



#GIRLSVOICES: ALL WE NEED IS OPPORTUNITY

Yuma, 15, from Nicaragua, is on a mission to change people's mind-sets around violence.



Acts of violence are common in my community. I've seen physical violence, trauma and bullying – much of which has taken place at the hands of gangs. In my neighbourhood, there are many gangs. They loiter on the streets, harassing boys and girls and encouraging fights. When they see us girls, they walk towards us and try to touch our hips, our shoulders and our face. Gangs scare us. This kind of behaviour causes confidence issues and leads to a lack of self-esteem, especially for girls my age.

It's hard to be a girl in my region as we are much more disadvantaged than boys. Men have all the power – especially at home – as they are the ones who make the decisions. However, being part of Plan International's Girl Power project, I now realise that women are just as strong as men and that life doesn't have to be like this. This, along with seeing people suffer from violence, is the reason I became an agent of change. I decided I wanted to change people's mind-sets around violence. I wanted to develop new ideas and I wanted to help those who have suffered harassment.

For me, it is important to support victims of violence in any way I can. If I am unable to deal with the case, I seek help from teachers, peers or those who work for Plan International. The most important thing is to support the victim in whatever way we can.

I have learnt how to interact with people and how to express myself. I now know what to do if someone is suffering violence. I enjoy learning new things and when I see someone has found happiness with my support it makes me feel good. I am keen to continue learning and share my ideas with others. I feel confident that women can achieve all the things that men do, and I am determined to keep learning.

GIRLS WITH NO EDUCATION ARE THREE TIMES AS LIKELY TO MARRY BY 18 AS THOSE WITH SECONDARY EDUCATION OR HIGHER.



AGENDA 2030: WHAT NOW?

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So, now what? As the ink dries on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and memories of a historic UN General Assembly begin to fade, "So, now what?" is the question we must all answer.

The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the most ambitious effort yet to reduce poverty, tackle inequality and injustice, and protect the planet. That 193 States have all agreed to them is, by any measure, a huge achievement.

Yet these goals will count for little if they remain just words on paper. When in New York, we all agreed that the true test of whether the 2030 Agenda lives up to expectations will come in its implementation. Full realisation of every goal and target by every state is essential if the promises of the SDGs are to lead to concrete results and improvements in the lives of children, especially girls, the world over. Not least because the goals of the Agenda are so interlinked and inter-dependent. What is also clear, however, is that the weakest part of the 2030 Agenda lies in the "follow-up and review". But without strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms, how will states – and other relevant actors – be held to account for their commitments?

Importantly, children and young people must be included in both designing the implementation plans of states and in ensuring that implementation is monitored effectively. Children have a right to be involved in the decisions that



A member of one of Plan International Peru's Child and Youth Advisory Councils writes down her ideas about the most important issues affecting children in Peru (Plan International / Adrian Benites)

affect them, and governments have an obligation to ensure their views are heard.

But young people, especially girls, face multiple exclusions which act as barriers to their effective participation in decision-making. Beyond the broad age- and gender-based discrimination, specific groups face additional disadvantages, such as rural youth or those with disabilities. Girls' ability to participate is most particularly constrained by poverty and the discriminatory social norms and attitudes which curtail the realisation of their rights on a daily basis.

Yet it is critical that their views – which are so often different to adults – are both sought and listened to. This is not only an end in-and-of-itself: it is fundamental to the success – or otherwise – of the entire 2030 Agenda.

That will require two things. Firstly, widespread, systematic changes must be made to structures and attitudes, so that children in general and girls in particular are recognised as legitimate actors and change-makers today, not simply passive beneficiaries of tomorrow.

Secondly, the appropriate mechanisms and processes

must be put in place throughout countries from national to local level, to enable young people to participate. That means they must include both formal and informal mechanisms, be age-appropriate, but also disability-friendly, perhaps in multiple languages and the using methods that are accessible to all young people – be they scorecards, surveys or using ICT.

Since it is at the local and national levels where young people are most able to participate meaningfully and effectively in both accountability processes, governments must ensure a "bottom up" approach to accountability.

As civil society, we also have a duty to ensure we work with – not just on behalf of – young people. From the way we conduct our advocacy to the programmes we implement, we too must be held accountable to ensure that we do not in any way undermine the achievement of the SDGs and work towards their realisation, within our mandates. This is something Plan International is committed to, and we look forward to working with girls – and boys – around the world to hold their leaders to account for their commitments in Agenda 2030.

WORLD LEADERS HAVE COMMITTED TO 17 GLOBAL GOALS TO END EXTREME POVERTY, PROTECT THE PLANET, AND ENSURE PROSPERITY FOR ALL. FOR THE GOALS TO BE REACHED, EVERYONE NEEDS TO DO THEIR PART: GOVERNMENTS, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENS.

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