



Members of a  
Champions of  
Change club in  
Ngong.

## PLAN FOR GIRLS CASE STUDY: CAMEROON

# A United Front

When young people in rural Ngong rally to stop a friend's marriage, their actions mark a turning point in their village's history.

**At the end of her first year of secondary school,** Habiba learned that one of her classmates was facing the prospect of forced marriage. With limited resources, her friend's father had decided it was unwise to continue investing in her education, believing she was better suited to household duties and motherhood.

In a panic, the girl turned to Habiba, 16, who was not only a close friend but also a youth leader with the Plan for Girls (P4G) project.

Launched by Plan International in 2018, P4G was a girl-led initiative designed to support adolescent girls and young women in actively participating

in decisions that affect their lives. Through P4G, Habiba was connected to a network of local youth, parents, teachers and traditional leaders – groups that worked together to advocate for girls' rights and intervene when those rights were at risk.

"I started raising awareness about child marriage and early pregnancy even before it was part of our action plans," says Habiba. She held sessions at school and visited community gatherings to discuss the causes and consequences of these issues. "The situation was really bad," she says.

In Cameroon, 30% of young women are married before they turn 18 and 11% before the age of 15.<sup>1</sup> This reality is rooted in deeply held beliefs that girls are inferior to boys and their primary value to society lies in their roles as mothers and homemakers. Once married, girls are often forced to leave school and start families before they are physically and mentally ready, leading to devastating consequences like pregnancy complications or even death.

“Don’t worry,” Habiba reassured her friend. “We have a network that can help you.”

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“In our Champions of Change club, we talk about leadership and assertive communication. How to speak with our parents and even with the authorities.”

—HABIBA, 16

## Step 1: Mobilize youth leaders

Habiba's first step was to reach out to her village's Champions of Change Club, of which she was an active member. Created as part of P4G and led by trained facilitators, the club brought young people together on a weekly basis to discuss gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights and how to drive positive change in their community. It offered a safe space to unpack taboo subjects and challenge social norms that fuel inequality, discrimination and violence. For girls, the curriculum focused on helping them understand their rights and building their self-esteem, while for boys, it emphasized the importance of being allies in advancing gender equality. By the end of the program, youth collaborated on advocacy projects, deepening their sense of solidarity.

So, when Habiba contacted several Champions of Change members about her classmate's situation, the group quickly understood the risks involved in early marriage. They also recognized that they would need more support to persuade the girl's father to change his mind.

Habiba leads a sensitization session for her peers.



<sup>1</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-in-west-and-central-africa-a-statistical-overview-and-reflections-on-ending-the-practice/>

## Step 2: Call on adult allies

Habiba and her team decided to turn to another group established through P4G: the Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Committee. They sent a delegation of five club members – three girls and two boys – to present a united front and emphasize the importance of the issue.

Each village involved in the P4G project had a Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Committee, made up of eight women and eight men, including parents and traditional leaders. Committee members received ongoing training to help them raise awareness, intervene in cases of gender-based violence, refer incidents to the authorities, and support survivors.

One key member of this committee was Fadimata Hamadou Innawa. As the elder sister of the village chief, she held significant influence in the community. Innawa also served on the P4G Girls and Allies Advisory Committee for the commune of Ngong, where she worked alongside other adults and girls, including Habiba, who were elected by their peers to guide the project and advocate for girls' rights.<sup>2</sup>

"The world has changed," says Innawa, explaining that a girl should be free to marry someone she loves and that both partners must be old enough for a strong and healthy marriage. She notes that her own perspective has shifted since joining the project. "Now when I see things happening that should no longer be happening, I call people to order."

## A sign of change

Within a week of learning about her friend's situation, Habiba visited her home, accompanied by members of the Champions of Change Club and the Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Committee. They spoke with her father about the importance of girls' education and the dangers of early marriage. He listened quietly, considering their points, and finally agreed to cancel the marriage. Habiba's



TOP: A young woman leads a Champions of Change meeting.

BOTTOM: Champions of Change club members stand up for gender equality and youth rights.

friend was overjoyed at the promise of returning to school the following term and pledged to work hard.

"In our community, everyone knows this story," says Innawa, "and everyone agrees that the youth were right to stop the marriage."

Her words reflect a shift in how young people, especially girls, are viewed in the village. Through their involvement in the Champions of Change club, intergenerational dialogues on community issues and income-generating initiatives, they have earned greater acceptance for their advocacy efforts.

"The youth involved in these groups understand the value of education and how to support themselves," says Innawa. "I only wish such groups had existed when I was young."

<sup>2</sup> The Girls and Allies Advisory Committee for the commune of Ngong had 25 girls and six allies, while the larger commune of Lagdo had 41 girls and eight adult allies on their committee.





Youth take part in a Champions of Change workshop.

She has since spoken with the girl whose forced marriage was halted, offering advice and reminding her that the Champions of Change club stood by her and that she must make the most of this new opportunity. For Innawa, being a strong ally means being patient, attentive and available to walk alongside young people as they navigate challenges.

Although the P4G project has ended, she is determined to continue supporting the girls in her community. She also believes that the story of this forced marriage will leave a lasting impact.

“Anyone considering such a decision will think twice now,” she says, “remembering how the youth rallied together to respond.”

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“When the young people need me, they come to me with their problems. And I help guide them on the right way to proceed.”

– FADIMATA HAMADOU  
INNAWA

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