

Human Rights Council second Intersessional meeting on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda 3 December 2019

Plan International submission

About Plan International

Plan International, Inc. is an independent non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1981 and in special consultative status with the ECOSOC since 2011. Founded over 80 years ago, Plan International is one of the oldest and largest child rights organisations in the world. We strive to advance children's rights and equality for all girls. Working with children and young people in 75 countries around the world, we tackle the root causes of inequality faced by children, especially girls. We welcome the forthcoming report to the High-Level Political Forum on the protection and realization of children's rights in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and hope that the below information from Plan International will be useful.

We use our experience on the ground and position as an authoritative global voice to influence those with power or responsibility, in order to promote the rights of girls, boys, and young people. The human rights of everyone everywhere are at the heart of our work. Our focus on advancing children's rights and equality for girls is founded on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Plan International believes that gender equality is central to achieving our vision for change: a world in which all children in all their diversity realize their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity. Plan International is committed to tackling the root causes and consequences of exclusion and gender inequality. Inclusion is central to reaching and supporting the most excluded girls, boys, and youth in all their diversity.

Introduction

Gender inequality is a global challenge that deprives girls and women of their fundamental rights and opportunities all over the world. Girls and women are disproportionately affected when it comes to access to education, health-care, decent work, and social life, and girls remain the largest excluded group in the world due to the double discrimination they face based on gender and age. At Plan International we know that when a girl can grow up safe, happy, and healthy with full enjoyment of all her rights, she can thrive and reach her full potential¹. Yet from their early lives to adulthood girls face distinct disadvantages directly related to this double discrimination.²

¹ Efforts to ensure girls' rights and gender equality in Norwegian development policies. An analysis of Norwegian policies from 2011 to 2017. Report commissioned by Plan International Norway. Accessible here: <https://www.fafo.no/images/pub/2018/20655.pdf>

² Plan International Girls' Rights Platform. Accessible here: <https://www.girlsrightsplatform.org/girls-rights-report>

The international community has repeatedly promised to make gender equality a reality. Over the last 30 years, while gender equality in education and health outcomes have significantly improved, this varies across countries and income groups. In 2015, the development of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs set out an ambitious roadmap for 193 governments, the UN, private sector and civil society, with a shared commitment to addressing common global challenges such as poverty and inequality. Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue across the agenda, with SDG 5 explicitly focused on gender equality and several targets and indicators that reference women, girls, gender or sex, recognizing that girls and women's equality and empowerment are preconditions to achieve all the goals.³ The 2030 Agenda and human rights conventions and standards therefore provide world decision-makers with a foundation in human rights, the necessary commitments and mechanisms for implementation and accountability, and a specific timeline for achieving gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination⁴.

Overall, Agenda 2030 is a powerful framework that can be leveraged to ensure the realisation of children's rights and gender equality. Yet gender-based discrimination, which is a violation of the core principle of non-discrimination in the CRC and CEDAW, persists as a barrier to the full realisation of children's rights and gender equality. Plan International is alarmed by the slow progress towards the SDGs, with recent reports suggesting we are far from being on track to achieve the goals by 2030 with 'monumental challenges' remaining in the areas of inequality among and within countries, climate change, poverty, and gender inequality.⁵ With just 11 years to go until 2030, a recent report finds that nearly 40% of the world's girls and women – 1.4billion – live in countries failing on gender equality according to a number of indicators.⁶ Across 129 countries, no country has fully achieved the promise of gender equality envisioned in the agenda, though there have been pockets of progress and success stories in areas where there has been coordinated and concerted policy focus and funding over the past 10-20 years such as hunger and nutrition, health and education.

Principles for implementing the 2030 Agenda and 'Leaving **NO ONE BEHIND**'

Plan International promotes the linkages and complementarity between the Agenda 2030 and human rights, most specifically those codified in the CRC and CEDAW conventions. Despite the limitations and inadequacy in addressing girl's intersecting identities, the mutually reinforcing nature of these agendas form the corner stone of girls' rights⁷. The below examples are crosscutting and interdependent in their potential to transform the situation for all children and are necessary for transformative change and the full realisation of children's rights, gender equality and the 2030 agenda.

- 1) **Apply a gender-transformative and age-sensitive child-rights based approach to achieve Agenda 2030, ensuring no child is left behind.** A child-rights based approach is required by all States for the full achievement of the SDGs and child rights. By committing to leave no one behind, the international community has pledged to tackle deep-rooted

³ Efforts to ensure girls' rights and gender equality in Norwegian development policies. An analysis of Norwegian policies from 2011 to 2017. Report commissioned by Plan International Norway. Accessible here: <https://www.fafo.no/images/pub/2018/20655.pdf>

⁴ [Convention on the Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\) For Youth](#). UN Women,

⁵ Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/>

⁶ Equal Measures Report 2019. Available at: https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EM2030_2019_Global_Report_English_WEB.pdf

⁷ ["Girls' Rights are Human Rights: An in-depth study of the status of girls in the international human rights framework"](#) report. Plan International, 2017

inequalities in its efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030, placing the human rights principles of universality and non-discrimination at the heart of development action for the first time, including gender equality. Success stories confirm that the potential to transform the lives of the world's most deprived and marginalised children, in particular girls, is possible. Yet, urgent and transformative progress is needed to tackle structural inequalities such as gender inequality.

- 2) **Engage with all children as active citizens and ensure every child's right to be heard, particularly girls, in all settings (informal and formal, offline and online).** This will help to re-dress power imbalances that sustain violations of children's rights, and can inform decision making in children's best interests. In order to respect the rights of all children, it is fundamentally important that a specific gender and inclusion lens be applied to ensure that children of all ages and backgrounds are valued as persons with their own views, feelings and insights. To strengthen the engagement of girls, they need to be empowered with information, opportunities to form and be part of associations, spaces to express their views, analyse power relations, and influence decision makers to defend their rights and hold governments to account towards their commitments on children's rights and gender equality.
- 3) **Track and demonstrate progress for all children by routinely collecting and disaggregating data on every child and work to close the gender data gap.** Disaggregated data is fundamental to decision-making on the specific needs of children, to benchmark data and measure progress, and to plan, monitor and adapt policies, at national and international levels. To achieve data disaggregation, states must ensure that capacities and partnerships are developed and to systematically collect data on inequalities and discrimination faced by children, including by sex, age, ethnicity, migration or displacement status, disability, religion, civil status, income, sexual orientation and gender identity. Sex and gender disaggregated data is particularly important for understanding the unique experiences and needs of all children taking into account all their intersecting identities throughout childhood and adolescence.
- 4) **Transform harmful social norms, and build on the strengths of girls, their families and communities.** Despite economic progress, harmful social and gender norms remain entrenched and have a huge impact on the rights of girls and the achievement of gender equality. Thus, social norms change is critical to fulfil children's rights and to achieve the SDG's, especially in relation to violence prevention, ending child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence, gender equity, disability inclusion, non-discrimination, participation, and engagement of children as active citizens.
- 5) **Prioritise strategic windows of opportunity in early childhood and adolescence with a focus on the struggles faced by adolescent girls.** Advances in brain science provide evidence regarding the critical importance of investments in early childhood development and in adolescence when there is formational neurobiological development with long-term consequences for individuals and society. Investments in ECD and adolescence are crucial across countries of different income levels and are particularly important in humanitarian contexts.
- 6) **Educate to achieve children's rights and gender equality:** The transformative progress that inclusive and quality education makes on improving children's lives is clear, particularly on girls who still face lower education rates than their male counterparts. Education can result in better livelihoods, poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, delayed marriage, enhanced civic engagement and reductions in child labour. There is an urgent need to close

the gender gap in education, as we know of the transformative impact of education for gender equality and girls' rights. Education on human rights and sustainable development for children and young people are vital for the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and the SDGs.

- 7) **Urgently address climate change and environmental harm, acknowledging that girls are disproportionately affected by climate crises:** Securing a healthy environment is an urgent precondition for the full realisation of children's rights and the achievement of the SDGs. Greater efforts are required by States to assess environmental impacts and make environmental information public, to facilitate public participation in environmental decision-making, including by protecting the rights of expression and association, and to provide access to effective remedies for environmental harm.
- 8) **Embed violence prevention at all levels, with particular attention to gender-based violence and the specific challenges faced by girls:** The importance of the SDG target 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children in all their diversity, and SDG target 5.2 on ending violence against women and girls must not be under-estimated. Mobilization of different actors to embed violence prevention in a variety of settings is crucial, particularly when it comes to gender-based violence. Increased investments must be made to strengthen systems to prevent and protect children from all forms of violence, acknowledging the unique forms of violence faced by girls, and ensuring strong linkages between informal and formal actors. Increased investments and research must be made into the gendered dynamics of violence and the prevalence of violence against girls.
- 9) **Prioritise children in governance with increased public investments and accountability, with focused investments to improve the situation for girls:** To realise the rights of every child, including the most marginalised and the specific needs of girls, as set out in the CRC and Agenda 2030, States must prioritise good governance. Tax revenues and aid, where necessary, should enable governments to increase their budget allocation for children with specific budget to invest in girls, and enable them to mobilise 'the maximum extent of their available resources' for the implementation of children's rights. Furthermore, to enhance good governance, safe space must be guaranteed for a stronger civil society, including child and youth led associations and increase the inclusion and meaningful participation of girls and young women.
- 10) **Ensure multi-sectoral work and coordination across actors:** Recognising the indivisibility of children's rights, coordinated multi-sectoral efforts by a range of actors (governments, businesses, UN agencies, civil society organisations, religious and faith-based organisations, parents and caregivers, children and youth, media, academia, donors) are required to ensure fulfilment of children's rights, the realization of gender equality and the achievement of the SDGs. Silos between sectors need to be broken down, and referral and coordination mechanisms need to be strengthened. Gender-transformative emergency preparedness and climate change adaptations need to be integrated into governance processes in communities, schools, districts, nations, and at regional and global level – with spaces for children's participation, especially the most marginalised.

Plan International Best Practices

Plan International's work is based on a human-rights based approach and the 2030 Agenda's promise to 'Leave No One Behind'. Due to our focus on gender equality and children's rights, our

programmatic work includes best practices for implementing SDG 5 alongside other SDG targets that are relevant for children and youth, particularly girls and young women.

Plan International ‘Safe Spaces’: Best Practice for SDG 5

Plan International is committed to the establish of girl-friendly safe spaces: locations in Plan camps that are accessible by girls and designated as “girl only” at either all times of the day or during specific timeframes each week. The services at these safe spaces empower girls to practice healthy behaviours in the family and camp settings, develop peer networks, strengthen their decision-making and goal setting skills, and build their knowledge of reproductive health, financial literacy, and report instances of violence. Girls can access counselling and referral services at the spaces, report violence and abuse, talk with mentors and peers, and participate in Choose A Future! Savings group and Enterprise Your Life Sessions.⁸

Plan International Sexual and Reproductive Health Best practice for SDG 3.7 and 5.6

Plan International is working in alliance with civil society organisations and governments to improve and expand sexual health services that respond to the needs of their young clients. The obstacles faced by young people when obtaining sexual and reproductive health services relate to availability and accessibility, as well as laws and policies that limit young people’s access to services and contraceptives. Through our programmes we work to ensure young people can access adolescent and youth-friendly health services that provide correct sexual and reproductive health information, modern contraceptives, STI/HIV and pregnancy tests. Plan International listens to adolescents, works with them to tailor youth-friendly health services to the local context, based on the health, and needs of young people.⁹

Plan International ‘Education in Emergencies’: Best practice for SDG 4 and SDG 5

Plan International’s education in emergencies programme strives to provide quality formal and non-formal education opportunities that meet the needs of girls and boys affected by humanitarian crises. Our work focuses on adolescent girls who are among the worst affected by disasters. As part of our work we ensure they receive the emotional support they need to recover from their experiences. Plan International is working to provide protecting learning spaces for children in north-east Nigeria to ensure they have a safe place to be during the day, to offer counselling and support and hope for a brighter future. These services provide support in conflict-affected fragile states and refugee situations, such as Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, refugee camps in Tanzania and ongoing conflict and unsettlement in South Sudan and Nigeria.¹⁰

Plan International ‘Generation Breakthrough’: Best Practice for SDG 4.5, 4.7 and SDG 5.5 and 5.6

In Bangladesh, Plan International has been piloting Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools through its Generation Breakthrough programme, targeting predominantly adolescents aged 10-14 years in partnership with the Ministry of Education and UNFPA. The CSE programme aims to develop gender transformative attitudes, build life skills and improve knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights. CSE has so far been successful in reducing sexual harassment within schools and increasing adolescents’ awareness of their rights.¹¹

⁸ Plan International ‘Safe Spaces for Children’ programme: <https://plan-international.org/spaces-children-act-children>

⁹ Plan International Sexual Health Services: <https://plan-international.org/sexual-health/access-sexual-health-services>

¹⁰ Plan International ‘Education in Emergencies’ programme: <https://plan-international.org/emergencies/education-in-emergencies>

¹¹ Generation Breakthrough Programme: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/asia/bangladesh/generation-breakthrough>

Plan International ‘Champions of Change’: Best Practice for SDG 5.1, 5.5 and SDG 10.2

Plan International’s Champions of Change programme first piloted in 2012 and continues to be implemented globally in over 40 countries. It is a community-wide strategy to engage boys and empower girls to challenge harmful social norms and promote gender equality. It uses a gender-synchronised approach, which supports children and young people to actively examine and reflect how rigid gender norms and power imbalances are present in their own lives. The programme has developed a comprehensive set of curricula for both girls and boys. It has proved effective because: 1) it uses a peer-to-peer model, helping young people feel invested and take ownership of the subject; 2) it explicitly fosters a youth-led social movement that challenges social norms and gains society-wide support for gender equality and girls’ rights; 3) it also promotes inter-generational dialogue and community-level advocacy on gender equality.¹²

Plan International ‘Safer Cities’: Best Practice for SDG 5, 11, and 16.2

Plan International’s programme ‘Safer Cities for Girls’ is implemented in 12 cities across the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, in line with SDG 11’s calls for universal access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems and safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces. The programme is focused on girls in cities who are faced with increased risks of sexual harassment, exploitation and insecurity. In Hanoi, Plan Vietnam have worked with girls, ticket inspectors and bus conductors to improve safety for girls on the public bus system. The programme provides girls with the platform to discuss the issues they face, provide input into the development of their cities, and ensures girls and boys are included and engaged as active citizens in line with SDG 10.2.¹³

General recommendations for national governments

Achieving the SDGs and transformative change for all children requires the coordination of national and global efforts to prioritise human rights and gender equality. In line with their commitments to CEDAW, CRC and Agenda 2030, the following recommendations apply for governments as the primary duty-bearers and their critical responsibility in ensuring children’s rights, gender equality and the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

- 1) All reservations to CEDAW, CRC, the SDGs, ICPD, and Beijing should be withdrawn immediately.
- 2) Regardless of reservations made, States should embrace, implement, and report progress on all Sustainable Development Goals and targets during review at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), in order not to leave girls behind.
- 3) States should ensure that reporting on progress towards the SDGs includes progress for those most left behind, especially the most marginalised girls. All reporting towards the HLPF should include efforts to report on the most vulnerable populations within that country.
- 4) States should ensure that reporting on progress towards the SDGs includes progress on children’s rights and gender equality obligations and vice versa. This will provide a more

¹² Plan International ‘Champions of Change’ <https://plan-international.org/youth-activism/champions-change>

¹³ Plan International ‘Creating Safer Cities’ Programme: <https://plan-international.org/ending-violence/safer-cities-girls>

complete picture of the situation of girls' rights around the world and ensure synergies in reporting to both human rights mechanisms and SDG processes.

- 5) States should acknowledge the interconnectivity of the SDGs and ensure that reporting on the SDGs includes a specific gender and inclusion lens throughout all the goals. This includes recognizing that girls' rights and gender equality are not confined to SDG 5 but are fundamental to the realization of the goals by 2030.
- 6) States should demonstrate their commitment to human rights and Agenda 2030 by committing the necessary human and financial resources to their implementation. If the SDGs are to be achieved, significant allocation of resources will be required from all States.