



The MWA is giving £500 to the Plan International UK (**PIUK**) campaign called *"Because I am a girl"*. This worthwhile cause follows last month's paper about Dignity Kits for women. PIUK is a global children's charity. They work to give every child the same chance in life.

15 million girls

will never have the opportunity to learn to read and write in primary school

More than 1 in 10 girls

have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives

15 million girls

marry before the age of 18 each year – the equivalent of one every 2 seconds. Girls continue to be among the most discriminated against and excluded in the world. One in five adolescent girls around the world is denied their right to an education by the daily realities of poverty, conflict and discrimination.

Every day, girls are taken out of school and forced into work or marriage where they risk isolation and abuse. Missing out on school can mark the end of a girl being able to choose her own future. The “*Because I am a Girl*” campaign wants to see a world in which girls can realise their rights by accessing a safe and fulfilling education, living a life free from violence and being heard.

PIUK works with girls and their communities to eliminate all the barriers that stand in the way of gender equality – such as child marriage, violence in and around schools, poor sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic insecurity.

PIUK believes that no-one suffers poverty more than girls. Yet, in the right environment, girls can break the cycle of poverty. With education, protection and support, girls can transform their lives and their communities, becoming a powerful force for change. So investing in girls is one of the best interventions we can make to end poverty for all.

Reaching adolescence can bring new risks and increased threats for girls, including the denial of rights and choices. This means that they are often invisible in global and national processes that seek to end poverty. Protecting the rights of adolescent girls, keeping them safe from harm, giving them access to a quality education and delaying marriage or childbirth means they can break the cycle of poverty and look forward to a brighter future. Violence in education means fear of going to the toilet, of sexual abuse from teachers and fellow students, of verbal discrimination, and of the journey to and from school.

PIUK researched sexual harassment in UK schools. One in five women (22 per cent) in the UK reported some experience of sexual touching, groping, flashing, sexual assault or rape while they were in or around school. Reports of sexual offences in UK schools have more than doubled in recent years to an average of 10 each school day. Two-thirds of victims of reported sex offences on school premises are girls or women (66 per cent). Middlesbrough is named the worst place in England and Wales to be a girl, while part of Surrey is ranked as the best – where girls are likelier to fully enjoy their rights based on life expectancy, child poverty, reproductive health and educational outcomes.

Naomi Hancock - using information from Plan International UK