

# THE RIGHT TO INCLUSIVE, QUALITY EDUCATION: PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S POSITION STATEMENT

Plan International believes that every child and young person has the right to access and complete a quality, inclusive education that covers at least pre-primary, primary and secondary education, in formal or non-formal settings, at the appropriate age, in a safe and supportive learning environment.

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## OVERVIEW: ACCESS TO EDUCATION

- Plan International believes that education should be available and accessible to all children on the basis of equal opportunity and non-discrimination. Every child must be able to access and complete an inclusive, quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education in order to meet global commitments.
- It is unacceptable that certain groups of children are prevented from being able to access, transition and complete a quality education due to their gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or political preference, age or disability. Such barriers are discriminatory and must be tackled through effective policies and adequate funding. Plan International will continue to work to ensure that girls' education is a priority issue globally, so that inequality in access to education is eradicated.
- If Agenda 2030 is not met for the most disadvantaged, the global community will have failed. Learning environments must be fit to accommodate all girls and boys regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic abilities. To achieve this, all actors must prioritise supporting the most vulnerable and excluded children who are least likely to be able to access education: These are: girls, children with disabilities, from the poorest backgrounds, living in conflict or emergency situations and from the most vulnerable and excluded groups.

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## SOCIAL NORMS AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

- Plan International believes that education is the key to unlocking girls' potential, and one of the most effective interventions for achieving development goals. Every girl has an equal right to access a quality education, in safe school environments that are free from gender bias, challenge discriminatory social norms and promote gender equality. We commit to prioritising the removal of gendered barriers to girls' access to education, such as poor sanitation and menstrual hygiene management facilities, early pregnancy and childcare, and child marriage.
- Girls are the under-valued majority, and can be a powerful force in their homes, communities and societies. It is crucial to challenge the gender inequality and social norms which prohibit girls from accessing and completing a quality education. Negative gender norms should never be justified on traditional, cultural or religious grounds.

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## ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- Plan International believes that mainstream education systems can and should be adapted to meet the needs of all learners, and should offer learning opportunities for every child. Not to do so is to ignore the potential of all children. Children with disabilities have an equal right to access an inclusive, quality education, and a right to the support and

adaptations necessary to facilitate their learning.

- Child-friendly, inclusive education from early years onwards brings better social, academic, health and economic outcomes for all learners, and at a lower cost than special/segregated education. As such, Plan International believes that inclusive education should be a global priority, without which development goals cannot be met.

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## ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY

- Plan International believes that no child should be denied the right to access an inclusive, quality education due to poverty, and recognises that poverty exacerbates the likelihood of exclusion for girls or children with disabilities. All actors – governments, intergovernmental organisations and civil society – have a responsibility to support those most in need to access and complete an inclusive, quality education.
- Plan International believes that pre-primary, primary and secondary education should be fee-and cost-free. Targeted measures should be taken to ensure that children from the poorest backgrounds, and particularly girls, are supported to access their right to education.

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## ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

- Plan International believes that no child should be denied their right to an education due to conflict and disaster. This fundamental right must be protected before, during and after an emergency, including for displaced children, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, to ensure educational continuity.
- We believe that education in emergencies is crucial to maintaining a sense of normalcy in children's lives, to provide safe, supportive spaces for children, and for equipping children with the skills and

knowledge they need to negotiate their present and future circumstances.

- We believe that education is a core humanitarian need. Education in emergencies interventions must be integrated into all stages of emergency planning and response: through contingency and disaster preparedness planning; early recovery immediately following an emergency; and long-term recovery.
- Interventions should ensure that children's immediate education needs are met, whilst also planning for longer-term provision, eventually reinstating or strengthening national education services.
- Plan International recognises that education in emergency responses should target those disproportionately affected by emergencies, or at greater risk, in particular girls and children with disabilities.

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## ACCESS TO NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

- Plan International recognises that non-formal education is a key inclusive education intervention. Non-formal education programmes can help to ensure that out-of-school children are able to access an education, and in some cases can be prepared for re-entry into the formal education system.

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## OVERVIEW: QUALITY, EQUITY AND EQUALITY

- Plan International believes that a quality education is comprehensive, empowering, promotes respect for the dignity and value of all people, and provides a broad range of learning processes that include wider life skills and comprehensive sexuality education. Quality education should provide children and young people with the necessary skills and knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to lead positive and productive lives and to be responsible and active citizens.

- Plan International believes that quality education outcomes cannot be secondary to access to education. If children are unable to learn and develop whilst in school, then the education system has failed them.
- We believe that education can help to realise the potential in all children, tackling many of the inequalities and exclusionary practices societies perpetuate. We believe we have a collective responsibility to ensure education systems achieve this, through quality curricula, teaching pedagogies and learning environments.

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## QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND PRE-PRIMARY PROVISION

- Plan international believes that pre-primary education is a vital component of quality education, ensuring children's brain development, strengthening their ability to learn, develop psychological resilience and to adapt to change, and preparing children to enter primary school. This helps to mitigate disadvantages faced by children born into poor and non-literate environments.
- We believe that early childhood care and pre-primary education is of critical value for the socialisation of gender equality. It is during early childhood and during the very first years of school that discriminatory social norms are formed. Pre-primary education must be gender-sensitive and actively reject harmful gender stereotypes.
- Plan International believes that ensuring every child has access to at least one year of free, quality pre-primary education should be a priority for national governments.
- Plan International believes that early childhood care provision is a vital intervention to reduce the burden and gendered distribution of unpaid care work, and provides essential support for young mothers in taking up educational or economic opportunities.

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## QUALITY CURRICULA

- Plan International believes that education must promote a culture of peace, dignity, equality and sustainability, and enable learners to engage with and address the issues relevant to their lives. The school curriculum should actively combat discrimination or prejudice on the basis of sex, gender, caste, language, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or culture.
- Plan International believes that all children, adolescents and young people – without discrimination – are entitled to comprehensive sexuality education to gain knowledge, explore values and attitudes, and develop the skills they need to make conscious, healthy and respectful choices about relationships and sexuality. Parents and educators should be supported to embrace children's learning from early childhood to allow them to explore, clarify and form life-long healthy attitudes and practices, free from coercion, violence and discrimination.
- Comprehensive sexuality education should be accessible for all children, adolescents and young people, in both formal and non-formal educational settings. Co-curricular activities which complement the formal curriculum are also important as are parental and community involvement and links to gender-responsive, child- adolescent- and youth-friendly healthcare and other services. It should be provided in a way that is non-judgemental, non-discriminatory, scientifically accurate, accessible, inclusive, rights-based, gender-transformative and adapted to the evolving capacity of the child, adolescent or young person.
- Quality education provision in emergencies – both formal and non-formal – must adhere to the minimum standards developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. It must: be delivered by trained professionals; promote gender equality and inclusion;

recognise and respond to the diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds of children; and include modules on human rights, conflict resolution, life skills, comprehensive sexuality education, and disaster risk reduction.

- We believe that a quality education should equip children with the skills and abilities to reach their full potential and maximise their chances of finding decent work. Education should be clearly linked to future opportunity, and should enable all learners to acquire the skills to succeed in employment or entrepreneurship.
- We believe that information technology must be built into education systems, to ensure that the digital revolution does not intensify inequalities and exclusion.

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## **TEACHERS: NUMBERS, QUALIFICATIONS, SKILLS AND SUPPORT**

- Teachers are the primary factor contributing to a quality, equitable and inclusive education. Teachers are an important, highly skilled resource, and as such deserve respect and support. In order for teachers to be able to do their job, and to ensure their regular attendance, national governments should commit to fairly remunerating teachers for their work.
- Plan International believes that female teachers and managers at all levels of education are vital to facilitating the learning of all children, particularly girls, and to combatting negative stereotypes about gender roles. Female teachers should be encouraged into the profession, enabled to progress in their careers, and to take on leadership positions.
- Teaching pedagogies must ensure that all children are supported to achieve learning outcomes and progress in a wide range of subjects, irrespective of gender or disability.

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## **OVERVIEW: ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

- Plan International believes that it is vital to education outcomes and for the wellbeing of children that schools are safe, inclusive spaces. Cultures of non-violence, respect and inclusion in schools are fundamental tenets of a quality education, and as such must be a global education priority.
- It is important that education systems link in with child protection and health systems, to ensure every child's wellbeing, and that no child falls through the gap.

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## **GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

- Plan International believes that children and young people, as participants in their own education, will best understand the particular challenges they face in accessing a quality, safe education. As such, children's participation in decision-making should be welcomed. Girls' and boys' interests, concerns and opinions should be heard at all levels— from the governance and management systems at school, to national level policy development.
- All children and young people, irrespective of sex, age, disability or other exclusionary categorisation, should be supported to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Targeted interventions should be put in place to ensure that girls and other children from marginalised and disenfranchised groups are enabled to participate on an equal basis with others, and that their value and sense of self-worth is reinforced.

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## **SCHOOL RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

- Plan International asserts that every child has the right to learn in a safe and secure environment, free from the fear or threat of violence. This is an inseparable aspect of a quality education. Addressing attitudes and behaviours that support or legitimise violence at the national, local, school and

community levels, is a key intervention to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence.

- We believe it is unacceptable that any child should be a victim of violence of any description either in school, or on the journey to and from school – including sexual violence or harassment, bullying and intimidation, and corporal punishment. We are committed to supporting children to recognise their own value, and the value of others, regardless of their gender. We believe this to be a fundamental learning outcome of an inclusive, quality education.
- Plan International believes that eliminating school-related gender-based violence should be a priority for all actors. School-related gender-based violence constitutes a serious rights violation, impacting on children's ability to enter, transition and complete school.

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## **FINANCING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION: THE GLOBAL FUNDING GAP**

- Plan International believes that no-one should be prevented from receiving a quality education due to a lack of resources. At least 12 years' free, quality, basic education, including at least 1 year pre-primary, should be available and accessible for all children.
- Plan International believes that education systems must be adequately and equitably financed – focusing on inclusive education and on gender equality in education systems. Funding should be prioritised for those who face the most barriers to accessing their right to education to ensure equitable learning outcomes and that no child is left behind.

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## **DOMESTIC FINANCING FOR EDUCATION**

- Plan International recognises that, as the primary duty bearers, national

governments are responsible for ensuring the right of all children to access and complete a quality, inclusive education. Fundamental to realising this right is demonstrating the necessary political and financial will to guarantee the right to education for all - including those most likely to be excluded.

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## **INTERNATIONAL FINANCING FOR EDUCATION**

- Plan International believes that the international community has a duty to support national governments from low and middle income countries to ensure public education systems are fully financed, so that every child is able to realise their right to inclusive, quality education. If education goals are not reached, then it will be impossible to fully meet the challenge of Agenda 2030.
- Plan International urges donors from all sectors to increase financing for education both bilaterally and multilaterally in order to meet the global shortfall in education financing.

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## **FINANCING EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES**

- Plan International believes that the right to education does not stop in emergencies, and that financing education provision is a crucial part of conflict and disaster prevention and response. National governments have a responsibility to finance the continued education of all children during or in the aftermath of disasters or conflict.
- Plan International believes that in the case of fragile or failing states, the international community should provide additional financial and technical support in order to ensure that this obligation is met for all children, everywhere. Plan International supports the Education Cannot Wait Fund as a mechanism to increase global funding for education in emergencies.

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## PRIVATE SECTOR FINANCING FOR EDUCATION

- Plan International believes that education provision is the responsibility of the State, and that the State is accountable for ensuring that the public education sector is fully financed.
- Plan International believes that private financing can play a greater role in supporting global education priorities, and should be welcomed where it seeks to complement, support and strengthen public education systems.
- Given the evidence showing that fee-charging schools exacerbate social and economic inequalities, Plan International does not support the provision of fee-charging private education, either by for-profit or not-for-profit agencies, where this allows the State to fail to meet its legal obligations to provide education for all. This is particularly the case where parents are left with no other options but to send their children to private schools or miss out on education. Plan International recognises that fee-charging education options can be a necessary transitional intervention on the road towards the provision of quality, free education for all children.

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## MONITORING PROGRESS ON GLOBAL EDUCATION GOALS

- Plan International believes that increased, responsible data collection and analysis is fundamental to informing and implementing effective policies that respond to the learning needs of all children. Current measurement leaves gaps in our understanding of education outcomes, and should be addressed by the international community.
- Plan International promotes cultures of learning and reflection through internal and external knowledge sharing to enhance evidence-based decision-making in Plan International, in national governments and among other education

stakeholders. National governments and international bodies must disaggregate data by sex, age, wealth quintile, location and disability as a minimum.