Girls Can Change the World!

Nine projects that are giving girls this chance
ABOUT US

Global Reach

Plan International works side by side with members of the community in thousands of communities across the developing world to end the cycle of poverty for children. Since its modest beginnings in 1937, Plan has grown into an $850 million international federation often ranked among the top 10 international development organizations by reputation, size, and scope. Its headquarters in the United Kingdom supervises the distribution of funds raised by 21 national fund-raising offices for projects carried out by 50 in-country field offices. Plan is an independent organization with no religious, political, or government affiliations.

Because I am a Girl is a girl-focused global campaign launched officially by Plan International in 2012. The campaign was created to shine a spotlight on Plan’s groundbreaking work in developing countries to protect vulnerable girls living in poverty from injustices, and to help them realize their full potential. It seeks to build support and momentum for the work still to be done.

Plan International USA

Plan International USA is the U.S. national office of Plan International. It plays a vital role in moving the Because I am a Girl campaign forward by funding nine girl-centered projects in Africa, Asia, and Central America.

“I remember when Plan first came to this community, back in ’98. Plan works with children, but really with the whole community. And it is the Because I am a Girl project that is changing my daughter’s life.”

— Carmen, mother of 17-year-old Johana
El Salvador
“There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. If we want to succeed in our efforts to build a more healthy, peaceful, and equitable world, the classrooms of the world have to be filled with girls as well as boys.”

— Kofi Annan, former United Nations secretary-general
A girl in the developing world faces an overwhelming set of challenges from the day she is born. Because she is a girl, she faces discrimination in her own home. Because she is a girl, she’s more likely to suffer from malnutrition, to be forced into an early marriage, to be subjected to violence, to be sold into the sex trade, or to become infected with HIV. Because she is a girl, she’ll have limited access to a doctor or even a primary education (if she’s able to go to school at all). Unless something changes, she, too, may begin to believe that she deserves less, that her health and welfare will never matter.

But what happens if something does change? What happens if a girl is given a chance? What happens if she has resources at hand to tap into her own power?

Decades of probing research and on-the-ground experience are confirming that investing in a girl enables her to lift herself out of poverty, improving the economic condition of her family, her community, and, ultimately, her country. Not only does it protect human rights, it also makes sound economic sense. Investing in girls delivers a higher return than any other investment made in a country’s development. Quite simply, it is the key to breaking the cycle of global poverty.

The Because I am a Girl international campaign is giving girls that chance. This global effort will touch the lives of 4 million girls. And for each of the projects, men and boys are playing a critical role, too, because real change can’t happen without the involvement of the entire community. What’s more, everyone benefits from the outcome – girls and boys, women and men.

With your support, the U.S. office of Plan is proud to be funding nine projects for the Because I am a Girl campaign. Locations are Burkina Faso, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Sierra Leone, and Vietnam. These projects work with individuals, families, communities, and institutional structures to provide girls with the skills, knowledge, and materials they need to grow and thrive.

Because being a girl should always be a positive, empowering experience.
BECAUSE I AM A GIRL

Because I am a Girl wouldn’t be what it is today without our Girl Ambassadors. For each of our projects, we select 12 adolescent girls in the very early phases to add their voices to deliberations on how the project can be most effectively designed. As the project moves along, they continue to advise Plan on what is working and what isn’t, and how the project can be improved.

The girls mature as the project matures, and soon they are taking on the role of trusted Girl Ambassador, talking with their peers and their communities about the difficult issues being tackled and the changes needed, thus honing their communications skills as future leaders. In many cases, they develop action plans for their communities and organize community events to increase education about girls’ rights, their health, and their potential.

Plan owes a deep debt of gratitude to each one of our Girl Ambassadors. We send them our heartfelt thanks for all they are doing today, and our sincere wishes for success and fulfillment in the days ahead.

OUR GIRL AMBASSADORS

Anisah, age 17, Indonesia

“I’m teaching my friends about the dangers of getting married and having babies too young.”

Sumitra, age 13, orphaned and living by the Indian border in Nepal

“My confidence has grown so much. I’ve even organized a whole program to teach my school about the dangers of trafficking.”

Johana, age 17, El Salvador

“Girls are not less! I am standing up and speaking out to help the girls in the community who are bullied by older men.”
AFRICA – BURKINA FASO: SECONDARY SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Going to school at all can be daunting for a girl in Burkina Faso. And being able to stay in school even when she becomes a teenager can feel like an impossible dream. To begin, she might have to walk up to 10 miles just to get there. Then, once she arrives, there might be no toilets, no privacy. And when lunchtime arrives, there might not be enough canteen food to go around. Meanwhile, back at home, household chores keep calling her name, and pressure might be mounting to get married.

But through your support of the Because I am a Girl campaign, you are shifting these odds. You are bringing quality secondary education to more than 12,000 boys and girls age 12 to 16 living in the provinces of Namentenga and Sanmatenga. Eleven participating schools are benefiting from additional classrooms, laboratories, and a new library. And additional food is supplied to the schools’ lunchtime canteens to keep them fully functional throughout the school year.

Boys and girls — who both have limited opportunities for secondary school in these regions — are reaping the benefits of the new school facilities. However, there are only 4 girls for every 5 boys in secondary school in Burkina Faso. Thus, 300 girls have enrolled in the project’s financial scholarship program, and each of them now has a bicycle to use as school transportation. And an additional 250 girls selected on the basis of need have free access to their school canteen. Other activities such as gender-sensitive training for teachers and school clubs have been woven into the project. These less-tangible but critical components are playing a vital role in laying the foundation for lasting change.
AFRICA – EGYPT: SAFE GIRLS TODAY, LEADERS TOMORROW

Many Egyptian girls are subject to harmful practices and traditions, some dating back centuries. They might be pulled out of school because their education is seen as having little value. They often are forced to marry young, meaning little or no schooling. Pregnancies compromise their health; they might become widows early on because their husbands are decades older; and they are at risk for domestic violence and sexual abuse at the hands of their husbands and relatives.

You are helping to make Egyptian girls safer through the Because I am a Girl project unfolding in two locations: Cairo South and Qalyoubiya, located north of Cairo in the Nile Delta region. First, the creation of community-run child-protection committees builds a safety network for girls in their own communities. Committee members educate their families, friends, and neighbors about child protection, including prevention of gender-based violence. They take a lead in reporting instances of rape and other types of violence, and are working to eliminate barriers that prevent cases from coming to light. They also act as an advocacy and referral service for girls affected by violence. Furthermore, men and boys join transformative discussions about gender awareness, and teen girls take leadership training and learn to mentor younger girls in peer-helper programs.

In total, your support reaches an estimated 1,500 girls age 6 to 8, creating a safe and nurturing environment for girls to grow, thrive, and become strong leaders in the future.

67 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys ages 15 to 29 believe a husband is sometimes justified for beating his wife.

(PopCouncil Survey of Young People in Egypt, 2011)
AFRICA – ETHIOPIA:
RAISING HANDS FOR GIRL-FRIENDLY CLASSROOMS

More than 1 million primary-age girls in Ethiopia are not in school. Too many parents, teachers, and village leaders still believe that it is a waste of time and money to educate girls. As elsewhere, young girls are expected to shoulder hours of household chores and care for younger siblings as their primary role in the family. Going to school can seem out of the question.

But you are changing the fate of these girls. The Because I am a Girl project is reaching more than 5,000 girls (and 5,000 boys) age 7 to 14 in eight public primary schools located in some of the most marginalized communities of Addis Ababa.

Both boys and girls benefit from new school equipment and facilities, and specific girl-focused activities will help to close the gender gap in educational opportunities. For example, hundreds of girls are being tutored in English and math; more than 1,000 girls are receiving notebooks, pencils, and school bags; and more than 400 girls without means are receiving their school uniforms at no cost. Separate latrines and hand-washing stations are being constructed at the schools so that girl students can stay safe and healthy at school and concentrate on their learning.

Parents of girls are joining savings groups and are taking business trainings so that they can generate more income and financially plan to send their daughters to school well into the future.

Finally, to build self-esteem and knowledge, girls are participating in public-speaking classes; learning about reproductive health (and receiving sanitary supplies); and taking part in training on child rights and responsibilities. Already, learning is being converted into action: After taking the training, two girls who were about to be forced into early marriage spoke up and were able to stay in school with the support of the community.

“I’ve learned what is expected of a good leader. I want to be a leader in my community.”

— Eden, age 13
Being able to save money a little bit at a time boosts a girl’s confidence, not to mention her practical ability to shape her future. That’s what thousands of girls are discovering when they join a Girls’ Savings and Loan Association in the Western Rural Area of Sierra Leone. The associations are a part of a broad Because I am a Girl initiative that, through your support, is helping girls save money, succeed in school, and stay safe. Ultimately, you are positively affecting the lives of 5,000 girls.

Unfortunately, none of these goals is to be easily had. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world. Sexual violence in schools is explicitly recognized as a major deterrent to girls’ education. In addition, nearly half of all girls in Sierra Leone become teen mothers, with more than 1 in 10 giving birth by age 15 and dropping out of school.

But you are helping girls stay in school and stay safe through support groups and mentor programs. Girls’ clubs at school are being established, with a special focus on ensuring that the most marginalized populations of girls with disabilities also are reached.

You are helping girls save money through the life-changing resource found in the Girls’ Savings and Loan Associations. Training includes record keeping, calculating interest on loans, and other financial literacy skills, but it also includes child rights, how to get help as a victim of sexual violence, and the consequences of early marriage and childbirth.

Once training is complete, it’s time to start saving, with parents and guardians funding the girls’ contributions and accessing loans to fund their daughters’ education and health needs. And the saving continues. So does the validation, the pride, the recognition, and the chance for a better life.

Sierra Leone has the 10th-highest adolescent fertility rate in the world.
(UNDP, 2010)

“My mom and grandma can’t save money because they can’t read or write. But now I can teach them how.”
— Danica, age 13
India has the largest number of working children anywhere in the world. Unofficial estimates put the total number as high as 60 million. Legally, with no minimum age required by law, children as young as 6 spend day after day toiling in fields and factories.

In the beedi (cigarette rolling) industry, for instance, young girls sit like robots alongside their mothers for countless hours and paltry pay, the nicotine seeping into their hands. Trapped in the only life they know, they are being robbed of their childhood, their health, and any opportunity for a different path.

You are a critical part of the fight to keep young girls in school and out of the fields and factories in Andhra Pradesh, an agricultural region where child labor is especially desperate. Your support of the Because I am a Girl project is reaching nearly 6,000 girls and boys age 6 to 14. Enrollment campaigns help young girls transition back into public schools, and vocational training programs teach older girls safe trades such as tailoring and computer skills and connect them with job opportunities upon graduation.

Project staff members are organizing community events and talking with parents about the longer-term benefits to families of daughters staying in school. They are linking families with livelihoods and resources — such as national employment schemes — so that families do not need to depend on the labor of their children.

To reinforce the message, community members are staging street-theater performances and carrying out a door-to-door sticker campaign about girls’ rights and child labor. Discussions with labor union leaders and local government officials strengthen institutional support to prevent child labor. Only with an approach on multiple levels can the addictive practice of child labor be transformed into fresh prospects for girls and boys alike.
ASIA – INDONESIA:
HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY BABIES

More than 7.5 million children suffer from malnutrition in Indonesia. In the poorest provinces, child and infant mortality is a problem of epic proportions, with malnutrition a strong contributor. Many of these children's mothers have been forced into early marriages. All too soon, they become pregnant and are at risk for their lives. In fact, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-old girls. If they do survive, they have little knowledge of how to protect their babies’ health or their own.

But you are fighting malnutrition and saving lives in 27 villages in the districts of Dompu and Sikka. The Because I am a Girl project is teaming with village midwives, community health workers, and traditional community leaders, combining community education with a host of practical measures to keep both mothers and babies healthy.

Parent Support Groups bring pregnant women, lactating mothers, and guardians together in a trusting environment to learn about prenatal care, delivery at the local health clinic, and breastfeeding as the healthy alternative to formula. They also learn about healthy cooking and feeding methods; how to monitor a baby’s growth and development; and danger signs that a child needs to be brought to the health clinic.

To instill healthy practices that begin early on, adolescent girls from the villages are attending meetings in youth centers to learn about sexual and reproductive health and about the rights of girls. These girls are becoming spokespeople on these issues, creating village action plans to educate the wider community.

Finally, you are providing practical resources in remote villages where food vendors rarely are seen, through demonstration plots for gardening and a community-run fish farm with tilapia and carp stock donated by the local fisheries department.

“My first baby was malnourished, but this group has taught me about nutrition to help my youngest baby grow up healthy.”

— Wenti, young mother of two
ASIA – NEPAL: PUTTING A STOP TO CHILD TRAFFICKING

The trafficking of children is one of the most horrific violations of human rights. An estimated 11,000 girls are trafficked every year from Nepal into India and other countries, primarily for prostitution. The country’s high unemployment rate, combined with a rapidly growing youth population, is creating an appalling heyday for child traffickers.

Girls might be especially vulnerable if they are poor, have dropped out of school, or live in unstable home situations. They might be told to lie about their age and migrate through illegal channels, falsely led by promises of good jobs or arranged marriages. Sometimes their families willingly sell them against their will. More often, however, their parents are also deceived.

Three districts that lie close to the border with India — Banke, Sunsari, and Rautahat — are especially heavy origin and transit areas for trafficking. In these vulnerable areas, your support is reaching 15,000 girls at risk of trafficking.

You are reducing these girls’ vulnerability through enrollment in the “Better Life Options” program, an alternative-education curriculum that 1) helps girls reintegrate into school life if they have dropped out; 2) connects them with vocational training; and 3) provides essential life-skills training such as sound decision-making, reproductive health, and increased self-esteem.

For girls who have been exposed to trafficking, your support is creating rehabilitation and reintegration centers. The centers are safe havens where they can begin to heal from their trauma and find hope. Vocational training is available, as is psychological counseling to help them transition back into their homes and communities with dignity and self-respect.

86 percent of trafficked Nepalese people are women and girls. (UNODC 2012)
Without a basic knowledge of finance, a young woman in Vietnam is trapped. She will never be able to pull herself out of the day-to-day struggle to simply make ends meet. Learning to save money is the first step for a young woman to build a stable and secure future for herself and her family.

You are giving young women this opportunity to stand on their own feet and safeguard their futures, through Village Savings and Loan (VSL) groups created in partnership with the Vietnam Women’s Union. Your support for the Because I am a Girl project in Vietnam creates hundreds of local VSL groups across Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces, two areas in the central region with high poverty rates and a high percentage of traditionally marginalized ethnic minorities.

Once women join a VSL group, they receive training on how the group operates, how to manage their own money, and the basics of longer-term economic planning for their household. In addition to saving, they can take out small loans to buy school books and uniforms for their children; purchase sewing machines and other equipment to start small businesses; and provide basics such as food on the table. With the ability to manage money, women and girls are participating more in society and are gradually shifting the way that they are viewed in their communities and families. What’s more, VSL groups are becoming platforms for women to learn about other vital issues such as domestic violence, parenting and communication, and sanitation.

Partnership with the Women’s Union has been indispensable. For its part, the union serves as adviser to help ensure that all project activities are in strict compliance with government regulations and policies. At the same time, the capacity of the local-level unions is steadily increasing to become, and remain, an expert resource for the VSL groups long after Plan steps out of the picture.
El Salvador is one of the most violent countries in the world. Its brutal civil war was characterized by death squads, child soldiers, and senseless violence and torture. Although the official conflict ended in the early 1990s, the culture of violence has continued, with gangs virtually ruling many communities. It is woven into the fabric of the community and understood to be normal.

A girl growing up in El Salvador faces violence everywhere she turns. No one bats an eye when a 13-year-old girl is bullied and blackmailed into living with a 24-year-old man as his girlfriend. The end result, commonly, is abuse and early pregnancy. Girls need opportunities, including education — but often their local community does not have a high school. And even if a neighboring community does have one, making the journey there can be fraught with danger because of the gangs.

You are giving girls in El Salvador the chance to live without fear of violence. Your support of the Because I am a Girl project reaches 1,800 girls and 180 boys age 12 to 18 in 10 municipalities. Youth groups have been created to help girls challenge prevailing negative cultural attitudes and prepare them to stand up against the discrimination, the bullying, and the violence. Together, girls are discussing specific places in their communities where they feel safe, places where they feel threatened, and how to lessen the risk. Peer helper and peer listener groups are part of the process.

Adolescent boys are partnering with girls to bring about this change. They are taking part in training sessions where they are rethinking what it means to be masculine, and finding ways to solve conflict nonviolently. They are becoming allies in the fight to bring peace and gender equality to their communities — gender equality that includes a wide range of opportunities for both boys and girls.

“I learned that I don’t have to stay silent if someone hurts me.”
— Gysela, age 13
JOIN US!

Get involved today by going to www.becauseiamagirl.us and becoming part of a global movement to create a brighter future for girls, their communities, and the world! On the site you can:

- **Promise it!** Join the 4 million-girl promise and sign our petition to take a stand against gender inequality!

- **Share it!** Spread the word about *Because I am a Girl* by texting, tweeting (@bcimagirl), posting on Facebook (www.facebook.com/bcimagirl), or emailing your friends.

- **Wear it!** Can a T-shirt help change a girl’s life? In a word: Yes! By wearing your commitment, you can generate awareness of girls facing discrimination and help lift 4 million girls out of poverty.

- **Give it!** Give differently and invest directly in girls around the world! Buy a baby chick that will become an egg-laying machine and provide food and income for a family; provide a girl with essential survival tools such as a birth certificate and vaccinations; or gather your friends and raise funds for a Gift of Hope. Check out dozens of gift ideas at www.planusa.org/giftsofhope.

Plan is proud to collaborate with many corporate partners committed to supporting girls worldwide. For more information about our partners, please visit www.planusa.org/biaagpartners.
Plan International USA
Promising Futures, Community by Community

Plan International USA is part of the Plan International federation, working side by side with communities around the world to end poverty for children, reaching more than 84 million boys and girls worldwide.

The Because I am a Girl campaign sprang from on-the-ground research that showed over time that investing in girls is the key to truly ending poverty for all girls and boys across the globe. When girls thrive, the whole community thrives.

At the heart of the Plan International USA Because I am a Girl campaign are these nine girl-focused projects that give girls the basic resources they need to transform their lives, their families, their communities, and the world.

Plan is a 501(c)(3) organization supported by corporations like Intel and Alex and Ani; institutions like USAID and the Gates Foundation; and generous donors like you.

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