

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

# A world where girls are equal to boys

ANNE-BIRGITTE ALBRECHTSEN

IMAGINE a world where girls and young women are seen and heard, occupying positions of influence within their communities and beyond. On this very day, you won't have to imagine: girls will be stepping into the shoes of political, social and economic leaders in a mass takeover that will make their invisible lives - both their plight and their potential - truly visible.

There will be over 200 takeovers in more than 50 countries. From the President of Nepal to the Minister of Finance in Canada, leading figures will be stepping aside. In Guatemala and Uganda, girls will take over senior roles in major banks; in Guinea-Bissau, a young woman will co-host a national TV debate. In China and Thailand, girls will take their teachers' roles, and in Timor-Leste a girl will become Vice Minister of Education.

In Bangladesh, girls are standing up and contributing across different sectors, as the Divisional Office Manager in Rangpur and Barisal, in the private sector as Vice President of Talent and Development of telecoms provider Robi, and right here in our own offices, as Country Director of Plan International.

When girls realise what is possible, they are more likely to find inspiration and become active agents of change. But the takeovers also provide an opportunity for those stepping aside to work with young women, to listen and to learn; to find out from them directly how they want to change their lives for the better.

Things need to change. In every walk of



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

life, in every corner of the world, girls face discrimination and injustice. Millions are denied their rights to a good education. They are unable to play an active and equal role in society. They are prevented from making important choices that affect their own lives, including decisions about sexual and reproductive health. They are often at risk of violence, simply for being a girl.

Things can change. Last year the UN agreed on an ambitious set of Global Goals that promise gender equality by 2030, among other things. While the challenges

in achieving those goals are vast, they are not insurmountable, if we act and act now. It will require a clear-sighted agenda for change based on six key elements.

First, we need to get the legal framework right. There are currently few direct mentions of girls in key international human rights instruments and, until that changes, girls will remain invisible. We need to build a movement to bolster those rights, and to drive change more widely.

A strong, grass-roots movement for girls' rights has emerged in recent years. We now

need to strengthen and sustain that movement, building solidarity with the girls and young women who are already at the front lines demanding their rights. Our global 'takeover' is just one way in which we plan to grow that movement.

However, while the UN's Global Goals represent an impressive statement of intent, they are just words unless governments act on the commitments they have made. We need to be ready to help countries deliver, but also to challenge them when they do not.

If we are going to hold governments to account, we need better data and we need to use it more effectively: girls are 'invisible' to policy-makers because they are not being counted properly. Better data is also vital to making the right kind of decisions and investments that can transform girls' lives.

Transformative change also requires new ways of working. We need to involve everyone, and the private sector has just as much of a role to play here as NGOs. Only by finding new ways of collaborating will we be able to find new solutions to complex problems.

Finally, we need to get the resourcing right. Just meeting the worldwide need for pregnancy-related care will require USD28 billion annually, a 100% increase from current funding. We'll need to be smarter about using all of the resources that are available, including working with the private sector.

If we are serious about reaching the Global Goals, we need to get serious about making change happen. The six changes are a map; our girls' takeover is the compass, setting the direction in which we need to travel. Girls will step into some of the biggest shoes, from presidents to journalism leaders to head teachers and business leaders. It is a powerful glimpse of the world we want to see. Our challenge is to make a future in which every girl has the chance to become an important presence, and for more than just one day.

The writer is CEO of Plan International.

## BBC Bangla at 75 The digital future is now

*The biggest challenge faced by the Bengali service came in 1971 when the Pakistan army launched a ferocious crackdown on Bengali nationalists campaigning for independence of what was then East Pakistan. The BBC became a lifeline service for millions of people inside East Pakistan and in refugee camps dotted along the border on the Indian side.*

SABIR MUSTAFA

WHEN, within hours of the July 1 attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka's plush suburb of Gulshan, the authorities suspended live television broadcasts to prevent reporters from inadvertently giving away movement of security forces, the BBC Bangla website and social-media channels saw a major spike in traffic. People switched to digital sources, and late into the night, more than 75,000 users were active on our Facebook page. Over the next day, as the details of the massacre inside the restaurant became clear, more than half a million visitors came to [bbcbanla.com](http://bbcbanla.com) for updates. Once again in the service's 75-year history, audiences came to us as a trusted source for news in an extraordinary time.

The BBC's Bengali service (as it was known then) was launched at the height of the Second World War, when the Bengali-speaking region of eastern India was under British rule and perilously close to the advancing Japanese army. The first programme, broadcast on 11 October 1941, carried a 'talk' written by George Orwell (under his real name of Eric Blair).

As the Bengali service brought its audiences news from around the world, it set standards for broadcasting and presentation in the Bengali language and the quality of radio dramas. World developments, in their turn, shaped up the service itself as the creation of Pakistan out of India's western and eastern regions led to the launch of two separate strands of the BBC's Bengali programme.

The two strands were brought together in 1969, through the launch of a new programme called 'Probaho'. That name - which means 'flow' - was destined to become the BBC's most-enduring brand among Bengali audiences. In 2015, we added the weekly TV programme, BBC Probaho, to our radio, digital and mobile content.

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Mrs Rekha Ali of the BBC's Bengali section (1945). Rekha Ali was the Bengali service presenter and its first full-time staff, joining the BBC in 1944, along with the other iconic BBC Bengali figure, Kamal Bose.

Pakistan and in refugee camps dotted along the border on the Indian side.

The BBC brought the news of the war and atrocities to its Bengali-speaking audiences - and to wider, global audiences. For the Bengali service staff, who had originated in East Pakistan, maintaining impartiality and objectivity in reporting became a struggle. But impartial coverage was maintained meticulously and earned

the respect and trust of the audience. Nineteen seventy-one was a watershed year, when BBC Bangla and its journalists became household names in what became a new country, Bangladesh. Memory of that year and the dramatic years to come, passed down the generations, still determines the huge respect and affection in which BBC Bangla is held in that part of the world.

The Bengali service has come a long way since those days of radio, when deep-voiced presenters read the news and hosted talk shows that delved into the world of high culture. While radio continues to form a strong part in the service's overall offer to its audiences - in Bangladesh, parts of eastern India and Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - the content, style and formats have evolved. Original journalism is now what drives the BBC Bangla's output, with a lot more news content from the region, particularly Bangladesh, more stories generated by our own correspondents. Our programmes are pacier, the language and tone is less formal - and hopefully more appealing to younger audiences.

If the changes that kicked off in the mid-1990s were about content and style, then the changes unfolding now encompass far greater areas. Technology is driving this evolution, forged by changing habits of the new generation of news consumers. BBC Bangla is now firmly on a course to move to a fully digital future.

Digital has become the platform of choice among many followers of BBC Bangla around the world. BBC Bangla's Facebook page now has around nine million followers. While most of them are from Bangladesh and India, the output is also popular among expatriate Bangladeshis and Bengali-speakers. Many of them are in the Gulf region: more than half a million followers of BBC Bangla on Facebook are in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain are among the top ten countries - and Riyadh, Dubai, Jeddah and Doha are among key cities - from where Bengali-speakers engage with us.

While radio remains a source of serious news, analyses and debates, the shift to digital is gathering inexorable momentum. There is a huge appetite among our young audiences for news, and digital is their preferred platform. BBC Bangla's ambition is to be an integral part of their news day, offering this new generation of news consumers' access to world-class news and information, and a great opportunity to engage and to share their own views and stories. This is already happening.

The writer is head of the BBC World Service's Bengali service.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**MELINDA GATES**  
American businesswoman and philanthropist.

*A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Doesn't go for the green
- Tobacco wad
- Go by
- Employ
- Exams for absentees
- Intense beam
- Ump's call
- Clinic picture
- Beagles and bassets
- Ohio city
- Historic time
- Storage place
- Color
- NBA star Tim
- Appliance part
- Remain
- Church event
- Violinist's need
- Hotel courtesy
- Way out
- Severe trial
- Bears' lairs
- Comfortably warm

**DOWN**

- Writer Stanislaw
- In the style of
- Shaggy ox
- Joins the bee
- Customary
- Livens (up)
- Sundae topper
- That guy's
- Louvre fill
- Director Craven
- Dallas native
- Sham
- Deal maker
- Friend of Porthos and Aramis
- Letter sign-off
- Mom's mate
- Big racket
- Homer's neighbor
- Cajun milieu
- Insertion marks
- 29 40% of North America
- Very small
- Location
- Tie the knot
- Woods man's tool
- Family
- French article
- 38 Back muscle, for short
- Shrewd

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

B	R	E	W	S	G	A	S	P	S
E	I	G	H	T	E	B	O	O	K
D	O	G	I	E	T	E	N	S	E
P	E	A	S	S	E	W			
S	H	O	P	L	I	F	T		
A	I	D	E	L	A	R	E	D	O
C	L	O	D	S	T	I	M	O	N
S	T	R	U	T	S	P	I	L	L
P	R	O	M	P	T	L	I		
B	A	T	E	P	E	E			
A	R	E	N	A	A	D	O	B	E
S	L	E	E	K	L	U	N	A	R
H	O	M	E	Y	S	P	E	A	R

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott