



**Belgium**  
partner in development

# THE STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS IN BENIN

March 2022



## GIRLS RIGHTS AT A GLANCE<sup>1</sup>

The Government of Benin has adopted a **strong legislative framework to protect and promote the rights of women and girls**. However, in the communities of Benin in general, and where Plan International is working in particular, **girls experience a wide range of discriminations and violence**, that are made possible by the **existence and strength of gender norms**, that consecrate the inferiority of girls and women to boys and men.

The low value attached to their voices and opinions conduct to **strictly limited decision-making power**, even for issues regarding themselves: one woman out of four have her need for family planning unmet. Patriarchal conceptions, stereotypes, the increased power and control of men over women also translates into **higher acceptance and prevalence of violence against girls and women**. In Benin, three in ten women consider justified for a man to beat his wife. Additionally, lack of access to quality, inclusive and gender-sensitive services, place girls and young women in a situation of **high vulnerability to violence** and, therefore, **prevent them from claiming their rights** and reporting the abuse they experience. Lack of decent employment and poverty is also highly correlated with acts of violence against girls and women.

With two men out of three considering **the role of a woman to be a wife and a mother**, women are expected to bear children and to be attached to the domestic sphere. As such, girls and young women are constrained to a gender-based division of labour that assigns them roles generally devalued, with eight hours daily devoted to **unpaid domestic work**, more precarious and lower paying jobs and less leisure time than men and boys.

**Learning infrastructures in Benin lack adequacy and inclusivity** with overcrowding classes and poor sanitation and needs-based facilities, conducting to a scarce level of education among adolescent girls. Combined with the limited position in society of girls and women, it results in high rates of school drop-outs for girls and adolescent girls. For two girls having completed primary school, only one will pursue her education and will be enrolled in secondary school. When growing up, young women face **low access to decent and quality economic opportunities to lift them up out of poverty and precariousness**. This translates into nine in ten women being engaged in vulnerable employment, and around one in ten only having a bank account and owning a house and a land.

Girls' already limited chances to thrive are even reduced when **gender intersects with poverty**. When living in poor households, girls are more than doubled **at risk of child, early and forced marriage** than girls evolving in wealthy households. Education is also correlated with a family' socio-economic situation: eight girls in low-income families out of ten have never been to school, in contrast to two in ten girls coming from richer families.

Because of these factors, girls and young women are **the most vulnerable to external shocks and upcoming threats**, such as **effects of climate change and pandemics**. Negative coping mechanisms adopted by the population affect primarily girls with increased gender-based violence, early pregnancies and school drop-out. However, the COVID-19 showed that situations of crisis can also be windows of opportunities to enhance empowerment of girls, challenge traditional stereotypes and change social and gender norms.

Yet, there is hope. With a reinforced application of the protective legislative framework already in place in Benin, increased knowledge of rights from the population, improved response mechanisms to violations of rights and higher representation of women in power positions that could promote more gender-aware policies, there is high chances that Beninese girls' rights will be better respected in the future.

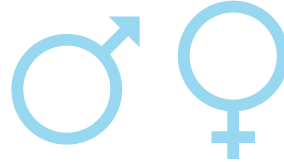
---

<sup>1</sup> The executive summary contains references that are made available across the report

# BENIN



RANKED **148/189**



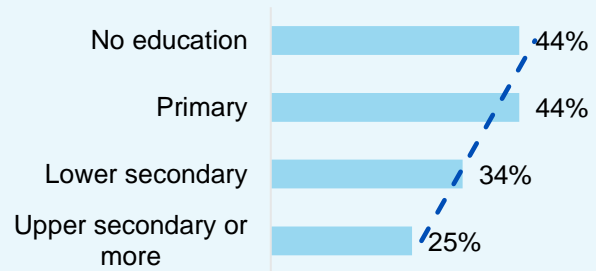
ON THE GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX



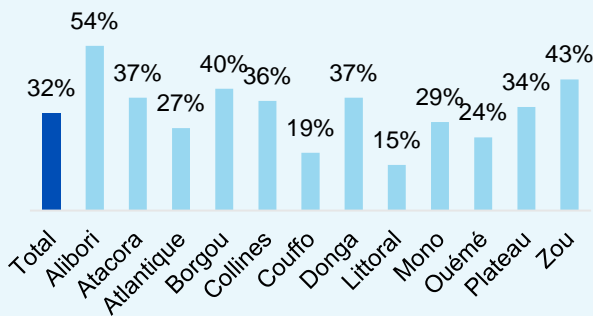
**55%**

**OF GIRLS AND WOMEN,  
AGED 15 TO 49, HAVE NO  
EDUCATION**

Share of girls experiencing **physical, sexual or emotional violence**, by level of education



Share of **girls married before 18**, in total, and by region



**93%** 

**OF WOMEN ARE ENGAGED  
IN VULNERABLE  
EMPLOYMENT**

## HOW GIRLS SHOULD BEHAVE: GENDER NORMS AT WORK IN BENIN

In the communities of Benin in which Plan International is working, girls **experience a wide range of discrimination and violence**, that are made possible by the **strength of limiting gender norms**, and that tend to state the inferiority of women and girls. This translates into **discriminatory systems that uphold the superior position of men over women**, as well as into daily lives as expecting men being the head of the family which position justifies privileges granted to him.

Globally, social norms around early marriage, son preference, domestic and unpaid care work, and women in the workforce and politics limit girls and young women's opportunities based on their gender.

### Clear expectations of what girls and boys should do

Expectations and **beliefs about gender roles, relationships and values trickles down** to all aspects of girls' and boys' lives, and results in **justifying that boys and men are prioritized on many aspects of power-decision making**. It also translates into social expectations that girls are encouraged to have children and start childbearing at early age, with girls' education being less valued, as well as their voices and opinions, even on issues that concern them.

Within couples, **decisions regarding women's health care, important investments for the household**, are predominantly taken by men only (more than 52%)<sup>2</sup>. Abiding by gender norms at stake, all women are not empowered to **discuss and negotiate sexual intercourse with their partners**, as 43% of interviewed women report they cannot refuse having sex when they do not wish to, and 60% report they cannot ask their partner to use a condom.<sup>3</sup> With additional barriers that adolescent girls and young women face, one woman in four in 2018 had their need for family planning unsatisfied.<sup>4</sup>

Refusing to comply with limiting gender norms is more accepted in urban areas, and increases with the level of education and wealth: on average, young women from rural areas, with low level of education and from a poor background, have less decision-making power and are less empowered to negotiate sexual intercourse.

### Justified violence, limited agency and social shame: at age 24, one young woman in four has experienced physical or sexual violence

**Girls are exposed early on to gender-based violence.** 25% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 have experienced physical or sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> As they grow older, young women are **particularly exposed to intimate partner violence**: 36% of young women aged 15-24, have experienced violence committed by a partner, either physical, sexual or emotional.<sup>6</sup>

Such experience of violence is deeply anchored in harmful norms that unfairly shape the roles and agency of women and girls and expect men to dominate and control women. These norms **condone violence against girls and women and impunity for perpetrators**,

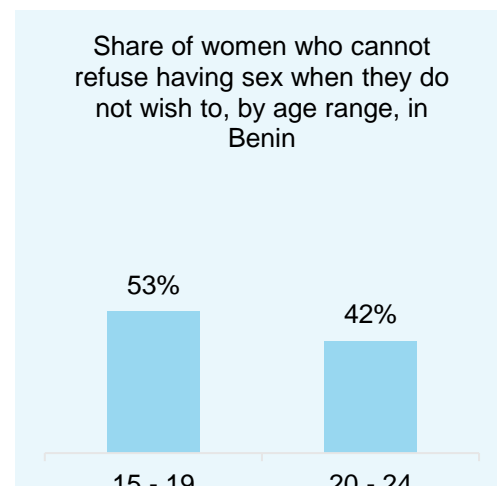


FIGURE 1: DHS, BENIN, 2017-2018

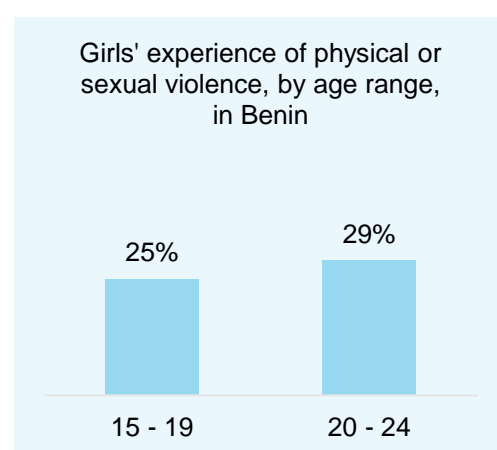


FIGURE 2: DHS, BENIN, 2017-2018

<sup>2</sup> DHS, *Benin*, 2017-2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> DHS, *Benin*, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

especially when women and girls fail to fulfil their traditional role of caregiver or challenge the authority of men. 32% of women consider it is justified that a man hits his partner if she burns the food, if she argues with him, if she goes out without notice, if she neglects children or if she refuses to have sex with him.<sup>7</sup> Such justifications are internalized very early on: 30% of adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 already consider it is justified that a man hits his partner for the cited reasons.<sup>8</sup>

**Poverty, among other factors, further entraps women and girls in abusive relationships** because they have fewer choices for staying safe and perpetrators are able to gain more control over them due to increased vulnerability. While 32% of women consider it is justified that a man hits his partner, this falls down to 19% for the wealthiest women, and down to 15% in Cotonou area.<sup>9</sup>

Share of girls considering it is justified for a man to beat his wife for at least one specific reason, by age range, in Benin

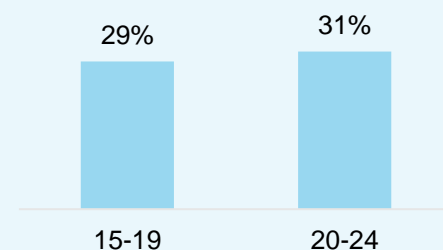


FIGURE 3: DHS, BENIN, 2017-2018

The **lack of access to quality, inclusive and gender-sensitive services, such as sexual and reproductive health services, increases the stigma and social shame** when they want to report acts committed against them. As a result, 65% of women who had experienced physical or sexual violence reported not seeking any help to stop the cycle of violence<sup>10</sup>.

### Representation matters: women in politics

As women and girls' opinions are not valued by their family and community members, they **lack access to political bodies, are not empowered to claim their rights and are not represented in the public sphere**. The access of girls and women to decision-making bodies still comes up against socio-cultural, economic and legal barriers that do not always allow women to have a public life and the same rights as men.

Despite programmes for the advancement of women and despite the fact that they make up more than 52% of the Beninese population, men are still in majority in all the country's decision-making bodies.<sup>11</sup> In May 2021, there were only five women in the 23 existing ministerial positions. The current configuration of the National Assembly has a representation rate of 7% of women, compared to about 9% for the seventh term.<sup>12</sup> In 30 years of democracy, the percentage of elected women has always remained below 13%.<sup>13</sup> At the level of the communes, out of the 77 current mayors, there are only 4 women elected in the 2020 communal elections.<sup>14</sup>

Socio-cultural prejudices, low school enrolment and retention rates for girls, and the non-positioning of women on electoral lists are all elements that **explain the gender inequalities in the participation of women in the decision-making process**.

### The burden of chores and double days for girls and young women: the impossible balance between domestic unpaid work and education

Two married men in three consider that the role of a woman is to be a wife and a mother.<sup>15</sup> Hence, as girls and young women are expected to be attached to the domestic sphere, **a strong gender-based division of labour applies**. Women and girls on the one hand, and men and boys on the other hand, are constrained with **very stereotyped tasks and roles**. Boys are expected, as they grow older, to

<sup>7</sup> DHS, *Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Social Watch Benin, *Journée Internationale de la Femme 2021: Peu de femmes à des postes de décision malgré les discours flatteurs*, [Journée Internationale de la femme 2021 : Peu de femmes à des postes de décision malgré les discours flatteurs | Social Watch Bénin](#), 2021, accessed on 24/01/2022.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Social Watch Benin, *Journée Internationale de la Femme 2021: Peu de femmes à des postes de décision malgré les discours flatteurs*, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Institut National pour la Promotion de la Femme, *Rapport synthèse des six études réalisées en 2013*, Benin, 2013.

bring money to the family, even if this involves accomplishing dangerous work such as including construction work.

Girls, on the other hand, are **responsible for domestic works such as water fetching, taking care of the house and supporting with children care**. As a result, girls spend significantly more time supporting their families with domestic chores. On average in Benin, women and girls have only 2 hours of their times for themselves each day, compared with approximately 8 hours of time spent in school for enrolled girls, and of daily income-generating work, for young women, and another 8 hours only dedicated to unpaid domestic work, including caring for their husband and children.<sup>16</sup>

As a result, **school drop-outs are high**: 61% of girls have completed primary school but only 35% of them are enrolled in secondary schools.<sup>17</sup>

### Drastic disparities between girls' and boys' education

Even though progress is made towards universal access to primary education, **there is a crucial need to focus on the quality of learning outcomes**. In Benin, girls' and boys' attendance in primary school is almost the same (62% and 68% respectively<sup>18</sup>). However, an important gap happens at secondary school level, that is captured by the gender parity index for literacy rate: with 70% of boys aged 15 to 24 years able to read and write, compared to only 52% of girls the same age<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, for 100 boys attending secondary school, only 78 girls pursue their education.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, evidence shows that quality of learning is a much better predictor of women empowerment than school attendance alone<sup>21</sup>; as the secondary attendance and the literacy rate, work as significant measurement proxy for the quality of education, it is essential that education programmes focus on inclusive, quality education.

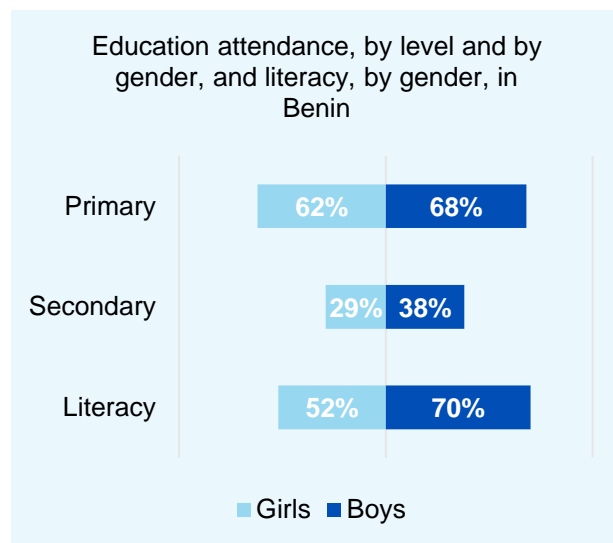


FIGURE 4: WORLD BANK, BENIN, 2019

**Lack of adequate infrastructures, harmful traditional practices and limiting gender norms cause drastic disparities between genders in youth literacy**, drive the risks of dropout at adolescence. The ratio of children per teacher in school proves inadequate learning environments with overcrowding of classes. There are 52 pupils for 1 teacher on average, aggravated by strong disparities between regions, with 95 pupils for 1 teacher in Alibori.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the **lack of adequate water and sanitation facilities** is a key driver to school dropout. Toilets, where they exist, are not separate and adapted to girls' needs. These hygiene deficiencies in public institutions prevent them from going to school, especially during menstruation.<sup>23</sup> The lack of basic sanitation facilities hinders the creation of safe spaces for girls to manage their menstruation in dignity.

Difficult social conditions for children who are experiencing additional **exclusion factors reinforce dropout**. **Living with disability** is a key exclusion factor when inclusive quality education is lacking. A programme officer at the Federation of Associations of disabled Persons of Benin interviewed during a study conducted by UNICEF confirmed so: "*Education in Benin is not yet inclusive because children*

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, *Analyse de la Situation des Enfants au Benin*, Benin, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, *Benin*, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> DHS, *Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Kaffenberger et al., *Effective investment in women's futures: Schooling with learning*, International Journal of Educational Development, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF, *Analyse de la Situation des Enfants au Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

with disabilities continue to be discriminated against because of the disability they carry, which requires specific arrangements for their care”<sup>24</sup>.

### The barriers to economic empowerment

As girls’ education is less valued, and as they are tied to the domestic sphere, for chores, or through early marriage, **when they grow up as young women, they have lower access to decent and quality job opportunities**, that could ensure their economic empowerment<sup>25</sup>. As a result, they face a number of barriers preventing them from lifting out of poverty, precariousness and acquire financial autonomy.<sup>26</sup>

Economic empowerment and limiting gender norms are strongly intertwined. Literature reviews regarding women’s agency and empowerment highlight that gender norms surrounding women’s agency moderate the impacts of many interventions that aim at alleviating material constraints. Access to financial resources alone, without addressing gender-specific constraints, is not a mechanism that consistently improves young women’s agency. However, giving young women more direct control over resources, often by employing design or program features such as privacy or digital payment systems, appears to be a mechanism that consistently leads to improvements in women’s agency.

### Yet, working with girls and young women as early as possible is a unique opportunity to strengthen their agency

Based on the literature review, programs show a greater impact when aiming to support young women in delaying marriage and childbearing, compared to programs that aimed to change household decision-making dynamics within a marriage, perhaps because women did not have good outside options.

Adolescence is a crucial time in the transition from childhood to adulthood, a time at which the expectations, opportunities, risks and needs for girls and boys diverge considerably.

**93% of women are engaged in vulnerable employment**<sup>27</sup>, meaning that they are the least likely to have formal work arrangements, social protection and safety nets to cope with economic shocks, and often are incapable of generating sufficient savings to offset these shocks.<sup>28</sup>

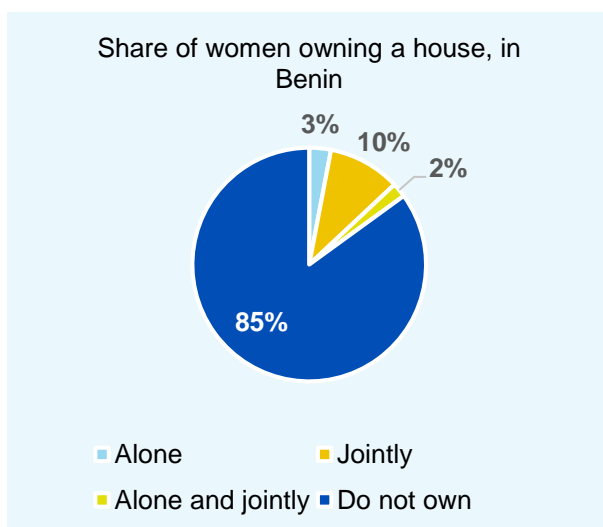


FIGURE 5: DHS, BENIN, 2017-2018

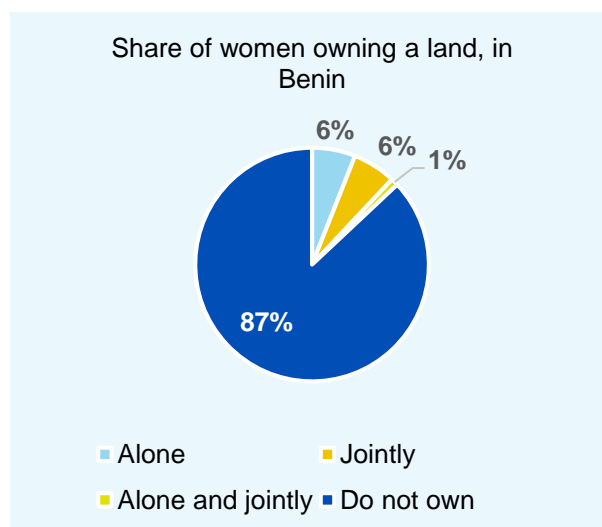


FIGURE 6: DHS, BENIN, 2017-2018

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, *Analyse de la Situation des Enfants au Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Wei Chang, Eleonora Guarnieri, Seema Jayachandran, Lucia Diaz-Martin, Akshara Gopalan, Claire Walsh. *Enhancing Women’s Agency: Cross-Cutting Lessons From Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Studies in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, July 2020. J-Pal Working Paper

<sup>26</sup> INPF, *Etude sur la prise en compte globale du genre dans les politiques publiques, plans et programmes au Benin*, Benin, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Vulnerable employment is contributing family workers and own-account workers as a percentage of total employment.

<sup>28</sup> World Bank, *Benin, op. cit.*

Among the specific barriers in accessing the labour market, young women are **struggling to access opportunities for successful income-generating activities, access support through property or credits** when they want to create a small business or to upscale the one they already have, as only 6% of young women and women have and use a bank account in Benin.<sup>29</sup> The main factors that prevent them from devoting more time to their own activity, including own income-generating activities are in majority their responsibility at home (61%), disagreement of their husband and/or parent (7%) and maternity (4%).<sup>30</sup>

While 45% of the agricultural workforce is women, they also face greater difficulties in accessing land, inputs and credit<sup>31</sup>. 85% and 87% of women and girls, aged 15 to 49, declared not owning a house, neither a land, respectively.<sup>32</sup>

## POVERTY TRAP, SHOCKS AND RESILIENCE: HOW POVERTY ACTS AS A BARRIER TO EMPOWERMENT

In 2020, in Benin, **one person in two** was living below the poverty line.<sup>33</sup> Combined with limiting gender norms in the society, lack of access to empowering educational or economic opportunities, poverty hits more severely girls and women, giving them less chances to thrive, as when gender intersects with poverty, poor girls and women are the ones suffering the biggest violations of their rights<sup>34</sup>.

Women in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) on average report less freedom of choice, control over one's life and life satisfaction compared to men in the same countries and women in wealthier countries. Globally, the average rate of respondents agreeing that wife beating is acceptable, that women have no say in decisions on large household purchases, or that agree that men make better business executives than women do, is strongly correlated with wealth of the country – the lower the GDP per capita, the more likely respondents will report negative attitudes towards gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.

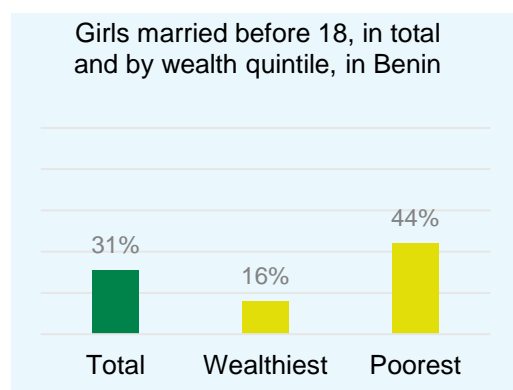


FIGURE 7: GIRLS NOT BRIDES, ATLAS, 2021

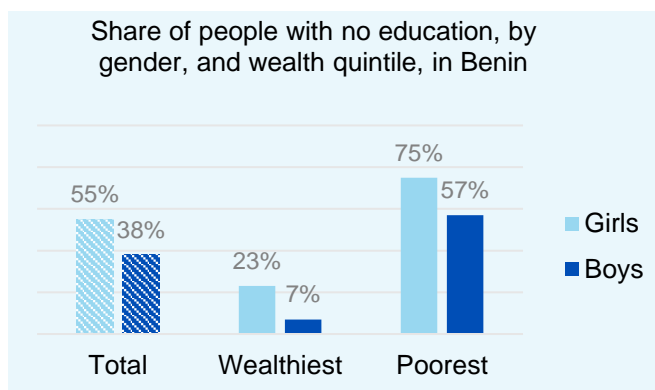


FIGURE 8: DHS, BENIN, 2012

### Harmful practices and the interaction between limiting norms and poverty

**Gender and poverty intersect in all aspects of girls and young women's life.** 44% of women in Benin's poorest households were married before 18, compared to 16% from the richest households.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> DHS, *Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, *Analyse de la Situation des Enfants au Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> DHS, *Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> World Bank, *Benin, op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Wei Chang et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Girls Not Brides, *Atlas, 2021.*



Not being able to provide for the needs of their daughter anymore, parents and caregivers may adopt this negative coping mechanisms thinking their future spouse will give her a new chance in life.

**Schooling is positively correlated as well with the level of economic well-being of the household.** Richer households mean higher rates of educational attainment: 57% of poorer men, and 75% of poorer women, have never been to school, while this is the case for only 7% of richer men and 23% of women.<sup>36</sup> "I couldn't finish primary school. I dropped out of school in the fourth grade, and after that I started learning. The reason I am at home now is because I can't afford the graduation fee"<sup>37</sup> testifies a 14-year-old girl in the Ouaké commune. Despite measures of free fees for primary and lower secondary levels, parents are continually asked to contribute to recurrent costs of running of schools, and to cover the costs of school supplies, uniforms, food and sometimes transport. Many parents, especially the poorest ones unable to afford the fees charged by school simply prefer removing girls from schools.<sup>38</sup>

### Complexity of future shocks and resilience

**While already undergoing multiple shocks, girls from poorest backgrounds are also the most vulnerable to external shocks.** Disasters, such as floods and droughts, that intensified since the 1970s, causing erosion, **exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities and push families to adopt additional negative coping mechanisms, which girls suffer the most from.** Climate change leads to an accelerated desertification in the North, while more frequent occurrence of torrential rains in the South. This affects severely food security with an expected reduction of production by 6% by 2025 if no adoptive measures are taken, as well as water resources, which could result in 40% to 60% reduction in the availability of water resources, further influencing Benin's food production.<sup>39</sup>

Families lose everything when such crisis occurs, causing so far preserved households to fall into poverty and severely degrading the living conditions of families already living below the poverty line. With the need to provide for their most basic needs first, including securing their food and shelter, the rights of girls are then overlooked. They are at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence for reasons such as disruption of communities and services, poor living conditions, and loss of livelihoods.<sup>40</sup> Although "comparative data on gender-based violence before and during emergencies is scarce, some studies have been able to show that levels of domestic and sexual violence increase following natural disasters across contexts".<sup>41</sup>

### How COVID-19 can be a setback for girls' right

Similarly to natural disasters, the COVID-19 has contributed to **further exacerbate the vulnerability of the poorer households.**<sup>42</sup> Health crisis, mainly and lastly the COVID-19 pandemic, had an unprecedented impact on girls' rights, widening further pre-existing gender inequalities. Before COVID-19, Benin had to face other outbreaks of water and airborne diseases, such as Cholera and Lassa fever, originating from poor hygiene practices and little attention to the sanitation sub-sector. Indeed, adequate sanitation facilities are rare among the population: 87% of households still use unimproved sanitation facilities, with 78% in urban areas and 94% in rural ones.<sup>43</sup>

Handwashing good practices are also difficult implement in practice as half of the population have no designed place to wash their hands, and with the lower the economic well-being of a household, the lower the availability of water and cleaning product people have.<sup>44</sup> Girls and women being the ones

---

<sup>36</sup> DHS, *Benin*, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF, *Analyse de la Situation des Enfants au Bénin*, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands, *Climate change profile: Benin*, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> CARE, *An assessment of gender-based violence in emergencies in Southern Benin*, Benin, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> CARE, *An assessment of gender-based violence in emergencies in Southern Benin*, *op. cit.*; referring to: Enarson, E. "Surviving Domestic Violence and Disasters." Freda Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children, January 1998. Retrieved 11/2/10 from <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/reports/dviol.htm>; Women Thrive Worldwide, "Women, Natural Disasters, and Reconstruction." International Museum of Women (n.d.). Retrieved 11/2/10

<sup>42</sup> Plan International, *Rapid Gender Assessment Report, Covid19 response*, Benin, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> DHS, *Benin*, 2017-2018.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

responsible for water fetching as per the gender norms, their burden also further increased to comply with COVID-19 prevention recommendations.

With COVID-19 pandemic and the governmental measures of lockdowns and school closures stemming from it, **violations of girls' rights are multiplying**. Limited resources, increased violence and abuse, increased rates of early and unwanted pregnancies and decreased school attendance are the main effects for girls, which will come with lifelong consequences.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic was also a **milestone to create some windows of opportunities for girls' empowerment**. On the one hand, the pandemic has rehabilitated girls and women with skills of leadership who now have a greater role in the family and community, including aspects of decision-making, income spending, and family and community mobilization. A young woman interviewed by Plan International staff stated: *"As incomes have fallen, the way of managing has changed. To cover all the family expenses, it is now Mum instead of Dad who manages our finances and expenses are reduced."*<sup>46</sup>.

On the other hand, traditional stereotypes have been challenged during the management of the crisis: that childcare is not a man's job, but a women's role, and that household decisions are the sole responsibility of the father are beginning to break down in some families, hence, creating an opportunity for a change in social and gender norms. A father reported *"We are forced to save money through intra-family dialogue. Together we make decisions because everyone has a say and we understand each other better. It's true that it's not always easy in my culture. Sometimes misunderstanding sets in between us because we don't agree on priorities"*<sup>47</sup>

## PROTECTING GIRLS' RIGHTS WITH STRONG LEGAL FRAMEWORKS: OPPORTUNITIES AND GAPS

Benin has a **strong legislative framework for the protection of girls' rights, in line with ratified international instruments**. Most of the international and regional conventions regarding women's rights and child rights were ratified by the Government – Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Despite remaining inequalities in the Family Code, according to which the woman can only remarry after a waiting period of three hundred days from the dissolution of the previous marriage for instance, the Government adopted a strong Children Code, that prohibits a range of harmful practices such as forced marriage, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation and cutting, trafficking, exploitation of children for domestic purposes, infanticide, illegal and prolonged detention, early pregnancy and using children as beggars.

The **protective legal framework is complemented by a number of national laws** such as the Law 2011-26 on the prevention and repression of gender-based violence and the Law 2003-03 on the repression of the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. In addition, in October 2021, the Beninese parliament passed Law No. 2021-12 amending and supplementing Law 2003-04 of 3 March 2003 on sexual health and reproduction in the Republic of Benin, which legalises the right to abortion.<sup>48</sup> Efforts have been done by the government with the adoption of subsequent national policies: National Policy on the Promotion of Women of 2001, National Policy on Education and Training of girls of 2007 and the National Policy on the Promotion of Gender Equality of 2009.

However, girls and young women continue to have their rights violated, because of the **limited application of the legislative framework in place and the lack of resources at the level of the deconcentrated structures** of the State and the communes in charge of child protection. Girls and women also lack knowledge about their rights, and lack agency and resources to claim those.

---

<sup>45</sup> Plan International, *Rapide Gender Assessment Report, Covid19 response, op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> 24h au Bénin, "La loi sur l'avortement votée", [La loi sur l'avortement votée \( lire le projet \) - 24 Heures au Bénin \(24haubenin.info\)](https://www.24haubenin.info), 2021, accessed on 11/01/2021.

Institutions fail to vulgarize and spread the framework to make the knowledge of girl's rights widespread in communities.<sup>49</sup>

**Response mechanisms to violations are also inadequate and fail to protect girls and women sufficiently.** In addition to not knowing their rights, women and girls do not know either the judicial remedies available. The legal procedures are unfamiliar, long, costly and complex. Even for judges and judicial police officer, it may be difficult to prosecute perpetrator because of procedural inconsistencies to apply the laws adopted in favour of women and gender promotion.<sup>50</sup> Girls and women are also **discouraged by the difficulty of gathering evidence** to prove that they are victims of gender-based violence, as well as the negative attitudes of police and law institution when receiving survivors.

A very limited number of municipalities have a vision oriented towards the promotion of women and girls' rights. With only 7% women in the parliament (2020)<sup>51</sup>, 22% in the government (2014) and 5% in municipalities executive bodies (2013)<sup>52</sup>, women are not represented in positions of power, in the public sphere and as role models. In addition, this results in gender-unaware policies that do not take into account girls and women's interests and priorities, and fails to advance gender equality.

## YET, THERE IS HOPE.

Across Plan's areas of intervention, **girls challenge restrictive gender norms and promote gender equality, empowerment, protective environment.** They lead change to ensure that girls from their communities access inclusive quality education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and that they live free from violence in their communities. With a strong attention to inclusion, gender-transformative and human-rights based approaches, programmes and influencing work focusing on education, agency, youth economic empowerment, protection from GBV, access to services, have the potential to equip girls with the relevant tools to challenge norms, claim their rights, thrive, empower themselves to be active drivers of change and lift themselves out of poverty.



<sup>49</sup> UNDP, *Situation de la Femme au Bénin en 2013*, Bénin, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> UNDP, *Situation de la Femme au Bénin en 2013*, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> World Bank, *Bénin*, *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> UNDP, *Situation de la Femme au Bénin en 2013*, *op. cit.*

## Methodological note

Most of the statistical data is taken from [the Demographic and Health Surveys](#), [the World Bank Open Data](#), [Girls Not Brides Atlas](#), [UNICEF data](#), [International Labour Organization data](#), [the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys](#). This report was written on the basis of a literature review conducted by Plan International Belgium in 2021, including internal reports and documentation from Plan International's projects and programmes, as well as guidelines from peer organisations, institutions, UN Agencies and global legal frameworks.

## Acknowledgements

This report is the result of work conducted by the teams of Plan International Belgium and Plan International Bénin, as part of the design of Plan International's Programme "*Autonomisation économique et émancipation sociale des adolescent.e.s et des jeunes (10-24 ans)*", funded by the Belgium Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) for the coming five years. The writing of the report was coordinated by Chloé Collier and Nolwenn Gontard. It is part of a series that intends to provide country-specific and cross-country analysis of the situation of girls' rights in eight partner countries of Plan International Belgium (Benin, Bolivia, Ecuador, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Vietnam), with special attention to the root causes of gender equality.

The authors would like to express their acknowledgements to all the teams who have contributed, and are especially thankful to Paul Fagnon, Elodie Iko, Rodrigue Dimon, Kiani Raets, François Defourny, Pierre Laviolette, Sofia Saintz de Aja, Marta Ricci, Géraldine Lamfalussy, Nassima El Ouary & Deborah Varisano, for the extensive contribution to this report.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the DGD. All remaining errors and opinions expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors.

**Cover Photo: women in Benin, 2021**

Credits: Plan International

**Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world.** We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL BELGIUM

Plan International Belgium (Plan Belgium) has been committed since 1983 to a fairer and more secure world for all children and young people, by addressing the root causes of challenges and obstacles encountered by girls and vulnerable children. All our projects seek to promote **gender equality, by analysing the root causes of unequal access to opportunities for girls and boys and of gender-based violence.** We are working alongside children, youth, our advocates and partners to address the root causes of the barriers that vulnerable girls and children face. Our programs contribute to Plan's overall ambition, that is by 2025, **100 million girls can learn, lead, decide and thrive.** Currently, Plan Belgium is working in Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Bolivia, Ecuador, Vietnam. Plan Belgium implements programs and projects in the impact areas of: i) protection against abuse and violence; ii) youth participation and leadership; iii) inclusive and quality safe education, both formal and non-formal; iv) economic strengthening of young people through employment and entrepreneurship.

In Belgium, Plan is particularly involved in the fight against gender-based violence, in the School of Children's Rights, in order to help teachers and students to be aware of their rights and those of their peers in Belgium and around the world. Finally, Plan as a civil society organization carries the voice of girls in civic and political mobilizations, including within development cooperation.

## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL BENIN

Plan International began **operating in Benin in 1994** to support children to exercise their rights. In Benin, there is a high mortality rate for children under 5 due to preventable diseases. In addition, adolescents and young people are at risk of sexual and reproductive health problems due to a lack of education. As a result, there are high rates of teenage pregnancy, girls dropping out of school and maternal death. **Plan International Benin works alongside youth-led organisations, partners and communities to ensure vulnerable children, especially girls and young women, are informed, confident and able to make key decisions about their lives and bodies without fear of violence.**





Plan International priorities in Bénin include ensuring vulnerable young people have access to high quality and safe sexual, reproductive and maternal health services, providing children and young people with access to safe, inclusive, quality education and good employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, protecting young people from all forms of violence and harmful traditional practices and providing young children with early education and stimulation.

### Plan International Benin

Carre 647, Rue 395 Aupiais  
Cadjeoun Cotonou,  
08 BP 699 Cotonou  
Benin  
T +229-21-30-39-51 / 21-30-64-97  
benin.co@plan-international.org

### Plan International Belgium

Galerie Ravensteingalerij 3 B 5  
1000 Brussel – Bruxelles  
T +32 (0)2 504 60 00 - F +32 (0)2 504 60 59  
info@planinternational.be

 planinternational.be  
 @planfans  
 @planbelgie  
@planbelgique  
 @planbelgium