



IMPLEMENTED IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH DAINDEMBEN FEDERATION

SAFER SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS

MIDLINE ASSESSMENT

June 2023

NOTE : THE PHOTOS USED IN THIS ASSESSMENT ARE NOT THE PHOTOS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CoC	Champions of Change
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FSU	Family Support Unit
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MLA	Midline Assessment
MGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PISL	Plan International Sierra Leone
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SRGBV	School-Related Gender-Based Violence
SS4G	Safer School for Girls

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study builds on the baseline assessment carried out in 2021, exploring School-Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) in Koinadugu district in Sierra Leone. SRGBV includes any form of abuse and exploitation that is based on gendered stereotypes or that targets pupils on the basis of their sex. The assessment explores a multi-level approach focusing on individual, community and institutional levels that build girls' agency in understanding the provisions of law, their understanding of their rights and support initiatives to champion the changes that concern them.

The objective of Safer Schools for Girls (SS4G) project is to create safe environments for both girls and boys, promoting gender-equitable relationships and reduce SRGBV by working in partnership with children, youth, parents, teachers, schools, community members, stakeholders and district education authorities.

The midline assessment was completed during the third quarter of the project's third year, with project participant children and local stakeholders. It measured the progress made of project indicators and to understand what is working well to reduce violence in the school and the community. It also explored what can be changed in the final stages of the project to bring more impactful results and what should be measured at the endline evaluation.

This study is based on a representative sample surveying 400 pupils, of which 200 are girls and 200 are boys, from 10 primary schools across six chiefdoms in Koinadugu district, Sierra Leone. The research methodology included structured questionnaires and semi-structured questionnaires for Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews. The development of the tools, analysis and preparation of the report were carried out by Plan International.

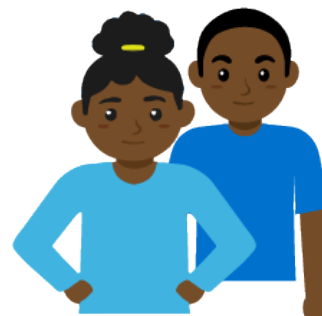
The assessment found that there are many gender norms, roles and stereotypes that can lead to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and lack of reporting of it. However, the project interventions, particularly with the Champions of Change model, has seen positive attitude and behaviour changes in project participants in relation to gender equality and GBV. In particular, engagement with boys have brought very strong results in developing a cohort of male champions who are not only changing their own behaviour in acts of abuse and GBV but raising awareness, challenging and reporting behaviours of others.

The findings reinforce that the approaches being used in the programme are effective in reducing violence in schools and the community. However, there are still areas that can be improved and need further support, particularly in addressing norms and attitudes in the wider community.



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District



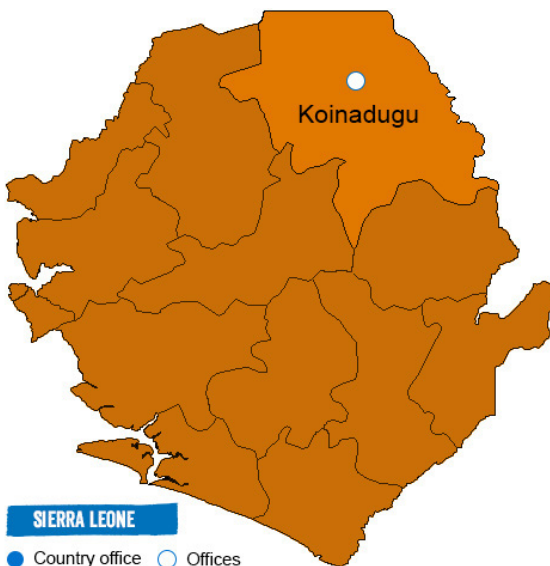
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Champions
of Change

PROJECT SUMMARY

Plan International Sierra Leone (PISL) is implementing a three-year project to address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in Koinadugu district in northern Sierra Leone. The Safer Schools For Girls (SS4G) project directly targets girls in 10 primary schools between ages 6 -15 years. The project targets 300 children in Champions of Change, 40 Champions of Change facilitators, 40 girls trained in advocacy and 100 GBV survivors in the core target group. Additionally, 96 frontline workers, teachers and staff and 4,685 other groups benefiting from the project, including children in the primary schools not part of the Champions of Change.

Plan International Sierra Leone (PISL) is implementing with Daindemben Federation, a local NGO. The project is funded by Comic Relief in partnership with FCDO for the Maanda Initiative (2020-2024) Preventing Sexual Violence in Primary Schools. The project started on the 1st of June 2020 and runs until the 31st December 2023. However, the project has seen several challenges such as COVID-19 related school closures and change of local implementing partner.



Project Goal: Girls, boys, and parents/care-givers in Koinadugu district will build their agency in understanding the provisions of gender laws, sexual reproductive health and rights and support initiatives to champion positive changes in issues that concern girls so that levels of school-related gender-based violence is reduced for primary school girls in project areas.

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

Plan International's champion of change aims to advance gender equality through youth engagement. The model aims to empower girls and engage boys to identify and challenge harmful, Negative masculinities that perpetuate discrimination and inequality in order to shift the agenda towards gender equality.

Champion of change has separate, but interrelated journeys of change for both boys and girls. The journey for girls focuses on self esteem, rights awareness, collective power and economic empowerment. The journey for boys includes learning how to avoid contributing to inequality and transform discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. As part of champion of change boys and girls come together to discuss their changing views on gender and social transformation and work together to find solutions for their communities.

The different approaches in the project being used to reduce school related gender-based violence falls under 4 project outcomes:

OUTCOME 1: Girls and boys as Champions of Change demonstrate positive attitudes with regards to the reduction of GBV in Schools

OUTCOME 2: Girls enjoy a more protective and safer environment in targeted schools.

OUTCOME 3: Boys, parents and community leaders in target areas adopt more positive attitudes and practices that protect and support girls and women

OUTCOME 4: Young survivors of GBV have increase service utilization of case management, support and justice

APPROACHES

1.1. Study Design and data collection methods

A mixed-methods approach are used to identify quantitative and qualitative changes of norms and attitudes as well as the drivers behind the changes experienced. Quantitative indicators are measured using a variety of survey instruments in order to understand progress against objectives. Structured questionnaires were delivered in focus group discussions and semi-structured questionnaires were delivered for Key Informant Interviews.

A two (2) days training workshop was held for 10 enumerators (5 female, 5 male) to provide understanding to the assessment methodology, tools, topics and ethics. Data was collected in all 10 communities, across six chiefdoms.

1.2. Ethical Process

As the assessment involved children, extreme care was taken both in terms of sensitising the data collectors during the training to adhere to the ethical and safeguarding protocols and follow-up of the practical implementation during the actual data collection was done to certify adherence safeguarding protocols. The purpose was to set out PISL's commitment and duty to conduct ethical Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) and keep the participants safe. A safeguarding risk assessment was completed, reviewed, discussed and approved by the Country Office prior to the survey. The safeguarding risk assessment was conducted using the MERL risk assessment tool.

Each pupil and community participant were well informed about the assessment and its objectives using a structured information sheet that had been developed prior to the MLA, in order to enable him/her to make an informed choice to participate or not to participate in the MLA. Additionally, as the data collection for the school children took place within the school settings, the school authorities who have the overall responsibility for the protection of the pupils were further asked for confirmation to involve the pupils in the study. Appropriate survey ethical policies, guidelines and codes of conduct were adhered-to, to ensure the safety of the responding pupils. This was verified through supervision conducted by the Safeguarding and Child Protection and MERL specialists during the assessment exercise.

1.3. Sampling Strategy

Sampling of pupils (Outcome 1, 2, 3): For Outcome 1, 2, 3, the milestone evaluation applied the base-line sample methods for consistency in tracking the project outcome. A random sampling approach was used to select a sample size of 400 (200 boys & 200 girls) respondents of pupils that are registered and present during the assessment period in Class 3 to Class 6 in the 10 selected SS4G primary schools. respondent. In each school the names of pupils were randomly sampled from the class registers and their number allocated to them in the register, which was used to draw the sample with an overall sample of 40 pupils per school, 20 girls and 20 boys.

A purposive sampling method was applied to follow-up on parents and community leaders of baseline respondents for the qualitative and key informant question. A sample of 24 parents and community leaders was used.

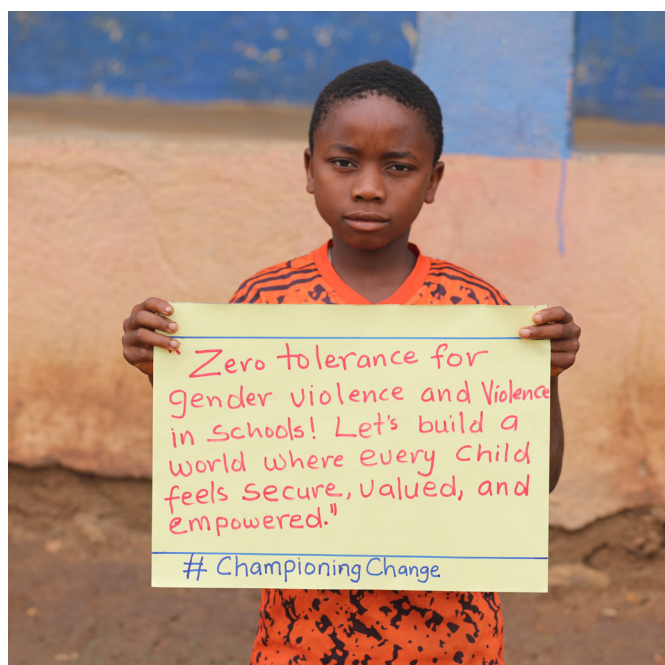


TABLE 1 SAMPLE SIZE FOR EACH INDICATOR

Indicators	Nr of selected schools/ communities	Target group	Data collection method
Outcome 1.1: Proportion of girls and boys participating in Champions of Change who have positive gender equitable attitudes	3-6 Schools	Girls and boys	Quantitative study
Outcome 1.2: Perceptions of girls and boys participating in CoC around the acceptability of Violence Against Women and Girls	5 Schools	Girls and Boys	Qualitative study (FGD)
Outcome 2.2: % direct beneficiaries who do not feel at greater risks of harm through their involvement in the project (disaggregated by gender and age)	5 schools	Girls	Quantitative study
Outcome 2.3: Perceptions of Girls 6 - 15 yrs. around the reduction of GBV in targeted schools since the start of the project	5 Schools	Girls	Qualitative study (FGD)
Outcome 3.1: Proportion of parents and community leaders in targeted areas who report using positive parenting practices	3 Communities	Parents/ Community Leaders	Key Informant Questionnaire
Outcome 3.2: Perceptions of women and girls around the reduction of violations against girls by boys and men in the community	3 Communities	Girls and Women	Qualitative study (FGD)
Outcome 4.1: Number of survivors aged 6 to 15 years old who reported to the Family Support Unit	2 FSU locations and 1 One Stop Centre	FSU officers and Project Staff	Key Informant Questionnaire
Outcome 4.2: Proportion of survivors who reported to FSU and were referred to a service	2 FSU locations and 1 One Stop Centre	FSU officers and One Stop staff	Key Informant Questionnaire
Outcome 4.3: Proportion of those who were referred and then used one of these services at the community/district levels (psycho-social, medical and justice services)	2 FSU locations and 1 One Stop Centre	FSU officers and One Stop staff	Key Informant Questionnaire

TABLE 2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION

Age	Girls	Boys	Prefer not to say	Total	Percentage
6 – 10 Years	56	49	2	107	27%
11 – 13 Years	125	121	3	249	62%
14 – 18 Years	16	28		44	11%
Total	197	198	5	400	100%

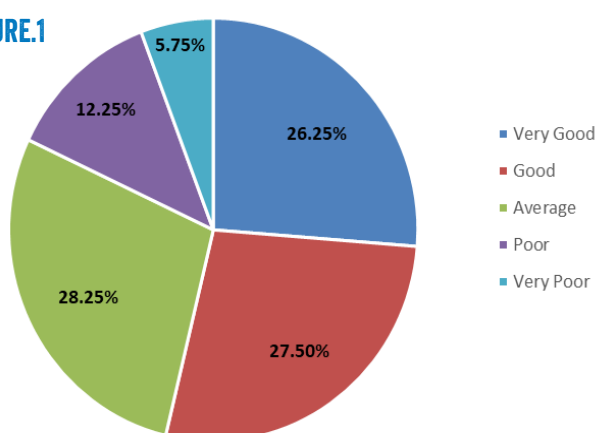
FINDINGS BASED ON PROJECT OUTCOMES

Outcome 1.1: Proportion of girls and boys participating in Champions of Change who have positive gender equitable attitudes

A quantitative survey was conducted with 400 boys and girls to measure this indicator. The girls and boys who had participated in the CoC module were selected to participate to this survey, Output 1.1 The Midline assessment (MLA) survey analysis shows that out of 400 respondents, 53.8% (20.0% Female, 33.5% Male, and 0.3% Prefer not to say) understand gender equality and gender-based violence.

Understanding of Gender Equality

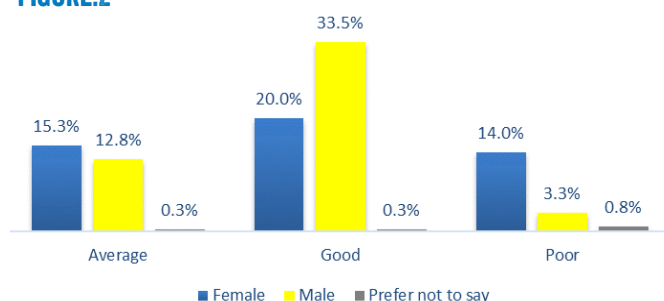
FIGURE.1



According to the results, boys participating CoC activities rated their understanding of gender equality slightly better than the girls. 14% of the girls believe that their understanding is poor. 87% of the participants mentioned that their attitudes towards gender equality changed since they participated in the CoC program.

Respondents rate on understanding of gender equality

FIGURE.2



When discussing if the children agreed that everyone should have equal opportunities, regardless of their gender (table 3); 89.5% of the children surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This suggests that the sentiment of supporting gender equality is shared by both genders to a significant extent. This alignment could be indicative of a growing awareness and acceptance of the importance of equal opportunities irrespective of gender. Interestingly, 140 males out of out of 200 strongly agreed compared to 54 females, whilst 125 females agreed to only 36 males. This shows positive trends towards male engagement as champions of girls and young women.

However, the presence of a category labelled “preferred not to say” (1.25%) introduces an interesting aspect to the analysis. While this proportion might appear small, it signifies the existence of a group of respondents who are either undecided or hesitant to openly express their stance on gender equality. This could stem from various reasons such as cultural influences, personal beliefs, or a lack of confidence in sharing their viewpoint. This category underscores the complexity of gauging attitudes towards gender equality, revealing a need for more probing in future research to truly understand this perspective.

Table 3 : Children's views on equal opportunities, equal pay and role of men in gender equality disaggregated by sex

Girls	Strongly Agree		Agree		Niether agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Grand Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Everyone should have equal opportunities, regardless of their gender	53	27%	125	63.5%	9	4.5%	9	4.5%	1	0.5%	197	100%
Women and men should be paid equally for the same job	174	88%	0	0%	7	4%	16	8%	0	0%	197	100%
Men and boys have a role to play in promoting gender equality	28	14%	111	56%	11	6%	41	21%	6	3%	197	100%

Boys	Strongly Agree		Agree		Niether agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Grand Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Everyone should have equal opportunities, regardless of their gender	140	71%	36	18%	10	5%	10	5%	1	1%	197	100%
Women and men should be paid equally for the same job	176	89%	0	0%	14	7%	7	4%	1	1%	198	100%
Men and boys have a role to play in promoting gender equality	135	69%	42	21%	9	5%	6	3%	5	3%	197	100%

70% of the girls agree that men and boys have a role to play in promoting gender equality while 14% of them do not agree. The reasons why some of the girls do not agree are indicated below:

- In our community some men still don't obey the rules of the authorities
- My father for example does not support my education
- Some men and boys are still stubborn in doing the GBV in the community
- Men do not allow women to lead
- They are not interested in promoting gender equality
- They do bad things to us they are not helpful
- They do not want us to be equal
- They don't have the right
- They think it is not good for women to be in such positions
- They will not believe that women should lead
- We the girls have right more than the boys
- Some boys still have negative thinking about the gender equality



Majority of the boys (87%) and girls (87%) agrees that it is important to have women in leadership positions, such as Head Teachers, Village Head, and Chief (table 4). They also believe that women and men should be paid equally for the same job.

Table 4 Responses to the statement “Is it important to have women in leadership positions, such as Head Teachers, Village Head, and Chief?”

In your opinion, is it important to have women in leadership positions, such as Head Teachers, Village Head, and Chief?	Girls		Boys		Prefer Not to Say		Grand Total	
	Nr	1%	Nr	1%	Nr	1%	Nr	1%
Very Important	63	32%	133	68%		0%	196	49%
Important	108	55%	38	19%	1	20%	147	37%
Somewhat Important	5	3%	5	3%		0%	10	3%
Not Important At All	12	6%	16	8%		0%	28	7%
Not Very Important	9	5%	5	3%	4	80%	18	5%
Grand Total	179	100%	198	100%	5	100%	399	100%

Although the number is not high, some of the participants think that it is not important to have women in leadership positions. Girls and boys have different opinions about this issue and their explanations are indicated below:

The reasons why girls who do not agree to the statement	The reasons who boys do not agree to the statement
If a woman has such position she would not listen to her husband	Men are superior and should be the heads
Not all the women are interested in leadership in our community	Men can do better than women
Only men can be in those positions	They cannot rule well
Some women are too lazy to handle the workload	They should be behind the men
Women are not strong enough to be in leadership	They have hot temper, and they make bad laws
Not all women can handle the workload	Women should not be giving too much power
In our community not everybody will listen to what a woman will say	For us and all other nearby communities, women are not allowed to be chiefs
I believe that only men have the right and ability to lead	Its men that are fit enough to be chiefs, they have the sense to rule
I have never seen a female leader and so I don't believe in women's leadership	Men control them at the end of the day
Only man should be in those positions	Men have more experience and knowledge than women
Only men that fit in those positions, women don't have that right	Because of their pride in them
Women cannot do what men can do and don't have the power men has	Our traditions don't allow them to be leaders
Women don't have the right to do so unless men	The community forbids women from contesting for chieftaincy
Men will not support the women at all not	They don't have the capability like men, and they are weaker sex
Due to our traditional practices, women cannot be crown as chiefs	They should be behind the men and not in front of them
We are not allowed	Women are meant to take care of the home and to help the husband
In school, women cannot be head teacher, women cannot handle the workload	Women are weaker sex
Some women become proud and arrogant when they held positions	If they become leaders, they will not support men and they will feel proud
	Men are the economic provider of the family
	They can only become women's leader
	They give birth to us
	Women has little knowledge about leadership. They are not strong like men
	Women will not respect the men again when in leadership position but its sometime nice to be a leader
	They can only be women's leader but not for men

Lastly, discussions revealed the CoC Curriculum has been very positive in addressing and changing their beliefs around the issues of gender roles. However, some activities in the CoC modules were reduced, some combined, and others simplified as the CoC curriculum was originally designed for targeting older children. This has resulted in some girls, for example, combining activities under “Being Assertive” or “Being Gender Aware” in some CoC clubs. There could be more sustained and greater change in beliefs and understanding if additional CoC curriculums could be designed for younger age groups, particularly for girls where there is more curriculum modules they could be undertaking.

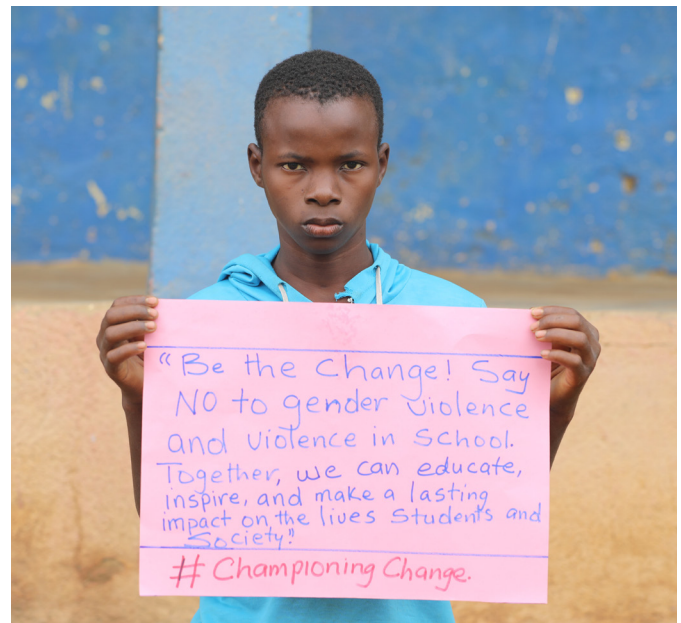
Outcome 1.2: Perceptions of girls and boys participating in CoC around the acceptability of Violence Against Women and Girls

A compelling revelation emerges from the evaluation of positive attitude and behaviour change towards violence and gender equality among boys participating in the CoC programme. The data highlights a substantial transformation in their outlook since their engagement with the initiative. Remarkably, 87.9% of the total respondents acknowledged that their perspectives had shifted. Among these, 39.3% were female, while 47.3% were male. This finding underscores the CoC program’s influence in fostering an evolution in attitudes, particularly among male participants, thereby contributing to a more equitable and compassionate society.

Notably, a negligible 1.0% of the respondents preferred not to disclose their perspectives. This statistic emphasizes the program’s success in eliciting candid responses from the participants, facilitating an open and honest discourse about their changing attitudes. This outcome resonates with the initiative’s broader objectives of instilling positive change and fostering gender-equitable attitudes among young individuals

Agency and voice

The analysis of the FGD indicates that the CoC trainings conducted for boys and girls in their communities have contributed to building their confidence in challenging negative attitudes of other community members. When respondents were asked whether they feel confident to talk to their parents and community members about gender equality and girls’ rights, all the respondents agreed that they can talk about those issues with their fellow students, their parents and other community members.



“I tell my fellow students in school who are not part of Champions of Change about girls rights”

- MALE PARTICIPANT OF CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

“I tell them I have right over my body and only me should control it”

- FEMALE PARTICIPANT OF CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

Positive changes in behaviour

The FGD brought an interesting revelation on how the participation of girls and boys in the CoC sessions has brought unique changes in their lives. Some of the girls and boys said since their participation in the sessions, they have experienced the following changes in their behaviour:

- Girls who used to go to school unclean now become aware of themselves and take care of their uniforms.
- Those who used to be disobedient to their parents are now very respectful to their elders including their peers

- Boys who used to see household chores such as washing plates and sweeping as a woman's job now help at home.
- A girl said she did not know it was her right to go to school, but after participating in the CoC sessions, she now knows her rights and can demand for them and for attending school
- Some boys said they used to bully girls, but after their participation in the sessions, they consider themselves as protectors of girls.
- Some girls said they now have confidence to report abuse if they witness or experience it.
- Another girl said she is now feels important in her community despite her gender.

These testimonies of the changes of attitudes and behaviours girls and boys experienced as participants in the CoC validate the importance of the topics being taught during the sessions. The perception of gender roles is now evolving, particularly, boys are now changing the way they relate with girls, and an improved gender socialization amongst boys and girls in the schools and the communities is happening.

Understanding and accepting of violence

When respondents were asked about their understanding of what abuse is, they clearly showed that they now understand abuse and the types of abuse compared to the understanding when the baseline study was carried out, when only some of the participants at the time had somewhat understood the concepts of abuse and gender-based violence concepts of gender and gender-based violence. When respondents were asked which behaviours, they consider as an abuse, both boys and girls gave examples from emotional, physical, and sexual violence and harmful traditional practices. In comparison to the baseline conducted before the start of the implementation of the project where respondents mostly only concentrated on physical violence.

A review of the responses indicates that children can now identify and understand a wider range of abuse in their community. This is a milestone achievement for the project as this will further support an increase in reporting of abuse against children in their communities, especially when related to sexual and gender-based violence. This is coupled with both boys and girls reporting that they now engage in conversations about GBV with their peers and reported instances of abuse.

However, the assessment revealed that among the 400 respondents there was a contrast between girls and boys in their propensity to disapprove of violence. A considerable proportion of girls, compared to boys, exhibited a higher inclination towards rejecting violent behaviour against women. Most male participants, however, still believed that violence was justified in some instances against women.

Perceived justified reasons for violence for women

Boys	Girls
Commits a crime	Fighting
Is having an affair	Stealing
If disobedient to partner	
Dress code (when dressed in revealing clothes)	

For girls, the only justified reasons given were around criminal behaviour, and this was a minority view. Whilst for boys, violence against a woman is justified for a wider range of reasons. The girls were dismissive of the boys' justification of abuse, and believed that even if you did not agree to a woman's behaviour you should report rather than take a violent course of action. Both boys and girls rated violent behaviour like flogging as more acceptable than sexual violence. This disparity aligns with existing societal notions about gender roles and norms related to what is deserving of violence in the wider community and country.

Perceived violence in the community

Despite some negative prevailing views on justified violence, there was a positive trend that all children reported a decrease of violence in their communities since the project baseline study.

"[violence] has been reduced drastically because the chief has established local byelaws."

"[violence is..] Not common because there is now awareness"

- MALE PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

When children were asked about the rate of violent incidents in their communities, almost all of them responded that it has reduced. They attributed the reduction of violence to the advent of the SS4G project and the increased education against violence amongst community members.

“Abuse was common before the project”

“With the help of Plan International all forms of abuse has reduced (in the community)”

- FEMALE PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Interestingly, children clearly identified feeling of safe as something that transcended physical, sexual and emotional violence perpetrated against children. For children, they feel safe when their environment is clean, they are sure of food to eat and clothes to wear. They feel safe when their parents are around and have conversations with them. These responses call for a shift on our understanding of safety for children by looking to provide the most basic needs for them.

Outcome 2.2: % direct beneficiaries who do not feel at greater risks of harm through their involvement in the project (disaggregated by gender and age)

The midline assessment findings highlight that an overwhelming majority of 390 out of 392 respondents (approximately 99.5%) express a sense of security within their respective communities. A small fraction of 2 respondents (about 0.15%) candidly conveyed their lack of safety due to enduring instances of corporal punishment within their homes, coupled with occasional experiences of bullying at school.

When exploring reporting mechanisms for GBV, especially in the school setting, there was a positive trend from the baseline study. During the baseline study, most pupils stated that though most schools and communities have in place reporting mechanisms, the mechanisms were ineffective or non-functional. 98% of the participants at the MLA were aware of the GBV reporting system in their community and now 93% of them feel comfortable of using the services. However, the explanations of why participants do not feel comfortable, still pointed to a need to improve the child-friendliness or

safeguard privacy or anonymity, something highlighted in the baseline. The reasons are indicated below:

- Lack of knowledge about the services
- Being ashamed or shy about using the services,
- Fear of reporting the cases
- Not be able to go alone without their parents
- Fear of being judged
- Believing that parents would blame them if they are raped
- Thinking that children’s voices are not always listened
- Fear of standing in front of elders to talk
- Assuming that they do nothing about it

82% of the respondents are trained as champions of change. Significantly, participants agree that CoC program improved safety in their community since the project started and they have been asked to define the change. As it can be seen in the below pie chart (Figure 3), respondents believe that cases are reported now (30%), children now can stay in the school (31%) and parents are now aware of children’s safety (39%). Participants also provided positive feedback about their experience with the CoC programme. They compared their feelings and knowledge before and after participating the programme. The testimonials of the participants demonstrate that they feel more powerful, they improved their knowledge on gender equality and they feel more comfortable going to the school and they feel safer in the community.

“After CoC sessions, I feel confident to talk to my teachers about anything.” **FEMALE PARTICIPANT, AGE 12**

“After taking CoC sessions I feel powerful” **FEMALE PARTICIPANT, AGE 11**

“After the COC sessions I have learnt about gender equality.” **FEMALE PARTICIPANT, AGE 12**

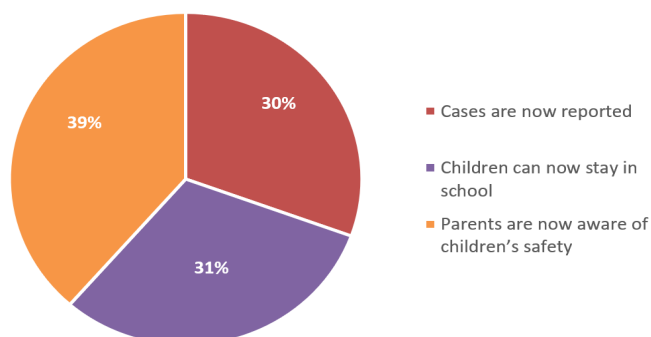
“Before I taught men are important than women but after I learnt that we are all the same”. **FEMALE PARTICIPANT, AGE 12**

“After the CoC sessions, both men and women can now make decisions in order for us to be safe in the community “

-FEMALE PARTICIPANT, AGE 12

Figure 3

How has the champion of change program improved safety in your community since the project started?



10% of the participants outlined that they experienced backlash or resistance from their peers or family members to participate to the CoC programme. Some of the participants mentioned that their parents' concern of not supporting them in the farm if they participated CoC programme and some parents believed that it is a waste of time.

Participants provided some recommendations for the Champions of Change programme to improve safety in their communities. They have requested more trainings to reach more people including parents, caregivers and community members to raise awareness on gender equality and GBV.

Outcome 2.3: Perceptions of girls 6 - 15 yrs. around the reduction of GBV in targeted schools since the start of the project

Under outcome 2.3, children's perceptions on how they and others feel in the school environment before and after the project was explored. Participants highlighted not just a reduction in GBV in the school setting, but also other changes in the schools that made them feel safer, such as a cleaner environment and school chores being done by both girls and boys. Although there was a high perception of a reduction of violence in the schools, some respondents disclosed there is still occasional beatings by teacher.

Girls highlighted that before the project came to their schools, flogging from teachers and sexual touching from boys was common. However, since the project girls feel much safer in schools, teachers do not beat or harass them, and they experience less bullying and touching from boys. All the girls consulted agreed that in-

"Teachers use to punish us severely for anything we do wrong"

"Some of the boys like to touch our sensitive parts"

- FEMALE PROJECT PARTICIPANTS COMMENTING ON THEIR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGUN

"Because nobody abuses us when we are in school, we feel a lot more comfortable and safe"

"Teachers no longer intimidate or harass students"

"We feel safe because boys don't fight us or bully us because we they have been taught not to do so"

- FEMALE PROJECT PARTICIPANTS COMMENTING ON THEIR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT SINCE THE PROJECT HAS BEGUN

Contributing to the reduction of GBV, those consulted highlighted reasons they thought contributed to the reduction of GBV which covered:

- Awareness and understanding of their rights
- Education from the Champions of Change model
- Bylaws that have been introduced into the community

Like those surveyed under Outcome 2.2, children also highlighted similar approaches they thought would reduce GBV in the school setting, as those highlighted in the community setting, as well as some specific recommendations for schools. This included:

- Engage Community people, including parents, on the issues in Champions of Change.
- Engage more directly with teachers and headmasters
- Capacity building of young people so they can continue engaging their peers
- More safe spaces for girls to be established, especially in schools.

- Separate safe space for boys in schools
- Strengthening of the guidance and counselling offered in schools

One difference from the baseline survey that was highlighted as an avenue for support in GBV matters in the schools setting was the identification of the school club and champions of change mentors. This highlighted the importance of having alternative safe space places and people that are more child friendly for pupils to report GBV.

Outcome 3.1: Proportion of parents and community leaders in targeted areas who report using positive parenting practices

The MLA data illustrates insights from a sample of 24 participants. 100% of participants all reported they have used positive parenting practices with their children in the community. Furthermore, every participant agreed that positive parenting practices can help reduce the use of violent disciplinary methods, which is a positive milestone to achieve in the project to shift mindsets and behaviours of parents and caregivers that have long been rooted in social norms of the communities.

Participants were able to provide various examples of positive parenting practices. One respondent emphasized that positive parenting encompasses meeting fundamental life requirements for children, including quality education, suitable clothing, adequate medical care, and proper nutrition. Another parent articulated that positive parenting involves nurturing children in a constructive manner to facilitate their holistic growth and development. Many highlighted the need for good communication, rather than physical disciplining or shouting at a child.

In addition, to providing examples of good practice, parents and stakeholders were able to provide examples of how they have engaged with children and the broader community, specifically in terms of encouragement and guidance:

- As the town's chief, I have shifted my advice to parents away from resorting to physical punishment or employing derogatory language towards their children. Instead, I advocate for alternative approaches, such as encouraging consistent reading to in still discipline.

- I have successfully abolished the use of corporal punishment for both male and female students within my school.
- I have taken measures to prevent teachers from engaging school-going students in arduous tasks, such as farming, that might negatively impact their emotional and psychological well-being.
- I am actively involved in motivating children, offering guidance on their journey towards becoming productive and responsible adults.
- I am committed to treating boys and girls impartially, fostering a mindset that views both genders as equals rather than establishing hierarchical distinctions.
- In cases where significant transgressions occur at school, my preferred disciplinary action involves assigning tasks like sweeping or water-fetching for a week, aiming to instill a sense of responsibility.

Prior to the project, respondents outlined conventional disciplinary methods that were employed by parents and caregivers, which included physical chastisement, assigning menial tasks, restricting mobility, withholding food, using offensive language in response to children's misbehaviour, and resorting to corporal punishment. The Baseline study found that parents and community leaders reported that children always, often or sometimes witnessed violence in the home 67% of the time and that they would physically discipline a child with an object either always, often or sometimes 77% of the time. However, the testimonials of those who have embraced positive parenting attest to its transformative power.



"This will make the girls to be self-empowered."

"Children will feel comfortable to always talk to their parents on things bothering them."

"We were not in peace with our children before [the project], we used to treat them bad and they left the house for good. But now we are friends"

- PARENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS HIGHLIGHTING THE BENEFITS POSITIVE PARENTING HAS BROUGHT TO THEIR HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES

The MLA findings reaffirm what children had been reporting in regard to the eradication or reduction of harmful practices, such as corporal punishment and abusive language in their schools and households. This speaks to the commitment of parents, caregivers, and educators to cultivate safe and nurturing spaces for children's development.

Outcome 3.2: Perceptions of women and girls around the reduction of violations against girls by boys and men in the community

When interviewing both women and girls the MLA reveals that the project has been successful in enhancing the awareness and understanding of both regarding the issue of reducing violence against them, particularly when it is perpetrated by boys and men. It was highlighted how the project has also contributed to change in the communities as members of the community now understand the laws, fines and responsibilities of how people, especially boys and men, should be treating girls and women. Domestic violence has been perceived to be reduced significantly, but also gender stereotypes that reinforced ideas that girls and women should be responsible for carrying out the chores and not prioritising education.

The Midline Assessment (MLA) findings reveal noteworthy shifts in the dynamics of how boys and men interact with women since the project's commencement:

- Instances of spousal and school-related abuse and violence by husbands and boys have markedly decreased.
- The prevalence of early and child marriages has seen a significant reduction.
- Boys are now actively participating in household chores, marking a departure from traditional gender roles.
- The establishment of bylaws indicates a systemic change in addressing gender-based issues.
- Equal involvement of both girls and boys in household tasks has become more prevalent.
- The presence of mutual understanding between husbands and wives concerning matters related to sexual relations signifies improved communication and decision-making within relationships.
- The project's influence has extended to parents, increasing their awareness of positive parenting practices.

It was further noted how both women and girls perceived their communities coming together and implementing measures to reduce violations against girls and women in the community. By laws and fines has been established and awareness raising about the role of the Family Support Unit in the police has increased, so people are aware they will be punished if they commit acts of violence or abuse against women and girls. Unlike at the baseline study however, women and youth and now involved in created and developing these by laws. This was one of the main reasons why they thought violations and abuse was happening still, and why now at the MLA they feel that the measures have been effective in reducing violations in the communities. There has been a significant increase in confidence in reporting of violations, whilst at the baseline study, there was a lack of confidence to do so.

Overall, the assessment reinforces the successes in empowering women and girls with a deeper understanding of gender-based violence, fostering a tangible shift in the behaviour of boys and men towards more respectful and equitable treatment. This progress is evident through the changes in perceived reduction of violence, transformed gender roles, and increased awareness among community members. Although, the project addresses primarily perceptions, opinions and attitudes, the accomplishments of the project, as evidenced by the MLA findings, are indicative of a positive trajectory toward gender equality and the creation of safer, more inclusive communities and schools.

"I aspired to become a councillor, but my gender hindered me, despite being qualified. However, I now feel empowered and secure enough to advocate for my rights."

- WOMAN PARTICIPANT

Outcome 4.1: Number of survivors aged 6 to 15 years old who reported to the Family Support Unit

The Midline Assessment findings underscore the project's impactful contribution to enhancing the capacity of the Family Support Unit (FSU) personnel in being a first response to GBV cases. Specifically, the project has focused on training FSU personnel in effectively utilizing the 14 standard operational procedures (SOPs) for reporting and managing cases of gender-based violence (GBV). They highlighted how they supported legal cases in court, provide support to families and all procedures and cases were conducted with confidentiality.

When a case is brought to the FSU we ensure your confidentiality.

-FSU KABALA POLICE OFFICER

Alongside the SOP training, a noteworthy accomplishment has been the successful popularization of a toll-free helpline, which has significantly increased the rate of reporting, as well as the utilization of services offered by the One Stop Center for GBV cases. The active promotion of these platforms has resulted in a tangible increase in survivors seeking support and assistance.

The operational effectiveness of the project is highlighted by the fact that, in response to these initiatives in promoting and raising awareness as well as professionalisation of the police staff, the Family Support Unit has received reports from a total of 39 survivors in year 3 of the project and 56 since the beginning of the project. These reports have consequently triggered investigations, leading to the apprehension of three suspects who are currently in police custody.

This outcome underscores the project's contribution to fostering a more accountable and responsive approach to addressing GBV incidents. Before the project started, the FSU were untrained and the coordination between the GBV steering committee in the district was ineffective.

An additional insight gleaned from the FSU personnel is that the services offered by the project are predominantly accessed by female survivors and victims. This gender-specific utilization aligns with the project's objective of creating a safe and supportive environment for women and girls in need.

The MLA confirms that the project's strategic focus on enhancing the capacity of FSU personnel and promoting accessible reporting mechanisms has yielded promising outcomes. Through training, outreach, and the establishment of efficient channels, the project is effectively fostering a system that is responsive to GBV cases, leading to tangible improvements in survivor support and the initiation of legal actions against perpetrators



Outcome 4.2: Proportion of survivors who reported to FSU and were referred to a service

Of the 39 survivors to reported to the Family Support Unit in the last year of the project, 100% were then referred to an appropriate support service or investigation.

However, the MLA did find differences in the ease of connecting survivors to other services depending on the location and resource available. The FSU in Kabala (the capital of Koinadugu district) identified a more successfully established network of service centres, such as the One Stop Center and hospitals, as well as being able to carry out support directly and investigations themselves

We accompany the survivor to the Hospital to ensure he/she receive better treatment from the Hospital

– FSU KABALA POLICE OFFICER

However, those in more remote areas struggled with the amount of support they were able to provide due to resources available to them. This meant it would sometimes be reduced to passing on information to senior ranks at the district division to support investigations.

One of the biggest challenges have to do with the means of transportation because I (the Police) have no means of transportation to facilities. My movement is restricted and most of the people in my area of operations are very vulnerable and hard to reach.

– FSU FADUGU POLICE OFFICER

However, all those interviewed positively responded on how the collaboration between FSU and other service providers in the district. This was also supported by staff from the One Stop Centre who also identified receiving support from the police, even if at times it came slightly delayed. All that interviewed highlighted good coordination between service providers in the district through the GBV steering committee, as well as convening emergency cases outside of the steering committee.

Outcome 4.3: Proportion of those who were referred and then used one of these services at the community/district levels (psycho-social, medical and justice services)

It was identified that there was a circular referral approach to the other services, depending on where the survivors first engaged a GBV service provider. The FSU tended to refer survivors to the One Stop Centre or Hospitals, for medical attention. The One Stop Centre, in addition to providing medical attention also provided items such as STI screening and treatment, clothes, bed spread and pads to survivors.

Furthermore, the One Stop Centre also referred survivors to the FSU for the legal investigations needed to track perpetrators. Both additional services provided regular sensitisation and messaging on GBV and rights of the survivors. It was also identified that the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs was another service provider that some survivors were referred to, as well as counselling opportunities.

So far, all survivors who have been referred from the FSU were female, and of those using the One Stop Centre facilities the majority were female. However, the interviews highlighted that utilisation of the service is difficult to validate. Although, they believed that all the survivors utilised the services referred to them, it was also highlighted that repeated or follow up utilisation does not always happen, such as repeated medical treatments or returning to the police station with additional documentation.

The perceived reasons given for not utilising services were:

- Poor medical attention given at hospitals
- Parents making compromises with perpetrators on behalf of survivors
- There are no safer homes (refuge) for survivors
- Survivors do not understand the benefits of the service being provided to them
- Some of the survivors tend to receive the first treatment but do not follow up again because of delays in receiving medical responses
- The distance to reach a One Stop Center can be very challenging
- Lack of funds to follow up certain cases or treatment
- Fear of the community due to negative traditional beliefs and shame

Both FSU and One Stop Center staff indicated that the Once Stop Center has helped many survivors. However, a lot of support is need for continued improvement. Resources such as transportation, fuel, vehicles are needed for the service providers, whilst more awareness raising with communities to challenge negative traditional norms about seeking help and support is needed to encourage survivors to continue with their referred service.

CHALLENGES

Internal Capacity

The assessment team encountered a couple of challenges during the MLA due to internal capacity and resources. The budget allocations had not been fully thought out at proposal design which coupled with lower capacity of the MERL department due to change of staff/staff gaps led to delays on the assessment being carried out and then analysed. With a more fully staffed team and larger budget, the scope of the MLA could have been expanded and carried out in a timelier manner.

Inability to measure the Safeguarding protocol and its impact

Objective 2.1- Protocol on safeguarding standards adopted within the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs - was unable to be assessed because of continued delays by government in developing the protocol with Plan International's support. This document is a policy document, as such the development of it needs to be led by the Ministries. The project team in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs held a workshop in year 2 of the project to support the drafting of the safeguarding standards that should be established in schools. Unfortunately, the project encountered major challenges with the Ministry to finalise the document, the delay has been as a result of the Ministry's lack of technical experts available to develop the said document at national level. This meant that the MLA was unable to both analyse the policy and its impact once piloted in the project area. In the interim, the Plan International Child Protection Specialist has acted by drafting a safeguarding standard checklist which will be a starting point for the development of the safeguarding standards for the district. Plan International should continue engagement continues with the government to support finalising a policy to pilot by partners

Sensitivity of topic

Given the highly sensitive nature of the content of the assessment this may have resulted respondents being hesitant to openly or honestly express their stance on the topics or also in underreporting of abuse they are involved in or witness. This is also highlighted in some of the respondents preferring not to say on some questions, although this was a very small percentage in most cases. Children in particular may be unwilling to identify perpetrators for abuses that happen within schools and communities because of fear of retribution by a teacher or community leader. The assessment team tried their best to overcome these challenges by holding the FGDs for schools and communities in a secluded area away from teachers and other community members, explaining the processes of consent, ability to leave assessments and also confidentiality.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Term / Immediate Recommendations Before the Project Closes

Internal capacity and resources

For the final evaluation an external evaluation should be carried out, who can address the capacity gaps that are being addressed in Plan International. Furthermore, ensuring a sufficient allocation of funding is available to ensure a broader scope of the assessment can be carried out. The programmes team should reallocate fund from underspent areas to supplement the budget line available for the evaluation.

Gender training for powerholders in the community

The assessment identified that although there was positive trends towards behaviour and attitudes around gender equality and GBV, there still was some prevailing views on when violence towards women may be justified. Particularly, the justified reasons provided by boys were of a wider range of reasons. Both the opinion and the disparity between female and male views aligns with existing societal notions about gender roles and norms related to what is deserving of violence in the wider community and country. It is recommended that further gender training be carried out in the community, particularly with power holders that are not directly connected to the project, as they are key to leading a change in societal views and also sustaining reducing violence in schools and communities. Furthermore, these community power holder trainings should include children, where they feel comfortable in joining. The results of the assessment demonstrated that a only a small number of children preferred not to disclose their perspectives or opinions on the subject matter. Although, it may be that the opinions they expressed may not be fully open or honest. Furthermore, children themselves highlighted how they should be involved in community meetings with stakeholders, so they could express their perspectives on the effects of GBV

“Involve community stakeholders and the people in meetings and tell them the effects of GBV on girls and women in the community”

“Train the CoC more on GBV so that we can pass on the message to others”

-Perspective of female participants in CoC when identifying actions that can be taken to reduce GBV

This is supported by findings in the baseline that identified more needs to be done to increase stakeholders’ understanding of gender and gender-based violence, as well as the FSU and One Stop Centre staff who claimed the biggest challenge for women and girls approaching the FSU for GBV investigations and reporting was parents and community fear.

Champions of Change materials to support continuation

Many children suggested that the Champions of Change model should continue after the project has finished. The school clubs are established and both facilitators and local partners are trained in the CoC continue with the model. What is needed is more resources to support its continuation. Before the project finishes, more CoC manuals and materials should be printed for the partner and schools, as currently only the facilitators have copies of the manuals. Also providing materials for the school clubs to keep the children’s interest and attendance in engaging in the subject matter and sessions, such as recreational materials.

Long Term Recommendations Beyond the Project

The use of Champions of Change in future projects

Due to the original CoC curriculum being designed for older children, the project team had to utilise support from Plan International's global Champions of Change Coordinator for adaptation for the context and the age range. This meant some activities in the modules have been reduced, some combined, and others simplified to be more age appropriate. This was quite time consuming and relied on global capacity for support. All children expressed the need and appreciation of taken part in CoC and it is recommended that in future programmes, in order to reach a wide range of ages a Champions of Change model for a young age range could be developed separately.

Understanding of Children's Views on Safety

The assessment highlighted how children's view of safety transcended physical, sexual and emotional violence perpetrated against children. They identified comforts and/or life sustaining activities as also feeling safe, such as clean environment is clean, food security and knowing they have clothes to wear. They feel safe when their parents are around and have conversations with them. These responses call for a shift on our understanding of safety for children by looking to provide the most basic needs for them. This can be integrated into other programmes that do not just address GBV but any intervention where children are the primary participant in the programme.

Positive Parenting as an Effective Approach

The feedback from parents and caregivers were positive in how they have integrated positive parenting approaches into their own homes and communities. It was strongly identified by those interviewed that more awareness raising and engagement with parents was needed, particularly on the topics of positive parenting. They identified that secret societies in Sierra Leone were hindering positive parenting practices, particularly in violating the rights of girls in regards to FGM. Therefore, more positive parenting trainings and engagements in the future, should include their responsibilities around protecting children from the negative practices of secret societies. Furthermore, trainings specifically on how secret societies (traditional beliefs) or those involved in practices such as FGM, could find alternative non-harmful approaches that balance positive parenting approaches with positive traditional beliefs.

Strengthening of Service Providers

The results of the KII with service providers showed a distinction between those that are providing services in harder to reach or more remote chiefdoms, than those in the district capital. Furthermore, all service providers highlighted the lack of resources in regards to transportation or capacity to track how utilisation of services is followed up by survivors. More work with the district authorities and service providers in establishing tools to be used for tracking of effectiveness and utilisation of service, will go a long way in providing improved monitoring and understanding what can be done better by service providers for survivors. Additionally, partners, donors and the government need to work together in finding solutions and advocating for budgets in addressing the financial gap in providing resources to the service providers. If existing service providers were provided with more support, training and resources within the communities, this would contribute to saving the need for extensive transport.

If existing service providers were provided with more support, training and resources within the communities, this would contribute to saving the need for extensive transport.



ANNEXES



For children and
equality for girls

CONSENT FORM

This standard consent form for engagements involving children should be completed by children (and/or their parents/guardians) who may be involved in any events or engagements organized by Plan International – it is not applicable to those participating as part of a large group or in the background of an event. This form confirms that participants have agreed to participate in the event or engagement and permits Plan International to use some or all of their image/contribution/performance in any publication (including electronic publications such as films or websites) and reports created by or for Plan International and to release this material to other parties. Plan International owns all copyright to the photographs, films, or the written copy that it produces. The forms will be retained on file by the Plan International office which organized the event or engagement.

Type and Purpose of Activity: Midline Data Collection for Safer Schools for Girls (SS4G) is a project funded by Comic Relief through Plan International Sierra Leone. It is implemented in 10 schools, in 6 chiefdoms in the Koinadugu district. In each school, Champions of Change (CoC) groups have been established in all 10 schools. Four (4) Mentors have been recruited to meet with the CoC kids on a weekly basis. The overall purpose of the midline study is to assess the extent of achievements of the programme against the targets, understand the factors enabling and disabling achievement of targets, the extent of ownership built within the community, capture key learnings from the implementation experience thus far.

.....
Date (s)/ Duration of the event:

Venue:.....

Duration:.....

Country (including local Plan office details): Plan Sierra Leone, PU name and address:

A. CHILD'S AGREEMENT

- 1) I have agreed to contribute to or participate in the above event/ Activity.
- 2) I agree that some or all of my contribution/images may be used by Plan in reports and/or publications.

Full Name of Child:

Address:/community:.....

Signed (Child):..... **Date:**.....

This form should be signed by all contributors who can read and write and are old enough to understand what they are agreeing to. Where the contributor is under 18 years of age, their parent/guardian must also give consent (below).

B. PARENT(S) OR GUARDIAN(S) CONSENT



For children and equality for girls

I confirm that I am the contributor's parent/guardian and agree to the above on behalf of the contributor.

Full Name:.....

Address:/community.....

Signed:..... Date:.....

C. THIRD PARTY CONSENT

In the case of the child and the parent/guardian being unable to read or write an independent person should sign the form on behalf of the family. This could be a teacher or community volunteer.

The third-party person will explain to the family:

- The reason for the event
- The process of the event
- That the contributor is agreeing to participate in the event
- That the contributor is agreeing to Plan and/or its licensees using some or all of the contribution of any media worldwide without restriction

I have discussed the above points in relation to the above event with the contributor and/or their parent/guardian. I confirm that the contributor and/or their parent/guardian have understood the above points and agree to participate in the above event.

Full Name:

Relationship/capacity known to child's Parent/Guardian:

Address/community.....

Signed..... Date.....

Full name and Job Title of Plan Staff administering consent form:

.....

Date:

Note

I understand that I can withdraw my consent for Plan International Sierra Leone to use all or part of my contribution by contacting Esther Elliot-Nyuma <Esther.Elliot-Nyuma@plan-international.org> +23276551321 . Plan International Sierra Leone will comply with my requests to amend or delete my contribution.

Safer School for Girls (SS4G) Mid Line Assessment - Protocol for engaging participants

Introductory Protocol for This Exercise.

Begin with the traditional greetings in the local language.

My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. We work for Plan International. We would like to ask you some questions about the issues affecting women and girls in your community so that we can better understand your needs and concerns about these groups. We are not asking for your specific stories; please do not use any names.

We are asking about things that you have heard of or know to be happening. If you feel uncomfortable at any time you can leave. Participation in the discussion is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. We have nothing to offer other than listening; there will be no other direct benefits related to this time we spend together today. We do not want your names and will not be writing your names down.

We also will not present any other potentially identifying information in anything that we produce based on this conversation. We will treat everything that you say today with respect, and we will only share the answers you give as general answers combined with those from all the people who speak to us. We ask that you keep everything confidential, too. My colleague will be taking notes to make sure that we do not miss what you have to say. I hope that this is OK with you? We really want to hear what you have to say, and I want you to answer my questions however you want. There is no wrong answer to any question. I expect our discussion to last for a maximum time of one hour.

Please note that you are under no obligation to respond to any question you don't want to and you are free to leave the discussion at any point.

If you have a query and would like to make a report to Plan International, please contact Esther Nyuma using the toll-free hotline 414 on Orange network.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Set the rules for the discussion (no wrong answers, everybody shares in the discussions, not competitive, everybody's view counts, anyone can leave at any time without providing a reason – and we will respect anyone's wishes to leave or remain silent during the session without judgement, anything discussed during this session will only remain between this group).

For further information on the SS4G project, midline assessment and additional annexes, contact Khadijatu Bakarr, Head of Programme Implementation; Khadijatu.Bakarr@plan-international.org or Kate Strivens, Business Development Manager; Kate.Strivens@plan-international.org

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