PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Until we are all equal

The State of the World's Girls 2026

Change her Forecast

How the climate crisis fuels sexual violence, child marriage and unintended pregnancy, and limits girls' futures

The State of the World's Girls 2026

5,000
survey participants involved in the primary research

139
face to face conversations

52
countries involved in secondary data analysis

This year's State of the World's Girls Report focuses on the impacts of climate change on girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights – impacts that have, until now, gone largely unrecognised, and topics that are rarely linked.

The primary research covers new ground. It was conducted through a large-scale survey in five countries involving 5,000 participants and through face-to-face conversations with 139 girls and young women across the same five countries. The report contains vivid first-hand descriptions, and analysis, of girls' experiences alongside their prescriptions for change. Additional research was carried out through secondary data analysis involving 52 countries worldwide.

Content warning: Some experiences described by participants in this study contain references to incidences of physical and sexual violence, as well as other sensitive and potentially distressing themes. Please read with care and at your own discretion.

Disclaimer:
The names of the children and young people in this report have been changed to ensure anonymity. Photos used in this report are not of research participants.

Executive Summary

This year, Plan International's State of the World's Girls Report focuses on the impacts of climate change on girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The primary research, unique in its field, was conducted through a large-scale survey in five countries – Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru, Senegal and Zimbabwe – involving 5,000 girls and young women aged 15-24, and through face-to-face conversations with 139 girls and young women across the same five countries.

The report, based on the ideas, opinions and experiences of adolescent girls and young women, explores how climate shocks affect access to contraception, gender-based violence, child marriage and unions,[1] and unintended pregnancy. It examines why and how, as health systems break down, household livelihoods are depleted, and protection safeguards are dismantled, climate events, such as floods, drought and heatwaves, restrict girls and young women's choices and have such profound implications throughout their lives. It also points clearly to where action would make the greatest difference to girls' lives.

> **"If we choose groups of youth leaders, they will be focused on a single goal... providing support and information to teenagers in the farthest settlements."**
>
> Anahi, 15-19, focus group, Peru

A family paddles through floodwaters in Bangladesh. After major rivers burst their banks, thousands of families were displaced. © Plan International

Research Findings

Nine out of ten girls reported that climate events[a] are placing serious pressures on their household's survival, health and stability.

It is clear from the research that the fall-out from the climate crisis lands hard on girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive choices. Schools and clinics close, opportunities narrow, and the economic stress which families experience reinforce harmful gender norms, pushing girls and their families into damaging coping strategies: some out-of-school girls may start to see marriage or unions as the only way forward. The sexual and reproductive health information and services, which would help to lessen the potentially devastating impacts on girls' lives, struggle to function and provide care. Girls and young women, now increasingly vulnerable to child marriage and unions, sexual violence and unintended pregnancies, face a compounding crisis.

[a] Girls and young women taking part in the survey were asked about the most severe climate event they had experienced and subsequent questions around impacts were anchored against this climate event. Options were: extreme heat, flood, drought, extreme cold, severe storms, landslides/mudslides or wildfires.

Flooding, caused most damage to infrastructure and access, blocking roads, destroying schools and clinics and making homes uninhabitable.

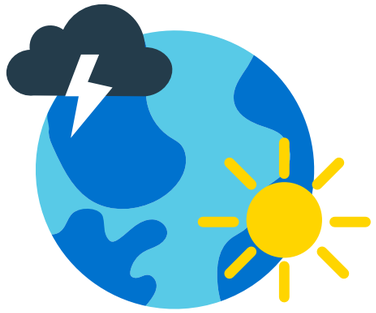
Drought, which undermines family incomes, has the most detrimental impact on girls lives and opportunities. Economic insecurity drives harmful coping strategies, such as child marriage and unions, and increases vulnerability to gender-based violence as family tensions escalate.

The burden does not fall equally: girls from minority backgrounds were twice as likely to struggle with access to services, nearly three times as likely to report unintended pregnancy and more than twice as likely to report pressure to marry or get pregnant.

Girls whose schooling is disrupted are twice as likely to marry before 18 or face unintended pregnancy. Findings from our secondary analysis confirm the protective effect of education: child marriage rates and rates of gender-based violence were lower among girls and young women with higher levels of schooling.

> **"Girls in schools are taught on their rights, against early marriage, taught how to protect themselves... Unfortunately, girls who are not in school miss out such important information on protection."**
> Faith, 17, Kenya

Extreme heat, floods and drought emerged as the most damaging climate events girls experienced. And put it as first sentence before As services, infrastructure and communities break down, climate events impact girls' and young women's lives, and their sexual and reproductive health and rights, in a variety of damaging ways:



76%
of girls and young women said more girls and young women in their community were struggling to access at least one sexual or reproductive health service, rising to 84% for those contending with drought. 68% had struggled personally.

24%
reported girls and young women struggling to access contraception services and 17% had struggled themselves.

49%
rising to 62% of those living in drought-affected areas, noticed more girls and young women with health problems during pregnancy or childbirth-related complications. Over 20% spoke from personal experience.

28%
of girls and young women noted an increase in gender-based violence: 66%, two thirds, said that an increase in sexual exploitation[b] had led to an increase in gender-based violence.

[b] Given the sample spans ages 15–24, this report uses "sexual exploitation" rather than "transactional sex": a child cannot meaningfully consent to exchanging sex for money, goods or benefits, so any involvement of a minor is exploitation and abuse, in line with international child-protection standards. However, questions in the survey employed the term transactional sex.

24%
of girls and young women said more girls and young women in their community were struggling to access gender-based violence prevention and response services.18.5% said they had experienced this personally.

36%
of adolescent girls and young women noticed more girls getting married before 18, and 11% said they personally had got married.

33%
noticed more unintended pregnancy in the community. 11% of girls and young women said they had personally experienced an unintended pregnancy.

> **"There is clear connection [between drought and unintended pregnancies]. During drought, families lose money. Girls enter into relationships to get extra money."**
> Chenai, 21, Zimbabwe

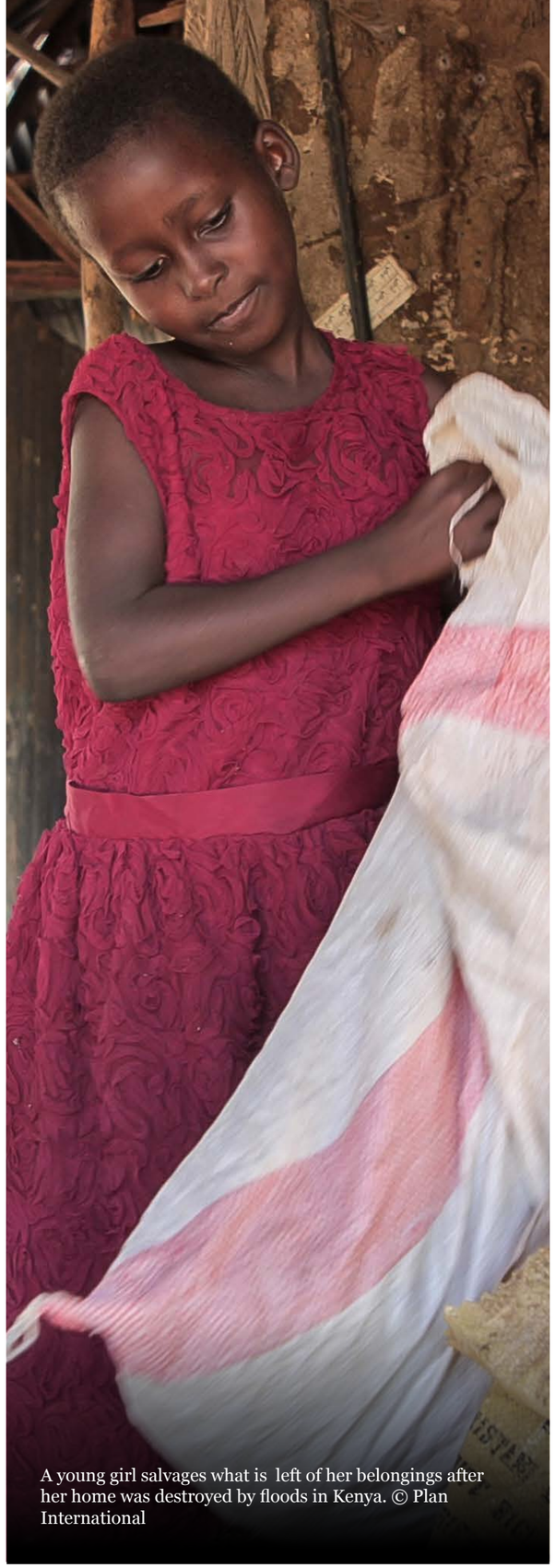
Conclusion

These impacts on girls' lives are not inevitable. The **evidence points to three stand-out areas** where sustained, targeted investment would do most to protect their rights and futures:

- **Keeping girls' education uninterrupted** through climate shocks, so they stay connected to the comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), rights knowledge, and service information that school provides;
- Intensifying efforts to **end child marriage and unions** as economic and climate pressures drive it upward;
- Treating girls living in high-risk climate settings as a distinct population who need **high-quality, holistic programming**, paying attention to their sexual and reproductive health needs, and designed for sustainable outcomes.

The research shows clearly that protecting girls' sexual and reproductive health needs, and safeguarding their education during climate events will also safeguard them from the further harms of child marriage and unions, unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence. All of which, they tell us, are increasing as the climate crisis advances.

> **"During the floods in 2022... at the shelter, the men stayed awake all night to watch over the girls because it was not safe. There were too many people, no lights, and we were afraid something would happen while everyone slept."**
> Tahira, 23, Bangladesh



A young girl salvages what is left of her belongings after her home was destroyed by floods in Kenya. © Plan International

Calls to Action

Emerging from the research are practical suggestions, from girls and young women themselves, that would protect their sexual and reproductive health and rights and help keep them safe from some of the harmful effects of climate hazards. Girls and young women require their health needs planned for and funded, the services running, access to uninterrupted education and their families' economic survival shored up.

> **"When it's difficult, we do solidarity between girls, cover up, do laundry for the neighbours, we protect ourselves, make talks on how to overcome our hardships."**
> Huguette, 23, Senegal

- **Ensure that there is money set aside for sexual repoductive health and rights** as part of any emergency response to climate crises: channel a share of the available finance to local and girl-led organisations, especially targeting those in high-risk climate settings.
- **Keep sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services available as part of emergency response:** make contraceptive and menstrual products part of disaster provision and provide targeted and integrated support when girls and young women face violence or pressures to marry.
- **Keep girls in school, with access to uninterrupted learning:** girls recognise that continuous access to safe, quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education, before, during and after climate shocks, is critical to protecting their rights and futures. Girls most at risk of dropping out need to be identified and supported.
- **Break the economic drivers of child marriage, unintended pregnancy and exploitation:** as climate and economic shocks intensify family poverty, they push the rate of child marriage and unions, sexual exploitation, unintended pregnancy and dropping out of school, upward. In the hardest hit areas governments must plan to support food provision, livelihoods and infrastructure for families under economic pressure.
- **Involve adolescent girls and young women in the decisions that affect their lives:** girls call for financial and practical support for youth-led approaches to crisis planning. Leave nobody out; those in the highest-risk climate settings, adolescent girls from minority and indigenous groups, girls with disabilities, displaced and migrating girls, those in remote areas, and married, in-union or pregnant girls, all need to be consulted and included.

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Preface

Reena Ghelani
Chief Executive Officer
Plan International

The climate emergency is impacting millions of girls and young women on an unprecedented scale. It is shaping their daily lives, limiting the opportunities and choices available to them, and challenging their rights. They are among those least responsible for the climate crisis, yet they are too often among those bearing the highest burdens.

The findings in this report are stark, and reflect opportunities denied, rights undermined and futures constrained. Nine in ten girls and young women we surveyed reported that climate events are placing serious pressure on their household's health, stability and ability to survive. More than three-quarters said girls and young women in their communities were struggling to access sexual and reproductive health services. They also reported a rise in child marriage, unintended pregnancies and increased levels of gender-based violence. These impacts are not isolated consequences. They are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, creating cycles of vulnerability that can last a lifetime.

> **Behind every climate shock are the human stories. This report seeks to capture these and amplify the voices and experience of the girls and young women whom we work alongside. It is a testament to their leadership, determination and agency.**

They shine a spotlight not only on the challenges they face, but also on the solutions they want to see, shape and drive. They understand what they and their communities need and are already taking action, supporting one another, advocating for change, and building resilience in the face of growing climate uncertainty.

Today, their message is more urgent than ever: the world has just experienced the hottest decade on record, and scientists warn that a developing El Niño is likely to intensify droughts, floods, extreme heat and food insecurity across many of the regions already most vulnerable to climate shocks. Girls, young women and communities that have barely recovered from one crisis increasingly face another.

Their call is crystal clear. Changing the forecast for girls and young women requires more than responding to disasters as they occur. Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services; protecting uninterrupted education, ending child, early and forced marriage; preventing gender-based violence; and investing in girls' and young women's leadership are not secondary considerations. They are essential.
Girls and young women deserve more than a future shaped by a crisis they did not create. They deserve a future they can shape themselves. This report is both a call to listen and a call to act.

Reena (far right) listens to girls' stories, Sudan.
© Plan International /Abdelazim Yousif

Foreword

Karen, 23, from Peru, has first-hand experience of the impacts of the climate crisis. She is an activist who has campaigned for comprehensive sexuality education in her country and is currently working with survivors of gender-based violence.

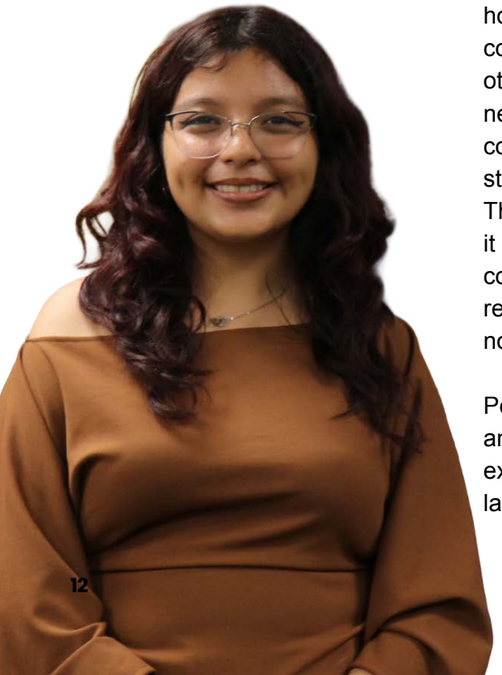
Growing up in Pucallpa, in the Peruvian Amazon, the rainy season was "just part of life". I remember being seven or eight, walking to school with plastic bags tied over my feet because the street between my house and the moto-taxi stop flooded almost every time it rained hard. My father would carry me if he could before leaving for work. When he couldn't, my brother and I walked on our own, trying not to arrive completely soaked.

"By high school, my own school flooded too. Desks filled with water and classes were cancelled. One classmate missed weeks of school after her family's home flooded, and spent that time helping her mother sell what they could to recover." Another dreaded cancelled classes because home meant living with an abusive father. For her, the classroom was the safest place she had.

Even then, I noticed how much people in my community relied on each other. During the worst weeks, neighbours organized ollas comunes so families would still have something to eat. That solidarity is real, but it also reflects how often communities are left to respond where the state does not.

Peru is now preparing for another strong El Niño, expected to peak between late 2026 and early 2027. Many girls will face disrupted schooling, displacement, and greater vulnerability to violence and unintended pregnancy: at the same time Peru has just passed a new law weakening comprehensive sexuality education which can only increase that vulnerability.

Reading this report, I could not help thinking about how these realities overlap. That is why this report matters. It shows that climate shocks, threats to reproductive health services and gender-based violence are not separate crises. They reinforce one another, often in ways that remain invisible. I recognised many of my own experiences in these pages. Today, I carry those lessons into my work at "Somos Amalia", supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and at "Por Mi Parque", working on water and disaster preparedness in Lima. My hope is that this report helps others see those connections too.



Karen, 23, Peru. @ Plan International

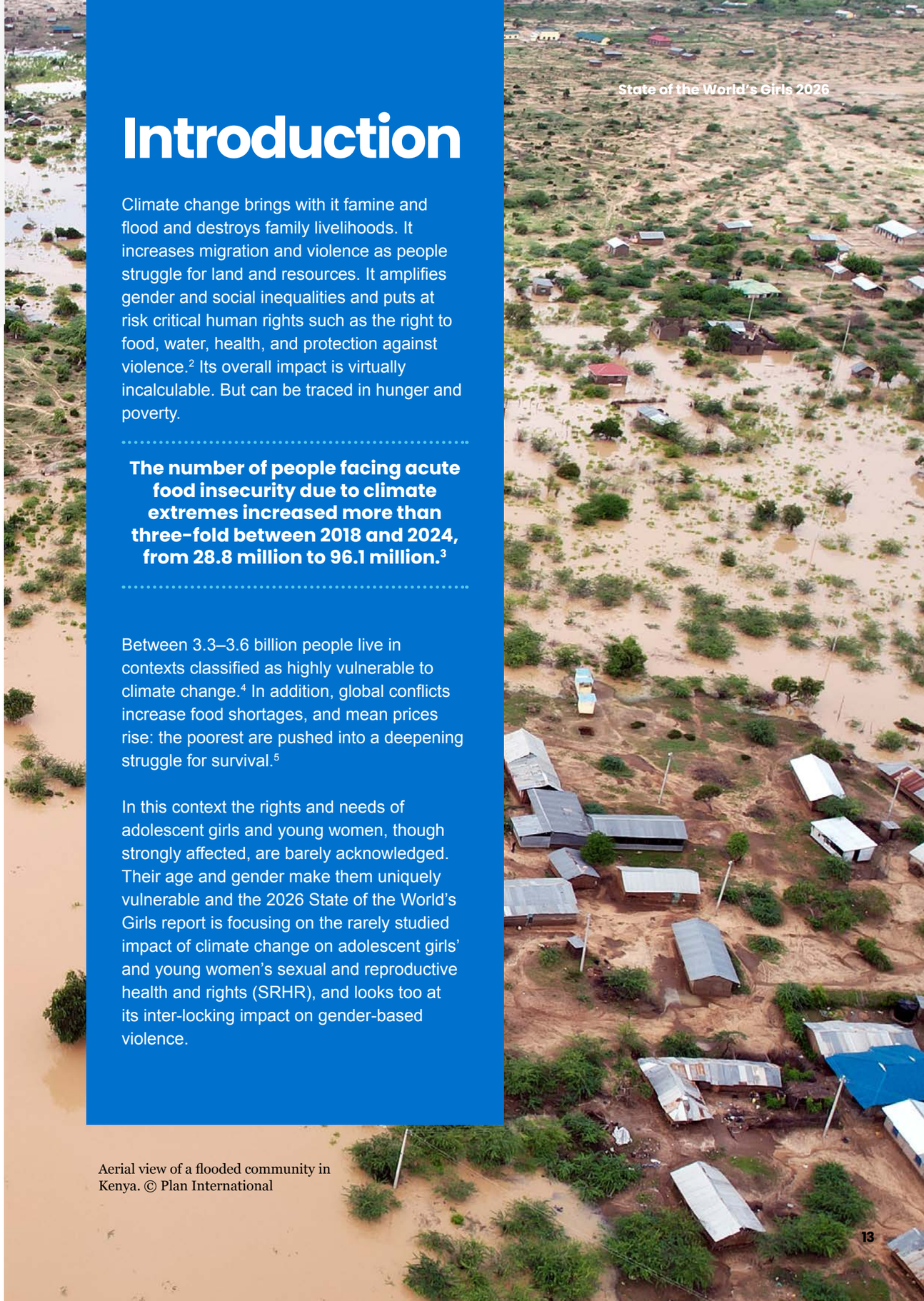
Introduction

Climate change brings with it famine and flood and destroys family livelihoods. It increases migration and violence as people struggle for land and resources. It amplifies gender and social inequalities and puts at risk critical human rights such as the right to food, water, health, and protection against violence.[2] Its overall impact is virtually incalculable. But can be traced in hunger and poverty.

The number of people facing acute food insecurity due to climate extremes increased more than three-fold between 2018 and 2024, from 28.8 million to 96.1 million.[3]

Between 3.3–3.6 billion people live in contexts classified as highly vulnerable to climate change.[4] In addition, global conflicts increase food shortages, and mean prices rise: the poorest are pushed into a deepening struggle for survival.[5]

In this context the rights and needs of adolescent girls and young women, though strongly affected, are barely acknowledged. Their age and gender make them uniquely vulnerable and the 2026 State of the World's Girls report is focusing on the rarely studied impact of climate change on adolescent girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and looks too at its inter-locking impact on gender-based violence.

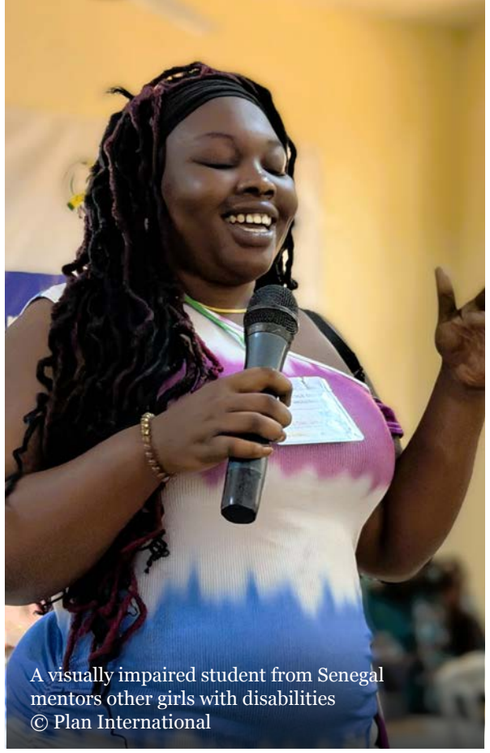


Aerial view of a flooded community in Kenya. © Plan International

Access to SRHR information, and the realisation of these rights, is important. It helps girls and young women stay healthy, safe and empowered, enabling them to pursue education, employment and exercise choice over who and when to marry, and if and when to have a child. Currently, adolescent girls and young women are facing intensifying threats to these rights and services from multiple directions: a lethal conjunction of funding cuts, anti-rights policies and the growing impacts of the climate crisis. As regressive policy shifts, and anti-rights movements restrict access to SRHR services and information, in many contexts, climate change destroys health infrastructure, displaces populations and increases poverty which further decimates the essential services that adolescent girls and women depend on. The interaction between policy rollbacks and climate disasters amplifies the impact of both. It is a frightening combination which shows no signs of diminishing.

The rollback is global, described by UN Women as “an increasingly organised pushback at gender equality and regression of women’s rights”. Everywhere, laws are being reshaped to restrict women’s freedoms, silence their voices, and allow abuse without consequence. Discriminatory legal frameworks, social norms, gaps between laws and implementation, traditional justice systems independent from the state, and conflict settings all serve to reinforce inequalities and halt progress towards women’s and girls’ rights.[6] In tune with these regressive policies there is also a cutback on official development assistance (ODA), despite increasing need.

In 2025, International aid fell by 23 per cent, the largest annual drop in the history of official development assistance.[7,8]



A visually impaired student from Senegal mentors other girls with disabilities © Plan International

As a result of these cuts in aid, in 2025, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) reported that the US Government was withholding, from five African countries, over $9.7 million of U.S.-funded contraceptives.[9] The outcome of all this in terms of increased poverty and hunger, and for girls and young women, in terms of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and shattered lives, is terrifying.[10]

This research, which seeks both to understand the links between climate change and SRHR and to identify solutions to the challenges girls face, is based on the experiences and opinions of girls and young women across five countries. It is evident that the worst harm is done to the most vulnerable: girls belonging to minority groups, those with a disability and those in remote and rural locations. These marginalised groups are among the least responsible for climate change but bear the greatest burden: as storm, flood and drought increase, deep-running inequalities between countries and among communities are exacerbated to devastating effect.

The particular impacts on adolescent girls and young women often go unnoticed, but not by them. Throughout the research they describe in vivid detail how climate events affect their lives and curtail their opportunities: hopes and dreams diminish as schools close and child marriage and unintended pregnancy become the default option. Family incomes decrease, health services become inaccessible, and community protection systems fracture. Girls see choices dwindling while fear and violence increase:

“Flooding increases the risk because of the loss of private space, the loss of protection, displacement, and the breakdown of stress-related surveillance. Everyone is in survival mode.” Huguette,23, Senegal

A girl washes dishes in floodwater near her home in Bangladesh. © Plan International

The interaction between climate events, child marriage and unions, gender-based violence and SRHR is complex and multifaceted:

Heatwaves, floods, droughts and storms disrupt food security, health systems, interrupt education and social protection systems and put households under strain. Girls and young women are particularly affected because their access to SRHR information and services and their ability to exercise independent reproductive choices are especially sensitive to these disruptions.

Extreme weather can damage health infrastructure, interrupt supply chains for contraceptives and essential medicines and divert limited health resources towards emergency response.

At household level, **climate related income shocks** can increase reliance on negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage and unions, sexual exploitation in exchange for money, goods or benefits, and taking girls out of school.

Climate stress is also associated with a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence, and displacement, both of which undermine SRHR, create a climate of fear, and destroy girls’ and young women’s ability to make their own choices.

The importance of sexual and reproductive health services extends beyond physical well-being. Access to information and care, or the lack of it, will, as girls reach adolescence, make an indelible mark on their lives. Understanding your body, dealing with menstruation, avoiding unintended pregnancy, being able to build healthy relationships and steering clear of being forced, exploited or coerced into sexual relationships, are all essential to opening up opportunities and enabling real choice. All these skills are dependent on circumstances, and the availability of support, guidance and resources from families, communities and governments. Extreme weather events and longer-term environmental changes disrupt healthcare, education and livelihoods, reducing access to contraception and other essential services while increasing the risks of child marriage and unions, gender-based violence, unintended pregnancy and exploitation.

Despite growing concerns, climate change and SRHR are often treated as separate issues. There is little research examining the links between them, and this report is an attempt to change that. In it we explore how climate shocks affect four key outcomes: access to contraception, **gender-based violence, child marriage and unions, and unintended pregnancy.** The report examines why and how, as health systems breakdown, household livelihoods are depleted, and protection safeguards are dismantled, climate events have such profound implications for girls' lives. It does not have to be like this and the report also asks what can be done.

The girls and young women taking part in the survey and interviews conducted are not short of ideas. They know how important SRHR is to their future and they know too what they need in the present.

> **"Everywhere, women and girls face the greatest threats and the deepest harm. Everywhere, women and girls are taking action to confront the climate and environmental crises. And everywhere, women and girls continue to be largely excluded from the rooms where decisions are taken."**
> António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

Girls in Peru take part in an activity to map risks in their community. © Plan International

Methodology[11]

Survey conducted in Bangladesh, Peru, Kenya, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

The questionnaire had 21 closed questions; most of them allowed respondents to select multiple answers. Questions were structured around five areas:

1. Filter questions to determine eligibility (location, climate event experience);
2. Demographic (age, minority group, income etc.);
3. General climate impacts;
4. Climate impacts on SRHR;
5. Solutions and youth voices.

The survey questionnaire was translated into different languages and 5,000 questionnaires, 1,000 per country, were completed.

Qualitative interviews and focus groups in the same five countries.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 54 girls and young women aged 15 to 24 years and 10 focus groups with a total of 85 participants were completed with girls and women of the same age category.[c]

Interviews and focus groups were carried out in climate affected locations in each of the study countries.[d]

Qualitative interviews and focus groups allowed researchers to move beyond the statistical patterns identified in the survey data, to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of girls in their own words.

Secondary data analysis: To explore the relationship between climate events and SRHR outcomes with a large-scale quantitative analysis we used existing demographic and health survey (DHS) data and climate data sets from 52 countries and over 460 subnational regions across three decades (1990-2019).

Ethics and safeguarding: Research ethics approval was granted from the Research Ethics Committee at the UK-based global affairs think tank ODI Global. In-country ethics approvals were also completed in Kenya and Senegal.[12] A full safeguarding risk assessment was conducted in collaboration with country office staff to identify potential risks and mitigation measures for all data collection methods.

For the survey data collection, the contractors had to sign a code of conduct confirming that they will adhere to Plan International's global Safeguarding Policy. Consent was obtained from all participants and from parents/guardians of 15 to 17-year-old participants: similarly for the interviews and focus group discussions. All participants were informed that they could opt out at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection, analysis and write-up process, and robust data security was ensured.

[c] Focus groups were divided by age in each country – one with 15-19 years and one with 20-24 years.

[d] Sunamganj in Bangladesh, Piura in Peru, Dukana in Kenya, Saint-Louis in Senegal and Mutare, Chiredzi and Mutoko in Zimbabwe

What We Know:

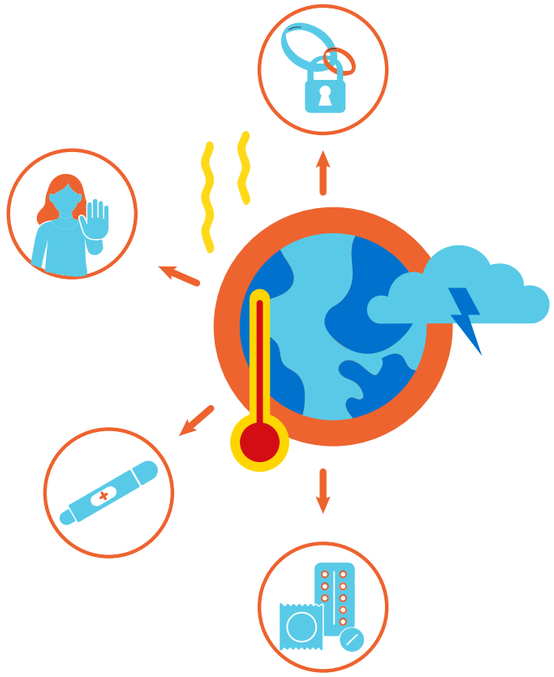
Reviewing the existing research

It is clear from our review of the available literature that access to contraception, and levels of gender-based violence, child marriage and unions and unintended pregnancies are all affected by the climate crisis and all four are inter-linked.

Globally approximately 11.5 million women are already experiencing climate-related loss of access to contraception, and projections estimate this rising to 14 million as climate hazards intensify.[13]

Access to contraception, as existing secondary research shows, is vastly impeded during climate crises. Damage to infrastructure makes roads impassable. Buildings and bridges are destroyed. Even if clinics remain open it is almost impossible for staff, patients or supplies to reach them. All of this combines to restrict access to all forms of contraception, resulting in heightened exposure to unintended pregnancies.[14] To make matters worse, climate-induced emergencies and displacement regularly trigger surges in gender-based and sexual violence due to the breakdown in food systems, protection systems and law enforcement.[15]

Consequently, the likelihood of pregnancy resulting from sexual violence escalates sharply and is heightened by the non-availability of emergency oral contraception. Increased family poverty, displacement and an overall lack of security also inhibit access to contraception, at a time when the need is greatest.



Gender-based violence is already a global epidemic: one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.[16] This violence has profound consequences. These include a higher risk of HIV infection and unintended pregnancies, as well as other physical injuries, psychological trauma, and long-term social and economic after-effects. Climate crises exacerbate existing gender inequalities while deepening pre-existing vulnerabilities such as economic stress, food insecurity and social instability. These conditions enable violence while simultaneously disrupting the protective systems designed to support survivors.

As climate events intensify, adolescent girls and young women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, from strangers, at home, and from those there to support them.

Heightened Risks

To avoid violence in shelters, or where aid is distributed, some women and girls stay home, increasing their vulnerability to floods, storms or aftershock.[17] They end up trading one risk for another.

Sexual coercion and harassment by relief workers which has been well documented in conflict and disaster zones not only adds an immediate harm but also pushes survivors away from essential aid.[18]

Economic pressures on households, as crops fail, markets are disrupted and food scarcity becomes a fact of life, is another driver of gender-based violence as stressed family members lash out. Resource scarcity driven by climate stress directly links to violence against women and girls.[19]

Research has also found that climate shocks can **destabilise men's ideas of their role as breadwinners and protectors**.[20] Violence becomes a way of proving one's masculinity after having been unable to protect their community and family from harm.

Displacement, which disrupts social cohesion, and the informal community surveillance mechanisms that can deter violent behaviour, further increases vulnerability to violence.[21]

For adolescent girls, displacement can coincide with school closures which removes a critical protective space, increasing exposure to sexual exploitation, child marriage and trafficking.

Across multiple regions, emerging studies show a clear association between climate crises and increases in child marriage and unions.[22] Prolonged drought and chronic food and water insecurity gradually erode the livelihoods and assets that households depend on, pushing families to take increasingly desperate measures. Marriage is frequently mobilised as a medium-long-term solution: reducing the number of mouths to feed, securing bride price payments, or transferring the perceived burden of a daughter's future to another household. Research also suggests that families view marriage as a mechanism for safeguarding girls from harassment, assault or reputational harm in temporary shelters or unstable communities.[23] **As child marriage and unions increase so, too, does unintended pregnancy**, with consequences that endure for life: child marriage and unions place girls in situations where they have little control over sexual activity or fertility. Numerous studies link the timing and intensity of disasters to increased pregnancy rates, unintended pregnancy, and pregnancy complications, especially where service interruptions and protection breakdowns intersect.[24]

Crucially, climate crises tend to increase unintended pregnancies among much younger girls, through coerced unions or following episodes of violence.[25] For very young adolescent girls, who face elevated health risks from pregnancy and often encounter significant barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services, climate emergencies can be particularly harmful: increased exposure to sexual violence combines with disrupted, or non-existent, access to contraception and other essential SRHR services and leaves them struggling with the trauma of violence, unintended pregnancy and childbirth.[26]

Girls display their risk assessment findings in Bangladesh. © Plan International

A girl in this situation has virtually no way to prevent a pregnancy or HIV infection resulting from rape. And it is children like this for whom pregnancy and childbirth is most dangerous.

Pregnancy complications and unsafe abortions are the leading causes of death among girls aged 15 to 19.[27]

The evidence reviewed here is clear, **climate shocks systematically disrupt the conditions under which adolescent girls and young women can exercise independent choice in terms of sexual and reproductive decision-making**.

Across contraceptive access, gender-based violence, child marriage and unions and unintended pregnancy, the same underlying mechanisms recur: health systems fails, household economies collapse, and the social and institutional protections that girls depend on fracture simultaneously. These are not separate harms but interlocking ones, each amplifying the others.

Critically, climate change does not introduce these harms into communities where they were absent but intensifies and extends existing inequalities, falling hardest on girls and young women in low-and-middle-income countries, whose access to services, protection, and rights was already the most precarious. There is little evidence in national adaptation plans, or in the meagreness of the available funding, that anything is likely to change: the gap between what the evidence shows and what is actually planned for and implemented is not a technical oversight, more a discriminatory blindness. Sexual and reproductive health and rights remain largely absent from climate policy, even as the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on women and girls is increasingly acknowledged.

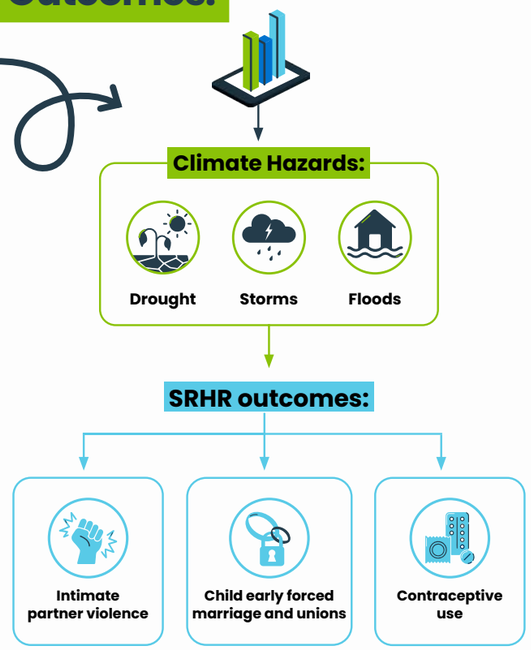
Only six per cent of adaptation funding and 0.5 per cent of multilateral climate funding[28] supports health-related initiatives. Girls' reproductive health and their right to make decisions about their own bodies are, in terms of health priorities, barely mentioned.[29]

Climate Hazards and SRHR Outcomes:

A large-scale analysis

To explore the relationship between climate events and SRHR outcomes at scale, Plan International commissioned a secondary analysis of climate hazards and SRHR outcomes across 52 countries and over 460 subnational regions, using three decades (1990–2019) of Demographic and Health Survey data, drawing on records from almost 2.9 million women.

The analysis tested three types of climate hazards, drought, floods and storms, against three SRHR outcomes: child, early and forced marriage and unions, intimate partner violence, and contraceptive use.



Key Findings

1. Different types of climate disasters have different effects on SRHR outcomes. Prolonged droughts, for example, drive up the prevalence of early unions among girls and young women,[30] especially in rural areas.

2. Drought is associated with higher contraceptive use as families put off having children, while the impact of floods and storms on early unions and contraceptive use is marginal.

3. The longer girls and young women stay in school the less likely it is that they will experience child marriage or unions or intimate partner violence.

4. Rural residence is consistently associated with worse outcomes in terms of higher rates of early marriage and lower contraceptive use.

In Summary

Findings indicate that the worst impacts of drought, floods and storms on SRHR outcomes run through drought and the economic pressure it creates. It lands hardest on early marriage and the timing of childbearing. **Keeping girls in school is the most effective strategy for reducing these outcomes and is the lever most clearly within reach of policy.**

What We Have Learned from Girls and Young Women

Very little research has been conducted on the links between climate crises, and adolescent girl and young women's SRHR. Even less has involved girls and young women themselves.

We asked the girls and young women taking part in this research to reflect on the general impacts of climate change on them and their communities and, more specifically, the impacts, either noticed or experienced, on access to SRH services and on the choices they were able to make during times of climate crisis.

Did they notice an increase in child marriage and unions, in gender-based violence and unintended pregnancies, and if so, why? They were asked too about their ideas for change and their hopes for the future.

Their responses give a timely and critical snapshot of how climate-related events – extreme heat, floods, drought, storms, extreme cold – some recurring, others spanning several years, are shaping the lives, health, safety and opportunities of adolescent girls and young women, in many different contexts and in a variety of ways. The diverse climate events reported by girls and young women create different risks across different communities: from damage to homes and livelihoods to disrupted health services, education, safety and care. It is very apparent, throughout the research, that the extent of this damage is far-reaching and life-changing.

"I cannot forget"

Those taking part in the research had all experienced a variety of climate shocks, with extreme heat, floods and drought being the most common. Their impact had left many traumatised. When girls and young women were asked about the most significant weather event they remembered, in Bangladesh, as Afsana recalls so vividly, it was the 2022 flood.

> **"The floodwater rushed in around 1:00 a.m. while we were asleep… my baby was only 22 days old. As we were trying to leave with the baby, the water kept rising. Eventually, I had to swim while holding my baby…. Even now, remembering that suffering makes my hands, feet, and whole body tremble."**
> Afsana, 24, Bangladesh

Shahina too was traumatised:

> **"The flood of 2022 is the one I remember the most in my life, and I cannot forget it… In our area, two children drowned and died in the water."**
> Shahina, 19, Bangladesh

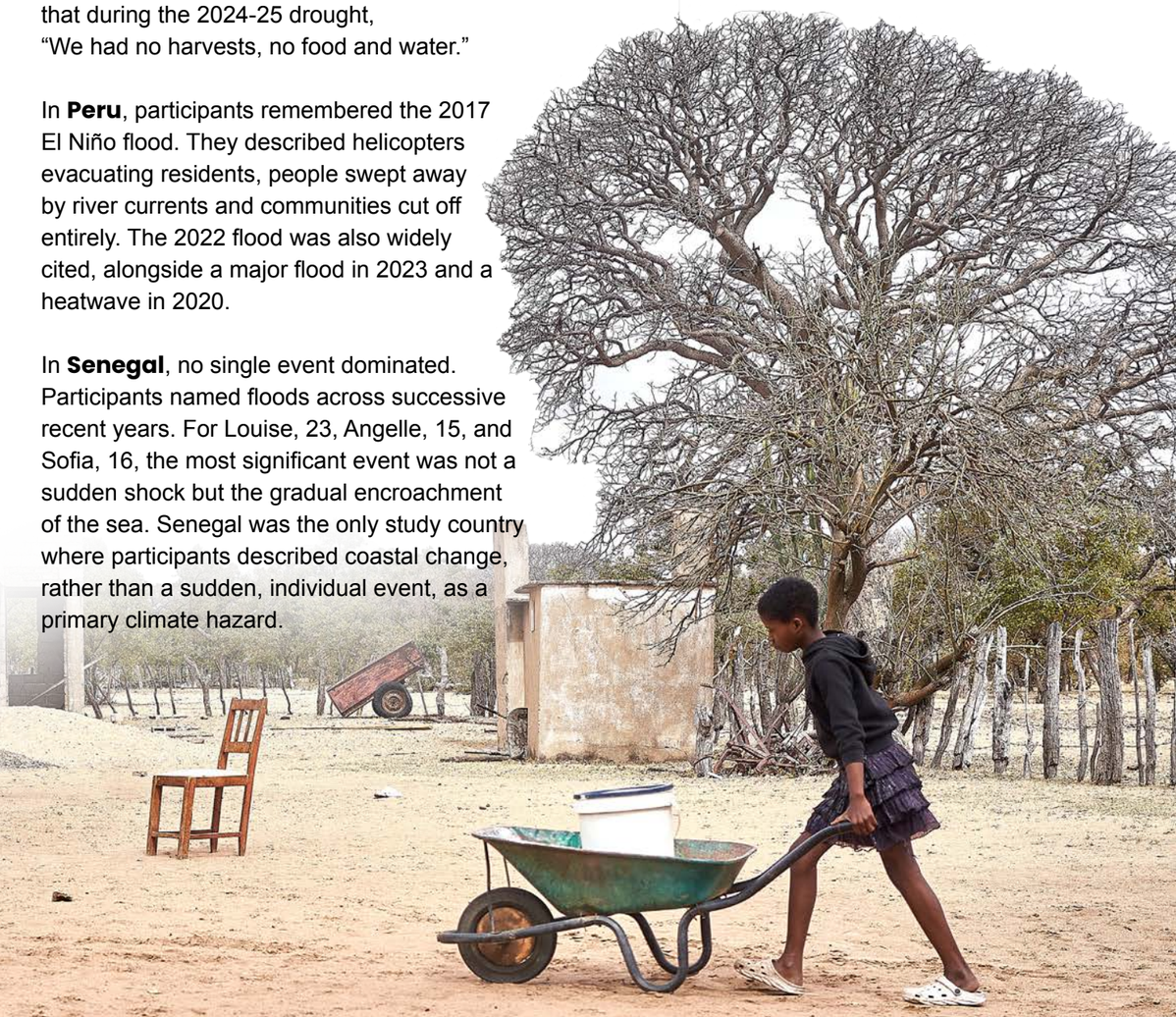
The flood left some areas waterlogged for up to 20 days. A further flood in 2024, noted as less severe, still closed schools for a month. Sayma, 22, also described a significant flood in 2025: ***"Last year, two of our relatives drowned."*** Rupa, 15, observed that the floods seem to be getting worse every year.

In **Kenya**, and **Zimbabwe** it was drought that participants described, often across several years. Chenai, 21, from Zimbabwe recalled that during the 2024-25 drought,
"We had no harvests, no food and water."

In **Peru**, participants remembered the 2017 El Niño flood. They described helicopters evacuating residents, people swept away by river currents and communities cut off entirely. The 2022 flood was also widely cited, alongside a major flood in 2023 and a heatwave in 2020.

In **Senegal**, no single event dominated. Participants named floods across successive recent years. For Louise, 23, Angelle, 15, and Sofia, 16, the most significant event was not a sudden shock but the gradual encroachment of the sea. Senegal was the only study country where participants described coastal change, rather than a sudden, individual event, as a primary climate hazard.

The climate hazards they talk about are diverse but they all help trigger the issues with girls' access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the increase in gender-based violence, unintended pregnancies and child marriage and unions, explored in this study: health systems breakdown, household economic pressure rises and societal protection collapses. Whole communities are left traumatised.



A girl returns home after collecting water from a borehole in a drought-affected area of Zimbabwe.
© Plan International

Promising Programme:

My Body, My Future

The My Body, My Future programme funded by Plan International Finland, worked with girls, adolescents and young people, parents, caregivers, community members and partners in Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The programme

Reached more than **1 million people** across six countries.

270,000 young people taking part directly.

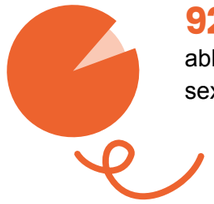
Challenged barriers restricting girls' access to SRHR information and services.

Expanded comprehensive sexuality education in and out of school.

The programme can be scaled across different countries and communities and is designed to be effective in different environments and contexts.

The programme adapted to local realities and co-created solutions with local communities and those most affected, ensuring relevance and sustainability.

Results:



92% of young people feel able to talk to a partner about sex and consent (up from 55%).

61% children, adolescents and youths have positive attitudes and increased ability to challenge gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms (up from 24%).

86% of teachers have adequate knowledge and skills to provide inclusive and quality CSE (up from 23%).

80% of adolescents feel confident to ask advice about SRHR from a trusted friend, peer or adult (up from 67%).

76% of the 83 health facilities we supported are now providing high quality SRH services (up from 29%) and 60% of youths report they have used SRH services in the past 12 months (up from 36%).

A key focus was protecting girls and young women's SRHR in the face of climate events. Recognising the increasing prevalence of climate shocks, the programme took action:

- **Comprehensive sexuality education curricula were adapted** to include climate education, helping young people understand and prepare for climate-related risks to their health and rights.
- **My Body My Future ensured that SRHR needs were included in local disaster and climate action plans**, so that access to care and supplies would not be interrupted during emergencies.
- The programme worked with families and communities to ensure that, **during climate shocks, girls' education and SRHR were protected rather than sacrificed.**
- **Young people were trained to advocate for the link between climate and SRHR**, participating in climate policy forums and using digital platforms to raise awareness.

My Body, My Future, which is embedded in the reality of young people's lives and works with them as partners, is an example of the continued importance of protecting sexual reproductive health and rights in all contexts.

The programme model is flexible, sustainable and, working together with young people and prioritising community engagement, lends itself to global roll-out, and provides a route to driving change.

A household in Zimbabwe relies on maize and livestock for food and income. © Plan International

A Spreading Crisis: The extent of the damage

Girls and young women taking part in the survey were asked about the impacts of climate events on their households and the wider community. The scale of the disruption, involving loss of life and livelihood, physical and mental health struggles, lack of food, interrupted education and displacement, is shattering.

Nine out of ten girls reported that climate events are placing serious pressures on their household's survival, health and stability.

- Almost half of the girls and young women, 48 per cent, told us that climate events are having an impact on their household's health
- 47 per cent reported loss of crops or livestock
- 39 per cent reported that their family had less to eat, and 38 per cent reported reduced access to water.
- Infrastructure damage to road and bridges was reported by 30 per cent and 28 per cent wrote of reduced employment
- Nearly a quarter, 24 per cent, reported disrupted education.

Based on this evidence, girls from across the five countries are telling us that climate events are not one-off disruptions. They are layered household crises. They leave families grieving for those lost; what they eat, how they earn, whether they can travel safely, whether girls can keep learning, and whether households can stay healthy and supported are all massively affected.

The household impacts of climate events are widespread, but they are not felt equally, with the girls and young women already facing exclusion, rural disadvantage or livelihood insecurity often the ones whose households are hit hardest.

Who is most affected at household-level?

Group	What stands out most	Key difference
Minority girls and young women	Food and income pressures	About twice as likely to report reduced access to food (49 per cent versus 24 per cent) and loss of income or employment (35 per cent versus 17 per cent)
Rural girls and young women	Loss of crops/livestock and food access	More than twice as likely to report loss of crops or livestock (67 per cent versus 30 per cent) and about twice as likely to report reduced access to food (54.5 per cent) versus 27 per cent)
Agriculture-dependent households	Loss of crops / livestock	About twice as likely to report loss of crops or livestock (72 per cent versus 37 per cent)
Drought-affected girls and young women	Food and income shocks	More than twice as likely to report reduced access to food (75 per cent versus 34 per cent) and loss of income or employment (53 per cent versus 24 per cent)
Girls from Zimbabwe	Food, income and crop/livestock losses	More than twice as likely to report reduced access to food (74 per cent versus 31 per cent) and loss of income or employment (51 per cent versus 22 per cent)

Drought seems to cut deepest into the basics of household survival:

Zimbabwe, where drought was the main climate event across many years, emerges as the worst affected country: 98 per cent of girls and young women reported at least one negative household impact, versus 90 per cent across the other study countries combined. Beyond their own households, respondents can also see the impacts on the wider community. Everyone suffers. Not only are livelihoods and basic needs affected but so too are health and wellbeing. Nearly half of girls and young women, 49 per cent, noticed physical or mental health impacts in their community after the main climate event.[31]

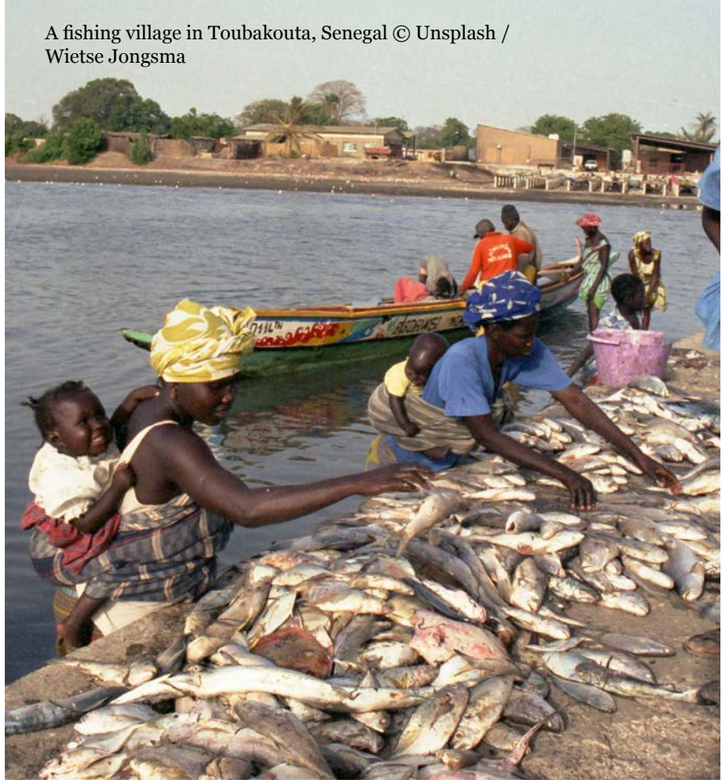
"There are serious problems…"

Again, the information from the survey was backed up by vivid descriptions from the interviewees who described shattered families, devastated communities and personal trauma that lasted well after the crisis event had passed.

The physical destruction was immediate and widespread. Houses, schools, hospitals, roads and community centres were damaged or submerged entirely in the case of floods. In **Peru**, where participants said most homes are built from adobe (mud bricks made from clay and sand), flooding proved especially destructive. Makeshift shelters of plastic sheets became temporary homes for the displaced, while others crowded into emergency shelters such as schools. Livestock was swept away or died from the heat and lack of water. As Isabela, 21, from Peru, commented, ***"People cried because they had lost everything."***

In **Senegal,** fishing households are among the worst affected. Coastal erosion meant that

In Peru, a family returns home after a devastating storm caused by El Niño.



A fishing village in Toubakouta, Senegal © Unsplash / Wietse Jongsma

families lost their livelihoods and men moved away to look for work. During the rainy season flooding is so bad that sometimes whole communities move in with relatives. Standing water is a health hazard which participants linked directly to illness.

> **"During the winter, I meet a lot of health problems because of the flooding in my house. The waters are invading our living space."** Marie, 24, Senegal

Hunger was reported everywhere: Afsana, 24, Bangladesh, related that "People reduced their household shopping and ate less food. Since there was no income or work at that time." Markets closed or became unreachable, and where shops remained open, prices for food, essential goods, candles, and even phone charging, surged dramatically. In Kenya, health facilities saw malnutrition cases overwhelm their capacity.

Girls' education was also a frequent casualty of the climate crisis, with reasons ranging from school closures, inaccessibility, girls being needed at home, families unable to pay fees, and overwhelming living conditions which made studying impossible.

> **"I dropped out of school because of the difficult living conditions: access to water was limited and there was no electricity. I couldn't learn my lessons, and my mother forbade me to light candles for fear that I would fall asleep with them."** Penda, 24, focus group, Senegal

Behind the picture of community devastation sit individual experiences of loss. Across all five countries, the girls and young women who participated in this study had personally endured the catastrophic events they described and the emotional weight of those experiences ran through their accounts. In **Peru,** Valentina's cousin and two nephews drowned. Others, like Faith and Grace, 17 and 15, in **Kenya,** lost livestock, financial security disappearing alongside their animals which "affected my well-being emotionally". Angelle, 15, in **Senegal** told us, "Because of the floods, my mother returned back to her father's home… So, I found myself managing the house in a very complicated context." Susana, 18, Peru, recalled a childhood flood where "practically everything we had bought was lost". Girls and young women also reported taking on whatever work they could get to help support their families – often putting themselves at risk – and family members travelled long distances to find work. Families fell apart.

This bridge in Piura, Peru, collapsed following heavy rain. © Plan International

Mutual Aid Matters

The interviewees also described the help they got, or didn't get, and how they and their communities tried to cope. The most consistent response was informal mutual aid. In Bangladesh, families with concrete-roofed homes let 12-13 others to stay on their rooftops during the floods and in the aftermath, helped each other rebuild homes. Some of the girls and young women said NGOs and local leaders also distributed food packages, medicines, and sanitary pads. Maya, 17, described relief distributed through local leaders and schools opened as emergency shelters. But formal assistance was not universal and often insufficient:

In **Senegal** also, it was the community that predominantly rallied round: the imam, the local chief and the mayor providing basic necessities, food and sand to limit the flooding. In **Peru**, institutional support was more visible, though could also be unevenly distributed. In some areas the municipality delivered aid campaigns. Emergency helicopter deliveries and medical evacuations reached some of the most affected communities during severe flooding. Some schools offered parenting sessions and continued to support pregnant girls and Plan International offered SRHR information and pregnancy prevention support to adolescent girls. In some communities, women organised collectively to run shared kitchens, "the Olla Comun", ensuring families who could no longer afford food were still able to eat. For Susana, 18, engagement with a programme-linked community space provided both practical support and a sense of not being alone:

In **Zimbabwe**, awareness campaigns on SRHR and child marriage run by government and NGOs provided some protection. Girls described dignity pack distributions (sanitary items), and comprehensive sexuality education, provided by the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) and Plan International, as support that helped keep them attending school. Reporting systems through local leaders, teachers, and health workers helped some girls respond to violence and abuse. In **Kenya**, community networks and women's groups provided food sharing and emotional encouragement, and a Gender and Child Protection Technical Working Group operated during climate events.

> **"I had the opportunity to interact with many girls, to get to know them... getting out of our environment and the situation we are going through and being able to... live these experiences helps us in some way or another to feel better and to relate better with people."**
> Susana, 18, Peru

For outside agencies, working with different community groups and supporting their efforts and priorities is key: wherever the aid comes from, those bringing it must be in tune with local needs and have the relevant expertise and experience. One size will not fit all.
For emotional support, girls across all countries turned first to those closest to them: mothers and fathers, siblings, partners, extended family, friends, and sometimes teachers and community workers. Faith and prayer were for some a source of comfort, with religious leaders and church communities playing an active role in Zimbabwe, Senegal and Kenya.

In **Senegal**, girls and young women placed family first, naming mothers, aunts, older sisters and neighbours, then the Badienou Gokh - community godmothers who provide guidance, support and referrals for GBV and maternal health.[32]

> **"When stress or worry becomes very heavy, I notice that women turn to their loved ones or the Badienou Gokh. They do not judge and they give advice."** Huguette, 23, Senegal

In **Bangladesh**, women's and youth groups, trusted neighbours, and family elders provided emotional anchoring. In Peru, parenting sessions at school and psychologists at health centres were described as extremely helpful.

> **"They come here to the psychologist. And in my case, I have also done that. Many teenage girls have found that they are listened to by the psychologist and by female doctors who also help us."** Susana, 18, Peru

A girl takes part in group support sessions for flood survivors, Peru. © Plan International

In contexts where none of these were available, some women simply kept things to themselves. Tahira, 23, Bangladesh, noted that for some, the pressure became unbearable: "To reduce mental stress, many commit suicide."

People on the whole showed remarkable resilience. Alongside emotional support, communities demonstrated strong practical solidarity. Collective food preparation, sharing household items, taking in displaced families, and pooling loans all emerged as communal responses to crisis.

Amidst the solidarity there is also a darker picture. Economic desperation drove girls towards more harmful coping strategies. Across **Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru and Zimbabwe**, the collapse of income, school closures, and loss of family support pushed girls into early marriages and unions sometimes decided by parents, sometimes entered into as a perceived route to safety or food.

> **"They are not very safe, rather very vulnerable as men target them for sex, capitalising on their desperation for food."**
>
> Melo, 24, Zimbabwe

Sexual exploitation in exchange for goods, money or benefits, and dropping out of school to take up unsafe or informal work in bars (where sexual exploitation is common), in logging, and on construction sites were reported across multiple contexts as responses to economic collapse.

> **"When my mother gets sick, and I have no money to help her, I go out to look for someone who has the money to help…He asks to do one, two, three things, and you're forced to do six rounds [meaning you have sex with them] so he gives you money."** Deka, 19, Kenya

In **Peru**, girls as young as 14 were described as working in bars, sometimes sent there by their parents.

Compounding the Crisis: As sexual and reproductive health services fail, risks multiply

With little targeted support forthcoming it is clear from the research that the fall-out from floods, drought and multiple climate events resulted in long-term negative outcomes for households and communities: displacement, decreasing incomes, and devastated infrastructure, which meant limited access to schools, clinics and markets, all took their toll.

Amidst the overall turmoil, families, communities and adolescent girls and young women in particular were contending with the loss of vital health services. As health clinics struggled to provide care, girls and young women who were increasingly vulnerable to child marriage and unions, sexual violence and unintended pregnancies, faced a compounding crisis. Access to medical attention, supplies, information and support became increasingly difficult.

> **Over three-quarters of girls and young women said they had noticed more girls and young women in their community struggling to access at least one SRHR service and over two-thirds of them had personally struggled.**

Survey results rank menstrual health as the single most reported access issue. Not only are products hard to come by, so is water, privacy and safe facilities. Sexual health information and education or counselling ranks second, ahead of pregnancy care, child-marriage and unions and gender-based violence prevention and response services, and contraception services. Together they show that what girls miss first relates to dignity and to information, enabling them to stay resilient, rather than to specific clinical services.

Girls and young women were asked not only about the perceived impact on girls in their communities but also about their personal experiences with SRH issues. Nearly half of them reported having personally experienced sexual and reproductive health problems as a direct result of climate shocks. The most prevalent concern was related to pregnancy health and childbirth. Others described reduced SRHR support, greater pressure to marry and get pregnant and an increase in anxiety.

> **20.5%**
> **of girls and young women had personally experienced adverse pregnancy health or childbirth related issues.**
>
> **11%**
> **had married before the age of 18 and 11% had experienced an unintended pregnancy**
>
> Problems and pressures vary

according to age, identifying as belonging to a minority group, livelihood pressures, the nature of the climate event and location. Girls from rural areas, for example, were not only more likely to have difficulty accessing at least one SRH service they were more than twice as likely to report barriers to child marriage prevention and response services. Girls from farming and fishing families, whose incomes were particularly under pressure, report more issues with pregnancy health and childbirth. While over three quarters of girls identifying as belonging to a minority group report greater difficulty with access to crucial SRH services.

These differences matter because climate-related SRHR risks do not look the same everywhere. Responses need to be shaped around the specific pressures girls and young women are reporting in each context.

> **"The disabled are most affected in such scenarios. Girls with disabilities, girls living in rural areas, girls not attending school and early/child marriage."** Faith, 15, Kenya

Girls advocate to end period poverty in Zimbabwe. © Plan International

Key Findings

The scale: health services are failing girls across the board

76% of girls and young women said more girls and young women in their community struggled to access at least one health service, rising to 84% for those contending with drought. 68 per cent had struggled personally.

The foundations collapse first

- **50%** said more girls and young women struggled to access menstrual products or clean water to manage menstruation.
- **37%** struggled to access sexual health information, education, or counselling.
- **24%** said more girls and young women in their community were struggling to access contraception services. 17% had struggled themselves.

Violence increases as protection systems fail

- **28%** noticed more violence against girls and women in their communities.
- **24%** said more girls and young women were struggling to access prevention and response services after a weather event. 18.5 per cent said they had experienced this personally.
- **66%** of girls and young women said that girls entering relationships in exchange for money or basic goods had led to an increase in violence against women and girls.

The consequences compound

- **33%** noted more unintended pregnancy in the community. 11% of girls and young women said they personally experienced an unintended pregnancy.
- **49%** noticed more pregnancy health or childbirth-related issues, including miscarriage and complications during childbirth. Over 20% spoke from personal experience.
- **36%** reflected that more girls were getting married before 18, 11% told us they personally had got married.

Bearing the greatest burden

Girls from minority communities were twice as likely to struggle with access to services.

What Will Tomorrow Bring?

There was very little optimism about the future. The majority of those we asked foresaw an increasing impact on their SRH needs and rights as climate events worsened. Girls and young women worry that climate shocks will keep making things worse.

81.5% are concerned about future climate events worsening at least one SRHR outcome.

Bangladesh		Kenya		Peru		Senegal		Zimbabwe	
65.4% At least one concern		79.9% At least one concern		90.6% At least one concern		77.0% At least one concern		94.8% At least one concern	
Top 3 future concerns:		Top 3 future concerns:		Top 3 future concerns:		Top 3 future concerns:		Top 3 future concerns:	
Pregnancy & delivery care	37.4%	Unintended pregnancy	60.2%	Unintended pregnancy	32.8%	CEFMU	34.9%	Unintended pregnancy	64%
Mentrual products	29.7%	Menstrual Products	55.1%	Contraception	30.0%	Unintended pregnancy	33.6%	Transactional sex	62.5%
CEFMU	22.0%	Sexuality education	51.1%	Pregnancy & Delivery care	24.4%	Pregnancy & Delivery care	33.4%	Gender-based violence	62.%

Note: Percentages show the share of girls and young women in each country selecting each future concern. Each country has n= 1,000

A woman carries her tent to higher ground following floods in Bangladesh. © Plan International

Breaking the Pathways to Harm

It is clear from the research what adolescent and young girls are experiencing as climate change bears down on their families and communities. What is less clear is how climate crises have such an impact. If we can track this, change is possible. What are the key factors that influence access to contraception, the rise in gender-based violence, in child marriages and unions and in unintended pregnancies? Analysis points to three main drivers: health system breakdown, household economic pressure and the collapse of societal protection. Fewer services, and less money, mean more tension and more violence, just as communities fracture and focus on sheer survival. There is much to contend with: as climate crises escalate, traditional development funding shrinks and political agendas encourage a rollback on gender equality and women's rights. Girls' and young women's SRHR, and girls and young women themselves, are at the sharp end of all this with unending consequences reaching far into the future.

If these consequences are to be disrupted, governments and international agencies need to recognise the particular harm that climate change is doing to girls and young women, acknowledge the importance of SRHR information and services in times of crisis, and find the funding for sustainable long-term planning. By working with local communities, including girls and young women, they can help to install resilience, protect crucial education and health services and provide economic stability in the face of drought, floods and heatwaves.

> **"Us, as the survivors of child marriage, should raise the awareness."** Girl, 15-19 year focus group, Zimbabwe

It is possible, by extending our understanding and listening to the ideas of girls and young women, to find targeted solutions, ways of ensuring that, as the climate crisis continues to explode, girls' life choices and chances will not be endlessly diminished.

Access to Contraception

"The clinics were closed."

In the interviews and focus groups countries, adolescent girls and young women described a health system that was already under considerable strain before any climate event occurred. **Senegal**, where girls described a relatively efficient system before climate shocks occurred, was the exception to the rule. In the main, in rural and remote areas, clinics are few and far away, contraceptive stocks are frequently depleted, and for many girls the practical and social barriers to accessing services are substantial, even without the added barriers created by flood, drought, heat and storms.

Emergency response team conduct rapid needs assessment in Kenya. © Plan International

When floods, droughts and extreme weather strike, they do not create an access crisis where none existed, but they take a system already under pressure and push it past its breaking point. The girls and young women we interviewed outlined clearly how this happens.

Stigma, for example, operates as a barrier everywhere. Young women having sex is generally not approved of. In Zimbabwe, girls described being reprimanded for seeking contraception. Sixteen-year-old Rutendo told us: "In our culture, talking about preventing pregnancy is a taboo. People call you prostitute." In Senegal, Fatou, 15, described the sense of shame when asking adults for information, while in Peru, embarrassment and fear of judgement by health workers was the most commonly cited reason girls do not attend health centres:

> **"When I got pregnant with my husband, I didn't go to any check-ups because I was 16 years old, and I was ashamed to be told: why didn't you use protection? So, I did not attend… It is the fear of rejection, of what people will say. And there are many people who may feel the same way I felt."** Maria, 24, Peru

Facilities close or operate at severely reduced capacity, contraceptive and medical supplies run out, transport routes become impassable, and the community outreach, that many girls rely on as their primary information source, stops. The most immediate impact described was the closure of health facilities and the departure of health workers. In Bangladesh, where flooding was frequent and severe, this was mentioned by nearly everyone.

Flood waters enter a home in Bangladesh. © Plan International

> **"The clinics were closed because floodwater had entered the premises, and roads were completely blocked. Health workers left the area during the flood and stopped providing services."** Moni, 15, Bangladesh

In **Peru**, interviewees noted that health facilities closed because the health workers who staffed them could not reach them. Where facilities remained accessible, participants described arriving to find them empty of supplies. In Bangladesh, contraceptive shortages during floods were widespread: pills, injections, and implants became unavailable as markets and pharmacies closed and supply chains collapsed. In Kenya, shortages of stock at already-stretched facilities were compounded by the inability to resupply:

In **Zimbabwe**, contraceptive pills were being sold by staff to buy food due to the economic pressures caused by drought. Menstrual hygiene products were similarly unavailable.

Maria, 24, **Peru**, described arriving at a health centre to collect her contraceptive injection and finding it flooded, the obstetrician unable to get through. In Kenya and Bangladesh, outreach workers – often the only route to contraception for girls and young women in remote areas – were suspended during climate events. In **Kenya**, the girls and young women described flooded roads cutting off access to both contraceptives and health information entirely. Rupa, from **Bangladesh**, described how female outreach workers were unable to visit for two months. The result was not just disrupted access to contraceptives but the complete absence of reproductive health care during critical periods.

> **"Contraception supplies run out of stock and this being a remote area it is difficult to get another centre where such services are offered."** Wanjiku, 20, Kenya

Senegal was different: girls described community-embedded health workers who continued to visit households and run talks on sexual health and menstruation, and in some cases mobile midwives conducted home visits.

> **"Most often, it is the Badienou Gokh (community godmother) who leads awareness. She informs us about the importance of prenatal visits and about my child's vaccination. Due to her support on this, I am able to better understand certain aspects of maternal and child health, even if the conditions in which we live remain very complicated because of the floods."** Louise, 23, Senegal

These community godmothers point the way – locally based, and knowledgeable, they help girls and young women with the challenges they face, however complicated life gets.

Across all five countries, participants described how reduced household income removed the ability to pay for transport, purchase contraceptives from private suppliers, or access any service with a cost attached. In Kenya, and Zimbabwe drought meant the loss of livestock which translated directly into an inability to buy contraceptives. Obtaining contraceptives meant travelling to town, and those journeys became unaffordable. In Zimbabwe, participants also described being tasked with fetching water over greater distances or caring for siblings during droughts so their parents could find money which meant they couldn't attend clinics or outreach services.

Menstrual hygiene was a particular casualty of household economic pressure. Even where sanitary products reached communities, families prioritised more pressing needs. For example, in Kenya and Zimbabwe, participants described families prioritising food and water over sanitary products during crises which left girls managing menstruation without basic materials.

Everywhere, rural and remote populations were consistently identified as disproportionately affected. Other disadvantaged groups include girls with disabilities, girls from pastoral communities and out-of-school girls whom Sofia, 15, from Senegal, described as "vulnerable due to their limited knowledge of reproductive health". The evidence from this study reflects a consistent underlying pattern: the girls with the least access to services and information before climate events bear the greatest burden when those events strike.

> **"I am from the highlands, and yes, we suffer more there than here. Perhaps there are no health centres nearby, we have to walk for an hour, an hour and a half to get there… and when it rains, we cannot go."** Maria, 24, Peru

As girls and young women everywhere struggle with accessing not only contraceptives, but wider SRHR information and services, the impact on their lives, both now and for the future is incalculable. As services breakdown and contraceptives are no longer accessible, they are also at growing risk from the complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and, in addition, face climate-related increases in gender-based violence as stress, and the collapse of normal societal protections wreak havoc.

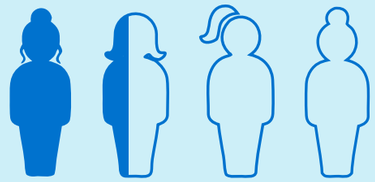
Gender-based Violence: Everywhere and every day

According to the girls and young women taking part in the research, the main reason for the rise in GBV is economic pressure. The need for money and resources is driving girls into harmful relationships, including sexual exploitation in exchange for money, goods or benefits, bringing with it an increased risk of GBV. Drought, which puts greater long-term pressure on household incomes and creates rising tensions, was also a driver of GBV. In communities affected by drought, higher rates were reported: 48 per cent said they had noticed more girls and young women experiencing gender-based violence, compared with 25 per cent among those whose main event was something else.

Rates varied across the five countries. **Zimbabwe**, where 60 per cent of survey respondents said they had noticed more girls and young women in their community experiencing gender-based violence, and the country most affected by drought, shows the harshest GBV-related risks, followed by Kenya, at 34 per cent.

"Girls are not safe…"

Everywhere safety is an everyday concern, one that climate change compounds rather than creates. In **Kenya, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Peru**, the majority of interview participants reported that girls do not feel safe in their communities. Threats ranged from sexual harassment, intimate partner violence and exploitation by older men and strangers. Only in some parts of rural Piura in Peru did participants describe their communities as comparatively safe because of small populations and close-knit social networks.



More than 1 in 4
survey respondents reported an increase in gender-based violence in their communities

A girls' dormitory in rural Zimbabwe provides safe accommodation so girls can stay in school. © Plan International / Tafadzwa Ufumeli

Violence against women and girls is not a new problem and even before any climate shocks certain groups, girls with disabilities for example, already faced disproportionate exposure. When climate events strike they intensify and extend existing risks, remove the limited protections that girls rely on, and create new and more dangerous situations. In Zimbabwe, as Rutendo, 16, told us, girls left at home while family members look for work "are not safe. We are left alone at home when adults move away to seek casual labour and we are exposed."

The concentration of displaced people in temporary shelters emerged as one of the most consistently reported risks. When families are forced to share cramped, mixed-sex spaces with strangers, girls face heightened exposure to harassment, unwanted touching, and sexual violence. Nights in emergency shelters were described as particularly dangerous, with darkness, cramped conditions, and the presence of strangers creating acute risk for girls, especially when moving to toilet facilities alone.

> **"During the 2022 flood, when married and unmarried women took shelter at [name of local school], many of them were harassed and became victims of eve-teasing (public sexual harassment)."** Diya, 17, focus group, Bangladesh

In **Senegal**, displacement rarely meant a formal emergency shelter. Households moved in with relatives or stayed on in flooded homes, and participants described living conditions deteriorating as displaced populations were absorbed into houses that were already crowded. Heat produced its own dangers:

Girls collect water in Kenya © Plan International

> **"During hot periods, we suffer enormously. The houses are covered with zinc canvases that strongly attract the sun's heat. Inside, it's very hot, it's stifling. Because of this, I often have to sleep outside with my children, even though I know it's not safe. But I have no other choice."** Louise, 23, Senegal

Girls' vulnerability to violence is also heightened when the search for limited resources – food, water, firewood – forces them to travel long distances away from home. In **Kenya**, participants described how drought pushes girls to accompany men and livestock on long migrations in search of water and pasture. In **Zimbabwe**, as Chenai, 21, comments, water scarcity forces girls to travel to distant shared water points, where harassment and coercion are common: "Boys block their way forcing them into relationships. If I say no, sometimes I get beaten up." Similarly, in Peru, the act of fetching water exposes girls to harassment. Dina, 19, describes how girls are forced to bathe outdoors where men try to photograph them, make sexually explicit remarks, and block their paths:

> **"They come from the mango fields, and whistle. If a girl doesn't notice, they take pictures of them. They also say words that a girl would not like to hear – they say 'Hey, sexy', 'You look hot'."** Dina, 19, Peru

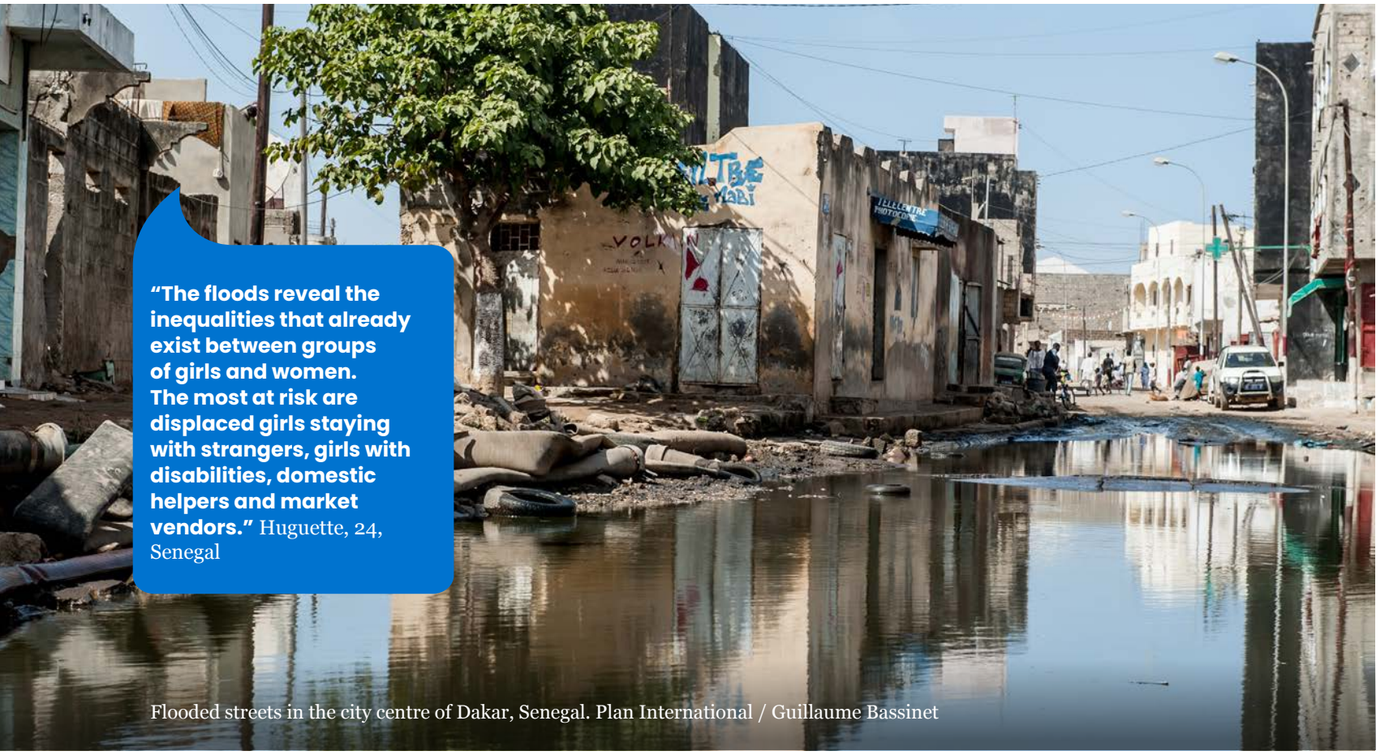
A girl 'carries' the burdens of social norms and stereotypes, Peru. ©Plan International

The link between resource scarcity and violence is not only about physical exposure. Several participants in **Peru** identified the stress of scarcity such as rising food prices, loss of income, and the inability to provide, as a key driver of household violence:

> **"During the rains, food is scarce, food prices rise… men, who sometimes get stressed, feel they carry a heavy burden on their shoulders… He went out to drink and then came in the night and broke his glass door, and his wife was pregnant. He was going to hit her. Fortunately, the neighbours managed to enter the house and rescue her."** Mia, 16, Peru

Tension over money and resources, which led to violence and the breakdown of her marriage, was also described by Marie, 24, **Senegal**. Pregnant and often ill, she carried on with the household work while her father-in-law refused to let her husband give her money for prescribed medicine, on the grounds that pregnancy is not an illness. She could not afford the transport to return to her mother's house. Her husband eventually hit her, then threw her out at seven months pregnant and stopped the daily allowance:

> **"I had difficulty doing my prenatal visits and eating a balanced diet during my pregnancy. Because of all this, I became very vulnerable, especially given my medical condition."** Marie, 24, Senegal



"The floods reveal the inequalities that already exist between groups of girls and women. The most at risk are displaced girls staying with strangers, girls with disabilities, domestic helpers and market vendors." Huguette, 24, Senegal

Flooded streets in the city centre of Dakar, Senegal. Plan International / Guillaume Bassinet

Participants across all countries described specific situations that emerge or intensify during climate events. Some girls in **Senegal** had stopped going out at night during floods altogether. Power outages were identified in **Peru** as creating particular danger: when electricity fails during floods, restaurants, streets, and routes, homes and workplaces become dark and unsafe for girls who work evening shifts or travel at night.

Girls with disabilities are among the most vulnerable. Evidence from this study reflects what the broader literature suggests: that disability significantly amplifies the negative impacts of climate-events – including violence – and that girls with disabilities are frequently absent from disaster planning.

Across all study countries, participants disclosed how disasters fracture community safeguarding: displacing families, closing schools, overwhelming justice systems, and creating conditions in which violence becomes harder to escape and easier to perpetrate. At home, at work, in the streets, danger is intensified and lurks everywhere.

Seeking Help

With violence increasing everywhere the absence of help is stark. Nearly a quarter of survey respondents said they had noticed more girls and young women in their community struggling to access gender-based violence prevention and response services after the climate-related event, with 18.5 per cent saying they had personally experienced this.

Individual stories back up the survey findings. The breakdown of societal protection and reporting systems, and the difficulty in getting help or justice, is described by interviewees across all five study countries. In **Senegal**, local reporting systems are in place and can be effective but even here, in times of crisis, they are described as hard to access. In many places it is local leaders, busy with disaster responses and often more supportive of the perpetrator than the girl or young woman complainant, who are supposed to enforce protection. But, even when local police, courts or health centres are involved, justice is, at best, patchy. Systems that were fragile before climate events became largely inaccessible during and after them.

> **"People from far away do not have police stations in their community, making it difficult to seek help for family violence or sexual violence during floods."** Mia, 16, Peru

In **Peru**, intimate partner violence is seen as normal, with the girls and young women describing it as something to be tolerated rather than reported:

In Kenya, severe drought and extreme weather are constant disruptions, putting girls' futures at risk. © Plan International

> **"Many times people don't go, because it is normalised, they say, 'He is my partner,' or, 'He is my husband and that's why I allow it, why generate another problem, I just let it go'… that is why people do not seek information or help to get out of it."** Susana, 18 Peru

The evidence points to a system that is insufficiently protective before climate events and largely absent during them. The girls and women in this study are navigating not just individual acts of violence but the structural failure of the institutions that are meant to protect them, a failure that climate events accelerate and deepen.

There are some exceptions. In **Kenya**, a Gender and Child Protection Technical Working Group operates during climate events, providing sensitisation and awareness-raising about rights and norms. Some individual communities in Peru proposed concrete actions which included setting up women's organisations, parent training, and coordinated policing of high-risk routes. Participants in Peru also described women as collectively raising their voices about violence and sharing information about climate risks through community networks:

> **"Because of the flooding issue, many women have now raised their voices… they now give information about violence they have suffered and encourage other women to do the same."** Mia, 16, Peru

Child Marriage and Unions

Over a third of girls report child marriage rates rising in their communities as result of climate events and eleven per cent of survey respondents reported that they themselves had married before 18.

As earlier research has indicated, climate change is having an impact on child marriage and unions and this is backed up by the survey findings.

Rates of child marriage and unions varied from country to country: in Zimbabwe, nearly two-thirds, 64 per cent, of girls and young women said they had noticed more girls getting married before 18 in their community, in **Senegal**, it was one in three, 32 per cent, compared with 22 per cent elsewhere.

This increase is largely attributed to financial pressure. The loss of income, food scarcity, school closures and disrupted services, which are the result of climate change events, all put pressure on girls' life choices and opportunities. To both girls and their families, marriage or a union can seem the only answer to the household's limited resources and the breakdown of services and support which is affecting entire communities.

As with gender-based violence, drought is the climate event most likely to push up the numbers of child marriages and unions and increase the pressure on girls and young women to marry. Among those whose communities were affected by drought, 60 per cent said that more girls in their community were getting married before 18. Nearly twice as many as those whose main event was something else.

60%
of respondents cited families needing money and resources as a reason to marry off their daughters, with 51% stating that families wanted to ensure girls had access to food and basic needs

58%
gave pregnancy as the reason for child marriage

47%
of survey respondents cited school closures and disrupted education as a key driver of child marriage

"…people start to see it as something normal…"

In all five research countries, interviewees note rising rates of child marriage, though child marriage in itself is described as "normal." In Bangladesh, marriage, a practice deeply tied to notions of honour, safety and reputation, typically takes place when a girl is 14-17. In **Zimbabwe**, it is between 15-17. In **Kenya**, it starts at age 12, driven by a bride price economy in which livestock such as camels and cattle are the currency of exchange. Early marriage is both culturally embedded and explicitly financial: Zuri, 19, from Kenya told us: "Girls are married off at early age in exchange for animals." For pastoralist families, a daughter's marriage represents one of the few remaining transactions available when climate has already depleted other assets. In **Peru**, unions and partnerships are often formed between 13-15 and increasingly this is accepted and expected:

> **"I think it has increased…. Some time ago, girls started to move in with their partners at age 15, and teenagers have begun to see it as something normal. This should not be the case, because most of us teenagers should think about bettering ourselves or studying something to be more than just a housewife."**
> Sandra, 15-19-year focus group, Peru

In **Senegal**, marriage often takes place at around 17 or 18 years old, the legal age for girls to marry is 16,[33] and is described by our interviewees as consent-based, neither arranged or transactional.

Across all countries, in the immediate aftermath of acute climate events, child marriage may temporarily plateau. As Noor, 24, **Bangladesh**, commented, "people focus on survival". It is in the recovery phase, as economic stress deepens and school disruption becomes entrenched that early union risk rises most sharply: across Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Bangladesh, girls describe climate-induced livelihood collapse that drives families towards early marriage as a coping strategy.

> **"When floods leave people completely destitute, families think about financial hardship and marry off girls at a very young age."** Shahina,19, Bangladesh

In **Zimbabwe**, drought destroys harvests and income, leaving families unable to pay school fees or feed all household members. In Kenya, drought kills livestock, removing the primary source of both income and bride wealth. Girls are married off in exchange for the animals that remain, with the transaction serving as economic survival for the family. With no herd left to sell and no other income, marrying a daughter to a man who can still pay dowry in livestock is how a family recapitalises. Galgalo, 22, **Kenya**, described the trade-off as it applied to her, "my father has no livestock to sell and take me to college, that's how I accepted to be married off".

Importantly, this is not solely a family-level decision. In **Zimbabwe**, girls themselves sometimes enter relationships with older men to access food, money, or basic necessities.

> **In some instances, girls themselves drop out of school to get married hoping their status would change and they are cushioned from the effects of drought but usually find that they have made a wrong decision."** Paidamayo, 21, Zimbabwe

In **Peru**, the economic mechanism is less transactional. Girls whose parents leave home to find work after floods are left unsupervised, stressed and lonely.

> **Many times, it's because parents go out to work due to floods and heat waves... and leave them and tell them to take care of the siblings. They are forced to play a role that does not correspond to their age... They seek to de-stress, they look for company in a guy who can be their partner."** Mia, 16, Peru

Senegal is the only study country where child marriage and unions are not driven by economic survival but are related mainly to school drop-out.

The importance of staying in school

Alongside, and linked to, financial pressure, girls cite education disruption, another failure both of services and societal protection, as a frequent trigger for child marriage and unions. School closure, or drop-out, removes not only learning but the structure, supervision, SRHR information, and peer support that ordinarily protect girls.

> **During the 2024 flood, schools remained closed for nearly one month, and as a result many families married off their daughters."** Tahira, 23, Bangladesh

In **Bangladesh**, the link between school closure and marriage is direct. Floods submerge schools for months, and families respond to daughters at home by arranging marriages. An additional and specifically Bangladeshi dynamic – worry about safety and reputation – compounds this:

> **"Families feel that unmarried girls are not safe staying at home, so they arrange their marriages."**
> Shahina, 19, Bangladesh

Girls from a school in Zimbabwe participate in Plan International's #EndChildMarriage campaign.
© Plan International / Tafadzwa Ufumeli / Magsman Media

In Zimbabwe and Kenya, the pathway runs from fee unaffordability through dropout to early union. In **Kenya**, livestock migration can take girls out of school entirely. Zuri, 19, expresses clearly the link between climate events, school dropout and marriage: ***"Drought forces many girls to drop out of school as they move along with boys and young men during the migration, leading them to unwanted marriage or union."*** In **Zimbabwe**, as Vimbai, 17, notes, dropout leaves girls idle and exposed:

> **Girls dropping out of school enter into early unions. They have unwanted sexual advances from out-of-school boys who have nothing to do. The pressure is too much. Sometimes girls have no choice but to succumb."** Vimbai, 17, Zimbabwe

Encouragingly, during a heatwave in Zimbabwe, as one participant mentioned, schools became protective spaces: "There was related heatwave and children could faint at school although no school was closed. Rather nutritional feeding was introduced at the local school." Paidamoyo, 21, Zimbabwe.

In **Peru**, Susana, 18, describes how school closures during floods leave girls isolated at home, often with mobile phone access and without parental supervision: "these girls maybe stay at home and start talking to people on social media". The route here runs through social exposure and loneliness rather than formal economic transaction, but the destination, early union, is the same. Participants in **Senegal** described girls who leave school early as having no activity beyond household chores and no route into work, as Madina, 16, states:

> **Marriage often becomes their only option."** Madina, 16, Senegal

Flood-driven dropout was linked directly to marriages at 17.

The protective function of school is most clearly expressed through its absence: when they are not in school, as Faith, 17, from Kenya, acknowledges, girls "miss out such important information on protection".

School drop-out is one factor that drives child marriage and unions, another is unintended pregnancy – girls moving in with the father of a child after becoming pregnant. As access to contraception collapses, unintended pregnancy, which is both a consequence of child marriage and a driver of it, increases. The relationship between child marriage and unions and unintended adolescent pregnancy is mutual and reinforcing.

Promising Programme

Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)

The importance of girl's uninterrupted education has been a key driver of Plan International's work with girls and young women. The Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) Programme, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO) Girls' Education Challenge, through Plan UK and Plan Zimbabwe, is a scalable, sustainable programme model, implemented initially in Zimbabwe but suitable for global roll out in a variety of contexts. It aims to improve learning outcomes for adolescent girls and support their transition into formal education, vocational training, or employment through a gender-transformative and inclusive approach. The programme reached more than 13,400 highly marginalised girls across 11 districts.

Successes include:

Over 77% of participants were able to move into education, vocational training, or employment opportunities. This reflects a substantial improvement in life chances for girls who were previously excluded from formal systems.

More than 75% of learners demonstrated improved literacy and numeracy skills.

By the end of the intervention, a significant proportion of girls reported **higher levels of self-confidence** and increased participation in household and community **decision-making processes.**

There were notable shifts in community attitudes, with over **90%** of girls reporting increased support for their education.

The programme also strengthened protection outcomes. Girls reported increased awareness of available support systems, and a significant improvement in their confidence to speak out on issues of violence and protection.

The programme was delivered through 88 community-based learning hubs and was implemented in a highly challenging context, marked by economic instability, climate-related shocks, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, SAGE demonstrated strong adaptability, shifting to flexible delivery methods which included home-based learning, small group sessions, and remote support through digital platforms such as WhatsApp.

The success of the SAGE Programme was driven by its integrated, community-based, and highly adapti ve delivery model, which responded holistically to the complex realities faced by marginalised adolescent girls. A major factor was the programme's ability to combine accelerated learning, vocational skills development, safeguarding, psychosocial support, and social norms transformation within one coordinated framework. This meant that girls were not only accessing learning opportunities but were also supported to transition into safer, more empowered, and economically productive lives.

The programme had a strong focus on community ownership and engagement, including the involvement of families, traditional leaders, men's clubs, Child Protection Committees, and intergenerational dialogue platforms. This helped create an enabling environment for girls' education and empowerment.

Equally important was the strategic partnership with government ministries, local organisations, and technical partners, which strengthened coordination, institutional ownership, and the overall sustainability of programme approaches.

The SAGE programme provides a model which is sustainable and adaptable. Focusing as it does on education in its broadest sense, it provides the confidence, opportunities, and the protection which girls need in order to realise their rights, fulfil their potential and contribute fully to family and community life, in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

Unintended Pregnancies

Extreme weather events mean that information is harder to access, contraception is disrupted, protection weakens, and economic pressure increases, as a result girls and young women face greater risks to their health, safety and futures. One of those risks, as the survey findings clearly illustrate, is unintended adolescent pregnancy.

Nearly a third, 33 per cent, of girls and young women had noticed an increase in pregnancy in their communities, 11 per cent of them said they themselves had experienced a pregnancy they did not intend as a result of the climate-related event.

The reasons why were many and varied:

81%
cited lack of information or education, or difficulty accessing sexual and reproductive health education

53%
referred to more transactional sex

53%
cited difficulty accessing contraception

47%
noted increased sexual violence

46%
attributed the increase in unintended pregnancy to weakened community support or protection

There was some variation between countries but in all of them lack of information and difficulty accessing sexual and reproductive health information was the most frequently cited cause of unintended pregnancy. **Zimbabwe** and **Kenya** were the two countries reporting the highest rates and drought again emerged as a key indicator. In communities affected by drought 54 per cent of those asked said they had noticed more girls and young women in their community experiencing unintended pregnancy, compared with 29 per cent of those where drought was not a factor.

"Many girls do not want a child…"

The survey results were backed up by the face-to-face interviews: girls and young women described unintended adolescent pregnancy as a recognised and ongoing reality; with girls becoming pregnant from as young as 12 and 13 years in **Peru** and multiple participants from **Zimbabwe** noting girls in primary and early secondary school becoming pregnant. In **Bangladesh**, Sayma, 22, thought about half of the girls in her community become pregnant without intending to. The reason most often given, reflecting the survey results, was a lack of knowledge and information about contraception methods – when and how to use them – and where to access services. This was compounded by poor communication between mothers and daughters: in Peru, mothers actively avoiding discussing sex and contraception with their daughters, and girls described a fundamental lack of trust that prevented them from seeking guidance from parents at all.

In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, girls learn about their rights, family planning and SRHR through a community group. ©Plan International / Tanveer Abid

> **"The mom was always heard saying, 'No, I am not going to say anything about that to my daughter, because I don't want to put ideas into her head.'"** Mia, 16, Peru

Partner and family pressure also played a significant role, particularly in Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, where husbands, in-laws, and community norms around superstitions exerted direct control over contraceptive use or pressurised girls to have children.

> **"Many girls do not want to have a child, but some families or mothers-in-law harass or pressure them about this issue."** Maya, 17, Bangladesh

Chenai, 21, in Zimbabwe, told a similar story: "Even my first pregnancy was not planned. My husband put too much pressure on me. I realised it when I was already pregnant."

Only in **Senegal** was unintended pregnancy described as rare: girls married at 17 and were expected to get pregnant fairly quickly and this was seen as intentional.

Participants from **Zimbabwe**, described girls' first sexual experiences as frequently occurring through force. And in both Zimbabwe and Kenya, the sexual exploitation of girls and young women by older men would often result in pregnancy. By and large, interviewees described a route to unintended pregnancy which ran through coercion and exploitation. Force or coercion, in whatever form it takes, commonly means no contraception.

Lack of information and support are also a casualty of climate shocks. Community outreach workers, school talks, and peer networks are key sources of information on SRHR. Everywhere climate events disrupted these practices. In **Bangladesh,** communication systems broke down entirely during floods: electricity and mobile networks failed, making it impossible to reach health workers or access information remotely.

"...there is a strong relationship [between floods and unintended pregnancies] because due to the flooding from the rains, it is difficult for us as women to look for information and we decide to practically lock ourselves up with what we have and look for quick solutions, and we cannot go to the health centre to seek help from a professional or someone who can help us."
Susana, 18, Peru

Flooded streets in Peru which is being affected by a coastal El Niño phenomenon. © Plan International

In **Kenya,** outreach programmes were reduced or suspended, schools that served as information points closed, and reliable information became harder to access. In Peru, health workers who would normally run talks at schools and in communities could not reach them during flooding.

Where they could, girls and young women turned to digital sources - websites, social media and AI chatbots - but even these were often inaccessible.

Most of the girls and young women taking part in the study recognised that both the lack of information and the increasing pressures they experienced were a family and community response to drought, flood, heat and storm. They drew direct links between climate events and rising rates of unintended pregnancy.

> **"During floods, transportation problems make the situation worse. Women cannot go to the market, so they are unable to buy contraceptive medicines. Health workers do not visit our area and do not provide guidelines. As a result, women are left without access to family planning services, increasing the risk of unintended pregnancy."** Moni, 15, Bangladesh

In **Kenya** and **Zimbabwe**, girls frequently linked drought and the resulting loss of income as a key factor in unintended pregnancy. Families could not afford contraceptives and some described economic desperation driving girls into exploitative relationships.

Families under economic stress fractured: parents left communities to find work, leaving girls without protection and guidance or trusted adults. In **Peru**, several participants explicitly linked blackouts and disaster conditions to increased sexual violence and rape, which was sometimes the cause of unintended pregnancy.

"The suffering during that time was extreme."

As access to ante-natal care and skilled birth attendants diminished, pregnancy and childbirth complications, sometimes fatal to mothers and their babies and always traumatic, increased. The descriptions are harrowing.

> **"My son was born during the flood. This is something I will remember for the rest of my life. The suffering during that time was extreme. Transportation was severely disrupted because of the flood. My son was born under very difficult and painful circumstances."** Sayma, 22, Bangladesh

> **"There were also many pregnant teenagers who could not have check-ups and I even remember that in those years the creek had risen... and they had to pass in inner tubes and there was a girl who was about to give birth... the road is very rough, and she had to cross the bridge, and the river overflowed, and there was no other way."** Anahi, 15-19 focus group, Peru

Childbirth became increasingly perilous: women delivering without skilled assistance, crossing flooded rivers to reach a clinic, or simply giving birth at home with no support at all.

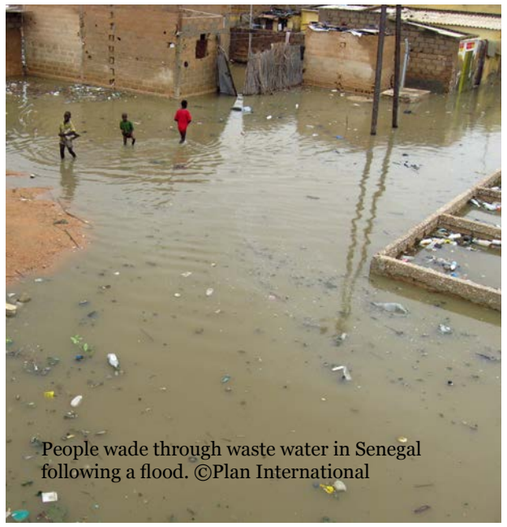
> **"Quite a few pregnant women had to give birth at home because there was no medical service, that is, it was complicated to cross the creek, and those who crossed risked their lives and the lives of the baby they were carrying."** Valentina, 23, Peru

In **Bangladesh**, participants described roads submerged under floodwater, boat journey prices that would increase fifty-fold during floods, and pregnant women unable to reach facilities during labour: ***"There were no roads, and if labour pain started, there was no way to access medical help."*** Sayma, 22, Bangladesh

In **Peru**, communities were often isolated. Pregnant women on motorcycles navigated deteriorating dirt roads, and those unable to do so simply did not receive care:

> **"It can be difficult for pregnant women to take their check-ups every month due to the deterioration of the roads... and it can cause the baby to suffer a malformation."**
> Susana, 18, Peru

In **Senegal**, it was home that proved dangerous. Pregnant women reported clearing wastewater from their homes every day, slipping in it and falling ill, and also being unable to complete prenatal visits because the roads were impassable.



People wade through waste water in Senegal following a flood. ©Plan International

> **"I had a difficult pregnancy because the sanitation infrastructures [septic tanks] were full. I had to carry basins of sewage on my head every day, and I had no space to relieve myself, the whole house being flooded. This situation led to complications during my pregnancy."** Mamadou, 22, focus group, Senegal

Dina,19, **Peru**, described a woman giving birth in a river when no healthcare worker could reach the facility. In **Bangladesh**, participants described newborns and mothers dying from cold after being trapped by floodwater. Afsana, 24, Bangladesh, recounted a woman going into labour on the day flooding began, ultimately delivering on a makeshift banana-trunk raft at a local school.

Deteriorating maternal health added to the hazards of childbirth: lack of food, overwork, and no pregnancy care all contributed to the risks pregnant women faced. In **Kenya**, girls and young women described drought leading to malnutrition among pregnant women, resulting in underweight babies and increased deaths, while Guyatu, 22, linked poor nutrition directly to miscarriage and premature births. Half of participants in Kenya described the long distances women were forced to travel to reach health facilities, walking long distances for water and firewood, and carrying heavy loads while pregnant, leading to miscarriages. Kaelo, 19, Kenya, connected pregnancy losses and complications during home deliveries directly to climate-related access barriers and reduced outreach services. These patterns were echoed in **Bangladesh** and **Zimbabwe**, where malnutrition caused by food shortages similarly led to miscarriages, premature births, and underweight babies, and infrastructure damage meant routine antenatal check-ups were missed. Participants in **Kenya** and **Bangladesh** also identified stress as a cause of pregnancy loss, linking the cumulative anxiety of displacement and deprivation directly to miscarriage.

Women travel long distances to collect water in Kenya. ©Plan International

Stress, worry, fear, anxiety and trauma

> **"There is definitely stress. When a flood happens, there is constant worry where will we stay, where will we go, and what will we eat?"** Sayma, 22, Bangladesh

The psychological impacts of climate events increase vulnerability: decision-making suffers, physical health is undermined, conflict escalates and families struggle even more to cope. Stress, worry, fear, anxiety and trauma emerge, not as isolated events, but as compound effects of simultaneous disruptions to homes, livelihoods, education, daily routines and access to SRH services.

In **Senegal**, rain itself became a trigger. Participants described lying awake through the rainy season in anticipation of water arriving, Fatou,15, saying simply that they could not sleep peacefully because they knew the water could come at any time. Sleep was the most commonly affected function, reported as shallow, broken, or invaded by nightmares:

> **"The floods traumatised me deeply. Since then, I sometimes have nightmares when I sleep."**
> Madina, 16, Senegal

Pregnancy can only add to the trauma and the most acute accounts of emotional and psychological distress came from girls and young women navigating pregnancy, often unintended, and new motherhood.

"There is a severe shortage of adequate food, and people experience intense mental stress and anxiety because income and livelihoods stop. In such conditions, pregnant women and postpartum mothers suffer greatly."
Nurjahan, 20, Bangladesh

Tahira, 23, **Bangladesh**, describes the "psychological stress" of being pregnant when a disaster strikes, while Sayma, 22, also in Bangladesh, recalls the compounding worry of pregnancy when floods make access to clinics, doctors, medication and nutritious food impossible. It is overwhelming. Climate-conscious family planning, for those with the knowledge and agency to carry it out, was already a survival strategy:

"Those who are aware plan their pregnancies, trying to avoid delivery dates falling during the rainy season."
Shahina, 15, Bangladesh.

Anahi, in the Peru 15-19 years focus group, spoke of unintended pregnancies resulting from sexual violence during blackouts, and of the psychological trauma that follows.

Sayma 22, Bangladesh, described how sheltering among strangers, in crowded mixed-sex emergency shelters, generated constant fear of sexual exploitation and abuse. In shelters where menstrual hygiene products and clean water were scarce or unavailable, participants also described heightened stress around managing their basic needs with neither privacy nor adequate supplies.

Economic collapse deepened the distress. When crops were destroyed, livestock lost and income stopped, mothers described the overwhelming helplessness of being unable to feed their children.

"During floods, the problems become much worse, people cannot work, they have no income, and they face severe hardship. They are constantly torn between whether to eat, whether to study, whether to educate their children"
Sayma, 22, Bangladesh

In **Senegal**, mothers worried constantly that the rainy season brought standing water which made them and their children ill, and they were unable to afford treatment. Mothers cut back on their own needs; Valentina 23, Peru, described going without food herself to feed her children: "even if we don't eat but they do." And interviewees everywhere reflected on the tension caused by dwindling resources.

When household stress escalated into conflict and fracture, young girls were left feeling desperate and alone. Participants from **Peru** described how that loneliness pushed girls toward boyfriends and pregnancy, abandoning their education and future plans. Rahela, 18, Bangladesh, described the quiet damage done to children's peace of mind when their daily routines were dismantled.

It was hard to ask for help, even where it did exist. Aitana, 21, Peru, described how stigma around mental health, "the embarrassment they feel", created its own barrier - the fear of being perceived as having something wrong with them prevented girls from seeking help at all.

The psychological impacts of climate crises do not just affect adolescent girls and young women but it is easy to see how the disruption can be particularly traumatic for them. The increase in sexual violence and unintended adolescent pregnancy, the fear experienced in displacement shelters, and the lack of protection, all add to the shock of storms and floods, and the rising anxiety as drought grips communities, which is shared by all. For girls and young women, the mental scars left by climate change will be deep and long-lasting.

In Bangladesh, Plan International's Safe Schools project is supporting children and teachers to build disaster-resilient schools. ©Plan International

In Kenya, school agricultural clubs are helping strengthen climate resilience through hands-on, nature-friendly projects that protect local environments. © Plan International

Finding A Way Through:

Girls speak out about what needs to happen

Girls and young women did not only describe what had gone wrong. They also articulated what needs to change. Their proposed solutions are focused on the importance of maintaining their sexual and reproductive health rights and services, grounded in direct experience, span the immediate and the structural, and consistently place girls and young women themselves at the centre of the response.

Education, improved health services and economic empowerment were the pivotal concerns and the desire for information, community awareness and safe spaces emerged as core priorities. As did the desire to be involved: included in forward planning and emergency response. When climate events devastate communities and destroy the services they rely on, girls and young women need to be supported but they also want to contribute and the key to this is being prepared – education, in its widest sense, lies at the heart of resilience.

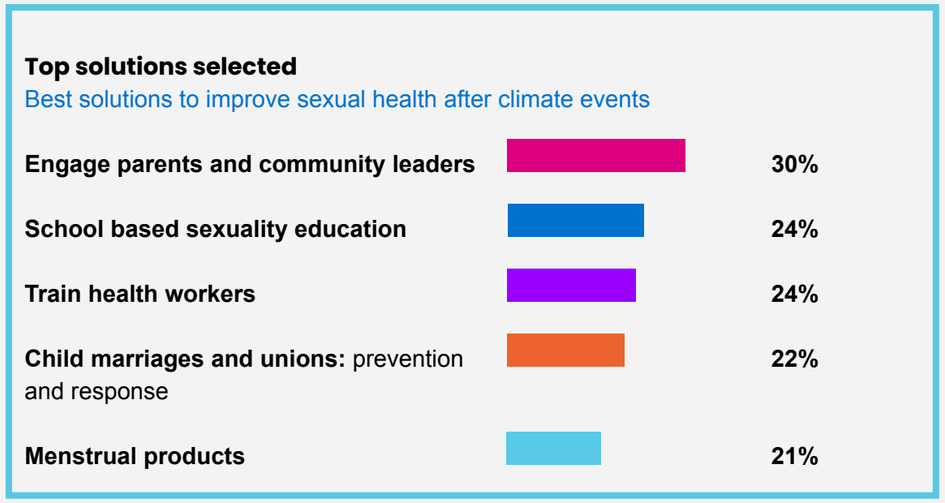
Girls and young women everywhere expressed a clear desire to be active agents in their communities, not passive recipients of support. Youth-led action proposals included peer education models, with older girls and young women who had completed education serving as motivators for younger ones, survivors of child marriage and unions leading awareness campaigns, and youth leader groups in every village to provide information, support and protection.

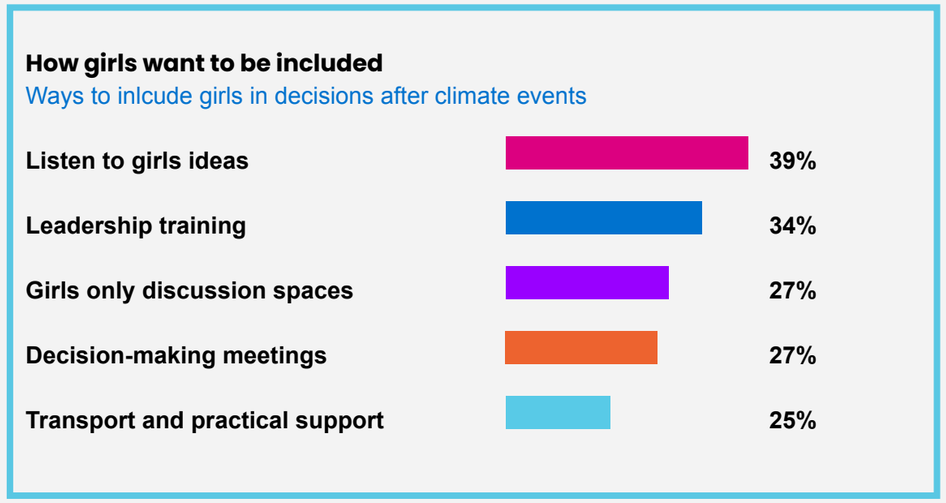
> **"Girls feel protected when they have something to do, when they are confident, when they are not alone, and when they have someone, they trust to confide in."** Huguette, 23, Senegal

In Senegal, a young woman is leading change in her community. © Plan International

What girls and young women tell us they want next.

98% selected at least one solution to improve girls' and young women's sexual health in response to climate events.





Note: Percentages show the share of girls and young women selecting each option. The solution priorities and decision-making priorities come from separate survey questions so they should be read as two related but distinct sets of findings. n= 5,000

Girls and young women can see that their needs and suggestions are largely ignored. Emergency systems don't include them, and communities in general are badly prepared for crises that are ongoing and increasing. Overall, they describe help from the authorities as too little, too late.

"…we do not receive any government assistance."

The interviewees we spoke to, across all the research countries, were concerned with the missing elements in their governments' responses to climate events. The situation described below is by no means unique:

> **During floods, we do not see anyone from the administration coming to check on us. No one comes to assess what kind of services people need or whether they should be taken to shelter centres. There is no such system and no responsible authority present… After floods, no one carries out any activities in our area. No organisations come, and we do not receive any government assistance."** Sanjida, 20, focus group, Bangladesh

Shelters were particularly under resourced with existing centres too small, and in some areas non-existent. Essential supplies including sanitary pads and iron and calcium supplements for antenatal care were routinely absent at shelters or when handing out provisions. Early warning systems were inconsistent: communicated via mosque loudspeakers where they functioned, but entirely absent when electricity failed, and respondents relied on word of mouth.

In **Senegal**, girls and young women described promises repeatedly given by authorities but not kept, including the absence of even routine hygiene provisions. When aid did arrive it came through community and faith structures rather than the state, or through people of good will, including a woman who handed out sanitary pads. They also mentioned an NGO providing hygiene kits, mosquito nets, bleach and sandbags. But it was clear what the emergency response consistently overlooked:

> **During and after a flood, the specific needs of girls remain invisible in the face of the emergency."** Fatou, 15, Senegal

In **Peru**, also, many reported that the authorities simply did not appear. There were no municipal plans, no coordinated response, no campaigns after events. Participants said no actions had been taken to help after climate events, and girls in more remote settlements faced isolation as roads became impassable and communications failed. As communities are displaced there is a loss of communal support:

> **We are individuals, we do not support each other. That's why my neighbour says that the city around here is very ugly, it's not like when we lived in the mountains and we all got together."** Maria, 24, Peru

In **Zimbabwe**, girls identified specific missing supports: continued education for pregnant girls and new mothers; food provision to reduce economic pressure and domestic violence; livelihood support such as small-scale farming, goats, chickens, and also borehole drilling. Similarly in **Kenya**, where girls named law enforcement and a rescue centre for survivors as missing, alongside support for families whose herds had died in the drought: without restocking, family livelihoods cannot recover.

In Kenya, families need support after drought kills livestock. © Plan International

Another issue that emerged was repairing basic infrastructure outside and inside houses. This emerged particularly in **Senegal** where persistent flooding made sanitation problems a health hazard, electricity failed to function and roads were largely impassable. Girls and young women, trapped at home with the housework, bear the brunt of much of this.

Across all contexts, girls named support for those experiencing unintended pregnancies such as psychological care, information, and guidance on navigating motherhood, as almost entirely absent after climate events.

Throughout the research it is clear that girls and young women understand the importance of SRHR in times of escalating climate crisis. They can see what girls and young women most need to help them withstand its impacts. They know what is missing and they know also what needs to be in place, if their rights, their safety and their life-chances are to be protected.

Reduce Child Marriage

Keep girls in school: this was the overriding priority in terms of reducing child marriage and unions and was also seen as pivotal to preventing unintended adolescent pregnancies.

There were different suggestions about how that might be done which included:

- Support for school fees and for stationery supplies
- Support for school re-enrolment and for continuing education for pregnant girls
- Community leaders to be held accountable for making sure that school-age children are actually in school.

Economic empowerment: girls and young women understood the importance of greater economic independence, and called for livelihood opportunities, including help with starting a business, vocational training and skills-based work as post-event support that lowers the risk of child marriage.

Legal protection: others focused on legal protections against child marriage which should be understood and enforced and be communicated through separate, targeted training for boys, girls, and parents. Participants also raised the specific issue of falsification of age documentation as a mechanism that undermines legal protections, calling for community-level accountability systems that make getting round the law harder.

> **"The legal system needs to be strengthened… community members and family members also need to be made aware."** Deetya, 23, focus group, Bangladesh

Promising Programme:

Combating Early Child Marriage in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, 51 per cent of girls are married before 18, and 10 per cent before 15, with higher prevalence in rural areas. Poverty influences these rates, with 64 per cent of girls from the poorest families becoming child brides. The Combating Early Child Marriage in Bangladesh project was designed to address these complex, interrelated issues by tackling root causes like poverty, harmful social and gender norms, and weak governance mechanisms.

The project, funded through Plan International Canada, focused on building the agency of in- and out-of-school adolescents, creating a supportive social environment, and strengthening institutions to prevent child marriage. Key activities included economic empowerment training, Gender Equity Movement in Schools sessions, training for out-of-school peer leaders, and establishing Child Marriage Prevention Committees.

The project operated initially in seven sub-districts in Bhola and Jhalokathi in the south of Bangladesh; it reached over 145,000 adolescents and involved a further 140,951 adults, including parents, teachers and local leaders. Plan International worked with two local partners and a further eight national organisations to ensure the project was sustainable and could be scaled up.

The project's successes included a substantial decrease in the rates of child marriage, increases in young people's knowledge of the issues involved and where they could seek support and information. There was a measurable and positive shift in parental attitudes towards girls' equality and strong progress towards institutional level attitude change. Both girls and boys reported greater support from parents in terms of staying in school, marrying later and nurturing their ambitions.

The programme adopted a multi-pronged and holistic approach: engaging across the community at all levels, working with men and boys, imparting skills, tackling attitudes and partnering locally and nationally. It recognises that attitudinal change must go hand in hand with the practical support that empowers girls and young women educationally and economically.

In Bangladesh:

51%
of girls are married before 18

10%
of girls are married before 15

Programme reach:

+145,000
adolescents reached

140,951
adults reached, including parents, teachers and local leaders

Reduce Unintended Pregnancies

Keep clinics functioning and information coming: girls called for access to clinics and better provision of contraception (including free provision at clinics), alongside SRHR information through channels that remain functional when normal services collapse. Local pharmacies and community-based health workers, where they operated, were recognised as key to the flow of support, supplies and information. Psychological support, counselling and guidance was seen as another crucial need.

To aid the information flow girls proposed WhatsApp groups moderated by health centres, gynaecologists, or trusted community liaisons, enabling support to reach girls even when roads are impassable:

Community radio, peer education networks, temporary campaign stands at community events, and online pages were all proposed as complementary channels.

Key to many of these suggestions is working closely with local communities and planning. Climate change means that drought, floods and other extreme weather events do not come completely out of the blue. The information and supplies that support adolescent girls' and young women's SRHR needs could be anticipated – part of emergency response and community preparedness.

> **"They should leave that information to someone in charge in each community who has access to that group and sends that type of information so that teenagers are informed despite the current phenomena."**
> Anahi, 23, focus group, Peru

Girls check the purity of their water supply. Through Plan International's Safe Horizons project in Peru, communities are helping school be resilient in the face of extreme climate events. © Plan International

Conclusion

This report set out to strengthen and deepen the evidence on how climate change threatens the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent girls and young women. Drawing together a literature review, a large-scale statistical analysis, a survey of 5,000 girls and young women, and in-depth interviews and focus groups across five countries, the evidence is clear.

Climate change systematically disrupts the conditions under which girls and women can exercise reproductive autonomy, make viable choices, and remain safe.

The heightening of economic stress, caused by the climate crisis, is the most powerful driver of harm. Persistent drought, the most detrimental to household finance, is the hazard associated with the most severe and widespread damage to girls and young women's SRHR. And with that, limiting their education, their opportunities and their safety. Drought drives up rates of child, early and forced marriage and unions and reshapes when, and whether, girls and young women decide to become pregnant. Floods, despite the trauma they can cause, and the life-threatening disruption those taking part in the research have described, seem to have a less significant long-term impact on girls' and young women's access to contraception, on child marriage and unions, gender-based violence and unintended pregnancy. The implication is significant: the gravest risk to girls and young women's health and safety accumulates over months and years of persistent climate pressure, persistent poverty and therefore persistent harmful coping strategies, rather than erupting from one single disaster. Intervention – targeted policies, funding, awareness raising – to put this right should not be impossible.

Communities living along eroding riverbanks in Bangladesh face repeated displacement. © Plan International

Across contraception access, gender-based violence, child marriage and unions and unintended pregnancy, the same mechanisms recur and are mutually reinforcing. Lack of contraception, and sexual violence, both make unintended pregnancy more likely which in turn puts pressure on child and early marriage and unions. The loss of family income also puts pressure on child marriage and unions as a coping strategy – leading yet again into unintended pregnancy. The rise in household tensions created by increasing poverty leads to an increase in gender-based violence. Understanding these outcomes as interlocking is essential, because interventions that address one in isolation will be undermined by the others left unaddressed.

At the heart of the evidence sits a question of climate justice. The girls bearing the sharpest consequences are those whose rights were already least secure, and who are least responsible for the emissions driving the crisis. A climate response that fails to take the diverse realities of girls' and young women's experiences into account, will deepen existing inequalities and will leave the most marginalised girls behind.

If the evidence reveals a consistent threat, it also points to a consistent lever. Across every strand of the statistical analysis, girls' education emerges as the single most stable protective factor, associated with lower rates of early marriage and unions and gender-based violence, in turn reducing unintended pregnancies.

Keeping girls in school during and after climate shocks and treating sexual and reproductive health information and services as critical infrastructure, rather than as a discretionary add-on is crucial. The girls and young women in this research understood this intuitively, naming sexuality education, information and the right to be heard, and supported by parents and community leaders, among their highest priorities for change. Staying in school also opens the way to the possibility of employment, of greater financial independence, which can help protect girls' and young women from the enforced choices that will change the course of their lives.

In Bangladesh, youth groups advocate for climate resilience. © Plan International

Education, however, is not the only lever the evidence points to. As the analysis above makes clear, the clearest channel of harm is economic: family poverty drives child marriage and unions, reshapes decisions about childbearing and increases gender-based violence, largely by intensifying pressure on household incomes. That makes economic security an equally important point of intervention. Climate crises drive increased poverty which in turn drives harmful coping strategies. This will only change if ending child marriage and unions and preventing unintended pregnancy becomes a sustained priority, not an emergency afterthought.

In Kenya, girls campaign for an end to early child marriage and unions. © Plan International

Social protection and income support, that cushion families against climate-driven losses, would reduce reliance on child marriage and unions, sexual exploitation or withdrawing girls from school as coping strategies.

They are a necessary complement to keeping girls in education and treating SRHR information and services as critical infrastructure. Safeguarding girls' rights under climate stress means tackling poverty as well as providing education. Only then will girls and young women be able to escape the current burdens placed uniquely on them as climate crises proliferate.

The evidence assembled here is sufficient to act upon, and the cost of continued inaction will be measured in the eroded health, safety and futures of the girls and young women least able to bear it.

In the current political climate, it is increasingly important for governments, NGOs, donors, and civil society organisations to work together. Girls and young women need us to find new sources of funding, which can be directed towards local and girl-led initiatives, to co-design interventions with them that not only work at local level, but can be scaled up and applied in many different contexts. Climate shocks are not going to go away, nor is their impact on girls and young women going to diminish. The recommendations that follow set out how we can all begin to respond, and they share a common thread: that girls and young women, whose testimony runs through this report, must be at the centre of the solutions designed in their name.

Recommendations[34]

Access to sexual and reproductive health is key to ensuring that climate change does not come down hardest on those least able to bear it. Adolescent girls and young women are at risk of having their lives irretrievably changed as poverty, increasing gender-based violence, lack of healthcare and of education all combine to limit their choices and put them at risk of lasting harm. The most disadvantaged amongst them – living in isolated communities, members of minority groups, those living with disability, affected by drought and with limited family resources – are most affected, but few escape. Understanding how SRHR access can protect girls and their futures from some of the worst impacts of the climate crisis is vital: girls and young women need their families, communities, international NGOs, donors and governments to work together, recognise this and plan accordingly.

Floods in Bangladesh are putting girls and their families at greater risk. © Plan International

International donors, national governments and humanitarian organisations must:

Build funding for SRHR into climate finance:

- Design climate policies that include measurable actions to maintain access to contraception, maternal healthcare, menstrual health, gender-based violence services, and comprehensive sexuality education throughout climate-related disruptions.
- Ring-fence a defined share of climate and humanitarian finance and integrate SRHR into response planning, treating it as adaptation and resilience rather than an optional add-on.
- Channel a defined share of available finance to local and girl-led organisations on flexible multi-year terms and reduce the debt burden carried by low-income countries so that more finance is available: climate change is bearing down hardest on those least responsible for it.

Keep SRHR information and services running as part of emergency response:

- Include adolescent SRHR in emergency provision, alongside strengthening longer term planning to make SRHR for girls and young women more climate resilient.
- Ensure the delivery, by trained health workers, of inclusive, age and gender- responsive SRH services for young people, that are free from stigma, discrimination and coercion, and are made available before, during and after climate shocks.
- Make contraceptive supplies and menstrual products part of disaster response and embed mobile clinics, health workers and SRHR information campaigns into response services.
- Include protection response services, and comprehensive sexuality education delivery, both in and out of school, as part of emergency provision.
- Ensure emergency shelters and other response sites have safe spaces for girls and women, and provide practical and psychological support when girls face gender-based violence or pressures to marry.

A mother and daughter in Kenya try to salvage what they can after devastating floods destroy their home. Plan International / Martin Ndichu

Keep girls in school and plan for uninterrupted education:

- Keep schools open and free for all children. Schools are critical centres for information, support, and safety for girls. Education protects against child marriage and gender-based violence in all its shapes and forms. It also opens doors to future employment and the economic empowerment that promotes gender equality and safety.
- Plan for uninterrupted education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and where necessary, online and offline distance learning.
- Be inclusive, ensure that funds and plans are in place to keep all girls and young women – those with a disability, living in remote areas and including pregnant adolescent girls and new mothers - learning.
- Track and carry out the re-enrolment of girls who drop-out post climate shocks

Break the economic drivers of child marriage, unintended pregnancy and exploitation:

- Support families struggling under economic hardship with food provision, livelihoods, job creation and maintaining infrastructure.
- Plan in advance so that social protection measures and cash transfers are in place before families are forced to resort to harmful coping strategies
- Support families and communities with social norm change so that marrying off a daughter is not an automatic coping strategy when times are hard.

Involve adolescent girls and young women in the discussions, decisions and implementation of any solutions designed in their name.

- Ensure adolescent girls and young women have meaningful representation in climate governance, adaptation planning and climate finance decision-making at all levels
- Provide financial and practical support for youth-led approaches to crisis planning, including leadership training, safe spaces, practical help to attend meetings, and support to run awareness campaigns in their communities to underline the importance of SRHR during climate shocks.

Design and target responses with and for the girls most at risk:

- Ensure that the needs and rights of those in the highest-risk climate settings, adolescent girls from minority and indigenous groups, girls with disabilities, displaced and migrating girls, those in remote areas, and married, in-union or pregnant girls, are acknowledged and accounted for.
- Drop gender-neutral, one-size-fits-all responses and collect disaggregated data.

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Endnotes

1 For the purposes of this report child marriage and unions acts as an umbrella term to include informal unions and child, early and forced marriages. Plan International defines Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) as any marriage or informal union, whether under civil, religious or customary law, with or without formal registration, where either one or both spouses are under the age of 18 and/or where the full and free informed consent of one or both of the parties has not been obtained. Plan International strongly condemns the practice of CEFMU and calls for its prohibition under national and customary law and for the full and effective enforcement of these laws. In line with the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 4, Plan International believes that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 and that this should apply equally to both men and women, regardless of any provisions concerning parental or judicial consent

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31 Girls and young women could select more than one response, so percentages do not add up to 100%. Percentages are calculated out of the full sample of girls and young women surveyed (n=5,000). "Physical or mental health challenges" combines physical health problems and mental health challenges. "Reduced access to health care or damaged health care facilities" combines reduced access to health care and damage to health care facilities.

32 While they contribute to health outreach, they are not formally trained health professionals.

33 Girls Not Brides (no date) Child Marriage Atlas: Senegal. Available at: https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/en/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/senegal (Accessed: 10 August 2026)

34 The recommendations presented here are a condensed version of the full set of recommendations. For further detail and implementation guidance, please see the technical report, available here: https://plan-international.org/uploads/2026/09/Technical-Report.pdf

Until we are all equal

About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we 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 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal

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Front cover image: During Peru's rainy season, flooding regularly disrupts 11-year-old Ciana's education.
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