



Until we are all equal

School enrolment rates among adolescent girls have increased in the Geita and Kigoma regions since KAGIS launched in 2021.



The Keeping Adolescent Girls in School project in Tanzania

Eliminating obstacles to a safe, inclusive quality education for girls

In its second year, the Keeping Adolescent Girls in School (KAGIS) project has reached more than **72,500 children** and adolescents and **10,000 community leaders, parents and caregivers** with activities that help address the daunting obstacles that prevent girls from getting the education they deserve.



As part of KAGIS, 500 bikes have been distributed to girls who face travelling long distances to and from school.

Menstrual health labs like this one have been established in the Geita and Kigoma regions.

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THE FIRST WORD Turning the Tide of Education

If you are a girl in Tanzania seeking an education, the odds are rarely in your favour. The KAGIS project is working to change that.

In Tanzania, a girl who dreams of pursuing an education is a girl who has to overcome countless obstacles: household and caregiving responsibilities; poverty; gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage and pregnancy; and a lack of family and community support. Add to this the stigma and myths about menstruation, inadequate access to menstrual products and a lack of water and sanitation infrastructure and you can understand why attendance rates are declining and academic performance is affected. Girls here are caught in a culture in which their education is undervalued and their ambitions disregarded.

“For many years, girls in our community were left behind, because their education was seen as less important than the dowry they could bring to their families,” explains Faustine Lucas Masayi, education officer for a ward in Tanzania’s Geita region. “But with increased awareness, we are beginning to see a shift in attitudes.”



Parents and caregivers of adolescent girls attend a VSLA meeting in the Kigoma region.

A WAY FORWARD

The KAGIS project was created to level the playing field, helping girls access the education they deserve. In addition to providing school materials and bursaries, KAGIS works with parents and community leaders to build awareness about the value of educating girls. It also aims to help end harmful cultural practices (like child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation) that force girls to abandon their education. For girls who must travel long distances to attend school, KAGIS distributes bicycles to help them get there safely. Plus, it boosts financial resources for families by establishing village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), which can help parents invest in their daughters’ education. As a direct result of KAGIS, the dropout rate for girls in primary school has already sharply decreased, from 5.5% to 4.4%.

At the core of this project is the push to transform >

unequal power relations and harmful cultural norms. By involving the government and key influencers from the outset, KAGIS is paving the way for a rights-based approach to girls' education that will endure long after the project phases out.

Funded by Global Affairs Canada and individual Plan International Canada donors like you, this five-year project is on track to reach more than 99,000 in-school and out-of-school adolescent girls.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Through your generous contribution, the KAGIS project is providing girls with an education, which will create a ripple effect of transformative change. When a girl flourishes, she brings her family and community along with her. As we complete Year 2 of this critical project, we are reflecting on the life-changing impact of your support.

In these pages, you'll meet Hellen, who stood at the edge of the road watching her brothers head off to school each day – until something unexpected happened. You'll also hear from young Judyness, who remained passionate about her education in the face of a severe injury that made her father reconsider sending her to school. Finally, you'll learn about "menstrual health labs," which offer a friendly space for both girls and boys, helping break stigmas and change minds. One boy who participated in the project said, "I have learned that boys need to know about menstruation issues too. This will help girls not have to miss school."

Plan International is immensely grateful for your trust in our work and your dedication to ensuring that girls in rural Tanzania receive access to the gift that keeps on giving: a safe, inclusive quality education.

Thank you for your continued support.

Project facts

WHO: Funded by Global Affairs Canada and individual Plan International Canada donors (CAD\$14,697,500), the KAGIS project will reach 96,336 students, including more than 49,174 girls, plus 2,950 girls who are not enrolled in school.

WHAT: Addressing the needs of adolescent girls – such as social and financial support, running water, gender-segregated washrooms and menstrual health products – and supporting them during and after their transition from primary to secondary school.

WHERE: Geita and Kigoma regions, in the northwest highlands of Tanzania

WHEN: May 2021 to September 2026

WHY: The KAGIS project has three goals:

1. Increase adolescent girls' agency to make decisions about their education and sexual and reproductive health, including to delay marriage and pregnancy.
2. Improve the ability of schools and sexual and reproductive health services to support adolescent girls in transitioning from primary to secondary school by increasing access to menstrual products, clean water and toilets as well as training teachers and health care providers to respond to girls' needs.
3. Strengthen local education and government authorities by helping them improve their policies and procedures to promote the enrolment, retention and meaningful involvement of girls throughout their education.



The KAGIS project helps adolescents, especially girls, build their self-confidence and leadership skills.

THE SCENE

Education at a Crossroads

Girls are leaving classrooms in Geita and Kigoma. Poverty, fewer schools and the cultural belief that girls don't need to be educated are to blame.

Soon after declaring its independence in 1961, Tanzania embraced education as a core value, declaring free and accessible education to be a human right. In 1977, Tanzania achieved a significant milestone with its commitment to provide free, compulsory primary education for every child in the country.

Tanzania has continued to make strides, pledging in 2015 to provide 11 years of fee-free education in order to help children stay in school until at least age 18, without exclusion based on gender or accessibility needs. As a result, enrolment rates have increased. But despite this progress, there are marked variations in enrolment, attendance and performance across regions and genders.

DISTINCT REGIONS WITH DISTINCT CHALLENGES

Tucked in the northwest highlands of Tanzania, the Geita and Kigoma regions face significant challenges. There are fewer schools, which means longer distances for children to travel, and a shortage of learning materials and qualified teachers. And despite the country's provision of fee-free education, poverty remains a key barrier to girls' education, as economically marginalized families still resort to child, early and forced marriage and child labour.

Sparse information about girls' health and rights is also a barrier to education. It leaves both boys and girls unequipped to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, which can lead to unintended pregnancies and an increased risk of maternal mortality. To this, add outdated teaching materials that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and myths, including about menstruation. When it comes to getting an education, the odds are not in a girl's favour.

► In Kigoma in 2020, only about 75% of primary-school-age children attended school, which was significantly below the national average of almost 96%.

► In 2020, Geita saw an alarming drop-out rate of 3.6% among primary-school students – more than double the national average of 1.6%.

► In Kigoma, the gender gap in education is illustrated by the Primary School Leaving Examination results: In 2020, more than 82% of boys passed, compared with less than 69% of girls.

BY THE NUMBERS

A few highlights of what your support has made possible over the past two years

1,400

adolescent girls received financial support and other resources – including vouchers for school supplies and bicycles to travel long distances to school safely – to help them continue their education.

43,800

textbooks were procured, improving the student-to-book ratio from 1:8 to 1:3.



Protection Committee members participate in training that equips them with the knowledge and resources to support girls.

277

Champions of Change clubs were established, promoting knowledge about gender equality and girls' health and rights to 7,538 adolescent members.

7

menstrual health labs were established and stocked with items such as brochures, menstrual products and soap.

4,020

adolescents participated in soccer competitions that promoted messaging about girls' rights and eliminating gender-based violence.

2,205

Protection Committee members were trained in how to manage cases of child, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation.

8,353

adolescents accessed sexual and reproductive health information, which included info about menstrual health and how to make menstrual pads.

537

teachers, non-formal education facilitators and government staff members participated in gender-equality-centred training, helping them recognize and address inequities that girls face.

203

village savings and loan associations were established to help families access loans and grow their savings.



Nasoro, a village chairman in Kigoma, volunteered to help produce bricks for a primary school's facilities.

104

health care workers were trained on how to provide equitable and adolescent-friendly care, including how to address gender-based inequalities.

114

community-led action plans were developed to help prevent child, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation.

“A girl’s voice, when she is standing up for her own rights, can be very loud. Her voice becomes even louder and stronger when the community stands with her and policy makers create an environment in which her rights can be fulfilled.”

– Lilian Mmbaga, communications officer, Plan International Tanzania

A STORY OF CHANGE

Blazing a Trail for Girls' Education

A Tanzanian girl's journey from housework to the classroom is a testament to the transformative power of education.

At 14, Hellen spent her days in her Tanzanian village completing household chores and working in her family's fields. Although she dreamed of becoming a teacher, the prospect of an early marriage loomed. Hellen's family held traditional views, believing that educating girls was unnecessary and a misuse of finances.

"I used to stand at the edge of the road every morning, watching my brothers go to school with their friends," she says. "I wanted to go too, but I thought school wasn't for girls. My mom was preparing me for marriage and taking care of the family."

However, a shift was starting to take place in Hellen's community. Working with her village, the KAGIS project held meetings that raised awareness about the value of girls' education and offered support in their enrolment. After attending several of these meetings, Hellen's family began to change their perspective.



Shifting attitudes about the value of girls' education helped Hellen enrol in school for the first time.

A RIPPLE EFFECT OF CHANGE

Hellen became the first girl in her family to attend school. The KAGIS project, along with the education officer in her ward, helped Hellen enrol in a specialized learning program for girls who, like her, had never attended formal classes. This support has provided Hellen with access to an education equivalent to that of her in-school peers, upholding Tanzania's long-held commitment to provide inclusive quality education.

Since the school is an eight-kilometre round trip from her home, Hellen was also given a bicycle, along with a school uniform and supplies.

Today, Hellen's family is proud of her accomplishment – and how her story has inspired 13 other families in the village to send their daughters to school too.

The KAGIS project, with the help of community members, identified 1,429 adolescent girls, including Hellen, who were held back from pursuing their education. Starting in January 2023, 524 girls began classes in the Geita and Kigoma regions. Among them, 250 girls received school materials, including uniforms, stationery and bags, as well as menstrual pads.

A STORY OF CHANGE

More Than Money: Savings Groups Rekindle Educational Hopes

Village savings and loan associations not only foster opportunities for lower-income families to support girls' education but also raise awareness about the importance of gender equality.



Judyness (left) feels that her future is brighter now that her father (right) has joined a savings group, helping her return to school.

Eleven-year-old Judyness was passionate about her education – until she sustained a debilitating leg injury while walking to school. No longer able to walk the distance, she remembers the heartbreak she felt when her father, believing her education would be an undue burden on their resources, decided to end it.

But after joining a village savings and loan association (VSLA) launched in the Kigoma region as part of the KAGIS project, Judyness's father began to see things differently. The savings groups aim to bolster financial support for parents to send their daughters to school, share savings strategies and spark critical thought and discussions about the negative impacts of gender inequality, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The groups also help parents recognize the importance of girls' education and learn effective parenting strategies that are sensitive to adolescents' – particularly girls' – needs.

"Joining this group was initially about savings and financial stability," Judyness's father says, "but I've learned that every child deserves an education, regardless of their gender or physical capabilities."

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

With new-found resolve and support from the VSLA, Judyness's father pledged to ensure his daughter's return to school and began assisting her with the commute. Judyness is extremely grateful for her father's new perspective and support. "My dreams of getting an education seemed to vanish after my accident," she says. "Now, thanks to the savings group and my father's support, I feel I've been granted a second chance. My studies can finally continue."

Under the aegis of the VSLA, Judyness returned to school, successfully passed her final exams last year and has enthusiastically stepped into the next grade, certain that her education is the key to a brighter, more promising future.

A STORY OF CHANGE

Helping Girls Stay in School – Period.

Plan International’s program director for the KAGIS project connects the dots between cultural beliefs and attitudes, information, infrastructure and girls’ declining school attendance.

“If menstruation can’t be well managed, then girls do not attend school,” says Nico Gachu, Plan International’s program director for the KAGIS project in Tanzania. In the communities where he works, girls have limited access to menstrual health information and products like pads and soap, leaving them in the dark about their periods and how to safely manage them.

To make matters worse, many schools don’t have the water and sanitation infrastructure (like gender-segregated washrooms) that girls need to comfortably manage their periods. But perhaps the biggest challenge is the social stigma that girls face about their periods and the toll it takes on their emotional well-being. “Many of us do not attend school during our periods because we are afraid of getting laughed at if we stain ourselves,” one adolescent girl shared during a dialogue session led by the KAGIS project.

Myths about menstruation also keep girls at home instead of in the classroom. In one community, Gachu was told about a prevailing belief that pressures girls to stay

home while they have their periods. According to this belief, if a girl walks on a farm while menstruating, the growth and yield of the crops could be negatively impacted.

But despite these deeply rooted norms and beliefs, attitudes are changing.

When asked which moments from the KAGIS project have left a lasting impression on him, Gachu tells the story of how a young boy responded when he noticed that a girl’s period had leaked through her clothes. “Instead of laughing at her, the boy gave her his sweater,” Gachu recalls.

He attributes this behavioural shift in large part to the KAGIS project’s efforts to foster a deeper understanding about the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents, especially girls, and support for gender equality.

A LABORATORY FOR CHANGE

One significant way the KAGIS project is helping achieve this is by establishing menstrual health labs, where health care workers are specifically trained in adolescent sexual



Menstrual health labs help girls access menstrual products, including pads, so they can manage their periods without having to skip classes.

and reproductive health and rights. These labs are stocked with informational brochures, menstrual products and soap so that adolescents can access resources and support to guide their decision making around important topics like family planning.

The labs also provide a comfortable space where trained facilitators can engage boys in the importance of gender equality and normalize girls’ sexual and reproductive health, helping them become champions in supporting girls. As one adolescent boy from Geita put it: “I have learned that boys need to know about menstruation issues too, so we can help break the shame. This will help girls not have to miss school.”

From Gachu’s perspective, this is what positive – and truly transformative – change looks like. It’s about not only providing resources but also changing mindsets and building a society that supports and uplifts all of its members. Through the KAGIS project, a significant step has been taken toward breaking the silence surrounding menstruation and building a future where boys and girls stand together as champions of change.

Thank you!

Addressing the reasons adolescent girls lose their agency and are forced out of the classroom is fundamentally important to helping them stay in school. Looking ahead, the third year of the KAGIS project will build on the progress already made and scale up its activities to promote gender equality and girls’ rights (including more sports, games and crafts), engage adolescents, train additional Champions of Change facilitators and more.

Thank you for your commitment to equitable and inclusive education for all. Your support is not only transforming individual lives but also contributing to a brighter, more equitable future for our global community.

Thank you again for your continued support.



Through menstrual health labs, both girls and boys learn accurate health information, helping break stigmas.



Until we are all equal



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KAGIS has helped organize soccer leagues for adolescent boys and girls, providing training for coaches and equipment like balls and jerseys.

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About Plan International Canada

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