



THE 2020

ASIA **GIRLS** REPORT

Introducing the Asia Girls' Leadership Index

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGSA	Adolescent Girls Situational Analysis
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
HDI	Human Development Index
ILO	International Labour Organization
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out an ambitious vision for universal progress on urgent issues over the next 15 years. Building on achievements to date, the Agenda commits us to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ‘for all nations and people and for all segments of society’ and pledges to leave no one behind. This presents a critical opportunity to advance the well-being and empowerment of a large segment of the world population that is at risk of being left out of global progress: 1.1 billion girls.

—Harnessing the Power of Data for Girls, UNICEF 2016



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FOREWORD



The **2020 Asia Girls Report** is Plan International's inaugural research report on the situation of girls in Asia and part of our contribution to the sustainable development agenda.

In 2015, one hundred and ninety-three countries adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committed to equitable, inclusive development that leaves no one behind. The Association of South East Asian States (ASEAN) and other Asian regional bodies subsequently incorporated the SDGs into cross-regional development cooperation platforms. As a result, the regional and national discourse in Asia is more focused on girls and gender than ever before. Yet girls throughout the region continue to experience fewer opportunities and weaker development outcomes than boys.

Much of the work to increase gender equality in Asia will succeed or fail based on our ability to counteract discriminatory gender norms. Gender norms affect girls from a very young age, starting with the decisions made for them by their families (for example, how much food and healthcare they receive, or whether they attend school). As girls grow older, they begin to participate in decision-making, but their expectations and the futures they see for themselves and for their peers are influenced and shaped by societal gender norms. These norms will influence if and what girls choose to study and whether they go on to higher education or a career. The choices made in a girl's second decade can set into motion a lifelong trajectory of inequality and poverty.

This is why we must not wait until girls are adults to start supporting them on the path to equal opportunity. By the time they are women, too much has already been decided by and for them. We must start earlier. Adolescence is a particularly important window of time when a girl develops the leadership capabilities that will enable or constrain her participation, her decision-making and the opportunities she will have access to for the rest of her life. The 2020 Asia Girls Report, released ahead of International Women's Day, focuses on this critical window and makes the case for investing in girls now, so they become the women leaders of tomorrow.

The report also introduces the Asia Girls' Leadership Index. The Index is the first of its kind and consolidates existing international and reliable data to present the status of girls' leadership across six domains in 19 South and Southeast Asian countries. It raises awareness of and advocates for actions to support girls' development, empowerment and ability to realise and exercise their rights. The Index, especially when combined with the advancement of country-specific adolescent girls' development frameworks (see Section 5 for a step-by-step guide to developing such a framework), is an instrument that can be used by national governments and their development partners to monitor and measure the advancement of girls' leadership and development as part of the sustainable development agenda.

Inequality in Asia looks different than in other parts of the world, so it is particularly important that we understand gender inequality in our region and ensure girls can realize their full potential now and in the future. This is even more critical because of the sheer numbers of girls who grow up in Asia: more than half of all the world's adolescents live here.

And now is the right moment in history for us to embrace this change. Asian economies continue to out-perform the rest of the world, and our governments, businesses and social change sectors are poised to do more with our own domestic resources than ever before. It is our time to show the world what we can and will do, with and for our girls in Asia, to leave no one behind.

Bhagyashri Dengle
Regional Director, Plan International Asia Pacific Hub



With the aim to help 'Girls Get Equal', our global strategy for 2017–2022 is an ambitious commitment to transform the lives of 100 million girls so they can:

LEARN so vulnerable children have the skills they need to succeed in life and work.

LEAD so vulnerable and excluded children have the power to take action on issues that matter to them.

DECIDE so children and young people, especially girls, have control over their own lives and bodies.

THRIVE so children and young people, especially girls, grow up cared for and free from violence and fear.

Our strategy commits us to producing an annual report that documents progress toward these goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you as well to all the young girls and women who participated in the interview and survey processes for their insightful contributions and information shared.

About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world.

We recognise that every single child has power and potential, but they are often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. It is girls who are most affected.

As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

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.



“When a girl reaches age 10, her world changes. A flurry of life-changing events pulls her in many directions. Where she ends up depends on the support she receives and the power she has to shape her future. In some parts of the world, a 10-year-old girl on the verge of adolescence sees limitless possibilities ahead and begins making choices that will influence her education and, later, her work and her life. But in other parts of the world, a 10-year-old girl’s horizons are limited. As she reaches puberty, a formidable combination of relatives, figures in her community, social and cultural norms, institutions and discriminatory laws block her path forward. By age 10, she may be forced to marry. She may be pulled out of school to begin a lifetime of childbearing and servitude to her husband. At 10, she may become property, a commodity that can be bought and sold. At 10, she may be denied any say in decisions about her life. At 10, her future is no longer hers. It is determined by others. Impeding a girl’s safe, healthy path through adolescence to a productive and autonomous adulthood is a violation of her rights. But it also takes a toll on her community and nation. Whenever a girl’s potential goes unrealised, we all lose.

Conversely, when a girl is able to exercise her rights, stay healthy, complete her education and make decisions about her own life, she—and everyone around her—wins. She will be healthier and, if she later chooses to start a family, her children will be healthier. She will be more productive and make a better living and, in turn, make the world a better place.”

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund
The State of World Population 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In any part of the world, a girl's transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is marked by challenges and complexity. During her second decade, she will experience rapid biological and psychosocial changes that will affect every aspect of her life: the roles and responsibilities she has within her family, the relationships she develops and maintains with her peers and in her community, her opportunities to pursue education and access health care, and her ability to participate in the decision-making processes that will affect her now and in the future.^{1,2}

That transition can be particularly challenging in Asia, which is home to more than half of the world's 1.1 billion girls under the age of 18.³ Asia is a vast region, both in terms of its geographic scope and its diversity of socio-cultural, geo-political and economic contexts. In many parts of Asia, girls and women are undervalued, underestimated, and continue to encounter gender-related restrictions and inequalities that keep them from realising their full potential. These discriminatory attitudes and practices significantly limit the ability of girls and women to define and act on their own goals, and to realise their rights.

To gain deeper insights into the key trends and issues that enable or constrain empowerment and leadership of adolescent girls and young women, Plan International conducted research on the 19 countries that make up the Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as Timor-Leste (which is not a full member of ASEAN but applied for membership in 2011 and is part of the ASEAN Regional Forum).

Although there is not one universally agreed-upon definition of girls' leadership, for the purpose of this research, we consider leadership in its broader form as **the individual competencies, skills and environmental conditions required to support girls to exercise agency, voice and participation in their own lives, households and communities**, rather than what is required to prepare them for leadership roles in business and government.

The inaugural *Asia Girls Report* presents the current state of girls' leadership in Asia, based on the findings of our research (including a literature review, survey and key informant interviews) and the Asia Girls' Leadership Index.



CALL TO ACTION

Across Asia, countries are making critical decisions and investments in their young populations that will influence the extent to which they achieve their 2030 sustainable development commitments. **With only a decade remaining before 2030, Plan International is calling on all countries in Asia to invest in adolescent girls now by developing and adopting adolescent girls' development frameworks as part of their national development planning and reporting against the sustainable development goals.**

Section 1 of this report explores the situation of girls and young women in Asia, including a broad discussion of the complex and dynamic transition girls undertake through adolescence into adulthood (and the many factors that can enable or constrain that transition).

Section 2 looks at how we constructed the Asia Girls' Leadership Index and what it is designed to measure.

Section 3 presents an overview of our research, including a summary of the methodologies used and the limitations identified.

Section 4 provides the integrated findings of our research and the **Asia Girls' Leadership Index** across six domains: education, health, economic opportunities, protection, political voice and representation, and national laws and policies. The Index is a composite index that measures the opportunities of adolescent girls and young women in the 19 SAARC and ASEAN countries to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities. It can be used as an instrument to support and inform policymakers, donors' and stakeholders' investment in leadership development for adolescent girls and young women at regional and national levels. It can also inform the design of contextually relevant and strategic programmes and monitor change in those programmes over time.

The Index rankings, shown in Table 4, reflect the current situation of girls' leadership in each country relative to the other countries. Of note, no single country received the same ranking across all domains (i.e., no country ranked first or last across all six domains). This suggests that, when compared with their neighbours in the region, some countries are doing better than others on certain domains, but no one country is excelling across all domains. The rankings alone mask the complex and variable reality behind the relative positions. The Index values, shown in Table 5, offer a more nuanced and practical understanding of girls' leadership in the region.

The three **highest-ranking countries** on the Index are Singapore (.778), Philippines (.717) and Vietnam (.712), all of which are members of ASEAN. Singapore's Index value is considerably higher than that of the second- and third-ranked countries, largely due to its first-place scores in four domains. The difference between the second- and third-ranking countries (Philippines and Vietnam, respectively) is more subtle, with Philippines' component domain rankings ranging from first (laws and policies) to 12th (health) and Vietnam's component domain rankings ranging from first (voice and participation) to 11th (protection).

The three **lowest-ranking countries** on the Index are Pakistan (.361), Bangladesh (.401) and Afghanistan (.403), all of which are members of SAARC. Pakistan's ranking is considerably lower than the second- and third-lowest ranked countries due to its 18th-place rankings in three domains and the lowest possible ranking in one additional domain. The difference between the second- and third-lowest ranking countries (Bangladesh and Afghanistan, respectively) is minimal. Bangladesh's component domain rankings range from 14th (education) to the lowest possible rankings in the laws and policies and protection domains. In comparison, Afghanistan's component domain rankings range from 15th (voice and participation) to the lowest possible rankings in the education and economic opportunities domains.

Finally, **Section 5** presents a call to action for countries in Asia to invest in adolescent girls and includes our proposed strategic approach for making this investment. With the signing of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, countries around the world committed to equitable and inclusive development that leaves no one behind. Since then, adolescent girls have received more attention than ever in global and national-level discourse.

Plan International is committed to supporting countries to respond to this call to action. Section 5 presents a six-step process for developing an adolescent girls' framework. It is based on our global experience advancing gender equality for girls, and more specifically, our contributions to the development of the Lao PDR adolescent girls' development framework (the Noi 2030 Framework). The key elements of a successful adolescent girls' framework are presented to further guide countries' development of adolescent girls' frameworks.

Investments in adolescent health and well-being are widely recognised as the best investments that can be made to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Countries that invest in girls' development and equality are doing more than investing in girls in their own right; they are also investing in tomorrow's adults and, as a result, the future of their nations as a whole.

Plan International's 2020 Asia Girls' Report, including the introduction of the Asia Girls' Leadership Index, presents the evidence to inform countries' decisions and investments in their young populations, as well as practical tools and guidance that will support their implementation and the extent to which they achieve their 2030 commitments.



1. WHY INVEST IN GIRLS' LEADERSHIP?

In many respects, the lives of girls today are better than those of previous generations. Girls are now more likely to survive childhood, more likely to complete their education, less likely to be undernourished and less likely to marry as children.⁴ Despite these advances, in many countries and regions around the world, girls and young women are undervalued and underestimated—and continue to encounter and experience gender-related deprivation, exclusion and inequalities that keep them from realising their full potential.

Gender equality is integral to achieving the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—and for all people to fully realise their human rights. By 2030, the girls who were 10 years old at the signing of the SDGs will be 25. How many of these girls will experience a better life than their mothers, finishing their education and choosing who and when to marry, what career to pursue and how many children to have? How many will experience the same discrimination and exclusion as their mothers, leaving school early to care for siblings, marrying and having their first children before the age of 18, seeking informal and unreliable employment (if even granted permission by their husbands and extended family to do so)? The decisions that nations, governments, communities and families make for their girls over the next decade will be critical.

To support the achievement of the SDGs, we are promoting the advancement of girls' leadership. In its broader form, leadership can be thought of as the individual competencies, skills and conditions required for girls to exercise agency, voice and participation in their own lives, households and communities, not just what is required to prepare them for leadership roles in business and government. While these two aspects of leadership have much in common, our broader definition considers all girls and the leadership capabilities they need to successfully navigate their daily lives.

If a girl is to develop those capabilities, her family and community must first address inequalities and their detrimental impact to her health, nutrition and education. She must be supported and encouraged to make her own decisions and to pursue opportunities that will allow her to realise her own goals, including those related to her career, whether or not she marries, and if and when she will have children. She must be given the same opportunities as her male peers to participate in public discourse, hold decision-making roles, and be protected from discrimination, harassment and abuse.

Supporting the development of girls' leadership means working across all sectors, as well as with governments, communities and families. It means challenging pervasive inequalities to alleviate stereotyping, prejudice, bias, discrimination and exclusion. This will not be an easy undertaking—but it is absolutely necessary so that no girls are left behind.

“In every part of the world, families and societies treat girls and boys differently, with girls facing greater discrimination and accessing fewer opportunities and little or sub-standard education, health care and nutrition.”

Because I Am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls
Plan International, 2007

ADDRESSING GENDER DISPARITIES DURING CHILDHOOD

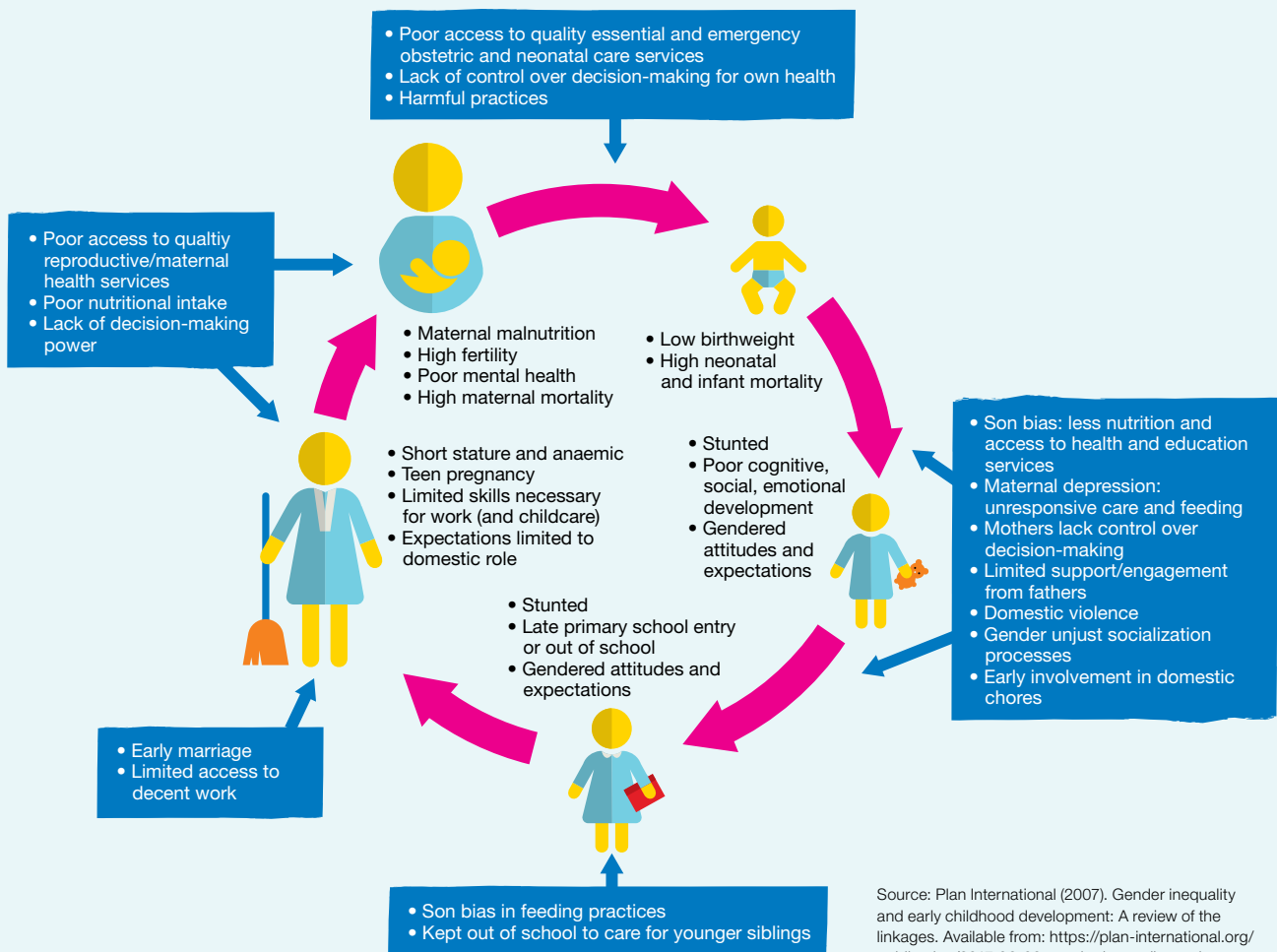
Girls often face gender discrimination before they are even born, due to attitudes and behaviour patterns passed down from generation to generation. These discriminatory attitudes and practices can have lifelong implications: for example, because many young girls receive a lower quality of care and attention than boys, they may fall behind boys from a developmental standpoint even before entering primary school.⁵

Early childhood is also when girls and boys learn gendered norms, attitudes and expectations within their families, communities and societies.⁶ By age five, many children already have a clear idea of how they are expected to behave, what the consequences might be for not conforming to these expectations, how they are valued based on their sex, and what roles they are expected to fulfil throughout their lives.⁷ These gender disparities and experiences of discrimination and exclusion are even more severe for girls with a disability.

The isolation and prejudice girls face are intergenerational and entrenched in social and cultural norms. As a result, girls are often limited in their opportunities for healthy development and in their ability to demonstrate leadership in their own lives, as individuals who can define and act upon their own goals.

Figure 1 depicts how gender inequality affects a girl's life course and is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Figure 1. Intergenerational impact of gender inequality



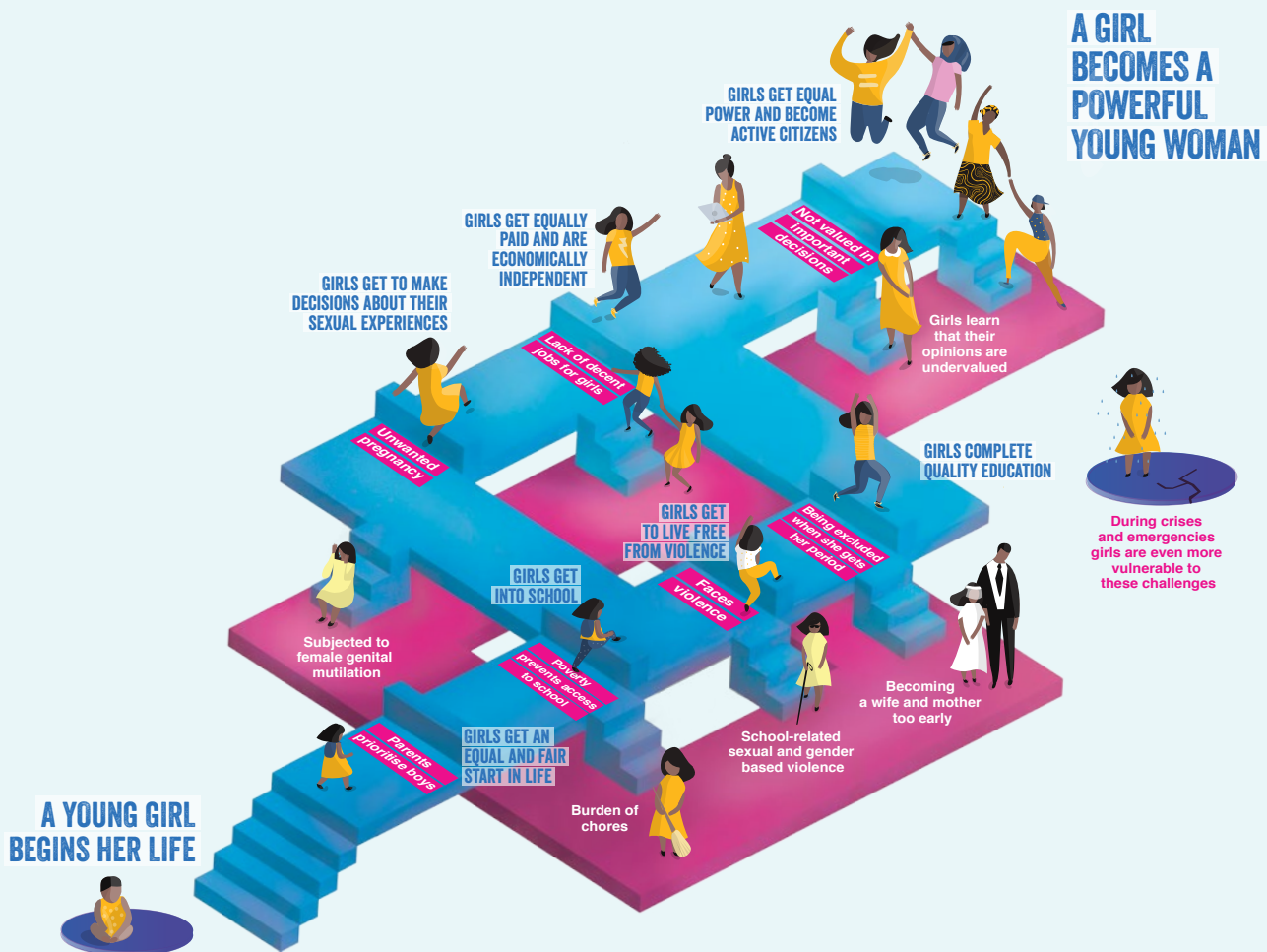
Source: Plan International (2007). Gender inequality and early childhood development: A review of the linkages. Available from: <https://plan-international.org/publication/2017-06-08-gender-inequality-and-early-childhood-development#download-options>

ADDRESSING GENDER DISPARITIES DURING ADOLESCENCE

As children approach puberty, gender disparities, bias, stereotypes and beliefs about a ‘fixed’ or socially defined identity are further cemented, influencing behaviours and decision-making by and for girls. In societies, communities and families where negative gender beliefs are steadfastly held, gender disparities become more evident, with more adverse outcomes for adolescent girls.⁸ The transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood is a complex journey: it is a period when lifelong behaviours are formed, pathways of opportunity (or risk) emerge, and the adult life trajectory begins to take shape. It is also when girls’ and boys’ lives begin to differ dramatically in terms of schooling, mobility, domestic and social responsibilities and marital status.⁹ The rapid biological and psychosocial changes that occur during the second decade of a girl’s life affect the roles and responsibilities she has within her family, the relationships she develops and maintains with her peers and in her community, her opportunities to pursue education and seek health care, and her ability to participate in the decision-making processes that will affect her now and in the future.¹⁰

Figure 2 illustrates the complex and intersecting factors that influence a girl’s life trajectory from the moment she is born. A single decision made by or for a girl at any point in her first or second decade has the potential to derail successes she has experienced up to that point and change her life course forever. Evidence from Plan International’s work shows that investing in girls requires a complementary, multi-level approach that combines girls’ empowerment, family and community mobilisation, economic resources and incentives, and legal and policy reform. This approach ensures girls are able to unlock their power, are free from violence and discrimination, and enjoy their full and equal rights.

Figure 2. The Girls’ Plan



Source: Plan International. The Girls’ Plan. [Accessed 8 January, 2020] Available from: <https://plan-international.org/girls-plan>

While adolescence is generally considered to be the period between 10 and 19 years of age, it actually comprises a series of stages with distinct developmental characteristics within that timeframe. Adolescents are a diverse, heterogeneous group: age and gender are just two critical distinguishing characteristics that, together with cultural norms, socio-political environment, economic status, geography and individual ability, can profoundly influence one's life path and experiences.¹¹

Figure 3 presents the Pan American Health Organization's classification of adolescent stages.

Figure 3. The stages of adolescence

Age	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Girls	Preadolescence			Early Adolescence		Middle Adolescence		Late Adolescence		Youth			Young Adulthood			
Boys	Preadolescence			Early Adolescence		Middle Adolescence		Late Adolesc.		Youth			Young Adulthood			

Domains of change that occur between the ages of 10 and 14 differentiated by sex, include:

- Physical development
- Biological changes (onset of puberty)
- Cognitive and emotional development
- Changes in social roles (among the poorest, a dramatic shift to adult responsibilities)

Source: Population Council (2016). *Investing when it counts: Reviewing the evidence and charting a course for very young adolescents*.

Available from: https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2016PGY_InvestingWhenItCounts.pdf

Adapted from Breinbauer, C., & Maddaleno, M. (2005). *Promoting healthy behaviors in adolescents*. In *Youth: Choices and change* (pp. 262–264). Washington, DC: Pan American Health Organization.

The literature commonly refers to two distinct phases in the second decade of life: very young adolescents (10–14 years of age) and older adolescents (15–19 years of age). Table 1 shows the distribution of adolescent girls according to these two phases in the 19 Asian countries that are the focus of this research.

Table 1. Adolescent girl population (by age group) in focus countries in Asia

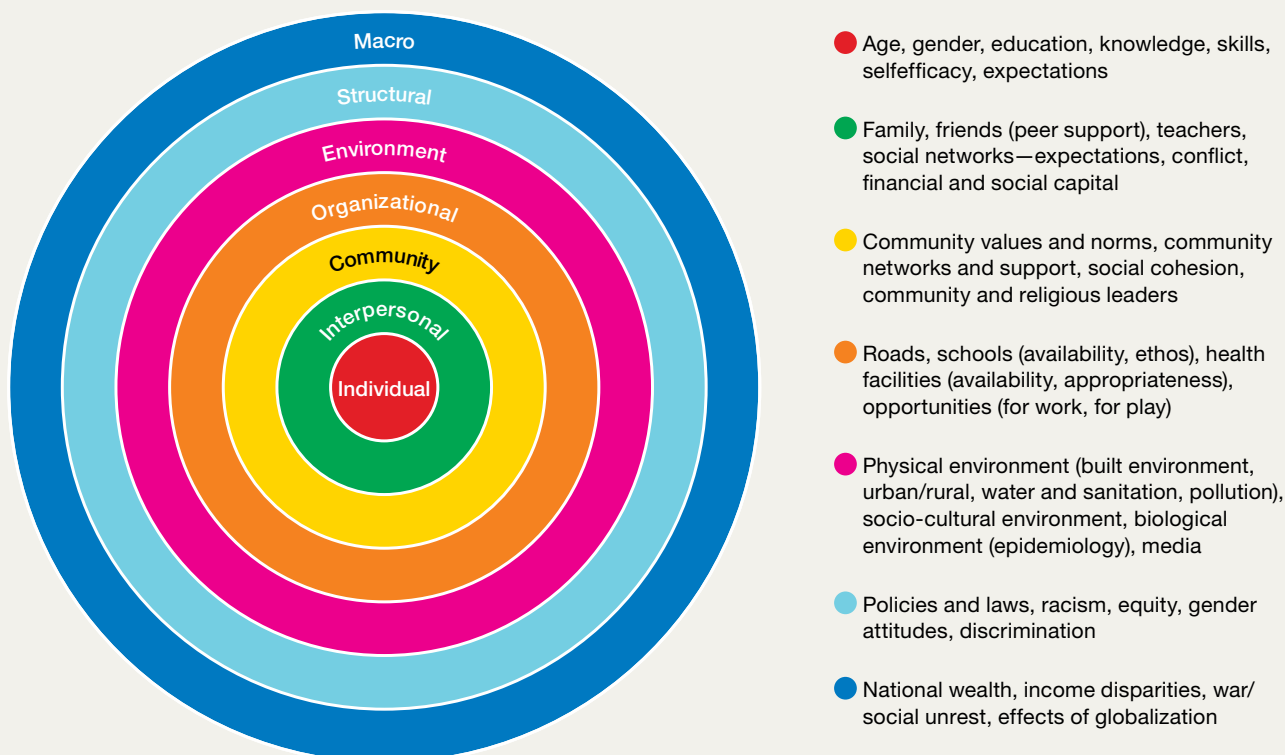
	Very Young Adolescents (10–14 years)	Older Adolescents (15–19 years)	Total
Girls	109,996	106,832	216,828
Boys	119,758	116,176	235,934
Total	229,754	223,008	452,762

Source: United Nations Departments of Economic and Social Affairs (2019)

The onset of puberty during very young adolescence is a particularly intense period of physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes.¹² Puberty can put into action a number of transitions for girls that are not as commonly experienced by boys, including leaving school, entering the labour force, child marriage, and becoming a caretaker or parent.¹³ In turn, these transitions put into action the life pathways, opportunities and risks that will either enable or constrain a girl's ability to develop and demonstrate leadership. Depending on the transitions that take place during very young adolescence, by the time a girl reaches older adolescence she may be concerned with raising children and managing a household—and her mobility and participation in decision-making processes may already be restricted to the domestic space. This will limit her opportunities to participate in, and influence the community and structural factors that will affect her life.

These transitions can occur amidst numerous concurrent social, economic, cultural and other factors that both protect and undermine adolescents' healthy development, as presented in Figure 4. Understanding the complexity of adolescence and the diverse needs of girls at different stages of adolescence is critical for the development and implementation of effective programmes to support the development of girls' leadership.

Figure 4. Determinants of adolescent health and well-being: An ecological model



Source: World Health Organization (2014). Health for the world's adolescents: A second chance in the second decade. Available from: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112750/WHO_FWC_MCA_14.05_eng.pdf?sequence=1

INVESTING TODAY FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE TOMORROW

In 2015, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development stated that ‘investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations.’¹⁴ Because adolescence is such a pivotal moment in girls’ lives, investing in adolescent girls can have life-long impacts on not only those girls but also their families, communities and countries. The active engagement of adolescents in sustainable development efforts is vital to achieving the SDGs, building sustainable, inclusive and stable societies, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of poverty, gender inequality, unemployment, conflict, migration and climate change.¹⁵

Gender inequalities in the allocation of resources and services (such as education, health care, nutrition and political voice) matter because of their impact on individual well-being and productivity as well as broader economic growth. Patterns of inequality begin at an early age, with boys routinely receiving a larger share of education and health spending than girls.¹⁶ Achieving gender equality is recognised as an essential precursor for achieving most of the SDGs due to the multiplier effects it would have across the whole spectrum of development.¹⁷ In particular, SDG 5 commits countries to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Doing so will help countries achieve many of the other SDGs by reducing gender gaps in access to health care, education and labour markets, and by further helping to reduce poverty, support economic growth and build more resilient communities.¹⁸



2. THE ASIA GIRLS' LEADERSHIP INDEX

Across Asia, multiple factors intersect to influence gender equality and how these are expressed and experienced by girls in each country, community and household. The factors themselves and the level of influence they have vary from country to country, meaning that girls' experiences and opportunities in one country may be very different to those in another country across the region.

The **Asia Girls' Leadership Index** is a composite index that measures the opportunities of adolescent girls and young women in 19 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities. It can be used as an instrument to support and inform policymakers', donors' and stakeholders' investment in leadership development for adolescent girls and young women at regional and national levels. It can also inform the design of contextually relevant and strategic programmes and to monitor change in those programmes over time.

For each country, the Index presents rankings for girls' leadership as a whole as well as for six core domains, establishing benchmarks for the areas that impact girls' opportunities to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities. The Index allows effective comparisons to be made across countries and regions. The six core domains are education, economic opportunities, protection, health, political voice and representation, and laws and policies. These are further divided into 23 indicators representing essential factors that can enable or constrain the healthy development of adolescent girls and young women as well as their ability to demonstrate

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDEX

The methods used to develop the Asia Girls' Leadership Index are summarised here. For further details, please see the Annex.

1. Selection of indicators and data population

Indicator selection was based on our Girls' Leadership Research Framework, which outlined domains and potential indicators. That framework informed a scan of global databases for complete data sets on each proposed indicator. Indicators were drawn from internationally recognised databases available online, with SDG indicators prioritised to support regular updating of the Index.

2. Normalisation

A normalisation process was conducted to account for indicators having different measurement units. This process resulted in unitless indicators with values between 0 and 1. A second process was undertaken to transform all indicators into 'positive' values.

3. Generation of the six domain indices

The domain indices were obtained by averaging the normalised positive indicators in each domain. Equal weights were assigned for each indicator within each domain.







4. Aggregation of the domain indices to produce the overall index

The overall index was obtained by averaging the six individual domain indices.

5. Computation of regional indices

The regional indices (ASEAN and SAARC) were computed by obtaining the weighted mean of the normalised indices and then aggregating these by the unweighted mean. The population of girls aged 10–19 in each country were used as weights.

Table 2: Asia Girls' Leadership Index: Domains and Indicators

Domain	Full Form	SDG Link	% Total
 Education	Completion Rate, Lower Secondary Female (%)	4.1	4.17%
	Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, female (%)	4.3.2	4.17%
	Access to Internet, Female (%)	17.8.1	4.17%
	Mean years of schooling, female (years)	HDI	4.17%
 Economic Opportunity	Share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate), Female (%)	8.6.1	4.17%
	Youth Labour Participation Rate, Female (%)	ILO	4.17%
	Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile-service provider, Female (%)	8.10.2	4.17%
	Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)	5.5.2	4.17%
 Protection	Percentage of girls aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour	8.7.1	5.56%
	Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18	5.3.1	5.56%
	Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner	5.2.1	5.56%
 Health	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)	3.7.2	4.17%
	Proportion of women aged 15-19 years who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	3.7.1	4.17%
	Prevalence of stunting, height for age, female (% of children under 5)	2.2.1	4.17%
	Suicide Mortality Rate (15-19), female (per 100,000 female population)	3.4.2	4.17%
 Political Voice and Representation	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments	5.5.1	5.56%
	Woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's	5.1.1	5.56%
	Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	16.9.1	5.56%
 Laws and Policies	Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents	5.1.1	3.33%
	Equal remuneration for work of equal value	5.1.1	3.33%
	Legislation on sexual harassment in employment	5.1.1	3.33%
	Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage	5.1.1	3.33%
	Legislation explicitly criminalizes marital rape	5.1.1	3.33%

leadership (i.e., to demonstrate empowerment, agency and decision-making) and to fully exercise their rights within their families, workplaces and communities.

Table 2 presents the domains and indicators included in the Index, along with the SDG they support and the proportion of the overall Index value contributed by the indicators.

In reviewing the dimensions of girls' leadership, limitations in the availability and consistency of information across the region were identified. However, credible and consistent data are critical—without it, governments and stakeholders are constrained in their ability to understand and design effective programmes to support the development of girls' leadership and overall well-being. The development of an Asia-wide index to assess the situation of girls' leadership domains is an opportunity to explore these gaps in depth and to identify proxies for the measurement of girls' leadership.

Other organisations have constructed youth and girls' leadership indices to track changes and advocate to national and global audiencesⁱ, and the frameworks and domains in which these have been developed are as important as they are complex, given the many dimensions involved in leadership. Our quest to add value to the existing literature on girls' and young women's leadership aligns with the UN Women's 2016–2020 Making Every Woman and Girl Count flagship programme, which focuses on addressing global data gaps. By bringing forward a broader definition and data specific to girls and girls' leadership, we are helping to ensure data are available and used to inform policy and advocacy. While the Index may not capture all the complexities of leadership or solve all existing data challenges relating to girls' leadership, it moves toward filling these gaps. It attempts to consolidate existing reliable, international data to determine if conditions for girls' and young women's leadership are improving and serves as a tool to raise awareness and advocate for actions to support girls' and young women's empowerment.

ⁱ See CARE (2012), Save the Children (2018) and ASEAN (2017) for more work on girls and youth indices. The latter does not specifically include data on girls or female adolescent populations.



3. ABOUT THE RESEARCH

We conducted research on girls' leadership in Asia to gain deeper insights into the key trends and issues that either enable or constrain adolescent girls' and young women's empowerment and leadership.

To do that, we looked at six domains: education, economic opportunities, health, protection, laws and policies, and political voice and representation. Taken together, these domains can create the conditions that support or constrain girls' leadership in their relationships, families, communities, workplaces, and broader social and cultural environment.

The direct impact of these conditions is felt at the individual level; however, their existence is dependent on multiple factors:

- Decisions, policies and socio-cultural norms within the household (e.g., family decision-making can determine girls' access to education and health services)
- Community, organisational and structural environments (e.g., protective behaviours, policies and laws)

These factors are also interdependent on one another. For example, economic opportunities arise out of educational achievement, which is influenced by a girl's health and the education system's policies and infrastructure. The collective individual impact of these factors shapes communities and society as a whole, which in turn reinforces the individual effects.

Our research focused on 19 SAARC and ASEAN countries, including Timor-Leste (which is not a full member of ASEAN but is a member of its Regional Forum).

Figure 5. Countries included in the research on girls' leadership in Asia



RESEARCH COMPONENTS

The research consisted of four main components.

1. Desk review
2. Development of the Asia Girls' Leadership Index
3. A survey on adolescent girls' and young women's perceptions on their opportunities, well-being and agency
4. Key informant interviews

The full findings from this research are presented with details from the Asia Girls' Leadership Index in Section 4.



THE DESK REVIEW

The desk review involved a comprehensive review of existing literature and research on girls' and young women's empowerment and leadership, related key concepts and theories, and the enabling and constraining factors. The review considered international and regional evidence, research and studies carried out in the past 10 years by research institutions, multi-lateral agencies, and international and national non-governmental organisations.

Specifically, the review aimed to address three core questions:

1. What are the key concepts, theories and emerging debates on girls' and young women's leadership and agency at the regional and global levels?
2. What are the enabling and constraining factors that affect how adolescent girls and young women across Asia develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities in different situations, including at family, community or national levels in the past decade (2008–2018)?
3. What are similar or contextually specific issues and trends across the region?

The desk review considered the skills and conditions required for girls and young women to realise and exercise qualities of leadership (agency, voice and participation, with empowerment underpinning all of these qualities) across the six domains of the Index: education, economic opportunities, health, protection, laws and policies, and political voice and representation. Within each domain, the desk review considered different measures and how these affected girls' and young women's ability to realise leadership within their own lives, families, communities and societies. This broad approach to the exploration of leadership is intended to consider all girls, as well as the complexities and intersectionalities of their transitions through adolescence into adulthood and the opportunities they have to navigate their daily lives.

Our review found little information specifically about leadership among girls and young adolescents; what does exist is focused mainly on international development. Much of the literature looks at adult leadership^{19,20} women's leadership²¹ or youth leadership.^{22,23} Although many of the concepts from women's leadership research are applicable, the transitional situation of girls and adolescents means there are key differences not addressed by adult-focused research.



SURVEY ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF OPPORTUNITIES, WELL-BEING AND AGENCY

We conducted a survey with adolescent girls and young women on their perceptions of opportunities to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities in their own lives.

The survey was conducted through interviewer-administered interviews (local languages) in select urban and rural locations in Bangladesh, Lao PDR and Vietnam, and through a self-administered online questionnaire (English) across the entire region. Online respondents came from all over Asia, including Philippines (26% of the total respondents), India (20%), Bangladesh (7%), Timor-Leste (7%), Vietnam (7%), Indonesia (6%), Thailand (5%), and Singapore (4%).

Target respondents for the offline survey were adolescent girls 15–19 years of age. We obtained written consent from all participants and the parents of respondents under 18 years. Target respondents for the online survey were young women 18 years and older to accommodate permission requirements.

A total of 621 respondents completed the offline survey and 110 respondents completed the online survey.



KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

We conducted key informant interviews with five adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 21 in Bangladesh and Vietnam. The interviews focused on respondents' perceptions of leadership and their opportunities to become leaders.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

It is important to note that there are some limitations in the information gathered through our research. The two primary limitations we encountered were the availability and consistency of data and the distinct differences between the offline and online survey respondents.

Availability and consistency of data

Globally, the collection, disaggregation and reporting of data on adolescent girls and young women is not consistent. There is limited availability of literature and data specifically on these age groups, and both the terms used and the age ranges referred to vary among indicators and organisations collecting the data. Many indicators straddle multiple stages of adolescence and youth. Table 3 presents a list of age definitions from a sample group of organisations, illustrating this inconsistency.

Of the 54 gender-specific SDG indicators, only 12 (22%) are reported regularly enough to generate reliable evidence of women's status and situations. In many cases, data on entire groups of women and girls is missing, making data on girls and female adolescents even more scarce.²⁴ These gaps in credible, consistent data make it difficult to measure dimensions of girls' leadership and to inform the design and creation of programs and policies that facilitate girls' leadership and overall well-being.

Differences in survey respondents

Survey respondents fell into two distinct groups: offline survey respondents and online survey respondents.

The offline respondents ranged in age from 15 to 19 years, with 42% aged 15 years and 6% aged 19 years. The online respondents were all at least 18 years old, with almost 40% 18 or 19 years old. Only 5% of online respondents were older than 24 years.

Although only four years separated the largest groups of respondents in the offline and online surveys, the differences in lived experience of a 15-year-old girl compared to that of a 19-year-old girl can be striking, depending on social, cultural and economic contexts. For example, a 15-year-old girl will often be occupied with school, friendships and household chores, while a 19-year-old girl could be married and pregnant with her first child.

It should also be noted that by completing the online survey, respondents demonstrated access to the Internet and a level of agency that supports their participation in such a survey. It may also reflect respondents' ages, positions within their families and societies, and the state of infrastructure in their communities. These characteristics were more variable among offline respondents.

The surveys are a rich source of information; however, the differences in composition between offline and online respondents make it difficult to draw direct comparisons between the two data sets. We have considered this in our analysis and presentation of the findings in subsequent sections.

WHAT IS GIRLS' LEADERSHIP

There is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of girls' leadership—and our research was not intended to provide one. Instead, its intent was to identify the enabling and constraining factors that affect adolescent girls' and young women's ability to develop and demonstrate leadership capabilities across the social ecological framework.

For the purpose of this research, we consider **leadership in its broader form as the individual competencies, skills and environmental conditions required to support girls to exercise agency, voice and participation in their own lives, households and communities**, rather than what is required to prepare girls for leadership roles in business and government. Although these two types of leadership have much in common, the broader approach enables us to consider all girls and the leadership capabilities they need to successfully navigate their daily lives.

Table 3. Age definitions of 'youth' used by various organizations

Organisation	Age Range
UNESCO	15–24
International Labour Organization	15–24
UN Human Settlements Programme	15–32
UN Population Fund	10–24
World Health Organization	10–29
World Bank	15–35
ASEAN Youth Development Index	15–35

Source: Global Youth Development Index Report (2016).



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4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This section presents the values of the Asia Girls' Leadership Index together with the findings of our desk review, survey and interviews, highlighting trends, drawing attention to possible correlations between different factors within and across domains, and indicating where discrepancies exist.

Tables 4 and 5 present the results of the Asia Girls' Leadership Index and its component domain indices for each country. Table 4 presents the countries' overall Index and domain rankings, while Table 5 presents the more precise Index and domain values (i.e., scores).

The rankings reflect the current situation of girls' leadership in each country relative to the other countries. Of note, there isn't a single country that received the same ranking across all domains (i.e., no country ranked first or last across them all). This suggests that, when compared with their neighbours in the region, some countries are doing better than others on certain domains, but no one country is excelling across all domains. Every country has areas of comparative strength and areas demanding improvement. For some, the variability is small, with rankings across the domains spanning only two or three positions; for others it is larger, with rankings across the domains spanning more than 10 positions.

The rankings alone mask the complex and variable reality behind the relative positions. The domain values offer a more nuanced and practical understanding of girls' leadership in the region. To illustrate, the rankings do not reflect the range in values that occurs across the Index and its component domains, nor do they reflect the clustering that is observed in some domain indices. A difference in ranking of one or two positions can reflect a difference in value as much as .054 or as little as 0.002. With that in mind, it is important to consider the Index and

Overall Rankings

Country	Rank	Index Value	
Singapore	1	0.778	
Philippines	2	0.717	
Vietnam	3	0.712	
Thailand	4	0.683	
Sri Lanka	5	0.629	
Bhutan	6	0.616	
Maldives	7	0.611	
Lao, PDR	8	0.603	
Malaysia	9	0.600	
Indonesia	10	0.595	
Cambodia	11	0.582	
Timor-Leste	12	0.570	
Myanmar	13	0.528	
India	14	0.519	
Brunei Darussalam	15	0.502	
Nepal	16	0.470	
Afghanistan	17	0.403	
Bangladesh	18	0.401	
Pakistan	19	0.361	

Table 4: Asia Girls' Leadership Index: Domain Rankingⁱ

Country	Index	Education	Economic Opportunities	Protection	Health	Voice	Laws
Afghanistan	17	19	19	16	16	15	4
Bangladesh	18	14	17	17	15	17	5
Bhutan	6	10	15	8	10	4	2
Brunei Darussalam	15	2	4	-	2	19	4
Cambodia	11	17	5	9	11	10	3
India	14	13	13	13	19	12	3
Indonesia	10	9	9	4	6	13	4
Lao, PDR	8	16	12	10	13	6	2
Malaysia	9	3	3	-	3	16	4
Maldives	7	6	8	2	9	8	4
Myanmar	13	11	11	6	8	14	5
Nepal	16	15	16	15	18	11	4
Pakistan	19	18	18	7	14	18	5
Philippines	2	4	6	3	12	3	1
Singapore	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Sri Lanka	5	8	10	5	7	9	3
Thailand	4	5	2	12	4	7	2
Timor-Leste	12	12	14	14	17	5	2
Vietnam	3	7	7	11	5	1	1

ⁱ It is important to note here that the indicators in the Laws and Policies domain refer to whether laws/ legislation or policies are in existence and ratified or not within the country. Consequently, the ranking is not out of 19, but rather based on the five available laws/ legislations that can be present in the country.

its component domains in depth, taking into account the indicators that comprise each domain, the context of each country and the factors that may influence the indicator achievement positively or negatively.

The three **highest-ranking countries** on the Index are Singapore (.778), Philippines (.717) and Vietnam (.712), all of which are members of ASEAN. Singapore's Index value is considerably higher than that of the second- and third-ranked countries, largely due to its first-place scores in four domains: education, economic opportunities, protection and health. Singapore ranks only second in the political voice and representation domain, likely because only 23 percent of the seats in its national parliament are held by women. In addition, Singapore received a third-place ranking (out of five) in the laws and policies domain as it has only three of the five pieces of legislation in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

The difference between the second- and third-ranking countries (Philippines and Vietnam, respectively) is more subtle, with Philippines' component domain rankings ranging from first (laws and policies) to 12th (health) and Vietnam's component domain rankings ranging from first (voice and participation) to 11th (protection).

The three **lowest-ranking countries** on the Index are Pakistan (.361), Bangladesh (.401) and Afghanistan (.403), all of which are members of SAARC. Pakistan's ranking is considerably lower than the second- and third-lowest ranked countries due to its 18th-place rankings in three domains (education, economic opportunities and voice) and the lowest possible ranking in the laws and policies domain, with none of the five pieces of legislation in place to

Table 5: Asia Girls' Leadership Index: Domain Values

Country	Index	Education	Economic Opportunities	Protection	Health	Voice	Laws
Afghanistan	0.403	0.111	0.167	0.575	0.566	0.596	0.400
Bangladesh	0.401	0.279	0.330	0.526	0.581	0.492	0.200
Bhutan	0.616	0.307	0.382	0.783	0.688	0.732	0.800
Brunei Darussalam	0.502	0.611	0.569	-	0.868	0.061	0.400
Cambodia	0.582	0.233	0.553	0.763	0.678	0.665	0.600
India	0.519	0.290	0.398	0.684	0.484	0.656	0.600
Indonesia	0.595	0.418	0.495	0.843	0.761	0.656	0.400
Lao, PDR	0.603	0.271	0.482	0.719	0.646	0.699	0.800
Malaysia	0.600	0.580	0.574	-	0.851	0.596	0.400
Maldives	0.611	0.466	0.518	0.895	0.701	0.685	0.400
Myanmar	0.528	0.295	0.484	0.813	0.724	0.652	0.200
Nepal	0.470	0.277	0.332	0.621	0.527	0.663	0.400
Pakistan	0.361	0.171	0.192	0.786	0.587	0.229	0.200
Philippines	0.717	0.507	0.520	0.845	0.659	0.768	1.000
Singapore	0.778	0.716	0.682	0.969	0.932	0.769	0.600
Sri Lanka	0.629	0.418	0.495	0.835	0.744	0.680	0.600
Thailand	0.683	0.477	0.596	0.693	0.842	0.689	0.800
Timor-Leste	0.570	0.292	0.387	0.672	0.557	0.714	0.800
Vietnam	0.712	0.449	0.519	0.718	0.816	0.773	1.000

promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. Despite its overall low ranking, Pakistan is demonstrating progress in health (ranked 14th out of 19) and protection (ranked 7th out of 17).

The difference between the second- and third-lowest ranking countries (Bangladesh and Afghanistan, respectively) is minimal. Bangladesh's component domain rankings range from 14th (of 19) in education to the lowest possible rankings in the laws and policies and protection domains (5th of 5 and 17th of 17, respectively). In comparison, Afghanistan's component domain rankings range from 15th (of 19) in voice and participation to the lowest possible rankings in the education and economic opportunities domains (19th of 19 in both cases). Despite efforts in both countries to address deeply rooted social and cultural gender inequalities, these are not yet being translated into meaningful change for girls.

Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain:

EDUCATION

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Country	Rank	Index Value	
Singapore	1	0.716	
Brunei Darussalam	2	0.611	
Malaysia	3	0.580	
Philippines	4	0.507	
Thailand	5	0.477	
Maldives	6	0.466	
Vietnam	7	0.449	
Sri Lanka	8	0.418	
Indonesia	9	0.418	
Bhutan	10	0.307	
Myanmar	11	0.295	
Timor-Leste	12	0.292	
India	13	0.290	
Bangladesh	14	0.279	
Nepal	15	0.277	
Lao, PDR	16	0.271	
Cambodia	17	0.233	
Pakistan	18	0.171	
Afghanistan	19	0.111	

Indicators:

- 1 Completion rate, lower secondary education, female (%)
- 2 Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, female (%)
- 3 Access to the Internet, female (%)
- 4 Mean years of schooling, female (years)



Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education

Ensuring access to quality education is the focus of SDG 4. As a core foundation on which successful development and transitions to adulthood depend, education is central to the achievement of many of the other SDGs. Within the literature, educational achievement is consistently referenced as one of the most critical determinants of girls' leadership.

Access to education shapes the outcomes of individuals from the earliest stages of their life. Educating women and girls has immense potential for the development of children and adolescents themselves, as well as for their future children. Education promotes social inclusion, supports economic growth and increases gender equality by reducing socio-economic disparities and delaying marriage and pregnancy.²⁵ In contrast, a lack of education reduces employment opportunities and future earning capacities that, over time, contribute to income inequality and lead to continued cycles of poverty.²⁶

In addition to academic content, school settings are socio-cultural environments that can have profound impacts, both positive and negative, on the physical and mental health and development of children and adolescents.²⁷ High-quality, accessible education has the potential to equip girls with important life skills and values that can support and promote their development and demonstration of leadership capabilities throughout their lives.

A 2019 report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Closing the Gap: Empowerment and Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific*, identifies gender as a factor that restricts access to and completion of education—and states that little has changed in this regard over time, so if the group with the poorest education outcomes was adolescent girls at the beginning of the century, the situation remains the same in the mid-2010s. These disparities restrict girls’ opportunities for the basic education and skills development that are needed to support their empowerment, agency and decision-making that are critical for leadership within their own lives.

Significant achievements have been made across Asia in education in the last decade. In Bangladesh, for example, secondary school enrolment for girls has jumped from 39% in 1998 to 67% in 2017.²⁸ The average net primary school enrolment rate in the region is now around 95%^{29,30} — but even high enrolment rates can be undermined by low attendance, early dropouts and quality of instruction. The region remains home to more than half of the world’s out-of-school children and youth,³¹ and in Afghanistan and Pakistan, primary school enrolment rates are less than 80% with significant gender gaps, illustrating the stark variability behind the regional achievement.

Index values

Index values in the education domain span from 0.111 to .0716, with a notable jump in values from the bottom 11 countries to the top eight countries (.307 to .418). At the lowest end of the Index, Afghanistan is .060 below Pakistan; at the highest end, Singapore is .105 higher than the second-ranked Brunei. Overall, ASEAN countries fare better than SAARC countries regarding girls’ educational achievements. Our survey findings align with the Index when taking into consideration the age of respondents in the two survey groups (offline and online).

Secondary and tertiary education completion and enrolment

While net enrolmentⁱ in secondary education has steadily improved, with a regional achievement of 64.1% (slightly above the world average of 62.5%³²), the completion of secondary education and subsequent transition from secondary to tertiary education remains a significant challenge for many of the region’s girls. Country-level completion of lower secondary education for girls varies widely across the region and is as low as 39.2% and 49.1% in Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively.³³

“Education, particularly at secondary level, is associated with a range of positive outcomes for women and girls, including greater awareness of their rights, greater participation in decision-making, reduced probability of early marriage and childbearing, and reduced likelihood of dying during childbirth”

UN Human Rights Council, 2015, as cited in UN Women, 2015

“The biggest challenges are preconceptions and fixed ideas that the society sets for girls. Many girls are not encouraged and trusted by surrounding people, even families. When girls need courage to grab their opportunity—studying abroad or aiming for higher education—parents think they should get married.”

[Social norms set lower standards for girls and influence the investments that are made for girls by their families.]

Young woman (age 20), Vietnam

ⁱ Net enrolment is the total number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. Source: UNESCO (2019). Net enrolment rate. Available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/node/334718>

Secondary education completion rates are an important measure for girls' leadership, as dropout rates are highest in the lower secondary grades when the actual cost and opportunity cost of education become higher, and when education systems struggle to provide high-quality instruction and suitable infrastructure to support girls' continued education. Gender disparities in educational achievement begin to emerge at this stage, as the willingness to educate girls is more greatly influenced by a family's income, pervasive negative socio-cultural norms and security situations, with many families often unwilling to invest in girls' education.

Despite significant economic advancement and improvements in educational outcomes, the cultural, institutional and social contexts have not changed sufficiently to remove gendered barriers preventing access to and completion of education.³⁴ Due to socio-cultural and traditional gender roles, adolescent girls may not be enrolled or are withdrawn from educational opportunities. Across the region, there is variability in the driving factors that influence a household's decision to enrol or withdraw their daughters from school, but commonly these include perceptions that sons are a better investment for a family's future, perceptions of girls' roles in domestic and agricultural work, early and forced marriage and pregnancy, and the perceived risk of violence within the school setting as well as on the journey to and from school.³⁵ The countries with the five lowest secondary school completion rates for girls are Lao PDR, Myanmar, Cambodia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Of these, Myanmar and Pakistan do not have laws prohibiting child marriage, while Lao PDR, Afghanistan and Cambodia rank 14th, 13th and 10th (of 17) for the percentage of women who were married before age 18.

A girls' transition to tertiary education builds on the foundation of learning, creating new opportunities for empowerment, participation in civil society, employment and leadership. The likelihood of completing tertiary education is also associated with a country's national income level. This can be seen when looking at the enrolment rates for women in tertiary education in the region, with Afghanistan (5.1%), Bhutan (8.9%) and Pakistan (9.4%) having the lowest enrolment rates and Malaysia (45.5%), Thailand (57.7%) and Singapore (90.6%) having the highest.³⁶

When girls do attend school, they often face poor conditions and weak learning environments, especially in rural areas characterised by lack of resources, gender-insensitive social contexts, gender-based violence, gender bias in school materials, and inadequate water and sanitation facilities to manage menstrual hygiene³⁷—all of which lead to absenteeism, poor performance and high drop-out rates.

SECONDARY COMPLETION DOES NOT EQUAL TERTIARY ENROLMENT

Looking at component indicator values within the education domain, **gains in secondary school completion are not translating into gains in university enrolment.**

While the top 14 ranked countries in the secondary school completion ratio indicator all reported more than 80% lower secondary school completion for girls, only one country (Singapore) reported more than 80% enrolment in tertiary education for girls. Thailand reported the second-highest tertiary enrolment rate for girls at 57.7%.

Access to the Internet

Digital technologies have strong potential to empower girls and women. The rapid advancement of digital technology is improving access to information and online learning opportunities even in the most remote communities. However, girls and women in developing countries often have less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men. Affordability, stereotypes around technology being 'for boys' and fear of being discriminated against stop girls from using digital resources.³⁸

The mobile phone gender gap is widest in South Asia where women are 28% less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 58% less likely to use mobile Internet.³⁹ In our survey of adolescent girls, 87% of online respondents and 61% of offline respondents reported having a smart phone, although there was considerable variation across the three offline country respondents (Bangladesh: 26%, Lao PDR: 92%, Vietnam: 59%). The lower overall rate of phone access amongst offline respondents could be a reflection of the younger age of the group. There is also enormous discrepancy in access to the Internet for girls across the region, with the lowest access rates reported in Afghanistan (4.9%) and Pakistan (6.2%) and highest reported in Singapore (87%) and Brunei (90%).^{40,41} The wide variation reflects the diversity of the region and the different opportunities girls have.

Without equal access to digital technologies, girls and women are not able to participate equally in increasingly digital societies, limiting their opportunities to learn, participate and influence issues that affect them.



Cambodia recommended to invest more in girls' education, especially at secondary level



Cambodia ranks 11th of 19 on the Asia Girls' Leadership Index, a solid overall showing but one of the lower scores among ASEAN countries. Cambodia could improve its standing by investing more in the two domains that are primarily responsible for depressing its ranking: health and education. Of the two, education offers the most room for improvement, with the country ranking 17th of 19 in this domain.

Although the Index does not consider primary education, Cambodia is generally considered to be relatively strong in providing equal access to girls in primary school settings through free universal primary education. Data collected by the Cambodian Ministry of Education shows that boys and girls start school on equal footing in primary education, but by secondary school, girls start to drop out.

The Index shows that Cambodia is underperforming compared to its neighbors with similar Human Development Index scores (Lao PDR and Myanmar), with the lowest rates in ASEAN for both secondary school completion and tertiary education enrolment rates for girls. While limited access to secondary school facilities and limited numbers of secondary school teachers in rural parts of the country are contributing factors to low secondary school completion and tertiary enrolment rates for girls, the situation is more complex than this. Cambodia also has the highest female youth labour participation rate in the region, suggesting economic participation for young women may be coming at the expense of (rather than as a result of) quality secondary and tertiary education opportunities. The country's child marriage rate could also have an impact on secondary school completion by girls.

More research into the correlation between girls' primary education, secondary and higher education opportunities, drop-out rates, child marriage and labour force participation, along with investment of development resources, is recommended for the Royal Government of Cambodia and its development partners to improve the enabling environment for girls' empowerment and leadership and Cambodia's overall standing in the Index.

Source: Royal Government of Cambodia (2015). *The National Education for All 2015 Review Report*. Available from: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000229713>



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Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain:

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Country	Rank	Index Value	
Singapore	1	0.682	
Thailand	2	0.596	
Malaysia	3	0.574	
Brunei Darussalam*	4	0.569	
Cambodia	5	0.553	
Philippines	6	0.520	
Vietnam	7	0.519	
Maldives	8	0.518	
Indonesia	9	0.495	
Sri Lanka	10	0.495	
Myanmar	11	0.484	
Lao, PDR	12	0.482	
India	13	0.398	
Timor-Leste	14	0.387	
Bhutan	15	0.382	
Nepal	16	0.332	
Bangladesh	17	0.330	
Pakistan	18	0.192	
Afghanistan	19	0.167	

* For Brunei, only Female Youth NEET Rate, Female Youth Labour Participation Rate and Female share of employment in managerial positions were available and used in the calculation of the Index value.

Indicators:

1. Share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), female (%)
2. Youth labour participation rate, female (%)
3. Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile service provider, female (%)
4. Share of employment in managerial positions, female (%)



Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The 2030 SDGs place considerable focus on youth employment opportunities and the right to decent work. Specifically, Target 5 of SDG 8 commits countries to achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, as well as equal pay for work of equal value. Target 6 commits countries to substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

Youth employment and economic empowerment are essential components of a strong foundation in any society. While employment during the adolescent years is critical for individual, family and national prosperity, it is also a complex issue: protection from child labour and participation in the education system are areas of concern during very young adolescence, while the ability to secure decent work is a major concern during late adolescence.

A woman is considered to be 'economically empowered' when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions.⁴² This definition acknowledges the multi-dimensional conditions required of both the individual and environment for a woman to pursue economic opportunities. Women who are engaged in formal or semi-formal forms of paid employment are, in general, more likely to report positive outcomes for a range of indicators compared with those who are not engaged in paid employment, including decision-making opportunities within the household as well as in public and political spheres.⁴³

Index values

Index values in the economic opportunities domain span from 0.167 to 0.682. There is a notable jump in values from the bottom seven countries to the top nine countries (.398 to .482). At the lowest end of the Index, the values for Afghanistan and Pakistan are notably lower than Bangladesh; at the highest end, Singapore's value is notably higher than the second-ranked country, Thailand. Overall, ASEAN countries fare better than SAARC countries regarding girls' economic opportunities. The findings from our adolescent survey align with the Index when taking into consideration the age of respondents in the two survey groups (offline and online).

Youth participation in the labour market

Numerous barriers exist to girls' and women's participation in positive economic opportunities, including discrimination, perceptions of gendered stereotypes about 'appropriate' work that limits employment options, wage gaps, exploitation, and a persistent double burden of paid work and domestic duties.⁴⁴ Across the region, youth are three to eight times more likely to be unemployed than adults, and the levels of youth unemployment and the disparities relative to adult employment rates indicate the widespread prevalence of unsuccessful school-to-work transitions.⁴⁵ As a result, youth are underrepresented in the labour market and largely remain an untapped resource for future economic growth and development.

For young people, jobs provide a source of income as well as dignity and self-respect, all of which are required for girls' realisation of leadership. As stated by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'in the absence of work, young people subsist in the margins of the economy and are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion.'⁴⁶

Access to financial resources

Having access to financial resources for personal or family use is critical for girls' development, creating opportunities for economic independence, empowerment and income generation. A variety of savings and insurance schemes allow individuals to borrow and invest funds to protect against vulnerabilities and unforeseen risk. Participation in these systems empowers women by giving them greater control over their finances, reducing inequality by strengthening their negotiating power within and outside their households.⁴⁷ Financial gains can be invested in education and health care, further alleviating girls' vulnerabilities and exposure to risk, especially as it relates to the health issues commonly experienced during pregnancy and childbirth.

“We need to recognise the girls and women as the resource of the country not as the burden. There is no other option than the economic empowerment of the girls.”

Young woman (age 21), Bangladesh

SURVEY RESULTS

Only 48% of online survey respondents agreed that **girls have the same opportunities as boys**, compared with 66% of offline survey respondents. Given the difference in the age groups of the respondents (see 'Limitations' in Section 3 for more details), this suggests that girls' perception of gender-based inequalities increases as they get closer to adulthood.

Optimistically, 75% of online respondents and 65% of offline respondents reported **having a dream job** they aspired to attain. In addition, 80% of online respondents and 67% of offline respondents reported **having at least one female role model they look up to**, while 93% of online respondents and 76% of offline respondents reported **having someone to talk to about things that bother them or are important to them**.

This is particularly promising given our research into girls' aspirations of leadership, which found that female leader role models inspire girls to believe and be confident in their own abilities, rights and potential to succeed.

Across Asia, an average of 7.65% of women aged 15 and older reported having borrowed money to start, operate or expand a farm or business in the previous 12 months, with figures ranging from as low as 0.5% and 1.8% in Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively, to as high as 16.1% in Cambodia and 20.9% in Singapore.⁴⁸ Further, 45.5% of women across the region reported having an account at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider (either by themselves or jointly with someone else) in the past 12 months, with figures ranging from as low as 7.0% and 7.2% in Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively, to as high as 82.5% in Malaysia and 96.3% in Singapore.⁴⁹

Mobility and career opportunities

In South Asia, social and cultural restrictions on women's mobility restrict access to decent work and sustain dependency. As a result, only 17% of women work in a sector outside agriculture.⁵⁰ In Southeast Asia, women and girls' employment is concentrated in the informal economy, largely because time, poverty and the burden of productive and reproductive labour all limit their opportunities.⁵¹ In situations where women are successful in gaining formal employment, the burden of caring for children falls to their older daughters, instigating the withdrawal of those girls from education and limiting their future employment opportunities, further continuing the cycle of poverty.

On average, 26.4% of managerial positions across the region are held by women—but those rates range from less than 5% in Afghanistan and Pakistan to 52.7% and 59% in Philippines and Lao PDR, respectively. This reflects the varying demographic and socio-cultural situations that enable or constrain women's opportunities to progress their careers, overcome gender pay gaps and take leadership roles.⁵²



“I am kind of the breadwinner in my family. I [get] some allowance as the sponsorship volunteer. I also do part time job in [a] community clinic and also provide tuition to two students. Monthly I earn around [USD \$120], with which I bear the study cost of myself and my brothers. I also contribute to the family expenses and support my mother while the business runs low. With our limited income, we also need to bear the medical expenses for my father as he has been sick for [the] last 11 years. After dinner when everybody goes to sleep, I start my study. [My father] is still not convinced that I should pursue higher education. He wants me to get married and start a family. If he finds me studying, he starts scolding me and creates a scene.”

— Young woman (age 21), Bangladesh

The informant is a 21-year-old undergrad student born and raised in a slum in Bangladesh. She is the eldest child in her family and has two younger brothers, who are studying in school. Her father is partially paralysed and can't work and her mother runs a small fabric shop in the slum with minimal earnings, mostly during festive seasons.

Her situation is a common one for many girls and young women in Asia. Although she is attending university, her chances of completing her studies and pursuing her dream job in social work are undermined by her heavy workload, household responsibilities and unsupportive father. While she is gainfully employed, she has minimal opportunities to save money and realise economic independence because her wages are spent in support of herself and her immediate family.

Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain:

HEALTH



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Country	Rank	Index Value
Singapore*	1	0.932
Brunei Darussalam	2	0.868
Malaysia	3	0.851
Thailand	4	0.842
Vietnam	5	0.816
Indonesia	6	0.761
Sri Lanka	7	0.744
Myanmar	8	0.724
Maldives	9	0.701
Bhutan	10	0.688
Cambodia	11	0.678
Philippines	12	0.659
Lao, PDR	13	0.646
Pakistan	14	0.587
Bangladesh	15	0.581
Afghanistan	16	0.566
Timor-Leste	17	0.557
Nepal	18	0.527
India	19	0.484

* For Singapore, Rate of family planning satisfied with modern methods for women 15–19 years was not publicly available.

Indicators:

1. Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 females aged 15–19)
2. Family-planning needs have been satisfied with modern methods; females aged 15–19 (%)
3. Prevalence of stunted height for age, females under the age of 5 (%)
4. Suicide mortality rate (suicides per 100,000 females aged 15–19)



Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all people at all ages is the focus of SDG 3, and is central to the achievement of many of the other SDGs. Access to affordable, quality health care is critical for improving health and eradicating poverty. Poor health in the early years of life can have lifelong negative impacts for individuals, their families and society as a whole: unhealthy living conditions, malnourishment and impaired cognitive development all influence children’s education outcomes and eventually their employment opportunities. Along with appropriate socio-cultural supports for health-related decision-making and behaviours, access to health care is also an essential condition for girls’ empowerment, agency and leadership more broadly.

As adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood, so do their health needs. Around the world, the major health risks for girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 14 are associated with unsafe water, sanitation and inadequate hand washing, with diarrheal diseases and lower respiratory infections ranking second and fourth among causes of death for this age group.^{53,54} In the 15–19 age group, however, substance use, unsafe sex, intimate partner violence and occupational hazards become more prominent, with suicide and maternal mortality ranking first and second among causes of death.

Globally, this is an unprecedented era for adolescent health. Considerable attention and resources are currently being directed to the health needs of this age group, including the SDGs as well as dozens of reports, strategies, action plans, standards, guidelines and tools from the United Nations, World Health Organization and other global agencies—all of which are calling for strong leadership at the highest levels of government to promote the implementation of adolescent-responsive policies and programmes.

Sustaining the improvements made in children’s health by investing in the health of adolescents ensures a triple dividend: the health of current adolescents, their health during later adulthood and the health of future generations.⁵⁵ Investing in and influencing adolescent health behaviours is critical not only for individuals, families and communities, but also for shaping the social and economic development of nations as a whole.^{56,57,58}

Index values

Index values in the health domain range from 0.484 to 0.932. There is a notable jump in values from the 14th- to the 13th-ranked country (.587 to .646) and again from the sixth- to the fifth-ranked country (.761 to .816). At the lowest end of the Index, 19th-ranked India is notably lower than 18th-ranked Nepal; at the highest end, Singapore is notably higher than the second-ranked Brunei. Overall, ASEAN countries fare better than SAARC countries regarding girls’ health.

Access to and costs of health services

Adolescence is a period when many health and lifestyle behaviours commence and are consolidated, including those related to diet, physical activity, substance use and sex. The detrimental effects of negative behaviours may not be realised as non-communicable diseases for years to come—and will have costly impacts for individuals, their families and the healthcare system.

Access to health services is determined by a range of factors that differ from country to country across Asia, including culture, gender, language, education and geographic proximity to healthcare providers. In countries without universal health care, individuals rely on personal savings for their health care, which can restrict access to services and keep individuals and families in cycles of debt and poverty.^{59,60} Countries in Asia have some of the highest health-related out-of-pocket expenditures; in most countries in the region, out-of-pocket expenses comprise at least one-third of total healthcare costs, forcing many people to postpone or avoid seeking health services entirely. In Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Cambodia, more than 60% of healthcare expenditures come through personal financing.⁶¹

Pregnancy, birth and family planning

Each year, approximately six million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth in Southeast Asia, an area with an adolescent birth rate of 33.9 per 1,000 females.⁶² However, while the adolescent birth rate in the wider Asia-Pacific region is 28 births per 1,000 females, this figure masks the wide variation in adolescent birth rates between countries in the region,



CAUSE AND EFFECT

“The children of mothers with no education are far more likely to be stunted than children born to mothers who have been to school.”

This statement from Save the Children’s 2015 report, *The Lottery of Birth*, illustrates the intergenerational cycle of discrimination, exclusion and lost opportunities that occurs in the context of gender inequality and harmful socio-cultural norms around infant and child feeding practices.

however, where rates are as high as 83.5 per 1,000 in Bangladesh, in the low 60s in Lao PDR and the Philippines, and as low as 5.8 and 3.7 per 1,000 in Maldives and Singapore, respectively.^{63,64} Pregnancy during adolescence can lead to a range of adverse physical, social and economic outcomes for girls, their newborns and the wider community, and limits their opportunities to realise leadership from a very early age.

Access to family-planning options supports girls' leadership in its broader sense: participating in proactive, voluntary decision-making around family planning contributes to completion of education empowerment, gender equality and the development of human capital.⁶⁵ The proportion of women aged 15–19 years across the region who have had their family-planning needs satisfied with modern methods varies from 9.5%, 20.8% and 22.1% percent in Maldives, Afghanistan and Timor-Leste, respectively, to more than 80% in Brunei, Indonesia and Thailand.⁶⁶

Hunger and malnutrition

Stunting is one of the primary manifestations of malnutrition in early childhood and is a commonly used indicator that reflects larger structural issues related to a lack of access to adequate food and insufficient nutrient intake. It has also been identified as the primary indicator in monitoring the realisation of SDG 2 on ending hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. On a population basis, high levels of stunting are associated with poor socio-economic conditions as well as an increased risk of frequent and early exposure to adverse conditions such as illness or inappropriate feeding practices. Similarly, a decrease in the national stunting rate is usually indicative of improvements in overall socio-economic conditions of a country.

Stunting in early childhood is a factor for girls' leadership because of the potential for irreversible loss of cognitive development and the associated implications for school readiness and ability to learn. Weaker overall health can also

The Philippines should tackle teen pregnancy and access to birth control to hold onto its high ranking



Although the Philippines ranks second overall out of 19 countries on the Asia Girls' Leadership Index, in the health domain it is only the 12th-ranked country and the second lowest in ASEAN. This is primarily due to its very high adolescent birth rate (ranking 16th of 19) and low rate of family-planning needs met through modern methods (11th of 18). The Philippines is a leader in many other areas but is lagging behind in respect to girls' health—and this will have a long-term impact on its ability to make headway on the sustainable development agenda. This is further reflected by the country's recent slip in the Gender Gap Report from 8th position globally in 2019 to 16th position in 2020. Despite this slip, the

Philippines remains the most gender-equal country in Asia.

The impact of having a child during adolescence can, over time, affect a girl's education and economic opportunities, increasing the burden she places on her family and the surrounding community. Adolescent pregnancies account for a significant proportion of maternal and child mortality, with complications during pregnancy and childbirth the leading cause of death for 15-to-19-year-old girls globally. Low- and middle-income countries account for 99% of global maternal deaths of women aged 15 to 49 years.

The Commission on Population and Development of the Philippines recently called on the country's president to issue an executive order declaring adolescent pregnancy a national emergency. Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia called for the enactment of the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act (Senate Bill 1888) filed by Sen. Risa Hontiveros in December 2018. The Act forms a Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Council and ensures young mothers have access to health care and family planning services. The Act further reiterates that it is prohibited for educational institutions and workplaces to suspend, expel or dismiss pregnant girls. Passing this bill is an important step the Philippines' legislature must take to break the intergenerational poverty cycle and improve the enabling environment for girls' development and realisation of leadership capabilities in the Philippines.

Sources: Rappler (2019). *Philippines drops to No. 16 in Gender Gap Report 2020*. Available from: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/247372-philippines-rankings-gender-gap-report-2020>

WHO (2018). *Adolescent pregnancy*. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

Rappler (2019). *Teenage pregnancy dragging PH economic growth*.

Available from: <https://www.rappler.com/business/243184-pernia-says-teenage-pregnancy-dragging-economic-growth>

Philippine Daily Inquirer (2019). *Teen pregnancies now 'nat'l social emergency'*. Available from: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1156646/teen-pregnancies-now-natl-social-emergency>

have a cascading impact on a girl's completion of school, participation in civil forums and economic opportunities. Within the region, the prevalence of stunting among female children under the age of five ranges from 43%, 39.4% and 37.9% percent in Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and India, respectively, to less than 10% in Singapore and Thailand.

Mental health and suicide

In recent years, mental health has emerged as a growing priority among adolescents, with depression being the leading cause of health-related disability for girls aged 15–19, and suicide the third-most prevalent cause of death during adolescence globally.⁶⁷ In most Asian countries, the suicide mortality rate is less than 10 deaths per 100,000 girls aged 15–19, with the notable exceptions being Bangladesh (17.4 per 100,000), India (27), Myanmar (12), Nepal (13.1) and Sri Lanka (11.7).

With up to half of all mental health disorders starting by the age of 14, delayed diagnosis and lack of treatment opportunities can have significant consequences for an individual's mental health as an adult.⁶⁸ Those consequences can include a negative impact on the ability to continue education and develop key life skills (e.g., confidence, decision-making, empowerment, resilience) that are critical for girls' leadership.

Globally, many countries have recognised the importance of adolescent health and this is reflected in national policies and strategies. Ministries of health in all countries in Southeast Asia, for example, have developed national adolescent health strategies and plans, as well as national standards for adolescent-friendly health services.⁶⁹ However, in most instances the focus of those services is on sexual and reproductive health, with little attention given to other areas of adolescent health and development, such as mental health, substance use, violence, nutrition and other non-communicable disease risk factors.^{70,71}

India's strong showing in sexual and reproductive health weakened by malnutrition and mental health concerns



India ranks 14th of 19 countries on the Asia Girls' Leadership Index but last overall when it comes to health. While India is succeeding in lowering adolescent birth rates (ranking 7th of 19) and providing modern family planning (13th of 19), it is still experiencing a high prevalence of stunting (17th of 19) and suicides among adolescent girls (last of 19).

Although stunting rates are high for both girls and boys under the age of five in India, their undernutrition is correlated with the poor nutrition, low marriage age and poor education of their mothers—which, in turn, is a reflection of the predominant social and cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality. The International Food Policy Research Institute recently concluded that 'any efforts to address stunting in high burden districts in India that do not explicitly consider the multiple ways in which women's status and poverty play out will likely fall short.'

In 2018, the Lancet published a study on suicide in India, reporting that suicide death rates were highest among women between the ages of 15 and 29. Several forms of gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination were highlighted as possible causes, including early marriage and a higher risk of depression. This aligns with the results from the Index, where India ranked second to last in the region (of 17) for the percentage of women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18.

Investing more in improved nutritional and mental health outcomes for girls is likely to improve India's overall ranking in the Asia Girl's Leadership Index and help it to rise out of last place in the health domain.

Sources: International Food Policy Research Institute (2018). *India's district-focused strategy to reduce childhood stunting must also address women's wellbeing and poverty reduction, finds new study*. Available from: <http://www.ifpri.org/news-release/indias-district-focused-strategy-reduce-childhood-stunting-must-also-address-womens>

The Lancet Public Health (2018). *Gender differentials and state variations in suicide deaths in India*. Available from: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(18\)30138-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(18)30138-5/fulltext)



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Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain:

LAWS & POLICIES

Country	Rank	Index Value	
Philippines	1	1.000	
Vietnam	1	1.000	
Bhutan	2	0.800	
Lao, PDR	2	0.800	
Thailand	2	0.800	
Timor-Leste	2	0.800	
Cambodia	3	0.600	
India	3	0.600	
Singapore	3	0.600	
Sri Lanka	3	0.600	
Afghanistan	4	0.400	
Brunei Darussalam	4	0.400	
Indonesia	4	0.400	
Malaysia	4	0.400	
Maldives	4	0.400	
Nepal	4	0.400	
Bangladesh	5	0.200	
Myanmar	5	0.200	
Pakistan	5	0.200	

Indicators:

1. Legislation ensures equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents
2. Legislation ensures equal remuneration for work of equal value
3. Legislation addresses sexual harassment in the workplace
4. Legislation prohibits or invalidates child marriage
5. Legislation explicitly criminalises marital rape



Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is central to the achievement of many of the other SDGs—and is a core condition on which successful development and transitions to adulthood depend.

* The indicators in this domain refer to whether laws/legislation or policies are in existence and ratified within the country. Consequently, the ranking is not out of 19 but is instead based on the five available laws/legislations that can be present in the country.

* Indicators under this domain are part of SDG Indicator 5.5.1: Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

A nation's laws and policies (and the systems in which they are implemented) act as a framework to guide spending on critical services that will create opportunities to empower citizens, alleviate poverty and build a safety net so that no one is left behind.⁷² Across Asia, some countries have introduced overarching, standalone national youth policies; others have taken a more fragmented approach, ascribing different youth-related issues to relevant ministries and departments, including health, education and welfare. Few of the national youth policies that have been developed are being implemented in a manner that considers the varied needs of specific segments of young people.⁷³

In addition to factors that limit strong policy and programme development anywhere in the world (e.g., lack of resources of political will, poor cross-sectoral coordination), the general lack of age and sex disaggregated data on adolescent populations is a significant constraint for policymakers, first in understanding the issues faced by adolescents and subsequently putting into place responsive, effective policies and programmes.

Across Asia, there is also often a gap between the existence of a law or policy and its implementation at the national and sub-national levels. It can take years before a new piece of legislation is rolled out and fully integrated across a country's many systems so it can begin to remove gender inequalities and support girls' healthy development and well-being.

Equal rights to inherit assets

The rights of sons and daughters to inherit assets from their parents reflects the social and cultural conditions and practices that exist at the household level that either support or restrict women's empowerment and agency. In many settings, property rights often influence other rights, such as those related to education, food security and protection from violence or early marriage.⁷⁴ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives and Pakistan do not currently have legislation providing for equal inheritance between sons and daughters.

Equal remuneration for work of equal value

'Remuneration' refers to the basic or minimum wage or salary and any additional compensation paid directly or indirectly, in cash or in kind, by an employer to a worker. 'Work of equal value' refers to jobs that are the same or similar as well as different jobs that are considered to have the same value, inclusive of situations in which men and women do different work so they can be equally compensated for work undertaken in traditional gender roles. (For example, caterers and cleaners, who are mostly women, are equally valued and compensated on par with gardeners and drivers, who are mostly men.)

Equal remuneration for work of equal value reflects social, cultural, civil and legal environments that recognise and support women's opportunities for economic gain and participation in the labour force. Within the region, only four countries—Bhutan, Brunei, Philippines and Vietnam—have legislation to support equal pay for equal work.

Protection against workplace violence and harassment

In June 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted its Convention on Violence and Harassment, a ground-breaking global treaty that will improve protections for workers facing violence and harassment. By setting standards for ending violence and harassment in the world of work, governments that have ratified the ILO Convention will be required to develop national laws prohibiting workplace violence and take measures to prevent it, such as launching information campaigns and requiring

CONSTRUCTION OF LAWS AND POLICIES DOMAIN

The information used to construct the Asia Girls' Leadership Index Laws and Policies domain was drawn from the World Bank's 2017 and 2018 Women, Business and the Law databases (<https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/aboutus>).

At the time the Index was developed, the databases did not reflect recent changes in Nepal's legislation supporting equal inheritance rights between sons and daughters or Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal's legislation to protect against child marriage.

Subsequent versions of the Index will reflect these important changes, when they are recorded in the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law databases, on which the Index is based.

“While a number of national and international legal norms protect the rights of the girl child in theory, in practice cultural and social beliefs about gender and the value of girls and boys have been much more difficult to overcome.”

United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2004



SURVEY RESULTS

In our survey of adolescent girls, 50% of online respondents said **housework is equally shared between male and female family members**, in contrast with 74% percent of offline respondents. Given the differences in the age groups of the respondents (see 'Limitations' in Section 3), this suggests inequalities in housework responsibilities increase as girls get older. This limits opportunities for girls to socialise outside the family, develop peer support networks and participate in decision-making processes that might affect their lives.

Similarly, only 45% of online respondents agreed that **girls and boys are treated equally** versus 80% of offline respondents.

companies to have workplace policies on violence. Governments will also be required to monitor the issue and provide measures to protect survivors and whistle-blowers from retaliation.

The existence of legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace reflects a government's commitment to creating an environment that supports women's employment and economic opportunities. Within the region, only Brunei, Indonesia and Myanmar do not have legislation prohibiting workplace sexual harassment.

Protection against child marriage

This indicator looks at whether legislation is in place that prevents the marriage of girls, boys or both before they reach the legal age of marriage with consent, including prohibitions on registering early/forced marriages or provisions stating that such a marriage is null and void. Many countries across Asia have made progress in this area, but Bhutan and Pakistan still lack relevant legislation to prohibit or invalidate child marriage.

Criminalisation of marital rape

Marital rape, like other forms of domestic violence, is an extreme expression of a man's power over a woman. Rape inside a marriage can lead to trauma, depression, loss of income due to injuries, poor school performance and psychological impact for children in the household, and in some instances, murder. Legislation that explicitly criminalises marital rape addresses social and cultural practices to promote gender equality and protect women from violence.

The indicator looks at whether legislation recognises and criminalises the act of rape regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and complainant, or if it states that marriage (or other relationships) can not constitute a defence to the charge of rape or other sexual assault. More than half of countries in the region do not have legislation criminalising rape within a marriage or other union, and there is no apparent difference between SAARC and ASEAN countries in this regard.

Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal advancing their legal systems to protect against child marriage



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In 2017, the Bangladesh government enacted the *Child Marriage Restraint Act*, imposing strong enforcement and punishment. Although the Act has the potential to protect the rights of millions of Bangladeshi girls, a special provision permits marriage below 18 years under 'special circumstances'.

In 2019, the Myanmar government enacted the *Child Rights Law*, establishing the minimum age of marriage as 18 years, amongst other protective measures in recognition of the value of childhood. Although the country does not yet have an action plan in place to operationalise the legislation, this is an important first step in the protection of children.

Although the legal age for marriage in Nepal has been 20 for many years, the enforcement of this law has been neglected, leading to Nepal having one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia. In 2018, the Nepalese government enacted new legislation to annul existing marriages in which one person is under 20 years and prescribe punishment for individuals in violation of the law.

Note: The Index draws information from global standard databases. At the time the Index was developed, the databases did not reflect the recent changes in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal's legislation to protect against child marriage.

Sources: Plan International (2017). *Bangladesh child marriage law could violate girls' rights*. Available from: <https://plan-international.org/news/2017-02-06-bangladesh-child-marriage-law-could-violate-girls-rights>

UNICEF (2019). *The enactment of the new Child Rights Law by the Government of Myanmar a landmark step*. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/press-releases/enactment-new-child-rights-law-government-myanmar-landmark-step-unicef>

Himalayan News Service (2018). *Govt preparing to amend civil, criminal codes: Draft amendment bill seeks to outlaw marriages between persons below 20 years of age*. The Himalayan Times. Available from: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/govt-preparing-to-amend-civil-criminal-codes/>

Nepal improving its legal and policy environment around inheritance



In September 2017, the Nepalese Parliament passed the Civil Code Bill and Civil Procedure Code Bill, putting into place reforms in the country's civil law, including equal property rights for sons and daughters.

The two bills came into force in August 2018.

Note: The Index draws information from global standard databases. At the time the Index was developed, the databases did not reflect the recent changes in Nepal's legislation.

Sources: Kamat, R.K. (September 26, 2017). *Sons, daughters to have equal rights in parental property*. The Himalayan Times. Available from: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/sons-daughters-equal-rights-parental-property/>

Kamat, R.K. (August 26, 2018). *New civil code gives women reason to rejoice*. The Himalayan Times. Available from: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/new-civil-code-gives-women-reason-to-rejoice/>



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Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain:
PROTECTION

Country	Rank	Index Value
Singapore	1	0.969
Maldives	2	0.895
Philippines	3	0.845
Indonesia	4	0.843
Sri Lanka	5	0.835
Myanmar	6	0.813
Pakistan	7	0.786
Bhutan	8	0.783
Cambodia	9	0.763
Lao, PDR	10	0.719
Vietnam	11	0.718
Thailand	12	0.693
India	13	0.684
Timor-Leste	14	0.672
Nepal	15	0.621
Afghanistan	16	0.575
Bangladesh	17	0.526
Brunei Darussalam*	-	-
Malaysia*	-	-

* For these countries, there are no publicly available data for these indicators.

Indicators:

1. Women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 (%)
2. Females aged 15 and older who have ever experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner (%)
3. Girls aged 5–17 engaged in child labour (%)



Sustainable Development Goals 16, 5, and 8:

Protecting girls is paramount to their healthy development and well-being, successful completion of education, access to income-generating opportunities and security, and participation in social and civil society.

SDG 16 commits countries to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

SDG 5 addresses violence against women and girls, including the direct elimination of harmful practices.

SDG 8 commits countries to eradicating forced labour and ending modern slavery and human trafficking. Countries are also required to work to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and to end all forms of child labour by 2025.

Child marriage

Child, early or forced marriage is commonly defined as a formal marriage or informal union where one or both of the parties are under 18 years of age. It accelerates girls through critical life-cycle stages, compromising their development, participation in social and civil society, and economic opportunities, and puts them at greater risk of domestic and sexual violence. It also increases their likelihood of dropping out of school, living in poor households, bearing more children at earlier ages and becoming infected with sexually transmitted infections.^{75,76,77}

Generally, girls are significantly more likely than boys to marry early—the global prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one-fifth that of girls.⁷⁸ In South Asia and East Asia, 30% and 18% of women aged 20–24, respectively, were married or in a union before they were 18 years old.^{79,80} The prevalence of child, early and forced marriage varies considerably across the region, guided by tradition, custom and a wide range of social, cultural and religious factors that underpin ingrained gender inequality.⁸¹ Singapore and Maldives have child marriage rates as low as 0.5% and 2.2%, respectively, while in Bangladesh, rates are as high as 58.6%.

Violence against girls and women

Across the region, many girls live with the regular threat of violence, jeopardising their physical and mental well-being as well as their opportunities to complete school and participate in social and civil society.⁸² Most perpetrators are known to girls and include teachers, peers, parents, guardians and husbands.⁸³ Various social, cultural and traditional practices intersect so that domestic and intimate partner violence are accepted as the norm, with perpetrators' behaviour overlooked and discussion in public implicitly discouraged.

Prevalence data from Asia shows that in many countries, women between the ages of 15 and 19 are at the highest risk of experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.⁸⁴ Across the region, the average percentage of the female population aged 15 and older that has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner is 27.8%. The highest rates were reported in Timor-Leste (58.8%), Bangladesh (53.3%) and Afghanistan (50.8%), while the lowest rates were reported in Singapore (6.1%).

“Girls are not safe—not outside, not at home, not even online. Everywhere they are victims of harassment. We can’t move freely even in daytime. I dream of a Bangladesh where girls will not be harassed only because they are girls.”

Young woman (age 19), Bangladesh

India making strong progress toward eliminating child marriage



The Asia Girls' Leadership Index is based on data sources that have been verified and are consistent across the region. Recent research from India suggests that the current rate of marriage among girls under 18 years in India is as low as 27%. Still, one in three of the world's child brides lives in India, with over half living in five states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

If child marriage is to be eliminated by 2030, additional efforts will be required to sustain and advance India's progress.

Note: The Index draws information from global standard databases. At the time the Index was developed, the databases recorded a child marriage rate of 47.4% for India and this figure was used for the Index.

Sources: UNICEF (2019). *Ending child marriage: A profile of progress in India*. Available from: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/ending-child-marriage-a-profile-of-progress-in-india/>



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Investing in protection from violence critical to helping Vietnam maintain a high overall ranking



Vietnam is a stand-out performer on the Asia Girls' Leadership Index, ranking third of 19 countries, but in the protection domain it places in the bottom half, ranking 11th of 17 countries for the protection of adolescent girls. This is primarily because of its high rates of child labour (14th of 17) and physical and sexual violence (13th of 17).

UN Women conducted an economic analysis of the cost of domestic violence on Vietnam's economy and found that 'an estimate of overall productivity loss comes to 1.78% of GDP.' Investing more to reduce the high rates of violence and child labour affecting girls could help Vietnam retain its place as one of the most robust, enabling environments for girls' leadership development in Southeast Asia.

Source: Duvvury, N., Carney, P., & Minh, N.H. (2013). *Estimating the cost of domestic violence against women in Viet Nam*. Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/2/estimating-the-cost-of-domestic-violence-against-women-in-viet-nam>

In our survey of adolescent girls, only 25% of online respondents and 32% of offline respondents reported feeling safe to walk alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Encouragingly, 60% of online respondents and 69% of offline respondents reported knowing where to seek help if they experienced violence or abuse, suggesting that in the event of a violent experience, most girls would have options available to them for support and treatment.

Child labour

The ILO defines child labour as work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and interferes with their schooling by obliging them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with work.⁸⁵ The three principal international conventions on child labour are ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age), ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These conventions set the legal boundaries for child labour and provide the legal basis for national and international actions against it.

Globally, data for child labour is problematic because it is based on national legislation rather than on statistics. Generally, it is collected as the percentage of children aged 5–14 engaged in child labour, but in some cases it counts children up to 17 years old.⁸⁶ The ILO estimates that around 168 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 in Asia and the Pacific are engaged in economic activity in order to survive. Child labour rates are highest in Nepal, Afghanistan, Cambodia and Vietnam (ranging from 12.2% to 19.3%) and lowest in Singapore and Bhutan (0.5% and 1.7%, respectively).⁸⁷

“My family tries to give me all the opportunities. However, because of the social context in many cases, girls like me don’t get opportunities like a boy. Like I’m not allowed to go outside after 7 p.m. because it’s not safe for girls at night.”

Adolescent girl (age 15),
Bangladesh



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Asia Girls' Leadership Index Domain:

POLITICAL VOICE & REPRESENTATION

Country	Rank	Index Value
Vietnam	1	0.773
Singapore	2	0.769
Philippines	3	0.768
Bhutan	4	0.732
Timor-Leste	5	0.714
Lao, PDR	6	0.699
Thailand	7	0.689
Maldives	8	0.685
Sri Lanka	9	0.680
Cambodia	10	0.665
Nepal	11	0.663
India	12	0.656
Indonesia	13	0.656
Myanmar	14	0.652
Afghanistan	15	0.596
Malaysia*	16	0.596
Bangladesh	17	0.492
Pakistan	18	0.229
Brunei Darussalam*	19	0.061

* For these countries, Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority is not publicly available, so the index is calculated based on only two indicators.

Indicators:

1. Girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority (%)
2. Seats held by women in national parliaments (%)
3. Woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's

Engaging youth as active citizens is integral to promoting and preserving peaceful and prosperous societies. Accordingly, since in the region many youth distrust the political process, there is a need for greater efforts to foster the faith of youth in political systems and promote full and meaningful participation in improving governance and building democratic institutions.

–UNESCAP, 2019, p.15

Involvement in community and civic forums, including political participation, reflects an individual's opportunity and agency to engage with and shape the society in which they exist and is an important element of social inclusion.⁸⁸ However, youth (and especially girls) face barriers to participation and engagement in civil society and decision-making processes.

In many countries, girls' mobility becomes restricted with the onset of puberty because of perceived threats to safety and security as well as local social and cultural norms that determine gender roles and what is considered acceptable. In extreme situations, this can include withdrawal from school and public life altogether into domestic roles where access to social and economic assets are governed by the larger family and, often, male decision-makers.⁸⁹ In addition to social and cultural factors, a lack of institutionalised opportunities further limits youth engagement and participation in decision-making processes. These and other factors restrict girls' access to and participation in public forums to collectively mobilise to influence laws and policies and to advocate for issues affecting them.

Birth registration

Registering children at birth is the first step to securing their recognition under the law, safeguarding their rights and ensuring that any violation of these rights is noticed. Children without official identification documents may be denied health care or education—both important precursors to their realisation of leadership. Later in life, lack of documentation can result in a child entering into marriage or the labour market, or being conscripted into the armed forces before the legal age. In adulthood, birth certificates may be required to obtain social assistance, secure a job in the formal sector, buy or prove the right to inherit property, vote or obtain a passport. A child's right to a name and nationality is enshrined in Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Timor-Leste, fewer than 60% of girls' births have been registered. In Bangladesh the number is even lower, with the births of only 20% of girls under the age of five registered,ⁱ as reflected in the sources used to compile the Index. Other sources indicate birth registration in Bangladesh is increasing quickly (see page 54).

Parliamentary representation

A strong and vibrant democracy is possible only when parliament is fully inclusive of the population it represents—and parliaments cannot consider themselves inclusive until they can boast the full participation of women. However, gender parity in parliamentary representation is still far from being realised, with the region overall reporting only 18% female parliamentarians. Numbers in individual countries range from below 10% in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Brunei to a high of 40% in Timor-Leste. This under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions limits women's opportunity to influence policy and reflects an environment with prejudicial socio-cultural norms, uneven implementation of policies and legislation, and insufficient resources.⁹⁰ This is not just about women's right to equality and their contributions to public affairs, but also about using women's resources and potential to set political and development priorities that benefit societies and the global community.

Women who hold parliamentary and managerial positions achieve personal and structural gains, and they also serve as aspirational role models for young girls. Our research found that girls are more likely to have leadership ambition and aspirations if they have female leaders as role models.

“I think the biggest challenge for girls and women is to get the respect they deserve in society. Girls are neglected because people do not respect women. We can overcome these challenges if we let our girls go to school and pursue higher education. We must give them the opportunity to give their opinion.”

Adolescent girl (age 15),
Bangladesh

ⁱ From Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey 2014. Although preliminary findings of the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for Bangladesh suggests a significant increase in birth registration, the dataset has not yet been published and cannot be used for the purposes of this report.

Bangladesh investments in birth registration are paying off



Bangladesh ranks 17th of 19 countries in the political voice and representation domain, largely due to its last place ranking in the proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered.

In recognition of the need for reliable and up-to-date demographic information, Bangladesh has taken several actions, including the announcement of a birth and death registration act in 2004, the introduction of an online birth and death registration service in 2010, and an in-depth assessment of the civil registration and vital statistics system in 2013 that identified multiple reasons for continued low registration rates. In response to these findings, the government established a multi-sector national civil registration and vital statistics coordinating group in 2016 to oversee renewed efforts to increase civil registrations.

With support from the Bloomberg Data for Health Initiative, Bangladesh piloted an improved comprehensive civil registration system between 2016 and 2018, resulting in increased timeliness and numbers of birth registrations, achieving 83% birth registration completeness (increased from an estimated 16% in 2016) in the pilot geography within two years.

In addition to informing governments, birth registration is helping reduce the incidence of child marriage in Bangladesh, giving girls legal identities and the basis on which to refute marriage before they are 18 years old. In one instance, at the age of 15, a girl from Dinajpur, Bangladesh, was able to use her birth certificate to advocate for her right to continue her education and not marry before the age of 18. Although the negotiations were difficult, without her birth certificate, the girl would have been forced into an arranged marriage at the age of 15.

Continued investment in improved civil registration systems, including expansion beyond the pilot geographies could drastically and quickly improve Bangladesh's birth registration and overall standing in the political voice and representation domain of the Asia Girls' Leadership Index. These efforts could also reduce child marriage, improving Bangladesh's standing in the protection domain of the Index. Bangladesh could also support other countries in Asia overcoming similar challenges by sharing its best practices and experiences to inform similar efforts and research across the region.

Sources: Uddin, M., Ashrafi, S.S.A., Azad, A.K., Chowdhury, A., Chowdhury, H.R., Riley, I.D., ... Alam, Z. (2019). *Improving coverage of civil registration and vital statistics, Bangladesh*. World Health Organization. Available from: <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/97/9/18-219162/en/>

Lomelin, J. (2014). *How birth certificates help fight child marriage*. Devex. Available from: <https://www.devex.com/news/how-birth-certificates-help-fight-child-marriage-84927>

Timor-Leste leads in political voice and representation but lags in health and domestic violence



While Timor-Leste leads the region in the proportion of seats held by women parliamentarians, that political power is not translating into improved health or protection outcomes for women and girls.

Timor-Leste ranks last of 17 countries for physical or sexual violence and 17th of 19 countries in the health domain, mainly due to its last-place ranking for female stunting and its position near the bottom of the table (ranking 16 of 19) for family planning.

A recent study for the Millennium Challenge Corporation found that, more than poverty and education, low “mother’s height was a strong determinant of stunting... suggesting the importance of her own nutrition before her child reaches the age of two, as well as underscoring the intergenerational effects of malnutrition.”

Improvements in health and nutrition outcomes would advance Timor-Leste’s overall ranking in the Index. Government and donor investment in in these areas would also have the added potential of improving educational outcomes and economic opportunities and of breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. However, any investment in women and girls’ development will continue to be undermined until the level of violence experienced by women is addressed in a meaningful way.

Source: University Research Co. *Addressing stunting in Timor-Leste: An assessment report*. Available from: <https://www.urc-chs.com/sites/default/files/urc-Addressing-Stunting-Timor-Leste-Assessment-Report-1809.pdf>

Specifically, they reported being inspired by the courage, determination and spirit demonstrated by these role models in often difficult circumstances.⁹¹ Respondents further reported how female leader role models inspired them to believe and be confident in their own abilities, rights and potential to succeed.

In addition to women in formal leadership roles, girls often identify their mothers, grandmothers, sisters and female teachers as individuals who inspire them, reinforcing the importance of family support to girls and young women in developing the requisite skills and providing the conditions for their realisation of leadership capabilities.⁹²

Countries across Asia exhibit factors that enable and constrain empowerment and leadership opportunities. While the existence or absence of these factors affects individuals, their existence or absence depends on interdependent decisions, policies and socio-cultural norms within households, communities, and organisational and structural environments. Gender inequalities remain pervasive in many dimensions of life, society and systems, affecting the allocation of resources, including education, health care, nutrition and political voice. These allocations in turn affect the conditions for girls' and young women's empowerment, agency, voice and participation.

Despite the often-discouraging situation for girls' development, opportunities and leadership across the region, girls themselves remain hopeful and optimistic about their futures. Online respondents to our survey on adolescent girls' perceptions, opportunities, well-being and agency (who were aged 18–24+) reported seeing themselves as smart (75%), capable of being leaders (69%) and having the ability to make decisions on issues that affect their lives (81%). The confidence, positivity and sense of ability reflected in these responses suggests that young women are prepared to overcome a myriad of challenges to lead successful and productive lives.

The perceptions of offline respondents, who were younger than the online group (aged 15–19), were considerably more varied. For example, in Bangladesh, 81% saw themselves as smart, 86% as capable of leading and 62% as having the ability to make decisions on issues that affect their lives. In contrast, in Vietnam, only 31% saw themselves as smart, 19% as being capable of leading and 53% as having the ability to make decisions on issues that affect their lives. The wide variation even in small samples is a reminder of the diversity of the region and the very different experiences girls have in their transitions from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.

Across the region, the literature, surveys, key informant interviews and results from the Asia Girls' Leadership Index all cited social and cultural norms that promote the persistence of gender inequality and reduced opportunities for girls as the root cause of poor progress against indicators across all domains. The Asia Girls' Leadership Index can serve as a powerful tool to help countries identify critical areas for programming and the best opportunities for regional development collaboration. To effect meaningful and sustained change, nations must address inequalities and commit to investing in adolescent girls' development as part of their national development strategies. Countries that invest in girls' development and equality are investing in more than girls in their own right; they are also investing in tomorrow's adults and, as a result, the future of their nations as a whole.

“The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim for equitable, inclusive development that leaves no one behind. The 15-year plan promises to help transform the futures of millions of 10-year old girls who have traditionally been left behind.

At the same time, many of the SDGs may only be achieved if everyone's potential—including all 10-year-old girls—is realised. Chief among the SDGs is a vision for a world without poverty. But how much progress can we expect if the enormous potential of girls remains stifled and squandered?

In many ways, a 10-year-old girl's life trajectory will be the true test of whether the 2030 Agenda is a success—or failure.

With support from family, community and nation, and the full realisation of her rights, a 10-year-old girl can thrive and help bring about the future we all want.

What the world will look like in 15 years will depend on our doing everything in our power to ignite the potential of a 10-year-old girl today.”

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund
The State of World Population 2016



5. A CALL TO ACTION: INVEST IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS

With the signing of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, countries around the world committed to equitable and inclusive development that leaves no one behind. Since then, adolescent girls have received more attention than ever in global and national-level discourse—in large part due to the recognition that gender equality (especially equality for girls) has a multiplier effect, benefiting girls now and in the future as well as their children. Investments in adolescent health and well-being are widely recognised as the best investments that can be made to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Countries that invest in girls' health and well-being are making more than just an investment in girls in their own right; they are also investing in tomorrow's adults and, as a result, the future of their nation as a whole.

WHAT IS AN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK?

While adolescent girls are considered pivotal for the achievement of the SDGs, they are not sufficiently represented among the SDG indicators and are typically neglected in related international and national monitoring frameworks. The use of country-specific adolescent girls' development frameworks, which build on the most relevant SDG indicators for adolescent girls with age and sex-disaggregated national census data, can help countries ensure they are investing in the right enabling environment for girls' development and help drive national development in line with the SDGs.

In 2016, Lao PDR launched the Noi 2030 Framework, the first-ever national adolescent girls' development framework in line with the 2030 Agenda (see the text box on page 60 for more details).

The Noi 2030 Framework is a visual monitoring tool that highlights the five SDG-related indicators of particular importance to the well-being of adolescent girls that the Government of Lao PDR has committed to report on.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ADOLESCENT GIRLS' DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

A focus on adolescents

All too often, discussions around adolescents (aged 10–19) quickly expand to become discussions on youth in general (aged 10–34, depending on the country). To realise sustainable change and meet their SDG commitments, it is critical for countries to maintain focus on adolescents. In some cases, this may require them to develop a better understanding of adolescent development and the distinct phases of adolescence (very young adolescence, middle adolescence and late adolescence), as well as the unique needs that girls have during each of these phases.



THE TIME TO INVEST IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS IS NOW

Across Asia, countries must make critical decisions about where to invest resources and how to monitor the impact of those investments on those who might otherwise be left behind, especially adolescent girls. Countries' investments in their young populations will influence the extent to which they achieve their 2030 sustainable development commitments. **With only a decade remaining before 2030, Plan International is calling on all countries in Asia to invest in adolescent girls now by developing and adopting adolescent girls' development frameworks as part of their national development planning efforts and by reporting against the sustainable development goals.** Plan International is also calling on the regional multi-lateral bodies, especially ASEAN and SAARC, to support their member states to design, share best practices and implement these important frameworks.

PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING AN ADOLESCENT GIRLS' DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Countries that want to develop their own framework to support adolescent girls' development can use these steps as a guide.

Step 1: Identify key priority areas of particular importance to the development of adolescent girls in your country (consult with girls and use secondary data and research, including the Asia Girl's Leadership Index).

Step 2: Review the global SDG indicators that address the priority issues you have identified.

Step 3: Compare the selected global SDG indicators with the localized SDG indicator frameworks and national census indicators to identify the specific indicators that are most relevant to adolescent girls in your country.

Step 4: Review the available national statistics indicators (these should be age- and gender-disaggregated) that align with the local SDG indicator frameworks.

Step 5: Develop a customised national adolescent girls' development framework that is focused on the top four to six needs of adolescent girls in your country based on the available indicators identified in steps 2 and 3.

Step 6: Work with your national government and key partners to secure the government's commitment to measure and report on the selected indicators in every voluntary national review.

To maximise the opportunity to positively affect girls' development and life trajectories, it is critical to recognise the diversity of this age group along with the cultural norms, socio-political and economic contexts, geographic factors and individual abilities that can enable or constrain adolescent girls' transition to adulthood. With the most significant life transitions often occurring with the onset of puberty, investments in very early adolescents have the potential for the greatest impact.

For example, in places where child marriage is common, a girl is likely to leave school at or even before puberty; once married, she is likely to spend most of her time within the confines of her house and perhaps have a child before she is officially an adult. Programmes that address the social and cultural norms that result in child marriage have the potential to affect the decisions families make for their very young adolescents—meaning a girl who might otherwise be married at the age of 14 will remain in school, pursue secondary and even tertiary education, and be given greater opportunities for economic empowerment and participation in community and social dialogue.

Robust partnerships

In Lao PDR, the Noi 2030 Framework was developed in partnership between the government, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and civil society. The partners established an Adolescent Girls Working Group led by UNFPA and Plan International Lao PDR that convened the actors needed to collaboratively design the Noi 2030 Framework together with the government stakeholders and research institutions.

Evidence-informed decisions

Decision-makers and stakeholders need to develop a more detailed understanding of the adolescent context, including their living situations and access to services and resources, as well as the cultural, socio-political, economic and geographic factors that enable or constrain adolescent development. The Asia Girls' Leadership Index is a good starting point, providing indicators across multiple domains and sectors. Strong and weak performances in these indicators can be used to guide further investigation into the root causes of constraints experienced by adolescents and, in turn, serve as a starting point for interventions. (For example, if laws exist to prevent child marriage but indicators report high rates of child marriage, the country will need to investigate the cause of the discrepancy and respond accordingly.)

The growing body of global evidence on effective adolescent programming should be considered as part of the program-design process to ensure effective intervention strategies and approaches are used.

Multi-sectoral engagement

Because the needs of adolescents are so diverse and complex, no single agency or sector will be able to deliver a truly effective programme to support positive adolescent development. As an example, a strong, evidence-informed education strategy to support girls' completion of secondary school and transition to tertiary education might be undermined by early marriage, underage pregnancy, parents who do not value girls' education, and undernutrition and poor health. Adolescent programming that can effectively address all of these factors requires concerted, coordinated and collaborative multi-sectoral commitments from government and other stakeholders.

Age- and gender-responsive resourcing

Even the most comprehensive, evidence-informed adolescent girls' development framework will be undermined if it is not suitably funded.

When countries develop frameworks, they must also commit to allocating enough resources to support the implementation of initiatives outlined within those frameworks.

Going beyond the adolescent girls' development framework, a critical demonstration of a country's commitment to the pursuit of gender equality is its commitment to gender-responsive budgeting that ensures the effective allocation of public resources to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition to providing a tool to demonstrate accountability to women's rights, gender-responsive budgeting promotes greater public transparency and addresses gender bias and discrimination.⁹³ UN Women's 2015 review of budget call circulars and gender budget statements in the Asia-Pacific region recognises that 14 of the 19 countries in this report had undertaken gender-responsive budgeting work at the time.⁹⁴ To support timely investments that promote adolescent girls' development, countries will also need to complement their gender-responsive budgeting by integrating age-sensitivity into their analyses.

Inclusivity

Including adolescent girls in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of adolescent frameworks, strategies, policies and programmes will inform, strengthen and improve their effectiveness. Adolescent girls' development frameworks and the processes to develop, deliver and monitor them must recognise the diversity of adolescents in their respective contexts (e.g., age, socio-economic status, disability, geography, cultures, sexualities) and create spaces and strategies through which all adolescents can participate.

A gender-transformative approach

Achievement of SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, is central to the achievement of many of the other SDGs—and a core condition on which successful development and transitions to adulthood depend. A gender-transformative approach goes beyond addressing 'symptoms' to explicitly tackle the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations and discriminatory social norms, systems, structures, policies and practices. Such an approach strives to improve the day-to-day condition of girls while advancing their position and value in society.

Each country's framework will need to consider a range of gender-transformative strategies to support the elimination of gender inequalities and the empowerment of adolescent girls.

New ways of working

To effect lasting change, governments and stakeholders will need to be prepared to change some of the ways they work—to go beyond 'business as usual'—whether by establishing new partnerships or considering different approaches to adolescent programming.

Monitoring and evaluation

To monitor progress, evaluate effectiveness and learn from successes and challenges, each country's framework should include an evidence-informed strategy for programme monitoring, evaluation, research and learning. Lao PDR and development partners also developed an Adolescent Girls Situational Analysis (AGSA), a large scale mixed-method survey that monitors progress against the indicators in the Noi 2030 Framework. The AGSA complements the Noi 2030 Framework by helping decision-makers determine where policy and practice changes may be needed to realise greater progress.



PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S SUPPORT FOR INVESTMENT IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Plan International is committed to supporting countries to respond to the call to action. To advance investment in adolescent girls in the countries where we work, we will:

- 1.** Support the establishment of multi-sectoral communities of practice, including working groups to support the design and implementation of adolescent girls' development frameworks
- 2.** Participate in national- and local-level dialogue to develop adolescent situational analysis
- 3.** Share relevant tools and methodologies for the development of country-specific frameworks

THE NOI 2030 FRAMEWORK

“Half of our population are young people and half of these young people are girls. They are our current and future labour force. To enable the country to fully realise the demographic dividend, we must ensure that young people, in particular adolescent girls, who are often lagging behind, are at the heart of our country’s development agenda.”

H.E. Dr. Khamlien Pholsena
Vice Minister of Ministry of
Planning and Investment, Lao PDR
International Day of the Girl Child,
October 2016

To support its commitment to the SDGs (and adolescent development more broadly), the Lao PDR National Institute of Public Health, in partnership with Plan International and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), developed the **Noi 2030 Framework**. It calls for increased preventive and protective investment in adolescent girls today so that, by 2030, young women in Lao PDR will have achieved gender parity and are contributing to their nation’s development. Supported by the government and its key development partners, the Framework presents the situation of adolescent girls related to five SDGs on education, sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, employment, and gender equality, as well as opportunities for girls to participate in decisions that matter to them.

The Framework centres on Noi, a created persona of a 10-year-old-girl, who was introduced on the International Day of the Girl Child in 2016. Through Noi, the Lao PDR adolescent girl population was brought into the spotlight, highlighting that adolescent girls are often overlooked in sub-national and national data, where they are subsumed under the demographic cohorts of children and women of reproductive age. The Framework presents a vision for Noi in 2030, when she and her peers will have transitioned through adolescence into adulthood. On the International Day of the Girl Child each year, Noi celebrates her birthday, bringing together government, development partners and stakeholders to assess and recognise progress toward improving the lives of adolescent girls. In 2019, Noi celebrated her 13th birthday with the Framework’s partners and stakeholders reaffirming their commitment to support Noi to stay on track for achieving the SDGs.

In addition to setting national goals for adolescent girls, the Noi 2030 Framework serves as a platform for multi-sectoral programming, bringing together the unique expertise of the government and its development partners to collectively identify and address the needs of adolescent girls in Lao PDR. The Framework calls for partnerships across all sectors to invest in adolescent girls, citing partnerships as essential to achieving the SDGs.

Two core activities under the Framework include:

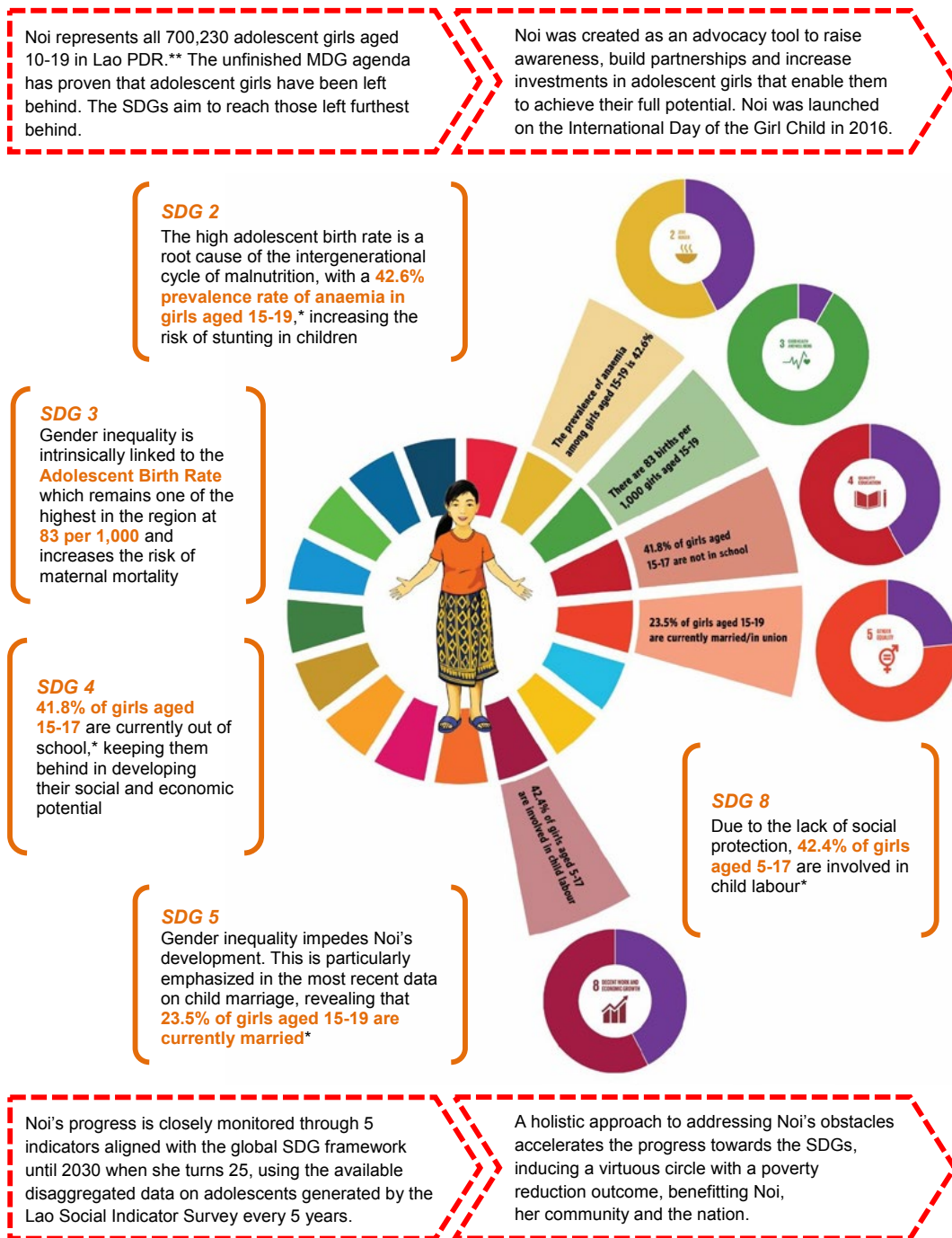
- Developing a provincial-level adolescent girls’ profile (or situation analysis) to identify main areas requiring concerted efforts and investment, and to inform policy and programming
- Contributing to the global body of knowledge on adolescents and the issues they face, leading to more effective programming that goes beyond the numbers to explore the root causes of those issues

The Framework was developed through a systematic process that included the identification of all SDG targets relevant to adolescent girls, the revision of indicators to provide national and sub-national data relevant to adolescents, and the addition of indicators to SDG targets where adolescents had been omitted. A survey was then developed and focus group discussions and key informant interviews conducted based on existing standardised international tools to establish a baseline for the identified indicators.

In 2017, Noi was the impetus for an interagency partnership between the United Nations World Food Programme and UNFPA to work on an advocacy initiative to improve access to nutrition, food security, education, and reproductive health information and services for adolescent girls and boys in Lao PDR.

The partnership approach has led to several innovations to support adolescent girls' development, including a second persona named Lar who is Noi's cousin, an adolescent girl with a disability; the Noi-Yakhoo mobile app (a one-stop source for youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health, gender and life skills information); and the *Me, My Body, My Planet, My Future* social media campaign, which aims to inspire young people to take positive actions on health, gender, environment and sustainable development issues in Lao PDR.

Figure 6. The Noi 2030 Framework: Achieving gender equality and empowerment of adolescent girls



UNFPA (2018). *Noi – The Adolescent Girl in Lao PDR*. Available from: https://lao.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Brochure%20-%20Noi_Version%202_Website_Final.pdf

Annex:

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASIA GIRLS' LEADERSHIP INDEX

This section presents details of how the Asia Girls' Leadership Index was developed.

Indicator selection and data population

The initial selection of indicators was based on Plan International's Girls' Leadership Research Framework, which outlined domains and potential indicators. Based on that framework, we conducted a scan of global databases to identify complete data sets (i.e., sets that included at least one data point for each of the 19 countries) for each of the proposed indicators. We prioritised Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators to support regular updating of the Index to monitor ongoing progress, as these indicators will be available for at least the next 10 years and likely for all countries. We replaced indicators for which multiple countries were missing data.

We drew values for indicators from internationally recognised databases available online, based on the last available year. Where data was not available in the same database, we obtained and used the original source of the data (e.g., National Labour Force Survey or National DHS Report). After populating the indicator values (raw data), we verified each value by cross-checking it against the original database and alternatives.

Table 6 presents the final selection of indicators for each domain, along with the SDG each supports and the proportion of the overall Index contributed by that indicator.

Normalisation

Each domain of the Index is an aggregation of a number of indicators. However, as each indicator has a different measurement unit, we had to conduct a normalisation process before aggregating the indicators for each domain. We normalised each indicator based on its min-max value using the following calculation:

$$\text{Normalized Indicator} = \frac{\text{Actual Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}{\text{Maximum Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}$$

The resulting indicators are unitless and have values between 0 and 1.

To enable us to rank countries according to any indicator in a given year, and to track the progress of a country in each indicator, we had to identify minimum and maximum values for each. These values were not based on internal data, but on extreme values within the global data set that are unlikely to be exceeded in the coming years. Our first step to obtaining these values was to select minimum and maximum values using global data sources. We then expanded these values beyond the extremes of the last five years to account for future variations and avoid the necessity of updating the maximum values. Table 7 presents the minimum and maximum values used to construct the Index.

Table 6: Asia Girls' Leadership Index: Domains and Indicators

Domain	Full Form	SDG Link	% Total
Education	Completion Rate, Lower Secondary Female (%)	4.1	4.17%
	Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, female (%)	4.3.2	4.17%
	Access to Internet, Female (%)	17.8.1	4.17%
	Mean years of schooling, female (years)	HDI	4.17%
Economic Opportunity	Share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate), Female (%)	8.6.1	4.17%
	Youth Labour Participation Rate, Female (%)	ILO	4.17%
	Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile-service provider, Female (%)	8.10.2	4.17%
	Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)	5.5.2	4.17%
Protection	Percentage of girls aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour	8.7.1	5.56%
	Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18	5.3.1	5.56%
	Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner	5.2.1	5.56%
Health	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)	3.7.2	4.17%
	Proportion of women aged 15-19 years who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	3.7.1	4.17%
	Prevalence of stunting, height for age, female (% of children under 5)	2.2.1	4.17%
	Suicide Mortality Rate (15-19), female (per 100,000 female population)	3.4.2	4.17%
Political Voice and Representation	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments	5.5.1	5.56%
	Woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's	5.1.1	5.56%
	Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	16.9.1	5.56%
Laws and Policies	Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents	5.1.1	3.33%
	Equal remuneration for work of equal value	5.1.1	3.33%
	Legislation on sexual harassment in employment	5.1.1	3.33%
	Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage	5.1.1	3.33%
	Legislation explicitly criminalizes marital rape	5.1.1	3.33%

Generation of domain indices

Of the normalised indicators, some are 'positive' qualities (i.e., the larger the indicator value, the better the situation), and some express 'negative' qualities (i.e., the larger the indicator value, the worse the situation). Examples of positive indicators include education indicators (% of secondary education completion, % of tertiary enrolment, etc.); examples of negative indicators include protection indicators (% of child labour, % of child marriage, etc.).

To aggregate the indicators into one index expressed in positive terms, we transformed the negative indicators using the formula $Ind+ = (1-Ind-)$, where $Ind+$ is the final positive value and $Ind-$ is the original normalised indicator.

We calculated the domain indices by averaging the normalised positive indicators within each domain using unweighted averages. For example, for the education and protection domains, the domain index is calculated as:

$$EDU = (EDU1 + EDU2 + EDU3 + EDU4) \div 4$$

$$PROT = (PROT1+ + PROT2+ + PROT3+) \div 3$$

Table 7. Minimum and maximum values used to develop the Asia Girls' Leadership Index

Domain	Short indicator	Full form indicator	Min	Max	Source	Min country	Max country	Min	Max
Education	Completion Rate, Lower Secondary	Completion Rate, Lower Secondary Female (%)	7.7	133.9	WB/ UNESCO	Central African Republic	Marshall Islands	5.0	150.0
	Tertiary enrolment	Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education, female (%)	1.1	134.1	WB/ UNESCO	Chad	Australia	0.0	150.0
	Access to internet	Access to Internet, Female (%)	0.7	99.8	ITU	Burundi	Qatar	0.0	100.0
	Mean years of schooling	Mean years of schooling, female (years)	1.0	13.9	HDI	Burkina Faso	Switzerland	0.0	15.0
Economic opportunity	Youth NEET Rate	Share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate), Female (%)	0.3	79.6	ILO	Qatar	Kyrgyzstan	0.0	100.0
	Youth Labour Participation	Youth Labour Participation Rate, Female (%)	5.2	82.4	ILO	Algeria	Iceland	0.0	100.0
	Account Ownership	Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile-service provider, Female (%)	1.7	100.0	HDI	Yemen	Norway/ Sweden	0.0	100.0
	Women in managerial positions	Female share of employment in managerial positions (%)	4.9	59.0	ILO	Pakistan	Lao, PDR	0.0	75.0
Protection	Child labour	Percentage of girls aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour	0.1	37.0	SDG/ UNICEF	Turkmenistan	Sierra Leone	0.0	50.0
	Child marriage	Percentage of women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18	2.5	76.3	HDI	Algeria	Niger	0.0	90.0
	Experienced physical and/or sexual violence	Percentage of the female population ages 15 and older that has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner	6.1	67.6	HDI	Singapore/ Georgia	Kiribati	0.0	80.0
Health	Adolescent Birth Rate	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)	0.3	192.0	HDI	Niger	Korea, DPR	0.0	200.0
	Family planning demand satisfied	Proportion of women aged 15–19 years who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods	5.6	89.8	WHO	Nicaragua	South Sudan	0.0	100.0
	Prevalence of stunting	Prevalence of stunting, height for age, female (% of children under 5)	1.2	47.9	WHO	United States	PNG	0.0	70.0
	Suicide Mortality Rate	Suicide Mortality Rate (15–19), female (per 100,000 female population)	0.0	29.2	WHO	SEE BELOW*	Guyana	0.0	40.0
Voice & representation	Seats in national parliaments	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments	0.0	55.7	HDI	PNG/ Mocronesia/ Vanautu	Rwanda	0.0	75.0
	Women's testimony	Woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's	0	1	WLawDB	-	-	0.0	1.0
	Birth registration	Proportion of girls under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	2.6	100.0	UNICEF	Ethiopia	SEE BELOW**	0.0	100.0
Law and policies	Inheritance rights	Equal rights between sons and daughters to inherit assets from parents	0	1	WLawDB	-	-	0.0	1.0
	Equal pay	Equal remuneration for work of equal value	0	1	WLawDB	-	-	0.0	1.0
	Sexual harassment in workplace	Legislation on sexual harassment in employment	0	1	WLawDB	-	-	0.0	1.0
	Child marriage	Laws prohibiting or invalidating child marriage	0	1	WLawDB	-	-	0.0	1.0
	Marital Rape	Legislation explicitly criminalizes marital rape	0	1	WLawDB	-	-	0.0	1.0

* Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Cyprus, Grenada, Iceland, Mauritius, St Vincent and the Grenadines

** 60 countries

The resulting domain index lies between 0 and 1; the higher the value, the more advanced the country is in this domain of girls' leadership. We can use these values to sort countries from highest to lowest to obtain a ranking for each domain.

Aggregation of the domain indices

The overall Index is obtained by averaging the six individual domain indices:

$$INDEX = (EDU + EC + HEALTH + LAW + PROT + VOICE) \div 6$$

Dealing with missing values

In some cases, values were missing. We dealt with these gaps in three different ways:

1. The figure for an indicator is missing but can be estimated from other data

In these cases, we looked for relevant data that could help us estimate a value. For example, we estimated EC1ⁱ for Bhutan using cross-country regression models, and PROT2ⁱⁱ for Singapore using the time series of child marriage in Singapore.

2. An indicator is missing and cannot be estimated

If other data was not available to help us estimate an indicator, we computed the domain index as the average of the other available indicators in this domain. For example, HEALTH2ⁱⁱⁱ for Singapore is calculated based on three of four indicators, while EC3^{iv} and VOICE3^v for Brunei and VOICE3 for Malaysia are calculated based on two of three indicators for each country.

3. All indicators in a domain are missing for a country

If no indicator values were available for a domain, we could not compute the domain index, so we calculated the Index for that country as the average of the remaining five domains. For example, no protection values were available for Brunei or Malaysia, so the Index for these two countries was computed based on five of the six domains only.

Computation of regional indices

Each of the 19 countries included in the Index belongs to one of two regions, SAARC or ASEAN. We computed the regional domain indices by first obtaining the weighted average of the normalised (positive) indicators, then aggregating these by unweighted average. The weights are the population of girls aged 10–19 in each country.

$$Ind_R = \frac{Ind_1 \times Pop_1 + Ind_2 \times Pop_2 + \dots + Ind_k \times Pop_k}{Pop_1 + Pop_2 + \dots + Pop_k}$$

Where:

- Ind_R is the regional weighted average of the normalised indicator. This value is then aggregated to compute the regional domain index.
- Ind_i (where $i = 1, 2, \dots, k$) is the normalised value of the indicator for country i , for all countries in region R .
- Pop_i (where $i = 1, 2, \dots, k$) is the population of girls aged 10–19 for country i , for all countries in region R .

ⁱ Female Youth NEET Rate

ⁱⁱ Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before age 18

ⁱⁱⁱ Family planning satisfied with modern methods (15-19)

^{iv} Account Ownership, Female

^v Proportion of girls under 5 years of age who births have been registered

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PLAN INTERNATIONAL IS AN INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION THAT ADVANCES CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY FOR GIRLS. WE STRIVE FOR A JUST WORLD, WORKING TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS. USING OUR REACH, EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE, WE DRIVE CHANGE IN PRACTICE AND POLICY AT LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS. WE ARE INDEPENDENT OF GOVERNMENTS, RELIGIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES. FOR MORE THAN 80 YEARS, WE HAVE BEEN BUILDING POWERFUL PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN AND ARE ACTIVE IN MORE THAN 75 COUNTRIES.



Girls Get Equal

Plan International has been campaigning for girls' rights for more than a decade. Our current Girls Get Equal campaign aims to ensure girls and young women have power over their own lives and can help shape the world around them. Promoting young female leadership is central to the campaign. While this includes access to formal positions of power and authority, such as increasing the numbers of young women and girls in decision-making roles in public life, it also looks beyond these formal positions. Girls Get Equal, with its iconic warpaint-style equal sign, seeks to redefine leadership to better reflect how girls, young women, and young advocates and activists are choosing to lead by working with them to ensure leadership is feminist, gender-transformative and inclusive. It means not reinforcing a narrow male-defined set of leadership skills and behaviours or replicating the male-dominated power and leadership structures that currently exist. Throughout the campaign there will be ongoing research, partnering with girls and young women to fully understand what it means to them to be a leader.



Partner with us!

Plan International intends to partner with a range of leading and contributing actors to promote and support investment in adolescent girls in the region. We welcome new partners who are willing to join our effort and combine resources and technical expertise to invest in adolescent girls' development and their successful transition from childhood through adolescence into adulthood.

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