

A young woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a black long-sleeved top with colorful, intricate embroidery on the cuffs and a matching patterned shawl. She is covering her face with both hands, her fingers spread, in a gesture of distress or crying. The background is a blurred rural landscape with green hills and a cloudy sky.

**GOALS OFF TARGET:  
ACCELERATING  
THE SDGs WITH GIRLS  
AND YOUNG WOMEN**



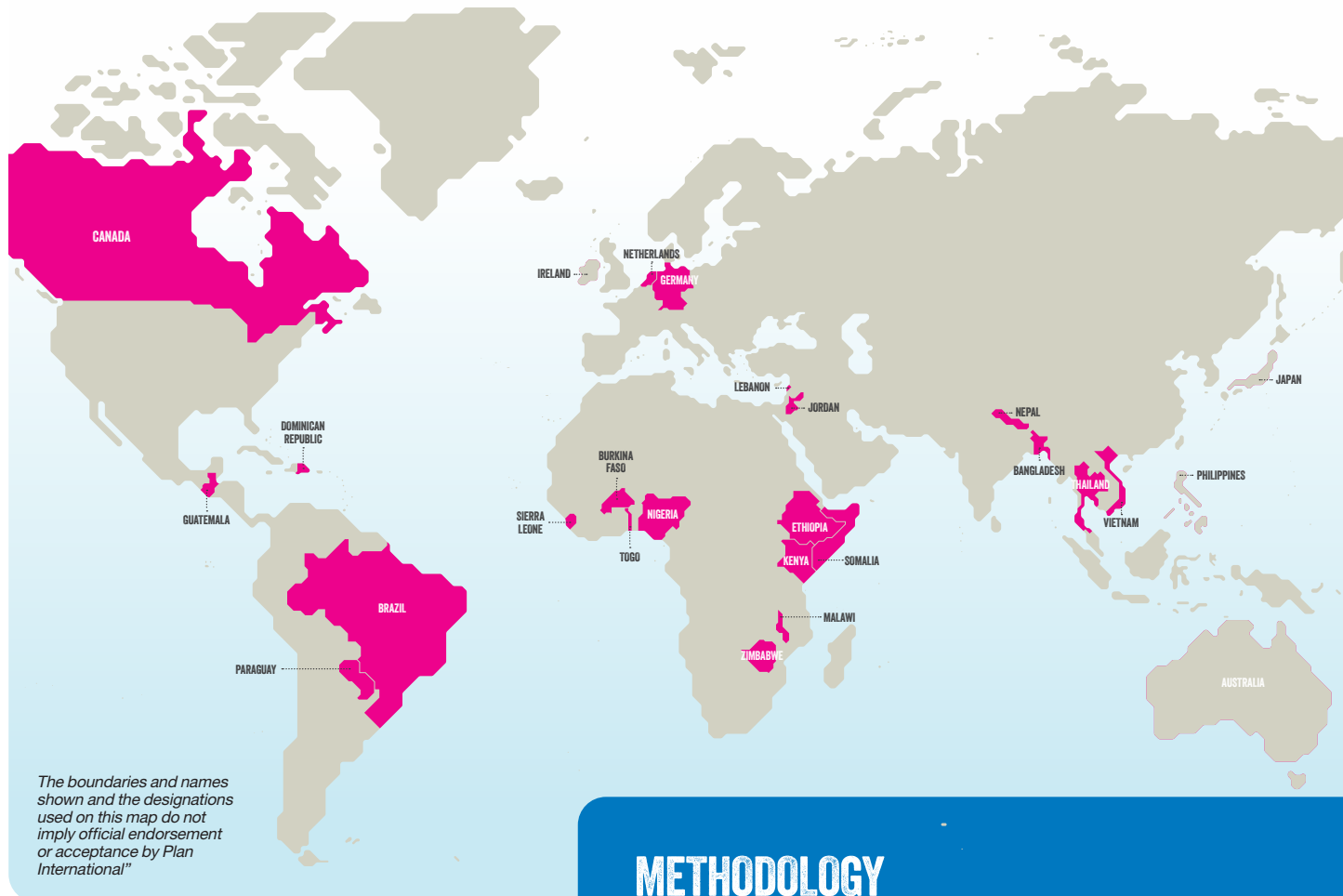
A 15-year-old girl from Sierra Leone, an advocate against the harmful practice of FGM.

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*Photos used in this report are not of research participants.*



***“The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.”***

**ENNA, 18 PHILIPPINES**

The Sustainable Development Goals were established in 2015. Eight years in, halfway to the 2030 deadline, this report, a supplement to the 2023 State of the World's Girls Report, takes a look at how the SDGs are perceived by girls and young women. Is the focus on gender equality being sustained and is it having a real impact on girls' lives? At the current rate of progress, will 2030 bring a better life and a better world?

## METHODOLOGY

This report is based on research conducted for the 2023 State of the World's Girls Report. It contains an analysis of SDG progress towards the goals girls and young women had identified as most important to them and this analysis was carried out in 26 countries. It includes face to face interviews and focus group discussions with over 250 adolescent girls and young women activists. The research is innovative, not least because the face-to-face interviews were led by 70 young women co-researchers who are themselves activists and the findings are supported by focus group discussions using participatory techniques.<sup>1</sup>

The peer to peer led interviews involved 203 girls and young women who identified as activists across 26 countries selected to ensure diversity in terms of geography, income levels and CIVICUS status: the latter a mix of open, closed, obstructed, repressed which would determine the levels of activism allowed. Overall, 57 participants, from these same countries, took part in the focus group discussions.

The final part of the interviews and focus group discussions was an open debate around the SDGs. What did or did not resonate with the activists about the SDGs, did they find the goals useful for their activism and did they know what SDGs their governments were taking action on?

1. For detailed methodology go to State of the World Girls 2023 Technical Report: Turning the World Around: Girls and young women activists leading the fight for equality: <https://plan-international.org/publications/turning-world-around>

# SETTING THE SCENE

The SDGs are a series of 17 goals fixed by the United Nations (UN) and adopted by 193 countries in 2015. Through sustainable (economic, environmental, and social) development, their overall objective is to create a better world, and a better life for all, by 2030.<sup>2</sup>

Along with SDG 5, specifically aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, 13 other Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16 and 17) establish clear commitments towards equality between men and women.

The SDGs are the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which by 2015 had lifted over one billion people out of extreme poverty, increased primary education rates, with many more girls in school, and more than halved the mortality rate for children under five.<sup>3</sup> The SDGs were put in place to build on and go beyond this success, recognising that so much more needs to be done, particularly in tackling the gap between rich and poor, gender equality and climate change.

A central pillar of Agenda 2030 is to 'leave no one behind' but despite their 2015 commitments to reach the most marginalised, member states have not always sustained their interest and their efforts.<sup>4</sup> Girls and young women, do still lag behind, suffering significant deprivations and inequalities. The persistent gender discrimination faced by girls and women everywhere is, for many, further compounded by disability, location, race, ethnicity or migration status.

## THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



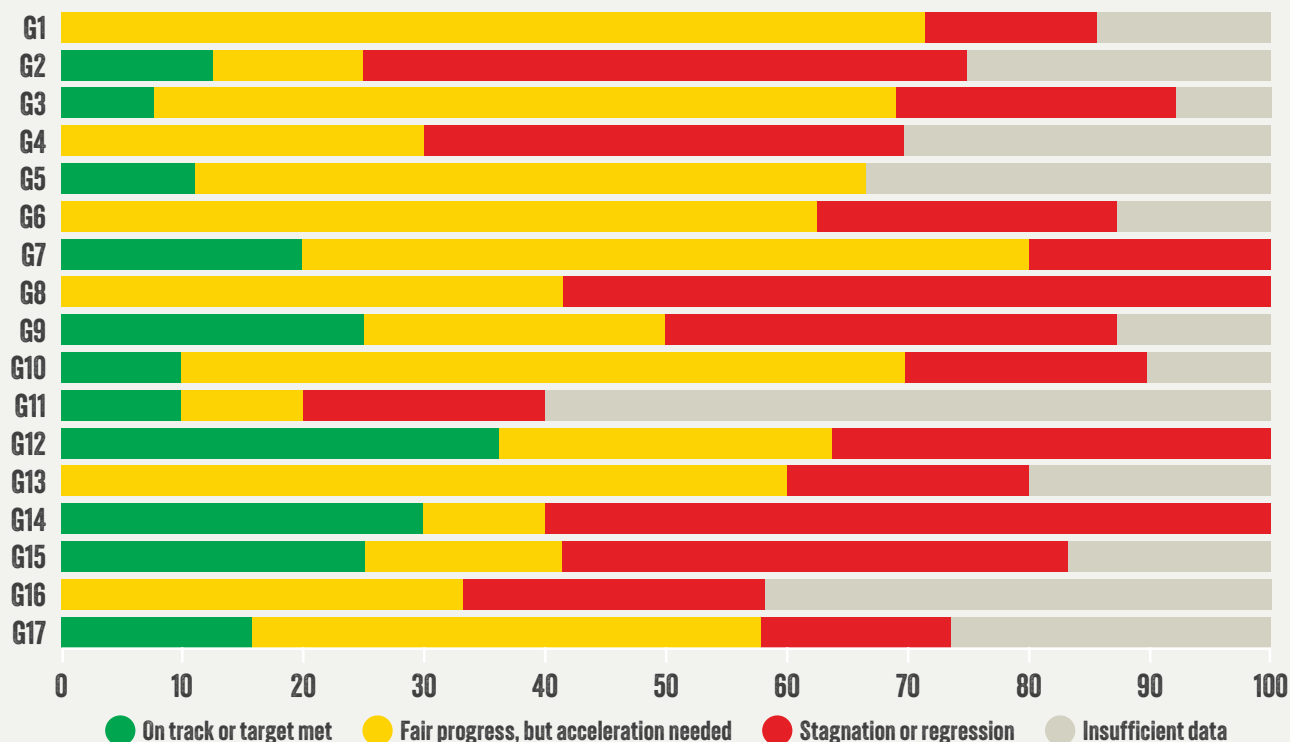
2. United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> [accessed 1 August 2023].

3. Global Citizen (n.d.). Millennium Development Goals: The Final Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/millennium-development-goals-the-final-report/> [accessed 11 August 2023].

4. Guglielmi and Jones (2019) Policy Note: The invisibility of adolescents within the SDGs. GAGE, ODI

Only around 12 per cent of SDG targets are on track for 2030, whilst nearly half of the targets are moderately or severely off track.<sup>5,6</sup>

## PROGRESS ASSESSMENT FOR THE 17 GOALS BASED ON ASSESSED TARGETS, 2023 OR LATEST DATA (PERCENTAGE)



**SDG 5 promised gender equality, but progress has stalled. Significantly, many of the other goals which have seen little or no progress are the ones inextricably linked to gender equality including:**



**The number of people living in extreme poverty today is higher than it was four years ago. On current trends, only 30 per cent of all countries will achieve SDG 1 on poverty by 2030.**



**Hunger has also increased and is back at 2005 levels.**



**Progress on health and education has been set back by the COVID-19 pandemic.**



**Inequalities are at a record high, and growing. Just 26 people have the same wealth as half of the world's population.**



**The concentrations of carbon dioxide are at their highest level in two million years. The extinction risk has increased by three per cent since 2015. More than one species in five is now threatened with extinction.<sup>7</sup>**

5. Warning Over Half of World Is Being Left Behind, Secretary-General Urges Greater Action to End Extreme Poverty, at Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report Launch. UN Press Retrieved from: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21776.doc.htm> [accessed 13 June 2023].

6. United Nations Statistics Division (2023). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023. Special Edition. Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet. Retrieved from: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf> [accessed 10 August 2023].

7. United Nations (2023) Halfway to the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals, progress at a constant 40 per cent is weak and insufficient. Retrieved from: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21776.doc.htm#:~:text=Halfway%20to%20the%20deadline%20for,cent%20is%20weak%20and%20insufficient> [accessed 11 August 2023].



## ARE THE SDGS WORKING FOR GIRLS? WHAT THE DATA TELLS US.

There has been little overall progress on gender equality at the global level between 2015 and 2020.<sup>8</sup> According to the World Economic Forum it will take another 131 years to achieve it.<sup>9</sup> The SDG Framework should be speeding this process up and one way to do this would be to implement their commitment to youth participation and use the energy and insights of the young – especially adolescent girls and young women who are the most affected by inequality and discrimination. The SDG preamble and other related initiatives, such as the Youth 2030 initiative, refers to young people as “critical agents of change.” It states that the SDGs “lie in the hands of today’s younger generation.” This has not translated into meaningful engagement or formalised funding for young people, particularly adolescent girl and young women activists. Nor is progress towards

young people as agents of change captured by any of the indicators. They have the capacity to be catalysts for real progress but this potential, though recognised in the preamble, has rarely been utilised or monitored.

There are some promising examples of countries that have established youth involvement in policy discussions: in Canada a Prime Minister’s Youth Council has been established and in Burkina Faso there is a youth leader who takes on the role of an ombudsmen for youth during the SDG advancement and localisation process.<sup>10</sup> Netherlands has a youth delegate programme with its own national SDG project and objectives and in 2017 Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability produced a youth-led shadow report for Japan’s Voluntary National Review. However, despite the declared commitment to involve young people so they can contribute towards the success of the SDG agenda, these examples are exceptions rather than the rule.

According to our analysis of five years of detailed research undertaken with girls and young women the issues they are most concerned about and the topics they campaign on are: poverty, violence against women and girls, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, climate and the environment. Focusing on the 26 countries taking part in this year’s State of the World’s Girls research, an evaluation of progress towards these priorities was mapped against the relevant SDGs. It proved revealing: not least because obtaining the relevant data is a problem in itself and reporting from member states is inconsistent. Very few member states, only 44 in 2022, take part in the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) so that even the High Level Political Forum on sustainable development, monitoring progress towards the SDGs, has little data to go on. Youth involvement is not a formalised aspect of VNRs, and youth inclusion in SDG monitoring is not financed across a majority of signatory states: only serving to underline that, at all levels, youth involvement is neither valued nor prioritised.

According to the UN SDG Gender snapshot “only 47 per cent of data required to track progress on SDG 5 are currently available, rendering women and girls effectively invisible.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally there is an overall lack of disaggregated data: only 18 indicators specifically call for data disaggregation and out of 232 SDG indicators less than eight per cent are gender- and adolescent or youth-specific.

8. Equal Measures 2030. 2022. 2022 SDG Gender Index. [online] Available at: <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/2022-sdg-gender-index/> [accessed 20 July 2023].

9. World Economic Forum. 2023. Global Gender Gap Report 2023. [online] Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023> [accessed 20 July 2023].

10. Ibid.

11. UN Women. (2022). “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022.” Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022> [accessed 14 August 2023].

Our analysis of SDG data makes it clear that there has been limited improvement in the lives of girls and young women. They are still poorer:

### INDICATOR 1.3.1

**Population covered by at least one social protection benefit**

Women are less likely to benefit from development when compared to men:

- In Sierra Leone ten per cent of women are covered by at least one social protection benefit, compared to 100 per cent of men (data from 2020).
- In Japan it is 66 per cent against 99 per cent.

There has been no discernible decline in violence against women and girls:

### INDICATOR 5.2.1

**Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.**

- Of the 26 countries reviewed, from the eight which measured how physical violence changed over time,<sup>12</sup> only two countries (Kenya and Philippines) saw the percentage of married and partnered adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 report less physical violence in the last 12 months.<sup>13</sup>
- For the majority, increases in violence were logged among this age group.

### INDICATOR 5.3.2

**Proportion of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), by age**

- There have been some decreases in the incidents of FGM/C.
- Across the five countries that measured change in the percentage of young women undergoing FGM/C over time, most have seen improvement.<sup>14</sup> However, current prevalence of this practice is still high.
- For example, Ethiopia managed to reduce the proportion of girls aged 15 to 19 undergoing FGM/C from 70 per cent in 2000 to 47 per cent in 2016.
- The situation is similar in Sierra Leone, and Burkina Faso where latest measurements indicate one in two girls are still undergoing this practice.

### INDICATOR 16.1.4

**Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark**

- In the five countries<sup>15</sup> who collect data on this indicator, women were much less likely to say they felt safe.
- In Canada in 2019, 30 per cent of women said they felt safe to walk around at night compared to 50 per cent of men.
- In Ireland the same year, it was estimated at 64 per cent for women, compared to 87 per cent for men.

12. Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, the Philippines and Sierra Leone.

13. Kenya reported a decrease from 23.7 per cent (in 2003) to 20.9 per cent (in 2014) and the Philippines reported a decrease of 14.7 per cent (in 2008) to 9.3 per cent (in 2017).

14. Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sierra Leone had seen reductions while Nigeria had a slight increase from 2.9 per cent (in 2003) to 13.7 per cent in 2018.

15. Germany, Canada, Ireland, Nigeria and Paraguay

In terms of social justice, and achieving gender equality, few countries have the appropriate laws in place to protect women' and girls' rights.

### INDICATOR 5.1.1

#### Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex

*\*The indicator tracks progress towards gender equality under four areas of law:*

- 1) overarching legal frameworks and public life;
- 2) violence against women;
- 3) employment and economic benefits; and
- 4) marriage and family.

- None of the 26 countries featured in our analysis have fully achieved the implementation of overarching and public life related legal frameworks to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and non-discrimination.
- The poorest performing countries are Lebanon, Jordan, Malawi and Thailand. There has been no change in this since 2018.
- This is a particularly worrying finding, as it means, in effect, that despite their commitments under the SDGs, not a single country analysed for this report has implemented adequate legislation to support the eradication of gender inequality.



Additionally, a recent UN Report, using data from 2017-2022, found that bias against women is as entrenched as it was a decade ago.<sup>16</sup>

The gender social norms index, covering 85 percent of the global population, reveals that close to nine out of ten men and women hold a fundamental bias against women: **half of people in 80 countries believe men make better political leaders and a quarter believe that it is justified for men to beat their wives.**

On this evidence the SDG agenda has made no discernible difference to the deep-rooted cultural norms and stereotypes which continue to hinder progress towards gender equality.

There are reasons for this: while the SDGs do provide a framework and global commitment, their success in bringing about change ultimately depends on national and local efforts. If the 2030 goals are to be reached governments, civil society organisations, community leaders, and individuals must show committed political will to work together to implement gender transformative policies, programmes, and initiatives. These must focus on challenging harmful social norms and be tailored to their specific contexts. This is even more crucial in the current climate where in many parts of the world we are witnessing a pervasive rollback of girls' and women's rights and an increasingly restricted civic space.<sup>17</sup> If gender discrimination is not addressed in every country and community the current generation of adolescent girls remains very much at risk of being left behind.

16. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Social Norms Index 2023. Retrieved from: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#indices/GSNI> [accessed 11th August 2023].

17. CIVICUS. (2023). Facts and Figures. CIVICUS Monitor. Retrieved from <https://monitor.civicus.org/facts/> [accessed 12th August 2023].



A 16-year-old takes over  
as the Swedish Ambassador  
to Burkina Faso.  
© Plan International

## Following the Money

Investment is key. Without targeted funding from governments, donors and NGOs, girls' and young women's lives are unlikely to substantially improve. In 2021, it was estimated that, despite new funding commitments, women's rights organisations receive only 0.13 per cent of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.4 per cent of all gender-related aid.<sup>18</sup> There is also notable absence of funding available for youth movements from multilateral or bilateral agencies and governments.<sup>19</sup>

Indicators tracking improvements in girls' education have seen the most progress in recent years and significantly it is this area that receives the most money – 51 per cent of available funding. Gender equality, including programmes tackling violence against women and girls, one of the priority areas for adolescent girl and young women activists, receives 11 per cent. Climate change-related issues, despite evidence on the impact of climate change on women, girls and young people receives only one per cent of the gender-and-adolescent-targeted Official Development Assistance.<sup>20</sup>

Funding lies at the heart of the success of the SDG Agenda. Where there is investment, as with girls' education, there is progress. Overall, girls and young women represent a powerful force for change. Research by Plan International and the World Bank has demonstrated that investing in girls' education and health can lead to substantial economic and social returns including increased labour force participation, higher income levels and reduced poverty rates.<sup>21, 22</sup> Girls and young women, often work at local level and the activists interviewed for this research had seen improvements in girls' lives as a result of their work raising awareness in communities about issues ranging from child marriage to period poverty to violence against women and girls. Investing in girl-led and girl-centred initiatives – properly carrying out the commitment to youth participation could be transformative.

Additionally, investing in data will be critical to monitoring SDG progress and ensuring accountability, as well as to increasing our understanding of girls' ongoing and emerging challenges and disadvantages.

18. AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development). (2021). Where is the money for feminist organising? Data Snapshots and call to action. Available at: [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID\\_Research\\_WITM\\_Brief\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID_Research_WITM_Brief_ENG.pdf) [accessed 16 May 2023].

19. FRIDA. "No Straight Lines: Transformations with Young Feminist Organisers" (2020). Available at: <https://nostraightlines.youngfeministfund.org/> [accessed 17 May 2023].

20. Devonald, M., Guglielmi, S. and Jones, N. (2023). Investing in adolescent girls: mapping global and national funding patterns from 2016 - 2020. Report. London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence

21. Citi Group and Plan International (2020) The Case for Holistic Investment in Girls: Improving Lives, Realizing Potential, Benefiting Everyone. Plan International. <https://plan-international.org/publications/the-case-for-holistic-investment-in-girls> [accessed 15 August 2023].

22. Wodon, Q., Montenegro, C., Nguyen, H., & Onagoruwa, A. (2018). Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls. The Cost of Not Educating Girls Notes Series. World Bank. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/29956> (License: CC BY 3.0 IGO) [accessed 15 August 2023].

# GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN HAVE THEIR SAY

***“The SDGs are very useful because they give an orientation for the campaigns and action plans.”***

FATIMATA, 22, BURKINA FASO

An 18-year-old from Nepal stopped her own marriage after learning about her rights.

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1

Most of the activists had heard of the SDGs, only eight out of 203 had not. The goals they were most familiar with through their campaigning and activism were gender equality, climate action, zero poverty and education. Girasol, 22, from Guatemala emphasised that, unlike the MDGs, the fact that the 2015 goals were formulated through a collaborative multi-stakeholder approach was especially important to her - perhaps making them more relevant.

2

Some used the SDGs for planning purposes, including developing campaign aims, advocating for policy change, educating others and designing activities or programmes. Although they frequently had to adapt them for their audiences who were not familiar with the global agenda, they were acknowledged as particularly useful in campaigns targeting national politicians. Often activists were not necessarily specifically working towards a particular goal but their activities were clearly aligned with these goals.

***“I can’t pinpoint an activist who talks exactly about one SDG goal and be like this is what I’m trying to do. But I have heard of activists who advocate about things that align with SDGs like Greta Thunberg.”***

MALA, 18, THAILAND

3

Activists had learned about the SDGs in a variety of ways: other activists, school or college, social media and from NGOs. Most activists who had heard of the SDGs found them useful and felt that the presence of the SDGs often gave the issues they were campaigning on more clout. They helped focus their own activities and the minds of politicians and those in authority whose support they were trying to get.

***“... I think SDGs are the in thing for activists now because you want to align with global movements. And even in applying for funding, the SDGs are those buzzwords that you use to get that sort of funding to have programmes running on the ground because they are what defines activism and its outputs.”***

**HAKA, 22, ZIMBABWE**

**4**

The SDGs can be a useful advocacy tool. They provide a global connection to other activists. They are also a good opportunity for young female activists to hold their governments to account - providing they know where to access information and how to use it. If this is to be really effective, young people's participation needs to be properly integrated into SDG monitoring, and adequate training in the processes of data monitoring, provided at the national level - and this means funding.

***“It is extremely important, because knowing that we have, that there is a whole, a whole struggle, let's say, behind what we are doing, it is very useful for us as an inspiration and it also gives us a safeguard, a support that we are not alone, fighting against all the problems that exist in society today.”***

**LUKI, 21, PARAGUAY**

**5**

Conversations with governments and politicians were often facilitated by the presence of the SDG agenda but though meetings were held some felt action was not forthcoming. Engagement was seen as ad hoc and unsystematic and activists complained about lack of follow up. More needs to be done to implement adolescent girls' and young women's sustained involvement with the SDG agenda.

***“There's a difference between listening and active listening. They listen and then it filters out one ear, and it goes in one ear and out the other. They'll listen for the ten minutes where they have to look engaged because they're put in a room with women who they've been told have important things to say. Whether or not they actually listen to anybody, God knows. I've seen no evidence of it.”***

**GORMFHLAITH, 24, IRELAND**

**6**

Some activists thought that, while the SDGs were useful at government or international level, they were not much use at community or grassroots level.

***“But I would never use the SDGs to justify a position within a group of young people that tries to, I don't know, change something within their city or their university or their town or whatever.”***

**LEONIE, 22, GERMANY**

7

Many felt that the SDGs had served to influence their governments: action on poverty and hunger reduction and gender equality were cited. Others were critical of the lack of progress on climate change.

***“It’s great achieving all other 16 of them [the goals], but if we don’t achieve climate action then we won’t have a world to live in.”***

ALINA, 24, IRELAND

8

Most of the criticism of the SDGs focused around them being too broad and deficient in implementation detail: activists lacked information about how to concretely use the SDGs in their work and how to get involved in SDG processes. The data is complex and activists felt if their participation was really prioritised there would be more help available: the data generated which might be useful to them was not accessible or user-friendly. Others felt that the SDGs were unrealistic:

***“Well, I think they are very nice goals and if it were all to be achieved in the end. That would be fantastic. But I don’t think it’s possible and certainly not in 15 years. Well, because it’s just so very many on so many different plains and all the so big complex problems that I also think it’s some problems that really need a whole systemic change.”***

LILLITH, 17, NETHERLANDS



A 21-year-old from Sierra Leone is an outspoken advocate against child marriage.

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# CONCLUSIONS

Despite some reservations, and some disagreement on the precise role that the SDGs play in young female activism, there is a sense overall that young women activists value the role the SDGs can play in their work, and their work in turn contributes to SDG outcomes. Many of the goals align with their own priorities - gender equality, GBV, SRHR and climate action – other goals like poverty and hunger reduction and quality education are intertwined with the work they are doing with their communities.

The presence of the SDGs both helps adolescent girls and young women feel part of a global activist community and can be used to motivate their own governments around the issues they care about. But they are not a magic bullet and many activists had limited expectations around them in terms of real impact on their lives and activities. There are issues too around accountability. How can girls and young women activists properly monitor progress and hold governments to account?

Significantly, some activists and many of their audiences, had not even heard of the SDGs which points to a need for better communication and a more targeted understanding between international policy makers and grassroots communities. With this in place, the campaigning energy and commitment of young women activists could be crucial in driving the SDG agenda.



Plan staff with the wheel of Sustainable Development Goals.  
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***“My initial reaction to the SDGs in grade seven was that these are really dumb. Did a bunch of politicians and diplomats really just get together and make a list of 17 problems in the world? I could do that ... I now think they're a useful framework and I get how they're good for an organisation ... I feel like I have a pretty solid understanding of them, and I feel like there could be more done to understand what each one really entails ... So my, I guess, growth has been from why do these exist, to, this is an interesting framework, but could be improved upon.”***

**AUDREY, 20, CANADA**

# RECOMMENDATIONS



A 17-year-old from Sierra Leone works in her community to advocate against Female Genital Mutilation.

© Plan International

**Deep rooted cultural norms and stereotypes, combined with a lack of appropriate funding, continue to hinder progress towards gender equality under the SDGs.**

This is compounded by current political and economic circumstances which include a widespread roll back of rights, particularly women's and girls' rights, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which has left both individuals and nations in straitened circumstances. It also provides an excuse for inaction. Overall, the success of the SDGs and its stated focus on inclusivity must start with those most vulnerable to discrimination and this includes girls and young women.

More determined and practical efforts are required to challenge and transform harmful social norms at all levels: in families and communities and within national institutions and legal systems. A greater investment in girl-led collective action and a clearer focus on pathways from the global framework to local implementation would go some way to enhancing and magnifying the impact of the SDG agenda at the grassroots, where it most matters.

***"It lacks a bit of relevance in terms of the delivery, because it's quite vague, it's quite broad. And sometimes it's also quite aspirational, because they are aspirational. And sometimes I think in an Australian context, especially if you're campaigning or trying to get something done, you want something very specific."***

**KAING, 19, AUSTRALIA**

In their activism, girls prioritise gender equality, tackling gender-based violence and their sexual and reproductive health rights. They see the SDG framework as a useful tool for advancing in these areas, if it is backed up by government support. These insights coupled with the irrefutable evidence that progress is nowhere near where it should be shows that not enough action is happening on the ground.

The recommendations below are based on listening to girls and young women:

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- 1 Member States must increase their political will, investments in and commitment to gender equality as a cross-cutting priority for the 2030 Agenda at the SDG summit and for the remainder of the SDGs.**
    - a. There is an urgent need to renew and increase Member State support to gender equality and girls' rights within the SDG framework. We call on **Member States to make firm statements of intent at the summit and affirm strong global and national commitments** to investing in gender equality and interventions for adolescent girls across all SDGs.
    - b. Accelerating progress on gender equality **requires integrated investment across SDG goals** which address the interconnected realities, concerns and priorities of girls. Girls do not focus on just one or two SDGs in their advocacy - their lives are not defined in that way. The approach to SDG implementation for girls should reflect this. We know that when cross-sectoral investments are made for adolescent girl programming, it provides gains across multiple SDGs.
    - c. Whilst the SDGs agenda provides an overall accountability framework for centralising gender equality in sustainable development, it must be acknowledged that other global processes this year will also provide opportunity for stakeholders to commit to girls' rights including but not limited to, the Global Forum for Adolescents, the Global Refugee Forum and COP28. Where possible, **there should be synergies and coherence between global processes – ensuring that every opportunity is taken to secure vital gains in gender equality and advance girls' rights globally.**
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- 2 National Governments must invest in age-and-gender-disaggregated data that properly tracks progress on the SDGs.** Applying these lenses to data collection is key to ensuring girls and women are no longer invisible within the SDG framework and we can track what real progress is being made. By the next SDG summit in 2027, we expect to see a discernible shift in the number of governments reporting with age- and gender- disaggregated data.
- 

- 3 International policymakers and national governments must promote and encourage ownership of the SDG Agenda at grassroots level,** providing accessible and practical information about the SDGs but also design SDG interventions, in direct partnership with girls to maximise their impact and relevance to local activists and their communities. Governments and civil society should encourage girls and young people to participate in the formal accountability mechanisms of the SDG framework such as the Voluntary National Reviews. Where girls are excluded from these spaces, they should be supported to engage in shadow and alternate reporting where progress from their perspectives can be captured, as can reporting where young people as change agents are taking the lead on SDG implementation. Governments should provide appropriate training in the processes of data monitoring and utilise tools like Citizen Scorecards with girls, youth groups and communities so governments can be held to account.
- 

- 4 International policymakers and national governments need to commit to systematic and ongoing engagement with adolescent girls and young women activists:** regular consultation and dialogue on the issues that affect their lives will ensure that young activists can help drive change and deliver the SDG promise of a better world that is fit to address today's challenges. To do this, policy makers and national governments must allocate sufficient funding to gender equality and youth participation, ensuring that commitments to both are not merely rhetorical but grounded in well-funded projects and programmes.
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*\*For the full list of acknowledgments see: State of the World Girls 2023 Technical Report: Turning the World Around: Girls and young women activists leading the fight for equality: <https://plan-international.org/publications/turning-world-around>.*

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**Cover photograph:** A 13-year-old girl leader from Kon Tum province, Vietnam. © Plan International

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### About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, supporters and partners. Using our reach, experience and knowledge, Plan International drives changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels. We are independent of governments, religions and political parties. For over 85 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children and we are active in more than 80 countries.

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