Moving forward

In this report we have heard the voices of adolescent girls from all over the world, living in many different circumstances and facing many different challenges. No two girls will be the same, but, wherever they are and however they live, they have the same rights and the same call on all of us to make these rights a reality. We have tackled the issues of adolescent girls in cities and ICTs because they are crucial new arenas which could and should provide girls with real opportunities to improve their education and their health, and give them the chance to grasp what life has to offer them in the 21st century. Girls are half the world's future: the citizens who will be running our cities and shaping technology in the decades to come. We owe it to them to ease their passage from childhood into womanhood so that they have the skills and the knowledge to build a better and safer world for us all. Drawing on more than 70 years' experience of international development, Plan recognises that discrimination against girls and women is one of the main underlying causes of child poverty. Girls and boys have the same entitlements to human rights, but they face different challenges in accessing them. Girls are more likely to be pulled out of school, have less access to medical care, and are often fed less. They also experience more violence and sexual harassment just because they are girls.

This lack of opportunity and care is unfair and unjust. Yet investing in girls and young women has a disproportionately beneficial effect in alleviating poverty for everyone; for the girls themselves, for their families, communities and entire countries. That argument chimes with the issues of justice and equality of opportunity, and is another reason why Plan is making the 'Because I am a Girl' campaign one of its flagship priorities in the years ahead.

This is the fourth report in the 'Because I am a Girl' series. In all of them we have come across discrimination and neglect as well as resilience and determination. Wherever we look we find the same combination of girls getting a raw deal and girls coping with all that life can throw at them. There are some who do not survive or thrive, but many succeed against the odds. We can learn from their experiences, from the stories they have told us and from the common threads that run through girls' lives and through the report series.

We have made specific recommendations to improve the opportunities of girls in the two arenas that this report has focused on, but more generally we can all contribute. We need to listen to adolescent girls' views and ensure that their voices are heard by decision-makers. We need to learn from what they have to say. We need to include them in research, in planning and in policies. We need to invest in girls' skills and ensure that they have access to information, the skills to use it and the power to protect themselves. And finally, we have shown that what many of them have achieved in the face of adversity is truly remarkable. We need to celebrate these achievements and ensure that all girls, wherever they live in the world, have the same chances in life as their brothers.

> **"In terms of world leaders, I would like them to know that young people are not simply 'leaders of tomorrow'. We are already leaders, and members of society, today. Our views matter. We need avenues to express them, and for that we need to know that there is guaranteed freedom of expression, as well as solid access to information. When we are treated as full partners in development issues, real change will result."**
>
> Hamza, student, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Plan
plan-international.org/becauseiamagirl

Because I am a Girl
THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S GIRLS 2010

Digital and Urban Frontiers:
Girls in a Changing Landscape

Plan

"The first night I was on the street I slept under a tree. Then the police came and they just fetched the girls. We thought maybe they just picked the girls to take us somewhere safe. They took us to Albert Park and then they just pointed to one of my friends. Her name was Nutanka, and then they just abused her and when she came out she was naked. They were trying to do something to me but I kept on screaming for other people and they didn't do anything to me. They just put the pepper spray on us and hit us with the sjambok [leather whip]. I was 13 or 14, I am not sure. I will never forget what the police did to my friend."

Precious, Durban, South Africa[1]

Man: *Say, you make me happy quickly and get 100 euros, only 10-15 minutes, I think it's ok offer*
Girl: *Well I'm not that kind of girl and I'm only 15.*

Extract from an online chat, Serbia[2]

This year's 'Because I am a Girl' report looks at the lives of adolescent girls in two of the fastest growing arenas in the world today – the urban environment and the digital world. Both present new opportunities for girls and young women but also new dangers: risks which are little regulated or researched. This is particularly serious at adolescence, when girls are becoming sexual beings but have not yet developed the skills or the knowledge to protect themselves from harm. It is precisely at this time in their lives that they need the most support. Yet this is also when prejudice and discrimination – that treat girls as less equal and less important than boys – put them most at risk. Young women like Precious should not have to put up with the abusive experiences that for many are part of their daily lives. In these new arenas girls have the right to the same protection, opportunity and equality that they should have always and everywhere.

If we plan our cities properly, if we keep girls safe on our streets and online, if we protect them from harm, but at the same time enable them to develop the skills they need, we have the chance to change lives. Now, as we build cities and the digital world expands, there is the opportunity to really equip girls with the skills and the knowledge to ensure a better and safer future for us all.

MANOOCHER DEGHATI / IRIN

1 Plan International. Interview with Precious for the Street Children's World Cup in Durban, South Africa, March 2010.
2 ASTRA Anti-Trafficking Action. "Human (Child) Trafficking, A look through the internet window". Belgrade, 2006. Available at: http://www.astra.org.rs/ eng/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/internet-research-eng.pdf . p72-3.

Bright lights and big hopes – adolescent girls in the city

For the first time in history, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas. And the numbers are growing rapidly – each month, five million people are added to the cities of the developing world.[3] We can estimate that by 2030 approximately 1.5 billion girls will live in urban areas.[4] This means that violence against girls in slums and on the streets is also growing. Adolescent girls in particular may be pushed into begging, transactional sex and other forms of exploitation and cruelty, as an escape from extreme poverty and homelessness. And yet cities also have the potential to offer girls more opportunities than ever.

Dreams come true

Girls come to the city full of dreams and aspirations about how their lives will improve. Statistics show that they are right to dream.
- A girl is much more likely to go to school if she lives in a city – in developing countries school attendance for girls from 10 to 14 is 18 per cent higher in urban than in rural areas, and 37 per cent higher for young women between 15 and 19.[5]
- Girls have access to better services and better healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services. In one study, over 37 per cent of women in urban areas said they used condoms to avoid HIV, compared with only 17 per cent of rural women. And 87 per cent of urban girls and women said they had 'ever used' a condom as opposed to 57 per cent of rural girls and women.[6]
- Girls are less likely to be married at an early age – for example, in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, 50 per cent of young women in rural areas are married by the time they are 18, which is about twice the rate of young women in cities.[7]

Jobs for the girls – training and employment opportunities in Egyptian towns[8]

El Marg is a city of immigrants from rural areas; 30 years ago it was just fields and villages. Now it is a slum town, an outpost of Cairo that houses some half a million people.
"It is difficult for young people to find work here," says Sameh, one of the facilitators of the Forsa programme, which gives three months' training to young people and then finds them work at the end. "This is why Forsa is so useful. In Arabic it means 'opportunity'."
The programme targets three categories of young people – those who have dropped out of school, those who have been to college but can't find work, and those who are working in jobs which do not suit their skills. Most come from poor families. Recruitment is done via posters and roadshows – but also via Facebook. The courses were first successfully trialled in India and because of their success have now been exported to Egypt.
Forsa training has already been carried out successfully in East Cairo, where 90 per cent of the graduates found jobs. Marwa, aged 19, was part of this programme. She says: *"Before joining Forsa, I was afraid to deal with people. After joining Forsa, I began to overcome my shyness and fear and started to be open to all. I acquired a great deal of self-confidence. I made a lot of friends throughout the course with whom I speak a lot and without any fears or worries."*
Ola, who is still at school, says: *"We are the youth; we are the future of this country, but when I analyse the situation I feel there is a lack of opportunities for jobs for young women. The government must think about young women and give us the same opportunities as boys."*

3 UN-Habitat. "State of the World's Cities 2008/2009". United Nations. http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?catid=7&cid=5964&subMenuId=0&typei d=46 (accessed June 2, 2010).
4 Plan International. 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' 2010
5 UNFPA. "Growing Up Urban, State of World Population 2007: Youth Supplement." UNFPA. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2007/youth/english/story/ preface.html (accessed June 9, 2010).
6 Rahman, M. "Determinants Of Knowledge And Awareness About AIDS: Urban-Rural Differentials In Bangladesh." Journal of Public Health and Epidemiology Vol. 1(1) (October 2009): 14-21.
7 UNFPA. "Growing Up Urban, State of World Population 2007: Youth Supplement." UNFPA. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2007/youth/english/story/ preface.html (accessed June 9, 2010)
8 Interview with Nikki van der Gaag, for Plan International, 'Because I am a Girl' report 2010

Facing danger

City life can offer many opportunities, but it is not, for girls in particular, risk free. Poverty and overcrowding, poor sanitation, unlit streets, lack of housing and sexual harassment all mean that girls do not feel safe. This sense of threat is not confined to girls in poorer countries or girls in slum areas.

- In the Netherlands, an online survey of girls in cities conducted for this report found that while most girls and young women felt safe walking around their neighbourhood in the day, at night 40 per cent of those between the ages of 11 and 18 said they did not feel safe. This rose to 63 per cent of 17 and 18 year-olds.[9]
- A World Health Organisation study found that in Bangladesh twice as many urban as rural young women over 15 years of age had experienced physical or sexual violence by someone other than their partner.[10]
- A survey in Brazil found that a quarter of all female respondents in the city reported violence, compared with just over one in six females in the provinces.[11]
- If you are a girl living in one of the world's growing slums, life is even more hazardous. Adolescent girls can be in danger while undertaking the most mundane of tasks, as Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, points out: "Girls in slums have to choose between defecating in a plastic bag or risking rape should they dare venture outside to a dirty public toilet at night."[12]

Plan, supported by Women in Cities International, has developed an **8 Point Call to Action**.
All girls should have the right to:

1. **Access safe education in the city**
2. **Be free from violence in the city**
3. **Secure and decent housing**
4. **Move safely in the city**
5. **Affordable and accessible services in the city**
6. **Age-appropriate and decent work in a healthy urban environment**
7. **Safe spaces in the city**
8. **Participate in making cities safer, more inclusive and more accessible.**

No one to take care of you: adolescent girls on the streets

"You have no one to take care of you. Nobody in the society respects you or wants to see you… People don't care whether you die, whether you live."

Street girl in Kenya[13]

UNICEF believes that there are at least 100 million street children globally;[14] approximately 30 per cent of those are girls. India has the largest number of street children of any country in the world, an estimated 18 million.[15] In many countries, the numbers appear to be increasing – for example, in Jakarta, Indonesia, there were 98,113 street children in 2004 but this had risen to 114,889 by 2006.[16]

"It is better to keep quiet"[17]

"My name's Sala, I'm 14 years old and I moved to Accra two years ago. As soon as I moved to the city I fell into a group of other schoolchildren who introduced me to sex work. We work together and help each other make contacts and find clients. Most nights I spend with clients. There are gangs in our area who often fight and at times the leaders harass us girls. I've gotten into a fight with another street girl over a client and at times have had clients punch me… I know I could go to the police if needed but there are times when it is better to keep quiet… plus sometimes the police are just as violent as the gangs; once when I was arrested

a police officer hit me on the head with the butt of his gun. I've never been able to go to school and because of this I don't feel as smart as those around me. I would like to be able to learn dressmaking and earn a decent living. Even though it is difficult on the street, I still look forward to a better future."

Adolescent girls end up on the street for a variety of reasons. One survey in the Philippines showed that problems at home, particularly violence, were the main reason that street children had left:[18]

- because they are physically abused by their parents or older siblings (21%)
- because they do not like their own homes (21%)
- because they were abandoned by their parents or do not know where they are (15%)
- because their parents were separated or because of their step-parent (6%)
- because they have to earn money (3%)
- because their basic needs were not met or poor conditions at home (2%).

Once on the street, girls experience staggering levels of violence, from assaults by passersby, abuse through sex work, rape and assault by boyfriends and male street 'brothers', mental and physical cruelty by pimps and drug dealers, to sexual harassment, assault and brutality by police, private security and prison guards.[19]

"A lot of men from the general public or from nearby offices come to the river. These then solicit sex from girls… A man comes and picks whoever they want to have sex with. If I am picked, I leave my child with the other girls and take the client down to the river."

Tanya, from Zimbabwe[20]

Invest in girls, invest in the future

"We know that girls are the most inspirational, the most transformational, the most untapped currency in our world today. What will it take to unleash this potential?"

Queen Rania of Jordan[21]

Girls, given support, are well able to grasp the opportunities available. In fact, adolescent girls are the best source of information on their own needs. The following declaration comes from street girls and former street girls from seven different countries who gathered together in March 2010, in Durban, South Africa, to compete in the first ever Street Child World Cup. During a conference session they developed a manifesto to petition those in authority over them to accept, respect and protect them.

"We, the girls living and [who] have lived on the streets and those of us in shelters from seven countries, the UK, Tanzania, South Africa, the Philippines, Ukraine, Brazil, and Nicaragua, met during the Deloitte Street World Cup Conference event which took place on 20-22 March 2010, in Durban, South Africa."
We the street girls have the following rights and we want them respected:

- The Right to live in a shelter and home
- The Right to have a family
- The Right to be safe
- The Right to be protected from sexual abuse
- The Right to go to school and get free education
- The Right to good health and access to free health services
- The Right to be heard
- The Right to belong
- The Right to be treated with respect and decency
- The Right to be treated as equal to boys
- The Right to be allowed to grow normally

9 Plan Netherlands, 'Safety in Cities: an online survey', conducted for Plan International 'Because I am a Girl' Report 2010
10 García-Moreno, Claudia, et al. Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes and Women's Responses. Switzerland: World Health Organisation, 2005.
11 ibid
12 Urban World. A New Strategy to Close the Gender Divide. July 2009, p. 19.
13 Girl participant. CRADLE / USK / CSC National Workshop on Street Children and Juvenile Justice. Nairobi, Kenya: March 6-7, 2003
14 "Amount of Street Children Rises." Tempo Interactive, February 5, 2007.
http://www.streetchildren.org.uk/_uploads/Publications/5_amount_of_street_children_rises.pdf.
15 ibid
16 ibid
17 Plan International. Interview conducted by Street Child Africa for the 'Because I am a Girl' report 2010.

18 Puzon, Marco Paa. Painted Gray Faces, Behind Bars and in the Streets: Street Children and Juvenile Justice System in the Philippines. University of the Philippines in partnership with the Consortium for Street Children, 2003.
19 Justice for Girls. Submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its' 5th periodic review of Canada: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/info-ngos/justice-girls-new.pdf (accessed: June 24, 2010)
20 Plan International. Interview conducted by Street Child Africa for the 'Because I am a Girl' report 2010.
21 Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, Women in the World, http://www.thedailybeast.com/video/item/women-in-the-world-queen-rania (accessed: 24 June 2010)

Adolescent girls and communications technologies – opportunity or exploitation?

"I'm interested in technology, multimedia – the business. I love entertainment, music, I'm meeting new people. [In school] I was exposed to media, the web, the internet… I loved it, that's where I could connect with my friends."'

Tibusiso Msibi, student, 18, Swaziland[22]

One of the advantages of city life can be the prospect of greater access to and better training in information and communication technologies (ICTs). Access to new information technologies and the media can make a huge impact on young women's lives, introducing them to new ideas and ways of thinking that open up real possibilities and opportunities but, like life in the city, these new opportunities are not risk free.

As many technologies become cheaper and easier to access, it is crucial that adolescent girls and young women, as well as young men, are able to benefit from their use. This means not only having access to the technologies, but the skills and expertise to be able to use them to full effect – and to know how to keep themselves safe when doing so.

There are seven specific reasons why these technologies are important to adolescent girls:[23]
1. To keep in touch with others, which reduces their isolation in countries where this is an issue
2. In order to further their education and acquire new skills
3. In order to take an active part in their communities and countries
4. In order to have the skills to find work
5. To build specific skills and knowledge on subjects they might otherwise not know about, such as HIV and AIDS
6. Because evidence has shown that learning to use these technologies can build self-esteem
7. Last but definitely not least, in order to keep safe

Moreover, ICTs have financial value for adolescent girls and young women. If they don't acquire the skills of modern technology they will be disadvantaged in the workplace.
"In today's world, computers are the tools we use for work, to learn, to communicate and to find out about the world… In terms of employment opportunities, with new jobs, 95 per cent are going to require some kind of technology," says Wendy Lazarus of The Children's Partnership in the US.[24]

22 BarCampSwaziland June 2009. Interview with Tibusiso Msibi in Swaziland, Africa. Youth Assets. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5h_OjhiPFs (accessed June 15, 2010).
23 Plan International. 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' report 2010
24 Youth of the Bresee Foundation together with The Children's Partnership. "Why Does Technology Matter For Youth? Community Technology Programs Deliver Opportunities to Youth." The Children's Partnership, 2007. http://www.childrenspartnership.org/AM/Template. cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=11243 (accessed June 15, 2010).

What stops girls using technology?
Research for the 2010 'Because I am a Girl' report found that there are six key factors that prevent girls from taking advantage of technology:[25]
1. Discrimination – girls are still viewed as second-class citizens in many societies.
2. Numbers – boys both outnumber girls and tend to dominate access to computers.
3. Confidence – because they don't have equal access at school, girls may be less confident than boys when it comes to going into IT jobs because they don't feel they have the same skills and knowledge as the young men competing for the jobs.
4. Language – in order to use these technologies, English is usually a requirement, and for girls with only basic literacy in their own language, this is a major barrier.
5. Time – girls' domestic roles, even at a young age, mean they have less free time than boys to explore and experiment with new technologies.
6. Money – girls are less likely than their brothers to have the financial resources to pay for, say, a mobile phone and its running costs, or access to the web in an internet café.
7. Freedom – boys are also more likely to be allowed to use internet cafés because parents are concerned about their daughters going out on their own.

The dark side of cyberspace – how technology is increasing sexual exploitation

"An average person with a computer, modem and search engine can find violent, degrading images within minutes – a search that could have taken a lifetime, just 15 years ago."

Donna Hughes[26]

ICTs are exposing adolescent girls to images of violence, exploitation and degradation of women at a time in their lives when they are developing sexually. We know that more girls than boys are affected by sexual exploitation worldwide, and that one in five women report having been sexually abused before the age of 15.[27] The internet creates intimacies with total strangers that seem safe, and so adolescent girls have become prime targets for modern methods of abuse, including trafficking via the internet, mobile phones and other communications technologies. Or as one expert put it "the internet is just a new medium for old kinds of bad behaviour".[28]
It is now possible for someone to snap a degrading photo of a young girl and disseminate it in seconds.

25 Plan International. 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' report 2010
26 Hughes, Donna. "The Use of New Communications and Information Technologies for Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children." Hastings Women's Law Journal Vol. 13:1: 129-148.
27 García-Moreno, Claudia, et al. Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes and Women's Responses. Switzerland: World Health Organisation, 2005.
28 Palfrey, John and Urs Gasser. Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives. Basic Books, 2009.

One study in the UK found that adolescents, particularly those in the 16 to 17 year-old age group, were in serious danger of "online seduction".[29] Adolescent girls are also vulnerable to online solicitation or 'grooming' (securing a girl's trust in order to draw her into a situation where she may be harmed). This enables sex offenders to engage girls on many levels, from sexual chat to enticing them into physical contact. The recent case of a young woman in the UK who was raped and murdered by a man she met through Facebook illustrates the real and present dangers these types of online solicitations can pose to adolescent girls.[30]

The International Institute for Child Rights and Development through the Child Protection Partnership undertook research in Brazil for 'Because I am a Girl'.[31] They interviewed 44 girls and conducted a national online survey with over 400 respondents.

The good news
• 84 per cent of girls have a mobile phone
• 60 per cent say they have learned about online dangers
• 82 per cent have used the internet, with 27 per cent indicating that they are always online
• The more awareness and knowledge about ICT use that girls have, the greater degree of security they feel online

The bad news
• 79 per cent of girls said they did not feel safe online
• Almost half the girls who responded to the survey indicated that their parents know what they access online
• Only a third of the girls know how to report a danger or something that makes them feel bad online
• Almost 50 per cent of girls say they would go to meet someone in person whom they had met online

'It makes you really upset' – peer to peer abuse
Girls aren't just being targeted and abused online by strangers. A girl's best friend, her classmates and her boyfriend may also use technology for abuse. Child to child abuse via mobile phones and the internet is also a growing problem.
Whilst online or cyberbullying is an extension of offline bullying, there are a number of differences. Firstly, children can escape from offline bullying, but online bullying follows them home, and the victims experience it every time they turn on their mobile phones or computers.

"It's easier to say horrible stuff about people on [the internet]. It gets brought into school. When friends do this, it's horrible. It makes you really upset. You don't want to go into school again." [32]

Secondly, the consequences may be there forever in the form of comments or images, often degrading or sexualised pictures, posted on the internet or circulated to an almost limitless number of recipients. Girls can unwittingly participate in risky online behaviour by posting personal details about themselves on the internet or allowing photographs of themselves to be published or circulated in cyberspace. Sexting is the practice of sending nude pictures via mobile phones, which sometimes happens between young people themselves. Teenagers may think they are sending a picture only to their boyfriend or girlfriend, forgetting that it is possible for the image to go from private to global in a matter of seconds.

29 Chat-wise, street-wise, Internet Forum in the United Kingdom, March 2001
30 http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/mar/08/peter-chapman-facebook-ashleigh-hall
31 Child Protection Partnership and Plan International, original research undertaken in Brazil for the 2010 'Because I am a Girl' report (March 2010)
32 Summary for Children and Young People, Byron Review, (2008) UK. Available at: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/pdfs/A%20Summary%20for%20 Children%20and%20Young%20People%20FINAL.pdf

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Unleashing girls' potential : Recommendations on adolescent girls and ICTs

"I feel that it's important for teens to advocate for online safety because the internet is an amazing thing! It is a useful and fun tool, and more and more kids are using it all the time… By teaching teens and their parents about dangers online, and how to deal with them, we can help teens to enjoy the internet safely and responsibly."

Ada, 14, US[33]

International and national laws and policies are trailing the rapid advancement of IT platforms. Existing conventions and national legislation need to be stepped up and more rigorously implemented. Plan proposes six actions that those in charge of making decisions about technology, whether in government, the business world, or in civil society organisations, can take to ensure that girls' needs are taken into account and that the opportunities they are entitled to are accessible to them.

A Call to Action – girls and tech
1. Increase girls' access and control over IT hardware
2. Invest in maths, science and vocational education for girls
3. Expand and improve online protection mechanisms
4. Stop violence against girls online
5. Implement international legislation and increase collaboration
6. Teach girls how to protect themselves

Invest in girls
As with girls in the city so with the digital world – without fundamental investment in girls and young women and a genuine desire to encourage their participation, they will be both at a disadvantage in the economy and at personal risk. Training projects that really benefit girls and encourage them to become IT literate do exist; a number of organisations run technology camps and IT training both in and out of school. Other organisations use mobile phone technology to help improve literacy or to convey basic information about health and other problems that help keep girls safe.[34] Girls and young women are very aware how important IT skills are – in Egypt, Alya told her mother that they needed "a computer not hot food"; a computer is much more important to her than an oven.[35]
It will be increasingly so. The pace of development in the ICT sector is only going to accelerate. The question is – will the world work together to ensure that girls are equipped with the skills they need to seize the opportunities that the digital world offers them, and not simply stand by as old forms of abuse are perpetuated and exacerbated by the power and reach of the online world?

33 Girl Scouts, Let Me Know: http://lmk.girlscouts.org/Meet-The-Girls/Rockstars/Ada.aspx (Accessed: June 24 2010)
34 Plan International. 'Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls' Report 2010
35 Interview with Nikki van der Gaag, for Plan International, 'Because I am a Girl' report 2010

Cintia and her mother, Brazil

CLAUDIA CANUTO

Because We are Girls
'Real Choices, Real Lives' [36] – Turning four

In 2007 Plan set up a cohort study – 'Real Choices, Real Lives' – to follow a group of girls from birth until their ninth birthday. Their stories help illuminate the decisions and choices families worldwide face as their daughters grow up, and are a vivid reminder that the facts and figures contained in the report are about real people – real girls and their families.

This year, because the focus of the report is on adolescent girls in new and changing places – both urban space and the growing world of new technologies – we interviewed not only the parents of the girls taking part but also older siblings, cousins and neighbours. We found that although the vast majority of the girls taking part in Plan's 'Real Choices, Real Lives' cohort study live in rural areas, the dramatic changes described in this year's 'Because I am a Girl' report are nevertheless having an impact on their families. This is particularly so in Latin America (Brazil, Dominican Republic and El Salvador) and in West Africa (Benin and Togo). In Benin, one third of all the families taking part in the study are separated by seasonal or long-term migration to nearby or capital cities. As family members move to cities, the study clearly shows both the 'push' factor of rural poverty and the 'pull' factor of opportunity that city life represents. The experiences of the 20 Togolese families in the study demonstrate the pull of the city among rural communities desperate to leave their poverty behind. Twelve of them have a close family member – mother, sister, brother – who has already moved. Many others talk of moving to their nearest city to find work and better educational opportunities for their children. Massama's father, for example, would like her to become a teacher, but there is no secondary school in their village so he too is thinking about moving to the nearest town. For many of the families the nearest town is Sekode. Situated by the main north-south road

Huguette, Benin

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36 'Real Choices, Real Lives' Cohort Study 2010 is funded by UKAID (PPA Grant).

running through Togo, it is on one of the major child-trafficking routes in West Africa – a potential risk to balance against the educational benefits.

The teenage members of an older focus group, neighbours and friends of the families in the study, who we interviewed in Uganda, were clear that they are motivated to move to cities and gave the following reasons:
• To send money back home and support their elderly parents
• To live a more exciting life than in the village
• To reduce family expenditure at home
• To raise money in order to build a house in their village of origin
• To pay school fees of their siblings
• Ultimately to help other family members to get jobs in the city/town.

Doreen, Philippines

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Thi Kim Khanh, Vietnam

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In Brazil, at least half of the families interviewed already have older daughters who have left home, the vast majority either to improve their educational prospects or to work. The sister of one of the girls taking part in the study explains: "I want to finish high school to work, and maybe go to the university, and here in Codo there isn't one…"
The young women we talked to in Brazil spoke for their younger siblings and all the children whose parents had gone to look for work elsewhere when they told us: "When any member of the family leaves, the changes are for the worse…" and "when one member of the family is absent, there is a lot of sadness…"
The cohort study also supplies revealing information about girls and new technology. A small number of the teenage relatives of the girls taking part in the study have access to information technology. Mobile phones feature most prominently in their lives. Access varies from country to country; in Togo, for example, none of the families taking part in the study had heard of the internet and none had regular access to mobile phones. In Brazil, where many in our cohort live in urban slums, all of the teenagers, girls and boys alike, have access to the internet, either at school or at an internet café. However, a larger proportion of boys interviewed appeared to have regular access to mobile phones.
Talking to a focus group of Brazilian mothers and daughters it became clear that girls are held back by parental fears for their safety. Girls commented: "We want to take a professional course… our mothers don't let us take a course outside the community… they are afraid of sexual harassment." This desire to protect girls will hold them back from school, from internet cafés, from college and from fulfilling their potential.

Soumeyatou, Togo

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