

Plan International, Inc.

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT UPDATE OF GENERAL RECOMMENDATION NO. 19 ON
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN BY COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)**

Geneva, September 2016

I. INTRODUCTION

Plan International is a child rights and development organisation that seeks to advance children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International wishes to thank the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for the draft update of General Recommendation No. 19 on Violence Against Women. We welcome this opportunity to highlight some issues that would further strengthen the General Recommendation and ensure that no girl is left behind. This submission treats a select number of key issues; it does not address all of the paragraphs in the General Recommendation.

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL AREAS OF FOCUS:

a. Age dimension

- i. Paragraph 9 of the draft update to the General Recommendation states that, "Gender-based violence affects women throughout their life cycle; accordingly references to women in this document include girls." Plan International welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement of a life-cycle perspective. The General Recommendation additionally acknowledges on several occasions the, "specific and intersecting forms of discrimination" (paragraph 11) faced by different groups of women. However, Plan International believes that grouping girls together with women throughout the General Recommendation obscures some of the specific vulnerabilities and barriers experienced by girls. Studies have shown that the forms of violence to which women and girls are exposed vary according to their age and stage of development.¹
 - We would therefore suggest expanding paragraph 9 to include an explanation of the age dimension of gender-based violence, recognizing the different forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence affecting girls of all ages, and the need for special measures to address specific forms of violence against girls.
 - We would welcome changing the title of the General Recommendation to "General Recommendation No. 19: accelerating elimination of gender-based violence against women *and girls*";
 - In addition to a more general overview in paragraph 9 of the types of violence affecting women and girls throughout the life cycle, we would suggest:
 - Broadening the scope of paragraph 15 to state "...including the evolving capacity of *girls*" (remove "adolescent");
 - Under "Prevention" in paragraph (j)(i), adding an explicit reference to other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM/C), infanticide, and forced sterilisation (cross-referencing General Recommendation No. 31 on harmful practices);
 - Under "International Cooperation", adding a recommendation on trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- ii. Under "Data collection and Monitoring" in paragraph (b), the General Recommendation states that, "Data should also be disaggregated in relation to intersecting forms of discrimination against women". Plan International is especially concerned that girls remain invisible in data. Most official sources collect data

¹ "Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children." A/61/299. United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children. 2006. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/491/05/PDF/N0649105.pdf?OpenElement>

only about girls and women aged 15-49, but some studies indicate that up to half of all cases of sexual assault are committed against girls under the age of 15.²

- Plan International suggests including the following language under “Data collection and monitoring”:
 - In order to ensure that women and girls access their right to freedom from violence throughout the life cycle, it is critical that States parties make efforts to study, systematize and have unified data systems on gender-based violence, including on measures to address violence, reporting mechanisms, as well as data on victims of violence.
 - States parties should work together with all relevant stakeholders to strengthen official national reporting efforts, focusing on filling the data gaps that exist, especially for girls under age 15.³
 - We also recommend that States parties use data from child protection systems on different forms of gender-based violence, ensuring that it is comprehensive and disaggregated.
- Plan International also encourages all States parties to continue to take steps to ensure functioning, coordinated, and rights-based civil registration and vital statistics systems and work towards universal birth registration as part of their efforts to achieve Goal 16.9 of the 2030 Agenda. This will facilitate the continual collection of accurate age- and gender-disaggregated data.

b. The impact of violence against women on children

- i. The 2006 UN Study on Violence against Children found that annually, 133 to 275 million children witness violence between their parents/caregivers on a frequent basis.⁴ This “indirect violence” can have a significant long-term impact on a child’s social, emotional and cognitive development.⁵ Witnessing violence against women can be considered emotional and/or mental violence (as described in General Comment No. 13 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child), and can thus constitute a violation of children’s right to freedom from all form of violence. Furthermore, witnessing violence is a key risk factor for the intergenerational transmission of violence: violence against women socializes girls to believe that they are of lower worth and can expect to be treated this way in adulthood, and boys to believe that they are superior and can expect to use violence over others in their adulthood. Several studies reveal that children who witness violence are more likely to be affected by violence as adults – either as victims or perpetrators.^{6, 7} The impact of violence is particularly significant during early childhood, when gender socialization is most pronounced.
 - Plan International suggests that language on the impact of violence against women on children and the perpetuation of cycles of violence be added to paragraph 10.
 - We would furthermore suggest that a recommendation be added under “Prevention” urging State parties to put in place programmes to support families, especially those with young children, including parenting education, equal care and support for girls and boys, and facilitation of men’s engagement in childcare and domestic chores. These have all been shown to impact on gender socialization, intra-family gendered relations, and the reduction of intimate partner violence.

c. Some examples of specific forms of violence affecting girls

- i. **School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV):** Experiencing gender-based violence in and around schools can have a negative impact on girls’ ability to enjoy other rights, including the right to education and the right to an adequate standard of health.⁸ While there are many forms of SRGBV, sexual violence against girls in and around schools is a central concern. Examples include: teachers who exploit their

² “Secretary-General’s Message World Population Day.” 11 July 2016. http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/SG_Message_-_World_Population_Day.pdf

³ “Counting the Invisible: Using Data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030.” Plan International. 2016. <https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl/counting-invisible-girls#>

⁴ UN Study on Violence Against Children

⁵ “Witnessing Violence Fact Sheet.” Joanne Davis, Ph.D. and Ernestine Briggs, Ph.D. (2000) <https://mainweb-v.musc.edu/vawprevention/research/witnessing.shtml>

⁶ UN Study on Violence Against Children

⁷ “A Study on Violence against Girls: Report on the International Girl Child Conference.” UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre and the Government of the Netherlands. 2009. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/violence_girls_eng.pdf

⁸ “Tackling Violence in Schools: A Global Perspective. Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Practice.” Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. 2012. <http://srsq.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/publications/Tackling%20Violence%20in%20Schools%20final.pdf>

authority and power to engage in “sex for grades” or the waiving of school fees; exposure to sexual violence and harassment during conflict when parts of their schools are used as barracks or bases by armed groups or police; sexual violence due to poorly designed or managed physical infrastructure, including latrines; and attacks against girls traveling long distances on poorly secured roads to and from school.⁹ While there are many ways to address such violence, a four-country study conducted by Plan International with over 4,000 girls aged 15-19 revealed that a lack of adequate reporting mechanisms was a main barrier to ending violence in and around schools.¹⁰

- ii. **Violence against women and girls with disabilities:** Girls with disabilities can often face triple discrimination, based on gender, age and disability. While studies have shown that overall, children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be victims of violence than their peers without disabilities, this difference is even more pronounced for girls. In one study in Uganda, a staggering one in four girls with disabilities reported experiencing sexual violence.¹¹ Although the General Recommendation acknowledges the particular vulnerability of women with disabilities to violence, girls face particularly barriers and violations of their rights: gender-specific neglect, humiliation, concealment, abandonment, abuse, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, which increases during puberty. Girls with disabilities are also particularly at risk of harmful practices, including “mercy killings”, infanticide, accusations of “spirit possession”, child, early and forced marriage, restrictions in feeding and nutrition.¹²
- iii. **Suggestions:** These are just two examples of specific forms of violence affecting girls; the following suggestions seek to address the aforementioned examples as well as all forms of violence affecting girls. Plan International suggests that recommendations be added:

- Under “Prevention” in paragraph (j) on provisions to ban “*all forms of violence against women and girls in all settings*”;
- Under “Protection and redress” in paragraph (a) on ensuring that national child protection systems are gender-sensitive;
- Under “Protection and redress” in paragraph (a) on ensuring that girls have access to gender- and age-appropriate reporting mechanisms that are accessible;
- Under “Protection and redress” in paragraph (b) on providing adequate physical infrastructure (including latrines, road lighting, etc.) in and around schools, to protect girls from violence;
- Under “Protection and redress” in paragraph (b)(iii) on ensuring non-discrimination in financial, legal and medical services for victims of violence.

d. Women’s and girls’ right to participate in the development of solutions to address violence

- i. Plan International would like to reiterate that in developing solutions to address and eliminate all forms of violence, it is paramount that States parties consult with women and girls and take their inputs into account, as stressed by the Committee in General Recommendation No. 23. By doing so, States parties will not only ensure accountability and transparency in their decision-making processes (in line with Goal 16.6 of the 2030 Agenda), but likewise create mechanisms to address and eliminate violence that are both gender- and age-appropriate, as well as adapted to the needs of different groups of women experiencing specific and intersecting forms of violence.

⁹ “A Girl’s Right to Learn Without Fear.” Working to end gender-based violence at school.” Plan International, 2013. <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-right-learn-without-fear>

¹⁰ “Girls Speak Out: A four-country survey of young women’s attitudes and recommendations for action.” Plan International, Ipsos MORI. 2015. <https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-speak-out>

¹¹ “Protect Us: Inclusion of children with disabilities in child protection.” Plan International. 2016. <https://plan-international.org/protect-us>

¹² “Article 6: Women and girls with disabilities.” CRPD-C-GC-3. 2016.

List of relevant sources (including additional sources to those cited in this submission):

- "Counting the Invisible: Using Data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030." Plan International. 2016. <https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl/counting-invisible-girls#>
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