

Press release
Plan International Finland
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Plan introduces new Sheboard app to challenge the way we talk to and about girls

Child rights organization Plan International is launching a new app, Sheboard, at Slush. The predictive text app questions the way we talk to and about girls, and seeks to raise awareness of the impacts of gendered speech.

The way we talk to girls is different from the way we talk to boys. Similarly, we talk differently about girls and boys. Both of these phenomena have real impacts on how girls perceive themselves and their abilities.

To challenge the ways we talk to and about girls, child rights organization Plan International Finland is introducing a new predictive text keyboard app, Sheboard, at the technology and startup event Slush. The new app suggests words to empower girls and swaps stereotypical expressions about girls to ones that pack a punch. The app will initially be launched in English.

– The purpose of Sheboard is to bring attention to these issues both in Finland and internationally. We want to help people see the impact that words have, and make them consider ways in which they can change how they talk in order to empower girls, says Plan’s Global Coordinator for Digital Development **Nora Lindström**.

Gender roles bind us from birth

Strict gender roles affect both girls and boys from birth, all over the world. However, gender roles have a particularly negative effect on girls. According to a recent studyⁱ, by the time girls are six years old they are likely to have internalized old-fashioned stereotypes suggesting boys are better suited for fields that require a certain type of intellectual capability such as mathematics and physics.

– Girls and boys as young as those starting in elementary school may already have very clear ideas about how they are expected to behave, how they can gain respect, and what is expected of them in the future, Lindström says.

With the Sheboard app, we aim to reach young people through their own channels. To make the app as meaningful as possible for all age groups, we asked a number of girls and women of different ages to contribute to the app with their personal empowerment phrase. The girls in Plan Finland’s Children’s Board, including 16-year-old **Aino Vehkavaara**, also contributed to the development of Sheboard.

– My empowerment phrase is ‘I’m capable’. Girls are smart and awesome, but we stress a lot about needing to be perfect and fear failure. Lack of self-esteem keeps us from chasing our dreams, and that’s not OK. We should dream, and dream big! Vehkavaara says.

Innovation for equality

Plan has made use of technology and innovation in its work for some time, often together with partners. The development of Sheboard is supported by Samsung Electronics Nordic.

– Technology has a great potential to break down barriers. We know that young people use their smartphones a lot and it shapes the way they perceive themselves and others. Social innovation for digital

inclusion is an important field that we have been involved in for quite some time, says **Elin Wallberg**, Head of Samsung Nordic Corporate Citizenship & Partnerships.

– When Plan contacted us and presented the idea of Sheboard, we saw it as a perfect opportunity to contribute our expertise in innovation and mobile technology to an important initiative.

In addition to Sheboard, Plan will also be showcasing other technological innovations used in its development and humanitarian programming at Slush.

– Technological innovations won't in themselves change harmful, gender-stereotypical behavior, but they can help raise awareness of these issues and support the equal treatment of girls and women both in Finland and elsewhere, Lindström emphasizes.

The Sheboard app will be launched on Thursday Dec. 30 at 10.45am at Samsung's Innovators Café at Slush. Representatives from Plan International Finland's Children's Board as well as Plan's SmartUp Factory innovation hubs in Ethiopia and Uganda will be present at the stand and available for interviews. The app can be tested at the stand for the duration of Slush.

Read more about the Sheboard app: Sheboard.com

Media kit: sheboard.com/media.html

Frequently asked questions: sheboard.com/faq.html

Download the Sheboard app in the Google Play Store. The app can be found by searching for 'Sheboard'.

Further information:

Nora Lindström, Global Coordinator for Digital Development, Plan International, tel. +358 45 613 4244, nora.lindstrom@plan-international.org

Elin Wallberg, Corporate Citizenship & Partnerships Manager, Samsung Electronics Nordic AB, tel. +46 707574822, e.wallberg@samsung.com

ⁱ Bian L., Leslie S.J., Cimpian A. (2017) 'Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests', *Science* 355: 389–391 (2017)