

# Because I am a Girl

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2012

Learning For Life

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Whatever you think of your school or college, education matters.

What does education enable you to do? How does it help you realise your dreams?



Imagine if you were denied an education....because you were a girl. Not too long ago, this was a reality for girls the world over, and for too many it still is. Education can sometimes be seen as important for boys only. Girls lose out because of their gender. For over 200 years people have campaigned for the equal rights of ALL children, boys and girls, to be able to benefit from their right to education.

This year, Plan's 'Because I am a Girl' report looks at the idea of 'Learning for Life' and education for adolescent girls aged 10-19 in particular. We look at some of the barriers girls can face which prevent them from attending secondary school; at what they are actually learning if they are in school, and at the opportunities that education creates in other aspects of girls' lives, such as health, jobs and relationships.

### What's this got to do with you?

Young people need to be informed, and it is vital that they know about girls' rights to their education and have the knowledge and skills to campaign in support of those rights, wherever they are in the world. There are numerous international declarations and laws that are supposed to safeguard all children's rights to an education and young people themselves can help to make sure these laws are upheld.

Globally there are 39 million girls aged 11-15 out of school. This is not right, and it's not fair. Girls' rights to education are meaningless unless they also have a supportive environment that helps them to enrol in school and stay there. They should not be stopped from going to school, by violence and sexism, and ultimately they should be free to make decisions about their own lives and schooling.

Many thanks to the members of Plan youth groups from the UK, USA, Finland, Canada, Malawi and Sierra Leone for their active participation in the development of this youth summary

Front cover photo Plan / Alf Berg

"Life here was tough! Girls' education was not a priority for most people. Most people married off their young girls to escape from high levels of poverty. Water, health and food were the most pressing needs of the communities."

Ayesha, 14, South Sudan

### Why adolescent girls?

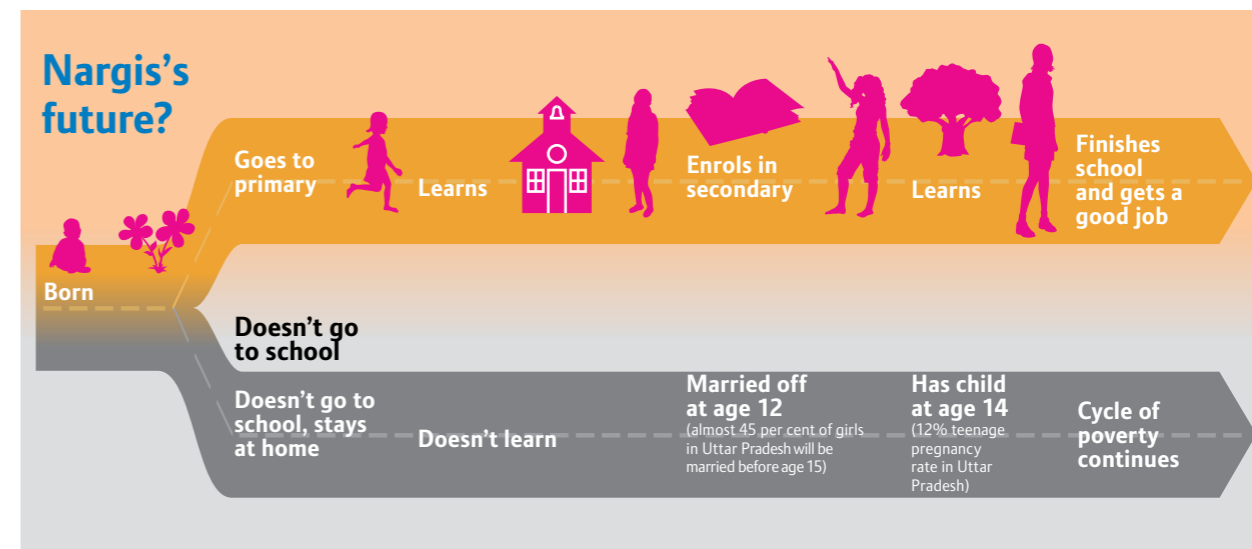
Because it is at puberty that in many parts of the world girls are seen as ready for motherhood, and are expected to take on domestic responsibilities.

### AGE 14- A PIVOTAL TIME!

Plan's research across 9 countries found that age 14 is the time most girls are likely to drop out of school. It is then that poverty and discrimination put huge pressures on a girl's ability to stay in school. Girls leave to take on the household chores, to get married, or because parents don't have the money to pay for their education. As girls develop physically there is often increasing focus on their reproductive and sexual roles rather than their educational needs and their right to education

### Nargis' Future?

Baby Nargis, welcomed as the world's seventh billionth person, was born on October 31st, 2011. She was born into a poor rural community in India. Although Nargis has the right to an education, whether she will be able to realise that right and benefit from the wider effects that a quality education can provide is another story. In the diagram below we have mapped out two fictional paths for how Nargis' future might look:



### What are human rights?

**Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled.**

You have human rights simply because you are human and they cannot be taken away. Human rights ensure people can live freely and that they are able to flourish, reach their potential and participate in society. They are there to ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and respect, but it does not always work out like that. Not everyone gets to realise their rights and it is important to know what they are and to stand up for them!



As well as the value of education for girls themselves, **ASK YOURSELF**, what are the benefits of girls' education to their family, their community and the wider world?

- Educated girls who go on to become mothers, are more likely to have their children later when their bodies can handle pregnancy and to have healthier and more educated children.
- They are more likely to earn better salaries and be able to negotiate fairer wages at work, so helping to lift their families and communities out of poverty.
- They are more likely to speak out on issues affecting them and their families, to understand their rights and be a force for change.
- Education also protects against violence. Educated men are less likely to inflict domestic violence and educated women are less likely to feel they must put up with it.

**Empowerment = having the POWER to make decisions and choices about your own life.**

Can you think of an example where you have been empowered to make a choice or decision about your life? What do you think would have happened if you were not empowered to make that decision?

### Know your rights:

Girls' right to education is protected in many important international legal documents spanning over 60 years, here are some key international rights agreements and other targets established by UN member states for you to familiarise yourself with:

International Human Rights Instruments + International Intergovernmental Declarations and Programmes of Actions	Article:	Relevance:
<b>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)</b>	Article 28, 29 (1), 2	<p><b>Article 28:</b> You have a right to education. The way bad behaviour in schools is dealt with should respect your dignity. Primary education should be free and compulsory. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this.</p> <p><b>Article 29:</b> Education should help develop your personality, talents and mental and physical skills. It should prepare you for life, encourage you to respect your parents. It should also encourage you to respect your own and other nations' and cultures. You have a right to learn about your rights. And education should help you live a peaceful and sustainable life.</p>
<b>Universal Declaration on Human Rights 1948</b>	Article 26	Everyone has the right to an education and primary education should be free and compulsory. Further education should be accessible to all depending on ability only and parents have the right to choose what kind of education their child receives. Education should develop global citizens who respect human rights, are tolerant of all cultures, nations, races and religions and want to maintain peace.
<b>Dakar Education for All (EFA) Platform For Action (2000)</b>	Goals 1-6	<p><b>6 goals:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve pre-school care and education, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.</li> <li>2. Ensure that there is free, good quality and compulsory education for all, especially girls, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged children.</li> <li>3. Ensure that the learning needs of all, not just young people, are met through learning and life skills programmes.</li> <li>4. Boost the number of adults who can read by 50 per cent between 2000 and 2015.</li> <li>5. Eliminate gender inequality in education.</li> <li>6. Improve the quality of education globally and ensure that everyone leaves education with the relevant qualifications, especially in core life skills such as maths, reading and writing.</li> </ol>
<b>Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)</b> In 2000, 189 nations made a promise to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. This pledge became the eight Millennium Development Goals	Goal 2 and 3	<p><b>MDG 2:</b> By 2015, all children should be able to complete a full primary school education.</p> <p><b>MDG 3:</b> There should be no gender inequality at any level of education by 2015.</p>

In reality, having a 'right' to something is no guarantee of actually getting it. A girl's right to go to school is not always honoured, and girls may not be aware of their rights to begin with.

“Girls have to help their parents with the house and with the farming. Girls have a duty to do as they are told. Boys do not have the same obligation to help... This sometimes means the boys go to school for longer than girls.”

Community leader, Houay How village, Laos

This year, Plan’s research across nine countries<sup>1</sup> found that 26 per cent of adolescent girls were out of school compared with only 18 per cent of boys.



Plan / Annie Mpalume

### Faith - The Oldest Girl in the Class:

Nineteen year-old Faith lives in the rural district of Chiredzi, Zimbabwe. She is the fourth of seven children. At the age of 13 she was forced to drop out of school as her mother felt that she had enough primary education. Her family could no longer afford to pay her school fees if they were to educate her younger siblings up to the same level. After leaving school, Faith went to work as a ‘house girl’ for a family in a nearby town.

“It was a horrible feeling to be cooking and cleaning for girls and boys who were a similar age to me. It made me so sad when they left each morning to go to school while I was left at home to do the cooking and cleaning.”

Helped by Plan, Faith eventually managed to return to school but coming from a poor family, she has clearly fought against the odds, “Many of my friends and girls I know from home are married already; some were as young as 12. I don’t want to be married yet. I want to stay in school and then, only after I have achieved something for myself, will I think about marriage.”

## SIX MAIN BARRIERS TO GIRLS’ EDUCATION:

There are numerous barriers that prevent girls, particularly adolescent girls, from attending school and learning while they are there. Research for this year’s ‘Because I am a Girl’ report identified several of them. They include:

1		<b>Early and forced Marriage/Child Marriage:</b> 1 in 7 girls in the world is married before the age of 18.
2		<b>Early Pregnancy:</b> 1 in 4 girls is a mother before the age of 18.
3		<b>Poverty/Schooling Costs:</b> even where education is by law free of charge, in many cases costs for things such as uniforms, books and exam fees still apply.
4		<b>Household chores:</b> research in Guinea Bissau found that girls work an average of eight hours per day on household chores compared to an average of three hours for boys.
5		<b>Violence in schools/Teacher abuse:</b> in Senegal researchers found that 80 per cent of children interviewed felt that teachers were the main source of violence in school and in Togo, 16 per cent named a teacher as responsible for the pregnancy of a classmate.
6		<b>Distance:</b> families can associate long journeys to school with danger and risk, not to mention the cost of transport. Poor, rural girls in almost every country have a lower rate of enrolment than their richer urban counterparts. In Pakistan for example, a half-kilometre increase in the distance to school will decrease girls’ enrolment by 20 per cent.



In El Salvador adolescent girls are sometimes taken out of school by their parents because there isn’t sufficient lighting on the road which increases the risk of assault.

<sup>1</sup>The nine countries are Cambodia, El Salvador, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

## Head of the Household

Many girls are responsible for family chores and looking after their siblings. Some girls are even left as the heads of their households because their parents may be sick, travelling for work, or are just not able to care for their children.

**“I am the head of my family: both my mother and father left one day back when I was only eight years old without saying goodbye...So it’s up to me and my brothers and sisters to feed ourselves....I wake up very early before the sun comes up to go and try and get work in other peoples fields. It is very hard work...I also do most of the cooking and housework, but sometimes my little brother will help, although he is only seven years old. I don’t go to school anymore...there is not enough money to pay my school fees. Maybe one day when my siblings are a bit older I could go back to school. I would learn and pass all my subjects, and then I could have a better job and a better life. Sometimes, I dream about becoming a teacher or maybe a nurse.”** Talent, aged 14, Zimbabwe

Girls like Talent have to put their dreams of going to school to one side as they do not have the time to go to school or learn because of their roles as carers and providers as well as household responsibilities.

### THINK:

What could support girls like Talent and her brothers and sisters to return to school and reach for their dreams? Could this sort of situation, having so much responsibility at 14, happen where you live?



Plan / Annie Mpalume

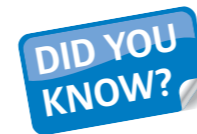
## The cost of educating girls:

One of the main reasons adolescent girls don’t attend school is cost, and the costs of sending girls to school rises with age. Research has shown that girls’ education in particular suffers more when parents do not have enough money to send all their children to school.

Secondary education costs are often three to five times higher than primary. Poverty plays a prominent role in the low transition rates for girls from primary to secondary school and in their withdrawal from education altogether.

**But there is a cost in not educating girls too. Failure to invest in girls’ education costs lives and money:**

- Health-related costs, as well as improving child and maternal mortality, could be avoided through investment in girls’ education. Not investing in girls’ education may cost more money: in Pakistan it was estimated that the annual costs of not educating girls were almost three times higher than the cost of educating them.
- Research has found that without investing in initiatives to support gender equality, governments will find it much harder to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.



In 2004 the amount needed to pay for basic education for all in the world’s poorest countries was less than the amount the USA and Europe spent on ice cream (\$31 billion) and not much more than on cosmetics (\$18 billion).

## Equal rights in school:

**“I think boys are confident enough and they can ask questions in the class. This gives teachers the idea that they are understanding the topic and boys are intelligent. We girls also want to ask questions, but we are shy and cannot ask questions...we become only listeners in the class.”** Girl, Pakistan

In your school do girls receive equal treatment from teachers and fellow students? Why? Why not?

What do you think is meant by ‘unequal power relations’ in the classroom? There are a number of obstacles within school that can affect the type of education girls receive. Here are some examples for you to think about:

- violence in school
- teacher abuse
- preferential treatment towards male students
- girls are often made to sit at the back of the classroom
- girls may be fed last at school
- lack of female teachers (especially in rural areas)
- lack of separate toilet facilities for girls
- curriculum (how girls are represented in school text books and lessons)
- large class sizes
- large age ranges within classes (often due to high levels of grade repetition)
- girls may be asked to clean the classrooms or the school toilets.

Research for the 2012 ‘Because I am a Girl’ report looked at teaching and learning in several schools. In many cases the way the community treated, and valued, men and women, boys and girls, was carried into the schools. The way the classroom is organised, the quality of the training the teacher has received and the attitudes of the pupils all have an impact on what you can learn.

### THINK:

What do we mean by gender equality in school? Why is it important?

ASK YOURSELF AND OTHERS:  
What role should adolescent boys have in supporting girls’ education?

We asked Joonas from Finland and this is what he said:

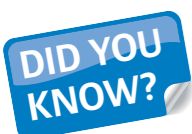
**“From my point of view the most important thing is understanding... Even I cannot deny (as a boy) that it’s so much easier to be taken seriously if you are a boy when we speak about (for example) politics. Because of historical reasons boys have always been the leaders. If boys don’t understand how wrong this is, there isn’t place for changing in future.”**

Joonas, 17 years old, Finland

<sup>2</sup> More information about the Millennium Development Goals can be found here: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

## Girl's rights: Moving beyond education:

- A good quality education should make it possible for girls to make their own decisions and choices in all aspects of their lives.
- Equality in secondary education can lead to higher rates of gender equality in the workplace and in the family.
- Education should be truly empowering, when girls finish school, they should have the ability and determination to challenge discrimination in their own homes, families, communities and relationships.
- Learning is not just about numeracy and spelling, what girls learn about themselves (as individuals and as members of their communities and families) is also extremely important.
- Girls should be empowered with the knowledge and skills to protect their own health and make well-informed choices about the sexual and reproductive aspects of their lives.
- By providing girls with safe and supportive educational environments, they are more likely to be able to make safer choices about sexual relationships.
- Education should be supportive for expectant and young mothers. In too many countries pregnancy means the end of education as girls are expelled from school and rarely come back.



In 2010, Tanzania changed its laws to allow young mothers to return to school and released guidelines on how to reintegrate adolescent mothers back into the education system, setting out extensive programmes to raise awareness of adolescents' rights.

## What about equal pay?

In recent years Latin America has been viewed as a success story for girls' education. In most countries the dropout rate is higher for boys and there are higher rates for young women finishing secondary school than young men. Young women are also more likely to attend university than young men. However...men still earn more than women in any age group, whatever level of education they have achieved, and in any type of employment.

### THINK:

Is this right? Why do you think this type of unfair discrimination exists?

## So what can be done?

Here are some interesting examples of successful initiatives which are improving girls' access to, and ability to remain in, secondary school:

- scholarships
- increased number of female teachers
- re-integration for young mothers
- mobile distance learning
- gender training for teachers and other school staff
- girl clubs (after school)
- more schools in rural locations
- improved transport
- enforcement of educational laws and marriage age.

### THINK BIGGER:

All of the examples above have had some success in working to increase girls' education, but education itself can only be successful, if it is linked to wider social change and equality at family, community and government level.

"The thing that helps us to realise our dreams is encouragement of the family." Adolescent secondary school girl, Morocco

## CALL TO ACTION

**The Youth Advocacy Group is made up of young people from all over the world (including a representative from Plan) working with the UN Special Envoy for Global Education. They are part of the UN Secretary General's historic Education First Initiative, and in order to make Education for All a reality they have drawn up the following calls to action:**

**Ensure universal access to consistent quality, inclusive and comprehensive education and training.**

1. Governments should recognize and encourage non-formal and vocational education, especially

in areas that are not addressed through the formal education system.

2. Improve the link between education and the labour market with a special focus on literacy.
3. Education should promote universal human rights values, ensuring full and uncompromising equality of opportunity, free from all and any forms of discrimination.
4. Government, Civil Society, the Private and Public Sectors should commit to work together to finance and invest in education systems in order to achieve the goal of ensuring "Education for All" by 2015.

## Further reading:

Here are some links to interesting sites where you can find out more about the issues raised;

- Learn about Plan International's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign and related resources here: <http://plan-international.org/girls>
- Plan USA's 'Because I am a Girl' Youth and Educator Toolkits are a useful resource: [www.planusa.org/educate](http://www.planusa.org/educate)
- Plan Asia's manual 'Bamboo Shoots' opens opportunities for children to learn about their own rights and discover the beauty of their potential: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/bamboo-shoots-training-manual-child-centred-community-development-child-le>
- Plan UK's 'Because I am a Girl' website for schools [www.becauseiamagirl.org.uk/schools](http://www.becauseiamagirl.org.uk/schools)
- Plan International, 'Because I am a Girl: I'll take it from here' video: <http://plan-international.org/girls/stories-and-videos-video-detail-16.php?lang=en>
- UNICEF, Basic Education and Gender Equality: [http://www.unicef.org/education/index\\_bigpicture.html](http://www.unicef.org/education/index_bigpicture.html)
- Millennium Development Goals can be found here: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
- World Bank summary on the International Day of the Girl: <http://www.worldbank.org/wb/slideshows/day-of-girl-education/>
- Education First Initiative: [www.globaleducationfirst.org](http://www.globaleducationfirst.org)
- Room to Read: [www.roomtoread.org](http://www.roomtoread.org)
- Special Envoy on Global Education website: <http://educationenvoy.org/>
- Global Campaign for Education website: <http://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/>
- The Girl Hub, The Girl Effect: [www.girleffect.org](http://www.girleffect.org)
- The Working Group on Girls, an NGO Committee working at the United Nations: <http://girlsrights.org/2011/05/csw-55-girls-statement/>
- UNICEF, Convention on Rights of the Child in Child-Friendly Language: [http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF\\_resources\\_crcchildfriendly.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_resources_crcchildfriendly.pdf) and [http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/little\\_book\\_rights.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/little_book_rights.pdf)
- United Nations resources on child friendly rights and resources: [http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/484\\_540.htm](http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/484_540.htm)
- Oxfam, summary of MDGs: [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change\\_the\\_world\\_in\\_eight\\_steps/files/introduction\\_background.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change_the_world_in_eight_steps/files/introduction_background.pdf) and a 2010 update of the process: [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change\\_the\\_world\\_in\\_eight\\_steps/files/2010\\_update.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change_the_world_in_eight_steps/files/2010_update.pdf)

## What next?

### If a girl gets a secondary education

years in secondary education

- She will increase her own income, and that of her family
- She's more likely to have a choice about when she has a child
- She's more likely to survive childbirth
- Her children are more likely to survive beyond the age of 5 years

### It's simple... ... right?

**BUT** globally, **39 million girls** between the age of **11 and 15 years** are **not in school**, many in the poorest areas of the world

- 1 in 7 girls is married by 15
- up to 50% will have a child by 18 in developing countries
- Violence against girls in school can mean they drop out

**Education is out of reach**

### What's the answer for girls?

Truly accessible, girl-friendly secondary education

### And what are the actions for governments?

- Make quality education for girls a national priority
- Take action on child marriage
- Prevent violence against girls

### Get involved.

Raise your hand to support quality education for girls.  
[raiseyourhandnow.com](http://raiseyourhandnow.com)

## What can you do?



- You could start by talking to your friends, families, teachers and community members about girls' rights to education.
- Get involved with youth organisations in favour of education for all in your own country - visit the Plan website for more information <http://plan-international.org/girls>
- Talk to your teachers/youth workers about organising a lesson or activity focusing on the importance of girls' rights to education.
- Could you orchestrate groups of your friends/peers to talk to your government representative?
- Localised campaigning: raise awareness of the importance of education for all by organising petitions, putting on exhibitions or plays, doing sponsored activities such as walks, runs, skips, dancing or using drama and singing to get your points across.
- Tweet about it: use social media like Facebook and Twitter to share some information about the barriers to education that girls face as well as how they can be overcome.
- Activities with peers: work with your peers, help them to see the importance of girls' rights to education – and ask them, what can THEY do about it?

**“I am the only one in my family who attended university. I am a role model in my family and my community, and I always try to encourage the girls of my village to strive for the best, despite the poverty that seems to be a barrier to their dreams.”**

Firehiwot Yemane, 24, Ethiopia



Plan / Nazia Parvez