

# Adolescent Girls' Views on Safety in Cities

Findings from the Because I am a Girl Urban Programme study in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala, and Lima



# Executive Summary

For the first time in history, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas. Each month, five million people are added to the cities of the developing world, and it is estimated that by 2030, approximately 1.5 billion girls will live in urban areas.<sup>1</sup>

Girls in cities contend with the duality of increased risks and increased opportunities. On the one hand they face sexual harassment, exploitation, and insecurity as they navigate the urban environment, while on the other hand, they are more likely to be educated, less likely to be married at an early age, and more likely to participate in politics. In spite of these important trends, very little information is available about girls and young women in urban environments. In particular, academics and development institutions alike have largely ignored the intersection between gender, age, safety and urbanisation, and girls tend to be overlooked in programming either aimed at 'youth' or 'women.'

## About the BIAAG Urban Programme

The **Because I am a Girl (BIAAG) Urban Programme** is a collaboration between Plan International, Women in Cities International (WICI), and UN-HABITAT to build safe, accountable, and inclusive cities *with and for* adolescent girls in all their diversity. It is being carried out in **five capital cities** around the world: Cairo, Egypt; Delhi, India; Hanoi, Vietnam; Kampala, Uganda; and Lima, Peru, and was established to put into action the recommendations from the report *Because I am a Girl: State of the World's Girls Urban and Digital Frontiers: Girls in a Changing Landscape (2010)*.<sup>2</sup>



The BIAAG Urban Programme is a groundbreaking programme that seeks to close existing gaps between urban programming targeting 'youth' or 'women', by focusing on adolescent girls who are often the most vulnerable population in a city, yet are frequently excluded from urban processes. This programme provides girls with a space to discuss the issues they are facing and to offer their own innovative ideas for making improvements to their cities. With a rising level of gender based violence and urban insecurity around the world, the programme is being introduced at a crucial time.

The **crosscutting outcome of the BIAAG Urban Programme** is to increase girls' active and meaningful participation in urban development and governance.

Additional outcomes are to:

- 1 Increase girls' safety and access to public spaces
- 2 Increase girls' autonomous mobility in the city
- 3 Improve girls' access to quality city services

**"I want to give my opinion to make changes in the future." Girl, Cairo**



<sup>1</sup> Plan International (2010). Because I am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2010. Digital and Urban Frontiers: Girls in a Changing Landscape. Woking, Plan International. [http://plan-international.org/girls/pdfs/BIAAG\\_2010\\_EN2.pdf](http://plan-international.org/girls/pdfs/BIAAG_2010_EN2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## The BIAAG Urban Programme Research Process

In 2012, a study to understand how safe and inclusive cities were for adolescent girls was carried out in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala, and Lima.

The research is among the first of its kind. Examining the unique position of adolescent girls in urban environments in an active and participatory way from a broad range of stakeholders is an innovative approach to delving into a new area of research. The tools are unique and inviting, and have the potential to be scaled up in further phases of the programme to move beyond a rapid assessment to more in-depth, comprehensive research.

A Rapid Situational Assessment (RSA) provided the BIAAG Urban Programme with information on local priorities, issues, and ideas on how to design a locally-led global programme to maximise its potential for positive change for girls in urban settings. The specific research questions asked were:

- 1 How do adolescent girls perceive their current city in terms of its safety and inclusivity, and how is this different from the views of other stakeholders in the community?
- 2 How do the five cities compare to each other, and what are the global trends that emerge?
- 3 What steps should be taken by the BIAAG Urban Programme to improve the situation for adolescent girls in each city?

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To provide a snapshot of the current situation for adolescent girls in each of the five cities to inform future programming;
- To identify key opportunities and challenges for the BIAAG Urban Programme in each city;
- To explore the perceptions of adolescent girls' safety across multiple stakeholders including adolescent girls, and identify inconsistencies in perceptions across various actors;
- To build the capacities of adolescent girls and boys to speak about and act on issues of safety and inclusion; and
- To identify key stakeholders and build relationships with various partners in support of the BIAAG Urban Programme.

Over 1,400 adolescent girls (1,000) and boys (400) participated in this unique study across the five cities. Further, a total of 153 stakeholders were interviewed as part of the Key Informant Interviews. While the BIAAG Urban Programme defines 'adolescence' as being 13-18 years of age, this definition did not always reflect local age bracket distinctions, so the actual age range of participants in the study is 11 to 23 years.



## Overview of the Tools

The study was made up of five tools.

### 1. Stakeholder, Programme, Policy Mapping

The first step was to perform desk research to develop a profile of the city's local context (including demographic information and crime statistics) within which to understand the safety and inclusion of girls. Conducting desk research to identify key stakeholders and existing policies and programmes in each city provided the BIAAG Urban Programme team with an understanding of the local context of girls' safety and inclusion at the beginning of the programme and served to outline existing gaps that the BIAAG Urban Programme could help to fill.

### 2. Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews with a broad range of stakeholders such as members of the community, government officials and select experts helped the BIAAG Urban Programme understand how members of the community perceived the situation of adolescent girls' safety and inclusion in the five cities. They were also used to identify perceived challenges and opportunities for girls in their respective cities.



### 3. Social Cartography

Social Cartography is a creative and practical way of understanding girls' experiences and visions for their cities. There are two parts to this tool: the first asks girls to draw a map to show the spaces she uses (the places she goes and the routes she takes) and how she feels along the way; and the second is a group map where girls work in small groups to draw their visions for an ideal city. For this tool, parallel exercises were also performed with the participation of boys, and the perspectives of girls and boys were compared to each other.

### 4. Girls' Opportunity Star

The Girls' Opportunity Star for safe and inclusive cities is a tool that involves girls in a series of focus group discussions surrounding 7-points of safety and inclusion. Girls are first asked to share their personal ratings of safety and inclusion for each of these points (e.g. a girl may rate that she 'never' feels safe when using public transit). They then engage in a group discussion on the different points and share what would need to change for the ratings to be better in their city.

### 5. Girls' Safety Walk

The Girls' Safety Walk is a group walk through a particular area of the city where girls note, with the help of a checklist, the particular elements of the built and social environment that they feel contribute to or hinder their sense of safety. Girls then debrief on their observations, identifying priority issues they would like to see addressed and offering recommendations for making their communities safer and more inclusive.



@ Plan Vietnam

**In Lima, only 2.2% of girls reported always feeling safe when walking in public spaces.**

**“In public spaces and in the street, the city is very dangerous. There are gangs, robberies, assaults; you can be kidnapped, followed, sexually harassed, [and] raped. Walking in the streets is dangerous, especially in desolate areas; it is more dangerous at night when there is low light.”**

**Girl, Lima**



@ Plan Peru

# Main Findings from the Five Cities

## What Girls Have to Say about their Safety and Inclusion

While the results from the study are not representative of the views of girls in cities around the world or even within those five cities, the findings do point to some valuable shared experiences that are important to analyse in order to successfully respond to adolescent girls' safety needs and to build safe and inclusive cities. In each of the cities, girls share similar experiences of insecurity, of sexual harassment and of feelings of exclusion. They also share visions of future cities that are well-lit, well-planned, and well-maintained and where they are given space to participate. It is arguably the consistency of the vision expressed by adolescent girls both within and across cities that is most intriguing.

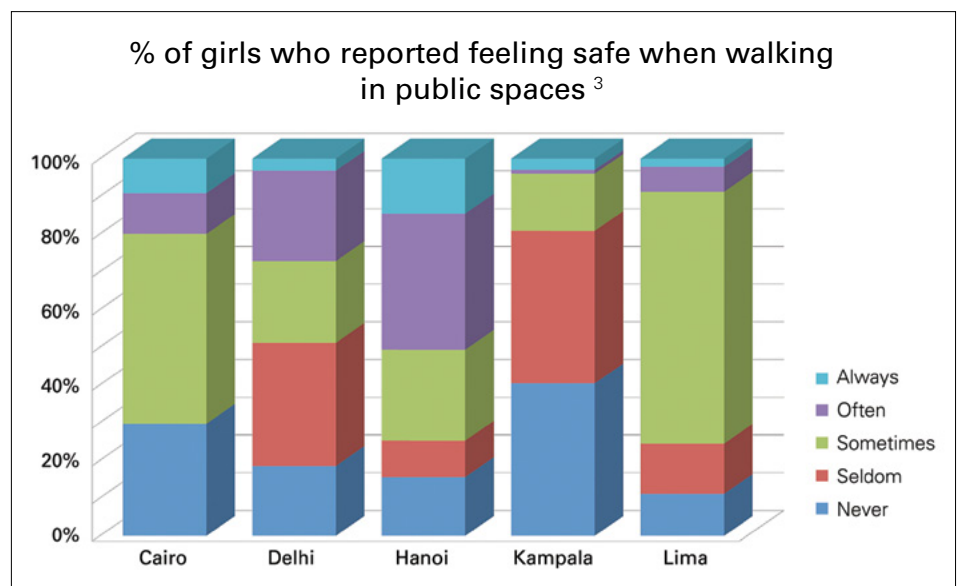
**In Kampala, 80% of girls do not feel safe.**

**“The absence of lights in parks and other public places is a big problem. Girl, Delhi**

## Girls' Safety and Access to Public Spaces

Very few girls in the study claimed that they *'always'* feel safe when walking in public spaces. The issue of lighting emerged in each of the cities as having an important impact on how safe adolescent girls feel in different spaces. Girls knew the streets or alleys that were well-lit and those that lacked lighting, which then influenced the paths they try to avoid at night. In Kampala and in Lima, girls shared that when their vision was obstructed they felt that it made the spaces more unsafe for them. Girls noted that the social use of space changes at different times of day. In Delhi, girls in residential areas avoided afternoons and late nights as spaces are usually empty during these hours, leading the girls to feel less at ease.

Conversely, in Kampala, the girls mentioned that the paths and lanes in their community were particularly crowded in the evening, causing girls to feel unsafe. The girls in Lima and Hanoi felt that drug and alcohol abuse were common elements of the social landscape. Girls in Hanoi explained that they fear being robbed or raped in parks. Girls in Lima reflected on how the presence of gangs and domestic violence affected how they felt in urban public spaces. It emerged that it was not only the actual users of a space that caused insecurity, but it was also the reputation of the space and the users of the space that affect girls' sense of safety.



<sup>3</sup> Note on the data: Cairo did not include the response of 'seldom' as an option for the girls, and data for Kampala was taken from the average ratings for each parish.

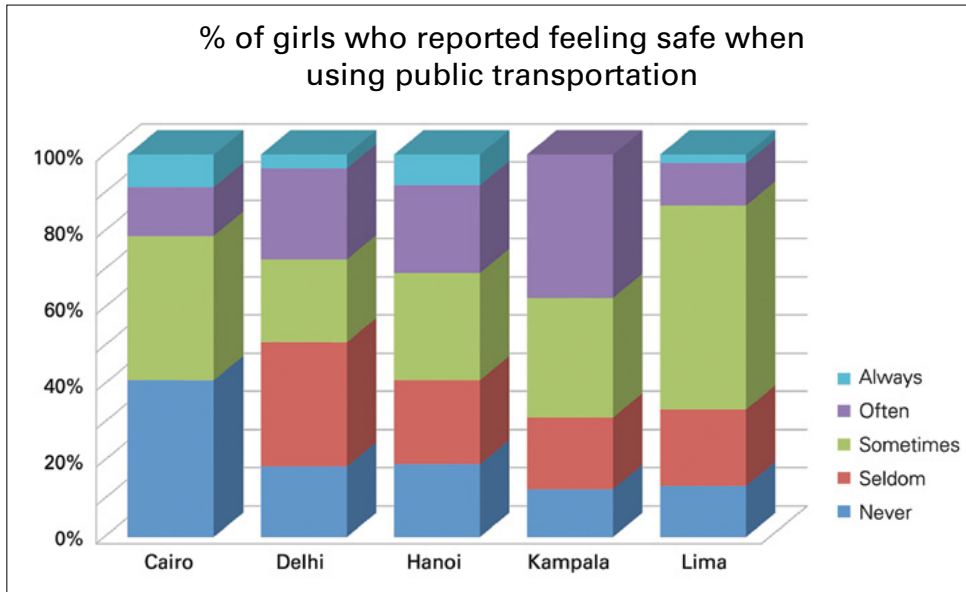
## Girls' Autonomous Mobility in the City

Existing barriers to girls' autonomous mobility across the cities included the lack of a public transportation system conducive to safe travelling. In fact, public transportation in all cities was a large concern for girls, and they reported feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, and disrespected while travelling. They pointed to improper conduct by other passengers as well as drivers, and to general inaction on the part of other people who witnessed such acts. In Hanoi, adolescent girls rarely walked from one place to the next, and complained of overcrowding, groping, sexual harassment and theft as being important safety issues affecting them on public buses. In Kampala, Lima, and Delhi, girls also pointed out that a lack of signage in the city limited their ability to know where they were and where they were going, thus limiting their mobility. In Cairo, it was emphasised that the families of some girls never allowed them to move around in public spaces by themselves, and girls were always accompanied.



@Plan

**Only 3.3% of girls reported always feeling safe when using public transportation in Delhi.**



**“We feel unsafe while going to school as we have to leave early and [have] no company of other girls. At that hour the roads are empty.”**

**Girl, Delhi**

**“Theft [and] sexual harassment happens [on] the bus. I was sexually touched intentionally and we could not trust the ticket seller too.”** Girl, Hanoi



## Girls' Access to Quality City Services

It is important for a girl's sense of safety that she be able to access a well-planned, well-maintained city, as well as basic and emergency services. Lack of basic services such as drainage systems and garbage collection can limit walking paths and cause girls to feel unsafe. Girls in Kampala, Cairo, Delhi and Lima all commented on how piles of garbage can block their paths or cause drains to overflow, limiting the space they have to move through. In Delhi, girls stressed that they often did not have personal toilets and public toilets were scarce and poorly maintained, forcing them to use open spaces, putting them at risk of sexual harassment

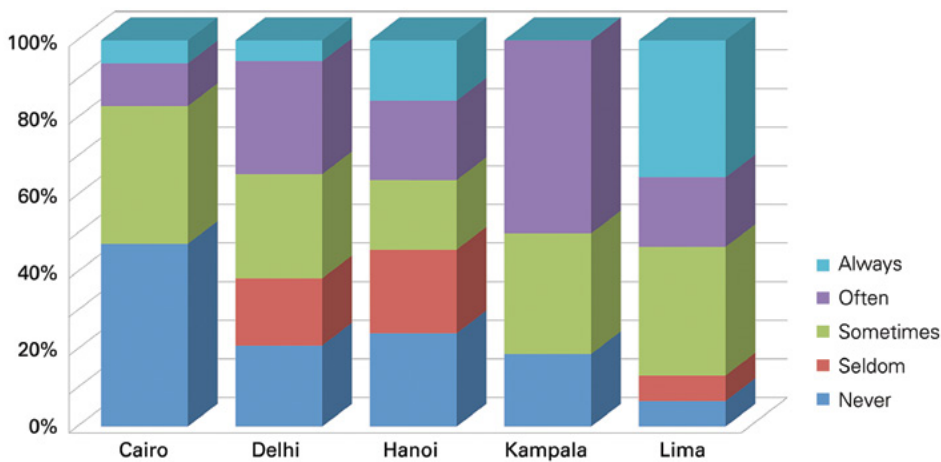
and assault. In terms of emergency services, girls in most of the cities commented on the lack of formal policing or security guards in their communities. In all five cities, girls questioned whether it would be worth reaching out to the police for their problems as they were often unresponsive, untrustworthy, or located too far away to respond in a timely manner. In Cairo, it is important to note that the recent revolution and accompanying unrest has increased the level of "thuggery" and violent fights, which is exacerbated by lack of security and police presence.

**In Hanoi, girls reported that they 'seldom' (36%) or 'rarely' (23%) had access to emergency services – notably the police.**

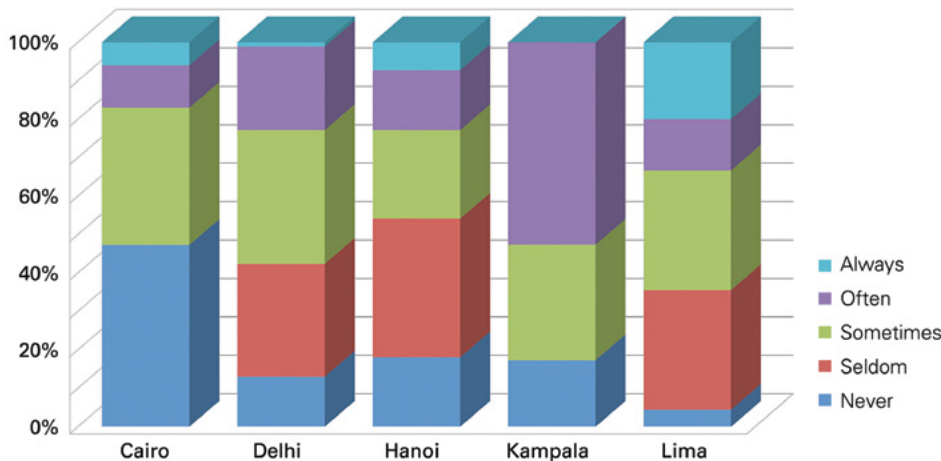
**"The roads are dark and large, if we call for help, no one can help us." Girl, Hanoi**

**In Cairo, 44% of girls felt that they never had access to emergency and/or basic services.**

**% of girls who reported having access to basic services, including water and sanitation**



**% of girls who reported having access to emergency services, including the police**

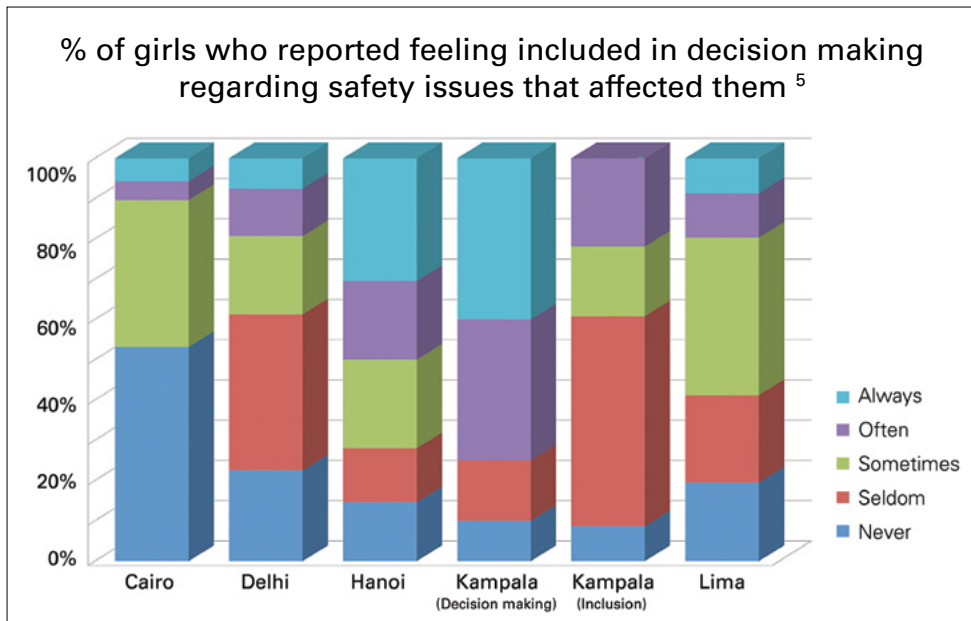


## Girls' Active and Meaningful Participation in Urban Development and Governance

Girls were often excluded from being able to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them. In Cairo, girls placed a great deal of emphasis on 'inclusion and decision-making' in particular during the Girls' Opportunity Star, and often spoke of feeling under-appreciated, and that their opinions were frequently overlooked or disregarded. This issue came up in Cairo as frequently as safety issues and incidences of sexual harassment. In Delhi, "girls shared that inclusion within the school, community, and governing systems are a distant reality for them when they do not feel included within their own families. The majority of them felt that their brothers were prioritised before them."<sup>4</sup> The girls posited that because they are young, female and poor, their opinions were not valued in the same way as others in the community. In several cities, girls pointed out that their participation in this study was the first time that they were being asked about their experiences and ideas for their cities.



**In Cairo, 32% of girls felt that they never could talk to anyone about their safety concerns.**



**In Lima, a girl said that frequent disregard for her opinions makes her feel "ashamed, sad, and lowers her self-esteem."**

<sup>4</sup> Plan India (2013) Report on the Findings of the Because I am a Girl Urban Programme Study in Delhi (*unpublished*)

<sup>5</sup> The Kampala team collected data on the issues of 'decision-making' and 'inclusion', while the other cities combined these two indicators.



# Important Themes Across the Cities

In general, cities noted that data was not typically sex and age-disaggregated, making it challenging to find information that would provide insight into adolescent girls. This supports earlier research completed by Plan, WICI and UN-HABITAT that pointed to these same gaps.<sup>6</sup> The teams connected this to gaps in policy and programming and failed to offer specific consideration to the needs of girls. For example, the Kampala Physical Development Plan (2012-2040) does not include considerations of safety issues, nor does it consider adolescent girls as important stakeholders. Finally, the fact that there is a lack of specific data about adolescent girls in each of the cities, combined with the fact that particular consideration of their needs is not typically taken into account in policies and programming, leads us to infer that girls are simply not a priority population in the eyes of government municipalities and other key decision-makers. Adolescent girls, being too young to vote and not typically independently wealthy, have very little influence over decision-making processes.

## “No one cares about us.” Girl, Cairo



## External context: growing momentum?

At the global level it was noted that there are important conventions, namely the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other initiatives such as the Secretary General’s UNiTE Campaign, the One Billion Rising Campaign, UNESCO and UN-HABITAT’s work around the right to the city, and Plan’s 8 Point Action Plan on Girls’ Right to the City, that reinforce the importance of working to build safe and inclusive cities with and for adolescent girls. As part of the Stakeholder, Programme and Policy Mapping tool, cities identified national policies, programmes and plans with objectives that are aligned to the efforts of the BIAAG Urban Programme, such as Peru’s National Plan Facing Violence against Women (2009-2015) that aims to eradicate violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment. Similar pieces of legislation, action plans and programmes were identified at the local level.

It is important to note that the BIAAG Urban Programme is happening at a time where there is unprecedented attention and mobilisation around issues of gender based violence. This is particularly true for two of the BIAAG Urban Programme cities - Cairo and Delhi. In Cairo, both during and after the revolution, international attention has turned to the phenomenon of sexual harassment. Even though a 2008 study revealed that 83% of Egyptian Women and 98% of foreign women experienced sexual harassment in Egypt,<sup>7</sup> it is only since the 2011 revolution that such problems have been widely acknowledged. A number of grassroots initiatives have since emerged to document the issue (e.g. HarassMap), vigilante groups trying to react or prevent it as it happens, or work on more subtle forms of consciousness-raising like graffiti campaigns. In Delhi, in the aftermath of a brutal sexual assault on a young woman in a bus in December 2012, people took to the streets in Delhi, in India and in cities around to world to demand an end to violence against women and girls. This has put great pressure on the government to show that they are taking the issue seriously.

<sup>6</sup> Plan, WICI, UN-HABITAT (2012). Adolescent Girls Creating Safer Cities: Harnessing the Potential of Communication for Development (C4D). <http://plan-international.org/girls/pdfs/adolescent-girls-safer-cities.pdf>

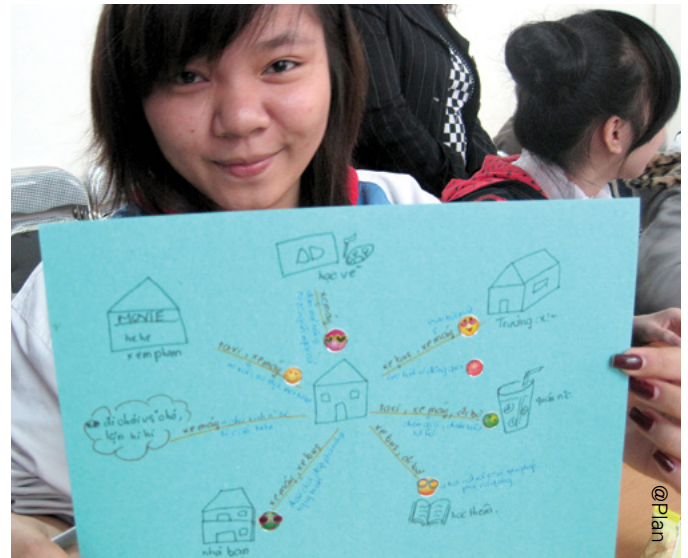
<sup>7</sup> The Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights. Clouds in Egypt’s Sky. Cairo: The Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, 2008. Web. (p.17)

## What Does an Ideal City Look Like?

Girls and boys drew group maps illustrating their visions of an ideal city, which were strikingly similar across the cities. Specifically, the commonly recurring elements included:

- **Access to emergency services:** hospitals, health centres and clinics, including provision of reproductive health services; security in the area, many police stations, female police officers;
- **Access to basic services:** public toilets, clean water made available through the installation of taps in public spaces and throughout the community, water tanks;
- **Spaces for play and leisure:** playground areas including flower gardens; small, clean parks with trees, grass, benches; cultural spaces; libraries; movie theatres; gyms; bookstores; bakeries; swimming pools;
- **Road infrastructure:** traffic lights in residential areas, sidewalks for pedestrians (i.e. free of vendors and loiterers), wide roads, walkways, traffic lights, flyovers, zebra crossings and street crossing for differently-abled people;
- **Markets and shopping areas:** with reasonable prices for poor people, big malls;
- **Schools:** a school system for all levels in their living areas;
- **Transit routes:** bus stations in their communities;
- **Cleanliness:** waste baskets at every corner of the street;
- **Housing:** organised (unlike the slums where many of them live), with planned roads, proper lighting; and
- **Religious institutions:** temples, mosques, churches.

Interestingly, the boys' maps showed that they placed greater emphasis on having places to go for leisure purposes. For example, boys' maps in Kampala, Hanoi and Lima included such things as clubs, malls, entertainment areas, football fields and arcades, largely absent from girls' maps. Girls' maps, on the other hand, focused a lot on infrastructure, ensuring, for example that hospitals, schools, markets, playgrounds and buses are easily accessible.



**Girls revealed that their participation in this study was the first time that they were being asked about their experiences and ideas for their cities.**



# Looking Ahead

Each city succeeded in responding to all of the research questions and to the objectives set forth for this study. Specifically, each city was able to obtain a snapshot of the current situation facing adolescent girls' safety and inclusion in five cities. Through the study, the teams were also able to identify key government and community stakeholders to engage with, identify various opportunities and challenges to address, promote critical dialogue and bridge the gap between girls and local authorities, and build the capacity of adolescent girls and boys to speak about and act on issues of safety and inclusion. Specifically, some of the recommendations are:

- **Increase girls' autonomous mobility in the city**

- Provide safe and reliable public transport.
- Formalise public transportation systems, including having buses pick up and drop off passengers at authorised stops.
- Offer gender-sensitive training for those involved in public transportation services.

- **Improve girls' access to quality city service, including emergency and basic services**

- Build clean, free, safe, and accessible public toilets, and ensure that these facilities are well-lit.
- Ensure that parks are clean, safe, and more accessible for adolescent girls, and ensure that parks are well-lit.
- Improve the quality and increase the quantity of policing and security measures in urban spaces.

- **Increase girls' active and meaningful participation in urban development and governance**

- Provide opportunities to include girls in decision-making processes at the municipal and national government levels.
- Provide platforms and opportunities for adolescent girls to speak about their experiences and share concerns.
- Support the development of girls-clubs within communities.

## Concluding Thoughts

The use of innovative and participatory research methodology to gain information about adolescent girls' safety and inclusion in five cities – Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala and Lima – has provided an important snapshot of the current situation of girls in urban environments. These tools provided girls with a space to speak out on the issues they are facing and to offer their own creative ideas for making improvements to their cities and communities. For many, this was the first and only time that they had been asked to share their experiences and ideas.

The findings from the research clearly show that there is a need for the BIAAG Urban Programme in cities around the world today. Adolescent girls are too often ignored or underrepresented in current policies and programming and are most excluded from urban development and governance processes. Their voices, now sidelined and silenced, must be brought forth and must be listened to in order to build cities that are inclusive of girls, that respond to their needs and priorities and where they feel safe to move freely. The BIAAG Urban Programme is working to incite this important shift in five diverse cities.

This innovative initiative is a globally united, locally implemented programme that brings together several partners to achieve a common goal – putting adolescent girls at the centre of transforming cities to become places of inclusion, tolerance, and opportunity for everyone. By bringing city officials and adolescent girls together there is a real opportunity to create real economic and social change within these societies that will benefit all citizens.

The complete report *Adolescent Girls' Views on Safety in Cities: Findings from the Because I am a Girl: Urban Programme*, will be finalised in April 2013 and available through the partner organisations' websites. ([www.plan-international.org/girls/reports-and-publications](http://www.plan-international.org/girls/reports-and-publications))

To watch 'Safer Cities: A Girl's Eye View of Living in the City', please visit <http://youtube.com/user/planinternationaltv>.

Please contact Alana Livesey for more details. [Alana.Livesey@plan-international.org](mailto:Alana.Livesey@plan-international.org)



### **Plan International Headquarters**

Dukes Court  
Duke Street  
Woking  
Surrey GU21 5BH  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 (0) 1483 755155  
Fax: +44 (0) 1483 756505

[info@plan-international.org](mailto:info@plan-international.org)  
[plan-international.org/girls](http://plan-international.org/girls)

### **Women in Cities International**

309-6465 Avenue Durocher  
Montréal, QC, Canada, H2V 3Z1  
Tel: (+1) 514-861-6123

[info@femmesetvilles.org](mailto:info@femmesetvilles.org)  
[www.womenincities.org](http://www.womenincities.org)

### **UN-HABITAT**

Two United Nations Plaza  
Room DC2-0943  
New York, N.Y. 10017, U.S.A.  
Tel: +1 (212) 963-4200  
Fax: +1 (212) 963-8721

[habitatny@un.org](mailto:habitatny@un.org)  
[www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)