



# COVID-19

PLAN INTERNATIONAL CANADA 2021 UPDATE

# PLAN INTERNATIONAL CANADA PROGRAMMING

## RESULTS AND PRIORITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that disease outbreaks affect women/girls and men/boys differently and impact and exacerbate inequalities within and between communities. Plan International Canada's **Living Under Lockdown: Girls and COVID-19 Report**, insists that COVID-19 response interventions focus on the unique needs of women and girls who have been disproportionately impacted by the socio-economic effects of this health crisis, including increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV)<sup>1</sup>. Without targeted and accelerated gender-responsive interventions, COVID-19 has the potential to disrupt decades of progress on gender equality.

In an effort to **Stop the Setback**, over the past year, Plan International Canada has been responding not only to the immediate health effects of COVID-19, but also the indirect impacts that negatively affect women and girls. By focusing on both the immediate and longer-term needs of vulnerable groups, we support communities to build back better, particularly for women and girls.

**As a global federation, our COVID-19 programs have reached over 80 million women, men, girls and boys<sup>2</sup>.**



The pandemic has changed the way we work, how we build resilience within communities and challenges us to be prepared for any future shocks and pandemics.

This summary report provides a snapshot of some of the COVID-19 actions supported directly by Plan International Canada and its donors, including projects supported by Global Affairs Canada (GAC).



1. Plan International. Living Under Lockdown: Girls and COVID-19, 2020.

2. Plan International. Global COVID-19 Response – One Year On, as of 27 November 2020. Figures include TV, radio and social media awareness campaign reach numbers for some countries.

# SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) PROJECTS

## EXAMPLES FROM SHOW (SENEGAL, GHANA, NIGERIA, BANGLADESH), WE DECIDE (PERU), ARRIBA (BOLIVIA) AND HEALTHY WOMEN AND GIRLS (MOZAMBIQUE)

Past pandemics, including Ebola, have shown that continuity of health and SRHR services are essential to avoid increases in unwanted pregnancies. UNFPA estimates that globally because of COVID-19 school closures, lockdowns, stay at home measures, and reluctance to visit health centres, there could be as many as 7 million unwanted pregnancies and 31 million additional cases of GBV<sup>3</sup>. Since the onset of the pandemic, Plan International Canada has adapted many of its ongoing projects to respond more effectively to COVID-19 and address new and changing health and related needs of target communities, namely for women and girls.

The objectives of this re-programming are to:

Mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the community and within the health facilities through  
**SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE COMMUNICATION (SBCC) MESSAGING AND PPE PROVISION**

Train and equip community and facility-based health care workers in  
**CASE DETECTION, VACCINATION, CONTACT TRACING, REFERRAL AND MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 CASES**

**SUPPORT MAINTENANCE OF DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL MNCH/SRH SERVICES**  
in health facilities

**MAINTAIN THE DEMAND AND UTILIZATION OF ESSENTIAL MNCH/SRH SERVICES**  
during the pandemic

3. UNFPA. New UNFPA projections predict calamitous impact on women's health as COVID-19 pandemic continues. UNFPA. April 2020

## THE “SHOW” PROJECT FOCUSES ON CONTINUITY OF SRHR SERVICES, HEALTH WORKER CAPACITY AND DETECTION/PREVENTION

Plan International Canada partners with Global Affairs Canada to implement the **Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW)**<sup>4</sup>, a multi year, gender transformative project in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria and Senegal. This project contributes to the reduction of maternal and child mortality, with a focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable women and adolescent girls, and their children. To achieve this project’s ambitious outcome, the utilization, delivery, and accountability of essential Maternal, Newborn and Child Health/Sexual and Reproductive Health (MNCH/SRH) services are being improved in remote, under served regions of these countries.



**BANGLADESH**



**GHANA**



**HAITI**



**NIGERIA**



**SENEGAL**

SHOW’s three-pronged gender transformative strategies to increase utilization, improve delivery and strengthen accountability of health services were adapted to meet the realities of COVID-19. The project helps to raise awareness and implement gender-responsive, community-based protective measures against COVID-19, including addressing the additional burden of unpaid care work on women and girls. As well, the SHOW project trains health care workers and provides necessary equipment to enable infection prevention and control (IPC), case detection, vaccinations, referral capabilities and encouraged the integration of **gender into key messages for risk communications**. Finally, SHOW has sourced and distributed PPE and worked closely with partners and the Ministry of Health to support the continuity of safe, gender-responsive, adolescent friendly MNCH/SRH services in 192 health centres.



## THE “WE DECIDE” PROJECT FOCUSES ON SUPPORTING SRHR RIGHTS FOR INDIGENOUS REMOTE COMMUNITIES IN PERU DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In partnership with Global Affairs Canada, Plan International Canada is implementing **We Decide**<sup>5</sup>, a project which aims to ensure that women and girls – with a special focus on Indigenous populations – are able to exercise their sexual and reproductive health and rights to prevent early and unwanted pregnancy in the region of Loreto, Peru. According to the Organization of Eastern Indigenous Peoples (ORPIO), health posts are short of supplies and do not have appropriate medicines or equipment to handle outbreaks of COVID-19<sup>6</sup>. Loreto has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic due to its isolation, socio-economic vulnerability and fragile health systems<sup>7</sup>.

4. Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children (SHOW) Project, 2015-2022, CAD 72 Million, Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, Senegal – funded by Global Affairs Canada

5. We Decide Project, 2018-2022, CAD 11.5 million, funded by Global Affairs Canada

6. Maria del Carmen Sacasa. Supporting Peru’s Indigenous People in the Fight Against COVID-19. UNDP Peru. April 2020

7. Pelàez, Stefanny. Fighting COVID-19 in Loreto: Peru’s Forgotten Region. Plan International Peru. June 2020.

In response to COVID-19, health facilities in the Loreto region were provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand washing stations were installed. Health facilities received virtual training on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), while sex-differentiated hygiene kits were distributed to adolescents. Hand washing stations were also installed in communities and schools. Given some hesitancy to visit health centres and lockdown restrictions, the We Decide project has used digital channels, such as radio, television spots and **social media** to promote SRHR and protection/wellbeing during the pandemic for women and girls.

## THE “ARRIBA” PROJECT EMPHASIZES DIGITAL AND VIRTUAL SBCC IN RURAL BOLIVIA

Plan International Canada and GAC also partner on the **Achieving Reproductive Rights in Bolivian Adolescents (ARRIBA)**<sup>8</sup> project, which aims to improve the SRH (including maternal and neonatal health) of adolescent girls, women of reproductive age and pregnant women among vulnerable populations in Bolivia. ARRIBA activities were adapted to respond to COVID-19 using virtual tools such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, radio and telephone calls. The project prioritized sharing information on safety and prevention measures related to COVID-19, prevention of GBV, and promotion of SRHR. Through social media and social and behaviour change communications (SBCC), messaging was spread to promote positive social behaviours during lockdown. ARRIBA also provided essential hygiene and SRH kits, including personal hygiene supplies along with menstrual pads and contraceptive methods for young people and their families.

## TACKLING MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES TO WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN MOZAMBIQUE (CHILD MARRIAGE, COVID-19 AND EMERGENCIES)

The GAC funded **Healthy Women and Girls (HWG)** project<sup>9</sup> aims to improve Sexual and Reproductive Health/ Maternal Newborn Health (SRH/MNH) in underserved populations of Moma, Mogovolas and Nampula city in Nampula province of Mozambique. This gender transformative project seeks to address



## RESULTS ACHIEVED: SHOW AND MOZAMBIQUE, BOLIVIA AND PERU

**7,812**  
HEALTH  
WORKERS  
TRAINED



on IPC, case detection, referral, contact tracing, GE and SGBV

**401**  
HEALTH  
FACILITIES  
SUPPORTED

for provision of safe  
MNCH/SRH services



**1,762**  
HEALTH FACILITIES &  
PUBLIC SPACES (SCHOOLS,  
PROTECTION SPACES, ETC.)



provided with equipment and supplies  
(including PPE and WASH facilities)

\*as of February, 2021

8. Achieving Reproductive Rights in Bolivian Adolescents (ARRIBA) Project, 2018-2023, CAD 11 million, funded by Global Affairs Canada

9. Healthy Women and Girls (HWG) Project, 2017-2022, CAD 14.5 million, funded by Global Affairs Canada

both the demand and supply-side barriers to accessing quality SRH/MNH services through a two-pronged approach. On the demand-side, the project increases the power of women and adolescent girls to make informed decisions and take actions regarding their marriage/union and SRHR. On the supply-side, the project improves access to gender-responsive and adolescent-friendly SRH/MNH services and referrals.

At the same time the country is facing increased vulnerabilities related to climate and man-made disasters. The HWG project's COVID-19 response plan has included: dissemination of COVID-19, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and childhood, early and forced marriage (CEFM) information through engagement of three local radio stations, orientation of community leaders who share COVID-19 related information (equipped with information, education and communication and PPE); provision of COVID-19 related equipment and supplies (PPE, menstrual health kits and hygiene supplies) to the seven targeted health facilities; training of health facility and community health providers on COVID-19 issues, support to continue providing SRH/MNH services and collection of sex and age disaggregated data related to COVID-19 as well as SRH/MNH.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED:

**104 MEDIA OUTLET NETWORK ACTORS,**

including community radio, trained on **accurate reporting** and **fighting myths about COVID-19** and **SGBV messaging**

**OVER 1.3 MILLION\***  
**PEOPLE REACHED**

with **COVID-19, GE and SGBV** messages

**1,146 TRADITIONAL & RELIGIOUS LEADERS,**

trained on **COVID-19 awareness, positive coping mechanisms, GE and SGBV**

\* This number includes expected reach in three SHOW countries (Senegal, Ghana, Bangladesh) as actual reach numbers have not yet been reported.



# CONTINUING THE FIGHT AGAINST MAJOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN THE COVID-19 ERA

## EXAMPLES FROM THE GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS AND MALARIA

**Plan International Canada is the only Canadian INGO implementing partner of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB), and Malaria with programming in 11 countries.** Through its Global Fund portfolio<sup>10</sup> of projects, Plan International Canada has experience adapting and implementing projects during a major health crisis including the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak. Building off this prior experience, Plan International was able to quickly adapt activities to follow required physical distancing and hygiene measures in countries where HIV, TB and malaria projects are being implemented.

Plan International Canada supported a timely revision of protocols and Plan Country Office teams helped train approximately **6,500 community health actors and partners** in an effort to reduce multiple vulnerabilities of populations at risk of COVID-19 as well as the three diseases. For example, in Zimbabwe, the team developed new operational standards and procedures for long-lasting insecticidal net (LLIN) distribution to safely continue this life-saving activity during COVID-19. As a result, **320,250 LLINs** were distributed during the height of COVID-19 through a safe door to door approach. This adapted delivery method has helped to protect **640,500 people** from malaria, one of the leading causes of health services consultation in the country.

As mentioned above, COVID-19 has furthered pre-existing vulnerabilities and had devastating impact on excluded and marginalized groups. Plan International Canada's HIV projects in Benin, El Salvador and Guinea conducted a rapid needs assessment for three vulnerable groups – men who have sex with men, female sex workers and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHIVA). These critical assessments demonstrated that these populations knew about COVID-19 prevention measures but were unable to practice them because they lacked access to products such as water, soap, and hand sanitizer. As well, some COVID-19 prevention measures, such as lockdowns, would also result in a significant deterioration of their livelihood. Plan International Canada was able to repurpose funds from projects financed through The Global Fund to distribute food rations in Benin and El Salvador for PLWHIV and the most vulnerable members within diverse LGBTQ communities. In Benin, **2,000 PLWHIV, including 1,282 women**, received food rations. In El Salvador, **1,191 families** affected by HIV received food baskets. Hygiene kits and masks were distributed to beneficiaries in all three countries.

## GLOBAL FUND ACHIEVEMENTS:

**1,191**  
**FAMILIES FROM**  
**EL SALVADOR**

who were affected by HIV  
received **food baskets**



**320,250**  
**LONG-LASTING**  
**INSECTICIDAL**  
**NETS (LLIN)**

were distributed during the  
height of COVID-19  
in **Zimbabwe**



10. Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, El Salvador, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, Zimbabwe



# ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

## EXAMPLE FROM WOMEN'S VOICES AND LEADERSHIP (WVL) IN GHANA AND ETHIOPIA

In partnership with GAC, **WVL** supports the capacity development and activities carried out by local and regional women's rights organizations (WROs) and movements in Ethiopia<sup>11</sup> and Ghana<sup>12</sup>. WVL's goal is to empower women and girls, support locally led women's movements, advance the protection of women's and girls' rights, and achieve gender equality. Due to the increased gender impacts of COVID-19, WVL programming has pivoted and identified additional groups to implement COVID-19 specific activities with and for their constituents.

### FUNDING AND GRANTS

- **24 flexible and responsive grants (\$300K+)** issued to new WRO partners to address the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Ethiopia (10) and Ghana (14)
- **23 funding top-ups provided to existing WRO partners (\$560K+)** who were previously awarded gender transformative grants to include new components to address COVID-19 in Ethiopia (10) and Ghana (13)

### WROS IN ACTION RESPONDING TO COVID-19

#### Women's economic empowerment to respond to the financial impact of COVID-19:

- **Skills for youth** to produce and sell sanitation supplies and raising awareness about COVID-19
- **Start-up capital** for women with disabilities who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 (e.g. hairdressers)
- Support for **young women out of school**, with specific attention on young mothers
- Community **awareness on transmission and prevention of COVID-19**
- Provision of **PPE** to healthcare workers and survivors of GBV
- **Legal support, transportation and hot-lines** for survivors of GBV
- **Gendered analysis of the government's response** to COVID-19 along with policy recommendations

11. Women's Voices and Leadership Ethiopia, 2019-2024, CAD 7.6 million, Funded by Global Affairs Canada

12. Women's Voices and Leadership Ghana, 2019-2024, CAD 5.7 million, Funded by Global Affairs Canada

## VIRTUAL TOOLS AND ADAPTATION

Driven by the need to adopt distance tools, the WVL project in Ghana was able to quickly leverage virtual tools and platforms to support the WROs in the country carry out grant orientation sessions (e.g. MSTeams), monitor activities and collect data (e.g. KoboCollect) and share information and events, as well as encourage one another and drive collective action through WhatsApp groups.

**“When the pandemic started, things fell apart. I felt worried, scared by the news and afraid that it would affect my family and loved ones. This is when I decided to get involved to support my girlfriends, practicing sisterhood with them, and sharing what I learned.**

**I started to share information on my social media networks on how to prevent violence against women and where to report it because, in this emergency, many girls, adolescents and women were reported as missing. The incidents of rape, family violence and femicide has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**As girls [Champions of Change], we made videos talking about this reality, so that women know they are not alone, that we are vigilant and demand that authorities protect us.”**

**– Cassandra, 15, We Decide Beneficiary**

**“I have faced the quarantine very bravely and with strength, always keeping in mind that this will pass someday. What I did was take care of my family, especially my mom because I love her very much.**

**I talked to them and made them understand what we learn with the ARRIBA project, including the importance of hand washing, keeping social distance and staying at home.”**

**– Mery, ARRIBA Beneficiary**



**“In our diversity, lies our strength. Together as feminist organizations, we shall maximize our efforts to promote a dignified life for women and girls during this pandemic. This support from Global Affairs Canada is important because it puts funding and decision-making power directly in the hands of women’s rights organizations to respond to the unique needs that women and girls face in the pandemic.**

**Ghanaian women constitute the majority of primary caregivers for families and in professional capacities of health and social work, placing them at an increased risk of exposure in both their personal and professional lives. Let women's voices count in responding to COVID-19. These women know how to solve their challenges, and together we shall win the fight against COVID-19.”**

**– Patricia Blankson Akakpo, Programmes Manager, Network for Women’s Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), WRO partner**

# RESOURCES

## Plan International Canada Reports on COVID-19

[Living Under Lockdown: Girls and COVID-19. 2020.](#)

[COVID-19 Pandemic Stop the Setback Campaign. 2020.](#)

[Fighting COVID-19 in Loreto: Peru's Forgotten Region. 2020.](#)

[African Girls in the COVID-19 Pandemic. 2020.](#)

[Under Siege: Impact of COVID-19 on Girls in Africa. 2020.](#)



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