every little thing, studying, playing, praying, enjoying her freedom, having a good time with her family and friends, and actively participating in her community's decisions about climate management in Jordan. She didn't really have a lot of unaccomplished wishes. Except for one: to travel abroad on her own. With the global commitment to control carbon emissions, travelling overseas had become quite restricted in 2055: one had to ask permission and demonstrate a good reason to do so. Tourism was not one of them.

So, when her parents asked her what she would like to do for her birthday, Amal knew exactly what to say. She picked a place in Europe because of their incredible work on climate adaptation technology. It would be a good opportunity for her to learn from their experience and apply some of that to Jordan. She booked a carbon-free flight, something that had been tested

with great success recently in her country. When she received the acceptance letter to travel, excitement filled her heart. She imagined all the adventures she would have, the new friends she would make, and the new dreams she would chase.

When she landed at her destination, a huge windstorm hit. That was definitely not the welcoming vibe she was expecting. At the airport, on the subway, and all the way to the room she rented, she felt stared at. Maybe she was just tired and needed a good night's sleep. The following day, the windstorm was over, and yet she felt as if she was inside a whirlwind on her own. From the moment she shared locally grown organic breakfast with her housemates to her arrival at the Climate Museum, whispers followed her, eyes lingered on her, she was treated coldly and faced verbal harassment. Of course, there were also some kind people with friendly gestures and warm smiles, but the noise of the overall behaviour never faded.

At first, she didn't understand why and decided to focus her attention as much as possible on the environmentally friendly technologies they were exposing at the museum. When a flying glass robot passed by her, she could see her image reflected in the robot's body, and she finally understood the stares: it was something so simple she would never have imagined—her hijab. A simple piece of fabric on her head was enough to make her stand out for the wrong reasons and turn her into a subject of curiosity, judgment, and hostility.

But Amal was not the kind of person who backed down. She reflected deeply, and then an idea struck her. It was simple, maybe even old-fashioned, but we know how old things become new again over time. Amal went to the closest 3D Printing shop and quickly designed a recycled hoodie in a calm blue, with #Human and #HijabiByChoice printed on it in multiple languages. When she left the store using it, the sky was covered with dark clouds, mirroring the unease she was feeling inside. The air was crisp, the streets were crowded, and yet, all eyes seemed to be on her, just as always.

Then, something different happened. As people read the hashtags on her hoodie, their expressions changed. Some smiled at her for the first time. People started engaging in conversations instead of staring silently, approaching her to ask about the hijab, her culture, and her story. She realized that not everyone was hostile—many were simply unaware that wearing a hijab can be a personal choice and, therefore, an expression of freedom and empowerment. In her many spontaneous conversations over her trip, she learned that as the world evolved considerably towards gender equality in the last 30 years, in some places like Europe the hijab had been all but forced out of use, in the name of gender equality and women's rights. Despite many advances, some misconceptions about Muslim women persisted: the hijab was seen in some places as a tool of oppression, a symbol of women's lack of autonomy that should be eliminated. She could never have

imagined that! Back home, Amal and her friends got to choose whether or not to wear a hijab, exercising the same rights and accessing the same opportunities as boys and young men do. She wore a hijab because her religion and her faith were important to her.

As the days went by, she also had the opportunity to share many great climate technologies from her home. More and more people were feeling inspired by Amal and Jordan. So, what began with a simple idea started to grow into a movement. Amal's hashtags were being used all over the world, filling recyclable hoodies on the streets and posts across online platforms asking for the end of discrimination against hijabis. So many stories were shared, and so many prejudices were being dismantled. Amal was convinced she should keep investing in the evolution of carbon-free flights to enable more face-to-face conversations as a powerful tool for breaking stereotypes and embracing diversity.

Sometimes, all it takes is a small spark to ignite change. The windstorm that once chased Amal had become the wind at her back, pushing her forward and expanding her horizons. On a bright, sunny morning after days of clouds, Amal realised that it wasn't just the weather that had changed—it was her. She was no longer lost in a whirlwind, she was driving a movement to make the world, step by step, conversation by conversation, more understanding and united in its differences.



Where the light comes in

By Reem, age 20, Ethiopia

Lucy, 17, was born into a family of really smart women, all experts in STEM. In her family, her grandmother was the first generation of girls to go to school. She became a famous mathematician and professor and has been a strong advocate for women occupying male-dominated fields ever since. Lucy's mother followed her mother's book and became a successful software engineer. Lucy hates math. She does well enough to pass the exams, but her passion is somewhere else: photography.

This has been a huge source of conflict at Lucy's house. Now that she is about to complete her secondary studies and pursue a university degree, which is actually non-negotiable in her family, Lucy has tried to convince them that she has an artistic soul. The reason why both her mother and grandmother do not want Lucy in an art school is because they believe she has been influenced by a new wave of holographic influencers who claim that women should follow a so-called "true nature", dedicating themselves to feminine roles and never succumb to the idea of capitalist production. "If you like photography so much, go study Physics, specialise in Optics, and work with light, which seems really fascinating", her grandmother advised. At the same time that tension was escalating at her house, Ethiopia was ending its last remaining armed conflicts. A combination of international aid, coming mainly from the African diaspora and the African Union, with the significant involvement of women in peace negotiations with neighbouring countries and armed groups, for almost 20 years, at last, had resulted in peace.

Lucy follows the news closely. She loves to observe which photos are selected by different media platforms and holographic influencers and reflect on whose stories are being told. Interestingly enough, everyone seems to just be celebrating the achievement of peace, without focusing on the stories of women and girls. She goes for a walk with her analogue camera – not surprisingly, she doesn't like the ultra-modern holographic ones. Lucy is so much in her head that, at some point, she finds herself lost in front of a refugee reintegration camp.

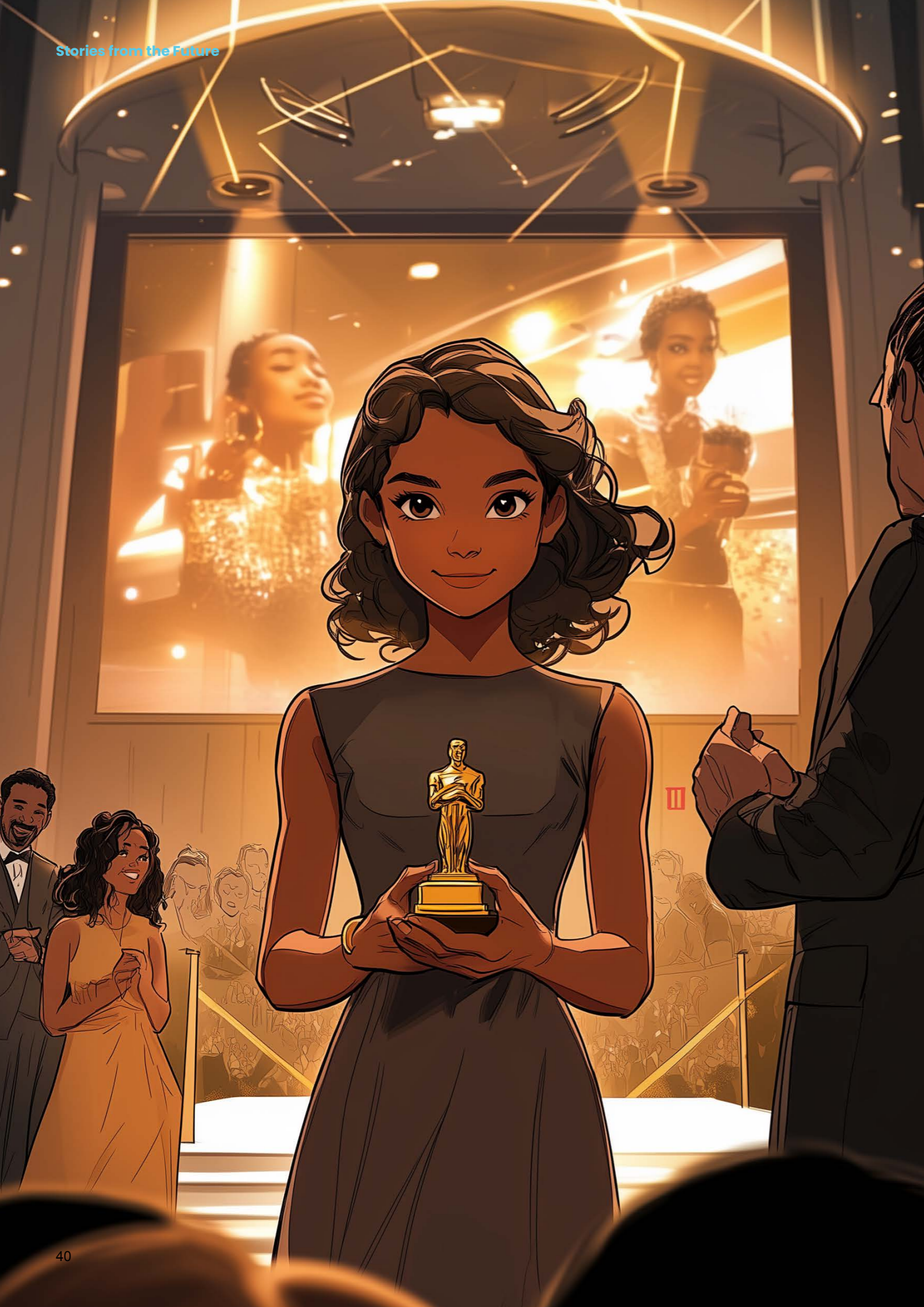
This is a story no one is talking about. Thousands of families, mostly women and children, are returning to their homeland. The country is so proud of its gender equality achievements in technology, politics, and peacebuilding that the stories of women and girls refugees do not fit the narrative of a progressive country.

Lucy sees a woman sitting alone, staring at her. Lucy instinctively raises her camera and takes a picture. Some women approach her and ask what she is doing. She says she would like to tell their stories. A girl looks at her old camera's diaphragm and asks: "What is that"? Lucy replies: "That is where the light comes in". They all smile.

For days, Lucy comes back to the camp to talk to the women and girls about their experiences. She teaches them how to take pictures and leaves the camera there so they can capture their routines, struggles, and little moments of joy. Through images, they reveal together how different women and girls experience life as a refugee in comparison to men and boys. If the country was really serious about achieving gender equality in all areas of society, these groups of women and girls should be truly prioritised.

Lucy takes pictures and testimonies of women and girls to one of the biggest media houses in the country, and they agree to publish them. The photo collection has global reach, since so many areas around the world have achieved full peace only in the last decade or so, and there are probably still many untold stories of women and girls in the aftermath of wars. While policymakers begin to dedicate more resources to a gender-responsive reintegration of women and girls, Lucy wins a prestigious photojournalism prize, and her mother and grandmother finally see her for who she is.

Peace has returned to Ethiopia, and now, to Lucy's home as well.



Not even one

By Ángela*, age 18, Peru

Note: This story mentions sexual violence. This story is entirely fictional and does not reflect the personal experiences of the author.

“Alma, 15, turns the snooze button off for the second time. The clock reads 7:30AM, 4 September 2055. She had better run, her best friends Paz and Valiente are probably already on their way to school. Alma hates waking up early but loves her friends more than that. She catches up with them halfway. Paz and Valiente make fun of Alma’s grumpy morning face. She tries to pretend she is mad at them but cannot contain her laughter. This is just another morning at “Inspira”, a country with warm people and perfect sunrises, sunsets, and evenings under the moon.

After class, Alma hugs her friends and goes straight to the chess club. “I can’t believe it hasn’t been even 24 hours since I left this chess board, and I was already missing it”, she says to Victoria, her proud coach. As the afternoon goes by, Alma wins game after game, beats Victoria’s challenges and breaks her own record. One day, I will be the biggest chess champion of Inspira, she thought to herself.

Like every day, Alma gets home and hugs her parents. Before going to sleep, she takes her chess journal to make a note about her extraordinary performance. When she pulls the journal from the shelf, a photo of her first championship, when she was only 5 years old, falls on the floor. Alma looks at the photo, distressed, and tries to hide it in the middle of her books again. Despite the warm temperature, Alma puts on her socks and covers her feet under the blanket.

That night, she barely sleeps. Her body shakes, and she sweats cold. In the middle of a confusing nightmare, she hears her own voice as a child: “No, coach, please, don’t.” Then she hears the voice of an adult man who responds: “Oh, dear, come on, we are just playing.” Alma wakes up crying like a little girl. Her mother quickly goes to her room, hugs Alma, and tries to comfort her.

In the morning, when the alarm clock rings, Alma’s mother turns it off. They both need to stay home that day. Over a warm breakfast, her mom says: “Oh, my sweet child, this trauma still haunts you... I am so sorry. If only I had stayed in that room with you, this would never have happened”. In tears, Alma replies that it was not her fault. At the time, thanks to Alma’s trust in her mother and the efficient protection mechanisms in place, Alma was believed and taken seriously. She had had access to physical and mental health services, and her coach was condemned to prison and banned from sports for life. Since the last therapy session five years ago, Alma and her mom haven’t talked about this again. However, a simple photo triggered a deep wound once more”.

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The lights come on, and the audience stands up and claps with enthusiasm. Alma’s mom and dad, as well as her friends Paz and Valiente, cannot contain their tears or smiles as Alma goes on stage to receive the main award of the Inspira Film Festival. The master of ceremonies asks Alma about her intentions in making this film at such a young age. Alma takes the microphone: “This story is not only mine. It used to be the story of 1 in every 5 girls 30 years ago. And it still is the story of 1 in every 10 nowadays. We know how far our country has advanced in preventing and combating all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. But for as long as we have one girl being violated, we will keep fighting”.



Madam President

By Tenneh, age 23, Sierra Leone

On a sunny afternoon in 2055, under the “Tree of Inspiration” in a small village called Binkolo, located in the Bombali District in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone, a smart, critical thinker 16-year-old girl named Fatima spoke passionately about women's and girls’ issues. She held a book about women's history in her hands and dozens of girls of all ages surrounded her to listen about the lives of the women's rights advocates who came before them. All those who fought for the end of child marriage, the prevention of teenage pregnancy, the advancement of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, their full access to quality education at all levels, and, of course, women's leadership.

Sierra Leone had recently achieved gender parity in parliament, as stipulated by law. However, projections would say it could still take nearly a century to have a female head of state. When the girls began to discuss this prediction, some boys passed by and overheard the conversation. The boys teased them, saying that the country had become a too-sweet society, and they hoped that the ceiling for the highest power position would remain in place. “To be the chief of a country is a man's job”, one of them said and was applauded by the others.

The girls could not have anticipated this kind of conservative thought coming out of the mouths of young boys. Fatima got so angry she didn't know what to say straight away. Sometimes, she could be too sensitive about criticism, so those feelings remained with her. When she returned home, she decided to do some research and check if this kind of backlash had happened before. Although she had access to the most amazing digital devices and online connections, she loved to dig into old books on a shelf that gently held the smell of her loving grandmother, an activist and former parliamentarian herself. As Fatima flicked through them, she found a lovely note that said: “We have fought hard. Your generation will be like milk and honey. Everything is in your hands – don't be afraid to conquer anything, girl. You got this. Love, Grandma”.

A fierce determination took over every cell of Fatima. Inspired by the footsteps of her grandmother and so many other women advocates from her country and acknowledging the privileges of her generation, she decided it was time to fight again and break the last

taboo for Sierra Leoneans: become the first female president of her country. And she certainly wouldn't wait a century for that.

Under the “Tree of Inspiration”, she began to convince girls to dream big and pursue their political aspirations. The following year, taking her education with the utmost seriousness as usual, Fatima joined the Political Science course at the university and started engaging young women on her campus in important political debates and publishing content online. Year after year, the University of Sierra Leone broke records of young women applying for Political Science courses, and every media channel in the country talked about the striking interest of young women in chieftaincy.

She faced resistance from different groups of men and women who believed that masculine traits were a non-negotiable requirement for a Head of State. Fatima then decided to write a book called “Her Time Is Now”, which contained the history of girls and women of all ages across Sierra Leone's history who dedicated their lives to the country's advancement and led in various areas using diverse skills and different leadership styles. The book became a number-one bestseller, and it was almost a shame if someone said they hadn't read it. Even opposing leaders started reading it. Back in Binkolo, Fatima's village, girls and young women were gathering under the Tree of Inspiration to read it together every night.

“Her Time Is Now” created a lasting cultural shift in the country, and the majority of Sierra Leoneans became convinced that, yes, a woman could become president one day. In fact, a survey showed that 70% of the population was looking forward to being represented by a woman. What was already in the law and the official goals of the country for decades, was finally being transformed into an accepted social norm. As soon as Fatima finished her university studies, she was elected the first female Mayor of Binkolo. She was the most-voted parliamentarian for the two mandates she ran, and earlier this year, in 2072, at 33, she became the youngest Head of State in the world, or our “Madam President”, as we kindly like to call her.



A medical centre to call my own

By G.T. Brielle*, age 18, Togo

Rachel, 12, has spent most of her time at a public hospital in Sotouboua, a town in the north of Togo. Except for a few colds, a fever or two, and one stomach virus, she had never been sick. But she was the daughter of two doctors and really enjoyed going to their workplace every day. Rachel's parents specialised in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV and treat everyone, from babies to elderly people. Usually, she paid much more attention to the babies than to any other patient and loved singing lullabies to them while her parents administered medicine and injections. One day, when Rachel arrived at the hospital, she saw a scared girl about her age hidden behind a cabinet at the reception.

"Hey, you can't play hide-and-seek here," Rachel warned, trying to reaffirm her power.

"Ssh," the girl responded, asking Rachel to be quiet.

Rachel approached the girl and asked her name.

"Gnankan," the girl whispered. "Now go away."

"Why?" Rachel insisted.

"No one can see me here!"

"Come with me, I know a side way."

Gnankan followed Rachel through a staff-only corridor and was magically at the door of Rachel's mom's office. Luckily, her mom had a free slot and attended to Gnankan right away. When Gnankan left the consultation looking slightly more relaxed, Rachel was waiting for her. Not even the cutest baby could have distracted Rachel this afternoon. They followed the same secret passage and exited the hospital into a calm and beautiful natural park.

Rachel offered to braid Gnankan's hair and adorn it with some beads she had in her purse. She had learned from her grandmother that braiding was a portal to honest conversations. Gnankan had never told this to anyone before: she had been born with HIV. Her father had abandoned her mother right after Gnankan was born.

With so much stigma in a traditional family, her mother never sought medical treatment and unfortunately died a week ago. Gnankan would live now with her aunt in Sotouboua.

"I don't want to die," said Gnankan.

"You won't die," Rachel said. "Well, maybe one day, like the rest of us, but not from HIV."

"How do you know that?"

"Because it is 2050! Free treatments are super advanced, and so, so many people are cured. Honestly, I don't understand why your mom didn't ask for help."

Gnankan told Rachel about everything she, as a girl, had to put up with at hospitals and health centres for being HIV+. Receptionists asked her intimate questions in front of everybody just to fill in a form, doctors treated her as if she was a married woman, and some nurses called her "promiscuous", even if she never had sex in her life.

"I'm glad I found your mom, Rachel. She is really nice."

"Yes, she is, but this is not enough! I imagine that if this horrible situation happened to you, it must have happened to other girls too, either because they are living with HIV, have a sexually transmitted disease, got unintendedly pregnant, or are simply looking for options for contraception. I totally understand why you didn't want to be seen today, but this has to stop."

At night, Rachel spoke to her parents. Even though they were excellent, caring doctors and had an adolescent girl at home, they were surprised by some of their needs, fears, and shame. It was clear that as much as medicine and medical treatment had evolved in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, adolescent girls were still being treated like adult women. It was time their experiences were heard and fully considered.

The next day, Rachel and Gnankan launched an anonymous survey at school and at the hospital to learn more about girls' experiences.

Because of its confidential nature, hundreds of responses were submitted. With the support of artificial intelligence, they mapped the key issues and designed some scenarios. Finally, the girls asked the Comprehensive Sexuality Education teacher to reserve a couple of classes for all of them to build together some mockups of "the medical centre of their dreams", detailing what an ideal experience would be in each of the identified scenarios.

With the support of Rachel's parents, their mockups were taken to the hospital administration. Some measures, such as personnel training on gender-responsive and adolescent-friendly services, the revision of privacy and confidentiality protocols, and the access of adolescent girls to services without parental consent, were immediately implemented. The year after, public funds were dedicated to the construction of a whole medical and well-being centre focused on adolescents' physical and mental health with a holistic approach.

Now, in 2055, the centre has just been inaugurated. The rooms for group work are cosy, and conversations are held with a lot of braiding and tasteful dishes. A warm and very well-trained team of multi-language professionals use the most advanced technology, and awareness-raising takes place in the form of theatre, games and songs. It has become a place young people like to go, even if just to hang out, without taboos. Rachel and Gnankan have become best friends. Next year, they are going to university to study medicine, and they know exactly where they want to work one day.


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FEMINIST FUTURES

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**We won't
stop until
we are all
equal.**



Until we are all equal







About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

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