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Witness:

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Key Points:

1. We are at a time in the history of the world, where there are great challenges and great hope for children, particularly girls.
2. Canada's reassertion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls on the global stage is not only the right thing to do – but the data and evidence suggest it is also a smart way to deliver better development outcomes that have a more sustainable impact.
3. Reasserting Child Protection and Child Rights within Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy is the next step in ensuring maximum results through implementation.
4. Reassert the importance of feminist data and evidence to ensure true downward accountability to people and upward accountability to policy makers, donors and governments.

We are at a time in the history of the world, where there are great challenges and great hope for children, particularly girls

The challenge

Wealth and gender inequality still leave the poor, young and particularly female behind; likely to be denied basic human rights. Adolescent girls face double discrimination because they are young, and they are girls. They are one of the most vulnerable and excluded groups in the world. Globally:

- Women and girls represent 60 percent of all undernourished people in the world¹
- 130 million girls worldwide are currently out of school²

¹ World Hunger <https://www.worldhunger.org/women-and-hunger-facts>

- 12 million girls are married by their 18th birthday each year; that's nearly 1 every 2 seconds³
- 120 million girls worldwide – that's about **1 in 10** – have experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives⁴

Canadian girls and young women face challenges too:

- Two in three (66%) Canadian girls have a female friend who has been sexually harassed⁵
- Only 16% of Canadian girls say they feel completely safe in public spaces⁶
- Three in four (76%) Canadian girls report experiencing gender-based discrimination⁷
- According to StatsCan, Canadian women earned 87 cents an hour for every dollar made by men in 2015 and although 62% of university undergraduate students in Canada are women, they don't necessarily end up getting paid better once they are in the work force⁸

Furthermore, there is a **gaping data deficit** rendering millions of girls around the world invisible because of a lack of timely and credible data. Mostly the data that are currently being collected fail to accurately reflect the specific challenges girls face – and other data relevant to their lives are not being captured at all.

- We may know how many girls are in school, for example, but we do not adequately measure how many leave school for various reasons, including child, early and forced marriage, pregnancy, sexual violence, school fees or a lack of employment opportunities following school.
- Most official sources on reproductive health collect data only about girls and women aged 15–49, thus very little is known about the 2 million children born to girls under age 15 each year in low and middle-income countries.

At the heart of the disadvantage of girls and women, relative to men and boys is **persistent, deeply entrenched gender inequality** and social norms and stereotypes resulting in the lower status and value of girls thus exacerbating poor development outcomes for girls and in turn for countries. Despite hard-fought progress and gains, gender equality is under threat from regressive policies and laws and oppressive social forces in many countries. According to the **World Economic Forum report released in November of 2017 the global gender gap will take 100 years to close at the current rate of change**⁹– and this is unacceptable at all levels. This is a grievous violation of human rights, and we need to stop accepting it as “normal”.

The hope

² UNESCO, Leaving no one behind: How far on the way to universal primary and secondary education, 2016 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002452/245238E.pdf>

³ UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according>

⁴ UNWOMEN <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>

⁵ Girls in Canada: Gender Equality Today, 2018- Plan International Canada survey of 1,002 Canadian girls between the ages of 14- and 24-years-old across Canada

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Women and Education: A Gender-based Statistical Report 2010-2011: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11542-eng.htm>

⁹ The Global Gender Gap Report 2017 http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf

Yet at this time of great challenge for many children, particularly girls, by signing on to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), every government has committed to leave no one behind and realize the human rights of all. Furthermore, we are witnessing a renewed and powerful upswell of social activism by girls and women as well as boys, men and people of fluid gender identities around the world and in Canada to continue fighting for their rights around the world that must be celebrated.

Indisputable evidence shows that investing in the personal, social, financial and physical assets of girls reaps tremendous rewards. **Girls are powerful agents of change**. When they are educated, healthy, protected and empowered – they pull themselves, their families, communities and even nations out of poverty.

- For every extra year a girl stays in school, her income can increase by 11 percent¹⁰
- If all women completed primary education, there would be 66% fewer maternal deaths¹¹
- If women equally participated in the global economy, they could generate additional GDP worth \$28 trillion by 2025¹²
- When women are engaged in peacebuilding, solutions are more comprehensive and long-lasting¹³

In addition, despite the expressed feeling of being discriminated against in many walks of life, Canadian girls aged 14-24 years of age are hopeful¹⁴:

- Eight in 10 (83%) Canadian girls feel hopeful or somewhat hopeful for the progress of gender equality in Canada.
- Nearly seven in 10 (67%) Canadian girls feel hopeful or somewhat hopeful for the progress of gender equality globally.

Non-discriminatory laws and policies though critical, are clearly not enough. The research Plan International has conducted globally has shown us that in order to transform attitudes and change the rules of society there must be a specific focus on power which, today, remains largely in male hands. These unequal power relations often remain invisible and internalized. Until they change nothing else will.

The way forward

¹⁰ World Bank, Missed Opportunities: The cost of Not Educating Girls

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29956/HighCostOfNotEducatingGirls.pdf?sequence=6>

¹¹ UNESCO, Girls' Education -The Facts <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf>

¹² McKinsey & Company: Still Looking for Room at the Top - <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/still-looking-for-room-at-the-top-ten-years-of-research-on-women-in-the-workplace>

¹³ USIP Essential Role of Women in Peacebuilding <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/11/essential-role-women-peacebuilding>

¹⁴ Girls in Canada: Gender Equality Today, 2018- Plan International Canada survey of 1,002 Canadian girls between the ages of 14- and 24-years-old across Canada

1. Canada's reassertion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls on the global stage is not only the right thing to do – but the data and evidence suggest it is also a smart way to deliver better development outcomes that have a more sustainable impact.

Ranging from the Muskoka Initiative to the Feminist International Assistance Policy to the recent G7 Declaration to Educate and Empower Girls in Crisis, Canada's longstanding and continued global leadership and strong reputation in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has been a lynchpin in mobilizing global efforts to tackle maternal and child mortality, child, early and forced marriage, promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents, promote education, economic empowerment, the political participation of women and girls and their role in peace and security. The current feminist vision in international assistance has further sharpened focus on the empowerment of women and girls as an end in and of itself; and means to sustainable development, paving the way for global dialogue and action that is inclusive of all citizens. These are hard won gains that must be pursued going forward **building on what we have achieved.**

As an organization with some 80 years of global experience of delivering evidence-based high impact gender-transformative approaches in development programming that tackle the root causes of gender inequality with a specific focus on girls' rights, Plan International Canada knows achieving the SDG ambition of 'leaving no one behind' requires transformative change not only **in what we do but how we do things** taking gender-transformative, integrated, holistic and well-coordinated action to leverage finite resources. We know, that unless gender related barriers that hamper children, especially girls and women in reaching their full potential are addressed, change will not be optimal or sustainable. Gender inequality anywhere leads to the subordination and exclusion of women and girls, sidelining half of the world's talent, experience and knowledge, leaving societies operating at under 50% capacity. For development assistance to yield maximum impact, it is critical to go beyond improving the **condition** of women and girls to improve their social **position** by investing in girls and women and in bringing about a change in the external barriers that block their way to power!

This means all development programming must be evidence based, designed to build and leverage the inherent power of girls and women so that they can demand and claim their rights, work with men and boys as active partners and beneficiaries of gender equality, work to shift social attitudes and stereotypes regarding the role of girls and women and work to make national and sub-national laws, policies, systems and services gender-responsive and adolescent-friendly. Systems and services that are based on reliable and high-quality data disaggregated by sex and age and other factors of exclusion such as ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation; systems and services that uphold the fundamental rights of citizens by removing systemic discrimination such as protocols requiring male partner consent for accessing certain reproductive health services or the expulsion of unmarried girls from school if they become pregnant; and systems and services that are inclusive of and accountable to women and girls.

Evidence from Plan International Canada's work in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali and Zimbabwe demonstrates the value, and effectiveness of a gender-transformative approach in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) projects that showed clear improvements in not only the condition of adolescent girls, but their position within the community as well. Uptake of critical SRMNCH services increased by almost 20%; women and girl's satisfaction with the services increased to 92%. In addition, the projects contributed to a fundamental change in attitudes of men in terms of shared roles and responsibilities, the perceived value of the girl-child and participation in shared decision-making. Most importantly, a clear change in women's leadership and participation in decision-making was achieved, not only in the community and health facility – but also within the household.

2. Reasserting Child Protection and Child Rights within Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy is the next step in ensuring maximum results through implementation.

Globally, child protection has been a neglected issue. The persistence of violence against children and the systematic violation of their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child remains a major obstacle towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals unless addressed with sufficient resources and attention. Canada is well positioned to address this gap, building on its strong and distinguished history in promoting and defending children's rights and working to protect the world's most vulnerable children from violence, exploitation and abuse; including children affected by armed conflict.

Canada was one of the first donors to recognize and promote a systems-strengthening approach to child protection, through support for national frameworks and community-based mechanisms that protect children from violence. This transformative approach is considered best practice in the field of child protection; and is critical to preventing and responding to violence and abuse effectively while supporting quality long-term solutions including solutions that empower girls and women; engage boys and men as partners in preventing and addressing child protection issues; build broad public awareness and enable systems to take collaborative action. Canada is well placed to champion child protection within its renewed approach to international assistance by driving gender-transformative solutions that strengthen essential child protection mechanisms and institutions from the community to the state level. To do so, Canada should explicitly reference children as a most vulnerable group and place a priority on meaningful participatory approaches to ensure their voices are heard.

Plan International's programs affirm that the power of adolescent-led action is incontrovertible. In Honduras, following a two-year campaign by Plan International, UN partners and young people, the National Congress voted to raise the minimum marriage age to 18 from 16. It also removed a loophole allowing under-18s to get married with parental permission. In the Dominican Republic, campaigners won the closing of a legal loophole that allowed under-18s to marry with parental consent. In Malawi, after a long effort and global petitions, the law was amended to ban all marriage for girls under 18 thus paving the way for girls to pursue their education and economic opportunities.

3. Reassert the importance of feminist data and evidence to ensure true downward accountability to people and upward accountability to policy makers, donors and governments.

Data are the bedrock of good decision-making and the raw material for accountability. As noted above, the gendered data gap is huge requiring urgent attention if we are to be able to monitor and measure progress towards the SDG indicators. Disaggregating data – breaking down information into smaller subsets – is an important way to uncover differences and inequalities between groups. Sex and age disaggregation is particularly important to distinguish and respond to the specific challenges people face during the life cycle in relation to each other. Disaggregation must go beyond age and sex, as people do not fall into homogeneous groups and generalizations can be misleading. Capturing disaggregated data by other characteristics – such as ethnicity, religion, disability, location, marital status, wealth, sexual orientation and gender identity – allows for a more nuanced analysis of how sex and age interact with other characteristics, which sometimes put girls and women at compounded disadvantage. Furthermore, particular forms of gender bias are revealed in the way we measure – or fail to measure – aspects of people’s lives. Surveys are often designed in ways that reproduce traditional gender norms and further minimize the role of women in family and economic life. For example, many socio-economic and agricultural surveys of households are constructed using the (male) head of household as the anchor for the household, and other family members are defined in relation to the (male) head. The assumption that men are most often the heads of household – a view explicitly stated in many survey module instructions and held by enumerators and respondents alike – undercounts women who fulfil this role. Finally, data need to be presented in context. Numbers alone may not reveal the full story. The realities of girls’ and women’s lives can be masked if qualitative and quantitative indicators are not analyzed in a combined and holistic way.¹⁵

Canada is well-positioned to push this agenda given its focus on setting a robust evidence base, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems in its development assistance. However, there is a need for Canada to define and measure gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls results as part of its commitments. To this end, taking into account the several empowerment indices that are in place globally, Plan International Canada would encourage the development of comprehensive measures covering equally changes in the **condition and position** of women and girls. Leveraging its development assistance, work with governments, the International Financial Institutions, the United Nations and civil society to strengthen and centralize data and accountability systems to ensure that interventions are based on evidence and report on investments targeting adolescent girls, including the collection, use and dissemination of data disaggregated by age and sex and, as appropriate, by other identity factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age and mental and physical disability. Furthermore, there is a need to focus on accountability to girls and

¹⁵ Plan International, Counting the Invisible: Using Data to Transform the Lives of Girls and Women by 2030 (Woking, UK: Plan International, 2016).

communities themselves, in addition to Canadian taxpayers, by measuring impact and empowerment in clear understandable terms.

About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. We have been building powerful partnerships for children for over 80 years and are now active in more than 70 countries.

We are calling on all Canadians to **Defy Normal**: to believe in the power and potential of every child and to take a stand anywhere children are oppressed, exploited or left behind and anywhere girls aren't equally valued.

Together, we can create a world where all unleash their full potential.

Our Purpose:

- We work with children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of barriers facing girls and all vulnerable children
- We support children's rights from birth to adulthood
- We enable children and communities to prepare for and respond to crisis and adversity
- We drive change in practice and policy at all levels using our reach, experience and knowledge