



Until we are all equal



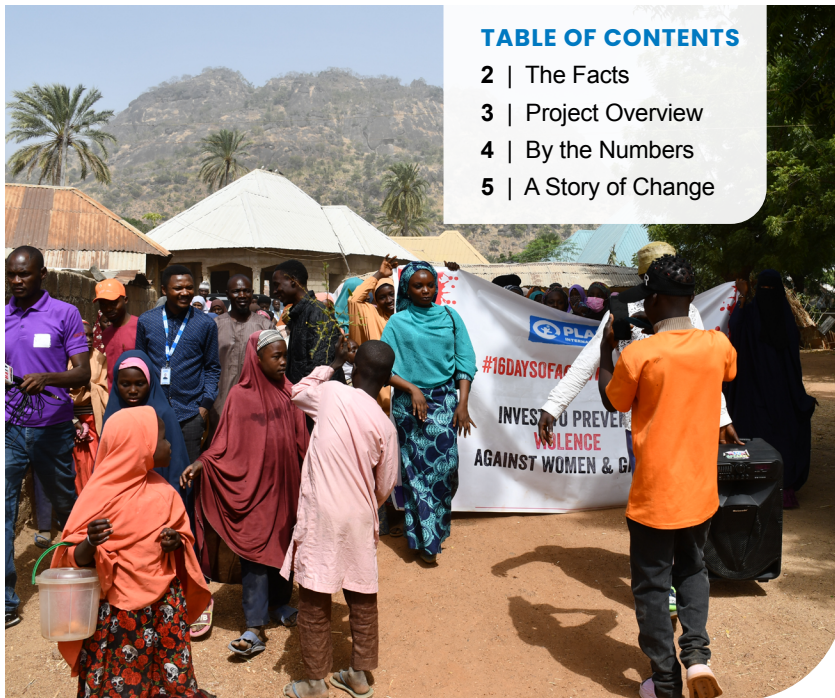
The ASPIRE project helps girls and young women stay healthy and earn an income, expanding their opportunities for the future.



# Unstoppable Girls

The **Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health in Nigeria** (ASPIRE) project is helping girls get the health care and life skills they need to protect their futures.





Girls and women in Bauchi, Nigeria, join a community rally to speak out against violence and raise awareness about their right to safety.

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## Transforming futures:

In its first three years, **ASPIRE** has reached more than 188,000 adolescents, including 133,400 girls. The project is making health care more accessible, teaching youth skills to earn a living, and working with communities to create a supportive environment where girls can thrive. Together, we're building healthier, more resilient generations.

## THE FACTS

**WHO:** Funded by Global Affairs Canada and individual Canadian donors, the Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health in Nigeria (ASPIRE) project works in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Life Helpers Initiative, and Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria.

**WHAT:** In Northern Nigeria, many girls don't know where to turn for reliable health advice. At the same time, the pressure to marry as young as 15 threatens their futures and increases the risk of health complications related to adolescent pregnancy. In Bauchi region, for example, one in four girls is pregnant before she turns 19. ASPIRE helps adolescent girls and young women access sexual and reproductive health services as well as life skills and mental health support.

**WHERE:** Bauchi and Sokoto, two regions with Nigeria's highest poverty rates and weakest health systems. Here, girls face the greatest risk of early marriage and early pregnancy.

**WHEN:** December 2021–November 2026

#### HOW:

► **Youth groups matter:** We've set up 202 youth groups where teens meet regularly to learn and talk about health, relationships, and their futures.

► **Better health care:** Health centres now have the equipment and medicines they need. Health workers are trained to treat young people with respect – so when a teenage girl walks in looking for advice, she receives judgment-free care and clear information.

► **Working with communities:** We partner with respected religious figures to encourage more community support for girls' health and rights. We've also started fathers' clubs, where men learn how delaying their daughters' marriages can lead to healthier families and better economic opportunities for everyone.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

# Girls Rewriting the Rules

In some parts of Nigeria, when a girl is pulled out of school but her brother can stay, no one bats an eye. It's not just about school fees – it's about beliefs that say girls belong in the home, not in the classroom. A 2023 UNICEF survey in Nigeria found that:

- 1 in 2 girls believes school distracts from housework and child care.
- 1 in 4 girls believes educating girls goes against tradition.

With your support, the ASPIRE project is challenging these norms.

### Usaina's story: Fighting for her education

At 18, Usaina lost her confidence after a strained romantic relationship. "I became timid," she says. Around the same time, her parents pulled her out of school, unable to afford fees for both her and her brother. She then enrolled in a religious school for a relatively modest fee – but the non-formal school didn't cover subjects like English, science, or math. "This is common," she says. "Some girls even pay their own school fees so they don't have to attend religious school."

ASPIRE mentors youth in 50 religious schools through health education sessions. Usaina joined one of the sessions and learned to challenge traditional roles for men and women and set boundaries in her relationships. Inspired by a female facilitator who taught the class in English, she asked her parents to re-enrol her in the formal school. They said no twice, but she kept trying. On her third attempt, they said yes.



**Top:** Women gather for a savings group session, where they pool their resources and grow their collective savings. **Right:** Ikilima scaled up her business with help from her savings and loan association. Her income now supports her family and her children's education.



"I can speak out more now," Usaina says. "I'll teach my children everything I've learned – and give them equal chances."

### Ikilima's story: Building a business

ASPIRE also supports parents in earning more so they don't have to choose between educating their sons or their daughters. Before joining a savings and loan association, Ikilima, who sells fabric, had only \$50 to buy supplies. She struggled to keep her business going and cover her family's needs.

When she joined a community savings group, she took part in financial training and created a business plan. These steps helped her qualify for a small loan to expand her fabric business. Today, she's a wholesaler with nearly \$400 in savings – enough to pay for food, school fees, and health services for her family. "Even my husband respects me now," she says.

## Thank you for your support

Your support of the ASPIRE project is helping girls and young women in Nigeria rewrite their stories – one conversation, one decision, one breakthrough at a time. Thank you.



“

I’ve learned that just because a girl gets her period, it doesn’t mean she’s ready to become pregnant, especially if she’s still young.”

—Aisha, 30, mother and project participant



In addition to clinics and medicines, ASPIRE has also made mental health care more accessible. The project supports girls and young women through group therapy programs where they learn how to face setbacks and navigate difficult moments.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Project Highlights

- **10,091 girls, both in and out of school**, have joined youth groups and health clubs to learn practical strategies to stay safe from physical and emotional violence and exploitation, and they’ve gained tools to strengthen their mental health. [End-of-project target: 23,380]

- **2,275 people have joined savings groups** that will help them expand their businesses, plan household budgets, and gain more influence over everyday decisions at home. With more control over spending, women can prioritize health care and education for themselves and their daughters.

- **38,314 parents and caregivers** have participated in discussions on why girls drop out of school, take on unequal household work, and marry young. These sessions have helped families challenge these expectations and support girls’ education and health.

- **625 adolescent girls’ youth groups** have completed sessions on caring for their bodies and their sexual health – helping them avoid early marriage and unwanted pregnancies and manage their periods so they don’t miss school. This knowledge among participants age 15 to 19 increased from 26% to 65%.

- After training that focused on treating patients with dignity and respect, **712 out of 791 health providers scored 70% or higher** in understanding girls’ and young women’s unique health needs. Three years ago, only half understood that boys and girls often need different kinds of care; today, 93% do.

- ASPIRE has introduced guided group mental health therapy for teens battling depression. After eight weeks, **560 of 624 adolescent girls and 496 of 552 boys fell within the healthy range**. So far, 2,002 young people have participated in these sessions.



## A STORY OF CHANGE

# One Girl Equals a Hundred Voices

Hussaina is helping girls and boys speak openly about sexual health – something she was once told to stay silent about.

In Hussaina's community, talking about periods, safe sex, and sexually transmitted diseases is discouraged. But Hussaina is breaking that silence. She speaks openly with siblings, friends, and elders about making healthy choices so that girls don't fall sick, miss school, or lose out on future opportunities.

A few years ago, her story was different. "I didn't know anything [about sexual health] before," she says. "Or about menstruation – I learned now that if you don't stay clean during your period, it can lead to infection."

Everything changed when Hussaina joined a five-day training with the ASPIRE project's Champions of Change program. The sessions gave her facts and the confidence to talk about her health without fear of judgment. She became a peer mentor, and over the next few months, she shared what she learned with nearly 100 young people. She teaches what she wishes she'd known earlier: "I talk to my siblings about the menstrual cycle and how to stay healthy. I tell them to talk to their friends too."

When girls understand how to manage their health, they're less likely to miss school or have unplanned pregnancies and more likely to complete their education. With 55,000 naira per month (equivalent to C\$61) – the average income in Nigeria for women with only a secondary education – a woman can barely afford shared housing and school fees. With a university

degree, her income can rise 4.5 times, making it possible to rent a comfortable apartment, pay for private school, and save for health care and future goals.

Today, girls in Hussaina's sessions ask questions about periods and contraceptives. Some even visit clinics for advice, not just medicine. The girls who have taken part in ASPIRE's 625 youth groups have shown real progress in sexual health awareness: At the start, only one in four girls age 15 to 19 could answer basic sexual health questions. Now, that number has jumped to six in 10.

Thanks to your support of ASPIRE, girls like Hussaina are becoming trusted sources of knowledge. And that's how change begins.

“

I talk to my siblings about the menstrual cycle and how to stay healthy. I tell them to talk to their friends, too.”

–Hussaina, 24,  
ASPIRE participant

Teenagers perform a community theatre piece to raise awareness about menstruation and break the silence around it.







Young women take part in a workshop that breaks myths about contraception and girls' and women's rights.

## Thank you for making space for girls to grow.

**Because of you, girls like Hussaina are leading health talks in their communities, and Usaina is back in school, speaking up for her future. These aren't just milestones – they're shifts in confidence, safety, and opportunity. Your support is helping girls feel heard, supported, and ready to shape their own path. Thank you for being part of this change.**



### About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada is a member of a global organization dedicated to advancing children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International has been building powerful partnerships with and for children for over 85 years and is now active in more than 80 countries. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind, or not equally valued. We're determined optimists, and we will continue to persevere until we are all equal.

**For more information, please contact:**  
[philanthropy@plancanada.ca](mailto:philanthropy@plancanada.ca)

**Plan International Canada**  
245 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 300  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4P 0B3

416-920-1654  
1-800-387-1418



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