

Turning evidence into practice:

Insights from qualitative research and community radio programming with girls on SRHR in Benin



Until we are all equal



Arts and Humanities Research Council



About Real Choices, Real Lives

Plan International is a leading independent development and humanitarian organisation dedicated to improving girls' lives globally. In 2006, Plan International began the unique research project, Real Choices, Real Lives (RCRL) – a longitudinal and qualitative study which has been following the lives of up to 142 girls in nine countries around the world: Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Benin, Togo, Uganda, Brazil, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. As of 2023, 87 girls were participating in the study. With data collected each year from the girls and their caregivers since the girls' births in 2006, the cohort study has explored in detail the lived experiences of these girls and their families as they have navigated different stages of growing up; it aims to document the social, economic, cultural, and institutional factors that influence girls' lives and their opportunities. The study has a distinct commitment to understanding the root causes of gender inequality by asking questions about beliefs, values, and expectations which aim to uncover how gendered social norms and behaviours are created and sustained or shift over time.

Real Choices, Real Lives has gathered data on a vast array of topics and themes – including education (and its relationship to climate change), health (including **sexual and reproductive health and rights**), **hunger, protection and violence, girls' activism and participation in civic spaces**, the ways in which **girls are challenging gender norms**, and many others. The study will continue to collect data until all girls reach the age of 18 in 2024.

Front cover: A teenager in Benin, who has been given the information she needs about her changing body and healthy relationships.

This page: A girl in Benin learning about her sexual and reproductive health rights.

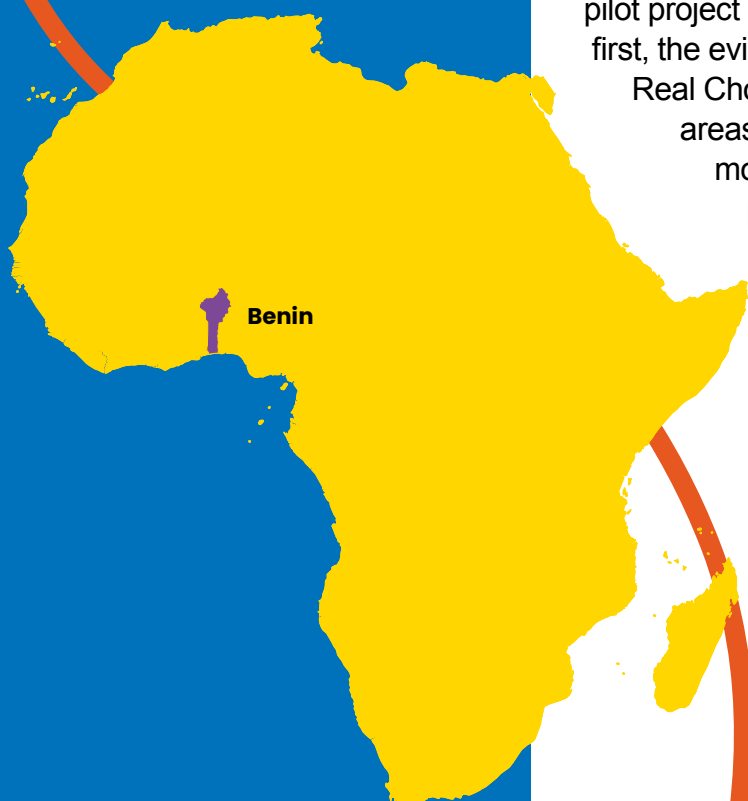
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How can we ensure that the wealth of research data amassed across the development sector meaningfully impacts the communities it comes from? Evidence for impact, or the ‘evidence-feedback loop’, concerns the ways that research can be used toward meaningful action, so that programmes and interventions are underpinned by evidence.

This Guidance Note documents a pilot evidence-for-impact project by Plan International and Cardiff University, implemented by Plan International Benin, that has navigated a key challenge commonly experienced across the development sector: a balance between how the organisation approaches girls’ sexual wellbeing and ensuring local ownership of the project that diverges from these aims.

In 2023, Plan International piloted an innovative radio project to facilitate dialogue between adolescent girls and their caregivers on their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This project was born out of [Plan International’s 2021 report for the longitudinal and qualitative research study, Real Choices, Real Lives](#) and a [2021 article published in the International Feminist Journal of Politics](#) (in collaboration with Cardiff University). The Benin SRHR Project designed and broadcast radio programming in two communities in the Kouffo Department in Benin exploring topics of sexual health, wellbeing and healthy relationships. This pilot project brought together two layers of youth voice: first, the evidence collected from the girls participating in Real Choices, Real Lives was used to identify critical areas of SRHR that adolescent girls want to learn more about; and secondly, Plan International partnered with young people from the two communities to use that evidence to develop radio scripts that would spark dialogue between adolescents and their caregivers.

In this Guidance Note, we outline our approach taken in this pilot project, key lessons learned, and recommendations on how similar evidence-driven interventions can be designed and implemented.



How to use evidence for impact

STEP 1:

Identify need

Engage with the community, local partners, programme staff, and/or in-country staff to identify specific issues needed to be addressed and how this may overlap with the findings of your evidence base.

What we did:

The idea for the Benin SRHR Project emerged during workshops in 2021 between the three project partners: Plan International Global Hub, Plan International Benin, and Cardiff University. These workshops established that there was a desire from Plan Benin staff to directly embed findings and evidence from Real Choices, Real Lives into community-level programming – particularly the communities that the girls participating in the research study live in. The concept for the project was thus born: to develop radio programme sketches and commentary on SRHR topics, to be co-designed with youth from two communities in Kouffo Department, with the aim of sparking discussion and intergenerational dialogue.

STEP 2:

Use evidence to create foundational stories

Based on the need identified, establish the key takeaways of your evidence: what did you find out and what information needs to be shared with communities? Use this as the starting point to create basic fictional short stories that give a generalised account of a person or people going through the issues you would like to inform the community about.

What we did:

To create 'foundational stories' as the basis for the radio sketches – which were then written by local youth – Plan International Global Hub and Cardiff University developed anonymised stories based on analysis of this qualitative data from the RCRL study in Benin. As the project was conducted in Real Choices, Real Lives communities, anonymisation of the data was very important,¹ and so we did not seek to exactly replicate what had been said in interviews. Any specific or identifying details were changed.

¹ As to protect the privacy of cohort girls and their families, all RCRL data is fully anonymised, in which all identifying details of the girls' real names and locations are erased and replaced with pseudonyms.



STEP 3:

Youth create radio scripts based on foundational stories

Engage with local youth by (1) training them in the key issues you want to share and bring awareness to in the community, and (2) hold workshops with them to turn your foundational stories into fully formed scripts that will comprise the radio programme.

What we did:

We engaged with nine young people from two communities in Benin, who used the foundational stories as inspiration to write scripts for sketches and commentary that were aired on local radio.

In the workshops, the participants drew on these 'foundational stories' to develop the scripts for the radio sketches and commentary. These young people worked together with the Benin team so that the radio programme would be reflective and representative of a range of youth realities in the communities.

STEP 4:

Deliver community radio programme

Collaborate with existing local radio channels or other media groups, working with existing media technicians and presenters who are already familiar with delivering the medium in the community. Broadcast the radio sketches and commentary developed by the youths.

What we did:

Plan International Benin staff facilitated the recording and broadcasting of the radio programme, sourcing voice actors, radio presenters and radio technicians. The programme, aimed at a family audience, started with a brief introduction on the nature of the programme. This included the intention for parents to discuss topics with youth to "enable our young people and teenagers to have responsible sexual and reproductive education". This was followed by two sketches, written by the youths in Step 3. The radio host also invited listeners to call in to discuss the topic on air.

What we have learned



Based on the experience of conducting the Benin pilot project, we have gathered learnings from participant and listener feedback, and the content of the broadcast.

➔ **1 Develop youths' capacity to understand and engage with the topic**

We learned that youth had different levels of understanding of SRHR issues, and so it is important to train the youth on the project topic so that they are all on the same page. This will better equip them to understand the foundational stories and to confidently engage in the writing workshops. To ensure clear understanding of the foundational stories for youth involved in the script writing workshops, meet with participants beforehand, to train them on the key SRHR themes and aims of the scripts.

➔ **2 Ensure the radio presenter can present the information clearly and confidently**

The radio broadcast is comprised of stories written by young people, with commentary from the radio presenter, and listener call-ins. We learned that with such a variety, it is important for the radio presenter to ensure the programme keeps on track with the key message – i.e. positive intergenerational dialogues about SRHR - so that listeners receive a clear learning from the programme. Share key educational resources with the radio presenter(s), to ensure they are well-versed in the topic and confident to present the information clearly.

➔ **3 Resource and plan for a longer-term radio series**

We produced and broadcasted one radio programme, which we found sparked listeners' interest to participate in youth-caregiver dialogues about SRHR but some still felt unsure about how to broach the topic with their children. We found that listeners were interested in a longer-series of programmes. More programmes could improve caregivers' confidence and knowledge to have these dialogues with young people. We suggest planning and resourcing for more radio programmes. This may come in the form of repeat broadcasts or through writing and recording multiple, different episodes along the same theme, to show applicability of this knowledge in different scenarios.

Our top tips



- ✓ **This format can be used for any topic, in any community!** The process outlined by these steps aimed to create an intervention based on a specified aspect of girls' lives (SRHR) and can be applied to other aspects of girls' lives too, such as education, participation, leadership. **Radio is not the only medium you can use.** The value of this project is that this format can be used for other media too: foundational stories based on data, followed by youth workshops to turn the stories into scripts or storyboards, and recording/broadcast of the product. There is potential to use this approach for not only radio programming, but also videos, animations or social media campaigns.
- ✓ **Invest in a series of programmes to support social change.** Longer-term programming is vital for this kind of intervention – either through repeat broadcasts or multiple recorded episodes. Ensure you have enough time and financial resourcing when planning the project.
- ✓ **Build participants' base understanding with early training.** To ensure all stakeholders in the project have a good level of understanding around girls' sexual wellbeing or any other aspect of child rights, be sure to hold trainings with youth and involved media presenters on the key issues of your project.

Learn more!



If you have any further questions on project then get in touch with Plan International, you can find further information on our [website](#).



Youth in Benin learning about their sexual and reproductive health, with the support of Plan International Benin. © Plan International

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About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we 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 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.



Until we are all equal

Plan International







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