



Standing with Girls in 2025

A summary of our impact evidence snapshots

Foreword

Who would have imagined that a girl from a tiny, remote village in Rwanda, where dreams often seemed out of reach, could one day sit at global tables shaping youth leadership and gender equality programming? Yet here I am, 25 years old, reflecting on a journey that began when Plan International empowered me at 14 giving me confidence, knowledge, and the courage to dream beyond the corridors where girls' voices were once silenced. That early support led me to become part of Plan's Global Young Influencers, connecting me to peers and mentors worldwide with whom I co-create campaigns and advocate for the rights and opportunities of fellow young people.

Since then, I have grown alongside extraordinary young leaders. Together, through YVLEAD, the organization we formed as Girls Get Equal Ambassadors, and with Plan's guidance in capacity building, we have created spaces where girls can make informed decisions about their bodies, exercise their agency, and raise their voices. Today, we are no longer hidden; we are at the forefront, at the table, shaping decisions that affect our communities and the wider world.



Joselyne gives a speech at the Women Deliver Conference in Kigali in 2023.

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**We are the hands that build tomorrow,
The voices once silent, now heard and proud.
We choose, we decide, we stand,
For bodies, minds, and futures unbound.**

This work is more than programmes; it is a movement of hearts and minds. Young people, especially girls, are no longer confined to corridors where our voices went unheard. We have agency, the knowledge to make informed decisions about our bodies, and we are increasingly at the forefront, at the table where decisions that shape our lives are being made. I have seen families, schools, and local leaders challenge harmful norms, governments open doors for youth participation, and young leaders rise with ideas that heal, empower, and inspire.

May this spirit continue to echo across generations, proving that youth leadership is not the promise of tomorrow, it is the power we hold today.

Joselyne, Global Young Influencer, Rwanda

Introduction

Plan International works with children, young people and their communities in over 80 countries, work which is constantly being evaluated so that as an organisation we learn and improve.

This short report draws on the review of our programming carried out this year and summarises some of the insights from the evidence gathered. The review is quantitative – there are lots of numbers – but also qualitative, drawing on earlier research, listening to the people we work with and looking both at what has been done and at what we can learn from it.

International development does not operate in a vacuum and 2025 has been a challenging year, characterised by greater need, reduced funding, and a pushback against both internationalism and gender equality. The aftermath of COVID-19 has continued to be damaging in terms of reduced economic prosperity for many families and nations, increased mental health issues and, for young people in particular, a very negative impact on their education, and consequently, their opportunities in life. Any gains made over the last decade need to be protected, and progress, where it can be spotted, celebrated.

The focus of our analysis for this report centres on six priority thematic areas, plus work responding to humanitarian emergencies. These areas are: **early childhood development, inclusive, quality, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, leadership – girls, boys and youth driving change, protection against violence, youth employment and entrepreneurship, and responding to immediate needs in crisis situations.** Underpinning all these is supporting girls' rights and promoting gender equality which are key drivers of Plan International's work across all countries and programme areas. Gender equality is fundamentally a human rights issue but research shows that female empowerment also helps lift families and communities out of poverty, safeguards children's wellbeing and protects against violence.¹ As an organisation we stand with girls to tear down barriers, save lives and build a world where equality for girls leads to progress for all.



An 11-year-old from Cambodia would like to be a teacher when she grows up.

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A central insight across the board, and this is not news to Plan, is the value of integrated holistic programming which means flexible and strategic funding. Everything is connected: improving the education and health of girls, for example, leads to a decrease in mortality and fertility rates, lower health costs, healthier and more educated children, and it can also help reduce inter-generational poverty. The importance of girls' education has also been linked to several Sustainable Development Goals including reducing conflict, achieving clean water and sanitation, as well as tackling climate change.

People and their families do not live in silos, and we must not work in them. Our evidence review reaffirms the importance of understanding how communities actually live and interact, seeing where their priorities lie, and working with them to bring about change.

1. Zawisza, M., et al. 2025. Worse for Women, Bad for All: A 62-Nation Study. *Social Psychological and Personality Science. Journal.*

1 Early Childhood Development



Two young sisters from Cambodia.
©Plan International

The importance of early childhood development has become increasingly understood over the last decades, and this topic is an area that fully illustrates the importance of integrated programming.

Nutrition programmes, health services, education provision, sanitation projects, parenting classes, an understanding of girls' rights and capabilities, all combine to promote the welfare of small children, helping them to survive and thrive.

Since 2000, global under-five mortality has **declined by 52 per cent.**²

However, progress is slowing down, and preventable deaths, especially among newborns, remain high.

250 million children are **at risk** of not reaching their full developmental potential due to insufficient nutrition and early stimulation.³

Additionally, despite a growing recognition of the importance of early learning this has not translated into comprehensive pre-school provision.



Nearly **60 per cent** of children in lower- and middle-income countries **lack pre-primary education.**⁴

2. United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME). 2025. [Levels & Trends Report 2024, Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation.](#)
3. [World Bank. Early Childhood Development](#) (updated April 05, 2024).
4. UNESCO and UNICEF. 2024. The right to a strong foundation, Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education.

Plan International's Programming in 2025



This year, Plan's early childhood development programming reached **57 million** children and adults, including 14 million girls, providing them with a **better start in life.**

Plan's gender-responsive parenting initiatives, including the Parenting Under Pressure (PUP) programme, significantly strengthened positive parenting practices with several projects reporting over 90 per cent of parents actively engaging with their children: improving the health and wellbeing of both children and parents and promoting gender equality and harmony at home as fathers played their part in childcare.

88 per cent of parents and caregivers we spoke to in our projects this year had recently **engaged with their young children in activities critical to promoting their learning and socio-emotional development.**

- Parents in **Rwanda** were, on average, undertaking one more child nurturing task per week 18 months after the end of Plan's **Real Fathers** project, with fathers undertaking 69 per cent more nurturing tasks per week. This is strong evidence of sustained change in parenting practices.
- In **Uganda** men became more involved in daily childcare needs, taking sick children to appointments, assisting with immunisations, cooking, and performing household chores, tasks previously considered "*inconceivable for men*" while mothers felt they were better able to care for their children without suffering anxiety or using corporal punishment.

Plan's nutrition initiatives played a vital role in supporting healthy growth, cognitive development, and overall wellbeing for children.

Over **611,000** people – including **556,000 children** – were **screened for malnutrition**, through projects in **10 countries.**

Over **360,000** people – including **356,000 children under five years old** – were **treated for moderate or severe acute malnutrition**, across **11 countries.**



- In **Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso**, Plan projects achieved 100 per cent of their goals for treatment of children with severe and moderate acute malnutrition.
- In **India**, a nutrition garden initiative led to 93 per cent of households consuming vegetables daily.
- In **Cambodia**, 27 per cent more caregivers were providing a minimum acceptable diet to children under two by the project end.

“Parents learned not to feed their kids junk food, put[ting] carrots and sweet potatoes into the porridge and giv[ing] eggs.”

Participant in Community-Based Integrated Child Development and Protection Project, Myanmar.

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Access to safe water and sanitation, improved significantly across numerous projects.

84 per cent of households sampled through our projects this year were using at least basic sanitation and hygiene facilities – critical if children are to grow up in healthy environments.



Over
420,000
people, including
157,000 women
and girls, gained
access to safe
water and improved
sanitation through
projects in 18 countries.



Children in Vietnam learn how to wash their hands properly at school.

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Integrated programming across nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, and maternal health consistently delivered stronger and more sustainable outcomes than standalone interventions: with nutrition improving physical development, access to safe water eradicating diarrhoea and saving lives, and improvements in maternal health benefitting children's.

Plan International's early learning interventions improved pre-schools, bettered parental and community attitudes to early childhood education, and enhanced teaching quality, boosting school enrolment.

- In **Togo**, the **PADIPET** project achieved an 81 per cent enrolment rate for children aged 3-5, a 33-percentage point increase from the start of the project. Many parents and teachers directly attributed this to the introduction of a school canteen, again demonstrating the intersections between early learning and sectors like nutrition.
- Plan's 12-week school readiness programme **LearnPlus** had positive results in **Cambodia** and **Tanzania**, significantly increasing on-time enrolment in Cambodia, while contributing to improvements in children's shape identification and puzzle-solving and social skills, empathy and conflict resolution in Tanzania. However, there remain opportunities to strengthen **LearnPlus'** impact on foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes.

In Summary

Early childhood lays the foundations for an entire life-time. Investing in children's health and wellbeing means investing in their parents and communities too: in education and sanitation, in nutrition and infrastructure. Only then will they get the start in life which every child deserves.

2 Inclusive and Quality Education

Promoting gender equality in education has been a key component of Plan International's work over the last two decades.

We know that keeping girls in school needs a multiplicity of different interventions. Globally, there has been progress, enrolment rates have increased, with 50 million more girls enrolled in school since 2015, but there is no room for complacency.

122 million girls remain out of school.⁵

Research reveals worrying gaps in overall service provision including:

- curricula that are not responsive to young people's needs, particularly with regard to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and to Climate Change preparedness.

“ We had SRHR as one of the topics in our biology class. However, our teacher simply decided to skip this topic.”

Adolescent Girl, 15 to 19 years old, Ukraine.⁶

- little attempt by governments and local organisations to provide education, including remote learning, for those increasing numbers of young people affected by humanitarian emergencies whether climate-related or driven by conflict, displacement and poverty.



Standing with Girls in 2025

A 15-year-old and her friends stand in the doorway of their school in Kilifi county in Kenya.

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“ I had great interest in learning but when the war broke out, we stopped learning. We didn't attend class even for year. Due to the continued war, many of the children lost their parents ... The high school we were learning at, its classrooms were burnt. The school was almost empty, no books and chairs. We shared one book for 12 students. Many students had no exercise books and uniforms.”

Young woman, 18 years old, Ethiopia.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in greater gender inequality in education with nearly one-third of young women neither in education, employment, nor training, compared to around 16 per cent of young men.⁸ Meeting Sustainable Development Goal Four, a commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, by 2030, remains unlikely at current funding levels.

5. UNESCO. [Progress on girls' access to education: What the new UNESCO data reveals](#) (data updated 15 March

6. Plan International. 2024. [Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania](#). 2024).

7. Plan International. 2024. State of the World's Girls 2024. [Still We Dream – Girls and young people living through conflict](#).

8. Statista. 2023. [Share of population not in education, training, or employment worldwide in 2023, by gender and region](#).

Plan International's Programming in 2025

Our inclusive, quality education programming reached **14 million** children and adults, including providing 5.1 million girls with better access to education.



This year's evaluations revealed strong improvements in teaching practices.

Across projects, **91 per cent** of teachers observed this year were using learner-centred, gender-responsive, inclusive teaching approaches.

Plan International's education projects expanded access to education, including in emergency contexts.



Our programming has supported over **over 550,000** children and young people – including 260,000 girls – across 20 countries to progress to the next stage of their education.

Distributing financial support in the form of bursaries, scholarships and learning materials to vulnerable families was highlighted as critical to ensure children remain in school. Water, sanitation and hygiene interventions also contribute to school attendance rates, especially for girls.

- Under the multisectoral *Girls Get Equal* project, reductions were seen in dropout rates for girls across six countries including an impressive 11 percentage point reduction in dropout for secondary students in **Niger**.

- This year's evaluations revealed **substantial improvements in learning outcomes** in foundational subjects like literacy and numeracy. In **India** 97 per cent of students who attended the *Shikshantar* supplementary learning centres demonstrated competency in core subjects like English and Maths compared to the start of the project where barely any students, less than one per cent, showed competency. In **Uganda**, 68 per cent of students attending supported primary schools achieved at least minimal reading and maths proficiency, up 40 percentage points from before the project, while in **Niger**, 74 per cent of pupils at Plan supported schools were proficient in maths, which was 49 percentage points higher than the group who were not supported by the project.
- **Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions showed strong results** across several projects, including 100 per cent of targeted schools with inclusive WASH facilities in **Tanzania**, improved hygiene behaviours for 85 per cent of children in **Nepal**, and 98 per cent of girls in **Bangladesh** able to access running water latrines and handwashing facilities in school.
- **School feeding projects reached over a million children**, nearly half of them girls. School meals both encourage children to remain in school and mean they learn more effectively.
- **Menstrual health and hygiene efforts significantly reduced school absences**, with 87 per cent of girls taking part in a project in **Nepal** and 97 per cent similarly in **Bangladesh** reporting no missed school days, supported by sanitary pad availability and rest spaces.
- **Plan International achieved notable policy influence across several countries**, driving government action to strengthen inclusive, gender-responsive education systems and disaster preparedness. In **Nepal**, the *STEAM Ahead* project worked closely with local governments to adopt inclusive, gender-responsive education policies, including education in emergency plans, child protection policies, local curricula as well as disaster risk reduction plans. In **Bangladesh**, national level engagement prompted the government to consider adjusting school calendars in disaster-prone areas, while in **Uganda** Plan's projects led to the modification of tools for government school supervision and inspection to include items such as supportive learning environment and gender and inclusion markers.



A 15-year-old is part of Plan International's Balika Shivar programme that supports out-of-school girls in remote areas of India.

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In Summary

Increasing access to quality education means influencing governments and donors, raising awareness in communities, improving school environments and discovering new ways of teaching and learning. We need to continue exploring scalable, low-cost education technology ('EdTech') solutions. As digital learning grows globally, Plan's future efforts can focus on inclusive, locally relevant technologies that match teacher capacity and learner needs.

Research also consistently reveals that gender disparities in education remain, involving teachers and students alike. Accessing education is particularly difficult for girls affected by conflict, poverty, and displacement: their families are worried for their safety, they have domestic responsibilities and in times of crisis, and shortage of cash, their education is unlikely to be prioritised. Poverty drives inequality.

“ The payment of school fees stands out for me the most. It stands out because it represents the essentials for my education. I was never sent away from school to go and get fees because Plan International had already paid for me. Some of the children had to go back home while we were studying. They would spend days and some, weeks absent from school ... if it was not [for] Plan, I would have stopped in those low primary classes.”

Adolescent Girl, 16 years old, Uganda.⁹

9. Plan International and RMIT. 2024. [Changing Lives 2024 – The impact of Plan International's child sponsorship programmes in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Uganda.](#)

3 LEAD: Girls, Boys and Youth as Active Drivers of Change

Fundamental to Plan International's work is engaging with young people who are so often excluded from civic life.

They have a lot to contribute and must be enabled to take part in the decisions that affect their lives, and be taken seriously in local, national and international fora.

“ I believe it is the youth that can build a country and to achieve this the youth must be given an opportunity to play a role in the development of their country. Starting from myself, I want to play my own role in the development of my country.”

Adolescent Girl, 16 years old, Ethiopia.¹⁰

Young people, girls and boys, are eager to lead and participate, but face persistent barriers:

- Funding cuts and restrictive donor requirements make it harder for youth-led organisations to access resources.
- Civic space is shrinking, particularly for girls and young women, due to anti-rights movements, restrictive legislation, and online abuse.
- International policy language around girls' rights is increasingly diluted with vague terms, and parental authority undermining girls' autonomy.



Young friends from a youth club in Cambodia.
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“ Being a woman is difficult and it is unfair how men perceive and berate women online and in person. The world is going backwards, and it is terrifying to witness.”

Survey participant, 20 years old, South-East England.¹¹

10. Plan International. 2024. State of the World's Girls 2024. [Still We Dream – Girls and young people living through conflict.](#)
11. Plan International UK. 2024. [The State of Girls' Rights in the UK.](#)

Plan International's Programmes in 2025

Evidence from this year demonstrates how we are continuing to support young people to take action on the issues that are important to them. Through building both soft and technical skills, providing safe and protective collaborative spaces, and meaningfully engaging families, communities, local leaders and national and international authorities, children, adolescents and youth were able to actively participate in a range of decision making. Multi-faceted support to youth, girl and women-led groups is essential to combating the current rollback of rights.

1.1 million girls were supported to be **active citizens**.



Programming for girls, boys and youth as active drivers of change reached 8.8 million people.

Despite the current climate, youth collective action achieves results. Evidence from this year points to successes, especially in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. Youth-led organisations are implementing impactful initiatives, building leadership and solidarity, and influencing policy at multiple levels.

- In **Colombia**, the project *Empoderarte por la paz* provided young people with technical training, platforms and spaces for collaboration, and opportunities for them to lead activities, acting as role models for peers in their communities. By the end of the project, girls and boys had strengthened their abilities in leadership and 83 per cent of girls felt empowered, compared to only 24 per cent beforehand.
- The multi-country *Programa Regional de Juventudes* worked with youth-led organisations, and networks in five countries across the Region of the Americas to position youth as right holders and agents of change within their social and political spheres. Plan International implemented a tailored combination of interventions, including:
 - providing opportunities to participate in regional spaces to increase visibility and share achievements.
 - supporting access to key funds and collaborations with civil society organisations and international entities.
 - fostering solid relationships with various organisations and state agencies.
 - ensuring strong internal structures for youth-led organisations and safety for their members.

2,906 youth-led organisations in **25** countries were helped to improve their ability to **advocate and act on issues** that affect young people.



“By seeing girls that actually [have avoided early pregnancy and] made it from primary school to secondary school and then into college and hearing neighbours say that I inspired them to do this... That has helped me to maybe see myself as somebody that can be a role model and change somebody's ways of thinking or be able to impact another person.”

Female Participant of a Girls and Youth-led Organisation.¹²

12. Guglielmi, S., Jones, N. and Pincock, K. 2024 [Resourcing girl- and youth-led sexual and reproductive health rights activism: potential and challenges](#).

A summary of our impact evidence snapshots

- The [Champions of Change \(CoC\)](#) methodology creates safe spaces for young people to ask questions, share ideas and engage in dynamic and participatory learning activities on a wide range of topics. For example, a project focused on establishing the importance of children's rights set up Champions of Change clubs where children, adolescents and youth were empowered, through intergenerational dialogue involving men's committees, to discuss a range of topics like gender equality, sexuality, child leadership and barriers between parents and children. In the clubs, young people were trained in activism, leadership and self-confidence enabling them, especially the girls, to be more visible and active in their communities.
- A multi-country project in **Bangladesh, Nepal and Thailand**, faced numerous cultural, legal, political and institutional barriers. Youth activists and leaders had to navigate a space rife with conservative attitudes, deep rooted gendered norms, cultural resistance, political pressures, and threats to safety, as well as a lack of legal recognition and a restrictive environment disabling youth-led and civil society organisations. Despite these, the project managed to achieve positive trends in almost all its outcomes, across all countries, through a complex package of interventions.

54 influencing successes, in support of girls' leadership, involving **18** changes or developments in laws, policies, regulations, or guidelines.



A young girl from Paraguay wants to make her mark and be part of change.

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In Summary

LEAD as an area of work is perhaps one of the most vulnerable to funding cuts and in the current political and economic climate one that is less likely to be prioritised. Consistent funding, structural support to enable youth-led groups to remain viable and effective and close attention to the needs of diverse groups of young people in a variety of contexts will be key to enabling youth leadership and civic engagement. In particular closer attention should be paid to populations facing the biggest challenges in gaining access to the levers of power.

4 Protection from Violence

Despite global commitments, violence against children and gender-based violence remains a stark challenge.

Protection from violence is essential if interventions around the other priority areas are to have any real impact, and it remains a central pillar of Plan International's work at programme and advocacy levels: violence against women and girls in many different forms has been the subject of a number of Plan's reports and research studies in both the [State of the World's Girls](#) series and the [Real Choices, Real Lives](#) study.

Over one billion children are estimated to experience violence annually, with girls, children with disabilities, and those from marginalised groups most at risk.

Nearly 1 in 4 adolescent girls, aged 15 to 19 years old, experience violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

12 million girls are married during childhood each year.^{13,14}



A 14-year-old and her friends at a community-based learning centre in Bangladesh.

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“ With low farm incomes, we are plunged into poverty. Some families are forced to give their children away in early marriages to free them from the burden of dropping out of school.”

Adolescent girl, 15 to 17 years old, Guinea.¹⁵

13. UNICEF. 2025. [Girl Goals: What has changed for girls? Adolescent girls' rights over 30 years.](#)

14. United Nations General Assembly. 2024. [Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children.](#)

15. Plan International and her, 2024, Thebaud-Bouillon-Njenga, N., Onyango, L. A., Cantor, A. & Kamagaté, A. [Study on the gendered impact of climate change on adolescent girls and young women in the Sahel: multi-country analysis in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.](#)

Plan International's Programmes in 2025



Our protection from violence programming reached over **11 million** children and adults, including 3.4 million girls.

This included supporting families and communities to keep their children safe, working with teachers, social services and other providers in strengthening child protection systems, and providing direct services to survivors and those at risk.

Plan International's research underscores the pervasiveness and complexity of violence, particularly gender-based violence and violence against children. Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and exploitation, is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, economic insecurity, and systemic service gaps. It is especially acute in contexts of conflict and displacement, where violence becomes both a cause and consequence of mobility.

23,978 survivors of gender-based violence received support in 17 countries.

71,442 people in 13 countries received broader protection support and referral services.

Online violence is a growing concern, with girls reporting high exposure to unwanted sexual content, cyberbullying and impersonation. These experiences often lead to anxiety, depression and withdrawal from digital spaces.

“ Internet is now quite a lot toxic. And [the] internet destroys people's mental health.”

Girl, 15 years old, Philippines.¹⁶

- In Nigeria, the *Empowering Adolescent Girls to Address Gender-Based Violence* project increased girls' knowledge of where to get information and services before, during, and after a crisis, by 50 percentage points. The project addressed fear and hesitation among younger adolescents by implementing structured psychosocial support, and age-appropriate life skills sessions to equip adolescent girls with essential tools to cope with adversity and build resilience, and safe spaces for peer support and mentorship. Integrating psychosocial components into vocational training empowered girls with practical coping skills, while positive parenting sessions strengthened family support systems.
- *REAL Fathers* is a multi-country initiative that engages fathers who are parenting young children and was designed to reach young men before social norms about gender roles, and their expectations, attitudes, and behaviours related to relationships, are established. Young fathers are engaged in one-on-one, couples, and group mentorship, supported by a community poster campaign and a celebration event. In Rwanda, use of violent discipline against under-five children saw significant reductions for men and women between the start and end of the project. Eighteen months later a follow up study was conducted to assess whether changes, in terms of a reduction in violence against children, and in intimate partner violence, were sustained, with generally positive findings.
- 96 per cent of trained social workers taking part in the *Learn and Stay Protected* project in Nigeria, were able to identify and respond to cases of sexual and gender-based violence, which was an overachievement against the goals of the project in this area.

16. Plan International and CNN. 2024. [Building Digital Resilience: Girls and young women demand a safer digital future](#)

“ Before, if a girl was abused, she would hide it because people would blame her. But now, we know it is not her fault, and she can go for help without shame.”

Adolescent Girl participant in Empowering Adolescent Girls to Adress Gender-based Violence Project, Camp for internally displaced people, Nigeria.

In Summary

Projects evaluated this year have been responding to diverse risks. This includes working with internally displaced people, refugees and host communities, and other protection programming in protracted crisis, a focus on child labour in South Sudan, supporting survivors of child trafficking in Burkina Faso and responding to climate risks across many countries. Everywhere psychosocial support interventions, providing safe spaces and counselling sessions have been key to showing improvements in wellbeing.

“ Before the project, I used to feel alone with my problems, but now I have learned how to talk about my fears and feel supported by other girls and mentors.”

Adolescent Girl participant in Empowering Adolescent Girls to Adress Gender-based Violence Project, Bama, Nigeria

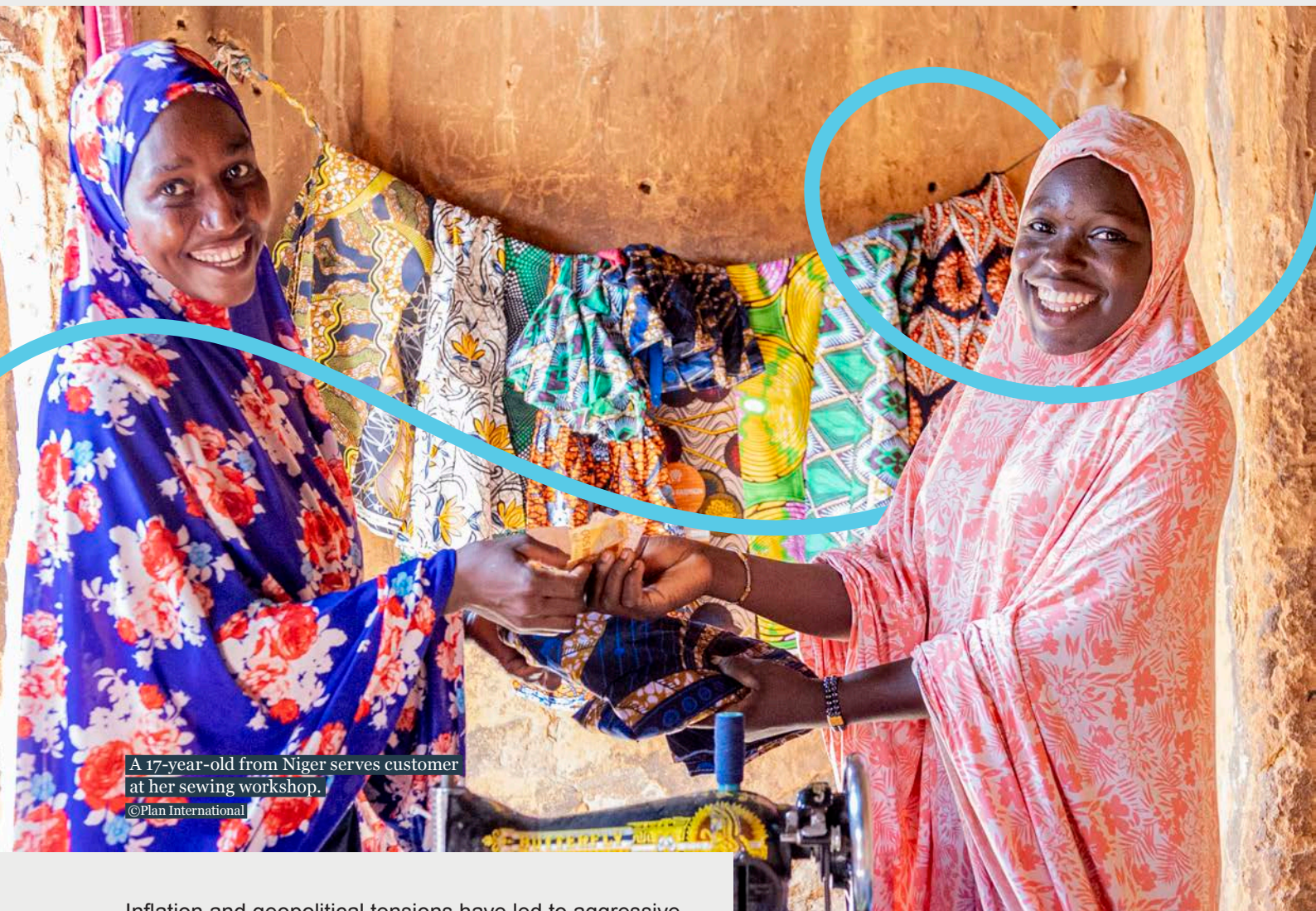
Tackling violence in all its forms benefits, like all the programme areas, from a holistic, integrated and targeted approach. Evidence consistently shows us that working not just with individuals but within the wider community is key to overall effectiveness, as is a focus on inclusivity, and an acknowledgement of diversity.

A 15-year-old from Peru teaches girls in her community how to protect themselves against violence.

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5 Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship



A 17-year-old from Niger serves customer at her sewing workshop.

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Inflation and geopolitical tensions have led to aggressive monetary policies that disproportionately affected developing countries, especially in Africa and Asia.

Youth in these regions face high unemployment, widespread informal work, and poverty, with women particularly impacted.

In sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated

145 million workers lived in **extreme poverty** in 2023, surviving on less than US \$2.15 a day.¹⁷

17. ILO. 2024. World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024. International Labour Organization.

In Asia and the Pacific region, more than **144 million** youth in the region are **not in education, employment or training**, the majority of whom are women.¹⁸

With this in mind, a priority for Plan is working with marginalised young people, especially young women, ensuring that they **gain knowledge and skills, can access opportunities and find decent work of their choosing**. In the current economic circumstances this is no easy task.

- In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, 230 million jobs will require digital skills by 2030, yet access remains uneven due to educational, geographic, and gender divides.¹⁹
- Climate shocks are also having an impact on family incomes, and increased unpaid care burdens have reduced girls' time for education and thus their job opportunities.²⁰
- Women's employment is further hampered by lack of childcare leaving many families trapped in poverty.

“ My wife couldn't go outside and work because of our baby but Plan has opened a daycare where we can take the child. Now she can do work outside without any worries ... We can fulfil our fundamental needs. We are solvent now.”

Male Community Leader, Bangladesh.²¹

18. Labour Force Statistics Database. Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total (% of youth population) | Data.

19. IFC. 2021. Demand for Digital Skills in Sub-Saharan Africa. Key Findings from a Five-Country Study: Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Rwanda. World Bank and International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group; INCLUDE. 2023. Digital Skills for Youth Employment in Africa: Fostering Digital Transformation for Social Inclusion, Gender Equality and Development.

20. Plan International. 2025. [Seeds of Change: Girls' rights in the era of ecological crisis](#).

21. Plan International and RMIT. 2024. [Changing Lives 2024 – The impact of Plan International's child sponsorship programmes in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Uganda](#).

Plan International's Programmes in 2025

Plan's focus on life, vocational and entrepreneurship skills training has helped many people into work, with 94 per cent of programme participants we spoke to this year actively pursuing job activities. Progress in developing entrepreneurship and vocational skills was clear throughout our programming this year.

3.7 million children and adults were reached with programming on **skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship**.

589,000 girls were helped to improve skills and access work opportunities.



A young woman serves a customer in her grocery shop in Nepal.

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A summary of our impact evidence snapshots

- In **Niger**, the **CONVENIO** project fostered the entrepreneurial spirit and business skills necessary to manage small and medium enterprises in 98 per cent of the surveyed young women participants. This was achieved through tailored capacity building, in coordination with experts and cooperative leaders.
- In **Paraguay**, the **SAPEA 2.0** project supported young people in developing business plans, reaching 91 per cent of 1,528 participants.
- In **Zimbabwe**, young people were trained in the skills and knowledge necessary to save and manage their finances. Through financial education and use of technology, participants could plan their ventures and calculate funding required. Community-based savings and loans associations, mutual support in borrowing funds and managing money mitigated challenges in access to finance.
- In **Ethiopia**, working in a protracted crisis context with host, internally displaced and refugee communities, almost all, 92 per cent, of the young people surveyed, were working on income generating activities and 95 per cent reported increases in their income as a result of the project. The project worked through one-stop service centres which were equipped with essential materials and services, providing a safe space for young people to engage in recreational, entertainment and economic empowerment activities. The help they received included vocational training, psychosocial, financial and legal support.

Climate Change and Green Jobs in our Programming

- In **India**, participants showed an increased awareness and understanding of green enterprises and jobs and of how climate change affects the businesses.
- In **Malawi**, farmers used agri-smart techniques improved their land farming outcomes
- In **Ghana**, green technology adoption improved women's access and control over resources leading to increased income for eco-friendly/green enterprises.
- In **Niger**, participants used renewable energy in their activities, leading to increased income and access to clean electricity.
- In **Zimbabwe**, climate change knowledge, and confidence in green economy led to the set-up of green businesses.



83 per cent of young people taking part in our projects this year felt confident about their life skills, including 85 per cent of girls.

These successes are replicated across countries and combine in many of them with influencing governments and businesses to embed structural change.

In Summary

Helping young people into work is essential, in all countries and contexts, to tackling poverty. Acquiring up to date skills, embracing technology and the green economy, not only helps with employment but also boosts confidence, enabling young people to contribute more to family and community life.

Support needs to be ongoing and though training is vital so too is enabling access to finance, links to the local economy and providing start up kits. Market analysis is also crucial to success which means working with the private sector, as well as governments, to make sure that skills are matched to the needs of the economy.

6 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Young women attend the Gender Equality Summer Camp in Hanoi.
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Plan International’s work in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights is focused on:

- preventing harmful practices
- providing age-and-gender-responsive information and services
- ensuring that young people, especially girls, have the information and skills they need to make informed choices
- providing positive sexuality education and dialogue, aimed at promoting healthy relationships
- reducing the incidences and impact of HIV and AIDS.

Programmes are targeted, in particular, at supporting adolescent girls and young women most at risk, including those living in crisis situations.

“As a young woman, you need to know that you’re able to decide what happens with your body and what kind of services you decide to access. And you should be able to do that without restrictions.”

Founder of the Ochanya Humanitarian Foundation.²²

In the current political and economic climate restrictions on access to sexual and reproductive health services are increasing. Persistent barriers continue to limit sexual and reproductive health and rights for all adolescents and young people, undermining their ability to make decisions about their bodies and health. These barriers include discriminatory laws, policies, norms and attitudes which operate globally and class women as second class citizens. They are combined with weak political leadership, growing inequality, and the failure to prioritise comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights in development, humanitarian and health agendas. The rise of a well-funded conservative anti-rights movement, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, climate change, and humanitarian emergencies and conflicts, alongside significant foreign aid cuts, has had unprecedented impact on access to essential health information and services for millions of people.

22. Guglielmi, S., Jones, N. and Pincock, K. 2024. [Resourcing girl- and youth-led sexual and reproductive health rights activism: potential and challenges.](#)

Plan International's Programmes in 2025



12 million

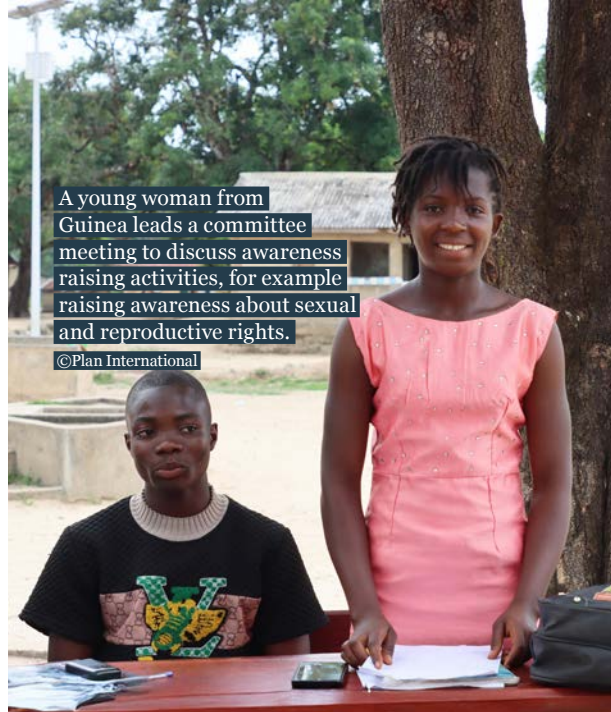
children and adults

have been reached with sexual and reproductive health and rights programming, including 3.6 million girls.

Over a million people in 13 countries were reached through awareness-raising activities aimed at reducing child, early and forced marriage and unions.

“ I witnessed an incident involving the early marriage of a girl from the village. It involved taking the dowry and setting the date for the religious ceremonies. I immediately raised the issue with the club, then with the village child protection committee. Together we met the girl's parents to persuade them of the dangers of CEFM, and finally they understood and cancelled the marriage.”

18-year-old member of future husbands' club, Niger.²³



A young woman from Guinea leads a committee meeting to discuss awareness raising activities, for example raising awareness about sexual and reproductive rights.

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Across several countries and continents Plan's programmes **improved access to contraception, significantly reducing unplanned pregnancies** amongst those targeted by the project.

- In **Cambodia**, the proportion of young women aged 15-24 experiencing an early pregnancy in the last three years fell from 17 per cent at the start of one of our projects to 8 per cent at the end
- In **Guatemala** the rate of teenage pregnancy in the programme areas was 722 per 100,000 and fell to 623 per 100,000 at the end of the project.

Menstrual health is an under-addressed issue and continues to be a priority for Plan International's programming. Across multiple reports and contexts, including the global [Still We Dream](#) report, [The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024](#), and a study on [perceptions and experiences surrounding menstruation in Colombia](#), girls told us about the challenges they face with their menstrual health, including stigma, poor infrastructure, and lack of products across both high-income and crisis settings.

“ It's embarrassing, because if you are at school and you get dirty, then they start laughing and it feels very uncomfortable because they look at you with a disgusted face, as if you are from another planet, it feels strange.”

Girl, 10 to 14 years old, Bogotá, Colombia.²⁴

23. Participant from GirlEngage project, Niger.

24. Quote from [Percepciones y Vivencias en Torno a la Menstruación. Estudios de Caso de Tres Instituciones Educativas de Bayunca, Quibdó y Bogotá.](#) (Translated from Spanish).

Another crucial focus in terms of sexual and reproductive health and rights is making sure girls are **aware of their rights and tackling the stigma** around topics like menstrual health, sex education and contraception.

Almost 500,000 children, adolescents and young people participated in activities around positive sexuality education and dialogue, including **238,000 girls.**

“ **The school clubs are very helpful because we can talk about things like menstrual hygiene and how to protect ourselves from early pregnancy**”

Adolescent, Tanzania.²⁵

- The **ELLA** project in **Colombia, Ecuador and Peru**, for example, overachieved its goals in terms of girls and young women feeling they could exercise their rights.
- In **Bangladesh**, one of our projects saw strong results across all groups of young people in terms of being able to say no to sexual activity and to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, including the use of contraception.
- As part of **NewGen** in **Cambodia**, the proportion of parents or caregivers better equipped to support their children on sexual and reproductive health and rights increased from 41 per cent to 72 per cent.

534,200 young people across 14 countries, including **278,047 girls and young women**, were supported to access sexual and reproductive health care.

In Summary

Access to sexual and reproductive health services and understanding rights in this area is crucially important in the lives of adolescents, particularly girls for whom early pregnancy is life-changing. Taking programmes to scale is always a challenge, so finding partnerships and allies in order to do this is crucial to build on success. This includes training healthcare professionals and sensitising community members to the needs of adolescents in terms of sexual and reproductive health and rights. These needs are too often overlooked, attended by stigma and shame, and particularly hard to realise in conflict and crisis areas when they are often most essential.



A 14-year-old from Nepal says she used to stay at home when she had her period.

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25. Participant from Protecting Girls from Harmful Practices in Mara and Geita Regions project, Tanzania.

7 Humanitarian Programming



The global landscape in 2025 is defined by escalating conflict, climate-related disasters, and persistent economic instability, leaving a record 300 million people in need of assistance.²⁶

With humanitarian funding failing to keep pace with skyrocketing needs, children and adolescents, especially girls and those from marginalised groups, are at highest risk.

Two friends in the camp for internally displaced people where they live in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

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“Climate change has led girls and women to exchange their bodies for food.”

Young woman research participant, 18 to 24 years old, Nigeria.²⁷

26. UNOCHA. 2024. [Global Humanitarian Overview 2025](#).

27. Plan International West and Central Africa Hub. 2024. [A Gathering Storm – A study on the gendered impact of climate change on the rights of adolescent girls and young women in the Sahel](#).

Plan International's Programmes in 2025

As well as responding to crises with rapid support, Plan also focuses on enabling education and protecting children: providing safe spaces and psychosocial support, rebuilding classrooms and learning spaces, implementing alternative learning programmes and establishing school nutrition programmes. Our work is aimed at both relieving current need and restricting future damage.

13 million children and adults were reached through our **humanitarian programming** including 3.2 million girls living in crisis.

Over 119,000 children were **enrolled in school** and an additional 209,000 reached through alternative education programmes.

We worked with **397,216** children, adolescents, young people and their families and communities in 37 countries on **reducing and responding to child protection risks**.

336,105 people across nine countries – mostly children under five years old – were **treated for moderate or severe acute malnutrition**.

In terms of climate change, our research reveals young people's resilience and ability to adapt: girls in Uganda, Togo, and Benin are actively engaging in community climate action.

“ I think she was taught about reforestation, sanitation and hygiene, clearing stagnant water whereby they act as bleeding areas [sic] for mosquitos caused by heavy rainfall.”

Participant's mother, Uganda.²⁸



A girl carries home water delivered by truck to a camp for internally displaced people in Palestine.

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28. Plan International. 2024. [Real Choices. Real Lives: Climate Change and Girl's Education Insights from Benin, Togo and Uganda](#).



The impact of a crisis is life-long, particularly when poverty pushes people into desperate choices. To help reduce this Plan International also supplied direct cash grants to families in need and supported 20,000 young people, mainly young women, into work. This focus on economic empowerment, especially for women and girls, can help mitigate some of the longer-term impacts of humanitarian crises. In Niger, for example, 87 per cent of families receiving support reported no child marriages, directly linking economic help to protecting girls.

Over 332,000 people, including 180,729 women and girls, and 10,046 households received cash and/or voucher distributions.



“ With the increase in forced marriages and child marriages, I myself am traumatised, because if your parents do not have the means to provide for your family needs, they give you up very early for marriage, so I am affected.”

Young woman research participant, 18 to 24 years old, Mali.²⁹

In Summary

Meeting the needs of those in crisis situations, whatever the cause, goes far beyond the complex logistics of providing food, water and shelter. Our evaluations this year have highlighted several areas of long-term difficulty, including meeting mental health needs, focusing on youth and community engagement in shaping humanitarian action, and planning for diversity and inclusion more effectively.

“ At the moment there is no consideration around safe spaces or specific allocated spaces for people with disability ... This becomes a bigger challenge when you are disabled and a female.”

Research participant, Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate.³⁰

29. Plan International West and Central Africa Hub. 2024. [A Gathering Storm – A study on the gendered impact of climate change on the rights of adolescent girls and young women in the Sahel.](#)

30. Plan International Australia. 2024. [Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate.](#)

What we have learned or confirmed

Not all the insights from this year's evidence review were new or startling. But looking closely at what is working and where we can do better, bringing together programme and research insights and putting it all in the context of today's world, gives us an opportunity to reflect, to consult, and forge a better way forward.

01 We need to continue to pursue integrated programming and emphasise the benefits of a holistic approach.

Holistic integrated programming is crucial to the rights and needs of the people supported by our projects. **This means that funding also must be flexible and embrace diversity. Integrated programmes are both effective and cost-effective.** In early childhood development, for example, linking mutually reinforcing areas like health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene programming can ensure children get the best start in life: connecting early learning with nutrition helps keep children healthy, motivated, and able to attend school consistently, reinforcing both educational and developmental outcomes. Integrating mental health support into parenting programmes offers a way to strengthen parental wellbeing that can extend to the whole family unit.

02 In all programme areas we must increase our focus on changing and challenging gender norms.

Male engagement in household tasks, and early childhood care in particular, benefits children and the entire family. **Economic empowerment, particularly of women and girls,** is crucial to raising families and communities out of poverty. It keeps girls in school, and improves health and wellbeing, not only now but for future generations. **Helping women into work outside the home contributes to gender equality, and tackles the power imbalances that can fuel domestic violence.** For long term, sustained change in behaviours driven by social norms, **it's also important that projects monitor trends in norms and behaviours consistently** – not just knowledge and individual attitudes – to understand whether progress is being made and design future projects to respond to areas that need attention.

03 Infrastructure projects – water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, classrooms, wells – extend their influence far beyond the individual projects themselves.

Creating safe spaces, repairing classrooms, community and health centres, means **invigorated communities with more opportunities** and better mental health. However, this means **working in partnership with communities, alongside governments and other duty bearers,** to promote ownership.



04 Clear targeting and selection, as well as tailoring of interventions – with associated resourcing – is required to respond to the needs of groups with the most barriers to access.

For example, mobile populations, different ethnic groups, LGBTQIA+ groups and people living with disabilities. We need to continue to **strengthen inclusion in programme design and delivery**. This must be associated with **specific analysis and reflection** on the extent to which interventions are successfully engaging diverse types of participants, and whether we are seeing the outcomes expected.

05 Mental health challenges must not be overlooked.

Psychosocial support is especially important in crisis situations but living with the poverty and uncertainty, which stalks many of the communities we work with, means that day to day life creates stress, furthers inequality, and induces anxiety amongst all sections of the population. The mental health of young people, especially adolescent girls and young women, continues to be affected by the impact of COVID-19. The importance of **sustained psychosocial support, integrated into communities, cannot be overstated**.

06 Partnering is key.

Involving young people, their caregivers and community leaders, as projects are designed, keeps them properly targeted and relevant to their lives. **It is partnerships and alliances that make for lasting change**: forging formal and informal links between diverse groups of young people and those in power at local, national and international level, and working with local businesses and within local economies can help build robust and resilient communities.

07 Longterm sustained support ...

... across **all countries and programme areas**, combined with assessment and evaluation, rather than a one-off project model, is crucial to providing economic empowerment and opportunities, particularly to young people who are often in crisis situations.

Conclusion

Key drivers of all our work are partnering, communication, engagement: enabling young people to be part of the decisions that govern their lives, and to use the energy and creativity that so many have to drive change in their communities and wider society.

Supporting communities in their daily lives also means talking to parents, teachers, community leaders: being aware of the issues they care about and raising awareness of the value of education, gender equality, good quality health services to both individuals and to the community as a whole. Influencing governments, international organisations donors and the media is important too. Without them, without legislation, publicity, funding and sheer political will there can be no lasting systemic change.

We evaluate our work according to “topics” – education, health, leadership, employment, amongst others – but although we work in thematic areas, people’s lives do not divide up so neatly – everything is connected: providing proper sanitation enables better health and education, helping women into work reduces child marriage. Central to people’s lives is the need to be relieved from overwhelming poverty, which is impossible to do on your own. It is also imperative to understand the underlying, and often unspoken, gender and social norms that govern opportunities, encourage violence, and restrict economic empowerment. As support from governments and donors dwindles, assisting local economies, establishing networks and partnerships, and providing training for jobs in the modern world is a vital component of development work.

In the current climate, where the damage done by war and weather, and the consequent poverty, is on the increase, while funding is decreasing and rights, particularly gender rights, are being rolled back, it is easy for aid organisations and the communities they serve to become discouraged. But the evidence coming in from our programme work points clearly, not only to pain and poverty, but to resilience, energy and, in young people in particular, both the desire and the ability to build better lives, to find a future brighter than the present, step by step.



A young woman in Bangladesh uses her bicycle to visit girls at risk of child marriage.
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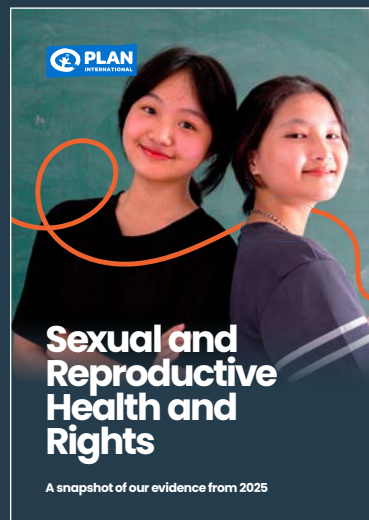
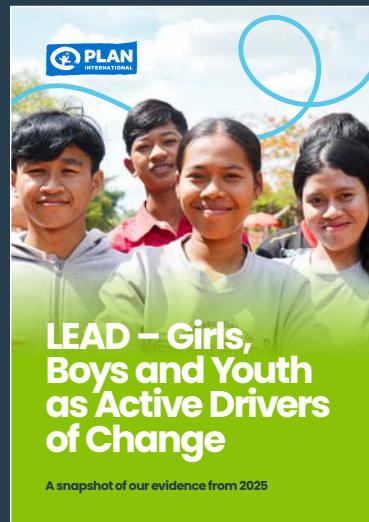
“ Positive things have happened. I have been able to pursue education because child marriage has stopped. I couldn’t speak before ... Now I can say a lot in front of people. Even if they asked my name, I couldn’t say it before, I felt embarrassed. Now this shyness is decreasing from what it was before.”

Female, 20 years old, Bangladesh.³¹

31. Plan International and RMIT. 2024. [Changing Lives 2024 – The impact of Plan International’s child sponsorship programmes in Bangladesh, Ecuador and Uganda.](#)

Read more from 2025

To learn more about the insights from our evidence in each thematic area this year, our suite of **annual evidence snapshots of impact** is available [here](#).



Girls in Nepal take part in a workshop to develop their manifesto.

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Until we are all equal

About Plan International

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

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

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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Note: Images used throughout this report are not of research participants. Consent was received for the use of all images.

Front cover image: Girls in Guatemala now have a safe space where they can meet. © Plan International