



**LEAD**

**Girls, boys and youth as active drivers of change – Summary**

## OUR GOAL

Adolescents and youth take collective action for systemic social and political change. In particular, we will support girls and young women to engage politically to shape how decisions are taken; change perceptions on what they are capable of; and together with boys and young men, advance gender equality and young people's rights.

## THE ISSUES AT STAKE

Many young people feel excluded and disempowered by the existing formal political structures – the ballot box, political parties and parliaments. In the ways these structures operate and how decisions are taken, they fail to reflect and respond to young people's needs or include their views – as the statistics suggest.

- Less than 2% of the world's parliamentarians are under 30 years, only 22% are women.
- Voter turnout for 18 to 25 year olds is still lower than among other age groups.
- Two out of three countries do not consult young people on policies that directly affect them.

Young people are therefore increasingly finding other ways to drive social change and express themselves politically – through digital tools and strategies, informal protests, innovative campaigns and projects. However, marginalised groups – poor, uneducated and rural youth, and especially girls and young women – are still not sufficiently heard.

## WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER?

Young people have unique inside knowledge about the issues that matter and the solutions that work for them. Therefore various human rights conventions including the [CRC](#) and [CEDAW](#) as well as the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) recognise the right of children and young people to have their voices heard. In line with democratic principles of inclusivity and representation, states also have a responsibility to take young people's interests fairly into account when making policies and decisions that affect them. In addition to that, studies also show that political disenfranchisement, inequality and a youthful population are together increasing the risks of instability and violence, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia and North Africa and the Middle East.

## ROOT CAUSES OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S POLITICAL DISENFRANCHISEMENT

- Negative perceptions and assumptions can influence the extent to which adults allow children and young people to participate in household or public decision-making. Families can actively discourage girls and young women from voicing their views and engaging in politics, seen as a male domain. The media too, can depict negative and disempowering images of young people - painting them as troublemakers and not change-makers.
- Lack of access to trustworthy information, IT, funding, safe spaces to meet, support for skills and opportunities to gain experience in public processes can limit young people's political participation and ability to take collective action.
- More broadly, more than 100 governments have restricted the freedom of civil society, which also affects young activists, and existing international legal frameworks fail to adequately champion and provide protection for children's and young people's rights to express their views or associate.



## OUR KEY INVESTMENT AREAS



### Young people's organisations and their initiatives to influence change.

We will prioritise partnering with young people's organisations engaged in promoting girls' rights and gender equality. We will strengthen collective capabilities, networks and explore more flexible options of funding for them.



### Young people's voice and image in the media.

We will support young people to use social and traditional media effectively and safely for their change initiatives. We will boost investments to build partnerships between young people and media, to produce more relevant content especially by girls and young women and increase media literacy. We will encourage media to tell a more gender equal story to change discriminatory norms.



### Young people's participation in decision-making processes of governments.

Youth-led social accountability initiatives offer young people the chance to engage with decision makers, helping them to drive clear improvements to services vital for them. We will intensify the work to promote the participation of young people in government planning and budgeting at all levels, including disaster response planning.

# OUR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

Plan International applies a gender transformative approach to young people's political empowerment and conflict transformation in all our programme and influencing work. It involves:

- Building young people's and particularly girls and young women's agency and political skills, fostering young people's networks with allies and supporting them to take collective action for gender equality.
- Supporting gender-responsive intergenerational dialogue with parents and others who have an influence in young people's lives and on their political engagement.
- Creating safe spaces for young people to explore concepts and manifestations of gender and social inequality and injustice; to promote dialogue between young women and men; and to address risks from their social and political engagement.
- Working with adult change agents for gender-equality from within families, communities and public institutions to help drive changes within institutions.

- Proactively influencing political systems and processes to ensure that they are gender and age responsive, that girls' and young women's voices are equally listened to in decision-making processes and to advance the civil and political rights of all young people.

## GLOBAL INFLUENCING PRIORITIES

Our global influencing works together the Girls Get Equal Campaign that celebrate girls' individual and collective agency and youth-led activism for gender equality. It aims to:

- Support global movements of young people to help increase space for meaningful youth engagement, activism and formal political participation in decision-making.
- Influence global policy makers to include young people, particularly young women, more systematically in decision-making and accountability processes in development settings but also in emergencies and peacebuilding.
- Influence global and regional development actors to boost investments and commitments to progress on key treaties related to empowering young people, especially girls and young women.

