



**We Are the Girls**

Let's fight gender inequality together.

# We Are the GIRLS.

**2022 Annual campaign review**

# A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

Plan's We Are the Girls campaign is a worldwide effort to support girls as they come together in the fight for gender equality. Here are some examples of programming supported by the campaign, from various countries where Plan works.

## Egypt: Safer Cities for Girls

**COMPLETE!**

This project supported girls' leadership and advocacy for community safety in the city of Cairo, running from 2019 through the end of 2021. Through the project activities, more than 3,000 young people were trained to become gender equality advocates in their neighborhoods, resulting in the implementation of 25 safety initiatives.

## El Salvador: Champions of Change

This project supports the young leaders who are ending the culture of violence against girls by rewriting gender rules and engaging boys and men. The project includes a National Girls' Movement, a group of girls that meet regularly to plan and execute advocacy campaigns for gender equality.

## Global: Kotex® She Can Initiative

**FULLY FUNDED**

In Brazil, China, Colombia, Guatemala, India, Nigeria, Peru and Vietnam, Kotex and its parent company Kimberly-Clark have partnered with Plan to support menstrual health, in school and at home. So far, the project has reached 35,231 young people in Vietnam through training and education programs focused on menstrual health and gender equality.

## Guatemala: Connection to Success

Young women are building better futures for themselves through this project, which prepares them for jobs or entrepreneurship. Already, 2,465 young people have completed Plan's life skills and gender equality training through the project, giving them the confidence they need to succeed.

## Indonesia: GIRL 2.0

**FULLY FUNDED**

This project provides training and financial support to young people who want to start their own businesses, as well as scholarships so that they can finish school. So far, 211 young people have completed training to gain professional and financial skills.



## India and Nepal: PROTECT

This project fights child trafficking and promotes awareness by supporting young leaders. So far, 1,205 young people across both countries have been trained to lead advocacy campaigns, and the young leaders play a significant role in crafting messages for their communities.

## Mexico and Central America: Protected Passage

In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, this project helps to protect migrating adolescent girls and provide support for those returning to their home countries. Participating young people lead awareness events in their communities to combat stigma against people who migrate, among other activities.

## Senegal: Girls Learn & Thrive

This project spreads the truth about child marriage and keeps girls in school. Girls Learn & Thrive utilizes the **GirlEngage** approach through a girls' steering committee, which makes critical decisions about the design and planning of activities, as well as the recruitment of new participants.



### U.S.: Girls Out Loud

As part of Plan's We Are the Girls campaign, we created Girls Out Loud, a group of girls between the ages of 13 and 18 living in the U.S. Through our private Instagram account, these girls safely share their thoughts and feelings about gender and girls' rights.

### U.S.: Youth Advisory Board

Plan USA is guided by a Youth Advisory Board made up of young people from across the country who serve as ambassadors for their generation. The YAB's role touches every aspect of Plan's operations, from advocacy and marketing to program design and implementation.

### U.S.: Youth Leadership Academy

This annual project invites high school-aged young people to spend a year designing and implementing a project that tackles the social justice issues they care about. Building from the U.N.'s sustainable development goals, the program guides young leaders as they make a difference in their communities with support from their peers and experts from Plan's global network.

### Zimbabwe: The Graduation Project

This project helps more girls stay in school by building dormitories that will keep them safe, and uses the **GirlEngage** approach to design those spaces to meet girls' needs. In addition, the project provides information on girls' sexual and reproductive rights. Already, the percentage of participating girls who said they know how to access adolescent-friendly health services has jumped from just 13% at the beginning of the project to 93%.



Jamila, 23, works at a Plan early education center in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. “I want to be the country’s future,” she says. “I want to become a great teacher. I want to learn new things. This is my dream, for myself, my community and my country.”

The **GirlEngage** approach recognizes that girls aren’t in this fight alone. So, each Plan project supported by the We Are the Girls campaign works on multiple levels to achieve its goals, from the individual level to the levels of family, community and society. While each project has its own metrics related to specific program objectives, such as girls’ enrollment in school or the total value of seed capital provided to entrepreneurs, the campaign as a whole measures its success via three main indicators:

1. Changes in girls’ sense of agency.
2. Changes in gender power relations, as related to social position and gender norms.
3. Changes in the enabling environment, including community and national conversations about girls’ equality, resulting in real policy change.

This review examines program results from each of these indicators across Plan’s project portfolio, highlighting salient examples from projects throughout 2022.

## INTRODUCTION

We Are the Girls is Plan International USA’s ambitious campaign for investment in adolescent girls to achieve gender equality. Through a diverse portfolio of innovative projects, the campaign seeks to unite girls from around the world to lead the fight against gender inequality. And, by implementing Plan’s unique girl-driven **GirlEngage** approach, We Are the Girls will trigger a chain reaction across Plan’s projects around the world, ultimately impacting 10 million lives.

**GirlEngage** is Plan USA’s new approach to development, the first and only approach that’s supporting girls as they become the drivers of the change they want and need in their lives. It is a strategy focused on adolescent girls and young women that makes it possible for the girls themselves to lead our programs — from designing projects, to leading activities, to measuring success.

For too long, adolescent girls in poverty have been viewed as problems to be fixed, rather than partners from whom to learn. But girls know the changes they need in their lives, and it’s up to us to listen and work with them, and for them, to make that change happen.

## INDICATOR: GIRLS' AGENCY

At the most basic level, all Plan projects should improve girls' feeling of control over their own lives, **their power to decide which path their life will take** — in other words, their sense of agency.

Plan's definition of agency involves several other aspects of how a girl perceives herself and acts in the world, including positive identity, self-efficacy, ability to plan ahead, perseverance and positive beliefs about the future. But a girl's feeling of agency depends on a variety of other factors, too, including her culture, family traditions and values.

For example, the Kotex® She Can Initiative works in eight countries to support girls as they educate their communities about menstrual health. As participants learn about periods, they share the information with others, disproving stereotypes and eliminating stigma. As of September 2022, the project's work in Vietnam alone had **trained 35,231 young people on menstrual health and gender equality**, in order to reduce stigma surrounding periods.

"I joined the project when I experienced my first menstrual period with doubts and fears," Chi, an 18-year-old girl who participated in the project in Vietnam, said. "But I think with project activities at schools now, girls will be equipped with enough knowledge about reproductive health [and] the menstrual period so that they can confidently welcome puberty. With the knowledge and skills learned, **I feel more confident, more mature, and will bring the knowledge and skills learned to share and help other girls.**"

In Zimbabwe, The Graduation Project has also incorporated activities to promote menstrual health awareness. In June 2022, Plan staff worked with local health agencies to support events at the two project schools. Overall, 590 girls and 419 boys participated in discussions about how to use and dispose of period products and how to fight period stigma in their communities.

Project staff credit activities like this with the huge strides the program has prompted in girls' sense of agency. Before the project began, less than 1% of participating girls felt that they had agency and control over their lives and their futures. Now, **67% of girls have reported feeling a sense of increased agency.**

A study of young people who have participated in Plan programming in the U.S. recently found similar results. Overall, 64% of program graduates reported that their participation left them feeling "very empowered," and 80% strongly agreed that Plan programming played a role in their feelings of self-confidence.

"They never treated us like kids; they always treated us like adults," one Plan program graduate said. "They always spoke to us like adults, they didn't dumb anything down to teach it in a way that was simplified. **I feel that they really treated us like equals** and just having this community of adults treat this big community of youth like that really empowered us to feel that 'yes, we're just as smart as adults and we can do all the stuff they're doing.' I feel like that personally helped with my confidence a lot. Because I felt like I was treated in the way that I wanted."



**"I want girls to be free — not to be afraid to go out on the streets alone — and for girls and women not to depend on anyone, to be who they want to be,"** 12-year-old Yordana, from Bolivia, says.



Maham, 20, is a member of Plan USA’s Youth Advisory Board. “My grandma was a single mom,” she says. “My mom immigrated from Pakistan. They’ve all had to be really strong in their lives and **that has allowed me to see women as powerful and kind of leverage that power in myself.**”

“My mom and I were very happy,” she remembers. “And I felt satisfied and motivated to have a job. The internship opened spaces and the opportunity for me to make myself known. Now I can support my family and my studies. I hope to do a good job and, little by little, move up the ladder.”

A similar project in Indonesia called GIRL 2.0 is also supporting young entrepreneurs as they start and grow their businesses. As of September 2022, 211 participants have developed key life, professional and financial skills through the project’s curriculum. These trainings covered topics including gender equality, leadership, money management, digital marketing and how to create a business plan.

Over the past 15+ years, more than 500 young people have participated in Plan USA’s domestic programming. Today, 15 young people make up Plan’s Youth Advisory Board, who are involved in every aspect of Plan’s operations, from advocacy and marketing to program design and implementation. And every year, young people ages 13-18 in the U.S. join the Youth Leadership Academy, an immersive yearlong program in which participants design and implement projects that tackle social justice issues they’re passionate about. In 2022, 100% of YLA participants were young women.

Another way that projects supported by Plan’s We Are the Girls campaign improve girls’ agency is by focusing on economic opportunity. In Guatemala, the Connection to Success project trains young people who are looking for a job or want to start their own business. As of September 2022, **1,608 young women and another 857 young men have completed life skills and gender equality training** through this project.

“Being in the employability project has helped me a lot,” Eliza, a 23-year-old participant, said. “I learned to communicate in a better way. It tells me how I should present myself in the interviews. I elaborated my resume, and I considered other points that help the company where you are looking for a job to take you into account.”

Through Connection to Success, Eliza got an internship at a local hotel, which led to a full-time job as a waitress and kitchen assistant.



**35,231 young people** in Vietnam trained on menstrual health and gender equality, in order to reduce stigma surrounding periods.



**67% of girl participants** in Zimbabwe reported feeling a sense of increased agency.



**2,465 young people** in Guatemala completed life skills and gender equality training.



Roshani, 19, works with the PROTECT project in Nepal. “I believe that we have been trusted with the work we continue to do in our community,” she says. “I now realize that all the dots are connected to form one line.”

The Maya chatbot app can be used to send messages and receive replies. Users from all over Nepal can ask questions about trafficking, child marriage and labor, and share information with each other. So far, 9,553 people have interacted with Maya. In addition, a dedicated Facebook page encourages people to interact, discuss and open up about human trafficking and its consequences for children, young people and adults. The project has **tracked 14,742 interactions with social media content**, like their Facebook Page, to date.

Meanwhile, in India, young leaders are using printed materials and text messages to spread awareness. As of September 2022, the project had **disseminated nearly 21,000 materials and sent 30,857 digital messages** using SMS and social media.

“This is the first time I got knowledge about rights of children and various laws to protect their rights,” Naghma, a young leader with the project in India, said. “I will ensure that no child from my village will work as child labor. I also talk with parents to create awareness against child marriage. Child marriage is not merely a social problem, it’s a crime also.”

In Egypt, the Safer Cities for Girls project also worked with parents to increase awareness of girls’ rights and gender equality. Through structured intergenerational dialogue events, **604 parents, caregivers and community leaders discussed issues like sexual harassment and access to education**. Parents also learned about anger management, positive parenting and self-care, and reported that the sessions significantly improved their relationships with their children.

“I am happy that my daughter and I are more like friends,” one mother said. “She is telling me everything she feels or encounters with no fear or hesitancy.”

Parents also play a critical role in the Champions of Change project in El Salvador. Currently, **343 parents and caregivers are enrolled in the project’s Protective Families curriculum**, which is designed to involve parents of the program participants so

## INDICATOR: GENDER POWER RELATIONS

Girls represent critical threads in the fabric of their communities. So, any project that aspires to support girls must also support the people around them: parents, siblings, peers, teachers and other community members. In addition to measuring girls’ sense of agency, projects supported by this campaign are focused on shifting gender power relations toward equality in each of the project communities.

For example, the PROTECT project in India and Nepal trains young people to lead awareness sessions in their communities to fight human trafficking. One key part of preventing trafficking is identifying and understanding the key social norms that drive it, such as cultural attitudes toward child marriage and labor. In both countries, communications campaigns focused on educating people on these issues.

“We are all excited to have this resource center in our municipality,” 18-year-old Dipti, a project participant in Nepal, says. “We are increasing our digital advocacy with our involvement in social media, inviting people to use our Maya chatbot.”

that they can help create supportive environments for their children as they learn about gender equality. As of September 2022, they have made it through 85% of the training sessions.

“Seeing the potential of my daughter makes me feel extremely proud of her,” one said. “Because she has taken advantage of these spaces as much as possible, she and her group of friends are learning things that we as families may not be able to teach them. **The work you do as an organization is great and is reflected in the empowerment of girls.** For me, Plan International is a great model of trust and safety for my daughter to participate.”



**343 parents and caregivers** enrolled in training on how to create supportive environments for children in El Salvador.



**30,857** digital messages using SMS and social media sent to promote awareness of how to prevent human trafficking in India.



**604 parents, caregivers and community leaders** learned about girls' rights and gender equality in Egypt.

## INDICATOR: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

As girls advocate and create change in their communities, local leaders and decision-making bodies can amplify their work on a larger scale, improving life for even more young people. Many of Plan's projects include awareness-raising efforts and advocacy activities focused on changing public policy.

For example, girls who are part of the Girls Learn & Thrive project in Senegal participated in the annual U.N. global advocacy campaign called “16 days of activism against gender-based violence” in coordination with Children's Parliament, another youth group. The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women.

The girls decided to organize a march, at the end of which they delivered a memorandum to the governor of the Kédougou region. **They worked together to define the messages that they'd display on signs, as well as the content of the memorandum, which called for the government to better protect girls and women from gender-based violence.** Both girls and boys participated in the march, which was silent to symbolize victims who suffer in silence. At the end, the memorandum was read aloud and handed to the governor, who praised the girls for their commitment to equality.

Separately, the project team and the girls also advocated in front of the Regional Special Development Committee, a high-level committee that is in charge of the development of the entire region. The team presented the project, outlining the activities, sharing its challenges and painting a picture of their ambitions for the whole Kédougou region. The meeting was attended by local child protection committees, elected officials and more.

A particularly special part of this meeting was the role one of the girls held during it — that of governor. In order to represent the potential and capacity of girls, she acted as governor during the meeting with the committee, under the supervision of the deputy governor. She moderated the discussions and called for radical change in order to end the discrimination that holds girls back. Her

presence was a positive influence on the girls in attendance, who made commitments not only to their academic success, but more importantly to their fight for a gender-equitable world.

In the U.S., young leaders are also deeply involved in advocacy efforts for girls’ rights and gender equality. In 2022, as part of a **global Plan survey, 1,098 girls and young women from the U.S. shared their opinions on and experiences with political participation.** The survey found that only 5% of girls surveyed from the U.S. said they were generally happy with the decisions of their political leaders, as compared to 11% of girls globally. Similarly, 59% of girls surveyed in the U.S. said that they had felt stressed, worried or anxious due to the actions or decisions of political leaders, as compared with 43% of girls globally.

**Plan did a global survey of nearly 29,000 girls from around the world and asked what issues mattered most to them. Here’s what they had to say, both worldwide and specifically in the U.S.**

Top issues for girls globally	Top issues for girls in the U.S.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Poverty and unemployment.</li> <li>2. Conflict and peace, community violence and crime.</li> <li>3. Environmental issues including pollution and climate change.</li> <li>4. Mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.</li> <li>5. Access to education.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.</li> <li>2. Discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity, and LGBTQIA+ rights.</li> <li>3. Environmental issues, including pollution and deforestation, and climate change.</li> <li>4. Conflict and peace, community violence and crime.</li> <li>5. Poverty and unemployment.</li> </ol>



Fatoumata, 19, is an artist and girls’ rights activist in Dakar, Senegal. “People should listen to the girls and let them express their ideas,” she says. “I would especially like to ask everyone to help girls and to provide them with training so they can strengthen their leadership and empower themselves.”

However, the survey also found reason for hope. **Nearly 60% of girls surveyed in the U.S. said that girls’ and young women’s political participation is important in order to improve the situation of girls and young women in society,** and 56% said it was important also to act as role models for the next generation. Plan will use this research globally, including in the U.S., to advocate for girls’ leadership and opportunities for political participation.

Another way that girls in the U.S. are making their voices heard is through Plan’s Girls Out Loud group. As part of Plan’s We Are the Girls campaign, we invited girls between the ages of 13 and 18 living in the U.S. to safely share their thoughts and feelings about the experience of being a girl today — and talk about ways we can create change together — through our private Instagram account.

[One of the Girls Out Loud group’s first projects](#) was collaborating with Unsplash, the internet’s source of freely usable visuals. Together, we challenged Unsplash’s community of photographers to rethink the way girls are seen and revamp stock images to represent girls on their own terms. You can learn more about that project [on Plan’s blog](#).

Finally, the projects supported by Plan’s We Are the Girls campaign are also involving other community members in the fight for girls’ rights. Through the Protected Passage project, Plan staff are working across El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico to support girls and their families as they migrate. As of September 2022, **1,864 service providers have been trained to provide specialized care to children — particularly girls and young women — along the most common routes of migration.** Plan staff members are also working with local authorities to improve the system that provides care by updating standard care protocols to reflect the specific needs of girls and young women.

In addition, young people participating in Protected Passage are leading community awareness events to combat stigma against people who are migrating, increasing their neighbors’ understanding of why people migrate and the potential challenges they face.

“I am a true believer that opportunities must be seized and that we can always find people on our path who help us, giving us those unexpected opportunities that motivate me to move forward and continue pursuing my dreams,” one project participant in Honduras said. **“Thank you to organizations like Plan International and their team who support and strive to provide teens like me with the care and resources to meet our needs when we need it most.”**



**23 active members** of Girls Out Loud group in the U.S.



**1,864 service providers trained** to provide specialized care to children — particularly girls and young women — along the most common routes of migration in Mexico and Central America.



**1,098 girls and young women** from the U.S. surveyed on their opinions on and experiences with political participation.



## CONCLUSION

As Plan USA launches the We Are the Girls campaign publicly this year, there is much to celebrate. Thousands of girls around the world are realizing their power and using their voices to create the world they want to live in, including right here at home. United, adolescent girls know they can defeat gender inequality — for themselves, and for all of us. Plan has been cultivating young leaders since 1937. We know girls’ potential, because we’ve worked alongside them for decades. Thank you for being the match that will light their fire.

Gwyn is a 19-year-old mother in the Philippines. **“I find happiness and fulfillment in taking care of my daughter and hope for a better life for her,”** she says. **“I want to be free from poverty and have a good future to look forward to.”**

*We Are the Girls is Plan International USA’s campaign for investment in adolescent girls to achieve gender equality. We believe that adolescence represents a vast reserve of untapped potential. When we let young women take the lead, they’ll fight for change. When we invest in girls, we can eliminate gender inequality. Together, we can give young women a megaphone and amplify their message: “We are the girls who will change the world.”*

