



ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN CRISIS:

EXPERIENCES OF RISK AND
RESILIENCE ACROSS THREE
HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS



ADOLESCENT GIRLS LIVING THROUGH THESE THREE LONG-TERM CRISES FACE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS. HOWEVER, THEIR LIVES AND EXPERIENCES ALSO ILLUMINATE THE RISKS ENCOUNTERED AND THE COURAGE SHOWN BY GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN DEALING WITH SIMILAR SITUATIONS ALL OVER THE WORLD.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN CRISIS: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adolescent Girls in Crisis is a research project informed by and centred upon the voices and experiences of girls in three of the world's most troubled and volatile locations: South Sudan, the Lake Chad Basin and the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh.

The research found that:

GIRLS LIVE IN FEAR

Adolescent girls told us of the fear caused not only by the constant presence of armed men, but about gender-based violence within families, including child, early and forced marriage, which puts their health, their education and general well-being at risk.

GIRLS' LIVES ARE RESTRICTED

Adolescent girls lack freedom of movement: over protective parents, a heightened fear of violence and increased domestic chores confine them to the home and severely limit their opportunities. Adolescent girls cannot go to school, they cannot make friends and they cannot contact health services.

GIRLS WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

Adolescent girls everywhere express a passion for study and a disappointment that their current situation, often combined with pre-existing discrimination, prevents them from attending school or gaining access to vocational training. Fear keeps them at home, as does family poverty, but often also there are no schools or training centres for them to go to, they are too far away or they have missed so much education that they struggle to catch up.

GIRLS STRUGGLE TO STAY HEALTHY, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY

Adolescent girls lack proper nutrition, have little or no access to information about sexual and reproductive health, and, particularly in the area of mental health, have extremely restricted access to health services. All of which will have a long term destructive impact on their lives.

GIRLS WANT MORE CONTROL AND POWER OVER THEIR LIVES

The inability to control their lives to be consulted about decisions that affect them is reflected on by adolescent girls in all three research areas: adolescent girls cannot choose to carry on with their education, or whether, when or whom to marry, nor are they able to pursue livelihood opportunities that might give them a measure of independence.



Nyiel writing in her notepad in Baratuku resettlement camp in Uganda.

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WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The following recommendations are based on what adolescent girls have told us about their experiences and their priorities for the future:

- Increase **participation** of adolescent girls in decision making
- Ensure adolescent girls' **education** does not suffer
- Prioritise provision of adolescent girl-friendly **health** information and services, to include mental health issues and sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Tackle gender-based violence in all its forms to improve **security** for adolescent girls.

LESSONS FROM THREE MAJOR CRISES

Everybody caught up in war, famine, flood, or any other emergency situation has their lives torn apart, but none more so than adolescent girls. Pre-existing gender inequalities are exacerbated in all crises and adolescent girls' physical safety, their health and their future prospects are all threatened in ways that differ from the risks faced by younger girls and boys, or by men, adolescent boys and adult women. Often, too, just because they are young and female, their rights and needs are ignored.

"I want to go to school, to read lots of books. I want to play."

ROHINGYA GIRL, 10, BANGLADESH

A long-term crisis may well last throughout a girl's formative years and this ongoing disruption to nutrition, education, or knowledge building around issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights can have life-long effects.¹ Additionally, prolonged poverty, combined with entrenched gender discrimination, can make girls especially vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation and child, early and forced marriage.² Even if the crisis ends they can be left traumatised, with little education or chance of paid employment, and often with several children. Decisions taken for them during adolescence will change their lives forever.

"My parents will force me to get married. I have nothing to do. They could not do it in Burma but can do it here."

YOUNG ROHINGYA WOMAN, 18, BANGLADESH

Despite the large numbers of adolescent girls so profoundly affected by ongoing crises around the world, it is rare that either their own communities, national governments or the humanitarian sector at large, pay much attention to them: girls' rights in a crisis situation are not seen as a priority nor are their particular needs, or their rights under international law, recognised and addressed. This research, commissioned by Plan International, is an attempt to rectify that: to acknowledge that girls, as they enter and move through adolescence, do have particular challenges to face, they do have rights, and that their ideas about how to improve their lives today and tomorrow are worth listening to and acting upon.

"Enrol us in schools, provide skills acquisition, provide basic amenities (hospitals, electricity, water) so as to help us live our lives better and easier."

GIRL, 13, LAKE CHAD BASIN

Adolescent Girls in Crisis is informed by and centred upon the voices and experiences of girls in three of the world's most troubled, and volatile locations: South Sudan, the Lake Chad Basin and the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. The research reflects the diversity of the needs and experiences of adolescent girls - they are not a homogenous group only defined by age - as well as on what they may have in common. Not only do girls have the right to be consulted about their needs and priorities but a better understanding of the ways in which adolescent girls, in several different contexts, navigate ongoing crises will provide a solid basis for the humanitarian sector to work with them to improve their lives. By seeking out the usually unheard-voices of girls and young women in crises, our research project seeks to provide this understanding; focusing not just on areas of concern for adolescent girls, but also on the positive ways in which they respond to their circumstances and strive to support their communities.

"Girls are not supposed to talk in front of elders, some of their issues never get addressed because of this, stopping them from participating in the community the way that boys can."

NGO WORKER, JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN



Girl cooks inside her shelter in Balikhali camp, Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh).
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RESEARCH LOCATIONS: BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Rohingya community in Bangladesh

The Rohingya have been persecuted in Myanmar for decades but in August 2017 the crisis escalated after an outbreak of violence in Rakhine state - almost a million Rohingya were forced to flee Myanmar and now live in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in neighbouring Bangladesh.



52%

OF THE REFUGEE POPULATION ARE WOMEN AND GIRLS³

55-60%



OF REFUGEES ARE CHILDREN⁴

4%

OF THE REFUGEE POPULATION ARE CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS⁵



67%

OF THE ESTIMATED 58,700 PREGNANT WOMEN IN THE CAMPS HAVE NO ACCESS TO GYNAECOLOGICAL OR OBSTETRIC HEALTH CARE.⁶

South Sudan

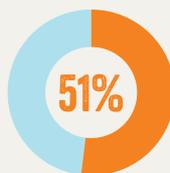
Now half a decade long, the conflict in South Sudan has displaced four million people, one in three South Sudanese, and placed seven million in need of humanitarian assistance.⁷

ALMOST

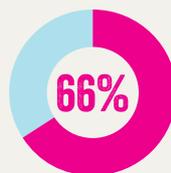
2M



WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE AT RISK OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE⁸



OF THE POPULATION ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18⁹



OF THE POPULATION ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 30¹⁰

OF THE

4 000 000

DISPLACED, OVER HALF (2.4 MILLION) ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18¹¹



2.5M

ARE SEEKING REFUGE IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.¹²

Lake Chad Basin

The crisis affecting the Lake Chad Basin is one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies¹³ in the world, having displaced more than 2.2 million people, half of whom are children, and left more than 10.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across north-east Nigeria, Cameroon's far north, western Chad and south-east Niger. The conflict has been characterised by rampant levels of gender-based violence and violence against children, with forced recruitment of child soldiers a significant concern. The combination of the statistics on maternal deaths and the increase in child marriage rates illustrates the particular adverse effects the crisis is having on girls and young women.

IN NIGER, RATES OF CHILD EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE ARE ALWAYS HIGH; BUT IN THE REGION OF NIGER MOST AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS, RATES ARE THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD:

89%

OF GIRLS MARRY AS CHILDREN¹⁴



THE LAKE CHAD BASIN HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST RATIOS OF MATERNAL DEATHS ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.¹⁵



773.4 PER 100,000 LIVE BIRTHS



Sarah, 16, lives with her younger brother and mother in South Sudan. She is responsible for growing all the food her family need to survive.
(©Kate Holt / Plan International)

WHAT DID WE WANT TO FIND OUT?

The research explores how adolescent girls within two age brackets (10-14 and 15-19 years old) understand the unique impact that crisis has had upon them. It seeks to amplify their voices and perceptions of the crisis and present their views on how the humanitarian sector might respond. It is driven by three major questions:

- 01** How do adolescent girls understand and experience insecurity?
- 02** How do adolescent girls navigate insecurity?
- 03** What are their needs and what opportunities exist to support adolescent girls in protracted crisis situations?

It is important to note that this research project is not designed to establish the prevalence of any particular issue, nor is it an objective account of adolescent girls' experiences. The findings in this project are subjective and underscore the fact that adolescent girls do not have a single view or set of experiences in crisis contexts. However, the project does highlight areas of both similarity and difference across countries, crises and age groups and provides a rich understanding of adolescent girls' experiences.

METHODOLOGY

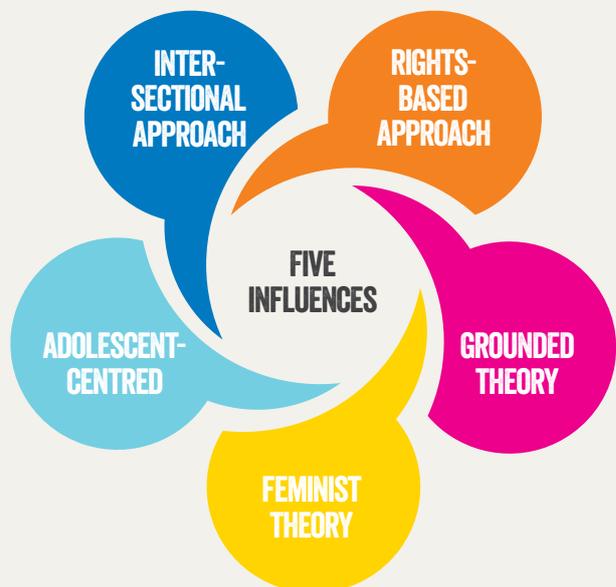
Research among the Rohingya community was conducted in Balukhali Camp in Cox's Bazar; amongst the displaced South Sudanese population research was carried out in five sites in South Sudan and in five sites in Uganda; in the Lake Chad Basin research was conducted in eleven sites in north Cameroon, seven in north-east Nigeria and seven in south-east Niger.

The research used mixed methods with an emphasis on qualitative research: it comprised of single sex discussion groups of adolescent girls (6-10 participants) and some groups of boys, in all locations. The groups were split according to age: 10-14, 15-19. Researchers also conducted a number of in-depth interviews with adolescent girls, community leaders, members of civil society organisations and NGOs. In discussions with girls and young women care was taken to use young, female interviewers with whom they would feel comfortable.

We also used a quantitative household survey with adolescent girls in order to cross-reference findings in interviews and focus group discussions. A total of 998 surveys (300 Rohingya, 249 from South Sudan, 449 from the Lake Chad Basin) were carried out across the three research areas.

The project places the voices of adolescent girls at the centre of its methodology. This approach allows adolescent girls a safe space to speak about their lives: it makes adolescents authoritative in discussions regarding their own welfare and in understanding their social, political and economic contexts. It means adolescent girls are both the source of knowledge and the primary analyst of their lives and experiences.

The methodology adopted in this research has five features:



WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN CRISIS

Despite the different contexts and cultures of the adolescent girls taking part in the research they have a lot in common. Everywhere girls and women wield less power in their families and communities than boys and men: girls are valued less than boys, and, in troubled times, the everyday discrimination they experience – domestic and sexual violence, lack of opportunity, child marriage, limited access to education – becomes more prevalent and more damaging.

During the research so many adolescent girls and young women talked about their experiences of violence, their fear of it, their longing for a better education and their need for better health services and more information, particularly about sexual and reproductive health. They spoke too about their sense of being ignored – by their families, communities and the humanitarian organisations in charge of their lives – and denied opportunities, both to develop their own capacities but also to take part in community life and work towards a better future.

“I want to be educated but cannot. This is the biggest interruption/barrier in my life.”

ROHINGYA GIRL, 14, BANGLADESH

GIRLS LIVE IN FEAR

This was particularly noticeable in the **Lake Chad Basin** and in **South Sudan** where they are concerned not only about the constant presence of armed men, but about gender-based violence within families, including child, early and forced marriage, which puts their health, their education and their general well-being at risk. One 16 year old girl from South Sudan, now living in Uganda, told researchers: “[I] know of children who have been abused or mistreated recently: heavy work, defilement, denial of education... many children are orphans with no one to take care of them.”

It is clear that domestic tensions are exacerbated by crisis situations: when household circumstances are greatly changed, poverty and trauma take their toll. In all three research areas, adolescent girls who had lost parents during the crisis and were not living with their immediate family felt especially unsafe.

- Across the research areas in **South Sudan**, adolescent girls talked about kidnappings, sexual violence, and criminal activities such as looting. There was particular apprehension about the large number of soldiers and the presence of active gun-fighting and violence: *“In the community soldiers are threatening to rape girls, forcing girls to marry them,”* (Girl, 15-19, South Sudan). Nearly a third of the girls surveyed, 33%, reported having been injured during the conflict.
- In the **Lake Chad Basin** adolescent girls described a wide spectrum of violence including conflict-related, community and domestic violence that infiltrates and impacts on almost every aspect of their lives. Adolescent girls across several of the research sites knew of girls their age who were forced to have relationships with men in order to survive: *“These girls are often raped by their master or by their boyfriends so as to have money.”* Many adolescent girls, nearly 35%, reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe in their own home. Just under a quarter of them had recently been hit or beaten and 60% of these incidents had happened at home. The violence can be hard to escape from: adolescent girls’ fear of harassment, most commonly from adolescent boys and young men, also restricts their mobility and access to opportunities and services in the wider community: *“Life is difficult here; we live in fear,”* (Girl, 14, Lake Chad Basin).
- In **Bangladesh**, although girls who had fled Myanmar remain afraid, the absence of armed men in the community means they feel safer than they did before: *“I feel good in camp. In Burma the army used to throw people into rivers, cutting them into pieces,”* (Rohingya Girl, 12, Bangladesh). It is clear from their testimony that violence and the fear it generates had dominated their lives and although they now feel safer the trauma lies just below the surface. Even though 94% of adolescent girls told researchers they felt safe or very safe at home in Bangladesh then the other studies, they also said they felt more restricted and stifled. They were trapped in the house and again, a number of them (16%), said they had been beaten or hit in the last month with 87% of reported cases taking place at home.

OVER 34%

OF THOSE SURVEYED IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN FELT UNSAFE AT HOME



Gulzar, 10, finds being in the camp difficult (Bangladesh).

(©Mahmud / Map / Plan International)

GIRLS' LIVES ARE RESTRICTED

The lack of freedom of movement that results from living with long-term crises was particularly remarked upon by adolescent girls in Bangladesh and the Lake Chad Basin. Parents become over-protective and, in many cases, the girls themselves are afraid. This severely limits their opportunities, already restricted enough by war, displacement and insecurity.

The lack of visibility and mobility which limits adolescent girls' access to any support available, and the household chores that confine them to the home, has far-reaching consequences: adolescent girls cannot go to school, they cannot make friends, they cannot contact health services and this limited access to information and peer support means they are more prone to depression, disease and early marriage and pregnancy. The damage done to girls' lives extends well into the future.

"Adolescent girls cannot leave their houses... family is the biggest hindrance in this regard, when asked to make three steps outside girls answered that their fathers and uncles would kill them - the situation is improving now though."

NGO WORKER, BANGLADESH

- In the camps in **Bangladesh**, families live among strangers and parents say they worry more about their girls' safety. It is clear too that pre-existing ideas about gender roles play a part in the decision to keep their daughters at home, especially the older girls: *"I cannot go outside. I have always to stay in the house and in this heat,"* (Young Rohingya woman, 18, Bangladesh).
- Adolescent girls in the **Lake Chad Basin** also talked about restrictions which had become worse with the conflict: *"Before I went to farm anywhere, even beyond this village. But now, I can't because I am afraid,"* (Girl, 13, Lake Chad Basin).

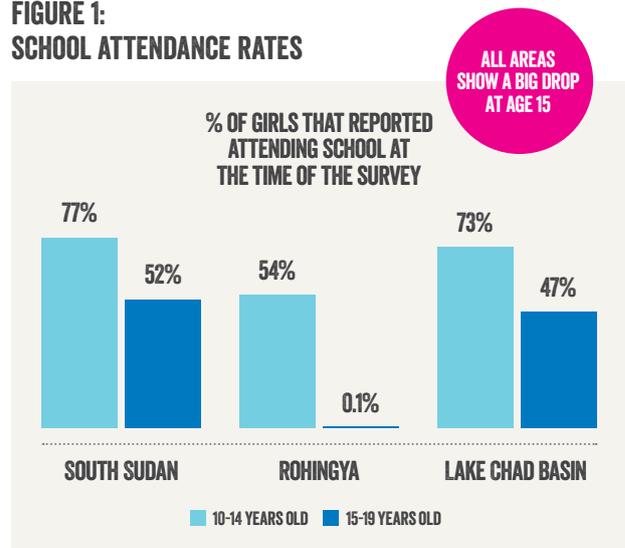
GIRLS WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL

Adolescent girls everywhere express a passion for study and a disappointment that their current situation prevents them from attending school or gaining access to vocational training. Fear is one factor that keeps them at home but there are many others: often there are no schools or training centres for them to go to, or they are too far away or they have missed so much education that they struggle to catch up. Family poverty is also a factor, in South Sudan 39% of girls not attending school said they couldn't afford to. This can put adolescent girls at risk; one group told researchers: *"a girl who didn't have school fees was advised by friends to have relationships with men in order to get school fees."* In many cases difficulties with girls' access to education pre-date the crisis situation and reflect pre-existing discriminatory attitudes.

ONLY 16%

OF FEMALES OVER THE AGE OF 15 IN SOUTH SUDAN ARE ABLE TO READ AND WRITE.¹⁶

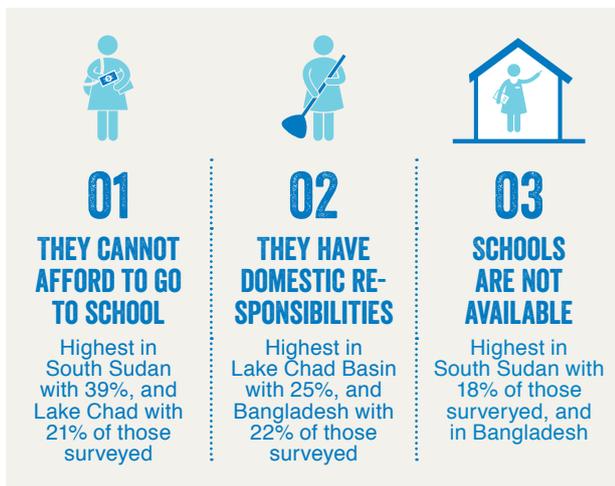
FIGURE 1:
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES



- In **South Sudan** adolescent girls reported that they have so many domestic chores that they miss out on school work. They know how much this will affect their future: *"I worry the most about not having enough time to revise because I have too much work to do at home and may end up failing my exams,"* (Girl, 17, South Sudan).
- This was an issue too in the **Lake Chad Basin** where 25% of out-of-school adolescent girls also blamed household responsibilities for keeping them out of education, with a further 21% saying they could not afford it. The girls know their education is not a priority to others, even in times of peace and plenty, and urged researchers: *"Tell our parents that school is important,"* (Girl, 13, Lake Chad Basin).

- In **South Sudan** there was a clear link between early pregnancy and access to education: 85% of adolescent girls surveyed who had ever been pregnant were not enrolled in school, compared to 29% of those that had never been pregnant.
- Adolescent girls from the **Rohingya community in Bangladesh** do not always have the opportunity to attend school although they are keen to do so. This lack of opportunity is not just down to the crisis: many had not attended school even before leaving Myanmar: *“The people of our area often say that girls do not need education. They think that girls should stay at home,”* (Rohingya girl, 13, Bangladesh).
- In the **Lake Chad Basin**, in nearly all the research sites, where they were attending school at all, girls left after primary school: as parents struggle to find funds and worry about their daughters’ safety, they marry them off.

FIGURE 2: TOP THREE REASONS WHY GIRLS DO NOT ATTEND SCHOOL



Everywhere, school attendance rates drop dramatically at 15, coinciding with an increase in early marriage and early pregnancy rates in all three research areas.

“School is not important because they will end up getting married and stay at home.”

FEMALE PARENT, LAKE CHAD BASIN



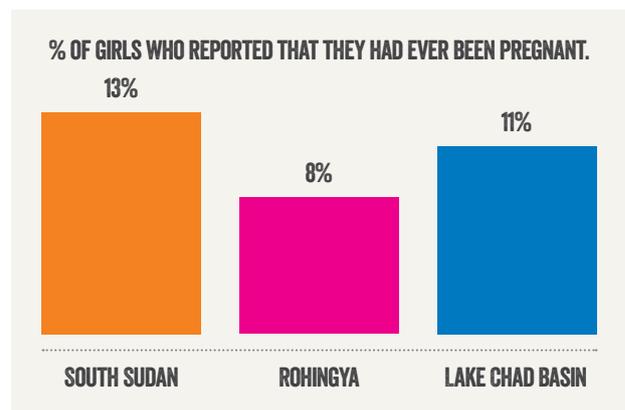
Girl learning at school (Niger).
(©Vincent Tremeaul)

GIRLS STRUGGLE TO STAY HEALTHY, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY

Poor nutrition, which can be particularly physically damaging during puberty, was a fact of life for adolescent girls and hunger will also affect their capacity to study with far-reaching consequences for the future. The lack of information about sexual and reproductive health, the restricted access to, or the complete absence of, health services—particularly in the area of mental health—will also have a destructive impact on adolescent girls’ lives.

53%
OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS SURVEYED IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN STATED THEY HAD EXPERIENCED A MAJOR INJURY OR DISEASE IN THE LAST YEAR.

FIGURE 3: PREGNANCY RATES STATISTICS ACROSS THE THREE AREAS



- Lack of clean water and good quality food is an issue particularly for pregnant or unaccompanied girls. In the **Lake Chad Basin** older adolescent girls in particular reported going hungry: *“Because the food is limited... it’s only given to my younger ones. My elder sister and I will just be patient and stay without eating,”* (Young woman, 18, Lake Chad Basin). In **South Sudan** only 23% of survey respondents reported always having enough to eat.
- All adolescent girls need better access to health services and they also want more information, particularly about sexual and reproductive health and rights: *“No one told this. We have learned when people whispered on the topic,”* (Girl, 18, Bangladesh). This lack of access to SRHR can be fatal and nowhere more so than in the **Lake Chad Basin** which has one of the highest ratios of maternal deaths anywhere in the world. *“When a girl reaches the age of 14 and above, she will have a boyfriend. It is very easy for her to get pregnant because she does not have enough knowledge about sex and her menstrual cycle,”* (Girl, 16, Lake Chad Basin).

- Mental health is another important issue, very few adolescent girls have access to mental health care despite the need: *“The war has caused many girls to have problems with their emotional health...many of them are victims of rape and suffer from constant depression, mental problems and trauma,”* (NGO Worker, South Sudan). Without help this may continue for the rest of their lives.

26%

OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS SURVEYED IN SOUTH SUDAN REPORTED HAVING CONSIDERED ENDING THEIR OWN LIVES AT LEAST ONCE IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

GIRLS WANT MORE POWER OVER THE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM

The inability to control their lives, to be consulted about decisions that affect them is reflected on by adolescent girls everywhere. They told us that people working in the humanitarian sector, even when they are planning services for adolescent girls, rarely talk to the girls themselves. In many cases adolescent girls cannot choose to carry on with their education, or whether, when or whom to marry, nor are they able to pursue livelihood opportunities that might give them a measure of independence.

“My friend from here was taken back to Sudan and gotten married to a man with two wives. And they did it in silence.”

SOUTH SUDANESE GIRL, 16, UGANDA



Adolescent girls in Niger share a joke with each other.
(©Plan International)

OVER 75%

OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS SURVEYED IN BANGLADESH REPORT HAVING NO ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR LIVES

RESILIENCE AND HOPE

There is however another side to the story: adolescent girls testify also to their hopes for the future and the dreams which have survived all that they have been through. Their energy and optimism, the ability to envisage a better future, is, in itself, a source of strength. In focus group discussions South Sudanese girls, aged 15-19 in Rhino Camp (Uganda), were asked about their career plans: two hope to become nurses, one wants to be an accountant, others looked forward to life as a pastor, a pilot, a policewoman, a doctor and five wanted to become teachers. Such optimism is a characteristic often associated with adolescence and demonstrates a resilience that is less evident in adult populations. Adolescent girls believe in the possibility of change and also in their own ability to contribute to it.

“I want to do a job after completing my education and work for the welfare of this community.”

ROHINGYA GIRL, 12, BANGLADESH

- Adolescent girls recognise that education and livelihood training is the best way to improve both their present and future lives.
- In all the communities researched, adolescent girls talked of the importance of family support. Despite acknowledging that families could be restrictive, or even violent, nearly 94% of girls interviewed in Bangladesh felt safe at home and depended on their mothers, aunts and sisters for support.
- Adolescent girls also rely on talking to their friends and having safe spaces to meet in – preferably with something to do. Many said they “felt better” with people of their own age to talk to, to share problems and information and to learn new skills. Adolescent girls in camps for displaced persons in the Lake Chad region of Niger described having peer leaders who would take their concerns to community leaders and try and resolve conflict. They found this useful and went to these peer leaders when they were feeling depressed.

Listening to adolescent girls it is clear that they understand how to improve their lives. Despite the adverse circumstances they are living under, they show resourcefulness, imagination, leadership, compassion, sacrifice, consideration of others, resilience and a desire to contribute to society: the very qualities that their communities will need as they seek to map a path out of crisis.

“I will create peace in South Sudan. I will become a good professional. I will develop the nation.”

GIRL, 15-19, SOUTH SUDAN

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In all three of the protracted crisis situations we have studied there are key overlapping areas of concern for adolescent girls. One, certainly, is that the humanitarian sector rarely listens to them and, despite an increasing literature on the rights and needs of adolescent girls, does not engage with girls and young women in the practical matters of their daily lives. This research provides an opportunity to change that.

The research also reveals that the situation of adolescent girls in crisis is largely determined by pre-existing gender roles: discriminatory attitudes becoming more entrenched. This, and the many differences of culture and context, must be clearly understood in the planning of humanitarian programmes and of camp management and infrastructure. Above all the authorities, whether local community leaders, government or humanitarian officials, need to call on the experience of adolescent girls. They are the ones facing the challenges of isolation and the “problems in regards to cooking, fuel, stovetop, electricity, shelter, difficulties going down the hill at night, water crisis and so on,” that, according to the Rohingya girls in Bangladesh, their everyday routine inflicts upon them.

It is clear from the interviews that, although adolescent girls do need protection from gender-based violence, they also prioritise consultation, education, livelihood opportunities, access to health services and practical measures regarding food, water and supplies to improve the grind of daily life. They feel that their priorities are largely ignored. It is striking overall how much adolescent girls look ahead: they express a very practical understanding of the impact of poverty on their lives and prospects. It is lack of money, and their own and their parents’ limited opportunities to earn any, as much as the surrounding violence, that is framing their future:



An adolescent girl from the Lake Chad Basin (Nigeria).

(©Plan International/Will Ayemoba)

“... train those who no longer go to school to do something else and encourage young people to study by helping their parents to undertake other small jobs.”

YOUNG WOMAN, 18, LAKE CHAD BASIN

What adolescent girls are telling us needs to be acknowledged and dealt with. The complexity of their situation – including the underlying gender discrimination and inequality that limits their opportunities wherever they are – must be addressed holistically, rather than a narrow cherry-picking of responses to a few more obvious needs.



Adolescent girls from the Lake Chad Basin (Nigeria).
 (©Plan International/Will Ayemoba)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are drawn from the focus group discussions and interviews with adolescent girls. Designed to acknowledge both their vulnerabilities and their strengths, they seek to highlight girls' stated priorities and to incorporate their suggestions and directions for change.

PARTICIPATION

Community leaders, programme planners and camp managers must listen to adolescent girls and make sure they have the opportunity to actively contribute to decision making processes. They need to be involved in the issues that affect them, not to be hidden at home. This means providing safe spaces, forums and processes that involve and are led by adolescent girls and are sensitive to gender inequality and power dynamics: acknowledging and tackling the endemic gender discrimination which exists within families and communities and deprives girls of their rights.

EDUCATION

Ensure that girls' education does not suffer. The education of adolescent girls needs to be factored into crisis planning and preparedness. Education systems need to be flexible and respond to girls' needs and circumstances, and should include life-skills and vocational education. Recruiting female teachers is vital for some communities and teachers and education officials must be pro-active, not just in providing services but in enabling girls to use them.

HEALTH SERVICES

Agencies and donors must prioritise funding for the provision of adolescent girl-friendly information and services. Mental health issues and sexual and reproductive health rights need to be a core focus. Safe spaces, discussion forums and peer networks not only improve mental health but also facilitate access to information and services.

SECURITY

Tackle gender-based violence in all its forms. This must include better camp infrastructure, law enforcement and reporting mechanisms, as well as promoting attitudinal and behavioural change at both family and community level. Recruiting male champions of change and establishing clear codes of conduct in camps and communities must engage men and boys in tackling gender-based violence and ending the discrimination that encourages it.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for example, Kirk, Jackie. 2006. "Education in Emergencies: The Gender Implications. Advocacy Brief." UNESCO Bangkok.
- 2 See, for example, UNHCR, Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children Norway. 1999. "Protection on Children and Adolescents in complex emergencies: Conference Report." <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae690200.pdf>.
- 3 Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). 10 May 2018. "Situation Report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis." p. 2. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20180510_-_iscg_-_sitrep_final.pdf
- 4 Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). 10 May 2018. "Situation Report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis." p. 2. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20180510_-_iscg_-_sitrep_final.pdf
- 5 Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). 10 May 2018. "Situation Report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis." p. 2. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20180510_-_iscg_-_sitrep_final.pdf
- 6 Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). 31 Dec 2017 "Situation Report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis" https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/171231_weekly_iscg_sitrep_final.pdf
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*Girls collect water in bowls
from the river (South Sudan).*
(©Plan International)





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No photographs were taken during the course of this research. Girls featured in images in the report are not the same as those that participated in the research.

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.

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