

**REAL CHOICES,  
REAL LIVES**

# **CLIMATE CHANGE AND GIRLS' EDUCATION: BARRIERS, GENDER NORMS AND PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE**

**Executive Summary**



**\* This is the Executive Summary for the report: *Climate Change and Girls' Education: Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience*. The full technical report, and accompanying synthesis report, can be found [here](#).**

---

## CONTENTS

Introduction	1
About Real Choices, Real Lives	3
Real Choices, Real Lives Cohort Study Map	4
Background to this Report	6
Key Findings	7
Recommendations	10



*Sylvia walks for miles to reach her apiary in the forest in El Salvador.*

©Plan International



# INTRODUCTION

***Climate Change and Girls' Education: Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience*** is set within the context of **unprecedented climate crisis, with record breaking heat, storms, wildfires, floods and droughts across the planet.**

The experiences of the 78 girls in eight countries that this [Real Choices, Real Lives](#) (RCRL) report outlines are representative of this growing crisis. All eight of the RCRL countries explored in this report (Benin, Brazil, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, the Philippines, Togo and Vietnam) are facing increasing climate-induced shocks and the subsequent impacts are aggravating socioeconomic inequalities. The RCRL cohort countries are representative of a wider phenomenon of low- to middle-income nations experiencing the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis.

While there is a well-established body of research<sup>1</sup> on gender and climate change, we are very rarely given access to the views and experiences of girls **in their own words.** This report seeks to address a major research gap by learning from girls around the world to understand their experiences of climate change and the impact that this has on their access to – and completion of – education. Through the girls' experiences and observations, we are able to understand how climate change is impacting their households and communities, affecting livelihoods, deepening deprivation and creating barriers to their access to education.

Equally, this report seeks to understand the impact that girls' education has on their views about climate change resilience, and on supporting their own adaptive capacities. The unique contribution of this report is in giving voice to the experiences, perspectives, insights and reflections of girls from different contexts around the world. With this distinctive approach to putting forward girls' voices, we are granted a far more nuanced picture of the complex impact of climate change on girls, their education and their adaptive capacities, which cannot be gleaned from large-scale quantitative studies.

*A young leader from the Philippines*

©Plan International



1. Please see the Literature Review, included as Section 3 of the full technical report.



*Schoolgirls in Togo attend celebrations for Plan International's gender-based violence project.*

©Plan International

Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Globally, approximately one billion children are at extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis.<sup>2</sup> The impact of climate change<sup>3</sup> on children – and girls in particular – can be severe and long lasting, potentially reversing the developmental gains made in access to, and completion of, education. This threatens the progress made to gender equality over recent decades.<sup>4</sup> Adolescent girls – as well as women and children in general – are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, because of the various political, social and economic barriers and inequalities they face due to their age and gender. Girls disproportionately experience disruption to their education and access to healthcare, increased risks of violence, increased child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), reduced economic opportunities,<sup>5</sup> and heightened susceptibility to health issues.<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite being disproportionately affected by climate change, girls' voices and perspectives are seldom included or considered in decision-making processes and policymaking which fundamentally shape their

future. Girls have a role in climate adaptation<sup>7</sup> too, by participating in household decisions to address their needs in the face of climate change impacts.<sup>8</sup> Yet, girls face barriers in their adaptive capacities, due to their limited access, control, use and knowledge of resources.<sup>9</sup>

Foundational to Plan International is the belief that all children have a fundamental and universal right to access and complete quality and inclusive education, from pre-primary to secondary level. However, social norms in many contexts mean that girls often require greater support in claiming and accessing this right. Plan International considers not only the impacts of climate change on education and girls' leadership, but how education and girls' leadership may in turn advance climate justice and social justice more broadly. In this report, we define leadership as any way that girls may exercise leadership qualities in their everyday lives, particularly in their decision-making. Given the complex relationship between climate change and its effects on girls' education and their adaptive capacities, it is imperative that we understand these issues from the perspective of girls themselves.

2. UNICEF (2021) 'The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index'. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>.
3. In this research, climate change is defined as a change of climate, which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods (UNFCCC (1992) 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change'. Available at: [https://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/background\\_publications\\_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf). It can alter precipitation patterns and intensities around the globe and increase climate-related disaster frequencies and intensities. This includes floods, droughts, landslides, wildfires, tropical storms and extreme temperatures (Plan International (2021) 'Climate Change, Young Women, and Girls'. Available at: [https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate\\_change\\_young\\_women\\_girls\\_plan\\_and\\_sei\\_final.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate_change_young_women_girls_plan_and_sei_final.pdf).
4. Sims, K. (2021) *Education, Girls' Education and Climate Change*, K4D Emerging Issues Report 29. Institute of Development Studies, pp.2-4.
5. Plan International (n.d.) '5 Ways Climate Change is Disrupting Girls' Lives'. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/case-studies/5-ways-climate-change-is-disrupting-girls-lives/>.
6. Plan International (2021) 'Climate Change, Young Women, and Girls'. Available at: [https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate\\_change\\_young\\_women\\_girls\\_plan\\_and\\_sei\\_final.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate_change_young_women_girls_plan_and_sei_final.pdf).
7. *Climate change adaptation* refers to long-term changes made by an individual or group, in order to moderate (or benefit from) the effects of climate change.
8. Plan International (2021) 'Climate Change, Young Women, and Girls'. Available at: [https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate\\_change\\_young\\_women\\_girls\\_plan\\_and\\_sei\\_final.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/climate_change_young_women_girls_plan_and_sei_final.pdf).
9. USAID (2016) 'Integrating Gender Considerations into Community-Based Adaptation in Agrarian Communities in the Lower Mekong Basin'. Available at: <https://www.climate-links.org/resources/integrating-gender-considerations-community-based-adaptation-agrarian-communities-lower>.



# ABOUT REAL CHOICES, REAL LIVES

Since 2007, the longitudinal and qualitative [Real Choices, Real Lives](#) (RCRL) research project has been following the lives of girls and their families in nine countries<sup>10</sup> around the world (see Figure 1: RCRL Cohort Study Map). In 2023, 78 girls<sup>11</sup> and their families were participating in the study which has followed the girls' lives, experiences and perspectives since their births in 2006.<sup>12,13</sup>

The study will continue to collect data until all girls reach the age of 18, and aims to document the social, economic, cultural and institutional factors that influence girls' lives and their opportunities, through the perspectives of girls themselves and their families. The study has a distinct commitment to understanding the root causes of gender inequality by asking questions about beliefs, values and expectations, which aim to uncover how gendered social norms and behaviours are created and sustained or shift over time.

Data on the study has now been gathered since 2007, giving a unique insight into the life cycle of girls and the choices, decisions and realities that shape their lives. The study has gathered data on a vast array of topics and themes, including education, health (including [sexual and reproductive health and rights](#)), [hunger, protection and violence](#), girls' activism and participation in civic spaces, the ways in which [girls are challenging gender norms](#), and many others.

The core RCRL research methodology is underpinned by a participatory approach, which means that the girls themselves play an active and influential part in decisions relating to the research project and Plan International's work in their communities, and that their recommendations for change and justice are centred and amplified. This means that not only are girls listened to, but their voices are heard and shape RCRL's aims and outcomes.



*Girl raises her hand to ask question at primary school in Cambodia.*

© Plan International

10. Apart from Brazil and the Dominican Republic, all of the cohort girls live in low- to lower-middle income economies. Brazil and the Dominican Republic are considered upper-middle income economies. All girls within each of the nine countries were sampled to be from among the poorest households within each country. The girls themselves are not sponsored by Plan International but are located in areas where Plan International operates.

11. Plan International recognises that gender is a multidimensional concept, which influences people's identities and expressions in many ways, and that gender identity goes beyond a binary field of 'female' and 'male'. The participants in this study were assigned female at birth, based on their sex characteristics. For the purposes of this study, 'girls' is used as an umbrella term.

12. An unfortunate limitation of the current report is that we were unable to include new data collection from RCRL girls in Uganda, due to delays in receiving ethics approval.

13. Annex 1 in the full report provides an overview of the RCRL girls who participated in the 2023 data collection.

**Figure 1: Real Choices, Real Lives  
Cohort Study Map**

- 
- DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
  - EL SALVADOR
  - BRAZIL
  - TOGO
  - BENIN
  - UGANDA\*
  - CAMBODIA
  - VIETNAM
  - PHILLIPINES

*\*Uganda is one of the nine focal countries for the Real Choices, Real Lives research study. Unfortunately, interviews could not be conducted with the cohort girls in Uganda in 2023 due to delays in ethics approval – their experiences and perspectives are therefore not included in this report.*





# BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

RCRL is an ongoing study that is uniquely placed to uncover the ways in which gender and social norms influence climate-vulnerable household decision-making, and the impact this has on girls' education. One of the unique contributions that the RCRL research project makes to conversations about girls' experiences of climate change is the longitudinal nature of the study, as each year we revisit the girls to build on our research. Although previous rounds of annual data collection have not focused on climate change or weather events, we have some historical evidence of how RCRL families have spoken about their observations of changing weather patterns over the years. The qualitative, longitudinal nature of the RCRL research project also provides us with the unique opportunity to explore girls' experiences and observations of climate change over the course of their lives.

The majority of RCRL girls live in rural and agricultural communities, and face specific challenges related to climate change. With 12 years of evidence, we are seeing similar narratives across the RCRL cohort: unanticipated weather events, worsening harvest yields, reduced household incomes, increased costs of living, and families seeking extra sources of income. Changes in temperature and seasonal changes are always expected, but the historical evidence that agricultural families have been struggling for a number of years demonstrates that these weather events are beyond the usual; it is clearly climate change.

Plan International has an extensive body of evidence relating to the complex ways in which climate change affects the communities with which it works – and particularly the impact on girls. Plan International recognises that addressing and funding mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage initiatives are crucial for effective climate action. In its work, Plan International highlights the disproportionate impact that climate change has on children – particularly girls – and especially those from the most vulnerable and poorest communities which have the fewest resources to cope with stressors. Climate change is the



*An adolescent girl from Cambodia has to get up at 5:30am to collect water from the well before it dries up.*

©Plan International

most significant intergenerational equity issue of our time, with children and future generations bearing the brunt of its impact on the planet. Plan International acknowledges that age, gender, and poverty make some children more vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Entrenched social and gender norms dictate behaviours, limit mobility and access to rights, and reduce capacity to deal with uncertainty for girls and young people. The particular vulnerability of girls to climate change due to the combined effects of age and gender discrimination has serious implications for their rights. Climate change magnifies existing inequalities and unequal access to health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, participation and protection.

Recognising the relationship between climate change and education, Plan International promotes quality, inclusive and gender-transformative education as an essential component of the global response to climate change.<sup>14</sup> Not only is girls' education severely impacted by climate change, but it is also a key solution to addressing the climate crisis. Education plays a critical role in imparting the knowledge, skills and competencies that girls need to be innovators, leaders and change-makers to demand, and contribute to, climate justice.

14. Plan International (2019) 'Climate Change: Focus on Girls and Young Women, Plan International Position Paper'. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/climate-change-focus-on-girls-and-young-women/>.



# KEY FINDINGS

## Girls' education is being interrupted by climate change

The insights and experiences shared by the RCRL girls provide us with real-world insights into the complex relationship between climate change and girls' education. Stories and experiences shared by the RCRL girls demonstrate that climate change is impacting access to, and completion of, quality education. Girls' education is being disrupted by direct impacts, including extreme weather events, damage and destruction of school infrastructure, and obstructed journeys to schools. While some girls in the Philippines report being able to catch up on their studies (as their teachers send out assignments via cell phone or arrange replacement classes), most of the girls in the rest of the cohort are missing school due to weather events (and the ensuing clean-up efforts) and losing out on school lessons. The longer girls remain out of school, the less likely they are to return to their education - and the more likely they are to fall victim to harmful practices and exploitation, including CEFMU, gender-based violence and early and unintended pregnancy. This highlights the need for safer learning environments for girls, and for education sectors to develop disaster risk reduction plans and education continuity strategies to limit disruption to learning in the face of hazards and stresses.

"When the weather forecast announces a storm or flood, the school will notify the students and then send a message to the parents, the school will announce the absence. After the flood, we all go to school and clean up. That is, after each flood, the whole class is assigned to clean up, and then all the students go to school the next day to do it."

KIM (16, VIETNAM)

"When it rains a lot, roofs are destroyed in markets and roads are flooded, making it difficult for children to go to school. Electricity poles also fall down."

CATHERINE'S MOTHER (BENIN)

Many girls also describe indirect impacts of climate change on their education. Worsening harvests, poor fishing yields and water shortages are examples of indirect impacts that the RCRL girls describe. For households and communities that are dependent on agriculture and fisheries for their livelihoods, these indirect impacts lead to loss of livelihoods, increased costs of living, higher market prices and deepening deprivation. In turn, these financial pressures have an impact on girls' education, with some families now unable to afford the cost of school fees, materials and travel to and from school. Girls are also being required to take on paid work or additional chores and care responsibilities, in order to contribute to the household income. In Togo, Larba has taken on a part-time job to pay for her school fees, which her parents can no longer afford due to climate change-related livelihood losses and rising costs of living. Larba feels as though she does not have enough time to learn outside of school hours, because at weekends she works in the field and only has time to study when she gets back at night. Larba's case demonstrates a need for social protections to preserve livelihoods and ensure girls' education is not disrupted.

"My stepfather, he is a fisherman. So, he goes fishing and sometimes he comes back with nothing, but before he used to go and bring back [many fish] and today the most he will catch is one fish, two fish."

REBECCA (16, EL SALVADOR)

"It is hard for people who rely on land ... For those who rely on water, it is hard to fish ... if they have money, that is no problem as they can buy at the market but if we don't have much money, it is hard for them to find food on their own because it is so hot."

LEAKHENA (16, CAMBODIA)

These direct and indirect barriers exacerbate gendered inequalities, with girls' education being deprioritised when households face financial insecurity; as a result, families resort to negative coping mechanisms such as CEFMU. In Vietnam, Uyen says that parents would prefer to take their daughters out of school over their sons, because girls are better able to help with chores; Uyen feels that this is "unfair" and "unreasonable". This highlights a need for social norms change to transform how girls' education is valued.

“[I] found it better to go and learn a trade ... My parents are no longer paying my school fees. So, the burden of expenses has fallen for my parents.”

NINI-RIKE (16, TOGO)

“Most parents do not prioritise studies, if a mother has to go run an errand, she stops sending the girl to school, she sees it as nothing one day, but that happens three times a week and then the girl loses love for school.”

COMMUNITY MEMBER (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

“Education in the future generates better income for families, and parents should seek to improve their income without affecting their children.”

GLADYS (16, EL SALVADOR)

## Education can help girls adapt and become resilient to climate change

The report also demonstrates that there is a critical link between girls’ education and their climate adaptation and resilience. Adaptation capacities require an ability to recognise and understand climate change, and exposure to adaptation options. Evidence from the RCRL girls indicates that they receive most of their information about climate change and climate adaptation from their education. Many of the girls are using the skills that they have learned in school – such as recycling, planting trees, joining youth collective action groups and spreading awareness. These individual actions demonstrate that girls are exercising leadership and agency in their everyday lives, and that education plays a key role in imparting the skills, knowledge and competencies to build girls’ agency and leadership.

“As a daughter of a farmer and also a young farmer myself, I know how it is when the product is at a loss because I had to miss my classes and sometimes, I cannot eat because the product is damaged due to bad weather. It is important for my fellow young people to know this so they can learn to appreciate what they have and use the resources in the right way and also appreciate nature.”

REYNA (16, PHILIPPINES)

“I like to recycle the old car tyres as well as reuse my water bottle for several times. I sometimes plant the trees at school with my friends too. I usually take the left-over water from dish washing and washing up to water our crop. I save money to pay for my English class every month too. I save energy everyday by limit the time of using electricity and I always tell my family and friends to take care themselves during the weather change too.”

DAVY (16, CAMBODIA)

Education is key to the girls’ adaptation efforts at the individual level and is a key component of their climate resilience. Yet, many of the girls express dissatisfaction with their level of climate change



Alice started her own business in Brazil.

©Plan International



education, believing that it does not go far enough in helping them to address climate change in their households and communities. Members of some RCRL communities in Brazil express their concern about the school curriculum on climate change, which they think is lacking, and about teachers' level of knowledge about climate change and whether they were equipped to instruct on the topic. In the Philippines, Rosamie calls for students to be included in the development of climate change curriculum to ensure that it adequately meets their needs. This shows a critical need for improved integration of climate change content into education curricula, and the need for girls' participation and leadership to ensure they are prepared to adapt to climate change. Doing so would ultimately build upon the leadership qualities we are seeing in the girls' personal climate actions.

"I would really like for our educators to have some training in each neighbourhood in my municipality about the reality of climate change ... the professional schools do not have updated information, from the school management to the teachers."

COMMUNITY LEADER (BRAZIL)

"It's not enough. I want us to learn about the damage that can be done and also about many of the things that climate change creates, but we don't go into them in depth in school lessons."

ANNABELLE (17, BENIN)

Girls demonstrate confidence in their knowledge of climate change and adaptation strategies in their willingness – and ability – to make recommendations towards climate resilience. Both the confidence and ability to make recommendations is shaped by their education on climate change issues. With regards to the future of the climate, several of the girls hope to see more action from governments, schools and communities. They make recommendations relating to agriculture and infrastructure, school curriculum and preparedness, community leadership in climate action, and government policy. Sharina (Dominican Republic) argues that the government should encourage young peoples' participation in climate change adaptation and should encourage youth groups working on these issues. The girls' recommendations for community change demonstrates that they recognise that the responsibility for systems-level adaptation solutions does not sit with them alone.



*A Vietnamese girl is a leader in her community.*

©Plan International

"My actions alone can't solve [climate change]."

JULIANA (16, BRAZIL)

"I hope there will be no more climate change in the future, and that people will also have knowledge on how to prevent it for their safety."

JOCELYN (17, PHILIPPINES)

The contribution that this report makes is to provide real-world examples of girls' views and perspectives on their experiences of climate change, the impacts they have observed in their communities, how climate change has affected their education, their knowledge of climate change adaptation options, and their everyday leadership in making decisions about responding to climate change at their individual and household levels. This report is distinct in putting forward the views and experiences of girls in **their own words**. With these rare insights, we are granted a far more nuanced 'real lives' picture of the complex impacts of climate change on girls, their education and their adaptive capacities.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations have been developed directly from the findings, including the ideas, opinions and recommendations from the RCRL girls themselves, their family members and members of the wider communities. This reflects their experiences of climate change and the ways in which it has affected their education, and the barriers to their education that have been identified through the stories and experiences they have shared. The recommendations below are also guided by the Comprehensive School Safety Framework,<sup>15</sup> which emphasises the need for safer learning facilities, school safety and educational continuity management, and risk reduction and resilience education.

## 01 Safe learning environments and school preparedness

**Ministries of Education, Environment, Finance and Meteorology should collaborate at all levels to:**

- Prioritise investments that strengthen the resilience of **school infrastructure and routes to school** to withstand extreme weather events and climate shocks.
  - Invest in **safe access to schools**, including construction and maintenance of climate-resilient roads that are less susceptible to flooding and damage.
- Develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-responsive **school safety policies and plans**, in line with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework. This includes:
  - Developing **school disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans**, informed by a gender- and age-responsive risk assessment that recognises and accounts for children's and girls' specific vulnerabilities and adaptation capacities. These assessments and plans should be co-developed with children to ensure that their needs are met.
  - Ensuring that loss and damage data related to education is disaggregated and informs gender and age responsive DRR and adaptation plans.
  - Investing in **education continuity plans** to ensure that, if weather events disrupt access to schools, learning can continue in other contextually appropriate ways. This may include e-learning, or the use of alternative sites for learning.
- **Funding and implementing inclusive, gender-responsive anticipatory action** at all levels of education policies, plans and actions. Taking anticipatory action ahead of a crisis to reduce the impact of forecasted shocks and stresses on children's access to education. Ensuring departments of education and schools have access to timely hydrometeorological data, predictive analysis and vulnerability data to inform and fund schools to take anticipatory action that has been pre-agreed by at-risk communities.
- Invest in **child-critical services** that contribute to children's equal access to schooling. This includes school meal programmes, financial support for tuition and school supplies, child-safe transportation to schools, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health services.
- As a guiding principle, **children should have equal opportunities to engage in the development, implementation and monitoring** of DRR and adaptation plans. Children should be recognised as active participants in decision-making on loss and damage, adaptation, and learning continuity as agents and rights-holders.

15. GADRRRES (2022) 'Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030'. Available at: <https://www.gadrrres.net/>.



## 02 Improving climate change curriculum

### Ministries of Education, together with Ministries of Environment, should:

- Mandate **climate change education** that is evidence- and science-based, contextually relevant, gender-transformative and inclusive, age-responsive, and inclusive of Indigenous knowledge and rights.
- Take a **gender-transformative approach to curriculum** reform that can change norms and attitudes and build the skills necessary to shift the way children are taught to think about the world around them. A holistic, systems-approach to climate change curriculum reform should equip learners with an understanding of intersecting social injustices that shape different vulnerabilities and adaptation capacities.
- Invest in **teacher training on climate change** by mandating and funding comprehensive climate change modules in training courses, providing teachers with access to up-to-date reliable data and facts, and offering ongoing professional development programmes to support effective delivery of transformative climate change curriculum.

### Schools should:

- Promote **action-oriented learning** that supports children and girls to develop collective action in climate change adaptation skills and pro-environmental behaviours, including tree-planting initiatives, growing vegetable gardens, writing letters to government and holding recycling drives.
- Ensure the **meaningful participation of children, including girls**, in the development of action-oriented learning plans that adequately address specific and contextual needs.
- Support the development of **girls' climate change leadership skills** by providing opportunities (such as school clubs) for girls to exercise and practice their leadership capabilities to promote climate change adaptation.
- Educate girls on **climate change decision-making processes** at all levels (local, national, regional and global) and on how they can engage in these processes as young leaders.



Adolescent girl from Kara region in Togo.  
©Plan International

## 03 Enabling environments for climate change adaptation and education

### Governments should:

- Review and update core institutional **policies, strategies, adaptation plans and guidance notes** to include education access, resilience and continuity.
- Develop or update **education sector plans** that are gender- and child-responsive, and prioritise resilience and climate change adaptation. Children and young people should be meaningfully included in the development of education sector plans and budgets.
- **Increase funding** for the implementation and monitoring of education policies that address climate change, including the development, delivery and evaluation of climate change curriculum.
- Advance climate-resilient development, by **strengthening participation of youth-led organisations** as key actors to ensure that Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans include climate education.
- Create an **enabling environment for children and young people's engagement** in climate change decision-making at all levels, where their views and recommendations are respected and valued, and they have real opportunities to influence decision-making.
- **Loss and damage finance** should provide immediate relief for students after a sudden-onset climate event or disaster, as well as build long-term resilience for children, including those affected by slow-onset events. Loss and damage finance should include provision for rebuilding school infrastructure destroyed by extreme weather events, ensuring it is more robust and able to better withstand climate-induced damage.
- Loss and damage financing should be allocated for **child-critical social services**, including education.
- Loss and damage response must be informed by **existing inequalities and disaggregated data** in order to capture the specific impact of the climate crisis on different groups of children. Loss and damage data related to education (for example, lost school days) should be disaggregated by gender, age and disability status.
- Increase climate finance allocations, particularly related to adaptation and loss and damage, to ensure children's access to quality, gender-transformative climate education and to build resilient education systems.
- Ensure **child and girls' rights** are guiding principles of loss and damage funding.
- **Increase social protections** by investing in alternative livelihoods and closing the adaptation gap by providing funding for losses and damages. Climate finance should be delivered primarily in the form of grants – particularly for adaptation and loss and damage. Funding for loss and damage should be decentralised and tailored to meet children's context-specific climate vulnerabilities.

### Community leaders should:

- Promote a commitment to social norms change on how girls' education, participation and leadership is valued, both broadly and specifically relating to climate change adaptation.
- Develop gender-responsive community adaptation plans that provide a fund for community-level financial support for households facing climate change-related livelihood losses.
- Develop gender- and age-responsive disaster response plans that consider intersecting social inequalities that contribute to community members' different levels of vulnerability and ability to respond to a climate shock.
- Promote climate change awareness and behaviour change in relation to collective pro-environmental actions, such as planting trees, recycling and other household- and community-level actions.



*Young people in the Philippines plant rice as part of climate-smart agriculture project.*  
©Plan International





---

## Acknowledgments

We offer our most sincere thanks to each and every girl, family member and community member in Benin, Brazil, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, the Philippines, Togo, Uganda and Vietnam who has contributed to the Real Choices, Real Lives research project over its history. Without their insights and time over the years, this research would not be possible.

Each of the country offices have overseen and conducted this report's data collection and we thank the many people who have been involved in the process. In particular, a special thank you must go to our focal points on the study: Roland Djalaly in Benin; Ana Lima in Brazil; Vannara Ouk in Cambodia; Olga Figueroa in the Dominican Republic; Yesenia Segovia in El Salvador; Manny Madamba in the Philippines; Joseph Badabadi in Togo; David Aziku in Uganda and Trung Truong Vu in Vietnam.

This report was written by Dr Keya Khandaker, Dr Kit Catterson and Emily Jayne Bruce.

We are hugely grateful to the following for their feedback on the report and recommendations: Rilian Agunos, Jessica Cooke, Jacqueline Gallinetti, Isobel Fergus, Jennifer Merryweather, Chanju Mwanza, Yona Nestel, Kristen Ostling, Brigitte Redrum, Kathleen Sherwin and Dr Rosie Walters.

Since 2021, the study is generously funded by Plan National Offices in Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK, and managed by Plan International Global. Prior to 2021, the study was managed and funded by Plan International UK.

---

**Editor:** Dr Camille Thomas

**Cover photograph:** Yoselin, in Central America, is a youth leader in her community. ©Plan International

**Layout:** Out of the Blue Creative Communication Solutions – [www.outoftheblue.co.za](http://www.outoftheblue.co.za)

---

## About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

---

## Plan International

International Headquarters  
Dukes Court, Duke Street, Woking,  
Surrey GU21 5BH, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1483 755155

Fax: +44 (0) 1483 756505

E-mail: [info@plan-international.org](mailto:info@plan-international.org)

**[plan-international.org](http://plan-international.org)**

Published in 2023. Text © Plan International



[facebook.com/planinternational](https://facebook.com/planinternational)



[twitter.com/planglobal](https://twitter.com/planglobal)



[instagram.com/planinternational](https://instagram.com/planinternational)



[linkedin.com/company/plan-international](https://linkedin.com/company/plan-international)



[youtube.com/user/planinternationaltv](https://youtube.com/user/planinternationaltv)