



Intentional Design Practitioner Report

An Assessment of Plan International El Salvador's GAD (Gender and Development) Programming—Using Evidence for Redirection after the Initial Implementation

By Alexia Abrego, Audrey Anderson, Maritza Avalos, Laura Brazee, Xenia de Velasco, Angel del Valle, Carlos Ernesto Martinez, Yesenia Segovia, and Gisela Turcios

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The Adolescent Girls Community of Practice is a project of the Population Council.

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About

The Intentional Design approach has been foundational to the Population Council’s work since 2000, when on-the-ground programs to reach the most excluded girls in the poorest communities greatly expanded. This practitioner report is part of a series of 20 reports reflecting work in sites around the world from 2000 to 2020. The Intentional Design approach was implemented in these sites with nongovernmental and governmental partners who explored the question: Why invest in girls? Once that was understood, the Council offered learning tools to navigate the questions: Where do we work? With whom do we work? When, chronologically, in the girls’ life cycles are the most crucial moments? Which content is meaningful and realistic and builds girls’ protective assets? What does success look like for different segments of girls?

In 2013, the Girl Roster tool was added when it was clear that many partners lacked the technical and scientific resources to establish the “universe” of girls in the places they had selected to work. Intentional Design tools—with the Roster being the most known and catalytic learning aid—have been utilized in South and East Asia; the Middle East; Central, East, and West Africa; North America; Latin America; and the Caribbean.

The Roster has been adapted for use in an array of sociodemographic contexts including dispersed rural villages, poor urban neighborhoods, conflict zones, refugee camps, densely packed informal/migrant-receiving settlements, high-risk HIV zones, before and after epidemics, as a rebuilding tool, and in Native American reservation communities. In every context, the Roster provided a transformative opportunity to see girls’ lives more systematically, drawing both quantitative and qualitative information. The efforts to estimate and segment the universe of girls has challenged initial assumptions about girls, families, safe and unsafe zones in communities, and the accessibility and relevance of services, even among those who felt they knew their community, including longstanding program staff. Across the board, practitioners report that on-the-ground application of the learning tools generates surprising and useful knowledge vital to shaping their work, assessing its reach, and articulating plans for expansion.

In the 20 reports that comprise this series, our partners share their experiences applying Intentional Design tools and principles. The reports represent just a few on-the-ground projects, but most of our partners report that the Intentional Design approach has taken root. We honor our partners for their honesty and dedication. They inspire us.

Judith Bruce and Sophie Soares

Authors, *Intentional Design: Reaching the Most Excluded Girls in the Poorest Communities—A Guide for Practitioners and Advocates*, from which these reports were excerpted.

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Findings and Decisions	Implementation Observations and Adaptations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8% of the children, boys and girls, lived with neither parent; program staff felt that these children should be prioritized in future recruitment. • A small percentage (2%) reported migrating; they may be at high risk and require special recruitment activities. • Of boys 6–18, 52% are out of school, and for girls a similar figure was 48%, but there was an age pattern differential: the girls had a higher chance of being out of school by age 15 and close to 10% of the children who had ever been to school were not enrolled. • Noting that they had been less successful in recruiting girls 10–14 than those 15–17, program staff set a goal of working with girls 12–14 at the beginning of the project—to maximize their participation—while engaging older girls 15–18 with leadership-building skills. • Following the assessment and Roster, program staff suggested that engaging younger girls 10–14 was both desirable and easier than anticipated; these girls should be engaged in GAD-type violence-reduction programs. • The girls most at risk of violence in groups aged 15–17 did not participate because they were not intentionally recruited from the beginning of the project. • Whereas more girls than boys were enrolled in Plan’s program overall, proportionately more boys than girls participated in GAD activities, whose goal was to contribute to the reduction of violence against girls and adolescents by reaching them with activities and to promote their agency and empowerment. (The absence of girls in the GAD program and its focus on males may be related to the finding that though there were benefits to the overall Plan programs, it did not result in reductions in violence.) • Findings affirmed the importance of working on building agency and measurable skills and centering work on gender roles in a power and negotiating framework. • Girls had a much greater awareness and longer list of types of violence than boys. Included among their needs: more support from adults, safe places to go for help; a safe place to spend the night away from home; knowing the names of ten people; and knowing how to fill out forms to report violence including knowing the name of official rescue places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement from Plan El Salvador was key. Everyone was on board with the assessment, from project leaders to the finance team, the country director, and the team based in Washington. Without their honest engagement, the assessment would not have been successful. • The study detailed was comprehensive, going to all the Plan sites and combining a variety of methods, initial informal assessments and community conversations, and the Roster exercise, followed by post-Roster focus groups. This thoroughness allowed program staff to identify the participation efforts of different segments and, going forward, their differential needs. • Roster focus groups gave more depth to the findings and recruitment. • Program staff across the 36 sites seemed to have their ability to “see” girls as well as enumerate them enhanced, leading Plan El Salvador to adopt these methods as part of its follow-up to the GAD program, called Champions of Change.

Introduction

This practitioner report documents activities conducted by the Population Council and Plan El Salvador as part of a comprehensive assessment at the close of the girl-centered project Girls Promoting the Reduction of Gender-Based Violence (GAD) implemented between April 2012 and April 2015 in El Salvador. This effort was a conscious exercise in both assessment and future capacity-building and involved three stages of project assessment that combined capacity-building activities at different levels to determine the extent to which Plan International reaches the most marginalized girls in El Salvador.

The three stages of the comprehensive assessment took place between January and October 2015 and were conducted in coordination with key staff based in El Salvador. These stages were: 1) Build capacity among project staff to collect Girl Roster information in 36 communities; 2) Design and supervise focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore the results of the project (based on highlights of the Girl Roster results); and 3) Facilitate workshops with key staff to revise the basic elements of the girl-centered program for El Salvador and present a vision for programmatic sustainability to Plan USA.

GAD 182 Project: Girls Promoting the Reduction of Gender-Based Violence

The goal of the GAD 182 project was to “contribute to the reduction of violence against girls and adolescents by reaching them with activities that promote their agency and empowerment, with the objective of strengthening their knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the prevention of violence.” The project reached 1,396 girls aged 12–18 across 36 communities in 9 municipalities from El Salvador. Activities implemented as part of the project included:

- Asset-building sessions with girls and boys in safe spaces at the community level, delivered by external consultants and complemented by referral services when cases of violence were identified;

- Identification of adolescent girls aged 12–16 with the potential of becoming girl leaders to be trained as “co-listeners” to support other girls who experienced violence;
- Creation of community-based plans for the prevention of violence against women, aimed at sensitizing parents, leaders, and boys in the community;
- Asset-building sessions with a number of boys aged 12–16 aimed at supporting girls in their empowerment process;
- Strengthening local institutions that provide services on violence prevention and attention by building gender-analysis capacities among services providers.

According to Plan El Salvador’s records, as of 2019, 436 communities in 62 municipalities across the 5 departments (see Figure 1) have been reached by their projects and activities. Table 1 summarizes the communities covered by each Program Unit Office (PU).

Assessment, Stage 1: Capacity building among project staff to collect Girl Roster information in 36 communities

The Council initially engaged with Plan El Salvador in early 2011 conducting a workshop with the GAD 182 project team to illustrate the basic elements of girl-centered programming. The workshop was organized by Plan USA’s Because I Am a Girl (BIAGG) team and Council staff from New York and Guatemala.

In late 2012, the Council organized a follow-up workshop with Plan El Salvador to guide them through a set of participatory tools to produce safety maps with girls and boys. Later, in December 2014, the Council invited key staff from Plan El Salvador involved in girl-centered projects to participate in a weeklong workshop where it engaged with different partners from the Central American region to reinforce the elements of the safe spaces model and shared with them lessons learned in recent years of the implementation of the AO program in Guatemala.

FIGURE 1. LOCATION OF PLAN EL SALVADOR'S CATCHMENT AREAS



TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF MUNICIPALITIES COVERED BY EACH PROGRAM UNIT OFFICE, PLAN EL SALVADOR (2019)

	Departments	Municipalities	Prevalence of Extreme Poverty
PU2	La Libertad	Puerto La Libertad	Low
		Ciudad Arce	Low
PU3	Chalatenango	Chalatenango	Low
		El Carrizal	High
	San Salvador	El Paisnal	Moderate
PU4	Cabañas	Ilobasco	High
		Sensuntepeque	Moderate
	Cuscatlán	San Rafael Cedros	Low

In January 2015, the BIAAG team discussed with the Council's office in Guatemala the need to build capacity at the headquarter and country levels in El Salvador to assess the reach of the GAD 182 project. As a result, a series of workshops were conducted in El Salvador's country office with the participation of all staff involved in the project at different stages. A summary of each workshop is described below, including one key finding from the external

programmatic perspective of the Council and one key takeaway from the perspective of the local staff in El Salvador (see Box 1).

To learn more about the specific segments of girls reached by GAD 182 and trace the effects of the program in those segments of girls who were reached, the Council guided the mapping coordinator in the analysis of information once field collection was completed. These are the results.

BOX 1. WORKSHOP 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING THE COVERAGE, RESULTS, AND EFFECTS OF PROJECTS. LOCATION: PLAN EL SALVADOR'S OFFICE; EL CARRIZAL (RURAL COMMUNITY)

Results:

- After discussing the differences between monitoring and evaluation strategies, participants identified some gaps between the outcomes and indicators included in the original project proposal and current monitoring data available to assess results. However, it is important to point out that outcome indicators often are adjusted after project start-up to adapt to current conditions at the project sites. Because the M&E plan is a living document, these adjustments are expected to be made.
- Both the BIAAG team and the Council identified the need to conduct a Girl Roster exercise in all communities covered by the project to understand the profile of girls who actually participated in the project.
- The Council introduced participants to the Girl Roster to collect information on girls and guided participants in a field test of the tool in one rural community where the project was implemented.
- A “data center” for the project was created (i.e., an Excel spreadsheet summarizing key information on the project by the community). Prior to the implementation of the workshop there was no centralized information on the project’s coverage. Figure 2 illustrates the information included in the data center.

FIGURE 2. MAP SHOWING GPS MARKS IN THE 36 COMMUNITIES INCLUDED IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GIRL ROSTER



Girl Roster collection in numbers

6 weeks of data collection 556 public spaces identified

4,775 households visited (close to 70% response rate)

Data collected on **4,144** girls (**52%**) and **3,845** boys (**48%**) between 1 and 17 years of age

TABLE 2. CHILDREN (BOYS AND GIRLS AGED 1-17) WHO ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN PLAN'S PROJECTS AND GAD 182 PARTICIPANTS

	Girls and Boys Aged 1-17		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Girl Roster summary	48% (N=3,845)	52% (N=4,144)	7,989
Enrolled in Plan's programs (all programs)	39% (N=735)	60% (N=1,129)	1,864
Participants in GAD 182*	78% (N=968)	22% (N=271)	1,239

Source: Girl Roster information collected by Plan El Salvador.

*Participants of GAD 182 are also eligible to participate in other projects implemented by Plan.

In the 36 communities (see Figure 2), for those households that provided information, findings include:

- **Living Status:** 8% (N=626) of boys and girls under the age of 18 lived with neither parent. Most of these children lived with their grandmother, a sibling, or uncle.
- **Education Status:** Close to 10% of children that have ever been to school (age >6 years old) were not enrolled in school. The percentage of out-of-school children and adolescents (aged 6-18) is 52% for boys (N=342) and 48% for girls (N=319). Compared to the national average, as documented by Plan's mapping analyst,¹ Girl Roster information showed that girls had a higher chance of being out of school by age 15.
- **Birth Certificates:** Mapping analysis shows that only 89 children under the age of 18 did not have birth certificates (89/7,989; 1%), a much lower figure than expected by the team.
- **Tracking Risk-Elevating Conditions—Child Migrants and People with Disabilities:** The mapping included a question to determine if any children under the age of 18 had migrated in the last three years. Mapping data showed that there were, indeed, children migrating (N=215). Although the

percentage was not high (2%), attention needed to be focused on understanding more of the causes that motivated children to move. As reported by key informants, the two main causes for which these 2% of children left the community were “to reunite with their parents” and to “find a job.” The latter explanations may be cause for some concern, considering that these children were exposed to human trafficking and gang violence. A similar level—about 2% of children—were reported with disabilities (N=195) across the “universe” of children in the 36 communities.

- **Enrollment in Plan's Projects:** Since these 36 communities were regularly engaged by Plan El Salvador (including sponsorships and scholarships for boys and girls), the Roster included a question on the participation in Plan's projects, including GAD 182 (see Table 2). Although more girls than boys were found among the general Plan programs, more boys than girls, proportionally and numerically, participated in the GAD program; this was paradoxical, as this project was directed toward reducing violence against girls. (In a later assessment it was seen that though there were many benefits, reduction in violence was not achieved. This suggests the need to look at recruitment processes and assumptions of the GAD program.)

¹ Analysis elaborated by Ernesto Martínez, M&E Specialist, based on data from the National Direction for Statistics and Census (2015).

TABLE 3. RESPONSE RATES OBTAINED IN THE COMMUNITIES COVERED BY EACH PROGRAM UNIT (PU)

	PU2	PU3	PU4
Households identified	2,688	1,829	2,425
Response rate	80%	73%	52%
Population in effective households	10,206	5,680	6,116

TABLE 4. UNMARRIED GIRLS AGED 10-17 IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL IN EACH PROGRAM UNIT IDENTIFIED IN THE MAPPING

Unmarried Girls	10-14 (N=1,301)			15-17 (N=894)		
	PU2	PU3	PU4	PU2	PU3	PU4
In school (%)	95%	98%	92%	81%	86%	69%
Out of school (%)	5%	2%	8%	19%	14%	31%
Total in segment (N=2,195)	619	323	359	406	259	229

Source: Roster information collected by Plan El Salvador.

The analysis of the mapping information for children showed that there were three segments in the 36 communities that needed to be addressed by future projects:

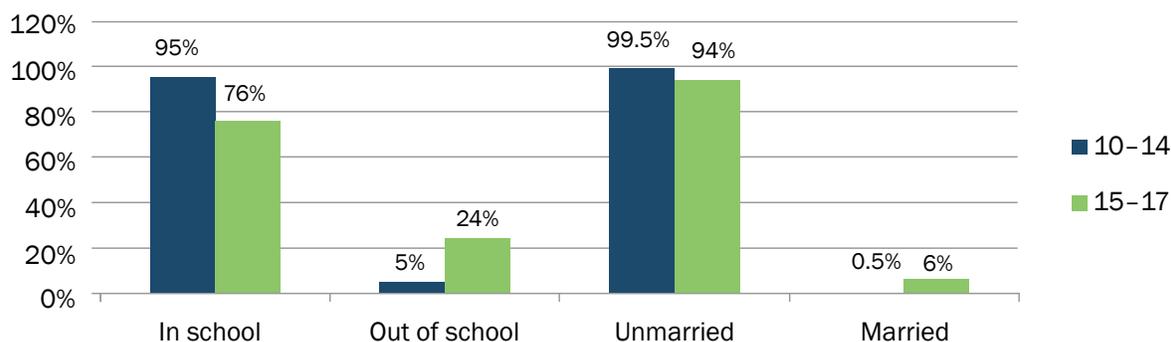
- Children under the age of 18 living without their parents;
- Children who migrated before turning 18 to reunite with their families and/or look for job opportunities;
- Children of school age who are currently out of school.

With the information collected, Plan El Salvador could identify exactly where the most-at-risk children lived. The team had enough information to build a profile for children in each community, municipality, and department. This means they could use the Roster information to inform future decisions concerning investments and project focalization (see Tables 3 and 4). Also, and most important, they now had a tool to identify those girls who are being left behind.

Now, to the key question that motivated the implementation of the Girl Roster: What does the universe of girls look like in the 36 communities where GAD 182 was implemented?

An examination of the universe of girls, with information collected using the Roster, tells the following story for girls in El Salvador. Most girls aged 10-14 are still living in their homes with both parents in those communities covered by the GAD 182 project. Most girls 10-14 are in school (95%), but as they reach puberty the chances of leaving school increase to the point that close to 25% of girls 15-17 are out of school (see Figure 3). Most girls aged 10-17 are not married, and 30% of unmarried girls live only with their mothers. There are 6 girls in age group 10-14 who are already married, and 2 of those have at least one child. Among girls in the age group 15-17, 6% (N=57) are living in unions and/or are married, and almost half of them (47%) have at least one child. By definition, the current status of 63 adolescent girls in the “universe” fits the expectation of child-marriage rates.

FIGURE 3. GIRLS IN “UNIVERSE,” BY AGE GROUP AND EDUCATION STATUS (N=2,258)



Source: Girl Roster information collected by Plan El Salvador.

Discussion

Plan El Salvador set the goal of working with girls aged 12-14 at the beginning of the project, while engaging older girls aged 15-18 with leadership-building skills. According to the project’s coordinator, this decision was based on the primary prevention rationale of engaging girls who are still in school before they start to drop out.

When looking at the project’s reach, within the universe of eligible adolescent girls aged 10-17, Plan was successful in recruiting 36% of girls aged 10-14 and 44% of older girls aged 15-17. Most of the girls recruited to participate in the project are still in school and living with both parents, and/or just the mother (83% for girls 10-14 and 73% for older girls 15-17).

The project was implemented in communities with an important number of unmarried girls 10-14 both in school (N=71) and out of school (N=25) who are currently living with neither parent who did not participate in GAD 182. As is usually the case, younger girls (10-14) have more time, permission from parents, and interest in attending this type of project. However, it is important to note that girls at most risk in the age group 15-17 did not participate because they were not intentionally recruited from the beginning of the project.

It is also important to bring attention to the fact that the project did recruit older girls aged 15-17 who are already mothers and have at least one child (N=8) and girls who are already married but have no children (N=13). According to the project’s coordinator, these girls showed interest in the project but faced more challenges than younger or unmarried girls negotiating their participation.

Moving into an Asset-Based, Age-Graded Approach²

The results presented in the previous section are based on focus group discussions with 49 adolescent girls aged 14-18 who participated in the “school for the prevention of gender-based violence,” 37 adolescent girls 14-18 who were trained as “co-listeners,” and 13 boys who participated in skill-building workshops. FGDs allowed participants’ ideas and perceptions on a variety of subjects to be voiced and provided valuable input on the impact that GAD 182 had on participants.

The project had an ambitious goal: “Contribute to the reduction of violence against girls and adolescents by reaching them with activities that promote their agency and empowerment, with the objective of strengthening their

² The analysis presented in this section refers to the findings from the FGDs, from the external perspective of the Population Council’s M&E specialist based at the Guatemala Office.

knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the prevention of violence.” Although Plan El Salvador based the project’s theory of change on an asset-building approach, activities designed to engage girls and boys did not fit such an approach. In the context of the prevention of violence, especially when strategies target young girls and adolescents, asset-building activities should have the longitudinal goal of helping girls understand that they are not responsible for the violence around them and provide them with skills to mitigate its effects.

Given the challenges that Plan El Salvador faced to implement and evaluate GAD 182 and considering that this was the first time that the country office implemented a girl-centered project, results reported by participants shed light on important accomplishments at the participant level. Results from FGDs organized after Roster results were collected show that none of the groups mentioned a significant reduction of the forms of violence that they see and/or experience in their houses, schools, or communities. Instead, participants appreciated the knowledge they gained in the domains of self-esteem, life plans, gender and sexuality, reproductive health, and awareness of the risks of violence.

Applying the Asset-based Toolkit to the Roster Results

By using the Council’s Building Assets Toolkit, we were able to identify a number of priorities for girls under specific themes (e.g., economic, social, cognitive, health) that guided the FGDs, and here a brief discussion is presented for the results observed. We frame this discussion using the basic assets that GAD 182 built (or aimed/should aim to build) for girls.

Self-esteem and Leadership among Older Girls

It is a fact that girls who were trained as “co-listeners” reported new skills in listening to other girls’ problems and experiences of

violence. As girls in FGDs mentioned, they felt that their self-esteem increased but also felt that adults in their communities should be more supportive. When fostering a local network of girl leaders, especially when there is an expectation for girls to serve as role models to their peers, organizations should have in mind that girls are not prepared to face the local authorities on their own. Although girls trained as co-listeners reported feeling more confident and capable of supporting other girls who experience violence, a leadership-building component should be designed that aims to train and support these girls in a sustainable manner.

In a context where young girls lack the resources and information to report violence, female leaders trained as mentors should:

- Know what the Community Council does, when it meets, and some of the official leaders;
- Be a female mentor who girls in the community can turn to for advice when faced with challenges;
- Know whom to ask/where to ask for help if she or someone she knows is a survivor of violence.

The increasing context of insecurity in El Salvador demands project staff be more cautious with the visibility they raise for girls when engaging them in activities that promote their leadership within the community. As illustrated by a story shared by one “co-listener,” without specific interventions by advocates, girls face the risk of being constantly retraumatized. This is something mentors can avoid with proper training and continuous support.

Additionally, most girls in the FGDs mentioned how bad it feels that adults do not appreciate their skills. Designating a person who provides regular aid and oversight to mentors can make the difference in keeping them motivated and reinforcing their self-esteem.

Gender Roles

As stated in the focus groups, adolescent girls and boys had a hard time differentiating gender from sex. Knowing that gender roles are socially constructed made a difference for some of the girls who participated in the project and has the potential to set the stage for discussing social norms like “machismo” and girls’ constrained mobility within the community.

Evidence shows that sexuality and HIV education programs addressing gender and power in intimate relationships are far more likely to be effective than programs that do not (Haberland 2015). Integrating comprehensive sexuality education into future curriculums designed for girl-centered programs at the country level has the potential of having greater effects on girls’ and boys’ knowledge of gender and sex, which is one of the topics girls reported they would like to learn in future projects.

When talking about gender in the FGDs, the issues of school dropout and unwanted pregnancies came up frequently. Some responses suggested that girls were responsible for protecting themselves to avoid sexual violence, which could imply that the notion of human rights also needs to be reinforced.

Perceptions of Safety within the Community (Public Spaces) and Safety Plans

The knowledge gap between boys and girls regarding the forms of violence shows a better engagement with girls through activities like the “school for the prevention of gender-based violence.” Girls in all FGDs were able to name a wider list of forms of violence and provided more details on the places and people they can go to in case of an emergency. Although girls reported that it was important to them to have the basic skills to be emotionally supportive to girls who experience violence, these same girls reported challenges in reporting the violence itself, referring to the lack of support or backing from adults.

It is important to remember that there will not always be people in the community who protect girls, unless it is explicitly planned by projects. To respond to this situation, future projects should equip girls to:

- Identify someone to go to for help in case of abuse at school and know where to report abuse;
- Have a safe place to spend the night away from home, if needed;
- Know the names of trained people in the community who can be relied upon to protect girls (the guardians);
- Know how to describe/express a problem to someone in authority, such as a local official;
- Know how to fill out forms to report violence;
- Know what to say and not to say to someone who has been a victim of a violent crime.

All of these are protective assets. When it comes to exercises like safety mapping, the project had the positive result of supporting girls and boys in identifying the risks they face in different public spaces in their communities. These techniques have the potential to increase girls’ confidence when reporting cases of violence. However, these plans need to be linked to local actions that engage community leaders in supporting boys and girls in reducing risks of violence to a minimum. To achieve this, projects should aim at building the following assets at different levels (girls, mentors, and guardians):

- Know where the nearest police station is and the kind of help the police can provide;
- Be aware of daily and seasonal demands on her time and know how to budget her time;
- Have a safe place to spend the night away from home, if needed;

- Know the location of a community center, the activities offered there, and how to participate;
- Know the location and hours of girl-only spaces (or project-related activities);
- Know what to say and not to say to someone who has been a victim of a violent crime;
- Know the time of day/week when she is likely to face more risks at home, at school, in the street.

Finally, the current context of escalating violence in El Salvador is forcing organizations to increase communication with local leaders and strengthen the strategies used to foster and sustain ties with communities. When doing so, future projects should keep in mind that any strategy that aims at preventing violence against girls by building their assets should prioritize girls' awareness about the constraints on their time and mobility as a key step to gain control over their decisions. The shift from the implementation of projects with irregular doses of exposure to asset-building sessions, to a program that includes multilevel modules will have the ability to build the skills girls need as they are growing, allowing them to navigate predictable and often age-specific challenges (Bruce 2015).

Conclusion

Plan El Salvador continues, as of 2019, to be guided by the Intentional Design approach and tools. Follow-on projects have incorporated as a regular feature a more careful rostering of the different segments and focus on building measurable assets and agency, especially among girls, as well as intentional recruitment within the Champions of Change program.

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For more information, please visit Plan International El Salvador's website: <https://plan-international.org/el-salvador>.

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