

# My Body My Future

Voices of Change

Inside the programme  
that's strengthening rights,  
shifting norms, and  
amplifying youth voices

MyBody  
MyFuture



# Contents

<b>Why This Matters</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Difference We Made</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Reaching Every Young Person</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Signs of Change in Social Norms</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Conversations That Matter: When Staff Values Shift</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Youth Advocacy in Action</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Transforming Masculinities: Reshaping Gender Norms</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Enabling Environments</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Building Bridges: Positive Parenting Skills</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Climate Resilience</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Economic Empowerment and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Innovation Through Collaboration</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>27</b>

# Foreword

Dear Reader,

As a global organisation, Plan International understands that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are essential to the overall wellbeing, dignity, and futures of adolescents and young people everywhere.

Adolescents and young people, in all their diversity, have the right to make their own informed life decisions – from what happens to their bodies, to whether, when and whom they marry, and if and when to have a child. Plan International is deeply committed to making this a reality by enabling every adolescent and young person to access pleasure-inclusive SRHR information and services. This is not a privilege – it’s a fundamental human right, and a matter of social justice.

This commitment is at the heart of our flagship gender-transformative and inclusive SRHR programme – My Body My Future (MBMF). Funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, MBMF is grounded in Plan International’s SRHR programme and influencing models – evidence-based and sex-positive models based on international best practice.

This publication brings these to life by telling the story of My Body My Future 2 (MBMF2) – a continuation of the My Body My Future programme. It delves into the breadth of the programme – the challenges, insights, learning and achievements – through powerful impact data and through the stories of individuals behind the work, as well as of young people and partners driving change in Ethiopia, Laos, Myanmar, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Through MBMF2, adolescents and young people have been empowered to make their own choices about their bodies and futures. Now, even more are demanding this right. The journey continues and this work must be prioritised – it is essential to supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals’ commitment to leave no one behind. 2030 is now just four years away.

Plan International is strongly positioned to improve the SRHR of adolescents and young people around the world. With presence in over 80 countries, and as MBMF2 demonstrates, we have strong and long-term engagement and partnerships with national and local authorities, civil society organisations, particularly those that are youth-led and prioritise SRHR, and young people and their communities. With the right sustainable funding, support and partnerships, lasting change is possible. It’s possible by working together, and by letting young people – in all their diversity – drive the change.

Annukka & Emebet



**“Adolescents and young people in all their diversity have the right to make their own informed and autonomous life decisions.”**



**Annukka Von Kaufmann**  
Programme Director  
Plan International Finland



**Emebet Wuhib-Mutungi**  
Global SRHR Programme Lead  
Plan International



# Why This Matters

Across the world, too many young people are denied the freedom or the information to make choices about their own bodies and futures. The My Body My Future 2 programme (MBMF2) set out to change that – tackling the complex and deeply rooted social, cultural, economic and political barriers that hold back sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for children, adolescents and young people.

These barriers take many forms, from gender inequality and stigma surrounding sexuality of adolescents and young people to harmful social norms. For many, the barriers are compounded, such as young people with disabilities or those with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities. These barriers are often reinforced by unequal power dynamics and discriminatory, restrictive laws and policies. Poverty and limited access to sexual health services deepen the cycle – both a cause and a consequence of unrealised SRHR. And even where progressive laws exist, weak enforcement or reactionary backlash often slow down progress.

Despite decades of global commitments, progress towards gender equality and SRHR remains slow, uneven and under threat. My Body My Future was created in response to increasing demand from young people to push forward that change.

A core part of MBMF2 was ensuring no adolescent or young person is left behind. This meant actively removing the barriers that prevent them, in all their diversity, from accessing information, services and support. By creating accessible, safe and affirming spaces, the programme ensured all young people could participate, be heard and make informed choices about their bodies and futures.

We know that, together with local partners, we can help build a world where every adolescent and young person can have their questions and uncertainties answered and make informed, confident choices about their body, their future and their life.

**Posters next page (source of data):** Poster 1 - MBMF2 baseline, Mozambique; Poster 2 - MBMF2 baseline, Ethiopia; and Poster 3 - MBMF2 baseline, Myanmar.



## The challenges

- Norms and expectations about how girls and boys should behave often put at risk their health, rights and choices and even their lives and futures.
- Many young people receive little or no comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and parents often lack the information and skills to support their children to navigate adolescence, relationships, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs.
- Poverty and economic inequality increase vulnerability – pushing some girls and women into unsafe situations like transactional sex and early or forced marriage and unions.
- SRH services often remain out of reach for adolescents and people with disabilities, as they're rarely designed with their specific needs in mind, even in contexts where supportive policies are already in place.
- Climate change and other crises add new pressures, deepening inequality by disrupting essential SRH services and putting adolescents and young people, especially girls, at greater risk.
- Restrictions on civil society organisations engaged in social and gender norm change and SRHR limit action and participation, silencing the voices needed most.

Who can I trust if I want to talk about my sexuality?

How can we get leaders to listen to the issues we're facing?

Why is it so hard to get contraceptives?

How can we know what we need to know?

I wish I had someone to talk to about how I feel



MBMF2 took a holistic, gender-transformative approach to SRHR, looking beyond services and education to the systems and norms that shape them, and problem-solving with new, innovative approaches.

Recognising that poverty drives harm related to sexual health, the programme supported income-generating activities and employability skills. Understanding that adolescents and young people are more vulnerable during times of crisis, resilience was built in to preserve SRHR even during conflict, climate shocks or other disasters. And knowing that education on sexuality and relationships makes a crucial difference to young people and those around them, the programme supported CSE both in and out of school, equipping adolescents and youth to make healthy and informed decisions.

By listening to the difficulties adolescents and young people were facing in realising their SRHR, we built a truly inclusive response to the problems MBMF2 needed to address.



# The Difference We Made

My Body My Future 2 (MBMF2) was a comprehensive response to the challenges holding young people back from their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The programme operated from 2022 to 2025 in Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Laos and Myanmar. Led by Plan International Finland and funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, it builds on the earlier four-year MBMF1 programme. The programme was delivered together with Plan Country Offices and 31 implementing partners – including community-based groups and organisations led by young people, women, LGBTQI+ people or people with disabilities.

MBMF2 took a holistic, gender-transformative approach to SRHR. It worked directly with children, adolescents and young people (CAY) aged 10–24, in all their diversity, and with the communities and systems that shape their lives. Across all six countries, the programme integrated a gender-transformative and inclusive approach to tackle the root causes of inequality, engaging particularly with persons with disabilities, and with LGBTQI+ adolescents and young people in Mozambique, Myanmar, Laos and Zimbabwe.

The programme was anchored in Plan International’s gender-transformative approach, which recognises that meaningful change relies on working across these areas together. Rather than treating them as separate strands, we addressed them in an integrated way so that each element strengthened the others. This involved:

- shifting gender norms across the life course,
- strengthening girls’ and young women’s agency,
- engaging boys and men to transform masculinities,
- advancing equality for girls and young women,
- ensuring inclusion,
- building supportive environments for girls’ rights.

## Intended Impact

That CAY in all their diversity have control over their bodies and futures, and live in healthy, safe and supportive environments.

## Outcome 1: Supporting CAY to make informed SRHR choices

MBMF2 expanded comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in all countries, both in and out of school, adapting content to local contexts and integrating climate education. Over the years, 57,000 CAY aged 10-24 years old, including those with disabilities, were engaged in CSE activities across the six countries. Some countries added Youth Economic Empowerment life skills and green skills to strengthen SRHR outcomes and the green transition. Over 1,100 adolescents and youths received vocational and/or entrepreneurship training. This contributes to increasing demand for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. A total of 730 teachers were trained to deliver quality CSE to students, in classrooms or through school clubs, in Laos, Uganda and Mozambique.

## Outcome 2: Improving access to quality, inclusive SRH services

MBMF2 worked with civil society SRH service provider partners and government health facilities to improve adolescent and youth-friendly SRH services – through service provider training and value clarification, disability inclusion, technical assistance, refurbishments, creating Youth Friendly Corners, and health facility-based peer navigators (Uganda). Some teams supported meaningful youth participation in planning and monitoring services. Delivery also included mobile clinic outreach and referral pathways. Together, these efforts strengthened the supply of age-inclusive, disability-inclusive and gender-responsive services, even in hard to reach areas. A total of 83 health facilities were supported by the programme across the six countries, and 786 service providers received training to provide inclusive quality age-responsive and gender-responsive SRH services.

## Outcome 3: Creating safe, supportive communities that challenge harmful norms

The programme facilitated community dialogues, intergenerational conversations, parenting sessions, and engagement with cultural and religious leaders to shift discriminatory norms around SRHR, reaching a total of 40,261 community members. In some countries, Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) – accessed by almost 4,000 young people – income-generating activities, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) committees helped households cope with climate-related shocks and stresses. This built the enabling environment for CAY’s SRHR.

## Outcome 4: Strengthening civil society and youth advocacy for SRHR

Activities focused on training civil society members, supporting youth-led advocacy on climate change and SRHR, and promoting stronger SRHR policies and public investment. This

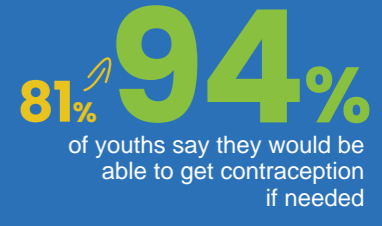
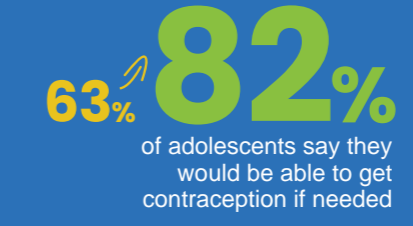
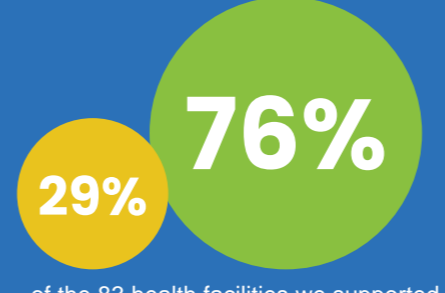
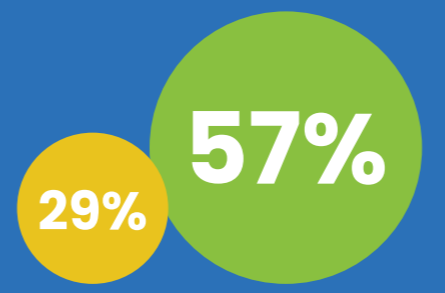
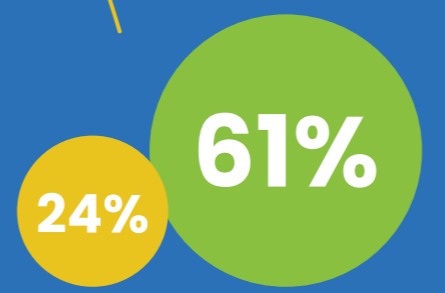
also contributed to a stronger enabling environment. Between 2022-2025 1,280 decision makers were reached with initiatives to promote adoption/implementation of laws and regulations that ensure availability of inclusive, non-discriminatory and quality SRH services. 800 adolescents and youths participated in advocacy processes promoting improved SRHR policies, gender equality and inclusion, climate resilience, or other related thematic.

## Reach

The programme reached around 1 million people across six countries, including 270,000 direct participants (209,000 CAY, including 130,000 girls and young women, and 4,700 CAY with disabilities) and around 732,000 indirect participants. Over 125,000 children, adolescents and youth were provided with SRH services through SRHR outreaches and mobile clinics.



Key: ■ Percentage before intervention (baseline) ■ Percentage after intervention



# Comprehensive Sexuality Education

**Plan's Senior SRHR Advisor, Leena Mubarak, tells us how CSE supports learners to make informed decisions, prevent harm and challenge inequitable norms – no matter where they live.**

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was foundational to our programme. CSE is far more than a sequence of biological lessons. It is a structured, holistic learning process that supports young people to understand their bodies, relationships and rights while building critical life skills. By investing in it, societies strengthen adolescents' ability to protect their wellbeing, contribute to safer community environments and build foundations for long-term gender equality.

One of the key strengths of My Body My Future 2 was the programme's ability to implement CSE in various contexts, including in those where this type of learning has become highly politicised and restricted. The key to delivering CSE in such settings is building trust, working closely with communities and institutions, and making sure content is culturally relevant and contextualised to the needs of learners. MBMF2 provided

CSE through multiple channels, involving teachers, peer facilitators, youth workers, health professionals, caregivers and community actors. This approach was especially important in restrictive contexts, where school-based CSE may be limited. Here alternative methods – such as peer-to-peer models, extracurricular clubs or community-based learning – became essential in reaching adolescents in a safe and acceptable way.

CSE addresses everything, from anatomy and puberty to relationships and the broader social norms that shape young people's lives. It supports learners to make informed decisions, prevent harm and challenge inequitable norms. Most importantly, our comprehensive sex-positive and rights-based approach responds to the realities adolescents and young people face, and makes sure they are not left without the information and skills they need, when they need them most.

## Expanding inclusive CSE in Laos

In Laos, major progress was made in expanding access to CSE for adolescents, especially out-of-school youth, ethnic minority girls, and young people with disabilities. Although CSE was included in the national curriculum, many sensitive topics remained difficult to teach, and inaccurate beliefs still limited young people's access to information. We responded by strengthening teachers' capacity, delivering tailored CSE sessions to adolescents both in and out of school, and engaging parents and community leaders to reduce stigma and open space for dialogue.

Working across 45 villages in Bokeo and Oudomxay, the project reached more than 11,000 young people and 2,800 parents, teachers, health staff, and leaders. Young people now have stronger knowledge, confidence, and skills to make informed sexual and reproductive health and rights (srhr) decisions, while parents, leaders, and service providers are more supportive and better equipped to meet their needs. The project's adaptable, inclusive approach, co-developed with government and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), offers a practical model for reaching diverse youth in rural, low-resource settings.



# Reaching Every Young Person

## Tailoring for political instability: Myanmar

Delivering CSE in Myanmar means working in one of the most challenging and fragile environments in the region. Children, adolescents and young people there had suffered from years of conflict and displacement, limited civic space, and the added impact of a major earthquake in 2025. Community structures and basic services were disrupted, while discussions around SRHR remained limited by conservative cultural norms.

In this context, more standard CSE models were often not feasible, making a locally designed, context-specific approach fundamental to the success of the programme. The CSE curriculum was developed by local staff and partners, and took local norms, security limitations and operational constraints into account. Built around the realities of daily life in Myanmar, it was designed to be modular, discreet and responsive to the barriers that adolescents and families face.

Working together with partners and UNFPA, Plan's CSE curriculum contributed towards the development of a harmonised CSE curriculum that was jointly implemented by a significant number of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the country. Plan Myanmar also co-chaired the coordination group for the curriculum. This group gave a space for CSOs to share learning and strengthen their CSE plans, and was an opportunity for Plan Myanmar to influence and improve wider CSE practice in the country.

Due to safety concerns and with many adolescents outside the formal school system, CSE was delivered by local facilitators in small, safe learning spaces. These facilitators understood the nuances of their own areas, and this local grounding meant the programme could adapt to changing conditions without compromising the learning experience.

With many adults feeling anxious or having misconceptions about CSE, Plan Myanmar implemented awareness-raising sessions for parents and caregivers. These sessions were designed to fit around parents' lives, taking into account long working hours and their safety. The short sessions gave clear information, addressed common misunderstandings, and shared simple parenting skills to support open communication with adolescents. This light, accessible format proved effective in reaching parents and became an important tool for building trust.

The approach taken by Plan Myanmar was resilient and locally led, responsive to Myanmar's complex and evolving context. MBMF2's work in Myanmar proves that local leadership, thoughtful design, and dedicated efforts to build trust can work to reach young people with the CSE needed to realise their rights.

## Flexibility across contexts: CSE activity cards

Across East and Southern Africa we introduced a flexible model for delivering CSE – a set of activity cards that act as hyper-adaptable guides for CSE sessions. With different political and cultural contexts in Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the cards proved useful and practical across all four environments. In total, 25,000 children, adolescents and young people were reached through the CSE activity cards model.

Common challenges in CSE implementation include curricula that are too long and so make implementation demanding, misunderstandings about what CSE is and what it is not, limited support for facilitators, and the politicisation of CSE. The cards provided a model that was easy for facilitators to adapt to suit local needs, making CSE implementation more feasible.

That means that what the activities looked like in practice was flexible. In Uganda, for instance, CSE is highly restricted. By implementing CSE as an extracurricular club at the school, the programme was able to deliver quality CSE for learners. Peer educators led the sessions, and teachers supported them to ensure safety and continuity. The extracurricular framing made it possible to deliver meaningful CSE while being careful about sensitive terminology and avoiding pushback.

In other countries, the environment is more enabling. In Mozambique, sessions based on the activity cards were implemented openly as CSE, both in and out of school. Because of the greater policy openness, the sessions could be introduced directly without needing alternative framing or terminology.

Across all settings, facilitators consistently valued that the sessions were practical and easy to implement. The clear structure helped build facilitator confidence, while the short format fit within school timetables and youth programming structures. These features made schools and district officials more receptive. The success of the activity cards model demonstrates that, with the right design, CSE can be delivered meaningfully in both restrictive and enabling environments.

**To find out more about our approach to CSE, go to:**  
[plan-international.org/srhr/comprehensive-sexuality-education](https://plan-international.org/srhr/comprehensive-sexuality-education)



# Signs of Change

**Plan's Senior Gender and Inclusion Advisor, Henry Salas, shares how their norms diagnosis approach opened up a deeper understanding of the unspoken rules and expectations that influence how people think, decide, and act.**

Across the My Body My Future 2 programme (MBMF2), one of the most powerful lessons was that, to truly make change sustainable, we must go beyond shifting behaviour. Meaningful transformation requires us to look beneath the surface, to interrogate the social expectations, power relations, and deeply held beliefs that shape choices around health, gender, and identity. This is precisely what a norms diagnosis sets out to uncover.

Our norms diagnosis approach gave us a behind-the-scenes look at what drives behaviour – the attitudes and assumptions, often unspoken, that influence people's actions. By applying diagnostics across a wide range of countries, we were able to bring new energy and insight to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) work. Teams in Ethiopia, Laos, Myanmar, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zimbabwe carried out norms diagnoses in 2022 and 2025. The results did more than map the landscape – they challenged assumptions and sparked new conversations. They reshaped the way programme teams imagined change and how they set out to achieve it.

By systematically comparing the two rounds of data, the programme was also able to track shifts in norms, community attitudes, and behaviours over time. This strategic investment in qualitative research and in-depth analysis provided rich insights into the subtle and complex ways norms were evolving, illuminating the pathways through which adolescents, families, communities, and service providers collectively influenced behaviour and beliefs.

The country-level studies revealed how adolescents, families, health workers, teachers, and community leaders were collectively challenging entrenched norms, opening dialogue, and gradually reshaping attitudes. These findings illustrated that the programme was not merely delivering services; it was delivering gender-transformative social change at multiple levels, empowering young people to envision and claim control over their bodies and futures.

## What the data shows: moving from silence to dialogue

A consistent pattern emerged in the data from 2022 to 2025: young people were increasingly exercising agency, moving from secrecy and fear to deliberate, proactive behaviours. They were initiating conversations with peers, parents, and community members, with growing self-determination and confidence in

their reproductive choices. Parents, teachers, health workers, and younger or more progressive religious leaders were actively providing guidance and encouragement – for example, integrating rights-based discussion around contraception in religious sermons in Mozambique. This action was not only breaking traditional taboos but also reframing contraception as a tool that supports education, well-being, and opportunity in young lives. Communities were beginning to see that a progressive attitude to sexual health can coexist with cultural and moral values.

The findings painted a vivid picture of a movement away from silence and fear towards dialogue, acceptance, and empowerment. These early signs suggest that our interventions were not only supporting young people to make informed choices but were also reshaping the environment in which these choices are made. The resilience, courage, and creativity of young people stand as a hopeful reminder that social transformation is within reach when we believe in and invest in the power of youth.

## The journey continues

This work is not without challenges. Talking about norms inevitably touches on sensitive issues – sexuality, power, identity – and change rarely follows a straight line. What matters is creating spaces where dialogue can continue, and where new ideas can coexist with cultural identity and community values. That balance is delicate but essential. True transformation is never imposed, it is co-created.

Despite progress, deeply entrenched norms continue to shape expectations around adolescent sexuality, particularly for girls, who often face heightened stigma, scrutiny and backlash. Conservative religious leaders, some parents, and certain community members continue to discourage contraceptive use, leaving young people to navigate conflicting messages. Young people with disabilities and out-of-school youth face additional barriers compounded by marginalisation.

This work is inherently long term and iterative, requiring sustained investment and reinforcement. By focusing on early signals, we can identify progress and acknowledge the careful, incremental work that is essential to achieve lasting impact. The evidence from across countries demonstrates that change is possible.

## A model for the future

Crucially, norms diagnosis gave implementing partners a shared language for discussing complex social change. At its core, the approach begins with identifying a behaviour that matters for young people's wellbeing. Teams then examine the social norms that shape that behaviour – the expectations, the social sanctions, and the groups that influence, encourage or restrict the behaviour – before using these insights to design interventions that are both feasible and genuinely transformative. This grounding encouraged honest reflection on the role of institutions themselves: how organisational practices can either reinforce or challenge harmful norms. For many partners, this meant revisiting how staff are trained, how community facilitators are supported, and how gender and inclusion are integrated into monitoring frameworks. The process deepened commitment, not just to delivering activities, but to embodying the change we hope to see.

The influence of our approach is already visible. In several programme countries, the insights from norms diagnosis

contributed to broader gender-transformative strategies, helping teams refine their focus and strengthen their partnerships with government and civil society. The approach was recognised as a model for how social norms analysis can be embedded across SRHR and gender and inclusion work – ensuring that programmes address not only the symptoms of inequality, but its roots.

Perhaps most importantly, this work reminds us that shifting norms is not an abstract exercise. It is about creating new possibilities for young people to make choices without fear, to lead, and to imagine futures that were once closed to them. It is slow, sometimes invisible work, but it forms the foundation for every sustainable change that follows. As the journey continues, norms diagnosis can be our compass – a way to remain grounded in evidence while listening closely to people's lived realities. By naming what has long been unspoken, communities can move from silent acceptance to shared understanding, and from understanding to action. That is where real transformation begins.



## Why gender-transformative programming?

Lasting progress comes from confronting the root causes of gender inequality – the unequal power relations, restrictive gender norms, and structural barriers that shape daily life. This commitment sits at the heart of everything we do. Our programming goes deeper than working around these injustices or treating only their symptoms. It is designed to shift power, challenge stereotypes, and reshape the dynamics that limit girls, young people, and communities.

# Conversations

**My Body My Future 2 (MBMF2) wasn't only about changing young people's lives – it was about the people behind the work, and how they change too. Conversations That Matter (CtM) is about staff and their values. CtM aimed to increase staff's knowledge and understanding of key sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues, better align their values and attitudes with Plan International's SRHR positions, and ensure the delivery of high-quality, accurate, and consistent SRHR messages and approaches across all of Plan's global programmes.**

**Martin Ogwang, a project manager with Plan Uganda, didn't see how this training would benefit him at first. He thought he already understood what it meant to protect and empower young people. As part of an external learning review of CtM in 2024, he shared how the training fundamentally shifted his thinking and the way he works with young people.**

I have attended three CtM trainings. The first one was in Helsinki in 2019. That was a big cultural shock, I did search into my personal values... The training took two weeks – half of it I spent quiet, just listening to what I thought were very strange things, it was a big search into my own thinking and raised topics that I thought were unreasonable. My first take was to not pay any attention to this training. I thought: people don't talk about this in my country, so why should I even pay attention to this? But the message had gone home to reflect on some of my values, even if I didn't have anyone to talk to back home.

I realised it was a safe space, to challenge my own values without anyone looking over my shoulder. It was the beginning of a change for me and a re-thinking of the deep-seated values that I held.

The second training was back in Uganda in 2021, and this training included a number of Plan Uganda staff. By this point, I had re-considered some of my values and could now speak in the workshop. But the workshop was very challenging for staff. I noticed that half of the staff left because they could not sit and listen to these conversations. Some of them needed more time; some even spread harmful messages about training – they had their own negative take on it.

The third training that I attended was a Training of Trainers. At this stage I was able to conceptualise the topics and had a lot of resolve to challenge and change my personal values and connect them to what was happening in our country.

## Lessons from my change process

One key lesson I've learned is that one training is not enough for someone to really change very deep-seated values. It is a journey, and often people need follow-up.

The space where the training is held is also very important in

supporting someone to change their thinking. It helped me to be away from home. There was no one looking over my shoulder and I had space to reflect on my views. It was harder to do this back home. The environment is very important to help someone to transform their values and attitudes.

Another thing that came out strongly is language. The language we use is influenced by norms and values, and some of this is 'condemning'. There were a lot of harmful messages in describing the relationships that girls have, for example. These norms are actually much stronger than any legal framework.

**“My decision-making approach was obscured by my values... The training helped me to change my perspective.”**

## Shifting my perspective

For me, the thing that I found out was that my decision-making approach was obscured by my values. I had the perspective that as I was in a programme management and leadership role, my point of view was right.

I remember when I developed the first framework on ending Child, Early, Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU), I did this from a religious perspective – wanting to save the girls and women from CEFMU and early pregnancy, as a rescue move. I didn't think about sexual and reproductive rights and didn't even feel that it would be important to listen to the girls. All that is taught is that it is a sin, without looking at their rights.

This training helped me to change my perspective – it was not about controlling the sexuality of the girls, and that was the main focus of the first framework, without looking at their rights. It was a complete shift after the CtM training. I look at it now from the rights of the girls and young women and supporting their empowerment to realise these rights. This was a significant change because it was about a change in worldviews. My worldview changed from a protection point of view, and now I want to give girls and young women their rights. The beholders of the rights take centre stage. It is about empowering the rights holder. I'm at the point where I want to empower the young woman to defend her rights and I become a facilitator to help her. That for me is a fundamental shift. It becomes more honourable and more sustainable – I go into the background to be a facilitator to enable them to actualise their rights. That way the girls make informed decisions. It also took a big burden away from me to always be on the frontline – now I put the girls and boys on the frontline.

# That Matter

## Reinforcing change through practice

The sequence of CtM trainings – three as a participant and two as a facilitator – helped me to keep revisiting my personal values.

The project design we are implementing has also reinforced this change. It became a necessity. Working with partners in the implementation process keeps me checking my values. In the first framework, when we were trying to save adolescents from CEFMU, we would take them back home, but within a year they would be pregnant or married again. We had to ask ourselves what we were doing – our rescue missions weren't working. The young women are now enjoying their SRHR but this time around with contraception. Working with young people at the implementation phase on the frontline has been more effective.

The change process in CtM can be a lonely process. You are confronting these norms, bringing in something that is right – but you can't talk about it easily. This is especially true when working with religious organisations and others in the community who may believe in things that are not helpful. My experience is that it was not about telling people, because I would face opposition. For me, it was about changing my own practice – for example, doing things with my daughters rather than letting their mother do it. I first changed my practice, and then when people started asking me questions about why I had changed, I started having the conversations.

When training partner staff, I also noticed a big difference. Because they respected me, they were much more open to listening and taking issues on board.

When we changed our practice, people did not think that we were importing these values – we live with them, we go to the same markets and churches, our children go to the same schools. When we did the training with partners, they had very searching questions, but they had respect for us. They felt that there must be something good about the training. It was the beginning of a game changer.

Initially, it took four weeks with the partners to get on board with the ideas. Afterwards, because of the trust we'd built, that helped to build the trust in CtM. Partners were coming to me with questions even some time after the training. They became the crusaders.



# Youth Advocacy in Action



We aim for a world where young people can make their own decisions and speak up against exclusion and injustice. The My Body My Future 2 programme (MBMF2) worked closely with communities and dedicated partner organisations to do this, and together we supported courageous young people to make their voices heard to governments, service providers, and civil society. We fought for them to have meaningful engagement in all spaces where decisions are made about their

bodies, their futures, and the issues that matter most to them, and we built a safe enabling environment for this to happen, so that young people could speak up with confidence and influence.

This meant listening to adolescents and youth – particularly those from marginalised and underrepresented groups. It meant equipping them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to advocate for their rights and the rights of others. And it meant providing space

for young people to have their voices heard and their needs addressed. In this way, we made sure youth voices were reaching decision-makers at all levels of society. In total, 800 adolescents and youths participated in advocacy initiatives supported by the programme.

The young advocates we worked with inspired us every day with their activism and their dedication. These are some of their stories...

## Tamenech (17), Ethiopia



Tamenech never imagined she'd one day speak up for others at her secondary school in Ethiopia. Living with a physical disability made walking difficult and often prevented her from going to school – for years she felt excluded.

Things changed when she joined a project through MBMF2 in Ethiopia, promoting gender equality and inclusion for girls and students with disabilities, particularly in rural areas. "Before the project started, there was nowhere that students with disabilities were represented or encouraged to share their experiences and ask questions," she said. "Things are different now."

Now, as a member of her school's student parliament, Tamenech represents her peers and others struggling as she did. "It made me so glad to be part of the student community."

Through the project, she also started a small income-generating activity raising sheep – a new source of pride and independence.

Eunice is the most prominent advocate for girls' rights in her village. When she was 13, she joined a Champions of Change (CoC) group – this initiative helped young people reflect on and challenge the gender norms that shape their lives. "Before then, I saw a lot of child marriages and teenage pregnancies around me, but I had no idea I could do something about it. This was a forgotten community," Eunice says.

As she gained more information and confidence, Eunice decided to set up a group of activists in her village, sharing the information and skills she learned from Plan. They discussed the challenges confronting children and young people and proposed solutions, primarily sharing information with others to influence change.

Eunice and her group have managed to prevent 15 child marriages and supported around 100 pregnant girls to remain in school. "I see a lot of girls who have given up their dreams... I will not stop talking about girls' rights until child marriage and discrimination towards girls end."



## Eunice (18), Mozambique

## Kim (23) & Kudzi (21), Zimbabwe



Kim and Kudzi were part of the by-girls, for-girls Amplifying Youth Voices (AYV) initiative powered by MBMF2 in Zimbabwe.

AYV empowered girls and young women with the skills and confidence to speak up for girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and championed the solutions that helped them reach their full potential.

Representing young people in their town, they participated in a discussion with senior parliamentarians as part of the Children's Rights Caucus – focused on child marriages, teenage pregnancies and the re-integration of teenage mothers in schools.

Alongside other youth, they advocated directly to leaders for access to comprehensive sexuality education as well as for more affordable and available sexual and reproductive health services and information. The response showed there was space to open the conversation around the barriers holding girls and youth back.

"We could see the parliamentarians welcoming the idea of going back to the drawing board and curating specifically tailored approaches."

Young people like Kim and Kudzi are leading the charge advocating for policies and calling for change from leaders.

**"Everyone deserves to be accepted as themselves."**

Custodio noticed in his teenage years that he was attracted to other boys, unlike his school friends. He felt alone and lost.

On the internet, Custodio found information about homosexuality and the LAMBDA organisation, an MBMF2 partner supporting gender and sexual minorities in Mozambique. He got to meet other gay people and understood that his feelings were natural. Eventually, Custodio was able to come out to his family and find acceptance. One of his most important supporters is his sister, Olinda.

Today, Custodio is one of LAMBDA's most courageous activists. He meets with community leaders and healthcare professionals to discuss minority rights, and helps LGBTQI+ people in his community access legal services. He also helps people access HIV testing and, if necessary, seek treatment for the virus. LGBTQI+ people are too often left without healthcare due to discrimination.

"I feel good because I know I'm doing the right thing. I'm confident that the information I share will ultimately change people's thinking."



## Custodio (22), Mozambique

# Transforming Masculinities

My Body My Future 2 (MBMF2) used Plan International's innovative Champions of Change (CoC) methodology to advance gender equality through youth engagement. CoC empowers young people in all their diversity: it supports girls and young women to build confidence, know their rights, and harness their collective power, while engaging boys and young men to question and challenge harmful ideas of masculinity that both affect them negatively and fuel inequality. We strengthened this engagement work by collaborating with Sonke Gender Justice, drawing on their expertise to better engage boys and young men on these issues. In total, over 14,000 children, adolescents and youths, including 7700 girls and young women, participated in the CoC methodology throughout the years. CoC creates spaces for young people to reflect on how gender norms shape their lives – and how they can shape them back. For some, like Yunus, that understanding is the start of both powerful personal change and a drive to help others do the same.

**“My hope is that future generations will live in a world where girls and boys, women and men can live equally, happily and support each other.”**

Yunus, 26, from Uganda, used to spend his time drinking and partying as a young man. However, after meeting his wife and joining Plan International's CoC project, he turned his back on his old ways. A dedicated family man, Yunus now promotes positive masculinity and helps break down harmful gender roles for boys and men by using his own past experiences as an example.

“When I was young, my father died. In school I completed advanced level, but my education stopped there. I moved from my home in another village to this fishing village and became a fisherman,” says Yunus. “We always went fishing early in the morning. In the evening we would come back and sell our catch and go to a disco or a party. Or if we knew there was a party on the opposite shore, we would stay there. We spent all the money on alcohol and had fun and met women. And the next day, the same thing,” Yunus says. “I had a lot of unprotected sex.” Yunus has mixed feelings about the past: he recalls many happy moments, but there was a dark undercurrent to it all. After numerous irresponsible relationships, he realised that he had to change. This change began when he met Holiver, his future wife. They fell in love and moved in together.

Holiver soon became pregnant. Yunus knew that he would now have to start living responsibly. Around the same time, he became familiar with the work of Plan International. Taking part in youth group discussions, Yunus came to a realisation.

“I stopped drinking because I realised that I was also responsible for others. I invested money in animals like goats and chickens. I started doing chores like cleaning and laundry.”

Yunus is now a Plan volunteer, activist and trainer. He teaches local boys and men about positive masculinity through CoC training sessions, which aim to promote sexual and

reproductive health and rights. Through these sessions, he encourages young people to drive change in their communities. A girls' and women's group also meets at the same time. Both groups discuss gender roles from their own perspective. Eventually, the groups will work together, but it is important that everyone can start by addressing the issue from their own perspective.

Plan International works to break down harmful gender stereotypes in Uganda and promote positive masculinity among boys and men, who can play a key role in championing gender equality and girls' rights. Narrow gender roles and expectations shackle both men and women, so everyone benefits from an equal society.

In many communities, housework and childcare are assumed to be the sole responsibility of women, while men are seen as having the power to make decisions about family matters and the freedom to do as they please. Where this is not the case, some believe there is something wrong with the family. Yunus is delighted that harmful gender roles are starting to break down, and communities are already experiencing significant change. “Young people's attitudes, awareness and

practices have changed slowly, but now boys and men are doing things that were once thought to be the preserve of women. I am happy about the change. Boys and girls work together and boys treat girls as equals.”

As morning turns to afternoon in the fishing village on the shores of Lake Kwanja, Yunus walks along the main road with his uncle, Dennis, and his friend, Eddie. The three of them used to fish together. In the nearby courtyard, fishermen are clearing their nets. Yunus remembers getting ready for a party here at the end of the day. “It's harder to make an income from fishing nowadays, but life is good. Yunus's work has brought a lot of good to our community too. The attitudes of all of us have changed,” says Dennis.

Yunus has not forgotten his roots or his old friends. He currently lives with his family – his wife, five-year-old daughter and one-year-old son – in their new home. However, he has shared his old home and its farm with friends who grow maize, cassava and mangoes. Yunus's mother moved to another community after buying land there. “My hope is that future generations will live in a world where girls and boys, women and men can live equally, happily and support each other,” says Yunus.



## Reshaping gender norms

# Enabling Environments

At Plan International, we know that lasting improvements to adolescents and young people's lives depend on the communities around them. Our long-term vision is that children, adolescents, and youths have control over their bodies and futures in a healthy, safe, supportive environment.

This vision was core to the My Body My Future programme (MBMF2) and its approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). We worked to create a positive enabling environment on multiple levels. Our 'Building Bridges' curriculum, a package on parenting skills for parents of adolescents, became a key part of this work. It focused on 'positive parenting' – building dialogue between parents and adolescents on SRHR and gender norms.

In the wider community, we engaged deeply with the influential figures who help set social norms, like religious and cultural leaders, to spread positive behaviours further afield. We supported school groups to build this into their planning, and we worked with young people to spread positive messages about SRHR in their communities.

Our work to create a positive enabling environment reached every level – from individuals to families, communities and the state. By building understanding at all these levels, we brought about a movement – people from different walks of life all working together so young people in their communities can be fully in control of their own bodies and futures.

## Laos: building parents' understanding with community drama

In Laos, we identified a need to greatly shift norms around contraception. Stigmatising attitudes meant that contraception was considered suitable only for married women, harming access for those not married.

The MBMF2 team used the Building Bridges curriculum to reach parents and encourage child-parent communication. Knowledge of the community's needs was key to making this effective. Based on the local context, we worked closely with village leaders to influence community norms on SRHR, and encourage parents to join the Building Bridges trainings.

Knowing that many young people in Laos live with their grandparents, we invited them as well.

Some minority communities in Laos do not write easily or speak the Lao language, so an information-dense training would not be the best way to reach them. Instead, the MBMF2 team and partners replaced 'lecture-style' sessions with group exercises, using pictures and videos to facilitate discussion and understanding. We also trialled youth-led community events, including raising awareness of some of the issues through drama shows. We found that community drama led to greater interest from the parents, especially among low literacy groups.

Our tailored approach led to positive change: adolescents told us their parents showed greater understanding of the issues they faced and were being more supportive. We learned concrete lessons about what works to effectively reach communities in Laos and change young people's lives there for the better.

## Zimbabwe: Promoting positive conversations in communities

In Zimbabwe's Bulawayo and Kwekwe districts, MBMF2 made significant strides to create a supportive environment for young people's SRHR. The Building Bridges training proved impactful thanks to the influence and commitment of Community Champions.

These 38 Community Champions – local leaders, parents and influential community members – were trained to deliver ten sessions of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to parents using the Building Bridges curriculum. They were given guidance on how to discuss sensitive topics and equipped with resources to run the sessions effectively, ensuring they were well-prepared to engage with parents and caregivers on crucial SRHR issues.

The results were tangible. These community leaders were recognised as 'positive parenting moderators', and given slots in community meetings to teach others about positive parenting. Through incorporating SRHR discussions into community activities, leaders helped normalise the topic and reduce stigma – a significant step in transforming the social norms that often hinder open conversations on SRHR.

Across the programme, team members highlighted the role religious leaders played in community transformation. One religious leader from the Apostolic sect in Samambwa, Kwekwe, embraced positive parenting, marking a significant shift within a traditionally conservative institution. Despite the sect's reputation for practices like polygamy, this leader introduced positive parenting sessions in his church that were well-received by members.

The involvement of church leaders really enhanced the program's outreach, spreading information to their

congregations and fostering broader acceptance and understanding of SRHR issues. This was particularly important in communities where traditional and religious beliefs heavily influence daily life.

Through the dedication of our Community Champions and the broader programme's efforts, MBMF2 made a positive enabling environment for young people's rights a reality. The communities visibly increased their support for young people's SRHR, and are now significantly more accepting of sexual minorities and other marginalised youth. What began with 38 trained Champions created a ripple effect across entire communities. MBMF2 opened doors for conversations once considered taboo, and helped make sure young people have the support they need to be in control of their own bodies and futures.

## A note from Pastor Masango, a Community Leader and Building Bridges Champion in Zimbabwe.

I'm Masango, a community leader and a pastor with the United Baptist Church. I'm part of the MBMF2 programme and share the lessons I have learnt through the Building Bridges curriculum here in my community.

In fact, you find me today having just completed training on how to support parents in communicating with their children on topics related to sex, sexuality and relationships. The first thing I am going to do, right away in fact, is to call community leaders and map how to share these interesting and life-changing lessons we have learned.

These necessary issues of sexuality and relationships are so important to communicate, in fact we even went as far as to contextualise some of the English words to our vernacular so that when we are talking to children they can understand what we are

saying – we tell them that 'it's not vulgar language to say your reproductive organ in your vernacular language!'

When it comes to supporting parents to communicate with their children on matters, I can say that around 70% really love the communication and want us to go through these community workshops and seminars with them.

**“It's not vulgar to say your reproductive organ in your vernacular language!”**

Of course, there are some who still think these topics are for adults alone. I remember someone saying they could never discuss sex with somebody who hasn't engaged in sex. But that's the sort of misconception which we are setting out to deal with.

One serious topic which I want to highlight with you before we finish is the LGBTQI+ community. Some people in our community support them, but the majority of people don't. When I'm talking to these people about how to help the LGBTQI+ community they resist and say, 'What kind of a pastor are you?' As a pastor, it's been a difficult moment for me. I had to go down and ask God and pray. But I recognised that we even have LGBTQI+ members within our church who we've talked to and supported. Now I am confident in supporting the LGBTQI+ community and fighting the resistance to it in my role as a Community Leader.



# Building

## Supporting parents to talk openly about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Talking about sexuality, reproductive health and relationships can be difficult for many families – whatever country they're in. Cultural norms, religious beliefs or generational differences can make these topics sensitive, and most people have had no training on how to broach it with their children. Parents can support young people in ways teachers and health workers often cannot, especially when it comes to navigating relationships and accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Plan International receives many requests to work with parents on this – a testament to our unique approach.

The Building Bridges curriculum aimed to meet that need. This ten-session course supported parents and caregivers to communicate more openly with their children about topics that can feel sensitive – such as puberty, sexuality, online safety, consent, and gender norms. It helped parents explore the physical, emotional and mental journey that their children go through during adolescence, and empowered them to support

their children on this journey. Over 21,200 community members were trained with Building Bridges throughout the countries.

Sessions were run by trained facilitators – who may also be parents, religious or cultural leaders. They adapted the curriculum to the communities they were working in using structured guidance. The training ran across diverse communities in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Uganda, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Laos, and this tailoring ensured conversations were age appropriate and culturally relevant, wherever they took place.

Parents and caregivers met in safe, supportive spaces to learn, practise new communication skills and share experiences with fellow parents. The results were transformative. Below, two programme leads share what they learned, from the breakthroughs and obstacles to the changes they hope to see in the future.



# Bridges



**Alemi Kebede**

Gender and Inclusion Coordinator, Plan International Ethiopia

Many parents in our context feel unprepared to discuss sexuality with their children because of social and cultural taboos. But when parents joined the sessions, we saw a real change.

Building Bridges creates a safe environment for both parents and adolescents to comfortably discuss

topics related to sex, sexuality and relationships. Building Bridges equips parents with the knowledge and skills to support their children to have an easy transition from childhood to adulthood. There is also an opportunity to have religious leaders in the group, who are influential gatekeepers.

### What surprised me most?

Mothers don't often go outside the home except on market days. but when the project began, we saw that many gathered to learn about adolescent health. Many spoke about how the sessions increased their social interaction as well as their knowledge. We also saw a big change in fathers, who started taking on more domestic chores and purchasing sanitary pads for their daughters.

When we ask at the end for the parents to speak up on something they've learned, we see every parent raise their hand to reflect on what they have taken from the sessions.

### Where we can go next?

We can go further on disability inclusion. We were only engaging parents with physical disability or visual impairment, but not, for example, hearing impairment. We need disability-friendly modules and facilitators trained in sign language, and it would be great if we integrated more pictorial presentation to compensate for varying levels of literacy. With the support of Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) we partner with, we can continue to improve accessibility.

**“As parents joined the sessions we saw real change.”**



**Tonny Ogwang**

Regional SRHR and Gender Transformative Programming Advisor, Plan International Uganda

The young people we worked with told us that, when it came to topics like sex and contraception, the biggest pushback and influence came from their parents. They did not even want to engage with the topics themselves, believing their parents would not approve.

That was how we knew we needed to involve parents too. After all, parents are the best educators for their children – why not empower them? Why not give them the tools?

### What surprised me most?

Opening discussions around LGBTQI+ topics in Laos, Zimbabwe and Mozambique has required care, given the diverse religious and cultural beliefs of parents. But these conversations are possible when approached with sensitivity, in stages, and in collaboration. We're now seeing parents and religious leaders in these countries come to us and actually ask how they can better support LGBTQI+ young people in their lives.

### Where we can go next?

Next, we want to find more innovative ways to engage men. We see that we lose many male participants over time. We could also have more impact by following up with a peer-to-peer

learning module, so parents can share knowledge more widely. And we found that we should avoid mixing generations in sessions, because younger parents may not speak freely in front of older ones.

### Why Building Bridges matters

Working only with young people isn't enough – it's crucial to strengthen engagement with parents, caregivers, and community role models like religious leaders. The change is visible: families are beginning to speak openly about topics that were once unspoken, and young people's lives are better as a result.

**“Parents are the best educators for their children – why not empower them?”**

# Climate Resilience

## Making sexual and reproductive health and rights climate resilient

### Why climate resilience?

The My Body My Future 2 programme (MBMF2) aimed to make sure young people's rights are sustained for the future – even in times of crisis. This change can only be truly maintained by building in climate resilience.

Increasing climate stresses are a major threat to young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Extreme weather events interrupt access to health services, while lack of clean water puts core needs such as menstrual health at risk. Worse still, when sustained climate change increases poverty and instability in a community, the risks to girls and young women are multiplied: violence increases, and many families resort to 'negative coping mechanisms' – pulling girls out of school to save money, or child marriage. Without active interventions to stop it, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and teen pregnancy all rise due to the long-term impacts of climate change.

MBMF2 took action to stop this, by working with communities on four levels to prevent climate crises becoming SRHR crises:

1. We built climate resilience into comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). We helped join the dots between the two issues, supporting young people with the skills to be more climate resilient.
2. We made sure SRHR was built into plans for climate action and disaster risk reduction (DRR). By prioritising SRHR in planning, we've helped ensure unbroken access to important care and supplies.
3. We promoted positive coping mechanisms. We're shifting the enabling environment in young people's families and communities, so that girls' education isn't the first casualty of a climate shock.
4. We supported young people to make their voices heard. We trained young people to highlight the link between climate and SRHR, and equipped them to engage in climate policy forums.

### What building climate resilience looks like: visualising vulnerability across countries

MBMF2 identified that many struggled at first to see the link between climate resilience and SRHR. Our 'body mapping' methodology, used across all six programme countries –

Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, Uganda and Zimbabwe – helped overcome this. Participants in CSE classes discussed real-life ways in which climate had impacted their lives, helping prompt open discussion on sensitive topics. For example, a young woman in Laos articulated how water scarcity could affect menstrual health "Disaster makes it difficult for personal hygiene, especially during menstruation," she said. "It also blocks us from getting healthcare. It is even harder for disabled, elderly people, and children for travel, and is difficult to find a doctor when needed."

Young people in the sessions discussed how things like water scarcity severely affected their comfort, confidence, and social behaviour. The discussions provided rich data – for instance, the experiences shared by young people in Uganda helped inform the design and implementation of the project.

The body mapping approach helped turn abstract concepts into tangible, personal experiences, opening up space for conversations on sensitive topics. Crucially, it helped build understanding, laying the groundwork for a process where the people experiencing the problems are the ones designing the solutions.

### What building climate resilience looks like: digital advocacy and disaster planning in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, climate-related emergencies like droughts and floods frequently disrupt SRHR services. But local DRR plans often failed to consider these critical needs – as a result, crises often led to higher rates of unplanned teenage pregnancy, and more adolescent girls and young women dropping out of school.

MBMF2 brought about a major shift in how participating communities planned for disasters. By engaging local policymakers with the evidence around increased vulnerability during times of crisis, and involving diverse young people in future planning, the local government was compelled to prioritise SRHR during emergencies.

The increased awareness of the link between climate and SRHR was greatly helped by an innovative digital programme in Zimbabwe – a youth-led podcast. Inspired by MBMF2's body mapping discussions, a group of girls in Bulawayo, one of the participating communities, designed a podcast to be streamed on the Amplifying Girls' Voices YouTube channel, reaching over 45,600 subscribers.

The episodes focused on the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls and women, and helped bring public attention to the crucial link between SRHR and climate disasters. The podcast helped show that digital channels like this are a promising way to engage young people in the country.

### What does the future hold? - with Katja Pellini, Senior Climate Change Advisor, Plan International

The climate crisis is deepening fast, and we can't delay on building in climate resilience. I look at MBMF2's work in Mozambique and think how lucky it was that we started work there when we did. Our programme activities came just in time to save lives and livelihoods during Cyclone Freddy, an exceptionally powerful tropical cyclone that hit in 2023.

Mozambique had local disaster management committees, but attendance had often fallen off and many were inactive. But in the communities where we worked, the committees met to revise disaster protocols, local officials were coming to speak with them, we discussed the importance of including girls, women, people with disabilities and more. The

committees were revitalised. And when Cyclone Freddy hit, those committees knew exactly what to do. I'm so grateful that we minimised the damage to their livelihoods and properties because of that timely intervention.

Across the life of this programme, I saw so much ingenuity in the communities we worked with – small innovations that improved people's lives. The different countries involved in the programme shared what was working between them and learned so much from each other's expertise. These local-level groups really have the solutions – imagine what they could do if they were resourced properly.

I'd like to see what counts as 'climate finance' go deeper. When we say 'climate' people often think of it as the surface level, things like solar panels. But climate affects people's lives in so many different ways. We need to bring climate finance to this level – where people who can do very important things with very little funding have the resources to do it.



# Economic Empowerment and SRHR

For young women to have control over their bodies and futures, it is absolutely crucial for them to be empowered economically. Poverty and a lack of resources for girls and young women can set off a vicious cycle. When girls don't have their own income, they often depend on parents or boyfriends to pay for crucial things like getting around, or sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. This takes away their ability to make decisions about their bodies and often leads to early marriage, unplanned pregnancy, transactional sex and exploitation. The My Body My Future 2 programme (MBMF2) believed in making sure girls and young women have financial security, giving them agency and the ability to make informed choices about their bodies and their lives.

An MBMF2 economic empowerment programme was transformative for Abida, a young woman in Ethiopia who built an independent and successful life after being left with few options. She learned more about relationships, communication and managing menstrual hygiene, SRH, unplanned pregnancy and abortion.

## Building two businesses from the ground up

Abida, 21, grew up in a small town in Ethiopia. After losing both parents, she was the only sibling left in the family home. When she chose to stay in her community and look for opportunities rather than move abroad, her boyfriend ended their relationship.

Her turning point came when she was invited to a free training session at a local Smart Up centre supported by MBMF2 and partners. She couldn't have afforded training otherwise. There, she learned entrepreneurship, climate risks, and life skills: how to start a business, manage income, and build resilience. She also learned about gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including relationships, communication, menstrual health, unplanned pregnancy and abortion.

With seed money from the programme, she and a friend opened a shop in nearby town. "I started to deposit 100–150 ETB per day depending on my income," she says. "I joined a savings group and contribute 1000 ETB every week... I have reached 67,000 ETB capital."

Abida also began farming at home, hiring people to help. The knowledge, skills and income she gained transformed her life. "In the past, it was very difficult for me to get money for clothes, dignity kits or sanitary pads," she explains. "I had no adequate

knowledge about menstrual health or harmful practices, and I feared discussing these issues due to the conservative culture."

Everything changed after the training. "Now I am free from financial problems and can buy whatever I need from the nearby markets with the profits from my business," she says. "The comprehensive trainings opened my eyes to SRHR, gender, entrepreneurship, life skills and communication."

Abida now feels confident advocating for others. "I teach and discuss sexual and reproductive health issues such as preventing early marriage and unplanned pregnancy, and introduce contraceptive options including pills and condoms to my colleagues," she says.

Her ventures continue to grow, and she hopes to use her success to benefit other young people in her community. She wants the Smart Up centre to keep operating so more young women can access the same opportunities. "I have comfortably identified my potential, knowledge and skills to achieve my intended business goals. I have adequate knowledge about the value of money and I have a clear vision to expand and diversify my own business and create employment opportunities for the unemployed youth in my area. Every young person should experience the happiness I get from the existence of the project in our district."

**"Every young person should experience the happiness I get from the existence of the project in our district."**



## Breaking Barriers: Zumera's story

Born without fingers, 24-year-old Zumera grew up hidden away in her village in rural district. "In the past my family used to hide me because I am a person with a disability," she says. Even when she insisted on going to school, the community treated her as a burden, and opportunities remained out of reach.

Everything shifted when the MBMF2 project introduced its disability-inclusive Smart Up programme. For the first time, Zumera found training designed to meet her needs – life skills, entrepreneurship, reproductive health sessions, and ICT training adapted so she could participate fully.

"Before the project, I was very afraid. Even when I went to the health centre, I could not explain my problems. Health workers sometimes spoke harshly, saying things like, "Why would a person with a disability come for services – are you pregnant?" Now, after receiving awareness, health workers have gained understanding. They prepared a special service room for youths, welcomed us properly, and we can go freely without fear. We receive services and talk openly with health professionals."

The programme also worked with local health workers to ensure respectful, accessible services for young people with disabilities, giving Zumera the confidence to seek care without fear.

Equipped with new skills and a small grant, she launched her own tea and coffee business, becoming financially independent and a role model in her disability association. Today, she advocates for SRHR and gender equality, showing other young people with disabilities what is possible. "Because of this project," she says, "I have become an example for many people with disabilities."

# Investing in young women

# Innovation Through Collaboration

Plan International strives to make children's rights and equality for girls a reality by working closely with partner organisations. We have strongly committed to localisation – shifting power and resources to local actors so that development is locally led, context-driven, and sustainable. We collaborate with diverse civil society actors to create lasting impact and strengthen social movements advancing gender equality. Through localisation, Plan and our partner organisations benefit from the transfer of skills, from shifts in power, and from sharing knowledge and resources together. All this means the voices of children and young people are heard more loudly, and we can reach more people, with better quality programmes, in more places.

Collaborative and equal partnerships were critical to the My Body My Future 2 programme (MBMF2). In each country we worked closely with a group of partners to drive the programme's human-rights-based and gender-transformative approach. These partners are experts in what they do, and we supported them not just to implement programmes, but to design them too.

MBMF2 was a driving force behind co-creation, co-design and co-leadership of programmes and projects across Plan International. We strengthened the institutional, technical and financial capacity of our local partners, including women-led groups, LGBTQI+ networks and youth-led organisations. We believe that localisation is not merely transferring responsibility or funds – it requires long-term investment in local systems.

From pooled expertise in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), powerful community relationships, and impactful service delivery, here are some of the innovative partnerships that underpinned the implementation of MBMF2.

## Working hand in hand with local partners

MBMF2 significantly strengthened access to high-quality, inclusive, and youth-friendly SRHR services through partnerships with local SRHR organisations affiliated with International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Laos. Working with organisations like Reproductive Health Uganda, the Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia (FGAE), and the Mozambican Association for Family Development (AMODEFA), the

programme was able to reach a wide range of young people, particularly those from low-income communities.

We worked hand in hand with government health facilities, ensuring reliable and consistent access to essential services, from pregnancy testing and contraception to abortion care and HIV screening. Supported by community health workers and local partners, we built in mobile outreach services, making sure that underserved communities were not left behind.

In addition to service delivery, IPPF affiliates were crucial for policy dialogue and strengthening the health system. In Ethiopia and Mozambique in particular, FGAE and AMODEFA made sure services worked for young people by training health workers, improving infrastructure, and providing essential supplies and personnel. 'Youth-friendly corners' were set up in schools and other community areas to create safe, confidential, and judgement-free spaces where young people could seek SRHR services without fear or stigma. These interventions showed how important partnership-driven approaches are to centre the needs of young people.

One critical collaboration was with government health workers, building their capacity to provide inclusive, age-appropriate, and non-judgemental care. These training sessions went beyond technical competencies – they addressed the personal values and norms that often cause bias toward LGBTQI+ young people in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Myanmar and Laos, and towards those with disabilities. This improved the quality of interactions between health workers and young people, fostering more respectful and empathetic service delivery. The government health workers also mentored partner organisations, strengthening their capacity to deliver SRHR services, and to use and analyse state data systems like the District Health Information Systems. This helped partner organisations to deepen the evidence and insights used in their advocacy work.

The diverse partnerships with IPPF affiliates under MBMF2 strongly complemented each other, showing shared responsibility and a unified commitment to young people's SRHR. It showed that when IPPF affiliates, government health systems, and community structures work together, they create a better enabling environment for young people to access quality SRHR services without discrimination.

## Menstrual Cups, Uganda

In Uganda, menstruation continues to keep girls out of the classroom. More than 60% of school-aged girls regularly miss school during their periods, and nearly one in four girls aged 12–18 drop out entirely once menstruation begins.

Through MBMF2, Plan International partnered with Finnish menstrual cup brand Lunette to change this. Together, they distributed menstrual cups in Ugandan schools and worked to create a supportive environment for their use.

"In addition to distributing the cups, we teach how to use them, work closely with schools and community leaders, and share information about menstruation with boys as well," explained SRHR Coordinator Semmy Achio. "Although the menstrual cup is still relatively new in Uganda, the demand is high in Lira City, Northern Uganda. Young people are looking for menstrual products that are sustainable, easy to use, and easy to keep clean."

For Lunette, the partnership is about more than access to products. "Menstrual health is not just about hygiene, but about human dignity, equal opportunities, and the right to live a full life," said CEO Aleksandra Oklińska. "Behind every number there is a story, a name, and a lost future. That's why it is so important for us to be involved."

Following a successful pilot, this partnership was extended elsewhere in Uganda and to other countries like Myanmar. It shows what becomes possible when innovative businesses and programmes like MBMF2 unite to remove barriers and support girls to stay in school.

## Inclusive SRHR, Myanmar

In Myanmar, where conflict and the challenging situation of the country shape everyday life, reaching young people with sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information requires more than technical expertise – it requires trust. MBMF2 partnered with Kumudra, a local LGBTQI+-centred organisation, to make sure young people in all their diversity could access SRHR support safely.

"Due to the political situation, armed conflicts frequently occur everywhere, so work must be done with a low profile. Educational materials must be distributed as quickly as possible...Work must be done after informing and requesting permission from the General Administration Department," the organisation said. Their community-based, low-profile approach enabled MBMF2 to build relationships and operate without relying on institutions young people could not safely access. Plan International and Kumudra launched services including HIV testing, family planning, STI investigation and mental health counselling – helping counter the serious lack of SRH services for adolescents and young people in the country.

For Kumudra, besides service delivery, their work to reach and support marginalised groups became especially important. They share SRH information, promote advocacy for more inclusive policies, run awareness sessions on LGBTQI+ rights and gender equality, and collaborate with women-led organisations to strengthen women's empowerment.

Despite the challenging situation in the country, the partnership enabled MBMF2 to reach young people with comprehensive sexuality education, support access to SRH services, and embed gender and rights discussions within wider social movements. It stands as proof that even in the most fragile settings, local leadership plus human rights-driven action can unlock lasting, transformative change.

# Acknowledgements

## Project Teams and Partners

### Ethiopia

Yene Raye II project team

- Professional Alliance for Development (PADet)
- Family Guidance Association in Ethiopia (FGAE)
- Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development (ECDD)

### Uganda

I Decide project team

- Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU)
- Communication for Development Foundation Uganda (CDFU)
- Lira District Union of Persons with Disabilities (LIDUPED)
- African Center for Trade and Development (ACTADE)

Community Based Organizations (CBOs):

- AYUA Uganda
- Community Development Shield Uganda (CDSU)
- Change Lead Agency for Social Change (CLASS)
- Dreams Rescue Foundation (DREF)
- Friends of Good Will (FOG)
- Growth Care Uganda (GCU)
- Global Support Development Initiative Uganda (GDI-Uganda)
- Global Youth Foundation (GYF)
- Hosanna Community Bridge (HCB)
- Lango Youth development Network (LAYDNET)
- Nation Youth Empowerment (NYE)
- Safe Aid Uganda (SAU)
- Shelter for Community Transformation (SCOT)

### Mozambique

Mandziku project team

- AMODEFA (Mozambican Association for Family Development)
- Associação LAMBDA
- MAHLAHLE (Association for the Promotion and Development of Women)

### Zimbabwe

My Body My Future project team

- Zimbabwe National Council of Disabled Persons of Zimbabwe (NCDPZ)
- Sexual Rights Centre Zimbabwe
- Intwasa Arts Festival koBulawayo

### Laos

Anakhot Khong Khoi 2 project team

- Promotion of Family Health Association (PHFA)
- Gender Development Association (GDA)
- Women with Disabilities Association (WWDA)

### Myanmar

Me Me Kanda, Me Me Anagat Pa project team

- Kumudra Social Life Support Association

## Contributors to this publication

### Covers

Images feature:

Gugulethu Matshazi Dube, young programme participant from Zimbabwe; Tan, young programme participant from Laos

### p. 1-2 Foreword

Image features Eunice Nhampossa and her friends, Mozambique.

### p.11-12 Conversations That Matter

Conversations that Matter Learning Review (2024), conducted for Plan International by Helen Parry, Independent Consultant

### p.13-14 Youth Advocacy in Action

- [Tamenech: My future as a girl leader | Plan International Ethiopia](#)
- ["Luulin homouttani kiroukseksi, jonka yritin häätää ruokoilemalla" - Plan Finland | Story by Iida Riekkö](#)

### p.15-16 Transforming Masculinities

- [Yunus näyttää uudenlaisen miehen mallia - Plan Finland | Story by Kalle Heino](#)

### p.17-18 Enabling Environment

Enabling environment strategies country briefs developed for MBMF2 learning and review by Helen Parry, Independent Consultant

### p.25-26 Innovation Through Collaboration

- [Plan ja Lunette parantavat kuukautisterveyttä Ugandassa - Plan Finland](#)

### p. 27-28

Image features Chidadiso Francisca Mbazoo, Lindiwe P Mlazi, Natasha Musabayane, and Sisasenkosi Ncubi, Zimbabwe.

Photography by Mikko Toivonen / Plan International

Illustrations by [Amazink Studio](#)

**Consent was obtained for the use of all images and personal stories.**

### Plan International

Emebet Wuhib-Mutungu, Tonny Ogwang, Henry Salas, Katja Pellini, Solène Vadé, Annukka von Kauffman, Eeva Ervamaa, Eeva Kirjasniemi, Anna Salmivuori, Mari Luosujärvi, Alemi Kebede, Kalle Heino, Iida Riekkö, Ella Lautaniemi, Anna Könönen, Mikko Toivonen, Jacqueline Dragon  
Helen Parry, independent consultant

### Report production

Project lead, editorial support, content coordination and production by Leena Mubarak, Senior SRHR Advisor, Plan International Finland

Creative direction, editorial development, content curation and design by [Ravel](#)



**SUOMI  
FINLAND**

## About Plan International

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

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

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

This publication has been supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). The views expressed in this publication are the authors' alone and are not necessarily the views of the MFA.

To learn more about Plan International's work on SRHR see:  
[plan-international.org/SRHR](https://plan-international.org/SRHR)

Plan International Finland  
Teollisuuskatu 13  
00510 Helsinki  
Finland

[plan-international.org](https://plan-international.org)

[facebook.com/planinternational](https://facebook.com/planinternational)

[X.com/planglobal](https://X.com/planglobal)

[instagram.com/planinternational](https://instagram.com/planinternational)

[linkedin.com/company/plan-international](https://linkedin.com/company/plan-international)

[youtube.com/user/planinternationaltv](https://youtube.com/user/planinternationaltv)