



**PLAN**  
INTERNATIONAL

# MY BODY. MY FUTURE.

PROGRAMME OF PLAN INTERNATIONAL FINLAND 2018–2021  
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FINLAND 2020



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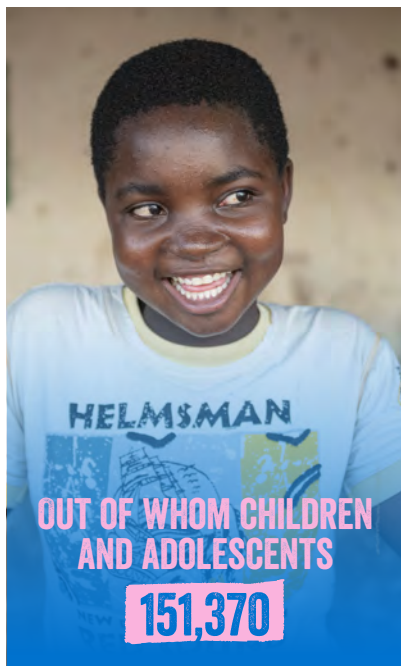
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# ABBREVIATIONS

AFHS Adolescent Friendly Health Service  
ASHR Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health  
AYFS The Adolescent and Youth Friendly Service  
BCC Behavioural Change Communication  
CB Children's Board  
CBO Community Based Organisation  
CBR Community Based Rehabilitation  
CDM Civil Disobedience Movement  
CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women  
CEFM Child, Early and Forced marriages  
CO Country Office (Plan International)  
CoC Champions of Change  
CPC Child Protection Committee  
CPCC Child Protection Community Committees  
CRC Convention on the Rights of the Child  
CSE Comprehensive Sexuality Education  
CSO Civil Society Organisation  
CSR Corporate Social Responsibility  
ERP Enterprise Resource Planning  
FGM Female Genital Mutilation  
FIBS Finnish Business and Society  
GBV Gender Based Violence  
GRPD Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
HVCA Hazard and Vulnerability Capacity Assessments  
IEC Information, Education and Communication  
INGO International Non-governmental Organisation  
LDC Least Developed Country  
LftW Light for the World (organisation)  
LGTBIQ+ community, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual  
M&E Monitoring and Evaluation  
MBMF My Body. My Future.  
MER Monitoring, Evaluation and Research  
MFA Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland  
MHM Menstrual Hygiene Management  
MoH Ministry of Health  
NCAWMC National Commission for Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children  
NGO Non-governmental Organisations  
OPD Organization for People with Disabilities  
PDR The Lao People's Democratic Republic  
PFHLA Promotion of Family Health Laos Association  
PSG Participatory School Governance  
SAP Systems, Applications, and Products in Data Processing– financial management programme  
SDG Sustainable Development Goals  
SRH Sexual and Reproductive Health  
SRHR Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights  
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation  
UWOPA Uganda Women Parliamentary Association  
VSLA Village Savings and Loans Association  
WaSH Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene  
Y.O.D.A. Your Organisation's Data and Analytics

## MY BODY. MY FUTURE. 2020 IN NUMBERS

### SRHR PROJECTS



THE PROPORTION OF YOUTH WHO REPORT POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES ON SRHR AND GENDER EQUALITY WENT UP FROM **24%** AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROGRAMME TO **53%** BY 2020.

THE PROPORTION OF YOUTH WHO REPORT HAVING TAKEN ACTION TOGETHER WITH PEERS RELATED TO SRHR ISSUES INCREASED FROM **25%** IN 2018 TO **69%** IN 2020.

THE PROPORTION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO VALUE GENDER EQUALITY INCREASED FROM **38%** AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROGRAMME TO **63%** IN 2020.

THE PROGRAMME WORKED WITH **62** DIFFERENT TYPES OF **CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS**, FROM COMMUNITY LEVEL AGENTS OF CHANGE TO NATIONAL LEVEL NETWORKS FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCING, TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND SRHR.

**92%** OF SRH SERVICE PROVIDERS REPORTED IN 2020 THEY RECOGNISE AND RESPECT THE DIVERSITY OF YOUTH AND THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS, COMPARED TO **50%** AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROGRAMME.

### YOUTH INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP





## COMMUNICATIONS, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN FINLAND



THE **39** CHILD RIGHTS AMBASSADORS VISITED  
**102** FINNISH SCHOOLS AND TRAINED **6,014**  
PUPILS ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, GENDER  
EQUALITY AND HATE SPEECH.

**515** EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS **IMPROVED**  
**THEIR SKILLS** IN CHILD RIGHTS, DIVERSITY  
AND ANTI-HATE SPEECH EDUCATION,  
GENDER EQUALITY AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP  
EDUCATION.

THE CHILDREN'S BOARD REACHED **2,400**  
PEOPLE WITH MESSAGES ON SDGS, GENDER  
EQUALITY AND ESPECIALLY THE EFFECTS OF  
**ONLINE HARASSMENT** ON GIRLS' RIGHTS.

PLAN FINLAND'S VOLUNTEERS HOSTED ALTOGETHER **141** DIFFERENT  
EVENTS AND REACHED **18,600** PEOPLE.

PLAN FINLAND'S COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES POTENTIAL  
REACH WAS **103 MILLION** PEOPLE.





# Your body is special

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SUMMARY

**M**y Body. My Future. (MBMF) is a joint programme between Plan International Finland and Plan International Country Offices in Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar and Uganda, as well as numerous project partners at the local and international levels. The programme seeks to advance girls' rights and gender equality, especially through promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with the aim of improving understanding and practices related to SRHR amongst adolescents both in and out of school. The programme takes a gender transformative approach to development, seeking to address social norms and barriers that limit the participation of adolescent girls in society. In addition, the programme includes a component on global citizenship education, advocacy and communications in Finland. The programme receives funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) for the years 2018–2021.

The world was struck by turmoil in 2020 as the global COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter referred to as “COVID-19” or “pandemic”) spread. What had begun as a robust implementation year after laying effective programme groundwork in 2018 and an active year of implementation in 2019, the third year of the programme was characterised by adaptations to the changed and exceptional global environment. Programme strategies as well as ways of working were modified while being mindful that people's lives had also changed. Plan International as an organisation went into “red alert mode”, meaning the focus of operations shifted to support the most necessary tasks and COVID-19 prevention.

The planned results of the programme were not anticipated to be achieved, at least to some extent, due to the changed situation. Alternative methods of working, however, allowed us to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and the accompanying restrictions measures and to continue the implementation of the programme. The programme managed to uphold the progress reported in previous years and achieve new results in 2020. In addition, the programme contributed to COVID-19 responses across the regions of operation. As a result of the multisectoral adaptation measures to COVID-19, which temporarily broadened the scope of work, and the introduction of new and innovative ways of working across projects, the direct reach of the programme increased considerably (more than tripling) during 2020: 261,320 people were reached directly by the SRHR projects in Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, and Uganda and approximately 410,550 people were reached indirectly<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The total direct and indirect reach of the MBMF programme's SRHR projects in Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, and Uganda was thus 671,870. When adding the reach of the youth innovation and employment SmartUp projects' reach (direct: 2,060, indirect: 5,650) and the reach of the programme in Finland (44,480), the total reach of the programme in 2020 was 724,060.





In 2020, the positive attitudes of adolescents towards SRHR and gender equality further strengthened and materialised in action. The proportion of youth involved in the programme activities who reported having taken action related to SRHR issues with peers increased respectively to 69%, compared to 66% in 2019 and 25% in 2018. The change in attitudes was also visible in the youth's own behaviour – notably in their use of SRHR information and services, which increased on the programme level from 48% in 2019 to 55%. Adolescents also reported that the services felt friendlier and more approachable than before. This is quite notable given the burdening of the information needs and channels as well as health services in 2020 due to COVID-19.

The burdened situation caused by COVID-19 did not appear to falter communities' support for gender equality and girls' rights, which indicates its strong establishment. According to the monitoring survey data, the share of community members who value gender equality and girls' rights (63%) as well as those emphasising the importance of girls' education (73%) remained at the level of the preceding year, counter to expectations. The stated support is also visible in parents and community leaders increasingly recognising and taking responsibility for their own roles in promoting gender equality.

Dozens of civil society actors were able to continue to stay active and support the programme in 2020, even though significantly fewer (62) civil society actors were able to engage actively than in the preceding year (141). The share of active civil society actors, however, varied greatly across different locations as COVID-19 limited activity more in some areas than in others. The active civil society partners adapted, discovered, and created new ways of working in the exceptional time, which indicates their resilience and strengthened capacity. The partnering civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) also advocated for youth friendly SRHR services and gender equality at multiple levels. For instance, in Laos, the partner CSOs, Gender and Development Association (GDA) and Plan supported the state party's response to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommendations on improving the health and education of Lao girls and women. The work of the CSOs and CBOs was crucial for achieving the programme results.

The health care workers and health service providers reported increased understanding of adolescent-friendly and inclusive SRH services: 92% (86% in 2019) of those interviewed self-reported as being able to recognise and respect the diversity of youth and their specific needs. In addition to improving the services' friendliness, relevance, and approachability to adolescents, the health care providers went out of their way to reach adolescents and to raise awareness of the availability of the services.



In 2020 1,126 (629 F/497 M) youth in Ethiopia and Uganda graduated from the innovation and youth entrepreneurship SmartUp Factory training. The project's youth mentors are showing great initiative in managing the SmartUp hubs. Girls are taking more active roles at the hubs than before, especially in Uganda.

Advancing children's rights and gender equality through global citizenship education, communications and advocacy made a "digital leap" in Finland in 2020. Plan Finland's Global School reached a remarkably wider geographical scope than ever before: remote lessons were held for a total of 27 different localities, reaching schools that Plan had not previously been able to visit. Plan's various volunteer and youth groups were able to meet, campaign and influence online.

The theme of the International Day of the Girl was current and apt as it addressed the online harassment of girls, a phenomenon that the pandemic has exacerbated. The Girls Takeover campaign was effective in addressing the theme as well as the digital gender gap (and the interlinkages of the two) for Finnish policymakers, companies, and institutions. Throughout the year, Plan Finland's advocacy specialists contributed to ensuring that girls' rights and climate justice were considered in political processes and decision-making. Plan's advocacy advisors made recommendations in several policy papers, such as the Africa Strategy, the new Climate Change Act, the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality, the Government Report on Development Policy, the Government's Human Rights Report, the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy, and the Government and Parliamentary Budget Decisions for the 2021 Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Funding.





## 1.2 THE MY BODY. MY FUTURE. PROGRAMME

Girls represent one of the largest excluded groups in the world today, and they continuously face barriers to exercising their rights because of their gender and age. Plan International's global strategy for 2017–2022 places girls at the forefront of action. The goal is to help 100 million girls learn, lead, decide and thrive. Under the theme “decide”, Plan International places a separate emphasis on SRHR, which are recognised in international treaties such as CEDAW and partially in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), but often go unfulfilled. In this thematic area, Plan International seeks to work together with its partners to promote the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriages (CEFM), the reduction of unwanted pregnancy, access to quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, and the engagement of boys and men in developing positive masculinities and promoting gender equality.

The current programme, with funding from Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland, started in 2018 and covers the years 2018–2021. In line with Plan International's global strategy and congruent to Finnish development policy priorities, Plan Finland sought to focus the programme on gender transformative programming and advancing girls' rights through promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. The My Body. My Future. programme was initially granted a budget of EUR 20.5 million for four years, of which the MFA support amounts to EUR 17.9 million. An additional EUR 2.5 million support by the MFA was later granted for the years 2020 and 2021.

In terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the programme makes a strong contribution towards Goal 3, ensuring good health and well-being, and Goal 5, gender equality and empowering all women and girls. In addition, the programme contributes to Goal 4, ensuring inclusive and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities, and Goal 8, decent work and economic growth.

The programme takes a holistic approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights, with the aim of improving understanding and practices related to SRHR issues amongst adolescents, both in and out of school, promoting gender equality and SRHR within communities, supporting civil society action for improved SRH rights and services, as well as working with service providers to improve adolescent-friendly SRH services. The programme aspires to be gender transformative, seeking to address norms and barriers that limit the participation of adolescent girls in society. In addition to gender equality, the programme promotes the innovation and entrepreneurial skills of youth and contributes towards improving resilience towards the effects of climate change within participating communities.

The number of projects and countries of intervention is limited. Programme intervention countries include Ethiopia, Uganda and Mozambique in Africa, and Laos and Myanmar in South-East Asia, all of which are classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The total number of international projects is eight, three of which are implemented in Ethiopia, two in Uganda and one in each of the remaining countries. Overall, our view is that maintaining the focus on a few countries and broader programmes make major impact possible at the country level, and the focus has allowed Plan Finland to offer better thematic and technical support to programme countries in our thematic focus areas. In addition to the international projects, the programme includes communications, advocacy and global education in Finland.



### 1.3 PLAN'S THEORY OF CHANGE

The programme is strictly based on Plan International's global approach and theory of change. The theory of change explains Plan's approach to achieving its purpose of "creating a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls", and is divided into three main dimensions of change:

- Helping to change harmful social norms, attitudes and behaviours
- Building social and economic resources and establishing the safety nets needed in times of crisis
- Influencing international and national laws, policies and investments

Plan International's programme and influence strategies further guide all programme implementation. According to these, Plan's programmes and projects seek to:

1. Promote positive attitudes, behaviours and practices
2. Strengthen and mobilise civil society
3. Develop stakeholder capacities
4. Influence power holders
5. Provide direct support in emergencies and fragile settings.

In line with the theory of change and Plan International's global commitments to be rights-based and gender transformative, the My Body. My Future. programme aims to renegotiate power to obtain more equitable opportunities for girls and boys to realise their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In so doing, Plan and its partners will be able to improve gender equality at the societal level and advance the interests of girls in particular. These specific interests of girls include, for instance, girls' freedom from violence and the freedom to make their own sexual and reproductive choices.

Plan International's position paper on SRHR, approved in 2017, lays further groundwork on SRHR work within Plan International and the projects it supports. Plan International believes that "all children, adolescents and young people should have the right to make their own free and informed choices and to have control over their sexual and reproductive health and lives, free from coercion, violence, discrimination and abuse". While cultural traditions, religious beliefs and social norms should be respected, they should not constitute reasons for countries to disregard international treaties and conventions in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights.





## 2. COUNTRY CONTEXT AND CONTEXT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

All the programme countries were affected by COVID-19 in 2020. States of emergency were declared, and social distancing and confinement measures resulted in limitations of gatherings and freedom of movement. These impacted civil societies heavily. Even though there were some positive trajectories in the contexts for civil society in the programme countries, such as new opportunities in Mozambique and Ethiopia following laws adopted in the previous year, restrictions continued to be in place for civil society organisations in most of the countries. Many SRHR topics also continue to be difficult to work with in some countries, especially topics such as comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) or safe abortion due to legal restrictions or norms that restrict discussions.

### 2.1 ETHIOPIA

Year 2020 was the first year following the approval of a new Organisations of Civil Societies Proclamation in Ethiopia, which removed many restrictions that had limited the participation of CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in advocacy or human rights work. This was an important step towards a more enabling environment for civil society in Ethiopia, and the changes have already been felt by NGOs: they are now allowed to engage in advocacy, speak about human rights and use media in their communication – all of which were not possible before. Less government supervision is required for programmatic work and models and funding channels have been made more flexible, both of which ease the space and work of CSOs.

NGOs and CSOs have also increasingly been able to contribute to national agendas. They are trying to make voices of the most vulnerable be heard in political discussions, and for example ensure the fair and equal participation of all in elections. Ethnicity plays an increasing role in Ethiopia and ethnic conflicts were omnipresent throughout the country, escalating in some areas in 2020. CSOs have been active in pleading the government to respect the human rights of all people regardless of their ethnicity. CSOs have even brought the ethnic-based federalisation model into question.

In general, CSOs are playing a great role in voicing community problems, for instance the economic burden of people intensified by COVID-19 and showing direction for the government. On the other hand, there is still a lot to be done to strengthen the commitment and involvement of CSOs on SRHR issues at different levels. SRHR issues are sensitive and there is resistance not only from the government but also from variety of actors at different levels including civil society actors. This is due to negative perceptions of CSE and SRHR and a tendency to relate them with promoting sexual diversity – which is a cultural taboo and even criminalised.



## 2.2 LAOS

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) has experienced a period of social, economic, and cultural change during the past two decades, with a significant reduction of poverty and improvements in health and education sectors. However, the economic and social differences between ethnic groups and geographic areas are dramatic. The government faces challenges in providing even basic services to vulnerable, remote, and ethnic minority populations, and laws are not always easy to understand, especially for those with a low level of education or Lao language skills.

There is limited space for and a high level of control over civil society in the country. This reduces the space for mobilisation and expression of views that are not supported by the state. In the field of MBMF thematic sectors of gender and SRHR, Laos is a signatory of the CRC, CEDAW as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Gender equality in the indicators has been improving, but women still struggle for full participation, representation, and inclusion. Wide gender disparities exist particularly among rural non-Lao ethnic groups. The government of Laos has shown positive signs towards sexual rights of young people. However, the social and gender norms, particularly those around female sexuality, child marriage or rights of especially female adolescents to speak up often contradicts with the existing laws and policies. Despite many positive developments, restrictions related to LGTBQ+ rights by the state continue to pose challenges to the realisation of sexual rights of all adolescents in their diversity and the ability of civil society actors to promote them.





## 2.3 MOZAMBIQUE

New legislation against child, early and forced marriages was approved in Mozambique in 2019, which opened opportunities for CSOs – including the Mozambican chapter of the MBMF programme, the Wutomi project – to advocate for the elimination of CEFM in the country. The SRHR CSO network created by the project started to disseminate the law, and it facilitated their advocacy and community awareness raising work in 2020.

In general, the space for civil society in Mozambique is relatively open by law but in

practice there can be multiple restrictions and barriers. The state of civic space per the CIVICUS Monitor rates Mozambique civic space as obstructed. The civic space is also heavily contested by power holders, including the use of illegal surveillance, bureaucratic harassment and demeaning public statements. The situation has deteriorated considerably in recent years.



## 2.4 MYANMAR

The human rights situation in Myanmar worsened in 2020<sup>2</sup>. There was an array of unwarrantedly restrictive laws to arrest and prosecute human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and government critics for the exercise of their freedoms of association and expression. Restrictions on peaceful protests, the arbitrary arrest and prosecution of protesters and the use of excessive force to disperse protests were also reported.

These concerns were however swept aside by the February 2021 military coup, and the violent crackdown by the Myanmar Armed Forces. The military declared a one-year state of emergency claiming fraud in the November 2020 elections and detained the elected civil government and parliament members. Many people in Myanmar are protesting and urge the release of the civil government and the restoration of democracy. Soldiers and police are arresting even peaceful protesters. The situation is chaotic and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) has spread throughout Myanmar.

Before the coup, the uncertainties surrounding operating in the COVID-19 context were starting to become clear, with new modalities for service delivery and new ways of working under way to address SRHR. Since the coup, the situation has again clouded and there is a great need for insight on the needs of the

<sup>2</sup> This was also reported by both Human Rights Watch (<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/myanmar-burma>) and CIVICUS (<https://monitor.civicus.org/country/myanmar/>).

communities and their concerns. Certainly, violence is commonplace at protest locations. Many sectors are at a halt, with cash flow restrictions, logistics demands, and worker strikes crippling day to day processes. Importantly, the accessibility of SRH services have been gravely limited as the health system has broken down. Political instability and violence increase gender-based violence (GBV) committed towards girls and women. With most frontline agency personnel not at their stations, the likelihood of unreported GBV cases is dramatically higher while at the same time referral and response mechanisms are not operational in many places. Young female protestors are also subject to a great deal of physical and mental trauma while in detention.

Within these dynamics, private, public, and civil society sector actors face intense social pressure to comply with the CDM and avoid all forms of engagement with the de facto regime. For an international non-governmental organisation (INGO), such as Plan International, this is reinforced by donors redirecting their funds intended for direct support to the government to target civil society groups instead. Civil society groups, rather than public or government actors, are now more reliable sources of SRHR services. The situation is further complicated by the wide variation in contexts at township, region, and state levels. That may change as more of Myanmar's ethnic armed organisations end their neutrality and commit to backing the protest movement.



## 2.5 UGANDA

Generally, the operating space for NGOs and CSOs in Uganda is relatively good and influencing work and community mobilisation allowed. However, the possibility to work with certain topics related to SRHR is limited or not permitted, both culturally and legally. For instance, sexuality education is not permitted in schools. In general, the legal framework concerning SRHR issues in Uganda is anti-rights-based and leans heavily on criminalisation. Unfortunately, progress was not seen in either democracy or the rights-based approaches in legislation in 2020 – and rather concerning developments have taken place in the first half of 2021.

Firstly, the re-elected President Museveni suspended the Democratic Governance Facility, a critical fund to the operations of many Ugandan CSOs mandated to advance the rule of law and good governance as well as several government bodies, such as the Uganda Human Rights Commission. Second, the January 2021 elections were marred by limitations on civic activity, and excessive use of force by state actors. The government also curtailed the flow of information and transparency of the process by shutting down the internet for five days and arresting and detaining some of the observers. Thirdly, Uganda's Sexual Offenses Bill 2019, which criminalises consensual same-sex relations<sup>3</sup>, sex work and enacts harsher punishments on those living with HIV was debated throughout 2020 and finally approved by parliament in May 2021.

One of the project strategies to advance vexed SRHR topics in Uganda is to work with the local community-based organisations which are less restricted. The collaboration of the project with the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) also facilitates not just advocacy and influencing but also protection of the project from governmental suspicion.

<sup>3</sup> Although the punishment for engaging in consensual same sex relations has been reduced to 10 years in jail instead of life imprisonment. See more in the UN Human Rights High Commissioner's Press briefing on the Bill: [ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27068&LangID=E](https://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27068&LangID=E)





## 3. PROGRAMME RESULTS

**M**y Body. My Future. programmatic work is divided into four main components: SRHR projects, youth innovation and entrepreneurship projects, global citizen education work, and advocacy and communications in Finland. The results of these components are presented in this chapter under their respective sub-headings. First, the results of the SRHR projects, the largest component by the number of projects and by budget are presented. This is followed by youth innovation projects, before moving to the results of Plan Finland's work in Finland.

### 3.1 SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS PROJECTS

Sexual and reproductive health and rights projects include a total of five projects in Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Myanmar, and Uganda, and form the largest component of the My Body. My Future. programme. They share an actor-based results framework, against which results are presented in this chapter. The programmes have four outcomes, the first of which is focused on improving knowledge and changing attitudes among adolescents in relation to SRHR and gender equality. The second outcome targets parents, community members, community leaders and other community-based actors to achieve a supportive environment for girls through increased awareness of adolescent SRHR, gender-based violence and action against child marriage. The third outcome seeks to mobilise civil society actors to work towards gender equality and girls' rights. The fourth outcome concentrates on advocacy for adolescent-friendly SRH services and for laws and policies that support the realisation of girls' rights.

During 2020, the SRHR projects reached 151,370 children and adolescents (89,780 F/61,590 M) under the age of 19 directly through different programme activities, as well as 109,950 adults (62,870 F/47,080 M). Of these, 5,280 were people with a disability. The direct reach of the programme increased considerably during 2020 (by 260%). This was a result of multisectoral adaption measures to COVID-19, which temporarily broadened the scope of activities, and the introduction of new and innovative ways of working across projects. These included, for instance, distance education methodology training for teachers in Mozambique, thanks to which an estimated over 30,000 pupils were able to continue learning during school closures, as well as reaching youth at village water points during lockdowns and integrating SRHR information with COVID-19 communications in Uganda. In addition, approximately 410,550 people were reached indirectly.

Despite the disruption and turmoil – in all communities and societies at large as well as in the programme and its strategies – imposed by COVID-19, the programme managed to uphold progress achieved in the previous years and achieve new results in 2020. Part of the focus of the work was, however, shifted to the prevention of COVID-19 and the mitigation of its impacts.

### 3.1.1 Outcome 1: Adolescent girls and boys increasingly realise their SRH rights

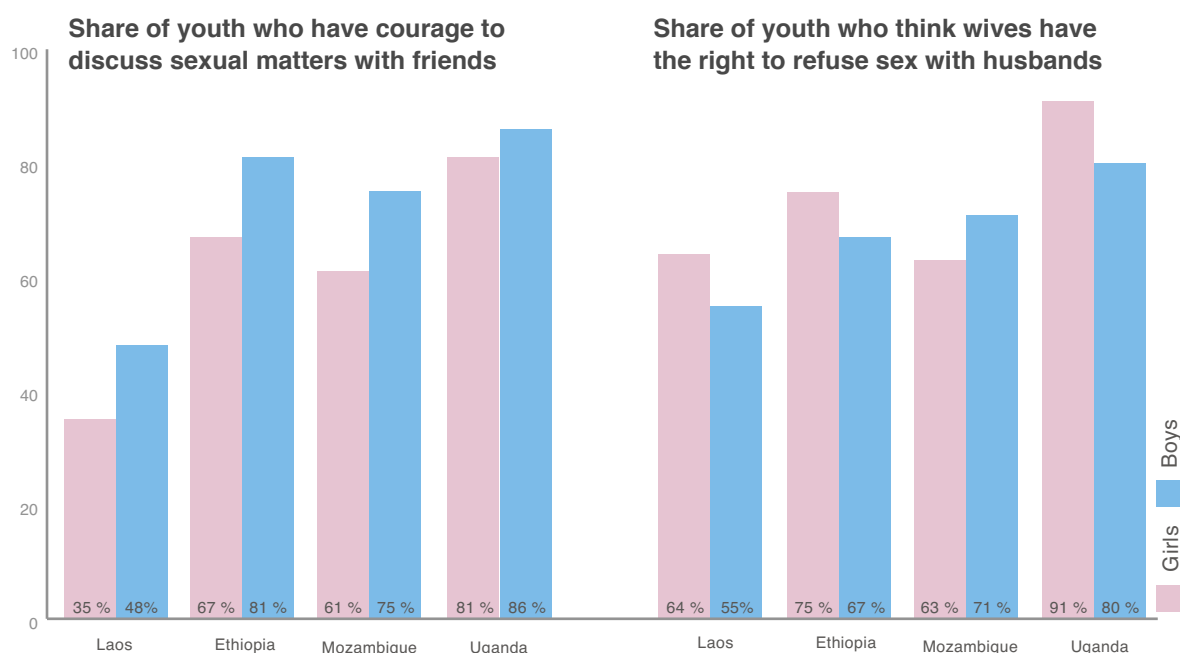
Outcome 1 aims to challenge and change existing social norms to promote gender equality and to remove barriers to girls' participation within society. The aim is to enhance knowledge among youth on gender equality, SRHR and other subjects, both within schools and for out-of-school youth. The strategies to reach adolescents vary according to the local context, but under normal circumstances include supporting youth clubs at schools, peer-to-peer clubs and champion of change clubs (CoC), as well as work on menstrual hygiene management (MHM), especially in Ethiopia and Uganda, more formal cooperation with schools, such as participatory school governance (PSG) in Uganda and support for comprehensive sexuality education (in Laos).

On the third year of the programme adolescents' positive attitudes towards SRHR and gender equality further strengthened. Especially remarkable in this exceptional year is that positive attitudes also materialised in actions. Of the participating youth, 53%<sup>4</sup> demonstrated positive attitudes in the monitoring survey, a 5% increase from the preceding year (48% in 2019), and a reaffirmation of the change from the baseline (24%) at the start of the programme.

A majority (60%; 56% in 2019) of the youth, for instance, thought that girls should be allowed to continue at school if they are pregnant. Whereas at the start of the programme, this was widely viewed among the adolescents as promoting "bad influence", the adolescents now also recognise the right to education of girls who are pregnant and their ability to continue at school is seen as crucial for them to retain equal opportunities for their future. Differences in the attitudes were not strongly divided by gender (boys' and girls' perspectives did not differ on this issue either) but regionally were rather vast in certain questions. For instance, the youth in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda averaged over 70% having a positive outlook (and as high as 80% in Ethiopia), compared to only 21% reacting positively in Laos. On the other hand, some issues, such as questioning of the gendered division of labour, were universally aligned – a total of 86% of the surveyed youth thought that men can also take part in customarily women's domestic chores (peaking at 92% in Laos compared to the 82% average of the African countries).

All in all, even though notable differences between boys and girls in the attitudes and adopted practices conducive to positive SRHR and gender equality did not appear, there were still some small differences that might indicate prevailing gender inequality. In general, boys for instance scored slightly higher in courage related questions regarding SRHR (e.g., the courage to ask for contraceptives and to discuss sexual matters) – the most notable differences between genders having the courage to talk about sexual matters with friends (62% F, 73% M). Girls on the other hand scored slightly higher in progressive attitudes towards gender equality – here the most notable difference was in the view that a wife has a right to refuse sex with her husband (75% F, 68% M).

**THE SHARE OF PARTICIPATING YOUTH WHO REPORT POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES ON SRHR AND GENDER EQUALITY REACHED 53% IN 2020.**



<sup>4</sup>Monitoring survey data was collected in all programme countries. However, the data from Myanmar had to be discarded due to concerns over its quality and accuracy (see more in Chapter 5.1.).





The change in attitudes was visible in action, and adolescents' courage to discuss sensitive SRHR issues and to act to advance them has indeed grown stronger. The proportion of youth involved in the programme who report having taken action related to SRHR issues with peers increased from 25% in 2018 to 66% in 2019 and 69% in 2020. This is an area that the programme had planned to especially support and invest in during 2020, but was affected by COVID-19. Still, some 600 peer-to-peer groups kept active during the year. These are spaces where young people can share ideas among themselves and build their own and each other's confidence together. The confidence acquired manifested, for example, in the arranged community dialogues to discuss SRHR and gender equality related topics with parents and other community members, in the courage to speak about these

issues on community radios and in taking active stands on the matters in their own lives. For instance, in one of the project areas in Ethiopia (Fagita Lekoma), up to 95% of adolescent girls reported having the courage to negotiate the use of condoms. They also feel that they can talk to and counsel fellow girls on the myths, misconceptions, and benefits of using contraceptives.

In addition to the strengthened courage to speak-up and act on SRHR and gender equality, the positive attitude towards these issues is also visible in the youth's own behaviour – notably in their use of SRH information and services, which increased on the programme level (from 48% in 2019 to to 55%). This is prominent, given the burdening of the information needs and channels as well as health services as a result of COVID-19. The increase was not, however, uniform across regions. While there was improvement in the three other countries surveyed, a slightly smaller proportion of adolescents than last year reported having used the services in Mozambique. However, the clinics reported there having had been an increase in adolescents' demand of services preceding the COVID-19 outbreak in Mozambique, but it had declined following the successive states of emergency.

**DESPITE COVID, ADOLESCENTS' USE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INFORMATION AND SERVICES INCREASED IN THE TARGET AREAS: FROM 48% IN 2019 TO 55% IN 2020.**

It must also, however, be noted that the increase and the use of SRH services by adolescents was regionally uneven. In Uganda, 88% of the adolescents interviewed reported having used the services in 2020 compared to the starting point of 54%. The increase in adolescents' use of services has been observed by the project team as well, and they have voiced a concern about the supply struggling to keep up with the increased demand. In other countries, at least according to the monitoring data, the demand for services has mostly remained at the same level, except for some regional variations. For example, in Ethiopia there was an increase to from 44% in 2019 to 50% in 2020, which was largely due to substantial increases in some areas, such as in Tiro Afeta (from 44% to 62%) and Hagere Selam (from 44% to 69%). Intensive use of local radio and regional TV programs for information sharing in Tiro Afeta and working closely with the local youth centre in Hagere Selam were seen as having contributed to the increase of youth's demand for SRH services in these areas.

Nonetheless, the training and support given to the service providers to enhance the appropriateness and friendliness of the services to adolescents seem to have been fruitful as more youth (74% compared to 68% in 2019) now also felt that the services were friendly to them. The youth also reported an increased addressing of SRHR issues by nurses and doctors. The health authorities also self-reported an increased understanding and means to provide adolescent friendly SRH services (see more in Chapter 3.1.4). The friendliness of the services, as well as parents', opinion leaders' and communities' strengthened support for adolescents' use of them (instead of imposing barriers such as stigma and restrictions) will likely usher the youth to increasingly use the services.

## **74% OF ADOLESCENTS IN THE TARGET AREAS PERCEIVE THE AVAILABLE SRH SERVICES AS ADOLESCENT-FRIENDLY.**

In the previous reporting round, it was noted that, according to the monitoring survey data, the respondents' understanding of gender equality was greater than understanding of topics related to SRHR. Even though the survey data of this reporting round implies improvement in

the knowledge of SRHR by the youth – from 19% in 2019 to 26% in 2020 – the level remained limited<sup>5</sup>. The knowledge, however, differed between topics as well as regions, from 39% in Uganda to 8% in Laos<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, the knowledge of boys and girls did not differ significantly, although that of boys was slightly stronger (25% F, 28% M). Discounting Laos, where both boys' and girls' knowledge levels were recorded relatively low, the difference was further highlighted as girls in Uganda, Mozambique and Ethiopia averaged 29% to boys' 34%). The youth demonstrated good knowledge of condoms,<sup>7</sup> for instance knowledge that condoms prevent both sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDIs) as well as unintended pregnancies was in total relatively strong (81%). This however was one of the questions where boys' and girls' knowledge differed the greatest (77% F, 85% M).

Girls' access to menstrual pads was not, according to the monitoring survey, disrupted even amidst COVID-19, but remained at the level of the preceding year, as 84% of girls reported having access to them at the programme level. Multiple actions were taken to uphold girls' access to adequate sanitary conditions as well as to continue the work around clarifying the myths related to menstruation. The knowledge of girls and boys about menstruation and MHM also remained at good level (75% of youth surveyed demonstrated adequate knowledge). Girls' knowledge was however stronger than that of boys (86% F, 65% M). There is local production of reusable sanitary pads supported by the programme in Uganda, Mozambique, and Ethiopia<sup>8</sup>. The local production of pads proved to enhance resilience as it contributed to the number of girls having regular access to menstrual products not plummeting during COVID-19 lockdowns. The access remained at the same level in all the other target regions, or even increased slightly (from 78% in 2019 to 83% in 2020 in Uganda), except for Mozambique, where a 15% decrease was reported<sup>9</sup>. Regardless, 80% of girls in Mozambique reported being able to use pads regularly. The distribution of pads was also integrated in the COVID-19 response in many of the programme areas (see more in Chapter 3.5.1.).

### **3.1.2 Outcome 2: Parents, community leaders and community members increasingly value equality for girls**

Outcome 2 targets community leaders, parents, and community members with the aim of increasing their awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, and specific topics such as action against child marriage or female genital mutilation.

Communities were under a very stressful situation in 2020<sup>10</sup> and a real strain and fear of setback was imposed on equality and girls' rights. Even if the target areas remained quite intact in terms of infections, the restriction measures that were nevertheless deployed limited economic, social, and political dimensions of life. It seems, however, that support for equality did not falter in the communities despite the COVID-19 situation that tested their adaptive capacity and resilience.

The share of community members who value gender equality and girls' rights (63%) as well as of those emphasising the importance of girls' education (73%) remained at a similar level as in the preceding year (with a slight increase of 2% in each) according to the monitoring survey data. Even though a clear majority of community members seem to value gender equality and girls' rights, substantial progress from the start of the programme (38%), the current level still leaves room for improvement. The increase derived from changed men's views<sup>11</sup> whereas slight decreases were detected in the stated support of women – their answers might reflect more on the actual state of affairs they have started to become more conscious and

<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire utilised to assess SRHR knowledge might have been quite technical and difficult, especially for younger respondents within the age group of 10–14 years, which partially explains the limited level SRHR related knowledge. It must also be noted that the questionnaire focuses heavily on sexual and reproductive health but captures more poorly developments across domains such as relationships; values, rights and sexuality; understanding gender; violence and staying safe; the human body and development; and sexuality and sexual behaviour, which are also integral components of Plan's SRHR education.

<sup>6</sup> The youth groups where these topics are discussed started the latest in Laos (only in late 2019), which partly explains the lower-level result from Laos.

<sup>7</sup> Knowledge regarding condoms was also strong in Laos, in fact the strongest, as 81% of girls and 89% of boys demonstrated it.

<sup>8</sup> The production is organised either through VSLAs (in Mozambique) – which then sell the pads at low prices – or as its own component that employs the youth directly (Uganda and Ethiopia), or e.g. through school clubs where girls make pads for themselves, their family members and peers.

<sup>9</sup> Despite the efforts to make reusable sanitary pads available by VSLA groups as part of income generating activities in Mozambique, access was also slightly below target. The limitation of movement during COVID-19 could have conditioned adolescents' access to sanitary pads more in Mozambique project areas than in the others.

<sup>10</sup> Although it is quite safe to say that COVID-19 impacted everyone's life in 2020, the impact did not fall equally on everyone, and it brought pre-existing inequalities sharply into focus. There were also other stressors than COVID-19 in the communities in 2020, for instance frequent ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia.

<sup>11</sup> At the programme level, the share of male community members who value gender equality and girls' rights increased from 59% in 2019 to 65% in 2020 and the share of male parents prioritising girls' education increased from 70% to 78% across the same time period.





**THE SHARE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO VALUE GENDER EQUALITY REACHED 63% DESPITE THE BURDENED SITUATION IN 2020.**

critical of. Nevertheless, for instance in Mozambique the project team have observed men in the target communities having become more open to accepting participation of women in decision making on issues concerning the household.

Whereas the level of community members' overall appreciation of gender equality and girls' rights mainly remained the same in all the countries (apart from Ethiopia where a notable 9% increase

was recorded, deriving mainly from the men's strengthened support), the developments in the views on girls' education were more uneven. There was a substantial (approximately 10%) increase in both Ethiopia and Mozambique – the project team in Ethiopia also observed in some of the project areas that girls had returned to school in large numbers after their closure – whereas there was a slight decrease in Laos and Uganda (more significantly in the latter: from 63% in 2019 to 56%). The decrease in Uganda was suggested to derive from the ambiguous relevance of the question for some of the respondents as schools were closed.

The stated support is also visible in the way parents as well as religious and traditional community leaders increasingly recognise and take responsibility for their own role in promoting gender equality. This is of key importance, as girls' rights will not progress unless they are supported and promoted by the communities they are part of. The community leaders are particularly important change agents due to the authority they possess. The community leaders have become aware of their role in eliminating harmful practises and on their possibilities to influence whole communities. In Uganda, arenas and prestige provided by religious events were used as platforms to promote the importance of the realisation of girls' rights and the eradication of harmful practices such as CEFM. For instance, the Muslim community and Pentecostal churches of Lira held several activities to raise awareness on the discriminatory practices against girls and women as well as banned the derogatory parading of girls in their traditional marriage ceremonies. The leaders are addressing issues such as SRHR service delivery and access for adolescents, which also positively impacts parents' attitudes towards these. In some places they have even started to address issues such as contraceptives and adolescents' use of them, a big step forward in breaking the strong taboo prevailing in most of the target areas around sex, and adolescent sex especially. This spurs parents' understanding of the importance of SRHR, leading them to encourage their adolescents to seek services.

**PARENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS INCREASINGLY RECOGNIZE, AND OWN, THEIR ROLE IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY.**

Parents have adopted knowledge, attitudes, and practices conducive to bolster gender equality. Acceptance of CEFM has declined and is even condemned (of the surveyed girls, 78% felt that their parents would not force them to marry), similarly to other harmful practices such as FGM, while for example support for a more gender balanced division of household chores has grown stronger. Further, 85% of parents surveyed across the projects viewed that girls should have the same rights as boys (a slight increase from 82% in 2019). Parents also seem to be increasingly at ease and better equipped to have conversations with adolescents on sensitive topics such as puberty, relationships, and sexuality – for instance, the proportion of surveyed parents who said feeling comfortable to discuss issues related to sex with adolescents increased to 72% (67% in 2019).

## **OF THE SURVEYED GIRLS, 78% FELT THAT THEIR PARENTS WOULD NOT FORCE THEM TO MARRY.**

The change in attitudes, competencies, and comfortability to address SRHR issues are also visible in actions. Parents were more actively encouraging their adolescent children to visit health centres when necessary. Communities and parents in Ethiopia and Uganda were also, for instance taking action by reporting parents

who were forcing their daughters to marry or planning to perform FGM on them. However, a fear of creating enmity within the community and frustration towards the legal system was reported to limit the community members involvement, at least in Uganda.

Substantial work regarding engaging parents and communities needed to be adapted from original plans to suit the COVID-19 circumstances. For instance, in Mozambique, the role of the trained community counsellors (Massungukate and Massungudota) became even more paramount during the pandemic as they mobilised parents to continue dialogue with their adolescents on SRHR issues as well as encouraged them to balance household chores so that girls could also have enough time to continue studying and play. Parents were also challenged by adolescents, especially by the ones taking part in the CoC program, to reflect on their views surrounding gender norms and SRHR issues. The youth's active role was especially emphasised in Myanmar, where no community dialogues were possible to be held.

The programme intends to support alternative income sources for the community members to promote small business activities and to increase the resilience of families through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). The VSLAs also serve as arenas to reach community members and discuss issues such as gender equality, SRHR, and GBV risk mitigation. In 2020 VSLAs were active and supported in Ethiopia and Mozambique. The funds that were planned to be used for VSLA support in Uganda were directed to the vocational training of girls who were out of school and to support them in starting businesses in groups. In total, 170 small business initiatives were established or ran (either by individuals or groups) within the programme. The VSLA activity was especially vibrant in Ethiopia, and the majority (155) of the businesses were ran there (of which 95% were women-led). (See more about the VSLAs and the girls' business groups in Chapter 4.5.)

Ethipad is social business initiative in Ethiopia that seeks to improve rural girls' and women's access to re-usable sanitary pads and to employ local youth in producing sanitary pads through seven producer associations. In 2020, Ethipad strengthened community members understanding of the importance of MHM and positive attitudes towards buying and using reusable locally produced sanitary pads. The demand for MHM products has consequently increased in the communities and family members, including men, have started to purchase them. Increased interest has encouraged local NGOs and community groups to buy the pads in bulk to distribute them in schools. The producer groups manufactured a total of 27,818 pads, out of which 93% were sold.

Improved product design skills have enhanced the quality of the pads and their packaging as well as enabled the product portfolio to expand to facemasks, diapers, and underwear<sup>12</sup>. This has led to increased sales of the products and income for the producer groups.

The project also continued its collaboration with local schools, constructing and supplying MHM rooms at 11 schools through a community managed approach. This has assisted a total of 9,010 girl pupils and 161 female teachers to take care of their personal hygiene, particularly during menstruation.

### **3.1.3 Outcome 3: Civil society actors engage and mobilise others for girls' rights**

The aim of Outcome 3 is to mobilise civil society actors to work towards gender equality and girls' rights. Three outputs or strategies are expected to contribute to this change. They include i) the capacity building of project implementing partners and other partner organisations on relevant topics; ii) mobilisation and joint action between existing civil society networks, CSOs and CBOs, and iii) the involvement of youth in planning and implementation of civil society action towards gender equality and the promotion of SRHR.

At least 62 civil society actors were actively involved in the programme in 2020<sup>13</sup>. The share of active civil society actors at different locations and levels varied greatly, as in some regions COVID-19 limited their activity more than in others. For instance, in Uganda, 29 out of the 30 implementing civil society partners were able to keep active, whereas about a fifth (20 out of 104) of Ethiopia's vast civil society network involved could remain functional throughout the year. The projects work with CSOs and other partner organisations to leverage the impact of their work in different context specific ways. The number of involved civil society actors varies a great deal between the projects as well; from 104 in Ethiopia to two in Laos,

<sup>12</sup> The production groups manufactured 16363 facemasks and 2725 pairs of womens' underwear in 2020.



whereas Myanmar does not have a specific outcome or targets set for civil society engagement. Plan is still establishing itself as a SRHR actor in Myanmar and has started networking – in 2020 the project engaged with INGOs, CBOs and the Regional Health Department to be part of a network supporting the national AIDS program and coordination around SRHR and an adolescent-friendly approach in health services. The team also networked to draw up a joint action plan for promoting SRHR in the communities.

### THE PROGRAMME WORKED WITH 62 DIFFERENT TYPES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND SRHR.

The fact that civil society actors were able to stay functional, adapt, and find and create new ways of working in the exceptional time indicates their resilience and strengthened capacity. The share of implementing partners meeting targets set in their capacity building plans increased, standing at 78% in 2020 according to capacity assessments<sup>14</sup>. The programme also supported 29 out

of the 36 implementing partner organisations in terms of their identified critical capacity gaps. Training was given, for example, on disability inclusion (DI), digital data collection tools, results-based management, and administration. The CSOs and CBOs clearly benefit from the programme in terms of strengthened organisational capacity. Meeting the targets of their capacity building plans will also set the CS partners on long-term trajectories in their work. For instance, in Laos, the partnering CSOs finalised organisational advocacy plans, which will support their advocacy henceforth.



In Ethiopia, civil society actors advocated for youth friendly SRH services and the access of children with disabilities to school, which both are reported to have improved<sup>15</sup>. Collaboration between CSOs, CBOs and government actors to end discriminatory practices against girls and young women was enhanced at the district level as a result of a newly established network. The Ministry of Woman and Children affairs supported adolescents to take part in the network, and youth were invited to a committee meeting to discuss and talk about the issues that affect their SRHR and position. An action plan was established based on the discussion to coordinate and fill gaps.

In Laos, the partner CSOs, the GDA and the Promotion of Family Health Association (PFHA), advocated actively for gender equality and SRHR at multiple levels. There was, however, less awareness raising activities directed to communities or public advocacy events in 2020 than originally planned, due to COVID-19. Plan and the GDA also engaged with the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC) to support the state party response to CEDAW recommendations on improved health and education status of girls and women in Laos. Through this engagement, both Plan and the GDA advocated with NCAWMC for opening access to safe abortion. A new decree has been drafted to this effect and will be put to the National Assembly for approval in 2021. The project partners are following the situation closely.

<sup>13</sup> This is around 69% of the whole network of involved CS actors, which is comprised of a variety of actors: more established CSOs, smaller CBOs, youth-led movements, international organisations, etc. Some act as implementing partners in the programme, some are more loosely linked e.g. through joint advocacy.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the assessments were completed only in 2019, so 2020 is the first year it is possible to report the number on the programme level. The share of partners meeting the targets set in their capacity building plans increased, for example from 67% to 97% in Uganda and from 50% to 76% in Mozambique from 2019 to 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Evidence deriving from school monitoring visits and discussions with the school management committees.

In Mozambique, the 11 CSOs (of which 5 are organisations for persons with disabilities) of the SRHR network built by the project were able to exchange experiences and best practices on targeting adolescents and youth during the pandemic through virtual meetings, even if the COVID-19 challenged the implementation of the planned joint activities. Adolescents in the communities were reached and mobilised, for instance by mobile campaigns that raised awareness of GBV, girls' rights and the provision of SRH services. The partner organisations also shifted the focus of their work to simultaneously act on preventing the pandemic and promote SRHR related topics, but the emphasis was often on the former. For instance, the community theatre groups recorded open scenes and radio spots with messages on preventing the spread of infections, SRH topics and the prevention of early marriages.

In Uganda, there is an active network of 29 CSOs and CBOs who implement the project and are also engaged in joint advocacy activities. For instance, the local government, police, health workers, civil servants in health and education sectors and cultural and religious leaders have been addressed about issues affecting SRHR and the wellbeing of youth. Some of the CBOs take part in youth coalitions that are present in all the sub-counties of the project. The coalitions raised issues such as the youth friendliness of services, ensuring washrooms for girls in state primary schools, and livelihood support also reaching the youth of parish committees to be included in their development plans.

### 3.1.4 Outcome 4: Government and local authorities place a higher priority on adolescent SRHR

Outcome 4 supports the capacity of local authorities and service providers to put adolescent-friendly inclusive public SRH services in place and promotes advocacy work towards laws and policies that support the realisation of gender equality and SRHR at the local and national levels.

The programme continued to support local authorities and service providers' capacities around adolescent friendly SRH services and their provisions. During the year, 37<sup>16</sup> service units or facilities were supported in these themes. According to a health care providers' self-evaluation, understanding of adolescent-friendly and inclusive SRH services stayed on an improving trajectory: of the 131 SRH service providers who took part in the self-assessment, 92% self-reported as being able to recognise and respect the diversity of youth and their specific needs – an increase of 6% from the year before. This result is also supported by the increase in the share of adolescents in the target areas who perceive SRH services as friendly (see more in Chapter 3.1.1).

**92% OF SRH SERVICE PROVIDERS  
REPORTED THAT THEY RECOGNISE AND  
RESPECT THE DIVERSITY OF YOUTH  
AND THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS.**

The understanding was also shown as a commitment of service providers in striving to provide adolescent friendly services in practice. Provision of services used the most by adolescents, such as contraceptives, STI and pregnancy testing, were available even during COVID-19. Many of the health facilities have arranged separate rooms for adolescents to discuss sensitive SRHR issues with privacy. 57% of the service providers surveyed reported that adolescents always have privacy (in that no one can e.g. overhear the discussions) at the centres. Most notably, the share of respondents who reported there not being any privacy decreased by 10% (from 21% in 2019 to 11%). When juxtaposing these results to the answers of the surveyed youth, among which the proportion who reported services having enough privacy and confidentiality stood high and increased slightly from last year (from 78% in 2019 to 81%), it seems that this aspect of the services has indeed improved.

Another area worth highlighting is the increase in the number of health care providers who consider staff being comfortable to provide services to diverse youth. It was considered that readiness and comfortability to serve youth with disabilities had especially increased (from 45% in 2019 to 55%). Similar increases applied to all category of adolescents specified (e.g. different ethnic groups), although less drastically, with the stark exception for LGBTIQ+ youth: the perceived comfortability level of staff to serve youth who belong to a sexual and/or gender minority remained relatively low (35%), displaying a big contrast between Laos (90%) and the African countries (11%)<sup>17</sup>. This was expected, as training on LGBTIQ+ needs has only been possible to conduct in Laos and, to a limited extent, in Mozambique, but not in Ethiopia or Uganda due to their restrictive legislations on LGBTIQ+ rights.

<sup>16</sup> The number increased from 32 in 2019 as five new units were included in Uganda in 2020. Also, for instance in Ethiopia, approximately five health posts per one centre are supported.

<sup>17</sup> Including in this case only Ethiopia and Mozambique, as this question was not asked in Uganda.



In addition to improving the services' friendliness, relevance, and approachability to adolescents, the health care providers went out of their way to reach adolescents as well as to address the issues affecting them. For instance, the service providers in part of the project areas in Ethiopia started taking measures to address GBV by strengthening referral systems within health facilities, whereas devoted outreach was done in Mozambique and Uganda to reach adolescent in remote areas e.g. through mobile brigades.

Influential advocacy and collaboration with administrations and governments at different levels was also done around adolescents' SRHR services. In Ethiopia, the programme supported the preparation and circulation of a government action plan for adolescent friendly service provision in one of the project regions. In Laos, the project has partnered with UNFPA to strengthen the relationship with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to support adolescent friendly health service (AFHS) training. The MoH also revised their strategy and action plan on reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health services in 2020 (approval pending), demonstrating an increased emphasis on adolescent health. In Myanmar, Plan also contributed to the national sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health strategic plan (currently pending) through engaging the technical core groups. SRHR is one of the key principles to all health care services nationwide in the plan.

Although COVID-19 heavily impacted administration and governance at different levels (making it understandably a top priority) and many processes were delayed or put on hold due to it – for instance, in Uganda the review of the adolescent SRH (ASHR) Services Standards and guidelines developed in 2019 – some policy developments relating to ASRHR still took place. Perhaps the most notable development regarded CSE in Laos, where the government incorporated the revision of the lower secondary school curriculum to include a new CSE curriculum (followed by advocacy and technical support led by UNFPA and Plan). This will enable incorporating CSE in secondary school textbooks. The project started to roll out the curriculum in late 2020, and, with the relevant ministry, began to provide training, and resource materials for teachers and other relevant staff.



### **3.1.5 The effect of COVID-19 on achieved and planned results of the SRHR projects**

The COVID-19 was the main challenge for the programme in 2020. A report on the anticipated effect of the pandemic on achieved and planned results was provided for the MFA in October. This chapter reflects on the effect on the outcomes of the SRHR projects as well as analyses how well the anticipation was realised. Most importantly, it lays out the effects of COVID-19 and how project implementation was adjusted.

It needs to be noted that the COVID-19 negatively impacts our target groups beyond changes in the programme implementation as the shock and stresses caused by it threatens the progress towards SRHR made so far in the target regions. These include the general effects of lockdowns, interruptions in education, disruptions of protective community structures such as the school system or community-based child protection mechanisms, stress caused by severe economic challenges and health concerns that create a complex crisis.

In complex crises, girls and women are often more profoundly affected. Social norms, discrimination, and harmful behaviours that negatively affect girls and their ability and opportunities to realise their sexual and reproductive rights may become more prevalent even in contexts where improvements and progress have happened. In addition, access to and availability of SRH services for adolescents may be limited as clinical

staff might be preoccupied by responding to the crisis and may lack items such as contraceptives, MHM products, medication, and protective equipment due to supply chain disruptions. Restrictions on movement and fear of exposure to COVID-19 prevented adolescents from accessing or even seeking SRHR services, including information and counselling. The lockdown measures and economic impact of the pandemic have created increased risk for GBV in particular. The full impacts are yet to unfold, and they will most likely have long-lasting effects.

It was anticipated that all projects would experience some changes and that planned results would not necessarily be achieved at least to some extent. Most significantly the situation was expected to hamper achieving targets in Mozambique. It is true, at least according to the monitoring survey data, that comparing to the previous reporting round, there were decreases in most of the indicator values for Mozambique, whereas the projects in other locations were able to meet targets, and the programme to make progress in total (apart from Myanmar where the COVID-19 restriction measures were still in place at the end of 2020 and many project activities have been adjusted, postponed or cancelled altogether due to the pandemic and political instability). While alternative ways of working allowed the mitigation of the effects of the pandemic and restrictions and the continuation of implementation, offices, however, note that coping with the crisis and adapting to new ways of working and engaging with the project activities takes time, flexibility, and new capacities. COVID-19 did not end in 2020 either, but is still affecting programme implementation, people, and societies in 2021, and most likely beyond<sup>18</sup>.



### Outcome 1

One of the programme strategies most disrupted by the pandemic and its prevention measures was collaboration with schools. School closures in all the programme countries and their only gradual opening made it difficult to reach children and adolescents in school with SRHR information and services, generally the primary approach to most projects. Restrictions on movement and public gatherings also made it challenging to reach out-of-school adolescents as well as to establish new, alternative ways of delivery. This means that various training sessions on SRHR, peer-to-peer group meetings and support and awareness raising events planned for 2020 were not conducted as planned. The need to develop alternative ways to reach adolescents varied between countries according to the situation with the school closures. In Laos schools re-opened after only two months, so activities remained quite unaffected, albeit with delays in implementation. The school closures affected Mozambique particularly, as implementation there has heavily relied on activities in schools, which remained closed. In Uganda, schools were also closed from March onwards (for other than the candidate classes) ceasing the PSG work which has been used to introduce CSE themes in schools as sexuality education is restricted.

Project staff brainstormed and tested alternative ways to reach adolescents. Peer-to-peer group sessions were organised separately for smaller groups. In Myanmar, the project recruited youth facilitators and trained them online to enable them to deliver SRHR information and arrange activities in the communities. In Mozambique, the community radio established by the project was instrumental for disseminating information and calls to action. In Laos, where schools opened early on, the project increased the number of

<sup>18</sup> Alongside with other crises in some of the programme areas, such as the military coup in Myanmar.



sessions on SRHR in schools to make up for lost time during closure. In Uganda, adolescents were reached *inter alia* at village water points. In Ethiopia university students who were at home due to COVID-19 formed volunteer groups that aimed at sensitising girls and boys through provision of IEC (Information, Education and Communication)/BCC (Behavioural Change Communication) materials with loudspeakers. Their messages raised youth awareness of COVID-19 as well as SRH issues in the community.

Despite the challenges, the programme succeeded in reaching adolescents in the villages and communities, which resulted in an even bigger volume of directly reached youth than normally. To some extent the engagement has however been perhaps less intense than what would have been possible to achieve with the more focused and enduring strategies, such as the PSG.

## Outcome 2

For most projects, implementation was halted between March and September due to restrictions on meetings, public gatherings, and movement. Activities such as community dialogues, parents support groups, VSLAs and awareness raising events used to collaborate with communities were not conducted during this time.

Instead, the projects collaborated with local child protection committees, government-lead task forces and police, and broadcasted discussions and messages on gender equality and girls' rights on community radio. Messages on gender equality, SRHR, the prevention of GBV and child marriage were also integrated and mainstreamed in COVID-19 health communications through accessible channels e.g., radio and other media and using megaphones on market days. In Laos, the efforts to raise awareness among parents and village leaders on the importance of girls' education was increased to counter the economic stress of COVID-19 on household income and the effect it may have of girls' schooling. In addition, the budget was repurposed to create a support fund for parents from poorer households to keep sending their daughters to school, with focus on girls in vulnerable situations.

Activities such as community dialogues in Mozambique, supporting income security and resilience especially for girls through business development in Uganda and hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessments as part of climate resilience work in Ethiopia were able to resume when the restrictions relaxed in the autumn.

Working with community health activists proved a successful approach to engage a wide group of people in the promotion of gender equality in times of crisis. In contexts with strict restrictions, such as in Myanmar, the project was able to run awareness raising sessions for small groups of community members using booklets developed on SRHR, gender equality and disability inclusion.

As big public gatherings were not allowed and schools were closed, raising community awareness on MHM and local, reusable sanitary pads was difficult. The project adjusted its approach and focused on supporting the members of local sanitary pad associations and health extension workers to disseminate information in the communities in collaboration with local authorities. The distribution of pads was also integrated in the COVID-19 response in many of the programme areas and with its support. For instance, in Ethiopia, the programme supported the government response which contributed to 2,900 adolescent girls and young women in vulnerable situations benefitting from the provision of sanitary pads. The programme also collaborated with the COVID-19 taskforce in Uganda to distribute pads to women and girls in lockdown. Information about menstruation was also shared at village water points in Uganda. MHM provides an access point for also discussing the more delicate SRHR issues.

## Outcome 3

Working through a network of local partners proved quite successful, as CBOs in particular are situated inside the communities and are easy for people to reach despite restrictions on movement and public gatherings. In some contexts, capacity building continued through an adapted mentorship approach.

CSOs and CBOs were active in taking part and supporting local authorities and task forces responding to and preventing COVID-19. They continued mobilising communities and leaders, and raised awareness on gender equality, girls' rights and SRHR throughout the crisis. Local CSOs and CBOs including the partner organisations were also active in advocating for SRHR services and prevention and protection from GBV among community members and the COVID-19 task forces and responders. This work also included establishing or maintaining hotlines for reporting GBV and child abuse e.g. in Mozambique. In Laos, organisations in the Adolescent Girls Working Group including Plan and UNFPA put forward recommendations to the government to counter COVID-19's economic impact on girls' rights. Nevertheless, many meetings, consultations, joint reviews and training sessions among local CSOs, CBOs and government actors were not possible to be organised.

## Outcome 4

The effect of COVID-19 on work done to achieve outcome 4 varied between the countries. In Laos, the work was not greatly disrupted. In Ethiopia, clinical staff and health workers in the project areas were to a large extent preoccupied with responding to COVID-19 and therefore less attention was paid to other services, including SRH services. Lack of SRH service provision was expected to affect results under this outcome. However, the situation varied a great deal within Ethiopia as well, and a substantial increase in adolescents' use of SRH services were reported in some of the areas (see more in Chapter 3.1.4.) In Uganda, the work was temporarily interrupted and regular monitoring and support visits to health facilities, for example, were not conducted to minimise transmission, but the project was able to catch up with the activities later in the year.

Some of the projects were able to continue with adapted capacity building and training of health workers and community health activists to ensure continuation of SRH services and that the needs of adolescents and women were addressed in the COVID-19 response. In Myanmar, virtual workshops on AYFS for health care providers assigned for the 10 project villages were organised. Some also provided supplies, such as contraceptives, hand washing materials, sanitisers etc.

Many network, coordination or steering committee meetings related to SRHR and gender equality between government, service provider and civil society actors were postponed as authorities were preoccupied with and prioritising the COVID-19 response. The projects supported governments in responding to the crisis by ensuring that SRHR and gender equality considerations were taken into account in the response and mainstreamed e.g. through messaging. Meetings with authorities and INGOs were successfully held online, and local coordination groups moved their meetings outside.



## Disability Inclusion

The programme trained health staff, distributed hygiene materials, and supported communities on inclusive COVID-19 prevention. With the support of Light for the World (LftW), an international disability and development organisation, the programme shared disability inclusive COVID-19 materials including posters, video, and voice clips in Uganda. In Ethiopia, the project response supported 452 persons with disabilities (197F/255M) through IEC materials, awareness sessions and IGA support. Inclusive information was shared through multiple channels including loudspeakers, printed material and visual presentations. In Mozambique, 10 OPD members were trained on COVID-19 preventive measures. The project sensitised teachers and families on how to support continuity of education of children with disability during the pandemic. Under the response, 111 families with members with disabilities were provided basic food items and 186 families provided with a hygiene kit.



## Covid response

During the calendar year 2020 a total of € 757,891 was allocated to COVID-19 response. The amount was distributed to all development projects depending on the need of each country office. Funds were quickly redirected to support the COVID-19 response in collaboration with local authorities. Preventive measures included e.g. messaging on SRHR, the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of GBV through various media, alongside with dissemination of COVID-19 preventive messages, and the distribution of cleaning and hygiene materials. In Mozambique, the programme collaborated with the Ministry of Education to train teachers in distance education methodologies, provided technical and financial support to produce learning materials for home-learning and delivery of lessons through the community radio established earlier by the project.



Some funds were also repurposed to complement the MFA funded humanitarian project to integrate COVID-19 awareness and preventive activities to the ongoing work to reduce child mortality and morbidity in children under five and pregnant and lactating women in Ethiopia. The project was implemented in 5 districts located in Amhara (the Telemet, Dehana and Sehal districts) and Oromia region (the Bule Hora and Birbirssa Kojow districts). During the 3.5-month implementation period, 138,047 people (82,900F/55,147M) were reached through different activities addressing COVID-19 awareness creation and regular hygiene and sanitation promotion activities, capacity building of health professionals and by provision of hygiene items.

In-service training on COVID-19 prevention and hygiene and sanitation messaging was provided to 32 (13F/19M) health workers, 143 female health extensions workers and 476 (144F/332M) social workers. In addition, core water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) items such as soap, sanitiser, gloves and masks were purchased and distributed to 52 health facilities to enable them to resume their daily services. Additionally, 52 child-friendly hand washing facilities were installed at those health posts. At the household level particularly, adolescent girls' rights were addressed by providing dignity kits for 335 girls. The good coordination and collaboration between Plan International and the government offices as well as other NGOs and UN Agencies ensured successful implementation of the project and secured that the project addressed community needs and was in line with the response plan.

Total expenses of the COVID-19 response incurred during the year were € 671,055. In some contexts, the lockdowns and other restrictions also delayed the implementation of the response activities.



### 3.2 YOUTH INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The programme includes two projects designed to increase the capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship, and life skills of vulnerable urban youth in Uganda and Ethiopia. SmartUp Factory Hubs are spaces where young people learn crucial life and employment skills and have access to mentoring, peer support and a much-needed self-esteem boost that helps them find their place in the job market.

Three cohorts of students, a total of 104 youth (41 F/63 M), completed the full SmartUp Factory programme in Ethiopia in 2020. What is remarkable is that the youth mentors (alumni of the programme specifically selected to work as mentors in the hubs) are showing a great initiative in managing the hubs. They have developed their skills and confidence to influence the community, identify challenges and provide solutions. For instance, they organised COVID-19 awareness campaigns and developed messages, voice recording, and animation videos for disseminating information both in the streets and online. Some mentors continued working at the hubs and organised peer to peer discussions for small groups which helped the youth to manage stress during lockdowns. The mentors also organised online classes which enabled training a larger number of youths.

A third SmartUp Factory hub was opened in Ethiopia in 2020 despite COVID-19. However, as the pandemic hit the capital city hard, the hub was opened in Bahir Dar in Amhara instead of Addis Ababa as had been planned. This also brought the hub closer to the SRHR MBMF project in Ethiopia. The Amhara hub was not yet fully operational in 2020, but a five-day-long introduction course on business skills was provided to 150 (90 F/60 M) adolescents and youth. The hub also started to prepare collaboration with primary schools in the area for establishing coding clubs for girls.

**THIRD SMARTUP FACTORY HUB  
WAS OPENED IN ETHIOPIA  
IN 2020 DESPITE COVID-19.**

In Uganda, a total of 1,022 youth (588 F/434 M) students graduated from the SmartUp Factory training. This is a great achievement when taking into consideration that the project trained fewer cohorts than normal due to COVID-19 restrictions. The training hours per day were shortened due to curfews and sessions were organised outdoors as much as possible. The project provided tents, extra chairs, hand sanitiser and face masks to the hubs to support safe training.

In the third year of implementation, SmartUp Factory strengthened its relations with the surrounding communities. Altogether 270 members of the communities joined to discuss the activities of the hubs, establish synergies in the community, and address challenges faced by the hubs and the communities. Meetings with communities and especially parents also served as platforms to discuss issues that concern youth and girls especially, such as child marriage and pregnancies.

As the mentors take a big responsibility in the running of the hubs, their re-and upskilling is a high priority of the project. In 2020, the mentors enhanced their skills in report writing, safeguarding, first aid, SRHR and disability inclusion. Including more youth with disabilities has been a long-term goal for the project,



and after the training, the mentors have been able to map out disability led agencies and other institutions in their area as means of strengthening referral networks. Altogether 28 youth (16 F/12 M) with disabilities completed the training programme<sup>19</sup>.

The Girls Leadership Academy and Girl's coding bootcamp are specific programmes of the SmartUp in Uganda that focus on empowering female mentees. The leadership academy approach has encouraged many girls to take up active roles at the hub and as a result majority of the hub administrators are female. The results of the programme in Uganda are visible beyond the hubs as well as female mentees and alumni are leading community projects and taking elective positions. The girl's leadership dialogues in Ethiopia have reported similar results. The peer dialogues conducted on regular basis have supported girls in building their confidence, skills and capabilities as well as helped them speak up about the demands from their families and communities and advocate for their rights and needs.

**FEMALE MENTEES AND ALUMNI ARE  
LEADING COMMUNITY PROJECTS  
AND TAKING ELECTIVE POSITIONS.**



### 3.3 COMMUNICATIONS, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN FINLAND

In addition to international programmes, the My Body. My Future. programme engages in advocacy, global citizenship education and communications in Finland, with the aim of advancing girls' rights and global gender equality, as well as raising awareness of the effects of climate change in the global south, especially from the perspective of girls. As in international work, children and youth are engaged as active participants in advocacy and awareness raising.

The results of the programmatic work in Finland are presented in this chapter. The chapters are divided on the basis of the target groups we are working with: the first covering the work done with children and youth, the second concentrating on educational authorities, the third focusing on the general public and the fourth covering advocacy towards decision makers in Finland.

In 2020, the programme reached 44,480 people in Finland, of whom approximately 13,920 (9,220 F/4,700 M) were children under 18 and 30,560 (19,860 F/ 10,700 M) were adults.

The Global School initiative and youth engagement programme receive core funding from both the MFA and the Ministry of Education and Culture. While this report represents the results in which the MFA is the only donor or the contribution of the MFA is significant, it is not always meaningful to separate the contribution of these two donors. For example, the salaries related to these initiatives are covered with funds from both donors.

<sup>19</sup> This is a great improvement from the preceding year (2019) when 12 youth with disabilities graduated from the SmartUp Factory training programme in Uganda. On the contrary, only one person with disability graduated from the training programme in SmartUp Ethiopia in 2020, compared to 14 in 2019. This is a good example of how disability inclusion is an active process and a systemic change rather than a one-off event.

### 3.3.1 Children and young people promote children's rights, gender equality and sustainable development goals

To bring forward children and youth's active citizenship, Plan's Children's Board (CB, Planin lastenhallitus) offered 11-18-year-old children a forum to learn about children's rights and gender equality and practice influencing in an encouraging environment. Despite the COVID-19 situation, the group was able to meet according to their planned schedule, albeit mostly online. To adapt to the situation, CB focused mostly on online campaigning and small scale local workshops at schools. They also published a podcast series which was launched during Children's Rights Week. CB participated in the organisation-wide International Day of the Girl campaign, bringing up the theme of online harassment by writing an opinion piece on the theme, which was published in ten different newspapers such as Helsingin Sanomat, Turun Sanomat and Kaleva. In 2020 CB's activities reached 2,400 people altogether. 72% of the members reported having significantly enhanced their knowledge and skills required in promoting children's rights, gender equality and the SDGs.

#### **DUE TO THE COVID-19, NEW REMOTE AND OUTDOOR VISIT CONCEPTS WERE CREATED.**

Plan made a positive impact on children in the formal education system through the Global School activities. Due to the COVID-19 situation, new long-distance and outdoor visit concepts were created so Child Rights Ambassadors were able to visit schools remotely or outdoors. The 39 ambassadors reached a total of 6,014 pupils. This was little less than

normally, but on a remarkably wider geographical scope than before: remote lessons were held in 27 localities (compared to 6 in 2019), reaching schools that Plan had not been able to visit before. The remote lesson concepts gained a lot of positive feedback from teachers, and may be continued even after the pandemic. The quality of the visits remained strong, with 91% of teachers in the classes visited evaluating the visit as meeting its targets well.

Plan started a new Young Equality Influencers group in cooperation with The National Council of Women of Finland. It engaged 16 youth to deepen their understanding of global equality issues. The participants received practical knowledge on influencing these through executing various equality actions alone or in small groups. The actions included organising an art exhibition, writing opinion pieces to local magazines, planning a social media campaign, and holding presentations in schools. The young people were supported by mentors from the member organisations of the National Council.

The Youth Climate Group (Ilmastotsempparit) was established in the spring of 2019 to encourage the government to create ambitious climate policy. In 2020, the group offered the 15 young participants the means to learn about climate issues, the impact of climate change on girls' rights globally and learn how to influence policy making. The Youth Climate Group has sent encouraging messages via e-mail, Twitter and letters to the ministers and members of parliament who have addressed the climate crisis in committees and plenary sessions.

**REMOTE LESSONS WERE HELD IN 27 LOCALITIES (COMPARED TO 6 IN 2019), REACHING SCHOOLS THAT PLAN HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO VISIT BEFORE.**

### 3.3.2 Education professionals provide quality global citizenship education

Plan's Global School strengthened the capacity of educational professionals to practice quality global citizenship education by giving in-service training and by producing teaching resources. The teacher training was focused on four topics: 1) children's rights and sustainable development, 2) diversity and anti-hate speech education, 3) gender roles and equality, and 4) global citizenship education and values. The project's target (250 educators) was exceeded clearly, reaching 515 educators and teacher students in 11 training sessions (out of which 6 were face-to-face training sessions and 5 online training sessions due to COVID-19). Three training sessions were tailored for early childhood educators. The online training gathered participants from all over Finland. Out of the education professionals and students who gave immediate feedback, 74 % judged that the training gave them insight and tools for their work.

To also ensure the quality and participatory methods in remote lessons, the Child Rights Ambassadors were trained on distance learning methods and a new lesson plan package tailored for distance learning was created. Consequently, their school visits were able to continue remotely during the pandemic. Several peer-learning opportunities throughout the year were also facilitated.

The Global School maintained, updated, and distributed pedagogical resources both in digital and printed formats. During the 2-month distance learning period, all materials were in high demand and the number of visitors on the website (globalaikoulu.net) grew by 30% compared to the previous year. New learning resources published in 2020 included e-learning material on climate change and girls' rights for independent learning; a teaching resource linked to our photo exhibitions; and school material linked to Plan's International Day of the Girl campaign.





**THE NUMBER OF VISITORS ON THE WEBSITE ([GLOBAALIKOULU.NET](https://globaalikoulu.net)) GREW BY 30% COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS YEAR.**

Also, a new version of the popular Lapsen oikeuksien kymppi book was published in August and raised plenty of interest among teachers. Targeted at 10 to 12-year-olds, Lapsen oikeuksien kymppi is a 10-lesson learning module on children's rights and sustainable development. In 2020, it

underwent a complete revision, and the new version builds on Agenda2030 and the current curriculum for basic education, covering new topics such as gender rights and the climate crisis.

Plan also broadened its materials for different teaching methods by designing a new learning game on climate change and active citizenship called IlmaSTOPeli. The game was released in 2021, but the materials were promoted beforehand in relevant networks such as Educa, the Subject Aid service and through online marketing. 7,000 educators downloaded or ordered the materials.

Global School specialists participated in different networks and advocacy processes relevant to maintaining the quality of the global citizenship education among education professionals (e.g. Fingo, the Ministry of Education, UNESCO, Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto). Upon request, they also gave publishing comments on an upper secondary school geography textbook prior to its publication.

### **3.3.3 General public value empowerment of girls and women and enhancing global gender equality.**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a large impact on Plan's communication work in 2020. Two planned reporting trips to programme countries had to be canceled. Thanks to well-coordinated global cooperation and constant alertness, strong communication products on the link between girls and women's rights and achieving the SDGs, and the position of the most vulnerable people, especially girls, were still produced. Although international news topics were difficult to get through in the media at the start of the pandemic, the analytical expert content of Plan was in high demand. Plan's two research studies gained wide media visibility and the readership of its blog grew.

Plan engaged in active media work and achieved significant visibility by highlighting girls' experiences of isolation and the effects of the pandemic on menstruation health. In the financial year, Plan increased its potential media visibility reach by 30% from the previous financial year.

Plan Finland's communication methods were developed to be more dynamic and diverse, which is visible in its communication channels. The reach of the social media channels was over half million people per month. Thanks to the community of active followers and supporters, the content was widely shared, and people participated in social media discussion around the themes of Plan's work.



### **THE REACH OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS WAS OVER HALF MILLION PEOPLE PER MONTH.**

The Plan magazine, which communicates Plan's achievements and the need for the work to supporters and partners, was published quarterly. The stakeholder magazine (circulation circa 30,000) remains an important engagement method and receives positive feedback on each issue.

The International Day of the Girl on 11 October was a peak in operations. In 2020 Plan campaigned against the online harassment of girls, an extremely topical theme as the pandemic had increased online use. The campaign pointed out that online abuse is silencing girls' voices and depriving their ability to express themselves freely or engage in activism. Information, a video-manifesto, and a global study on the topic were produced, all of which attracted widespread attention. Volunteers and local partners brought the campaign into over 80 cities through 160 different activities such as movie screenings, live and virtual photo events as well as book displays in 111 libraries.

In the #GirlsTakeover campaign eight 14-18-year-old girls took over positions of high-profile leaders in the public and private sector (for example Prime minister Sanna Marin, Aalto University, Futurice, F-Secure and Rovio) for one day during the International Day of the Girl campaign. In 2020 the Takeover campaign highlighted the digital gender gap and the importance of gender equality in technology. The girls taking part in the campaign brought up their opinions during the takeover and according to the feedback given they considered the takeover as the most important role in their volunteering year.

**IN 2020 PLAN CAMPAIGNED AGAINST THE EXTREMELY TOPICAL THEME OF ONLINE HARASSMENT OF GIRLS.**



Plan International Finland's volunteers operated in 12 different cities and online in different channels. New ways to volunteer for girls' rights were developed online, such as Facebook live sessions and Wikipedia activism<sup>20</sup>. Over 400 people signed up for nine different webinars to learn more about Plan's themes. The webinars got excellent feedback and average mark of 4.4/5. Local volunteers reached over 2,000 people through almost 30 events (the amount of reached people decreased due to the cancellation of big events). However, the outreach was wide despite the pandemic. For example, six different photo exhibitions toured 41 cities and reached over 11,000 people.

**PLAN INTERNATIONAL FINLAND'S  
VOLUNTEERS OPERATED IN  
12 DIFFERENT CITIES AND ONLINE.**

### **3.3.4 Finnish development policy supports the realisation of global gender equality, children's rights and SDGs**

In 2020, the advocacy work of Plan International Finland contributed to ensuring that girls' rights and climate justice were taken into account in political processes and decision-making. Plan's advocacy advisors commented on and made recommendations for several policy papers, such as the Africa Strategy, the new Climate Change Act, the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality, the Government Report on Development Policy, the Government's Human Rights Report, the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy, the Bill preventing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and the Government and Parliamentary Budget Decisions for 2021 Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Funding.

#### **THE ADVOCACY WORK CONTRIBUTED TO ENSURING THAT GIRLS' RIGHTS AND CLIMATE JUSTICE WERE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISION-MAKING.**

Plan Finland's ordered study on enhancing gender equality and equity in Finnish foreign policy was finalised in 2020. The study was presented to Parliament's working group on girls' rights and development and distributed to decision-makers and officials working on equality, foreign policy and human rights. The study also supported several meetings with government officials during the year.

In climate justice advocacy, Plan highlighted girls' vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and took a stand to increase Finland's international climate funding. Further mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and a strong Climate Change Act that respects human rights were also advocated for. Plan also supported the climate change case of six Portuguese youth in The EU Human Rights Council.

Plan Finland's advocacy team had more than 50 meetings with decision-makers. The unequal impact of COVID-19 in the global south and between genders was discussed in the meetings, as well as the alarming rise of backlash of gender equality. In addition, gender equal foreign policy, development cooperation finance, gendered online violence and climate funding, among other issues, were discussed.

In its advocacy work, Plan ensured that girls' voices were heard in the work of the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality led by Finland. A webinar for the ministry and Finnish youth was organised to map out the worries and hopes of the youth to influence Finland's goalsetting. In addition, Plan provided insights and views of adolescent girls from around the world considering a gender equal future of technology and innovation to the ministry's officials. Plan's national and global reports on online gender-based violence played a significant role in shaping the priorities of Finland in the Generation Equality Technology and Innovation coalition. Online GBV eventually became one of four areas the coalition will focus on.

Plan International Finland continued to serve as a secretariat of Parliament's working group on girls' rights and development, providing information on gendered impacts on topical political processes and decisions throughout the year in several webinars and meetings.

The pandemic challenged youth-led participatory advocacy, as live meetings with young activists and decision-makers were not able to be supported. Seven meaningful interactions, however, took place between young activists and decision-makers in 2020, in addition to numerous connections between decision makers and the Youth Climate Group, as well as the Generation Equality webinar.

<sup>20</sup> Writing articles about influential girls and women thus creating more equal gender representation on Wikipedia.



## 4. THEMATIC AND CROSS-CUTTING WORK

To guarantee effective implementation of the My Body. My Future. programme across different countries, Plan Finland provides thematic support to project implementation and to Plan International in general. Plan Finland's areas of technical expertise include gender and SRHR, disability inclusion, digital development and innovation. In addition, resilience is defined as a cross-cutting theme, and in 2020 Plan Finland strengthened its thematic expert portfolio by hiring a full-time climate resilience specialist. The programme also has a small component of corporate partnerships.

During the third year of the programme, Plan Finland's thematic specialists supported the programme implementation with thematic training events and general advice. Plan Finland also has supported Plan International's global networks in these areas of expertise with thematic advice and has taken part in global organisational development processes. The areas in which Plan Finland engages are strategically selected so that they benefit both the programme implementation and the organisation from a wider perspective.

### 4.1 GENDER AND SRHR

The promotion of gender equality and girls' rights is at the heart of the MBMF programme. Within the programme, Plan Finland is investing in knowledge creation, capacity building and development of thematic tools for programming in gender equality and SRHR with dedicated technical human resources. The work is conducted on two levels:

1. Supporting country offices in implementing high-quality gender transformative SRHR projects.
2. Actively engaging with the gender and SRHR development work within Plan International globally to support the creation of harmonised global practices that benefit both the programme and the organisation, as well as the wider sector in general.

During 2020, all country projects used Plan International's Gender Transformative Marker to assess how well they are integrating gender transformative approach in practice. The tool is designed to facilitate internal discussion, reflection and learning on the different elements of gender transformative programming. The reflection sessions provided country teams with an understanding on the aspects that need further strengthening and generated action steps for going forward. Common areas for improvement in all projects were working with boys and men as well as strengthening the focus on diversity. In addition, more strategic work on norm change is needed.



During the year, continuous support was given to the country teams on the contextualisation and implementation of the Champions of Change methodology and an internal reflection of the methodology was produced to contribute to the further development of the model. During the last quarter of the year, an Intersectional Gender Analysis was commissioned to get an external overview of the approaches used in the programme and an assessment on how well these approaches address the gender gaps and intersecting needs of adolescents in the different country contexts. The report of this analysis was finalised in February 2021 and it provides the programme with a set of valuable recommendations for future programming and influencing work.

A “Defy Normal” training session was organised in Helsinki in early 2020 for the members of project teams. The training brought together 18 participants working directly in projects, including project managers, thematic advisors, and a representative from the Mozambican partner organisations. The process effectively supported the identification of strategies for advancing norm change and provided a space to share tools to analyse the strength and stickiness (resistance to change) of norms with project staff. The goal of the training was to support programme work by increasing understanding among project staff on how to advance norm change, a critical component for increasing the impact of SRHR and responding to the interests of children, adolescents, and youth in the programme communities. The programme also supported the development of key global operational research pieces on CSE and adolescent sexual wellbeing that are finalised in 2021 and provide findings to improve programming.

To strengthen SRHR and gender during project implementation in the African countries where we operate, a Regional Technical Specialist on SRHR and Gender Transformative Programming was recruited, starting work in November 2020. The Specialist is based in Uganda and provides thematic support in implementation and strengthens the capabilities of Plan and partner staff with training and coaching. Value-clarification training on SRHR is ongoing and country-specific deployments for the calendar year 2021 (in virtual and physical modalities) were also planned, based on an assessment of the needs, opportunities and challenges observed by project staff.

In addition to these specific activities, SRHR and gender technical support was provided to project managers and core implementing staff in the form of webinars, guidance notes and discussion sessions whenever needed, to encourage joint learning and sharing. For example, online sessions on Plan International’s CSE Programme Standards were coordinated for project staff to support and encourage actions to strengthen an enabling environment for SRHR, such as involvement in national technical working groups and advocacy.



## 4.2 DISABILITY INCLUSION

The rights and participation of persons with disabilities is implemented through a twin-track approach that applies mainstreaming and specific actions. As girls are at the heart of our work, the inclusion approach takes into consideration the impact of intersectionality, with a focus on girls with disabilities. The programme continued its partnership with LftW, covering regional advisers for each project. Inclusion work is also supported by a Plan Finland inclusion specialist who contributed to disability inclusion development and coordination in the global Plan International federation.



The increase in capacity to recognise, analyse and promote the participation of persons with disability among Plan and partner teams achieved during the previous phases of the programme materialised well in 2020. Throughout the global programme, special efforts were made to reach adolescent with disabilities and support their participation. In total, the programme reached over 3,000 youth with disabilities directly. In Ethiopia, 314 adolescents (211F/113M) with disabilities participated in SRH and gender awareness trainings and related sharing sessions and 53 adolescent girls with disabilities were supported with increased opportunities for income generation through engagement in income generating activities (IGAs) thus enhancing their opportunities to cover school fees and continue education. In Uganda, in cooperation with LftW, the project increased inclusive communication and awareness raising, for instance through facilitating radio talks on disability inclusion and rights.

More targeted action was done in Mozambique, where the project initiated a 35 day Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) pilot with the objective of supporting inclusion and the rehabilitation of persons, mainly children, with disability within their communities. CBR training was provided to 30 representatives of OPDs, the Child Protection Committee (CPC) and the local government. The CBR pilot reached 233 persons with disabilities including 154 children and adolescents. Monitoring revealed positive signs in the participation of children with disabilities and their support from community members. OPDs and CPC members also linked families with members with disabilities with health services.

Throughout the programme, disability inclusion awareness was also included in community awareness, in addition to gender and SRHR messaging. In Myanmar, disability awareness posters and pamphlets were distributed and Lao language production of the Disability Awareness toolkit was finalised for use by village leaders in community awareness sessions.

The project also supported families with members with disabilities through training on positive parenting and DI skills for 12 parents of children with disabilities in Ethiopia. To support access of girls with disabilities to menstrual hygiene, Ethipad, in cooperation with other actors, facilitated workshops on inclusive construction of MHM in schools and other facilities in the target areas.

During 2020, there was also an increase in cooperation with and participation of local OPDs in the programme. In Mozambique, the project coordinated with 6 local OPDs to promote their participation in community mobilisation and engagement of OPD members in CoC and Community dialogues to support the delivery of SRHR awareness among persons with disabilities. The project trained 30 OPD representatives, the Child Protection Community Committees (CPCC), the District Service of Social Affairs and project staff



members in CBR. In Uganda, the DI and SRHR training was provided to 42 OPD and local government representatives from 7 districts in the Lango and Acholi sub-regions. In Myanmar, the project coordinated with the Leprosy Myanmar Mission to support persons with disabilities and referral systems to health and rehabilitation services. Laos project participated in Disability Inclusive Development Working Group to share and coordinate actions for inclusion.

At the national levels, the project consulted with other organisations to map policies of the Lao government on the rights of people with disabilities, identifying priority policy and framework processes to engage with. Plan Uganda, LftW and the partner organisations met with 43 members of parliament to progress the inclusiveness of the Sexual Offences Bill. The projects also coordinated with regional and local authorities responsible for disability sector across the programme.

### Challenges and lessons learnt

Some of the planned disability inclusion activities were cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. LftW's inclusion advisors' visits were limited due to travel restrictions, especially in Laos and Myanmar. Cooperation with local OPDs was enhanced to highlight the voices of local persons with disabilities, support capacity development and sustainability. However, there are not active local OPDs in all project areas. The stigma surrounding disability prevails, hindering participation of persons with disabilities in activities and services. More out-of-school outreach is needed to reach girls and adolescents with disabilities who do not continue to secondary level education. Based on experience, projects have allocated additional budget for reasonable accommodation measures and upgrading the accessibility of service providers to support the participation of persons with disabilities. All in all, inclusion requires a systematic, long-term and multilevel approach, and the active participation of persons with disabilities.



## 4.3 INNOVATION

The aim of innovation work is to promote a culture of innovation, agile practices and methodologies, such as human-centred design thinking, within Plan International, and within the programme in particular, and explore how a culture of innovation can enhance our work. The approach to innovation work is twofold. First, part of the innovation programming is the SmartUp Factory projects in Uganda and Ethiopia (for more see Chapter 3.2). Second, specific activities are implemented to support innovation in the programme more widely.

The annual SmartUp innovation challenge was not organised in either Ethiopia or Uganda in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions and political unrest which prevented travelling in the countries. In Ethiopia, the previous challenge winners received extensive training on running a business and developing business plans. In Uganda, the innovation challenge model itself was developed to increase the quality of ideas and the number of participants, especially girls and young women outside Kampala. They were also trained on social enterprises and inspired to come up with simple, cost effective and innovative ideas that suits their context. The ideas generated ranged from nursery tree seedlings, energy saving stoves, re-usable sanitary pad making, bread and confectionaries.

The second last version of the Solar Media Backpack (SMB) – a rugged and portable media station which contains a projector, power banks, loudspeakers, a GPS tracker and a solar panel designed for low-resource settings and comes in a form of a backpack – was tested in Ethiopia in early 2020 during annual data collection and feedback was integrated in the final design. The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for supply chains globally which caused delays in acquiring components for the product, but the SMBs were finally ready and shipped to all projects in December.



#### 4.4 DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

Plan International, as other organisations, took major leaps in digital upskilling and adaptation of digital tools in 2020 due to COVID-19. While the planned hands-on support for the CO teams on use of the digital tools was not possible, the global situation created space for learning and strengthened distant support. As an example, the SMB manufacturer Tespack took a bigger role in supporting the country teams via Whatsapp. Although the physical distance between individuals and teams grew, the online environment provided new spaces and tools for collaboration. Adapting to the new ways of working was beneficial to the process of designing the next phase of the MBMF programme and writing the proposal as a global team.

The pandemic also forced the teams to innovate new ways for delivering the projects. As part of the COVID-19 response the project in Mozambique developed distance education processes for primary and secondary schools. This included training the teachers to design and deliver education using different communication platforms, namely community radio, mobile phones, and printouts. In the SmartUp Factory project in both Uganda and Ethiopia, the mentors used online platforms and multimedia to deliver training and mentor their peers. WhatsApp and Telegram were utilised for sharing training content and allowed discussions in groups, and YouTube was utilised for sharing recorded classes. However, many of the youth do not have access to the internet, computers, or smartphones. In Ethiopia, the project provided internet airtime packages to the enrolled youth champions, and they were able to continue the training online. Due to political instability in both Uganda and Ethiopia, internet limitations and interruptions posed additional challenges to the online training.

#### 4.5 RESILIENCE

Resilience is essential to ensure the sustainability of the development gains achieved in the programme. Assessments conducted in Uganda and Ethiopia show that climate change is already visible in the target communities. In Uganda, 81% of the respondents confirm that they have seen changes in their community related to global warming. It is fundamental to prepare the communities for impacts of climate change and other external environmental risks. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 has shown that the capacity of communities to adapt is apparent but limited. Solely capacity building is not enough to address multiple, multilevel, and stratified risks, but structures that uphold vulnerability and undermine the full and equal enjoyment of children's human rights, particularly girls or children with disabilities in poor households, need to be changed.



A three-day resilience training workshop was organised in Helsinki in early March 2020 for members of the project teams alongside the “Defy Normal” training. In the workshop, resilience activities were planned and designed for each of the projects. However, the COVID-19 ironically enough cut short or delayed the implementation of many of these activities. The following resilience activities were nevertheless implemented in 2020.

In Uganda resilience activities focused on equitable social and economic safety nets and resources, increasing adolescents and youth’s adaptive capacity through economic empowerment. 260 out of school girls were trained and have used the skills to improve their situation. The girls formed entrepreneurial groups to run small scale business activities, which increased their ability to decide their future and enhance their conditions and social positions in the community. As a result, 10 businesses were started and run by the girls as a means to support their livelihood.

In Ethiopia, the resilience work focused on improving risk knowledge through Hazard and Vulnerability Capacity Assessments (HVCA). The programme’s civil society partners carried out assessments in 24 highly vulnerable communities in project districts, in partnership with the local disaster risk reduction scheme. The HVCA confirmed that women, children, and adolescent girls, including those with disabilities, are not commonly consulted by hazard risk management teams, making them absent from identifying specific risks they face. Based on the assessments’ results, the communities identified activities to reduce risks and increase capacity to absorb climate-induced stresses.

Ethiopia also continued to support Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) both among parents and within the youth groups. The VSLAs’ primary purpose is to create an economic safety net that helps households adopt positive coping mechanisms during shocks and stresses so that girls may stay at school and avoid early marriage. In 2020, the programme supported over 140 VSLAs in Ethiopia, and 50 of them revised their by-laws, incorporating child protection in their regulations.

Besides working with the saving associations, the project provided extensive support through income generating activities focusing on girls at risk and the most vulnerable families, selected with a criterion defined with local governments to identify poor households. The project channelled IGA to families with children with disabilities. With the support, families could improve agricultural practices, received essential tools for income generation or direct support to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19. (See more in Chapter 4.2.)

An immediate external risk communities faced in all project locations was the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. In Mozambique, it impacted the planned resilience activities the most, as funds were reallocated to the distance education component in response to school closure. However, VSLAs continued to be supported and 208 (138 F/70 M) VSLA members were active in Mozambique in 2020. Participation in the VSLA groups has increased the economic resilience of households. VSLAs also contributed to COVID-19 prevention by producing and selling masks in community gatherings.

In 2020 Plan International developed a new guidance (Pathways to Resilience Framework) for supporting the integration of resilience thinking into all programme and project design and implementation. The framework outlines Plan International’s approach to resilience programming. It can be contextualised for different settings (e.g., rural, urban), adapted for many sectors (e.g., education, health), used across development and humanitarian contexts, and utilised for a standalone resilience programme. While the framework was published late in the year, it was not actively used in 2020. However, all projects were sensitised to it, and it will provide a good foundation for the integrated resilience approach in the next phase of the programme.

## 4.6 CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND ADVOCACY

In 2020, Plan Finland engaged with advocacy work to promote corporate responsibility and to demand that companies respect human rights and gender equality. Plan continued collaboration with Finnish Business and Society (FIBS) and the Fairtrade Foundation in Finland to review companies’ corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports from a human rights perspective. The participating companies were from various industries, such as retail, food, telecommunications and machinery. Feedback was available for FIBS Pro members and the results were presented in a FIBS webinar.

Finnish businesses were engaged in the Girls Takeover campaign as part of the International Day of the Girl. Youth delegates took over the positions of business leaders for a day to raise the voice of girls in leadership positions. Advocacy conducted during the campaign aimed to raise awareness on girls’ rights, gender equality and technology. The youth delegates engaged in discussions on gender equality in game industry with Rovio, cyber security industry with F-Secure and solution development with Futurice. (See more about the Girl’s Takeover in Chapter 3.3.3.)



## 5. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

### 5.1 MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

Building on the groundwork done on establishing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in previous years, the focus in 2020 shifted from setting up and rolling out systems for systematic monitoring towards ensuring and improving quality. All SRHR projects conducted annual data collection independently, with only remote support from Plan International Finland due to COVID-19. This has enabled us to monitor progress towards selected joint results at outcome level in a systematic and coherent manner across implementation and projects for the third year in a row.

The Ethipad M&E framework was updated in 2020, and the indicators on production, distribution and income were complemented with indicators geared more towards knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of menstruation. This process also offered the project an opportunity to test Plan International's global M&E frameworks with standardised indicators (allowing systematic and compatible data collection across the global organisation) launched in 2020. Use of the programme's digital data collection tools was expanded to also cover the Ethipad project, and the country office took the lead in testing and conducting data collection with only remote technical support.

Overall, the annual data collection exercises went smoothly despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the limited and remote technical support from Plan International Finland. Challenges encountered included discarding the monitoring data collected in Myanmar due to concerns over its quality and accuracy<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the data collection exercise served as a learning curve for the project team undertaking the data collection independently for the first time, and Plan Finland, responsible for technical support, gained expertise on pitfalls and the possible risks associated with remote monitoring using mobile phones. This demonstrated well the importance of thorough data collection training and support during the process as well as the need for proper measures for data quality and accuracy assurance. Further areas of improvement identified were the need for increased support to build digital competencies, confidence and creativity in data collection and analysis; strengthened data literacy skills within the whole team to increase usefulness and use of the data collected; and experimenting with ways of bringing and presenting data more easily to staff not regularly working with figures, graphs, charts or big bodies of qualitative evidence.

All country offices participated in a co-creation process lead by Fjord<sup>22</sup> to boost qualitative data collection, analysis and use of the findings. In a series of workshops, main challenges and gaps were identified,

<sup>21</sup> Verification of data was not possible due to the February coup.

<sup>22</sup> As part of the partnership with Accenture Finland to strengthen data driven project management within the programme. Collaboration was a continuation of previous phases that focused on building processes and tools for data driven management and digital monitoring.



multiple ideas for improvement generated and a set of tools developed to support the teams in more systematic preparation, conduct, documentation, and analysis of qualitative information from monitoring. The tools included a process description in form of a journey map, a checklist for preparations, an updated note-taker template and piloting on digital analysis tools.

As a follow-up to the social and gender norm training, the project teams conducted a norm analysis that also included experimentation on the use of vignettes as a discussion and data collection tool to unearth underlying norms and attitudes, with promising feedback from the M&E perspective.

The existing understanding and evidence-base on opportunities, strategies and partnerships for CSE and adolescent, youth-friendly SRH service provision and gender transformative programming were strengthened with three external analyses<sup>23</sup> conducted during 2020. All exercises proved to be good opportunities for learning, exchanging ideas and engaging with external SRHR experts and yielded useful information and recommendations for programming.

Preparations for evaluation of the two SmartUp projects began in 2020 with development of terms of reference and consultant selection. The evaluations were designed to experiment with the outcome harvesting approach to unearth results, appreciate the unpredictable nature of change taking place in youth-led initiatives and create an engaging experience for the projects staff and participating youth. The evaluations will be launched in 2021.

Plans to enhance south-south collaboration and knowledge exchange were partially hampered due to COVID-19 and the organisation-wide travel ban. However, the increased and improved use of digital platforms allowed these to continue with joint sharing and development and at times provided an even more democratic and open access to joint learning platforms, as most events in 2020 eventually took place online with no travel required. These included, for example, the preparatory work leading up to the planning and theory of change development for the next phase of the programme that draws together various people and expertise across country offices.

Plan Finland participated in the development of a global COVID-19 response M&E framework<sup>24</sup> with particular attention directed to disability inclusive monitoring. Plan Finland supported country offices in planning for the M&E implementation and, together with the project M&E staff in country offices, explored and experimented on the use of programme digital data collection tools in supporting the monitoring and data management of the COVID-19 response. This, however, eventually proved to be too challenging a task for a single programme. However, most Plan regions and country offices did eventually have systems up and running to support monitoring for the response.

Finally, Plan Finland explored opportunities for data storytelling with a service design pilot built around the existing digital solutions, combining both quantitative and qualitative data on results and performance. The process facilitated by Fjord resulted in a prototype of an interactive website that informed results reporting, communication on results and Plan Finland's website development.

## 5.2 COMPLIANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Adherence to Plan International's rules and regulations as well as compliance with the MFA regulations is constantly monitored as part of programme management. Plan International's rules and regulations on financial management, child protection policy and safeguarding guidelines, risk management strategy, amongst other relevant policies and processes, are applicable to all of Plan's offices and, for their part, guarantee effective grant compliance.

Plan International's Global Assurance team provides independent and objective assurance and support services to assess and improve on the effectiveness of risk management, internal control, and governance processes. Plan Finland has access to the Global Assurance reports, and it exchanges information about audit and financial compliance concerns globally and regionally. Plan has zero tolerance for corruption and fraud and the Counter Fraud Unit under Plan International Global Hub carries out investigations, if necessary.

A global pandemic was a risk that the programme had not foreseen, and our ability to manage the outbreak of an unforeseen risk was tested. At the outbreak of the pandemic, Plan International crafted global programme guidance to COVID-19 with the purpose of providing support to ensure programme continuity where feasible; supporting the country offices (COs) to make adaptations to existing programmes to limit the risk of infection to staff and communities; enabling COs to support national government response

<sup>23</sup> These included: SRHR situation analysis, SRHR partnership assessment and mapping, and intersectional gender analysis.

<sup>24</sup> The M&E framework was developed to provide guidance, set standards for data collection and to harmonise the response monitoring across the global organisation. It complemented an established process of regular situation reporting across the Plan countries.



programmes to limit the spread and impact; and supporting communities' resilience against COVID-19 and preparing the programme areas to cope with the impacts of an outbreak. The guidance proved to be very useful and facilitated the projects to adapt to the situation at hand so that implementation could continue in all the programme areas (although with varying delay times). Plan International also released guidance to support LGBTIQ+ youth in the COVID-19 responses as well as provided guidance on safeguarding children and young people and preventing sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (PSHEA) during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the responses to it.

Plan International's guidance and tools to ensure ethics and safeguarding for Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (MER) activities was strengthened in 2020. There are now six guiding ethical principles, including considerations for safeguarding, to which all MER initiatives should adhere to. Plan International also approved a PSHEA policy and updated its Safeguarding Children and Young People implementation standards. Measures to strengthen staff's capacity in the theme was taken by making a training on safeguarding children and young people compulsory to all staff. In addition, a new guidance (Pathways to Resilience Framework) for supporting the integration of resilience thinking into all programme and project design and implementation was developed (see more in Chapter 4.5). Plan Finland also updated its programme manual to clear and streamline the programme management processes.

Globally, Plan International has a risk management system and Global Policy on Risk Management encourages all project implementing staff, including implementing partners, to engage in risk identification, assessment, and control over risks. The policy sets out common requirements and definitions and specifies staff and management responsibilities. On a programme level, each project of My Body. My Future. analyses risk and updates their risk matrices at least annually. In addition, a programme-level risk matrix, analysing contextual, programmatic and institutional risks, is drawn up and updated annually. See Annex 3 for the updated risk matrix.

As said, a global pandemic was a materialised risk in 2020 that the programme had not foreseen. Some of the risks that had been predicted also materialised, including political unrest, especially in Ethiopia, to some extent in Uganda and to a graver degree (although materialising mainly after the reporting period) in Myanmar. Many of the materialised risks (foreseen or not) were also intertwined with the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, global anti-gender movements have taken advantage of the emergency to push their agenda and used it as cover for pushing back against progressive reforms<sup>25</sup>. COVID-19 and its restriction measures imposed a situation where civil rights in most countries of the world were limited to maintain the functioning

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ippf.org/news/ippf-members-see-opponents-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-step-pressure-during>



of health care systems and to avoid mortality. For countries with a weaker democracy and transparency of government, there is reason to believe that the situation was used to also shrink the space of civil society purposely. This can be anticipated to differing degrees in the MBMF countries (see more in Chapter 2).

Risks to programme identified for the period starting from 2021 include new risks brought to the surface by COVID-19, starting from the actual risk of programme participants and staff being infected, as large-scale vaccinations are not reaching the MBMF countries at least in the first half of the year. In addition, there are COVID-19 related economic risks to government funds as well as to programme participants' livelihoods, risks of movement restrictions, and, possibly partly affected by COVID-19, food insecurity, economic constraints, and high levels of poverty leading families to opt for negative coping mechanisms. There are currently on-going political conflicts, which have direct and indirect impacts to programme implementation. The risk of political unrest is thus heightened. In Myanmar especially, there is a risk of increasing violence and insecurity including armed conflicts under the military rule. There is the risk, for organisations such as Plan, of not being able to continue working if violent conflicts take place in the project areas. A new risk was also identified as Myanmar's situation escalated in early 2021 – that of Plan staff being exposed to political conflict. This is a risk that is highly likely in some contexts and needs to be managed with the utmost care. One risk that is especially characteristic for a final year of programme implementation (and already materialised) and is thus worth highlighting is staff turnover. This concerns well qualified and talented staff in particular if they experience uncertainty concerning the continuation of their employment. Losing qualified and experienced staff who are familiar with the programme is especially regrettable in situations where the programme is heading to a subsequent phase, as is the case with MBMF.

The most important programme-level risks that materialised during 2020 include the following:

- The COVID-19 pandemic affected programme implementation in all locations.
- The full impacts of COVID-19 are yet to unfold. The school closures have already led to increase in drop-out rates in 2020. The number of child marriages and cases of harmful practices are also estimated to have increased in some of the implementing areas (statistics are to verify these). The global anti-gender movement has also used the emergency to push their agenda.
- Civil rights, such as freedom of movement, were limited due to COVID-19 and its restriction measures. There is reason to believe that the situation might have been used by governments to purposely shrink the space of civil society. This can be suspected to be the case to differing degrees in the MBMF countries. For example, in Myanmar, COVID-19 was used as an excuse for discriminatory voting practices.
- Political unrest took place to various degrees in Myanmar, Ethiopia and Uganda.

## 5.3 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

In 2020, the COVID-19 caused challenges to the implementation and affected the financial aspects of the programme. The nature of our development projects is to work in the communities but during the lockdown there was limited access to our programme areas. Several measures to accelerate budget delivery were taken – reallocating funds, launching new initiatives, and maintaining closer communication with the country offices. However, due to the impact of COVID-19 the expenditure rate was 84% at the end of the year. Comparing to previous programme periods, the expenditure rate has been between 95 and 100% in the third year of implementation in normal circumstances.

Deviations to project budgets have been explained in the financial report. The programme expenditure in 2020 was EUR 5.53 million, of which the MFA funding consisted of EUR 5.37 million. We partially utilised the MFA self-funding relief and allocated self-finance only to the projects that earned earmarked donations during the year. The carry-over of MFA funds from 2020 to 2021 was EUR 942,657. The carry-over will be allocated to the programme budget of 2021 based on needs assessments.

For the financial monitoring of grants, the country offices currently use SAP which is a system designed to deal with complex grant requirements. In 2020 Plan International continued the implementation of a multi-year global project (Y.O.D.A. Your Organisation's Data and Analytics) to improve and harmonise financial management and streamline and digitalise programme monitoring, management, and procurement processes at Plan International. As a result, SAP will be replaced in 2022 by a new ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) solution that merges financial management with grants, programmes, projects, logistics and procurement in an interlinked solution.

# FINANCIAL REPORT 2020



## MFA Financial Report 2020

		Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure vs. budget %	MFA costs	Self-funding	Self-funding %	Carry over
Mozambique	Vutomi - My Life MOZ100056 (259PL149)	540 000	449 865	83	449 865	-	0 %	90 135
Uganda	Nina Amua UGA100359 - I Decide (285PL150)	1 014 000	661 778	65	661 778	-	0 %	352 222
Uganda	Development SmartUps Community Project UGA100387 (285PL147)	226 657	273 794	121	268 059	5 735	2 %	-47 137
Ethiopia	Yene Raey - My Future ETH102181 (238PL151)	800 000	616 908	77	541 034	75 874	12 %	183 092
Ethiopia	Local Sanitary Pad Production through Youth Groups ETH102201	400 000	325 643	81	249 769	75 874	23 %	74 357
Ethiopia	Humanitarian: Nutrition and WaSH	100 000	98 147	98	98 147	-	0 %	1 853
Ethiopia	Startup Factory Youth Innovation Project ETH102219 (238PL115)	160 000	149 027	93	149 027	-	0 %	10 973
	<b>East and Southern Africa Total</b>	<b>3 240 657</b>	<b>2 575 161</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>2 417 678</b>	<b>157 483</b>	<b>6 %</b>	<b>665 496</b>
Laos	Anakhot khong-khoi - My Future LAO100070 (745PL224)	814 000	600 503	74	600 503	-	0 %	213 497
Myanmar	Empowering adolescents to enjoy their SRHR and be free from violence MMR100117	200 634	153 741	77	153 741	-	0 %	46 893
	<b>Asia Total</b>	<b>1 014 634</b>	<b>754 244</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>754 244</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0 %</b>	<b>260 390</b>
Global & Finland	Startup Innovation (998PL511)	35 000	2 014	6	2 014	-	0 %	32 986
Global & Finland	Corporate engagement (998PL514)	10 000	10 378	104	10 378	-	0 %	-378
Global & Finland	Disability inclusion (998PL517)	155 000	128 744	83	128 744	-	0 %	26 256
Global & Finland	Gender and SRHR (998PL515)	160 000	168 789	105	168 789	-	0 %	-8 789
Finland	Global citizenship education & advocacy (998PL501)	445 000	476 810	107	476 810	-	0 %	-31 810
	<b>Global thematic Total</b>	<b>805 000</b>	<b>786 735</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>786 735</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0 %</b>	<b>18 265</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>5 060 291</b>	<b>4 116 140</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>3 958 657</b>	<b>157 483</b>	<b>3,83 %</b>	<b>944 151</b>

FINANCIAL SUMMARY	Total budget		"Expenditure vs. budget %"				Carry over
<b>Programme activities</b>	<b>5 060 291</b>	<b>4 116 140</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>3 958 657</b>	<b>157 483</b>	<b>3,83 %</b>	<b>944 151</b>
<b>Plan Finland</b>							
MEAL & Quality Assurance	110 000	102 206	93	102 206	-	0 %	7 794
Communications in Finland	297 000	291 552	98	291 552	-	0 %	5 448
Administration	661 588	552 887	84	552 887	-	0 %	108 701
Plan Finland programme salaries	487 000	466 081	96	466 081	-	0 %	20 919
<b>Total Plan Finland</b>	<b>1 555 588</b>	<b>1 412 726</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>1 412 726</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0 %</b>	<b>142 862</b>
<b>TOTAL 2020</b>	<b>6 615 879</b>	<b>5 528 866</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>5 371 383</b>	<b>157 483</b>	<b>2,8 %</b>	<b>1 087 013</b>

<b>MFA Financing</b>	<b>€</b>
Transferred from 2019	514 039
Funds 2020	5 800 000
<b>MFA funds available</b>	<b>6 314 039</b>
<b>Expenditure 2020</b>	<b>-5 371 383</b>
<b>Carry over to 2021</b>	<b>942 657</b>

**Summary of Plan Finland costs**

**Quality Assurance**

Planning, monitoring, technical support and programme development	102 206,00	102 206,00
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**Global Citizenship Education**

Global Citizenship Education	476 810,00	476 810,00
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**Communications in Finland**

Programme communications	291 552,00	291 552,00
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**Administration**

Programme related costs of administrative staff	79 688,14	
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Share of administration cost of programme teams	67 669,32	
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Fundraising activities	186 170,86	
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Share of		
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Premises	66 671,06	
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IT	30 787,70	
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Administration cost of management, premises and HR	87 291,41	
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Misc.:Organization communication, donor education public, audits	41 367,29	
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	226 117,47	
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<b>Administration costs total</b>	<b>559 645,79</b>	
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<b>MFA approved administration costs 10%</b>	<b>552 886,58</b>	<b>552 886,58</b>
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Non-eligible administration costs	6 759,21	
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<b>PLAN FINLAND COSTS TOTAL</b>		<b>1 423 454,58</b>
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## Self-funding 2020

<b>1. Project specific self-funding</b>	<b>Donations</b>
Vutomi - My Life MOZ100056 (259PL149)	0,00
Development SmartUps Community Project UGA100387 (285PL147)	5 735,00
Yene Raey - My Future ETH102181 (238PL151)	75 874,15
Local Sanitary Pad Production through Youth Groups ETH102201	75 874,15
Smartup Factory Youth Innovation Project ETH102219 (238PL115)	0,00
Anakhot khong-khoi - My Future LAO100070 (745PL224)	0,00
Empowering adolescents and young women to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights and be free from violence MMR1000117 (635PL225)	0,00
Smartup Innovation (998PL511)	0,00
Corporate engagement (998PL514)	0,00
Disability inclusion (998PL517)	0,00
Gender and SRHR (998PL515)	0,00
<b>PROJECT SPECIFIC SELF-FUNDING TOTAL</b>	<b>157 483,30</b>
<b>2. Project specific sponsorship funding</b>	
Nina Amua UGA100359 - I Decide (285PL150)	0,00
Yene Raey - My Future ETH102181 (238PL151)	0,00
<b>PROJECT SPECIFIC SPONSORSHIP FUNDING TOTAL</b>	<b>0,00</b>
<b>PROJECT SPECIFIC TOTAL</b>	<b>157 483,30</b>
<b>3. Plan Finland self-funding</b>	
998PL406 Quality Assurance	0,00
999PL516 Communications in Finland	0,00
998PL01 Plan Finland administration	0,00
998PL501 Global Education	0,00
Plan Finland programme salaries	0,00
<b>PLAN FINLAND TOTAL</b>	<b>0,00</b>
<b>SELF-FUNDING TOTAL</b>	<b>157 483,30</b>



### About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

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