PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Until we are all equal

Measuring gender equality and empowerment in crisis-affected classrooms

Backed by Education Cannot Wait, a Plan International Canada–led coalition is redefining how gender equality and empowerment is measured in crisis-affected education settings.

What's at stake

Change rarely announces itself with a drumroll. It shows up in smaller ways: a girl who finally raises her hand; a head teacher who rearranges timetables so market days no longer interfere with attendance; a parent who decides that marriage can wait because learning can't. These are real shifts in power and possibility, but most monitoring systems don't catch them.

That's the gap our partnership is trying to close, and we are doing this with the Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women & Girls (GEEWG) Measurement Toolkit. This isn't a complicated and time-intensive survey that burdens schools or learners. It's a lean, practical set of questions designed to notice what usually hides in plain sight – such as learner inclusion and safety, gender-responsive teaching practices, parental support, and community efforts to make schools fair and inclusive for all.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The GEEWG Toolkit captures everyday gendered conditions shaping learning, safety, and participation in crisis-affected classrooms.

- Early piloting shows credible gender equality measurement depends on co-creation, safeguarding, and meaningful local adaptation.

- Lessons from Uganda are strengthening a practical, globally usable public good for ECW-supported education contexts.

Enumerator conducts interview in Kyangwali refugee settlement | Pazel Conroy Consulting Ltd.

Approach

The toolkit looks at four kinds of change to measure gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls:

1. Access to information and resources linked to education, but also health and protection/violence;
2. Everyday roles and responsibilities in the classroom, home and community;
3. Decision-making and control over processes within families and schools; and
4. Systems and structures that make school feel safe, equal, and inclusive.

Each group sees these questions from a different vantage point. Learners tell us about safety, support, and their own agency and ability to speak up and act on decisions that impact their life. Parents speak to attitudes and the actions they take to promote gender equality and ensure equal access to and continuity of school for all children. Teachers reflect on inclusive pedagogy and school environments, and whether the school stands behind them if they need to report cases of violence in school. Community and religious leaders reveal how norms are enforced in the community, which impacts education. School governance members show whether decisions and budgets follow good intentions and promote gender-responsive and inclusive practices, systems and learning spaces.

ECW's Commitment to GEEWG

"Our commitment to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women & girls in education is steadfast. This initiative translates the elusive concept of gender-equal education in emergencies into contextually grounded and actionable insights, strengthening programmes and policies to address gender-based disparities and the needs of all learners."

Maurits Spoelder, Monitoring Manager, ECW

We're not doing this alone. Oxford MeasurEd brings the measurement backbone, making sure questions are clear, meaningful, and statistically sound without becoming technocratic. A small, independent Reference Group of gender equality and education practitioners and researchers keep us honest and grounded, reviewing items for face and content validity, advising on ethics and translation, and stress testing assumptions across contexts so the tools are usable, not just rigorous.

Figure 1. Four-dimensional model of GEEWG measurement framework

To make sure the toolkit travels beyond a single country, and to ensure it can be used as a global public good, we're taking a three-pilot path. Each round will be run in a distinct ECW supported context, stress testing the same domains with different languages, school models, and service ecosystems. We capture and carry lessons forward after each pilot, refining items, translation notes, and scoring, so after Pilot 3 the instruments are both robust and usable across diverse settings.

Progress to Date

In Uganda's Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, the first of three pilots kicked off in October 2025. AVSI Foundation, our lead implementing partner, opened doors to schools, community leaders and families, working alongside local consortium partners. Pazel Conroy Consulting, our local data collection partner, led field operations starting with local adaptation and translation of the tools, followed up with a comprehensive training and pretesting. Data collection wrapped up by the end of October, which also included cognitive interviewing, and real-time quality checks. Different actors; different strengths; one shared aim: measure what matters to inform better planning and effective response, so there can be sustainable change.

Collaborative Tool Development

We built carefully, and we built iteratively. Before anything goes wide, ECW, Oxford MeasurEd and our Reference Group reviewed all tools and asked key questions: Are the questions clear? Are we asking the right questions to measure the change we want to see? In the case of Uganda, Pazel Conroy Consulting and AVSI helped to contextualize and translate the tools, ensuring the questions were relevant to the communities and made sense to the people who would answer and act on them. They also led the training of the data collectors. Then we sat down with respondents for cognitive interviews, not to audit them, but to listen for misunderstandings, discomfort, or wording that misses the

local meaning. In Kyangwali, we learned fast that literal translations of sensitive terms, such as sexual harassment, menstruation, early pregnancy, can land far from everyday speech. So, we ran language huddles in Runyoro, Swahili, and Kigegere, co-crafting neutral phrasing and practicing it through role plays.

Prioritizing Safeguarding in Data Collection

Safeguarding sits at the center, not the margins. Both parent or guardian consent and child assent were essential before any participation began; interviews were private; gender matching was used between respondents and data collectors for all interviews; clear stop/skip rules were applied if distress shows up; and referral pathways and processes were in place to support with any cases of violence or protection that arose to ensure that participants had access to the resources and services they needed. We also took care of the data collection team: structured debriefs, rotation caps, and optional counseling. Good data never just happens; it's made possible by ensuring safe and inclusive spaces and processes.

Sampling Strategy

Our sampling was pragmatic and protective. We preselected respondents against transparent criteria, assigned unique IDs that linked consent to interview, and oversampled to absorb no shows. That structure exposed realities we needed to respect, complex guardianship, child-headed households, and the role of Accelerated Education Programmes and Bridging classes within communities, which often enroll learners at risk of dropping out or returning after a long absence.

It's important to say what these pilots are and what they aren't. We're not running an impact evaluation; we're testing whether a practical toolkit can reliably capture gendered conditions that enable learning, in real schools with real constraints. Early analyses uses straightforward statistics to flag unclear items and check reliability; more advanced models are used selectively, only where the data support them. Across the 3 pilots, we'll test what holds up from one context to the next so that program teams can compare like with like and act with confidence.

Key Findings

The first pilot indicated that several questions will need to be revised due to social desirability bias in the way they were framed, which led to a tendency for respondents to answer in ways they believe are socially acceptable rather than reflecting their true experiences or opinions. The pilot also provided valuable direction on how to better

cluster questions, so they align more closely with the relevant indicators. These findings highlight several broader insights that are essential for strengthening the tool moving forward:

- **Social norms don't change in isolation: Real shifts in gender equality show up across learners, caregivers, educators, and the school and community leaders who shape everyday decisions.**

- **How a tool is built matters just as much as what it measures: Co-creation, iterative piloting, and continuous feedback are what make measurement tools credible, usable, and actually adopted in practice.**

- **Context isn't an afterthought: Adapting and reviewing tools works best when local implementing partners and Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) actors are meaningfully involved, not just consulted, at every stage.**

Conclusion

Data collector training in Hoima, Uganda | Pazel Conroy Consulting Ltd.

If you work in education in emergencies, none of this will sound abstract. You already know that gender equality is built, or broken, in the decisions people make every day – teachers in classrooms, parents at the door, leaders at the roadside, committees in cramped offices. Our hope is simple: give you a toolkit that sees those decisions clearly, safely, and soon enough to do something about them. ECW's mandate, Plan International Canada's coordination, Oxford MeasurEd's rigor, AVSI and partners' deep roots, and Pazel Conroy's field craft – together they make that possible. Stay tuned for the release of the full toolkit package, but don't wait to start the conversation on how this resource can be applied to your work.

Authorship/Acknowledgement

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Learn more and get involved at plancanada.ca

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