"IT'S NOT REALLY SAFE FOR US GIRLS"

"I will not feel safe when walking about town – it's not really safe for us girls."
– Adolescent girl, 14-24, Honiara.

The safety of girls in cities is a global problem. But there are actions we can take to create a safe and equal world for all girls.

Plan International Australia and Plan International Solomon Islands

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PLAN INTERNATIONAL | The charity for girls' equality

Australian Aid

INTRODUCTION

Most of the world's cities aren't safe for girls.

Gender inequality means girls and women face unique barriers and challenges when navigating through cities – such as a heightened risk to physical and sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation. With cities and public transport designed by a majority of men – girls' experiences and their needs and opinions are hardly ever recognised.

Too often they are denied their right to freedom and safety, and the experience of having to 'pick up the pace' when just trying to get home is all too common.

One of the ways Plan International is addressing this global issue is through our Safer Cities for Girls program – implemented also in Honiara, Solomon Islands. This baseline report on Plan International's Safer Cities for Girls Honiara program looks at the experiences, perceptions, and voices of adolescent girls to ensure they are at the centre of our work in transforming cities.

If we're to create a safer, more equal world – one where all children can live happy and healthy lives – it's going to take more than adding lights to darkened public spaces. It's going to need a multi-pronged strategy that focuses on improving the physical and built environment of spaces for girls' safety, embedding girls' voices into how we plan and design our future cities, as well as unpicking deeply rooted gender stereotypes and norms that hinder our progress to gender equality.

Most importantly – it's going to take all of us to make our cities safer for girls. We can't do this alone.

WHAT IS SAFER CITIES FOR GIRLS?

Safer Cities for Girls is a joint program developed by Plan International, Women in Cities International, and UN-HABITAT to address the increased risks that adolescent girls face in cities.

The overarching goal of the program is to ultimately build safe, accountable, and inclusive cities with – and for – adolescent girls (13-18 years). Safer Cities for Girls begun in 2014 in Cairo (Egypt), Delhi (India), Hanoi (Vietnam), and Kampala (Uganda).

Since then, it has been scaled up to run in Alexandria and Assiut (Egypt), Jaipur (India), Honiara (Solomon Islands), Lima (Peru), Asunción (Paraguay), Masbate (Philippines) and Nairobi (Kenya).

SAFER CITIES FOR GIRLS APPROACH
The program works to:

1 Influence governments and policy makers to make laws and city services more receptive and inclusive to girls' safety.

2 Influence families and communities to promote a supportive social environment that promotes girls' safety and inclusion in cities.

3 Engage adolescent girls to be active citizens and agents of change by building capacities, strengthening assests, and creating opportunities for meaningful participation.
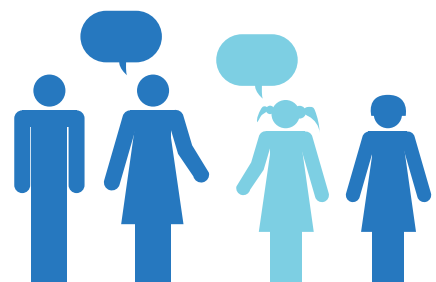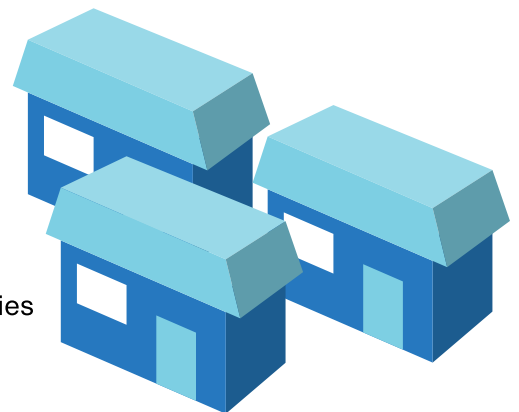
Young women take part in a safety walk in Honiara.

Safer Cities for Girls aims to change not just how safe girls actually are in cities, it works to change how they perceive their own safety.

Actual safety: This relates to a city's crime prevention and response. Although this is relevant, it doesn't provide a complete picture of girls' experiences in cities.

Perceived safety: This relates to how girls feel about their physical environment, such as the lighting, signage, and maintenance of spaces, and their social environment; how people use communal space, and the sense of community in an area. It also relates to either their own experience or their friends' experiences in a certain space, and includes community stories of an area (media and news stories).

This program is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP); and implemented in formal partnership with the Honiara City Council (HCC) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

WHERE WE STARTED

Our Safer Cities for Girls baseline report focused on the experiences, perceptions, and voices of adolescent girls so they are at the centre of transforming our cities.

The tools we used

The policy review tool, which is a qualitative method of analysis that reviews existing national and local policies and programs that are currently in place, and relevant to the safety of adolescent girls.

Individual interviews with key informants are a qualitative tool that provide information on how a broad range of public officials and community leaders view adolescent girls' safety. Interviews assist to triangulate data from the other tools and access information about policies and who holds responsibilities in a city.
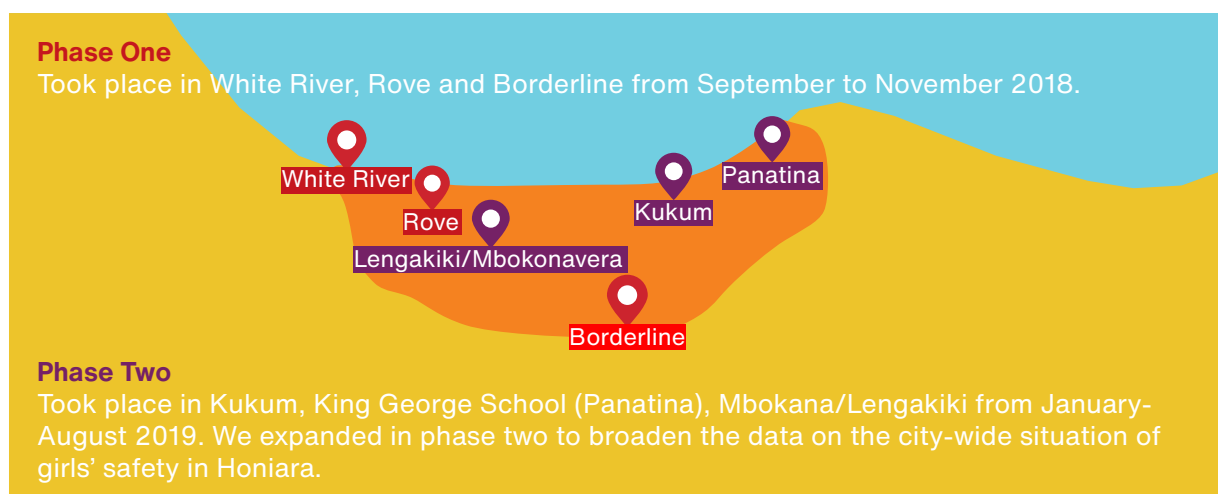
The Girls' Empowerment Star for Safe and Inclusive Cities (GES) is both a qualitative and quantitative tool that allows adolescent girls and boys to communicate their perceptions, opinions and safety concerns.

Street surveys gather the perceptions of adult men and women about the safety of adolescent girls in cities and on public transport.

We used these tools to develop our baseline for the Safer Cities for Girls Honiara report across two phases:

Phase One
Took place in White River, Rove and Borderline from September to November 2018.

White River · Rove · Lengakiki/Mbokonavera · Kukum · Panatina · Borderline

Phase Two
Took place in Kukum, King George School (Panatina), Mbokana/Lengakiki from January-August 2019. We expanded in phase two to broaden the data on the city-wide situation of girls' safety in Honiara.

The research was conducted by an independent team[1] of locally-based researchers who are trained in qualitative and quantitative research techniques and analysis. They hosted focus-group discussions with 236 adolescent girls and 105 adolescent boys.

2,042 adult community members participated in the street survey at busy transport hubs, and 24 key stakeholders were interviewed. There is a high number of adult community members because of their involvement in the street surveys, which allowed us to collect quantitative data that we could compare with in-depth qualitative responses from adolescent girls.

Diversity and inclusion

All of the adolescent participants in this research identify as girls or boys respectively, which is the terminology we've used in this report. We do however recognise that young people may also identify as other genders, and that their gender identity may not reflect the sex that they were assigned at birth. While sexual and gender diversity did not come up in this research, this is likely a reflection of the broader context within Solomon Islands. Gender-diverse people and sexual minority groups are rarely open about their sexual orientation or gender identity because of the stigma, and fact that homosexuality is illegal in Solomon Islands. We recommend that further research should be considered to look at how this factors into girls' safety.

WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Adolescent girls' real and perceived risk of sexual harassment restricts their access to public spaces and public transport

Safety in Public Spaces

After completing our baseline report, it was clear that adolescent girls, boys, and their communities all agreed that girls weren't able to fully participate in Honiara's public spaces because of the high number of harassment and violent incidents, especially at night.

Adolescent girls themselves do not feel safe in public spaces. Of the 236 girls who participated in the Honiara focus group, only 7% of girls said they "always feel safe in public". The reasons girls do not feel safe are the high levels of sexist behaviours and sexual harassment they have experienced – or fear they will experience – in public.

The top five perceived safety risks for girls in public spaces were:

1. Drunk and intoxicated people
2. Theft
3. Verbal Harassment
4. Touching
5. Rape

Results on how girls felt in public spaces are similar to those in the Safer Cities for Girls global baseline (2017), which looked at six cities around the world.

Proportion of girls who report that they always feel safe in public spaces in their city.

Kampala 14%	
Hanoi 13%	
Delhi 4%	
Cairo 8%	
Lima 3%	
Nairobi 12.5%	
Honiara 7%	
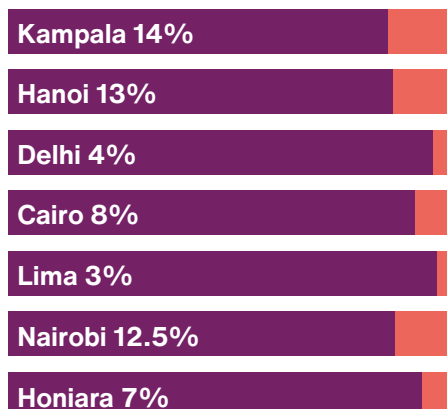
A key finding of Plan International's Unsafe In The City report on young women's perception on safety in five cities globally (2018) was that the underlying cause of many girls' and young women's feeling of insecurity is men's behaviour – particularly the use of violence against women and girls.[2]

Safety on Public Transport

ONLY 5% OF GIRLS IN THE FOCUS GROUP SAID THEY

"ALWAYS FEEL SAFE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT."

Travelling to school was considered particularly unsafe, with some girls reporting that they experience intoxicated drivers and staff on public transport – coupled with tragic reports of a recent abduction, sexual assault and murder of a girl by a public transport driver.

The top five perceived safety risks for girls on public transport were:

1. Drunk and intoxicated drivers and conductors
2. Drunk and intoxicated passengers
3. Verbal Harassment
4. Rape
5. Touching

Physical changes to public spaces and transport

The top three recommendations from adolescent girls on how Honiara could improve their safety in public spaces were focussed on physical changes to the built environment and transport networks. These were:

- Increased security staff (particularly around schools and public spaces)

- Increased surveillance equipment (lights and security cameras at bus stops and public areas)

- Better law enforcement (patrols and prosecution) to act against crimes in public spaces and transport

Although both adolescent girls and boys feel safety in public spaces and on transport can be improved by changing the built environment and by preventing crime, they hadn't considered the responsibility of people, particularly men, to change their behaviours. There wasn't an awareness on how the norms, attitudes and behaviours of boys and men can lead to sexual harassment of adolescent girls in public spaces and on transport.

GIRLS SPEAK

Here's what some adolescent girls – aged between 14 to 24 and living in Honiara – had to say:

"If you walk about on your own, you don't know when an accident might happen to you. Any man or any boy can rape you. So, it's not safe to walk about on your own".

"Even me, I will not feel safe when walking about town. When you walk about you look around and some men stand up, staring and come follow you – so it's not really safe for us girls."

"No matter if you might see police there [in public spaces], still bad activities happen to girls in our society ... people take girls and hurt them, even kill them, so our places are not safe. And when we girls hear about these things we really do not feel safe."

"For example, you are a girl, you go on your own inside the bus and it is empty – the bus driver and conductors have wicked minds, like they will keep driving with the girl inside, then kidnap the girl and take her where they want to take her."

"A girl might be late and she wants to ring a taxi – sometimes if the taxi driver has a good mind then it's ok, but if not then it's not safe for girls to go in public transport."

"Sometimes us girls go through difficulties in life, like if parents do not work. We will not feel safe because any man will lie to us about money and do terrible things to us inside public transport like taxis and buses."

Girls with disabilities

Further, adolescent girls with disabilities reported that they are excluding themselves entirely from public spaces and public transport.

"I heard a story that my sister, they harassed her on the road, so I learnt from that and I do not like to go walkabout too."

"My mum stops me from going anywhere when it is dark."

"Sometimes when we walkabout and follow the road I do not want to talk to anyone, I am just quiet."

2. The problem cannot be blamed on a lack of lighting – entrenched gender norms and social structures contribute to girls' lack of safety

Increasing the safety of girls and women in public spaces is going to take more than improving the built environment, such as adding more lights. Although physical improvements can have an impact on real and perceived safety, it's important to understand that it's not just about improving physical spaces – it's about changing attitudes and behaviours.

Entrenched social and gender norms and stereotypes in Honiara – including the normalisation of violence against women, adolescent girls and children – is a large contributing factor to the lack of safety of girls in public spaces.

Gender norms and stereotypes

Gender inequality in the Solomon Islands is seen to be driven (and supported) by deeply held views and societal structures.

The recent, Ending Violence Against Children (2019) report states *"communities [in the Pacific and Timor-Leste] are deeply patriarchal with entrenched notions of gender roles developed through traditional ideologies, customary practices and powerful religious influences."*[3]

Furthermore, research undertaken on adolescent girls' education in Honiara (Plan International 2019[4]), adolescent girls' state, *'Gender inequality is a fact of life: from the youngest ages, but particularly once we hit adolescence, boys are seen as the priority. It includes the expectations placed on us to perform certain roles, especially completing housework, looking after siblings or older relatives, and working in the gardens. We girls carry too much of the workload [housework], and this is unfair. We do an average of 15-20 hours of chores a week, whereas boys do next to nothing – anywhere from one to six hours a week.'*

Violence is often a result of unequal gender and power dynamics.

Understanding the relationship between social and gender norms, and the normalisation of violence against women, girls and children in public, in the home, and at school is important. Girls and boys experience different forms of violence. Girls are more likely to experience psychological bullying, sexual violence and harassment, whereas boys are more likely to experience corporal punishment and physical violence. And we know that globally, children who do not conform to gender norms or stereotypes, are particularly vulnerable to violence and bullying (End Violence Against Children, 2019).[5]

Violence also contributes to a destabilising cycle of violence where child victims are more likely to be perpetrators or victims later in life. We know that when children experience high levels of violence at home, this can result in a range of anti-social and aggressive behaviours, which ultimately threaten the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.[6] When children have witnessed or experienced violence, they have a higher tendency to normalise it, and this is expressed in different ways between boys and girls. Research shows girls who have witnessed or experienced violence have a higher tendency to internalise an expectation of violence in their own intimate relationships.[7] Boys have a higher likelihood to model the behaviours of their father, and to continue the cycle of violence.[8]

Victim blaming

What is this? We define victim blaming as an act where the victim of a crime, accident, or any type of abuse is held as wholly or partially responsible for the wrongful conduct committed against them.

Most participants reflected their belief that girls should not be 'going around' at night or be unaccompanied. This indicates a deeply entrenched belief that girls are responsible for their own safety, and should modify their behaviours – or exclude themselves entirely from public spaces – rather than focus on the need for men to take responsibility for their violent behaviours and stop sexually harassing girls. Girls are given the impression that by dressing or behaving a certain way, they are protected from violence. However, studies around the world show this is clearly not the case (e.g. **https://harassmap. org/en/myths-and-responses**).

In all baseline focus groups, there were comments on how the way girls dressed or acted contributed to harassment and violence, from both boys and girls:

"Us girls, too, sometimes how we wear clothes like it will make some people to go like "shhh shhh" [sound to get attention] and come behind us, follow us." **Adolescent girl, 14-24, Honiara.**

"If us girls do the right thing at the right time and at the right place we will be safe, so that's it, us ourselves can make our country safe, that is all." **Adolescent girl, 14-24, Honiara.**

"If girls wear trousers, men will be led to do things because they look nice." **Adolescent boy, 14-24, Borderline.**

"Girls don't be so open and tempting of men." **Man, 18-25 years, Borderline.**

"Girls should go to church to avoid these [safety] problems." **Man, 26-40, Rove.**

The good news is there is anecdotal evidence that these attitudes are shifting – and results from the interviews in our baseline report highlighted that many condemned victim blaming. However, more work is to be done to shift this belief throughout the community.

Alcohol and Mood-altering Substances

Kwaso is perceived as a key factor in triggering and exacerbating harmful attitudes and violent behaviour towards women and girls. Research suggests that while alcohol is not a direct cause of violence against women, excessive alcohol use can *'exacerbate violence against women, weakening pro-social or positive behaviour in individuals and at a community level'.*[9] Interviews with key community members showed that easy access to inexpensive home brewed alcohol (Kwaso) was considered a key factor why the community feels girls are not safe in public in Honiara – as intoxicated people are seen main perpetrators of violence.

Bystander culture

Despite the small size of Honiara and it being common for people to often greet those they know in the street, it's clear that this doesn't contribute to a safe environment for girls.

86% of women and 82% of men reported they would not intervene if they witness sexual harassment of girls in public. The main reasons for this came from fear, or thinking it was not 'my business'. This is in line with Plan International's research on street harassment (2018) – included in the document review – that was undertaken in five cities around the world and found bystander intervention is not common.[10] Research has also found that in a group setting, if one person is aggressive, there is a higher chance that this can act as a trigger for others who might otherwise not commit aggressive acts.[11]

3. Girls' voices and experiences aren't valued

Due to entrenched gender and cultural norms, very little value is placed on girls' voices and their experiences. These norms become barriers for young women and girls – stopping them from being able to influence change, or to be key decision-makers in their community.

ONLY 38% OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS FELT THEY COULD SPEAK UP IN FRONT OF ADULTS

pointing to norms which do not include adolescent girls in adult conversations or decision-making spaces.

ONLY 14% OF GIRLS FELT THEIR SAFETY CONCERNS WERE VALUED AND HEARD

When discussing pregnancy and boyfriends, some girls expressed their fear in talking to adults about these two things, in case they are blamed or experience violence. Some adolescent girls pointed out the difficulty in trying to talk to men in general about their safety concerns, because a man could be a perpetrator himself and likely responsible for harassment and violence.

We know that girls want to be involved in decision-making. They want their voices heard. Yet cultural norms privilege male voices and participation in decision-making, coupled with the perception that women and girls 'aren't capable of speaking out' – all which limits the space for them to do so.

Both adolescent girls and boys aged 14-24 cited 'culture' as a reason why girls do not speak up.

Here's what girls had to say:

"Why I say sometimes [girls can't talk in front of an adult] is because some adults too do not respect us girls when we pass them, so we are frightened of them too, that's how we feel."

"Sometimes girls are fearful because of the situation they go through, either it's private or they do not really feel good to share it with their parents. Either outcome is not good and they feel uncomfortable to share their feelings."

"Some girls do not speak out about their issues so it's hard for anyone to take actions about what us girls face so they just ignore it. Unless any type of organisation faces it then they [girls] will just like to talk about it and take action against it."

"The women are fearful to stand up and tell their ideas they want to tell because the men will look down on the women."

"It depends only on the girls who are well educated they can talk inside those kinds of meetings and they are brave enough that if they are asked to talk on their views about issues in the community to make decisions they will."

"If you talk when the big men are there then they would say 'none of you should be here' and chase you away."

All quotes from adolescent girls aged 14-24 years.

Girls with disabilities only speak up if the setting is deliberately designed for them

Some girls with disabilities who took part in the baseline report pointed out they could only go to meetings if parents took them. Deaf girls also needed interpreters, which were difficult to come by. One adolescent girl with a disability shared:

"At a meeting I would be ignored, as if I am an idiot." **Adolescent girl with disability, 14-24, Honiara**

Education is key

One thing was clear though – education can give girls the encouragement and confidence they need to raise their voices.

"In the past, girls do not have the right to stand up in front but this time, due to education, they have the right ... because girls are educated and know what is right and wrong and according to creation women and men have the right to tell out whatever, so yes, both of them have rights to talk about issues they have in life." **Adolescent girl, 14-24, Honiara.**

Neslyn, 20, outside her home near Honiara.

Mary, 13, out the front of her school in Solomon Islands.

4. Public transport in Honiara is unregulated and working with individual transport companies or owner-drivers is challenging.

When participants were asked, 'what could be done to improve adolescent girls' safety in public?', the top responses were:

1. Remove tint from bus and taxi windows

2. Conduct awareness training on good conduct and anti-sexual harassment for all transport staff (including how drivers can report sexual harassment they witness and how to respond and support girls and women when it occurs)

3. Employ more female staff on public transport

4. Introduce identification for transport staff and vehicles and uniforms to enable reporting

5. Prohibit drinking alcohol by transport staff and passengers

This issue was also taken to Parliament by the Young Women's Parliamentary Group[12], which resulted in an ordinance with the Honiara City Council to enforce the removal of the dark tint on bus and taxi windows. However, Honiara City Council doesn't yet have authority to enforce the ordinance due to the lack of regulation governing buses and taxis. Other city-wide challenges in Honiara also need to be overcome – such as finding ways to engage drivers in a training that could potentially temporarily take them away from their job and impact their income.

5. Authorities are engaged and willing to take action to improve the safety of adolescent girls, but their reach is limited.

As a partner to our Safer Cities for Girls program, Honiara City Council has a role to play in including the voices and opinions of adolescent girls to look at how to make physical spaces safer – such as the installation of more streetlights and cleaner environments. When the program launched, the Honiara City Council facilitated the program by cleaning and refurbishing an underpass linking pedestrians to the Honiara Central Market (August 2019).

However, without ongoing funding, these improvements are challenging. In addition, Honiara City Council does not own all spaces that were proposed for a rebuild or refurbishment. Alongside this, infrastructure and security are weak due to a weak legislative environment and lack of funds and capacity for local government to enforce policy and ordinances.

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and security personnel also have an important role in adolescent girl's safety in public places. Increased surveillance and policing were included in the top three priorities, however global research indicates Police and other authorities can also perpetuate victim blaming and harassment. Plan International therefore recommends training within the Police Force and other relevant authorities, to improve their response and reporting rates.[13]

THE ACTIONS SAFER CITIES FOR GIRLS CAN TAKE

1. Develop a program strategy with key stakeholders on how to change gender norms and address sexual harassment

To change some of the attitudes and behaviours outlined in this report, we need a strategy that takes power dynamics into account, and is jointly developed and owned by government agencies and NGOs. We recognise that work in this area is already happening, which is why Safer Cities for Girls will collaborate with key partners and stakeholders to address gaps and avoid duplication.

Although this strategy would be developed for Honiara with adolescent girls, boys and local stakeholders, it could build on Plan International's experiences from the other cities running the Safer Cities for Girls program, and the success we've seen with actions such as;

- starting conversations between young people and adults about gender norms, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against adolescent girls in public spaces

- engaging communities and general public in discussions on gender based violence

- public campaigning against sexual harassment and promoting girls' safety in public spaces

- working with partners and role models to promote different behaviours

- collaborate with partners willing to implement the Champions of Change program, and cultivate a 'call it out' culture.

To make it specific to Honiara, it's important this strategy takes into consideration;

1. **The accessibility of Kwaso and its relation in exacerbating sexist behaviours and sexual harassment.**
Key stakeholders could involve boys and girls, the Ministry of Health, Honiara City Council, Solomon Islands Brewery Ltd, International Non-Government Organisations, Community Based Organisations, Royal Solomon Island Police Force, and adolescent girls and boys.

2. **Further explore the perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls in relation to police and security.**
Key stakeholders could include the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, Honiara City Council, taxi and bus operators, non-government organisations, and community-based organisations addressing violence against women and girls. This work could look more deeply at the role and opportunities for Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to work closely with others to improve the safety of adolescent girls.

3. **Contribute to raising awareness of sexual harassment and victim blaming in public spaces and on transport**
Key stakeholders could include Honiara City Council, Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, taxi and bus operators, non-government organisations, community-based organisations addressing violence against women and girls, adolescent girls and boys as well as parents, community leaders and the general public, to address the root causes of sexual harassment of adolescent girls.

2. Support school and public-transport providers to listen to what girls are saying on how to improve their safety

The program will work collectively with schools, transport providers, representatives of civil society and government, and adolescent girls, to find positive motivations for transport workers to remove dark tinting from bus and taxi windows. Introducing identification of vehicles and transport staff will also improve the ability for girls to report any problems.

It can also work with communities to establish training for taxi and bus drivers on how to change their behaviour and encourage their employers to hire more female staff.

Some of our previous research[14] has also explored the barriers to education that adolescent girls in Solomon Islands face. One of the recommendations was to introduce designated school buses so girls could travel safely and cheaply to school. Although providing school buses could improve the safety for adolescent girls in the short term, it doesn't address the behaviours of men and boys that contribute to girls' feeling unsafe. Therefore, long-term strategies to encourage behaviour change of bus and taxi drivers is also needed.

Philomena, 13, sits in class in the Solomon Islands.

3. Work in partnership with Honiara City Council to include adolescent girls in decision making about public spaces – and support government workers to undergo training as part of the Safer Cities for Girls program

While there are existing structures for adolescent girls to work with decision makers, including the Honiara City Council Youth Council, there are opportunities to increase girls' participation in decision making about public spaces and transport. The Youth Council consists of youth members from each of Honiara's 12 wards. Whist the Youth Council do not directly influence Honiara City Councillors or engage in decision-making processes, its inclusion of adolescent girls is important for representation, and to help build their skills and confidence. It is also an important mechanism girls can use themselves to raise issues about their own safety.

Our partnership with Honiara City Council presents an opportunity for young people to be more heavily involved in urban planning. Honiara City Council supports adolescent girls and boys to partake in the Safer Cities for Girls Honiara program through the Division for Women and Youth, however the partnership should extend beyond this division into other areas responsible for urban planning, infrastructure and services.

Honiara City Council staff across a range of divisions should engage in the Safer Cities for Girls training, and there must be deliberate – and regular – engagement between adolescent girls and those responsible for improving their safety through policies, planning, and services.

Lastly, Honiara City Council can further support girls' safety by collecting data on the issues they're facing and breaking it down by gender, age and exclusion criteria, such as disability. This information should be used to design policies and processes to address girls' safety in Honiara. Designing and planning inclusive cities requires us to work with girls and young women in the design, implementation and monitoring of both infrastructure and services.

Children on their way to school in West Guadalcanal.

4. Influence existing groups and create online spaces where girls can make decisions on their safety

We need to find opportunities for girls and young women to participate in decision-making or policy-influencing spaces. We know these opportunities are limited, but there appears to be existing formal spaces where girls can share their recommendations on how to improve their safety in Honiara. One example is the Young Women's Parliamentary Group, established in 2011. This group consists of young women (over 18 up to age 35) and has the potential to amplify the voices of adolescent girls in Solomon Islands National Parliament. The group's patron is the Solomon Islands Prime Minister.

There are also informal spaces such as social media platforms where young people can raise awareness of issues and influence decision makers. Those interviewed as part of the research suggested using a Facebook group for sharing information and raising awareness on key safety issues. Facebook is influential because telecommunication companies are providing 'Facebook-free' data in the Solomon Islands, making it a widely-used platform. It's clear there is an opportunity for the program to run across informal spaces – such as social media – to increase girls' safety in Honiara.

5. Collaborate with existing projects that support the elimination of violence against women and girls

We know collaboration is key. The recently formed Ending Violence Against Children Coalition (EVAC) helps to raise certain issues related to the prevention of violence against children and girls in both policy and advocacy settings.

One of the EVAC members expressed a willingness to engage the EVAC coalition on the issues outlined in the program.

There is also the potential to work with the Anglican Church, who currently run the only safe house for women and children in Honiara. There is a good understanding of gender equality amongst some of the Church's staff and leadership, who have attended gender training (including for male advocates) with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. One key stakeholder expressed a willingness to explore a collaboration with Plan International's Champions of Change Program, which works to support and empower adolescent girls on their rights, as well as working with boys on gender equality and positive masculinities.

CONCLUSION

The State of the World's Girls report, calls for everyone to take responsibility for girls' safety in public spaces.

It is everyone's responsibility to condemn harassment and violence against girls and women. More specifically men and boys need to recognise that sexist behaviour is intolerable and change it by learning to respect girls and women as their equals: standing out against the culture of verbal and physical abuse, not standing by. And understanding also that harassment should not be part of a "normal" life for girls and young women. It is not harmless fun, it is frightening, disempowering and completely unacceptable.[15]

The baseline research shows that adolescent girls don't feel safe in the public spaces and on public transport in Honiara. To stop the perpetuating violence against girls and women, we will need multiple and simultaneous strategies to change policy, improve public transport and infrastructure, and to challenge and break down gender norms.

We know that the work needed to change these deeply entrenched norms must be done in partnership and coalition – it cannot be achieved by one organisation or one program alone.

If we're to create a safer, more equal world for girls – our Safer Cities for Girls program must also collaborate with a range of key partners in Honiara, so that girls' voices and experiences are heard and valued.

Anecdotal evidence show that change is already happening. For example, training, conversations and exposure to new ideas appear to contribute to more people challenging victim blaming. Some younger families are also choosing to raise their sons and their daughters more equally.

There also appears to be an increasing awareness on the importance of listening to girls' voices, so much so that girls themselves are speaking up and demanding their rights.

But there is still more to be done. That's why Plan International, along with our partners, are committed to making the world's cities safer for all girls. Because a safer world for girls, means a better world for everyone.

For further information about Safer Cities for Girls Honiara, please contact Ella Kauhue
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Front cover image: *Monica, 19, outside her home in Honiara.*

ENDNOTES

1   Led by Dr Anouk Ride, the team included local researchers Melinda Ki'l and Miriam Resture, Alice Eric and Raywin Aluta

2   Goulds, S et al: Unsafe in the City: the everyday experiences of girls in the city (State of the World's Girls), 2018

3   Suthanthiraraj, Kavitha et al; Unseen, Unsafe: the underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, Save the Children 2019

4   Philips, K et al; Stronger Together: Girls leading change in the Solomon Islands - equal access to secondary education, Plan International Australia, 2019

5   Suthanthiraraj, Kavitha et al; Unseen, Unsafe: the underinvestment in ending violence against children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, Save the Children 2019.

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