LEARNINGS FROM CSE PRACTITIONERS IN EL SALVADOR, LAOS AND ZIMBABWE:

OPERATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

PLAN INTERNATIONAL | TORCHLIGHT COLLECTIVE

May 2022

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
WAS TO EXTRACT EXTERNAL
AND INTERNAL LEARNINGS
WITH THE AIM OF PROVIDING
OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S CSE
PROGRAMMING GLOBALLY.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDC	United States Center for Disease Control
CEFMU	Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Unions
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EO	External organisation
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GH	Plan International's Global Hub
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
ITGSE	International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and other marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoH	Ministry of Health
PMNCH	Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health
REC	Research Ethics Committee
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STIs	Sexually Transmitted infections
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Sverige

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, based on research undertaken from March to December 2021, provides findings and operational guidance for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) across Plan International and beyond. It analyses the available information and learning from CSE programming in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe. It is expected that learnings from this research will contribute to the development of a global programme model for CSE.

It includes a review of relevant literature and existing guidance, interviews with international experts in CSE, in-country research in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe, and validation workshops with the staff of the Plan International country offices mentioned.

> **"IF YOU WANT TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE, IT TAKES TIME ... DONORS GIVING AT LEAST 6 MONTHS TO DESIGN IS CRUCIAL TO ENSURING THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION."** [1]

WHAT WE FOUND

The external literature review and interviews conducted in the first phase of research **revealed that there is little operational guidance aimed at NGOs or civil society organisations**; most existing recommendations are high-level, to be taken into consideration by policy-makers or technical staff in the public sector. This finding highlighted the importance of the operations research in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe.

The research yielded **important guidance, based on implementers' experience of what works in practice**. These examples may work in one setting, but not in another, and therefore cannot be posited as universal recommendations. However, they serve as an opportunity for experimentation, learning and growth and should be embraced as such.

Although *evaluating* Plan International's work was beyond the scope of this study, **research in Zimbabwe, Laos and El Salvador uncovered a wealth of expertise and practical programme knowledge** which can be adapted globally.

The study uncovered many aspects of CSE that need further research and **the report also includes a list of topics that merit further consideration and exploration**.

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1. Validation workshop, Laos.

Key recommendations have emerged from both the literature review and from research interviews with CSE practitioners. Many are cross-cutting – important throughout all five stages of the programme cycle – **engagement and planning, design, implementation and delivery, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and sustainability and scale up**. They can be summarised as follows:

- **Avoid a one size fits all approach:** context is crucial in CSE programme planning.
- **Undertake comprehensive mapping** of needs and potential entry points and participatory processes with stakeholders: this will illuminate how to achieve buy-in from young people, their communities and their governments.
- **Build and maintain partnerships:** partners at many levels are vital for effectiveness, funding and sustainability. They should include youth and community organisations that reach out to marginalised groups as well as schools and government ministries. Internally, seek support from a range of colleagues.
- **Include training and ongoing support** for all facilitators and educators in programme design and budgets. Train educators in methodology as well as content and invest in values and attitude training for staff and partners, to ensure an evidence-informed and rights-based approach to CSE.

- **Provide detailed budgets** and fund sufficient time at all stages of the process; including funding young people's meaningful participation and embedding sustainability and scale-up strategies.
- **Ensure that programme design respects privacy, practises informed consent** and prioritises the safety, in all spaces including digital, of both educators and participants without shying away from difficult topics.
- **Consult young people at a every step of the way** and be primarily accountable to *them* – rather than parents, teachers or experts. They must be at the heart of programme and project design. Invest in qualitative research in order to facilitate accountability to young learners and to other stakeholders.
- **Make use of digital tools and spaces,** but not exclusively.
- **Share learning** – CSE practitioners must find time and space to do this.
- **Conduct further research** to shed light on areas of CSE where evidence is lacking.

> **PLAN PARTICIPATES IN ALLIANCES IN LINE WITH THEIR APPROACHES AND PRINCIPLES ... THEY [THE PARTNERS] NEED TO HAVE EXPERIENCE IN THE SUBJECT, OPENNESS TO COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION, LEARNING AND MUTUAL RESPECT. PLAN RESPECTS THE WORK THAT MANY ORGANISATIONS HAVE DEVELOPED IN THE COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS, AND IS VERY INTERESTED IN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS.** [2]

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2.   Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.

INTRODUCTION

Plan International's Global Hub (GH), Plan International Finland and Plan International Sweden commissioned a research study on the operational-isation of Comprehensive sexuality Education (CSE) within and outside of Plan International. Despite an ever-growing evidence base on the effectiveness of CSE on a variety of health and gender outcomes, there is little in the way of operational guidance that takes into account the wide variety of contexts in which CSE is implemented.

Further, existing operational guidance, notably that of International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)[3], United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)[4] and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation (UNESCO)[5], whilst useful, is not tailored to the specific and unique roles that Plan International plays in the contexts where it works. Plan International has invested significant time and resources to position itself as an important partner in CSE implementation, and this work represents a strong step forward.

This study, entitled *'Learnings from CSE Practitioners in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe: operational research report'* is intended to fill gaps in the existing evidence by distilling lessons from implementing organisations worldwide and drawing upon the strengths and experiences of the country offices in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe, all of which are involved in CSE programming. It **focuses exclusively on operationalisation – the how of CSE**. The purpose of the research was to extract external and internal learnings with the aim of providing operational recommendations for Plan International's CSE programming globally. To this end, the study examines the various stages of CSE programmatic implementation: Engagement/Planning; Design; Implementation/Delivery; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning; and Sustainability/Scale-Up, as well as areas of inquiry within those stages and crosscutting considerations.

This study follows closely on the release of Plan International's *'Putting the C in CSE: Standards for Content, Delivery and Environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (2020)'[6]* and the related assessment tools. Together with these and other research, the operational guidance resulting from this study intends to inform the development of Plan's global CSE programme model.

The study was conducted in four phases:

01 THE FIRST PHASE ARTICULATED THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AREAS OF INQUIRY AND METHODOLOGY.

02 THE SECOND PHASE FOCUSED ON THE EXPERIENCES OF ORGANISATIONS OUTSIDE OF PLAN INTERNATIONAL THROUGH A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE AND A SERIES OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH EXTERNAL GLOBAL PRACTITIONERS.

03 THE THIRD PHASE SOUGHT TO GATHER MORE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES FROM FIELD RESEARCH IN THREE COUNTRIES – EL SALVADOR, LAOS, AND ZIMBABWE – TO PROVIDE PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR CSE IMPLEMENTERS.

04 THE FOURTH PHASE ANALYSED THE FINDINGS AND VALIDATED AND SHARED THE PRELIMINARY DATA.

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3. IPPF (2013). *Inside and Out*. Available at: https://www.ippf.org/resource/inside-and-out-comprehensive-sexuality-education-cse-assessment-tool
4. UNFPA (2020). *Out of school CSE guidelines*.
5. UNESCO (2020). *Sexuality education review and assessment tool (SERAT)*. Paris, France.
6. Plan International (2020). *Putting the C in CSE: Standards for content, delivery and environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. Available at: https://plan-international.org/publications/comprehensive-sexuality-education-standards

FIGURE 1: PLAN INTERNATIONAL CSE PROGRAMME CYCLE

CSE PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

01 ENGAGEMENT/ PLANNING

02 DESIGN

03 IMPLEMENTATION/ DELIVERY

04 MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

05 SUSTAINABILITY/ SCALE-UP
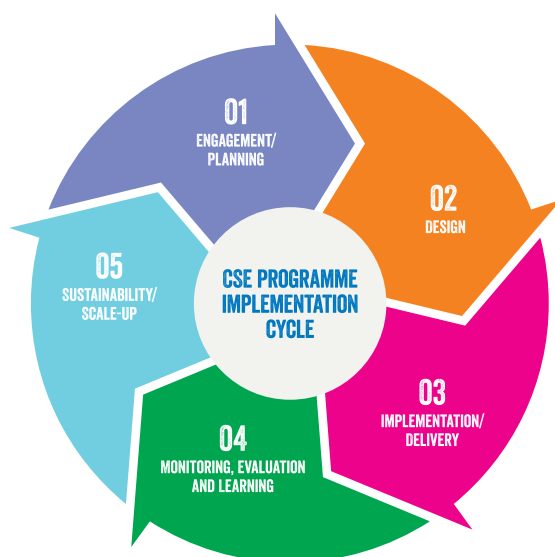
This report presents the combined results of what was gathered in Phase Two and Phase Three of the study and in addition incorporates reflections on preliminary findings from validation workshops with the country offices' staff. Many of the examples yielded from the research are context-specific. The authors have made every effort to differentiate between more universal guidance and examples of contextual solutions that can be seen as a menu of options to test and adapt in local programming, particularly where there are sociodemographic, cultural, or programmatic similarities with one or more countries included in the study.

Finally, the report describes gaps in findings and suggests areas that merit further consideration and study as Plan International forms and tests its global CSE programme model.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S WORK ON CSE

Plan International's work on young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has been developing over the past decade. It is underpinned by a gender-transformative approach, aiming to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and to shift the unequal power relations that control female sexuality. Comprehensive sexuality education is a key investment area. Plan International aims to support access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and dialogue that enables children, adolescents and young people to explore values and attitudes, and build skills and coping mechanisms, regarding sex and sexuality. Other key CSE resources include:

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S CSE STANDARDS

A suite of materials outlining Plan International's CSE standards, comprising a comprehensive, human rights-based, sex-positive, gender transformative and inclusive approach towards sex and relationships for children and young people, from early childhood to adulthood.

https://plan-international.org/publications/comprehensive-sexuality-education-standards
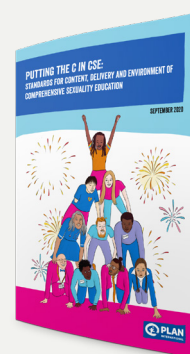
PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S TRANSLATING CSE COMMITMENTS INTO ACTION

A tool to support governments to successfully and meaningfully implement CSE.

https://plan-international.org/publications/translating-cse-commitments-into-action

METHODOLOGY

STUDY OBJECTIVE

To develop operational recommendations for CSE programming that are consistent with Plan International's rights-/evidence-based, gender-transformative approach.

PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

? What practical and applicable lessons can be learnt from Plan International's CSE programming and that of peer organisations?

? How are the principles behind Plan International's CSE standards being implemented by the El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe country offices?

The study consisted of **four phases**, each with distinct tasks and data collection methods.[7]

01 During the inception phase (**Phase One**), the team worked collaboratively with Plan International and country office staff members to refine the methodology for the entirety of the study and align the research questions.

02 **Phase Two** of the study was the external investigation, during which the research team conducted a rapid literature review on operationalising CSE and carried out nine in-depth interviews with organisations involved in the implementation of CSE at global, regional and national levels.

03 **Phase Three** was the internal investigation, during which data was collected in three countries where Plan International implements CSE programming – El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe.

04 **Phase Four** during the final phase of the study, data from Phase Three were analysed and preliminary findings shared with stakeholders during online validation workshops. The data from phases two and three, as well as the validation meetings, feed into this report.

FIGURE 2: RESEARCH PHASES FOR THE 'OPERATIONALISING CSE WITHIN PLAN INTERNATIONAL' STUDY

PHASE 1
INCEPTION

PHASE 2
EXTERNAL
INVESTIGATION

PHASE 3
INTERNAL
INVESTIGATION

PHASE 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND
REPORT WRITING
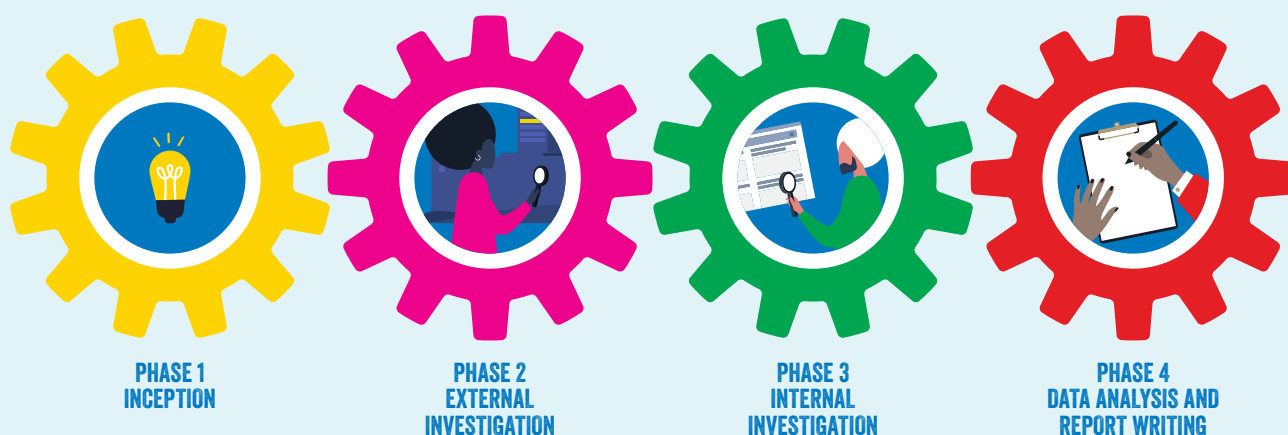
7.   Detailed methodology available from Plan International

DATA COLLECTION

01 LITERATURE REVIEW

The research team identified relevant literature on operationalising CSE through bibliographic review and online and database searches using key terms. Both peer reviewed and grey literature were included in the review, as long as documents were relevant to one of the primary research questions and the publication date was on or after 1 January 2000.

02 EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

The research team, in coordination with Plan International, generated a list of 25 external organisations and corresponding contact people representing expertise in CSE at a global, regional and/or national level. The final sample consists of nine respondents, representing UN agencies, youth-led organisations, International NGOS, and other civil society organisations identified for their experience implementing CSE. Each study participant was given a unique identifier that consists of 'EO' (external organisation) and a number; these are used in this report to ensure anonymity.

03 INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

Data was collected from CSE programmes in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe. The data collection period was June-September 2021 and collection methods included: in-depth interviews focus group discussions, validation workshops and a programme discovery tool.

- The **interviews and focus group discussions** focused on lessons learnt across all areas of inquiry, with researchers being able to tailor each interview or group discussion to the expertise/experience of the participants. In-depth interviews were carried out with 50 participants, 12 of whom were young leaders; there were 14 focus group discussions attended by 63 people – 14 adults and 49 youth.

- The **programme discovery tool**, which was intended to be completed first in each of the three countries, was a self-administered digital questionnaire and was filled in by 14 participants. It provided background information that allowed the researchers to avoid spending too much interview or focus group discussion time focused on grasping the basics of the programme.

- The **field diary and observation tools** were intended to give insights from the everyday operation of the programme from the perspective of Plan International staff members, educators/facilitators and young learners. Time limitations meant that these were not implemented.

- The **validation workshops**, attended by 20 practitioners, served as a method of sharing the preliminary findings from Phase Three and filling gaps for areas of inquiry for which less data were available.

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of this study is the sheer breadth of the research questions. Though the study has yielded a substantial number of actionable recommendations across all areas of inquiry, it would be impossible to explore each of them in great depth. There were also several timing-related limitations that affected the quantity of data collected for this study. In all three countries, at least part of the time period for data collection (June – September 2021) fell during the regularly-scheduled school holidays. The challenges posed by the school holidays were compounded by COVID-19 restrictions throughout the study period.

ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

Ahead of the internal investigation, Plan International sought and received ethical approval for the study from the Overseas Development Institute's Research Ethics Committee (REC). The team completed safeguarding risk assessments at global and local level. All researchers completed Plan's online safeguarding course. Researchers obtained informed consent from all study participants, and from parents and guardians where applicable, using both verbal and written descriptions of the research objectives and how data would be used, ensuring that those approached for inclusion were aware of their ability to refuse participation at any time.

COUNTRY PROFILES

This section provides background and an overview of the CSE programmes included in the study as well as general information about each Plan International country office's approach to CSE.

LAOS

VIETNAM

GULF OF TONKIN

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

ZIMBABWE

ZAMBIA

BOTSWANA

MOZAMBIQUE

SOUTH AFRICA

INDIAN OCEAN

BELIZE

GUATEMALA

HONDURAS

EL SALVADOR

PACIFIC OCEAN

NICAR

EL SALVADOR

CSE is incorporated within the larger *'Derechos sexuales y derechos reproductivos VIH (DSDR-VIH)' [Sexual and reproductive rights and HIV]* programme and is part of Plan El Salvador's 2016-2021 strategic plan. It has four main components: prevention of unwanted/unplanned pregnancies, prevention of second pregnancy, HIV/AIDS prevention, and sexual and reproductive rights in humanitarian settings. CSE implementation covers a wide section of community members ranging from 10-29 years old. Interventions are focused in both community and school contexts for adolescents and young people. The programme is implemented in more than 400 communities and since starting in 2016, has reached approximately 30,000 10-29-year-old participants both in schools and in out-of-school settings.

Plan International El Salvador runs a course directly with young people which, during the past year and a half, has been online due to COVID-19. The DSDR curriculum, which is entitled *'Sexualidad, una dimensión humana para conquistar' [Sexuality, a human dimension to conquer]*, covers sexuality education and life-skills training activities and guidelines for educators/facilitators.[8] The country office also trains teachers on integrating CSE into the official school curriculum.

Plan El Salvador's CSE programme has a strong advocacy component. Plan is a primary partner of the Ministry of Education in CSE implementation in public schools. This partnership allows them not only to access schools and education centres, but also to participate in developing curricula and education toolkits. They work closely with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to ensure both healthcare providers and educators/facilitators develop their knowledge and skills on CSE. So far, Plan El Salvador has trained more than 5,000 educators in CSE.

LAOS

Plan International Laos has been involved with CSE advocacy and programming since 2017. In that year, the CSE curriculum for secondary schools was developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) with support from the UNFPA country programme. From 2017 to mid-2019, the MoES and UNFPA engaged Plan International to provide inputs into learning objectives, modules and reviews of the curriculum materials for the following topics: gender equality and child rights, reproductive system, changes at puberty, relationships, consent, decision making and online safety. The CSE curriculum is used to supplement the national curriculum for three secondary school subjects: Population Studies, ICT and Biology.

In 2018 the *'Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights programme'*, was set up to help bolster the efforts of the MoES in Houn district, Oudomxay province. The programme is implemented exclusively with school-going adolescents in Houn district's 15 secondary schools. Apart from training and supporting MoES classroom teachers in the delivery of CSE, Plan International Laos also initiated extracurricular student clubs to complement in-classroom learning. A toolkit named 'Merlin Phahoo' was developed for these clubs together with a youth-led social enterprise.

ZIMBABWE

Through the *'Promoting access to inclusive SRHR and SGBV information and services in Zimbabwe, Project'* and the *'DREAMS AGYW HIV Project'*, Plan International Zimbabwe has been supporting government teachers to deliver CSE to young people in school, and working within a consortium of partners to deliver CSE to out-of-school 10-24-year-olds. The programme is operational in the Harare, Kwekwe, Chiredzi, Bulawayo and Mutare regions and aims to reduce teenage pregnancies and STIs.

For young people in primary and secondary school, Plan International has been working in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) to expand the life-skills education curriculum in line with the *'UN International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education'* and Plan International's *'Putting the C in CSE: Standards for Content, Delivery and Environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education'*. They are currently in discussion with the ministry and UNESCO on adapting teaching and learning materials to relevant CSE standards and guidelines. Plan International also offers ongoing support to teachers and provides monitoring tools.

For young people out-of-school, the programme uses *'Champions of Change'*[9] modules that include sexuality and gender information, and focus on social norm change. With the advent of COVID-19, Plan International Zimbabwe adopted a hybrid approach, which included in-person delivery in small groups, digital delivery via WhatsApp and bulk SMSing and providing links to services through mobile outreach.

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8. Plan International El Salvador. (n.d). *Sexualidad: una dimensión humana para conquistar.*
9. Plan International (n.d). *Champions of change.* Available at: https://plan-international.org/youth-activism/champions-change

FINDINGS AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This section contains the findings and operational recommendations emerging from the research. It is the product of the authors' analysis of findings identified throughout the three research phases: literature review, external interviews and internal field research – including collective activities like focus group discussions, and validation workshops.[10]

The recommendations can be taken into account by Plan International when developing global CSE guidance and country-level programmes.

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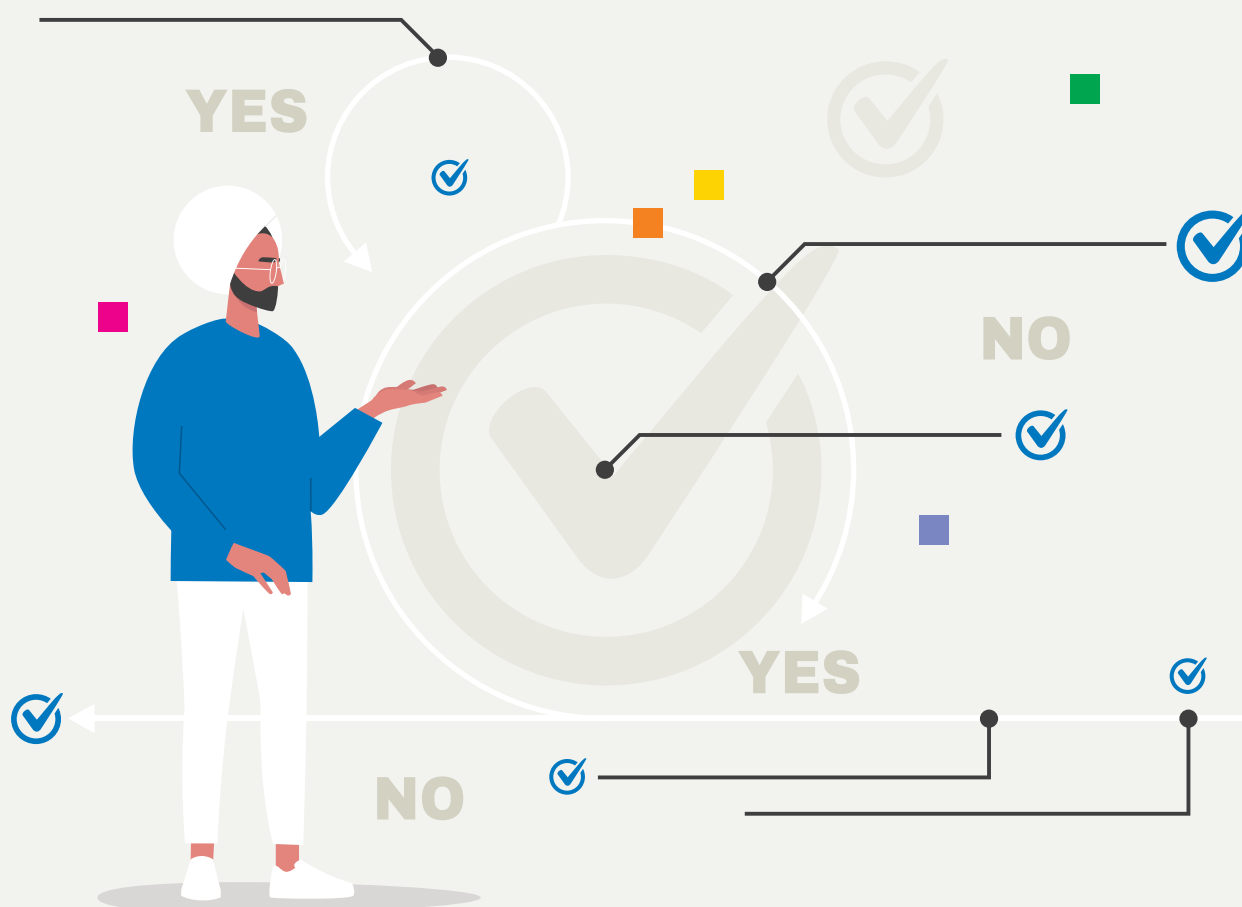
10. Where the practice is directly attributable to a study participant, the source is cited in a footnote.

01 ENGAGEMENT/ PLANNING

The engagement of relevant stakeholders, understanding the context in which the programme is to operate and building in sustainability and scale-up right from the beginning are crucial to the quality and success of CSE programming.

A LEARNING, MAPPING AND ASSESSING NEEDS

Much has been written elsewhere about what topics to include in a context assessment; in this section, we draw out recommendations on how to strengthen the process.

Use context assessment as a trust-building opportunity

It is important to frame contact with the communities as an ongoing trust-building process rather than a technical or donor requirement. This approach is a stepping stone to constructing meaningful partnerships within the different community institutions and leaders. As relevant stakeholders and potential partners 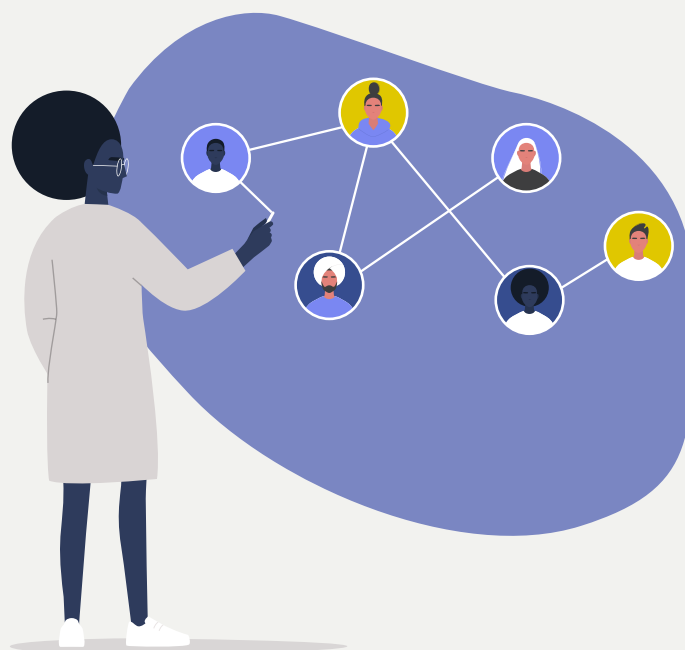are identified, they should be given the opportunity to feed into both the understanding of the context as well as the design of the programme(s), and there should be evidence and feedback about how their inputs were used.

This approach was evident in country offices: staff from Plan El Salvador mentioned the importance of working together with local collectives and youth-led initiatives:

WITHIN THE CRITERIA WE CONSIDER ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE EXPERIENCE [IN CSE], ARE OPEN TO COLLECTIVE WORK, [ONGOING] LEARNING, AND MUTUAL RESPECT. PLAN RESPECTS A LOT THOSE EXISTING LOCAL COLLECTIVES AND YOUTH-BASED ORGANISATIONS. [11]

Make the context assessment an ongoing element of programme implementation

It was clear from numerous sources that **understanding operational contexts is crucial for all CSE programme stages**. Often existing knowledge, at Plan International or with its partners, of the context is available and sufficient.

However, even when the programme implementation has a robust operations history, resources need to be allocated to update existing mappings and needs assessments, including perceptions from youth and children themselves on social norms and their own needs. Some programmes and initiatives can have a high staff/volunteer turnover or they change their structures or project activities over time, so regular updates are vital. Programmes also need to update their knowledge of the needs of children and young people, who are traditionally left out of mainstream programmes. One key external partner mentioned:

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11.   Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.

> **AFTER 10 YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION HISTORY IN THE COUNTRIES, WE DON'T START AFRESH BUT WORK USING THE KNOWLEDGE OF EXISTING PARTNERS. AT THE START OF EACH CYCLE (EVERY FIVE YEARS) WE DO A CONTEXT ANALYSIS LOOKING AT ACCEPTABILITY, SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE POLICY FRAMEWORK. WITHIN THE EXPANSION OF WHAT WE DO, WE WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO TEST WHAT IS ATTRACTIVE LANGUAGE, MATERIALS, THE BEST SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS ETC. TO USE.** [12]

Allocate enough time and human resources to the context assessment activities of the CSE initiative

As part of making context assessments a core element of programming, allocating time and human resources to it is essential. Some study participants mentioned concerns over not having enough time to run a comprehensive context assessment in the communities and to reach those communities that might need more time for trust-building:

> **THERE WAS LIMITED TIME TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS AND START MEETINGS. THEREFORE, MORE TIME BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IS IMPORTANT TO FOSTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROJECT.** [13]

Others noted, during the validation workshops, that having ample time for engaging with community members, particularly children, adolescents, young people, and their caregivers was key to project success:

> **[THIS PROJECT REQUIRED] HAVING A 6-MONTH DESIGN PROCESS AND SUPPORT TEAM THAT ALLOWS US A LENGTHY TIME TO DEVELOP PROGRAMMES. IT TAKES TIME TO DEVELOP RESOURCES AND TAILOR TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS. IF YOU WANT TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE, IT TAKES TIME – INCLUDING OTHER LANGUAGE GROUPS.** [14]

It is important for Plan to understand the community: particularly children, adolescents, and youth, in all of their diversity. **The assessment should seek to understand the needs of marginalised ethnic groups, LGBTIQ+ youth and young people with disabilities, living in poverty, involved in transactional sex and others who are traditionally excluded from mainstream youth programming.**

If the programme intends to operate through the public sector, for example, in partnership with the Ministry of Education in schools, exploring the needs of all young people during the assessment stage can generate the arguments and justifications needed to ensure programming outside of traditional classroom settings.

Develop robust political and organisational mappings and keep them updated

This gives the programme staff a clear overview of who are the key stakeholders in the community, how they link to each other, and what kind of populations might be left behind, or overrepresented, in the CSE initiatives. Paying attention to this ongoing mapping exercise can facilitate inclusion initiatives in the future, since information on potential partners from the communities of interest is being continuously documented.

This context mapping can also give the programme team a closer look at potential entry points and potential opposition to CSE in different levels: community, national, regional. These mappings can draw from quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods approaches, including youth-led research.[15] Stakeholder mappings can also include:

- **National, regional, and global laws and policies** related to CSE, SRHR, and broader education policy including the level of investment in CSE by the government.[16]
- **Relevant public health and education data** at the local and national levels. For example, school enrolment rates (disaggregated by age and gender if data is available) and SRH indicators, which should inform programme design.[17]

12. External expert (EO6).
13. External stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS4Z).
14. Validation workshop, Laos
15. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/; External experts (E06; EO10; E017)

16. Haberland, N., & Rogow, D. (2015). *Sexuality education: Emerging trends in evidence and practice.* The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine, 56(1 Suppl), S15-21.
17. Haberland, N., & Rogow, D. (2015). *Sexuality education: Emerging trends in evidence and practice.* The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine, 56(1 Suppl), S15-21.

- A list of other **civil society organisations (CSOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and movements involved in the provision of or advocacy for CSE**, including youth development programmes and cultural/religious institutions to understand their positioning regarding guiding principles in relation to CSE and SRHR and how they relate to Plan International's standards. It is important to include all relevant actors in the mapping even if they are not desired partners.
- **Where CSE is already provided in schools, map the way in which it is integrated;** for example, is it a curricular or extracurricular activity? Identify and build upon existing capacity and curricular or extracurricular CSE materials.[18]
- **Assess the schools' system or modality (private/public);** this information can provide valuable insights on how to plan for sustainability and scale-up of CSE programming.

Needs assessments are necessary but not sufficient; complement them with participatory processes with stakeholders

Plan International already has needs assessment elements in their planning process as : participants mentioned they were done as "routine at project proposal stage.[19]" However, **investing time and resources to undertake participatory exercises** with, for example, parents, community and religious leaders, educators/facilitators and youth, can allow not only the identification of needs but will also result in a clearer picture of their causes.[20] This process can lead to identifying shared values, social norms and attitudes surrounding adolescent SRH and their participation in society. This, in turn, helps to prevent backlash and creates a favourable environment for CSE in each community.

Include a diversity of stakeholders in mapping and context assessment activities

The inclusion of a diversity of adolescents and young people, as well as community leaders, organisations, collectives, and participants into the project design right from the beginning really matters: making inclusiveness a core feature of the CSE initiative.

Involving a diversity of stakeholders in context assessment activities can include formative research and consultations in preparation for programme design.[21] Key stakeholders could include:

- **Young people in all their diversity** (this includes but it is not limited to): young people with disabilities, young people living in humanitarian settings, indigenous youth, young lesbian, gay, bisexual, and gender non-binary/nonconforming people, young transgender people, young intersex people, young people living with HIV, young people who use drugs, youth engaged in transactional sex and young people who are in detention.[22]
- **Teachers and educators/facilitators, CSE implementers, faith-based organisations, NGOs, CSOs, and academia:**[23] these actors can be involved in capacity assessments, values clarification activities, and exploratory interviews to determine 'how CSE ready' they are for implementation.[24]
- **Parents and caregivers:** share and validate the findings of the context analysis with a range of stakeholders during, for example, parent-teacher meetings, community forums, and school management meetings.[25]
- **Social media influencers:** several elements of CSE are present in digital spaces, it is worth identifying influencers who could mobilise positive CSE and SRHR messaging.[26]

Assess the digital environments accessed by young people and communities

In the digital era, the lines dividing the online and off-line lives of people become blurred.[27] **Digital media represents an important source of information regarding SRH.** Therefore, it is important for CSE implementers to map and understand where adolescents, young people, and the general community access this kind of information online.[28] Similarly, knowing how community members exchange CSE and SRH information (and misinformation) through social media can reveal valuable information about mis/information channels and digital gaps. A study participant from Plan International Zimbabwe mentions:

18 ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19.
19. Programme discovery tool, Zimbabwe.
20. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/; External experts (E06; EO10; E017)
21. UNESCO (2020). *Sexuality education review and assessment tool (SERAT).* Available at: Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool (SERAT) 3.0 | Digital library | Comprehensive Sexuality Education Learning Platform (cse-learning-platform-unesco.org) ; External experts (EO8; EO17)
22. External expert (EO17).
23. External expert (EO17).

24. External expert (EO8).
25. External expert (EO8).
26. UNESCO (2020). Switched on: sexuality education in the digital space. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372784
27. UNESCO (2020). Sexuality education review and assessment tool (SERAT). Available at: Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool (SERAT) 3.0 | Digital library | Comprehensive Sexuality Education Learning Platform (cse-learning-platform-unesco.org)
28. UNFPA (2020). International technical and programmatic guidance on out-of-school Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

> **YOUNG PEOPLE GET INFORMATION FROM THE MEDIA AND THEN CONSULT WITH THE EDUCATORS/FACILITATORS ON INFORMATION THEY FOUND OUT. TV, TWITTER, FACEBOOK, RADIO STATIONS [AND] PHONES ARE USED TO SPREAD CSE.** [29]

B — BUILDING EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT

Partnerships and external relations are part of the social dynamics of delivering CSE and identifying the right partners is key to successful programming: a significant number of study participants, both external and in the three study countries, commented that **Plan International has a unique position as a trusted partner in child protection and development and supporting children, adolescents and youth**.

> **PLAN HAS A TRUSTWORTHY REPUTATION IN SPACES AROUND CSE BECAUSE OF THEIR BROADER WORK. SOMETIMES YOU NEED ORGANISATIONS THAT SPEAK OPENLY ABOUT SEXUALITY, TO PARTNER WITH THE ORGANISATION TO HELP THE ORGANISATION UNDERSTAND HOW TO DELIVER CSE THE RIGHT WAY, SO WORKING WITH MORE LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS THAT DELIVER IN A MORE SENSITIVE WAY CAN WORK BETTER.** [30]

Focus on both partnership building and maintenance

For partner selection, **CSE practitioners should consider organisations that share its values and strengthen its youth-centeredness and gender-transformative approaches**. A key first step is to understand the purpose and proposed additional value of the partnerships, what do they contribute, intellectually or in terms of resources and diversity, that will complement Plan International's expertise and experience?

In **El Salvador**, for example, a youth working group was formed, including youth-led and LGBTIQ+ organisations, to provide input into the public sector collaboration on in-school CSE curricula and programmes. The organisations involved remain partners to Plan International.[31]

Public sector partnerships are key for working in public (and private, depending on the country context) schools. There was no data on how Plan partnered with specific schools, but close partnerships with schools are cited as key to working with parents. The researchers have witnessed broad public sector partnerships with NGOS stemming from relationships built at school or municipal level and elevated to national agreements. Referral networks and connections to service providers should be considered within partnerships to ensure the capacity to implement at the delivery stage.

Partnerships should be based on communication channels and common projects through memoranda of understanding and other forms of explicit agreement, that adapt to the organisational dynamics of the different partners. **Once alliances are established, they need constant follow-up.** This can take the form of on-going training, technical exchanges, and spaces to co-design strategic advocacy and project plans.

Opportunities for collaborative planning are important. Youth-led organisations, LGBTIQ+ organisations and organisations led by persons with disabilities in particular should not be given any reason to doubt being full partners at all stages of the project.

Keep the partnership network as diverse as possible

Potential partners mentioned throughout the external and internal investigations were:

- youth-led organisations
- government agencies
- health professional bodies
- religious organisations and leaders
- youth/child protection agencies
- parent-teacher associations
- teacher/educator networks
- women's collectives and local non-profits.[32]

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29. Educator, Zimbabwe (E5Z).
30. External expert (EO6).
31. Validation, El Salvador.
32. External expert (EO6).

However, exploring outside of the usual SRHR scope can foster an intersectional approach to CSE planning and delivery.[33]

Plan El Salvador addressed partnering with LBGTIQ+ organisations[34] and Laos mentioned partnering with women's organisations.[35] These, in addition to organisations led by youth and by people with disabilities, are essential to partnering according to Plan International's values. Within this diversity, it is also crucial to foster engagement with religious/traditional leaders and congregations by sharing the positive aspects of CSE and exploring common-ground visions, missions, and strategies.[36]

Comments from study participants back up this approach:

> *... YOU NEED TO DO A SURVEY WITH RELIGIOUS PEOPLE AND BRING THE DATA TO THEIR LEADERS TO GET THEIR BUY-IN. IT HAS TO BE A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH. BRING THE EVIDENCE FROM THEIR CONTEXT.* [37]

> *IN GENERAL, WE IMPLEMENT AN APPROACH OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, THE STARTING POINT IS THE RIGHTS APPROACH, THIS NARRATIVE [HUMAN RIGHTS] MAKES IT EASIER TO TALK ABOUT SEXUAL DIVERSITY.* [38]

C ENGAGEMENT OF PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND CAREGIVERS
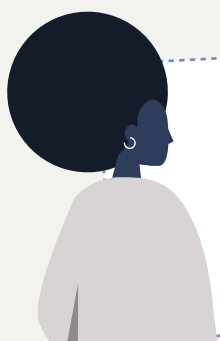
Parents and guardians of young people are the primary sexuality educators of their children and key to CSE implementation. [39]

> *WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO BE SAFE, WE WANT THEM TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES; EVERYONE WANTS THEIR KIDS TO CONTINUE IN EDUCATION AND THRIVE ... [USE] THOSE VALUES AS YOUR OPENERS, YOUR FOUNDATION. A WHOLE LOT OF GROUND WORK IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS IS IMPORTANT. AS SOON AS THERE IS A MURMURING OF HOW CSE IS SEXUALISING CHILDREN, THE PROGRAMME COLLAPSES ... WHEN THEY SEE IT'S IMPORTANT STUFF, THEY WANT THEIR KIDS TO KNOW.* [40]

Exercise flexibility when including families and caregivers in planning, design and implementation

This involvement should not be one size fits all; the activities for parents and carers must fit their schedules and be as open and inclusive possible to different family configurations. The needs of single parents, may be different from those of older siblings or grandparents who are acting as primary carers and their desire for involvement may vary:

> *PARENTS CAN BE SUPER WORRIED ABOUT CSE, BUT SOME PARENTS WILL RESPOND BETTER TO HAVING CLOSE PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAMME, OTHERS GET TIRED OF ALL THE THINGS AND JUST NEED SOME VERY LIGHT TOUCH ACTIVITIES.* [41]

Many cannot go to multiple meetings but parents and carers can be motivated to engage in constant but strategic activities through diverse communication channels. Ideally, include in planning, caregiving offers, transportation and other incentives. **Events can be tied to other school-events like parent-teachers' meetings and recurrent school calendar events.**[42] Of course, this participatory approach has as a prerequisite a strong partnership between Plan International and the school as outlined in Plan International's *'Putting the C in CSE: Standards for Content, Delivery and Environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education* standards 10 and 12, regarding total school support and caregiver involvement, respectively.[43]

33. External expert (EO2).
34. Validation workshop, El Salvador.
35. Programme discovery tool, Laos.
36. SAfAIDS (2015). *Religious leaders: Know more about CSE and youth friendly services!* Available at: https:// healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/ files/ resources/unesco_cse_know_how_rl_guides_final.pdf
37. Validation workshop, Zimbabwe.
38. Validation workshop, El Salvador.

39. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/
40. External expert (EO5).
41. External expert (EO10).
42. WISE (n.d). Best practices for family engagement in sex education implementation; External expert (EO10)
43. Plan International (2021). Young people's perspectives on sexual wellbeing and consent. Available at: https://plan-international.org/publications/sexual-wellbeing-consent

Plan International offices in Laos engage in this kind of planning:

> *ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS, WHEN WE ORGANISE SPECIAL EVENTS, SUCH AS NATIONAL TEACHER'S DAY, SCIENCE DAY IN OUR SCHOOL ... PARENTS ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE. DURING THESE EVENTS, STUDENTS PERFORM DIFFERENT PERFORMANCES ... THROUGH WHICH CSE RELATED MESSAGES ARE CONVEYED.* [44]

Similarly, offices in El Salvador and Zimbabwe:

> *[THE PARENTS] WERE INVITED FOR THE FIRST INFORMATIVE MEETING, THEY WERE EXPLAINED THE PROCESS OF THE [CSE] WORKSHOPS S AND THEY WERE GIVEN MATERIAL SPECIFICALLY FOR PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN ... [THE PARENTS] SENT PICTURES WORKING TOGETHER, SOME WERE ABLE TO DO IT.* [45]

> *A FEW PARENTS ARE INVOLVED AS THERE ARE COMMITTEES AND SOME OF THEM ATTEND. THEY WERE NOT HAPPY BUT AFTER BEING TAUGHT THEY STARTED TO BE SUPPORTIVE.* [46]

Create training spaces for families and caregivers

Research shows that messaging surrounding CSE was adapted to parents, which is a good strategy to get buy-in and engage them in further activities. This is particularly necessary when parents act as gatekeepers of CSE programmes in- and out-of-school.

Some partners proposed:

> *ENGAGE PARENTS THROUGH LESS CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS, (E.G., MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT) THAT THEY WILL BE OPEN TO AND SEE A NEED FOR, BEFORE BROACHING THE FULL RANGE OF CSE TOPICS WITH THEM.* [47]

> To fully include parents, they should receive comprehensive CSE messaging, not topics cherry picked for ease or acceptability.
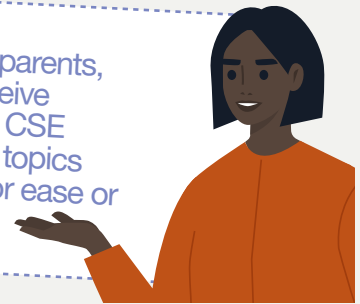
The inclusion of training and dialogue spaces for parents can provide an opportunity to solve doubts and gain practical skills on how to communicate with children, adolescents, and young people about their sexuality and overall well-being. As mentioned before these activities should have a flexible schedule and include incentives during initial phases.

> Parental engagement should be included in the budget to account for stipends, transportation, print educational resources and other materials where needed.

Build intergenerational spaces into CSE delivery

Consider building in a parent/caregiver-child/adolescent communication component to the CSE programme that acts as a bridge to promote the role of parents in their children's sexuality education.[48] Some participants suggested positive parenting workshops and parent-child dialogue groups with several father-son or mother-daughter duos and a facilitator using participatory methods to engage everyone in discussion about CSE topics.[49] One educator in El Salvador explained:

> *MANY PARENTS ARE NOW ATTENDING PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION SESSIONS, AS A RESULT OF SCHOOLS BEING CLOSED, CHILDREN ARE NOT GETTING INFORMATION FROM SCHOOLS.* [50]

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44. Educator, Laos (E5L).
45. Educator, El Salvador (E3ES).
46. Young person, Zimbabwe (YPFGD3Z).
47. External expert (EO17).
48. External experts (EO8, EO5).
49. External expert (EO5).
50. Educator, El Salvador (ES1S).

In addition to the above recommendations, the integration of at-home activities that involve parents into the curricula was also suggested: for example, homework or discussion activities that can take place out of the learning environment.

Include activities outside of school centres

Many of the references to parents' and caregivers' involvement use the school as an entry point and 'space for encounter' with families. This approach is absolutely necessary but is not sufficient to reach out to those parents and caregivers whose children are outside of the formal school system. Alternatives can range from **partnering with community centres, faith-based congregations, and grassroots coalitions that engage in outreach to historically excluded populations.**[51]

D ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Almost every publication and study participant mentioned the importance of youth engagement but there is little clarity on the specific collaboration models that can foster spaces to amplify the voices of young people. Furthermore, this study revealed little regarding the practicalities of engaging with youth where Plan International's offices may not have specialised expertise.

The inclusion of young people must, from the outset, be significant, participatory, and beyond a consultative status. It must include young people from diverse backgrounds as individuals and acknowledge the work of organised youth-led collectives. Any engagement with young people must be underpinned by good safeguarding and care practices.

Prioritise young people's participation as a transversal element of CSE at all stages of the process from Engagement and Planning to Sustainability and Scale-up

There is no time in a CSE programming cycle when young people in all their diversity should not be involved and this should be considered in planning and budgeting. A diversity of young people includes any that may be excluded from traditional youth programming.

Engaging with marginalised young people requires significant trust building and often partnerships with collectives or groups that have already built that trust in the community and are already serving some needs.

The literature and study participants agree that beyond the statistics, **CSE programmers need to know what is going on in the real lives of young people in all of their diversity**. This requires listening, intently, on an ongoing basis and acting upon suggestions made by youth. This is not only imperative to a programme's success but, also, part of an organisation's accountability to the populations it is attempting to reach. During the research process, several local offices and **Plan International partners often mentioned youth engagement as part of the programme delivery phase and reported being trained to do this**: involving young people as researchers and encouraged to give feedback.[52, 53, 54]

However, the CSE implementation at the **Laos country office** highlighted the need to allocate enough time and resources for young people to be integrated from the planning and engagement process:

> IF YOU WANT TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE, IT TAKES TIME – INCLUDING OTHER LANGUAGE GROUPS. WE WOULD NOT HAVE THE RESOURCES WE DO, AND THESE WILL EXTEND BEYOND THE LIFE OF THE PROJECT. DONORS GIVING AT LEAST 6 MONTHS TO DESIGN IS CRUCIAL TO ENSURING THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION.[55]

An additional suggested resource on youth engagement is *The Flower of Participation* from YOUACT and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality (2017).[56]

Engage with youth-led organisations to include young people in CSE programming

it is important, in terms of diversity, to build partnerships that encourage young advocates to collaborate with country offices activities.[57] According to the vast majority of interviews, the recruiting process at schools is done on the basis of students' availability and interest, or teachers' perceptions of leadership skills, which may not allow for a diverse pool of young people to engage. Some prospective participants are selected on the basis of their academic performance:

51. UNFPA (2020). International Technical and Programmatic Guidance on Out-of-School CSE.
52. Young person, El Salvador (YL2ES).
53. Validation workshop, Laos.
54. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L).
55. Validation workshop, Laos.
56. YOUACT and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality (2017). The Flower of Participation. Available at: https://www.youthdoit.org/assets/Uploads/20171122-Flower-of-Participation-Narrative.pdf
57. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19.

> *SINCE THEY TOOK CLASS HOURS TO DEVELOP THE ACTIVITIES, THEY WERE ASKED TO KEEP UP WITH THEIR HOMEWORK … THEY WERE ASKED TO BE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAD GOOD GRADES AND THEY WERE ENCOURAGED TO TURN IN THEIR HOMEWORK SO AS NOT TO LEAVE ANYONE OUT.* [58]

These practices could lead to elite recruiting and become a barrier to the full participation of those young people who come from historically marginalised communities. For this reason, **partnering with youth-led initiatives and actively recruiting a diversity of young people can help ensure inclusion within programme**s. Similarly, in the partnership building stage, CSE implementers must negotiate with school authorities to improve the inclusiveness of the process.

Budget for young people's participation

Budgeting for overarching and meaningful youth participation is key to programme sustainability. Include in the budget incentives and reimbursements to enable young people's participation in workshops and meetings: for example, mobile credit and money for transportation.[59] Similarly, those youth who act as peer-educators should get stipends for their work or another kind of socioeconomic support.[60]

Another suggestion from partner organisations is to hire young people as local office staff:

> *ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAMME CYCLE: ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESEARCH THROUGH FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS, INTERVIEWS, BUT ALSO AS PAID RESEARCHERS, FACILITATORS, AND PEER EDUCATORS OR PEER SERVICE PROVIDERS.* [61]

Use creative and flexible outreach strategies

Reaching children and young people, particularly girls, in insecure environments or humanitarian settings is a challenge to full and diverse participation principles. Suggestions from external partners included: offering flexible access to the programme, for example

eliminating strict attendance requirements; running programmes at times when participants are most available and providing transportation costs and budget for them.[62]

Similarly, to increase the participation of those young people and adolescents who are more excluded, the outreach and participants' inclusion process should align with the out-of-school education strategy of the local offices. Youth-led collectives can be vital partners in identifying and engaging with hard-to-reach populations:

> *GIRLS WHO FALL PREGNANT AND STOP ATTENDING SCHOOL MISS OUT ON IMPORTANT INFORMATION, THEREFORE THERE IS A NEED TO REACH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MARRIED AND THOSE WHO ARE PREGNANT. YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL ARE MISSING.* [63]

Young people can also be engaged through internship programmes and professional development within Plan offices.[64]

E ADVOCATING FOR CSE

Advocacy cuts across all stages of a CSE programme, findings from the study illustrate how diverse advocacy can be in different contexts and at different stages of a programme.

Set long-term advocacy goals whilst also being flexible and responsive

As with all areas of inquiry for this study, **CSE advocacy is very context-specific; not only will the asks or objectives differ, but also the target audiences, methods or channels for influence and timing**. What's more, depending on where pressure needs to be applied, boundaries need to be pushed and bottlenecks need to be addressed, **advocacy priorities change across the course of a CSE programme**.

58. Educator, El Salvador (E2ES).
59. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19.
60. Billowitz, M., Evelia H., Menard-Freeman, L., and Watson, K. (2020) Asking the Right Questions: Existing evidence and the research agenda for youth peer education in SRH programming.
61. External expert (EO17).
62. External expert (EO17).
63. Staff, Zimbabwe (PFGD1Z).
64. Staff, Zimbabwe (comment on report draft).

At a macro level, priorities can change with geopolitical factors that are out of the control of the programme team: for example, when new political parties take power or when there is staff turnover within ministries. At a more micro level, unforeseen challenges such as opposition from a teachers' union or a misinformation campaign by local media may require nimble responses alongside matching finances. At the same time, there are **some long-term advocacy goals and targets that can be considered fixed: these have to do with** ensuring the longevity, quality and scale-up of CSE for which government support is needed.

Country offices included in the study mentioned **the importance of raising awareness and ensuring the buy-in of crucial stakeholders and gatekeepers**. Less mention was made of accountability and law or policy reform, though those were documented in the literature and by external interviewees, as being a crucial component of CSE advocacy.

TABLE 1: CSE ADVOCACY FOCUS AREAS AND EXAMPLES

CSE ADVOCACY FOCUS AREAS	EXAMPLES
Raise awareness	• dispel misconceptions about the objectives of CSE • ensure the buy-in of principals, educators/facilitators and communities
Integrate CSE into the national education system	• make CSE examinable within schools • include CSE in the national curriculum at all levels • ensure the quality of CSE within various settings by feeding learning from monitoring and evaluation into advocacy efforts (see 'Monitoring, evaluation and institutional learning' section) • integrate pre-service training on CSE into teacher training colleges[65] (see 'Sustainability and scale-up')
Expand access to CSE	• change social norms that prevent young people from receiving adequate information about SRHR[66] • increase access to CSE by ethnic and language minorities through the translation of curricula and/or resources[67] • ensure linkages with healthcare and other essential services for young people, including for those living with a disability and with diverse SOGIESC • expand CSE to various marginalised groups or communities
Accountability for provision of CSE	• hold governments to account for international and national commitments to CSE • increase funding and government support for CSE at national and local levels[68] • reform or raise awareness of laws or policies that impact CSE delivery and content[69]

65. External expert (EO8).
66. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS4Z).
67. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L).
68 LSE (2020). Delivering Successful Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

69. SAfAIDS (2015). Religious leaders: Know more about CSE and youth friendly services! Available at: https:// healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/ files/ resources/unesco_cse_know_how_rl_guides_final.pdf ; UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/ ; External expert (EO11)

Draw on local level examples to inform national level advocacy

One of Plan International's strengths in relation to CSE advocacy is its proximity to the realities on the ground. **Informing advocacy with these realities is powerful and should be further explored and systematised**. In **El Salvador**, Plan International is using the experience of community-level work to influence key actors:

> **❝ ... AN EXAMPLE THAT WE CAN MENTION IS THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREGNANCY PREVENTION, IN WHICH WE SHOWED THE WORK THAT PLAN IS UNDERTAKING AND IN ADDITION HAD PARTICIPATION OF THE ADOLESCENTS FROM OUR SRHR COURSE. IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S NOT JUST PLAN, BUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAMME THEMSELVES WHO HAVE INFLUENCE. ❞** [70]

Communicate clearly the objectives and outcomes of CSE with target audiences

In large part, CSE advocacy is viewed by country offices as the means through which information about the true purpose of CSE is shared with a variety of target audiences: including government officials, parliamentarians, parents, community leaders and young people themselves. Study participants saw **communications as a crucial advocacy tool for creating favourable social and political environments for CSE programming**.[71]

In **Plan International Laos**, providing information to communities, including parents, that illustrates the importance of CSE is seen as key to creating mutual understanding and safe spaces within which young people can learn. In **Zimbabwe**, the CSE programme is actively involved in sharing its successes and outcomes on social media and through reports to foster further understanding of its aims.[72]

Several study participants spoke of the personal responsibility they assume to communicate and advocate within their own sphere of influence. An educator from Laos explained:

> **❝ I TOOK PART IN ENCOURAGING OTHER TEACHERS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO RAISE THEIR AWARENESS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF CSE – TAKE CHANCES TO EXPLAIN TO THEM WHEN OPPORTUNITY ALLOWS. FOR EXAMPLE, DURING CASUAL DISCUSSION ON GENERAL TOPICS THAT ARE CLOSE TO CSE, I INSERT SOME CSE TOPICS INTO THE DISCUSSION. OF COURSE, THE ATMOSPHERE/PEOPLE'S MOOD HAVE TO BE OBSERVED BECAUSE OTHERWISE PEOPLE WILL GO AGAINST IT. ❞** [73]

Work with existing movements and legal frameworks in each context

In many countries and contexts, CSE has been a part of feminist, women's and youth movements' advocacy for several decades and there are many established players and coalitions through which this advocacy is being conducted.[74] Plan International should map these key players and consider if and how it can contribute. In **Laos**, for example, Plan International is working with a variety of partners that are similarly supportive of CSE and, collectively, they are using the *Noi Framework*,[75] which is an advocacy tool focused on the **rights of girls** and the fulfilment of the SDGs, as a hook for their CSE advocacy.[76]

70. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
71. Educator, Laos (E5L); Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L), Programme discovery tools, Laos and Zimbabwe.
72. Programme discovery tool, Zimbabwe.
73. Educator, Laos (E5L).

74. UNESCO (2017). CSE scale-up in practice. Case studies from Eastern and Southern Africa. Available at: https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/cse_scale_up_in_practice_june_2017_final_.pdf
75. UNFPA (n.d.). The Noi 2030 framework - Achieving gender equality and empowerment of girls. Available at: https://lao.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/noi_2030_framework_eng.pdf
76. Programme discovery tool, Laos.

The international frameworks, listed below, provide opportunities for CSE advocacy.

Examples of international normative frameworks in relation to CSE [77]

- **Sustainable development goals (SDGs)**

  Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all stages (SDG3); Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG4); Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG5)

- **International Conference for Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action; Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences**

  Call upon governments to 'give full attention to meeting the sexual and reproductive health-service, information and education needs of young people, with full respect for their privacy and confidentiality, free of discrimination, and to provide them with evidence-based comprehensive education on human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, human rights and gender equality, to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality'.

- **Human Rights Council**

  Calls upon States to: 'Develop and implement educational programmes and teaching materials, including comprehensive sexuality education, based on full and accurate information, for all adolescents and youth, in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities'.

- **Committee on the Rights of the Child**

  Urges States that: 'Age-appropriate, comprehensive and inclusive sexual and reproductive health education, based on scientific evidence and human rights standards and developed with adolescents, should be part of the mandatory school curriculum and reach out-of-school adolescents.'

- **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

  Recommends: 'The realisation of the right to sexual and reproductive health requires that State parties meet their obligations, such as the right to education on sexuality and reproduction that is comprehensive, non-discriminatory, evidence-based, scientifically accurate and age-appropriate'.

At the regional level, opportunities for advocacy vary. In East and Southern Africa, for example, more than twenty governments have committed to young people's health and rights in the *East and Southern Africa Ministerial Commitment on access to CSE and youth-friendly health service*s.[78, 79] West African countries are considering a similar commitment.

National level frameworks for CSE are found in laws and policies, which should be assessed during the planning stages of a programme. Ministries of Education may have their own policies or directives, related to CSE, in place. Advocates should review these and assess the extent to which they are supportive and clearly communicated to stakeholders. Not only are such national policies important for accountability purposes but they are also useful in supporting organisations to address backlash and opposition by demonstrating government support for CSE.[80]

F ADDRESSING BACKLASH AND OPPOSITION

Addressing backlash and opposition may start – but definitely does not end – during the 'Engagement/Planning' phase. Phase Two research revealed the importance of exploring how country offices can anticipate and address backlash or opposition to CSE. Despite this, most Phase Three study **participants did not highlight it as a major obstacle, except in relation to parents' and community members' misconceptions about CSE** and religious fundamentalism in El Salvador, including amongst educators and facilitators.[81] One educator from Laos mentioned:

> **[THERE IS] NOT MUCH BACKLASH OR OPPOSITION IN SCHOOLS BECAUSE THE COMMUNITY AND THE STUDENTS NOW HAVE BETTER AWARENESS ABOUT CSE. DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICES AND HEALTH CENTRES DISSEMINATE INFORMATION IN COMMUNITIES. COMMUNITY'S AWARENESS HAS INCREASED. PERCEPTION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC HAS ALSO CHANGED A LOT.** [82]

77. Copied from UNESCO (2018). *International technical guidance on sexuality education.* p. 82. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770/PDF/260770eng.pdf.multi
78. https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/
79. This commitment will be renewed in late 2021 by 20+ governments from the region.
80. UNESCO (2017). *CSE scale-up in practice.* Case studies from Eastern and Southern Africa. Available at: https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/cse_scale_up_in_practice_june_2017_final_.pdf
81. Educators, El Salvador (E1ES, E5ES); Young person, El Salvador (YL6ES).
82. Educator, Laos (E5L).

Study participants did highlight the **importance of addressing parents' opposition to their children's participation in CSE**. One stakeholder from Zimbabwe said:

> *IGNORANCE AND MISCONCEPTIONS FOR EXAMPLE ... PARENTS SAY THAT CSE IS A WAY OF ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN SEXUAL ACTIVITIES.* [83]

Study participants from El Salvador take an approach that uses content related to self-care for young people (as opposed to sexual behaviour) as an entry point so that parents (and youth themselves) do not feel that CSE programming is encouraging young people to have sex.[84]
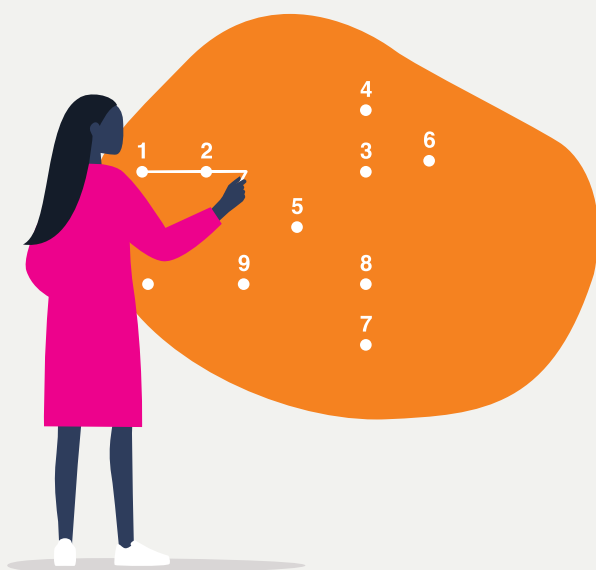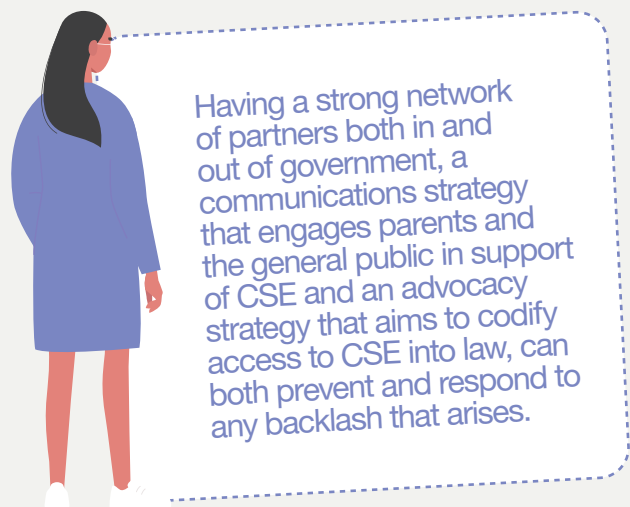
This approach should be closely examined to ensure that young people who do engage in sex are not stigmatised as a result of any CSE messaging. Additionally, curricula used must meet international standards: **topics that are essential to young people's rights and development should not be diluted**.

The following tactics can help mitigate the impact of the backlash from organised opposition to CSE:

- **Equip participants/parents with evidence-based talking points about CSE.** Often members of organised opposition groups come with their own misinformation in the guise of "research" about programming, young peoples' sexuality and health, that seem official, but are not based on rigorous science, evidence, or sound data collection methods and analysis.

- **Avoid responding to members of the opposition (unless absolutely necessary),** as they often have a mandate just to elicit a negative response.

- **Engage "friendly" religious leaders in CSE spaces, and equip them with information.** As mentioned elsewhere in this report, "common ground" partners can also help mitigate opposition and soften the perceptions of CSE as a radical intervention.

> Having a strong network of partners both in and out of government, a communications strategy that engages parents and the general public in support of CSE and an advocacy strategy that aims to codify access to CSE into law, can both prevent and respond to any backlash that arises.

02
DESIGN

The engagement of stakeholders, including external partners, parents, and young people, described in the Engagement/Planning section should continue during this stage to encourage participatory planning and accountability. Likewise, this is a time period when effort and thought should be dedicated to detailed budgeting and to the monitoring, evaluation, research and learning plan for the programme as well as sustainability and scale-up.

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83. Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS4Z).

84. Educator, El Salvador (E3ES).

A   PLANNING AND PROGRAMMATIC DESIGN

Planning and programme design refers **to the specifics of CSE programming – the** *who,* *what, where,* **and** *how* – based on the contextual analysis made for this programme or for other SRHR programming already taking place.

Determine programme objectives that can serve as entry points for CSE

External literature and Phase Two interviews note that **the entry point for CSE should be context-specific**: for example, addressing high rates of unintended pregnancy amongst adolescents, or child abuse and should have buy-in from a range of stakeholders.[85] An emphasis on context and buy-in will help prevent backlash and opposition.

Country offices have crafted their objectives around the issues that are most likely to garner support from communities and the government. Within this approach, however, their programmes contain a rights-based, and not solely public health, perspective:

- In **El Salvador,** the programme objectives focus on adolescent pregnancy and HIV/STI prevention, though the programme contains a rights-based focus.[86]
- In **Laos**, child, early and forced marriages (CEFM) and school dropout were cited as entry points for CSE.[87]
- In **Zimbabwe**, adolescent pregnancy, STIs, and the need to reach underserved populations informed programme objectives[88] and study participants noted how their mapping process led to identification of these entry points:

> ❝ WHEN WE WERE MAPPING WARDS, WE REALISED THAT THERE ARE HIGH ISSUES OF TEENAGE PREGNANCIES, STIS AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS THEREFORE WE IDENTIFIED ENTRY POINTS ON THE BASIS OF THESE INDICATORS. AFTER IDENTIFYING THE WARDS, THERE WERE DISTRICT LEVEL MEETINGS AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LEADERS AS WELL AS COMMUNITY CADRES. ❞ [89]
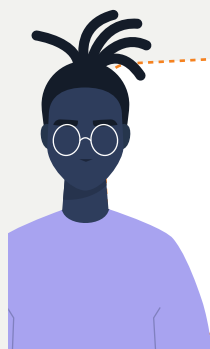
> In addition to public health issues, which may be of national interest, it is also recommended to focus on CSE as an issue of rights and justice.[90]

In other words, the SRHR of young people is not strictly a behaviour change issue, like giving up smoking. A rights and justice perspective takes into account the right to express one's sexuality and experience pleasure: Plan International aims to deliver holistic SRHR programmes that reflect positive sexual experiences rather than focussing only on risks.[91]

Seek input from stakeholders during the planning and design stage

As previously mentioned, **it is important to reach out to more marginalised groups and involve them in partnerships at all levels of the project**, including as feasible in syllabus or curriculum development.

Input should include participants from all levels of society and come from: children and young people in all their diversity; parents, guardians, other family members; educators/facilitators, faith leaders and other community leaders; the media, health and other service providers, local government officials; national ministries of children, youth, health, women, gender, protection, justice, social welfare, Indigenous affairs and departments of education and non-formal education.[92]

In all three countries, **Plan International has developed memoranda of understanding with ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and Health to ensure their support and buy-in** for their work. This is necessary for scale-up in the long-term, and helps ensure a birds-eye view of other existing programmes and how they can work together for greater effectiveness within existing infrastructure. It is an approach endorsed by the external expert quoted below:[93]

85. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19; External experts (EO5; EO8; EO10).
86. El Salvador Programme discovery tool.
87. Laos Programme discovery tool.
88. Zimbabwe Programme discovery tool.
89. Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS4Z).

90. Advocates for Youth (2018). Professional Learning Standards for Sexuality Education
91. Plan International (2021). Young People's Perspectives on Sexual Wellbeing and Consent. Available at: https://plan-international.org/publications/sexual-wellbeing-consent
92. External experts (EO7; EO11).
93. External expert (EO6); El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe Programme discovery tools.

> **WE NOW USE THE OFFICIAL ROUTE AS IT HAS MORE SUPPORT FOR SCALE UP. WE NOW DEVELOP MOUS WITH MINISTRIES, WE WORK WITH THEM IN ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND WORK WITH THEM TO SENSITISE COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS.** [94]

It is important to engage with government ministries in the development of CSE programming – Ministry of Health officials, for example, may have a different perspective on young people's needs and can connect the programme to health services. **But it is also important to note that they should not become gatekeepers to comprehensive rights- and evidence-based sexuality education.** This underscores the importance of having other programme partners at the table, including youth-led organisations, who will reinforce Plan's principles.

Design CSE programmes to respond to the context assessment, including determining geographies and participant profiles

The purpose of a context assessment is to design a programme that is responsive to a community's SRHR needs while still ensuring evidence and right-based messaging.

It should be noted that contexts and understandings of these needs change over time and it is helpful to review periodically whether a programme is still responding to the needs of the populations that it was meant to serve. It will be especially beneficial to **exchange experiences of programme adaptation and innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic**, in order to inform future design decisions.[95]

External literature and interviews in Phase Two suggested using the available data to **identify geographic hot spots where young people are lacking in access to information and/or services** and use this as a starting point for programming; as well as **identifying where support for CSE is high**, in certain schools or communities perhaps and start with programming there.[96] Study participants in Phase Two also recommended identifying gaps in the delivery of CSE and going to where the need exists. This might include out-of-school groups who do not access formal CSE, or designing programmes specifically for certain groups – young people with disabilities, for example – who need supplementary information that is not provided in the formal curriculum.

Country offices engage in this type of informed programme design. The **El Salvador** office uses a five-step process:

01 **Context analysis** in which specialists in thematic areas are sought, and implementation gaps and opportunities are identified;

02 **Stakeholder consultation** with all groups relevant to the proposed programme, including government institutions, adolescents and youth, families, and municipal representatives;

03 **Design of strategies,** methodology, and populations of interest (beneficiaries), which Plan International staff produce in a programme proposal including the context, justification, strategies, population of focus, and evaluation proposal;

04 **Review and feedback** on the programme undertaken by the Plan International management team;

05 **Adjustment and approval** of the programme.[97]

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94. External expert (EO6).
95. Young person, El Salvador (YL6ES).

96. External expert (EO8).
97. El Salvador Programme discovery tool.

In **Laos**, partners make decisions about number, length, and frequency and location of the CSE sessions, taking into account location of villages, in addition to location of health centres.[98]
The **Zimbabwe** programme discovery tool acknowledged that the CSE programme could improve on inclusion of diverse young people based on an informed design process, but did describe work with YPLHIV and sex workers in **out-of-school** CSE programmes. Other criteria that study participants mentioned for determining where and with whom to engage in CSE programming were:

- **Where Plan International already has programmes**, and therefore trust, in the communities. Study participants expressed the importance of Plan International's experience and reputation working in education, child protection, and youth development.[99]

- **With underserved populations**, such as young people living with a disability, ethnic minorities, girls who are not in school, sex workers, and young people living with HIV[100] and LGBTIQ+ youth

- **Where health centres are located.**[101]

- **Taking into account the needs of adolescents and youth from their perspectives** based on their inputs.[102]

> **IN TERMS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, WE CHOOSE THE PLACE WHERE IT'S POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE TO JOIN. WHEN YOU DO THE CONTEXT ANALYSIS, AND YOU KNOW PEOPLE HAVE THESE VULNERABILITIES YOU USE THIS INFORMATION, MAKE IT MORE INCLUSIVE.**[103]

Provide feedback to consultation participants, especially youth and adolescents, about how their participation has influenced programme design

While country offices described consulting with young people within the design process, there was little evidence that young people were aware of their role in design or any changes or adjustments to the programme that took place as a result of their participation.[104]

B ADDRESSING INTERNAL CULTURES

Addressing culture and values, which takes time and therefore requires money, must be reflected in programme design. **It is critical to engaging with historically marginalised communities and identities and to address the needs of programme staff:** including Plan International staff, educators and facilitators, who may also require more understanding of sex and sexuality, and may have adolescent children themselves.

Prioritise competency and recruitment of CSE educators and facilitators as much as training

There were varied opinions expressed in the research about the characteristics required of a CSE educator but it is seen as important to create spaces for continual dialogue, to promote understanding of gender and sexuality issues, and encourage collaborative problem-solving.

As one educator put it:

> **IF PEOPLE ARE NOT COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY, THEN BEING A CSE EDUCATOR WILL BE DIFFICULT.**[105]

Staff who are already open and interested in CSE topics should be hired, and safe spaces created to continue to challenge prominent social norms and contextual beliefs.

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98. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L).
99. El Salvador, Laos, and Zimbabwe Programme discovery tool.
100. Stakeholders, Laos and Zimbabwe (CLS7L; CLS6Z); Zimbabwe programme discovery tool.
101. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L).

102. Educator, El Salvador (E5ES).
103. External expert (EO2).
104. Stakeholders, Laos (CLS7L; CLS9L).
105. Laos Programme discovery tool.

> **THIS IMPLIES THAT HIRING IS AS IMPORTANT AS VALUES CLARIFICATION AND TRAINING. ENCOURAGE STAFF TO BE OPEN-MINDED AND BRIDGE GAPS BETWEEN THOSE OPPOSING AND THOSE SUPPORTING CSE: SEEK COMMON GROUND WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY REGARDING CSE.** [106]

For out-of-school programmes and those led by an outside facilitator, there is an opportunity to create an ideal profile for CSE facilitation and **ensure that the competences, skills, knowledge and disposition required are in line with the organisation's values and culture surrounding SRHR and gende**r. In contrast, for in-school programming there may be little choice: in the Laos school CSE programme, teachers are selected because they teach subjects deemed relevant to CSE or because the schools' principals select them.[107]

One external partner commented on gaps in the recruitment process:

> **WHEN YOU ARE RECRUITING, YOU NEED TO CHECK FOR OPENNESS AND FLEXIBILITY – OPENNESS TO CHALLENGE COMFORT ZONES. WE DON'T CHECK ON THIS DURING RECRUITMENT; BUT IT'S SO IMPORTANT ... IT CAN BE A DIFFICULT POSITION TO BE IN, ESPECIALLY IN A CONTEXT THAT'S OVERLY CONSERVATIVE. YOU'RE THE PERSON CHALLENGING THE NORM, AND YOU NEED TO ENSURE IT'S NOT A DIFFICULT AND LONELY PLACE FOR THOSE EDUCATORS.** [108]

Staff members, educators and facilitators must feel confident and supported to deal with complex situations, with institutional policies in place to back them up when challenges arise.
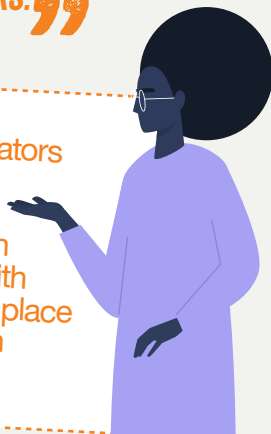
Even though the research in ideal profiles is sparse, researchers[109] mention the following:

- ✓ **expertise** in sexual health and trained in sex and relationship education
- ✓ **confident**, unembarrassed, straightforward, approachable
- ✓ **experienced** at talking about sex, using everyday language
- ✓ **trustworthy** and able to keep information confidential
- ✓ has **experiential knowledge**
- ✓ **comfortable** with their own sexuality
- ✓ **good at working with young people**, able to relate to and accept young people's sexual activity, respectful of young people's autonomy, has similar values to youth
- ✓ **provides a balanced** and non-judgemental view

Study participants also included in their ideal characteristics being non-discriminatory,[110] having extensive experience with the community and with youth and adolescents,[111] and being *"mindful of self-care."*[112]

Based on the data collected, it appears that having **the ability to recruit CSE facilitators/educators with some of the desired abilities and an openness to CSE topics is preferable to training people without those qualities**. Although the investment in educators who represent prevailing social norms and may not otherwise have chosen to be involved in CSE, can contribute to an increased acceptance of SRHR at a societal level.

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106. External expert (EO2).
107. Educator, Laos (E1L).
108. External expert (EO5).
109. Eisenberg, M. E., Madsen, N., Oliphant, J. A., Sieving, R. E., & Resnick, M. (2010). "Am I Qualified? How Do I know?" A Qualitative Study of Sexuality Educators' Training Experiences. *American Journal of Health Education*, 41(6), 337–344.

110. Educator, Zimbabwe (E3Z).
111. Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS10Z).
112. Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS9Z).

Invest in values clarification for educators, facilitators and staff and monitor that they convey the desired values and perspectives

Values clarification refers to a process of engaging with the attitudinal components, such as values, openness and commitment, that shape CSE planning and delivery and examines how to address prejudices in a pedagogical way. **Personal values do not shift through one training sessio**n and there is a need to emphasise the ability to think critically in safe spaces over a long period of time.[113]

Study participants addressed the topic in this way:

> *IN MANY CONTEXTS, IT'S A CULTURAL SHIFT WHEN YOU'RE DELIVERING CSE; YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE INTERACTIVE AND ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS. IT'S IN MANY CULTURES, ACROSS ASIA, YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO SAY HOW YOU REALLY FEEL. TO CREATE THAT SAFE SPACE, YOU NEED TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL FREE TO BREAK FROM CULTURAL NORMS."* [114]

> *VALUES CLARIFICATION IS ALWAYS ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS. IT IS AN INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE AROUND SEXUALITY, WHERE SPACE IS CREATED FOR PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THEIR IDEAS COME FROM, BOTH GOOD AND BAD. WE TRY TO BUILD AN UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND WHEN TO SAY YES. ONE OF THE BIGGEST ISSUES IS THAT THERE ARE STRONG INTERNAL FEELINGS OF PREVENTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO HAVE SEX BECAUSE THERE IS A LOT OF MORALITY BEHIND IT.* [115]

It is crucial to **discuss, reach consensus, and determine the reference values and norms of your programm**e: for example, mutual respect, tolerance, equality, inclusion and diversity.[116] It is recommended to include, as part of educators/facilitator training, the ability to distinguish between personal and professional attitudes with regards to CSE topics that may be considered sensitive.[117] Several participants commented on this:

> *[AS AN EDUCATOR] YOU CAN'T LET YOUR OWN PERSONALITY INFLUENCE THE PROCESS. IF I AM A PERSON WITH RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY, I CAN'T IMPOSE IT. WHEN FACILITATING, YOU SHOULD NOT MIX THOSE THINGS.* [118]

> *I REALISED THAT MY PERSONAL VALUES CAN AFFECT THE WAY I CASCADE INFORMATION FOR CSE AND THIS ALSO APPLIES TO THE TEACHERS WE TRAIN TO BE FACILITATORS. MY EXPOSURE THROUGH PLAN INTERNATIONAL HAS HOWEVER TAUGHT ME THAT EVERYTHING SHOULD BE TAUGHT VIA A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH THEN COUNSELLING CAN COME AFTER.* [119]

These references to educators/facilitators' own values makes it clear that an action point for Plan International can be **partnering with external organisations that manage values clarification and training (VCAT) methodologies and run ongoing training with all staff**, especially those in constant contact with the communities and schools.[120]

Invest in ongoing training and support, including spaces for reflection and learning

Ongoing training and reflection for programmatic staff members should include, at a minimum: commitment to sexuality education, respect for integrity and understanding of boundaries, open-mindedness and respect for others. These should include all CSE programme staff, not only facilitators/educators. These activities must include personal reflections on attitudes towards sexuality.[121]

> Training and support have to be ongoing, and are not sufficient on their own. Recognise that internal cultures reflect the external environment and challenging that is a long-term process.

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113. External expert (EO11).
114. External expert (EO5).
115. External expert (EO6).
116. UNESCO (2017). CSE scale-up in practice. Case studies from Eastern and Southern Africa. Available at: https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/cse_scale_up_in_practice_june_2017_final_.pdf
117. External expert (EO8).
118. Young person, El Salvador (YL5ES).
119. Staff, Zimbabwe (PFGD1Z).
120. Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS6Z).
121. UNFPA WCARO (2018). *Comprehensive sexuality education: Evidence and promising practices in West and Central Africa*. Available at: https://wcaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/VF_Brochure%20CSE_EN_WCARO%20(1).pdf

For many, **being involved in CSE programming may contravene social norms and entail social sanctions,**[122] so support and care for staff working on CSE is paramount and staff must be aware of the duty of care towards them from Plan International. In the researchers' experience, women who are involved in SRHR programming may be viewed as morally questionable in their communities and even by male co-workers; support to them, including ensuring a safe working environment, should be part of any CSE programming.

C DEVELOPING RESOURCES

The focus of this section is on operational recommendations for the steps involved in developing resources – curricula, handbooks, training curricula, content and in-session activities – that respond to the programme's objectives.

Use the context assessment to design CSE resources, pilot test them, and make adjustments as necessary

Following the initial context assessment conducted prior to any programme, a further needs assessment of the young people who have been defined as the population of interest should be undertaken, to find out what *they* most want to include in a programme, how *they* want to receive it, and to uncover any potential areas that require attention.[123]

> It is important to involve young people and other stakeholders in developing as well as pilot testing curricula for CSE programmes before rolling them out across the entire programme.[124]

For example, in **El Salvador, existing networks and youth consultative groups were involved in the development of the CSE manual**. The manual *'Sexualidad: Una dimensión humana para Conquistar' ['Sexuality: a Human Dimension to Conquer']* was a regional effort by Plan offices in five countries. In addition to the context analysis that had already taken place, Plan El Salvador consulted with adolescents and youth about their interests and priorities in terms of CSE. The design of resources also involved a review of successful CSE methodologies used in the region. A committee of youth organisations and the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of Education (MoE) reviewed the content, methodologies and incorporation of key topics.[125] Consultations should also take place to ensure inclusion for young people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ youth, and others.

Link teacher training explicitly to what is expected to be delivered

This means ensuring coordination between the pre-service training materials and the core teaching curriculum for CSE.[126] **In Laos for example, a human-centred design**[127] **approach**, gathering inputs from young people about what they would like included in a CSE programme, was taken from the outset. As a result, the teacher training manual was updated with their perspectives and more detailed SRHR information.[128]

Share and take advantage of economies of scale when developing programme materials without compromising the ability to adapt to context

External study participants expressed their concern over duplication and the lack of material dissemination:

> **"ALL COUNTRIES HAVE VERY GOOD MATERIAL BUT NOTHING GETS EXCHANGED AND THE RESOURCES DO NOT CIRCULATE. THERE'S NO CIRCULATION OF THESE DESIGNS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BUDGET FOR DISSEMINATION."** [129]

122. External expert (EO5).
123. ShareNet Netherlands (2021).
124. External expert (EO7).
125. El Salvador programme discovery tool.
126. James-Traore, et al., (2004).

127. Zhang T. & Dong H. (2008). *Human-centred design: an emergent conceptual model*. Available at: https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/3472/1/Fulltext.pdf?msclkid=f2eb3859c15011ec899e6f36e3806d9b.
128. Laos programme discovery tool.
129. External expert (EO10).

Plan International already employs a **resource sharing model** with the creation of guidance, or manuals, that can be used and adapted to local contexts. There is, however, a tension between economising by creating one manual, or one programme model, to be used around the world, and valuing indigenous knowledge and expertise around sexuality and gender. This can be addressed, as Plan International has done, by **creating global communities of practice**. In addition to **partnering with local SRHR and feminist organisations, including those that are youth-led** to create materials that represent SRHR expertise and are also responsive to the local context.

Use contextualised or locally developed resources

The development of resources for CSE should be understood as an ongoing process that takes into account international standards but seeks to meet specific contextual needs. The data analysis suggests that there must be space, methodologies, and resources for collaborative design, development, validation and readjustment within the communities where the programmes will take place. **It is important that indigenous knowledge about sexuality and SRHR is properly incorporated** into any international or national resources and the presence of local expertise acknowledged. Social norms should be taken into account in curriculum development, but without compromising the human rights core of CSE.

Specifically, this means not cherry picking for acceptable topics or approaches. One study identified in Phase Two showed that when young people in Ghana were asked what they wanted to learn about in CSE, it closely matched international standards. This suggests that adults may be the ones serving as gatekeepers, wishing to limit access to information out of fear or misconceptions[130] and echoes the recommendation about evaluating learners' needs and interests regarding CSE content when designing the programme and its content.

Use rights and gender and evidence-based guidance to ensure the most effective CSE content

Whether created locally or adapted from existing country, regional, or international resources, a rights and gender lens must be included throughout the different programme activities and content.[131] In addition to Plan International's topic tables and content guidance,[132] the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE)* and other international and national technical guidelines[133] can be used to develop curricula from scratch as well as improve missing, incorrect or inappropriately presented content in existing programme resources. **Plan International Laos** provides an example of content creation and adaptation to ensure effectiveness by reviewing materials with medical experts who are also involved in the provision of youth-friendly services to ensure that it is scientifically accurate.[134]

Take into consideration audio-visual resources as well as the language, literacy and access needs of the audiences

For all audiences, including educators, facilitators, and young learners, it is important to produce or adapt written material in simple language that is easily understood.[135] In all three countries, because of COVID-19 restrictions, Plan International has used digital tools for educator/facilitator training and with young people themselves. It is important to note that study participants everywhere stressed that **online approaches are not always possible**. WhatsApp groups are used as a lower-bandwidth strategy, but they still reflect a digital gap as young people may not have smartphones, or phones at all, or data.[136]

Aside from online resources, in Laos, young people are engaged in the delivery of CSE, and therefore require additional resources for CSE fairs (which tend to be one-off public outreach events), contact and sessions led by other youth and for videos and visual learning tools.[137] Young people should be involved in the development of these resources. Also in **Laos, Plan International** intends to create audio materials in local languages and dialects to be used on the radio to reach additional young people and their families.[138]

130. Amo-Adjei, J. (2021). Local realities or international imposition? Intersecting sexuality education needs of Ghanaian adolescents with international norms. *Global Public Health*, 1-16.

131. Rutgers (2018). Comprehensive Sexuality Education Knowledge File.

132. Plan International (2020). Putting the C in CSE: Standards for content, delivery and environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Available at: https://plan-international.org/publications/comprehensive-sexuality-education-standards

133. UNESCO and UNFPA (2012). Sexuality education: a ten-country review of school curricula in East and Southern Africa.

134. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS4L).

135. External expert (EO11).

136. Reflected across data from all three countries from multiple study participants.

137. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS1L).

138. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L).

D COSTING OF CSE PROGRAMMES

The cost of CSE programmes was not easy to explore, with budgets often underrepresenting real staff costs and broad evidence that **Plan International's CSE programmes are supported by project funding that it procures, almost exclusively, even when other partners are involved**. In all three countries, Plan International pays for one or more components of CSE delivery in schools in the public sector with donor funds: for example, while the state covers teachers' salaries, Plan International pays for training and/or materials, among other items.[139]

Adjust costing to the context and modality of delivery

There is scant research on the costing of CSE programming. A study participant from Phase Two warned that costing studies are expensive, complex and do not yield information that is applicable across many contexts.[140]

Even if the budget line items are identical from one country to the next, economies vary, and the cost of CSE in different settings may be difficult to compare. Further research is needed in each context to determine the initial costs vs maintenance costs.[141]

Similarly, as external experts in the research study testify, **there is a need to get more inputs for budgeting from field-level staff** or others in the geographic areas where programmes will take place.[142]

> **"IT WOULD BE BETTER TO INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVES FROM END-USERS/BENEFICIARIES (LIKE: YOUTHS, PARENTS, OFFICERS AT DISTRICT, PROVINCIAL AND CENTRAL LEVEL) INTO THE INITIAL STAGE LIKE PLANNING AND PROGRAMMATIC DESIGN PHASE. BY INVOLVING THOSE DIRECT BENEFICIARIES, WE WILL HAVE INSIGHT INFORMATION (ACTUAL NEEDS) TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT PROPOSAL BEFORE REQUESTING FUNDING."** [143]

> **"WE HAVE FOCUSED ON SCHOOLS. WE DID A COSTING AND EVALUATION FOR CSE. RECENT INSIGHTS SHOWED THAT THE INVESTMENT FOR THE FIRST TWO YEARS COMES FROM THE NGO, BUT AFTER THAT, THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO TAKE OVER. THIS IS THE APPROACH WE USE NOW."** [144]

Prepare for high initial investments; the costs reduce over time

This recommendation resulted from the literature review[145] and underscores the importance of advocating with donors for flexibility and for more sustainable funding: for example, multi-year funding with an exit plan to transfer costs to the public sector.[146] Many study participants highlighted programmes ending when the project period ended. This emphasises the importance of investment in lasting programmes, such as pre-service training that gets adopted as part of the educational system.

Invest in pre-service training and professional development, including using online platforms

The UNESCO costing report, one of the few undertaken,[147] found that:

- **Teacher salaries** are a large component of CSE programming costs
- **Advocacy** is a necessary component of programming and requires investment
- **Class sizes** are a large factor in cost per student, though a balance must be struck with quality implementation, which may decrease with larger class sizes
- **Online platforms** are a cost-effective training platform. However, in this current study, participants point out that any online CSE training or delivery will exclude large sectors of low-and-middle income countries.

139. Programme discovery tools, El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe.
140. External expert, personal communication.
141. Rutgers WPF and Stop AIDS Now (2009). Improving the quality of SRHR education programmes for young people.
142. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS6Z).
143. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS6L).

144. External expert (EO6).
145. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/
146. Young person, El Salvador (YL5ES); External expert (EO2).
147. UNESCO (2011). School-based Sexuality Education Programmes: A Cost and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis in Six Countries.

CSE learning resources and costing should go hand in hand

Developing resources is also intimately linked to costing. A programme must determine how many sessions will be delivered at the costing stage, but this will also be determined by the topics to be covered. As this youth leader from El Salvador notes:

" ... IF THE TOPIC IS COMPLICATED [YOU NEED] MORE SESSIONS. [148]

Make sure to include often overlooked items in budgets and costing proposals, including:

- **Project staff time,** for all stages of work, including assessment activities, design meetings and work, preparation of resources, training, MERL
- **Budget incentives and remuneration for young people's participation** including mobile credit, money for transportation, condoms, or other giveaways[149]
- **Costs related to inclusion and accessibility** including translation, physical accommodations for disability and transportation
- **Transportation and internet access** for facilitators and other staff[150]

- **Partnership costs and parental involvement costs,** including refreshments and staff time for meetings
- **Particular costing needs of fragile states and humanitarian settings including** transportation for participants and flexibility for unseen political costs or natural disasters[151]
- **Out-of-school** activities will require venues, facilitator/participant transportation and meals
- **Other items often left out** include values clarification for staff and educators/facilitators; context assessments, incentives, internal learning spaces, communication of results, ongoing training and support for facilitators/educators;[152] training and capacity building for youth.

03
IMPLEMENTATION/ DELIVERY

Implementation and delivery focus on the activities and interventions for CSE. Delivery has seen an increasing focus on digital CSE: a new methodology which, though providing support to learners and educators can also present new challenges.

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148. Young person, El Salvador (YL5ES).
149. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19; Young person, El Salvador (YL3ES).
150. External expert (EO17).

151. External expert (EO11).
152. External experts (EO10; EO5).

A — CREATING SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Creating safe learning environments, where participants feel free to explore sensitive topics freely and openly, is a critical factor in safeguarding all participants. The external literature reviewed did not meaningfully address the creation of safe environments. However, research interview data did, highlighting the importance of safe spaces and the inclusion of trauma-informed curricula[153] and methodologies, for both young learners and educators/facilitators.

> Creating a safe space should be seen as creating a balance, whereby young people feel protected and supported whilst also being free to explore, question, be critical and express themselves.

Include a whole-school approach to safety and safeguarding in schools

A whole school approach recognises that **schools exist within a community and mirror the values and norms its members have with regard to gender equality and the role, rights and duties of children, adolescents and young people.**[154]

In line with earlier recommendations and with the *Plan International's CSE standard, support the whole school,*[155] researchers emphasise the need to invest in the training and on-going support, logistic and programmatic, for key stakeholders facilitating CSE in schools.

> " SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENTS HAVE BEEN PUT FOR THE IN-SERVICE TRAINING FOR TEACHERS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS HOWEVER CSE IS NEW FOR THE SCHOOLS AND THEREFORE THERE WAS AND IS A NEED TO INVEST IN REFRESHER PROGRAMMES FOR SCHOOLS. " [156]

One external partner[157] mentions that this training and support, particularly with regard to how to address sexuality, gender and wellbeing, should also include educators and facilitators, staff and volunteer members, who are not delivering CSE. They should be aware of what is being taught and learn how to be supportive of their colleagues and other programme participants.

Balance safeguarding with autonomy and evolving capacity to create spaces where learners can express themselves

Though several participants mentioned that **Plan International's safeguarding expertise lends itself to creating safe learning environments for CSE**, one external organisation partner highlighted the false dissonance created between CSE and safeguarding.

> " ... THIS NEEDS TO BE DEALT WITH. IT'S ALMOST AS THOUGH THE SAFEGUARDING PART GOES WAY OVER TO PROTECTION – BUT WITH NO UNDERSTANDING OF AUTONOMY AND EVOLVING CAPACITY. THAT'S IMPORTANT FOR STAFF TO UNDERSTAND. THE CONCEPT OF EVOLVING CAPACITY NEEDS ATTENTION, TO PAY ATTENTION TO CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND VIEWING THEM AS SEXUAL BEINGS. EQUIPPING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE AGENCY THEY NEED TO BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES. THAT'S ONE PART OF IT. " [158]

Although it was not a frequent comment among Plan International's staff, some individuals are still concerned about the appropriateness of facilitating CSE to children (under 10 years old) and young adolescents (10-14 years old) or integrating it fully into school-curricula:

> " IN THE BIOLOGY SUBJECT FOR GRADE 1 OF SECONDARY SCHOOL, STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT PLANTS. IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO INTEGRATE CSE [IN THAT SUBJECT] BECAUSE IT [CSE] IS ABOUT HUMANS. IT WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE TO HAVE CSE AS RELATED EXTRA-CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES FOR THIS GRADE. " [159]

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153. External expert (EO2).
154. United Nations Girls Education Initiative (2021) Applying a whole school approach: strengthening education systems to address gender violence. Available at: https://www.ungei.org/blog-post/applying-whole-school-approach
155. Plan International (2020). Putting the C in CSE: Standards for content, delivery and environment of Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Available at: https://plan-international.org/publications/comprehensive-sexuality-education-standards

156. Staff, Zimbabwe (PFGD1Z).
157. External expert (EO8).
158. External expert (EO5).
159. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS4L)

To counter this unease, it is important to sensitise staff to understand that sexuality education's comprehensiveness includes the delivery of age-appropriate content that safeguards children and adolescents.

Prepare educators/facilitators to resolve conflicts and address discriminatory speech or behaviours in the moment

In all three countries, in reference to in-school programming, many study participants stated that CSE learning environments are considered safe *because* they happen in school settings.[160] The researchers wish to recommend a questioning of this premise, and encourage further exploration.

In validation workshops, participants explained that is it not only the structure of schools, but that **teacher training and preparedness to address discriminatory speech, harassment, and bullying also make safe environments**.[161] Plan International El Salvador staff emphasised the importance of having these safeguarding practices consolidated and shared constantly among staff, volunteers, and external collaborators:

" THESE PROTOCOLS ALLOW US TO ESTABLISH WARNING MECHANISMS IN CASE OF SITUATIONS OF RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, BOTH FOR PARTICIPANTS AND FOR THE TEAM OF FACILITATORS ... . WE ALSO SET UP MEETINGS TO MONITOR AND ANALYSE THE CONDITIONS OF THE SITE WHERE THE SESSIONS ARE TO BE HELD. " [162]

Include the importance of privacy and confidentiality in educators/facilitators' training

Sharing experiences regarding their friendships and relationships can be hard for people in general. Adolescents and young people may feel judged if their privacy and confidentiality are not ensured. Therefore, as the staff members quoted below emphasise, **all consent agreements and facilitation methodologies must make the privacy and confidentiality terms clear**.

" WE HAVE COEXISTENCE AGREEMENTS TO BE RESPECTED BY ALL ... THEY ARE GIVEN PRIOR INFORMATION ABOUT THESE AGREEMENTS ... THEY ARE GIVEN THE CONFIDENCE THAT THERE ARE NO WRONG ANSWERS, WE WON'T TELL THEIR PRIVATE THINGS TO THEIR PARENTS. " [163]

" YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE WHEN THE EDUCATOR UPHOLDS PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY. " [164]

Safeguarding protocols must recognise the evolving capacity of children, adolescents and young people, prioritise their privacy and confidentiality, while protecting their physical and psychosocial wellbeing and safety.

For example, learners should be aware that issues discussed in the sessions must not be shared outside the group. Likewise, all participants should also be aware that information that threatens the safety of others must be communicated to competent authorities with the utmost care to protect personal identities.[165]

Make informed consent to participate a constant practice within CSE activities

The internal and external investigation processes, indicated that robust protocols were in place to safeguard the identities and personal security of Plan International's participants, both in digital and in-person settings:

160. Staff, El Salvador (E4ES, E2ES); Zimbabwe (E1Z); Laos (E3L).
161. Validation workshops, El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe.
162. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
163. Staff, El Salvador (E1ES).

164. Staff, Zimbabwe (E1Z).
165. Sex Education Forum. (n.d). *Confidentiality: Promoting young people's sexual health and well-being in secondary schools.* Available at: https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/Confidentiality%20-%20SEF%20guidance.pdf

"THIS [PANDEMIC] HAS LED US TO GENERATE SAFEGUARD AND SECURITY PROTOCOLS THAT AIM TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF ADOLESCENTS, BUT ALSO TO DEFINE WARNING MECHANISMS IN CASE OF SITUATIONS OF VIOLATION OF RIGHTS. WE INCLUDED PROCESSES OF AUTHORISATION AND CONSENT WITH PARENTS, AND IN PLATFORMS SUCH AS ZOOM AND WHATSAPP GROUPS WE HAVE DELIMITED A PROTOCOL." [166]

The following actions could contribute to strengthen those protocols:

- **Let learners know in advance if documenting sessions for M&E purposes;** record audio only and work on consensus about participant's safety.
- **Anonymise data in reports and documents** resulting from the participation of learners and other contributors.[167]
- **Protect personal data** and be explicit about how it will be used with learners and partners.[168]

Include trauma-informed approaches to CSE

Despite the prevalence of violence and abuse towards children, adolescents, and young people, sexuality education does not generally accommodate trauma histories. This results in curricula, content and activities that ignore the particular needs and experiences of a proportion of learners.[169] In contrast, trauma-focused interventions often neglect the prospects for positive and nurturing sexuality-related experiences and relationships among young people who have been victims of abuse.

The data about trauma-informed CSE is limited and the researchers recommend further exploration to balance acknowledgement of trauma with positive approaches to CSE.

B SUPPORTING EDUCATORS

In delivering CSE, **programmes are only sustainable if organisations and implementers have a well-trained group of teachers, educators, and facilitators that renews periodically**. The external literature highlights the need for high-quality recruitment strategies, training, and support mechanisms that go beyond single sessions.[170] Interview data showed that support for educators and facilitators does go beyond equipping them with a comprehensive curriculum and extends to areas like self-care, training in facilitation methodologies, as well as conflict resolution strategies and skills.

Provide pre-service and ongoing training to educators and facilitators

For professionalised educators/facilitators, both in- and out-of-school, pre-service training on sexuality education at universities is often their first contact with CSE. Meanwhile, for those in the role of peer educators and CSE facilitators, without a formal background in education, the training curricula from organisations like Plan International is their entry point.

Focusing on educators and facilitators' training must be a priority during the whole programme cycle, for both in-school and out-of-school staff.

Plan International staff mention training is available, but recognise it could be strengthened by ensuring that more educators/facilitators complete all the programme modules:

166. Validation workshop, El Salvador.
167. ShareNet Netherlands (2021).
168. External expert (EO2).
169. Fava, N. M., & Bay-Cheng, L. Y. (2013). Trauma-informed sexuality education: Recognising the rights and resilience of youth. Sex Education, 13(4), 383–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2012.745808

170. Plan International (2021). Putting the C on CSE: standards for content, delivery and environment of comprehensive sexuality education.

> **PRE-SERVICE TRAINING WAS RECEIVED TWO YEARS BACK ON SEXUALITY, GBV, AND GENDER EQUALITY. SINCE THIS IS VOLUNTARY, SOME PEOPLE DROP OUT AND, WHEN NEW PEOPLE JOIN, THEY ATTEND A WORKSHOP AND NOT THE COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING.** [171]

Consider using a strengthened cascade training model (Training of Trainers) for higher coverage but ensure negotiating and maintaining minimum standards across training workshops. Plan International Zimbabwe, for example, uses this model to build CSE facilitation skills.[172]

Include ongoing development opportunities for teachers: a balance of learning content and skills, with opportunities to rehearse lessons and receive feedback from peers and supervisors and discussions on troubleshooting challenges.[173] **Standalone sessions for training have very little effect and are insufficient to inspire teacher confidence and competence over the long term.**[174] They need to be kept up to date when changes in the programme occur:

> **WHEN WE MOVED TO THE VIRTUAL MODALITY, WE HAD A SHORT WORKSHOP IN WHICH WE WERE GIVEN A BRIEFING ON HOW WE SHOULD DEVELOP THE WORKSHOP, HOW MUCH IT [THE PROGRAMME] WOULD BE MODIFIED.** [175]

Likewise, **young people require ongoing support when they are serving as peer-educators in communities and school settings.**[176] **This approach was evidenced in Laos** and should be strengthened across the country offices and regional programmes:

> **WE WERE TRAINED IN A PRACTICAL MANNER ... TEACHERS AND PROJECT FACILITATORS HELP US TO PLAN ACTIVITIES AND TEACH US CONTENTS THAT WE CAN TEACH OUR FRIENDS. TEACHERS AND PROJECT FACILITATORS ALSO FOLLOW UP AND HELP US TO IMPROVE.** [177]

Finally, **it is important to have monitoring and support mechanisms to identify teachers who are struggling or who, despite support and training, are not meeting expectations** – for example, those who display continued discomfort with CSE, are skipping topics or not using available CSE resources – and separate them from the programme.[178]

Train educators/facilitators in methodology as well as in content

To encourage the implementation of participatory methodologies in the sessions, **educators and facilitators must receive training in group dynamics, facilitation techniques, and participatory education.**[179] This kind of training is not focused on *what* to deliver, but emphasises how. For instance, educators and facilitators can make use of demonstrations, brainstorming, group discussion, cooperative learning, role-plays and independent study and consider using different media and storytelling.[180] Several Plan International stakeholders commented on the importance of games:

> **THE PARTICIPATION OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE BEGINNING [OF THE SESSIONS] IS COMPLICATED, BUT WHEN WE DO PARTICIPATION DYNAMICS AND GAMES AT THE END, THEY FEEL GOOD BECAUSE THEY WERE PLAYING.** [181]

> **WHEN I STARTED RECEIVING THE SESSIONS, I RECEIVED A LOT OF INFORMATION; THE TOPICS WERE COMPLICATED BUT THE WAY THE FACILITATORS TURNED THEM INTO ACTIVITIES AND GAMES MADE IT EASY TO UNDERSTAND AND HERE I AM, WHAT THEY TAUGHT ME IS BEING PUT INTO PRACTICE.** [182]

171. Staff, Zimbabwe (E1Z).
172. Zimbabwe Programme discovery tool.
173. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit. unesco.org/ ; UNESCO (2015). Comprehensive sexuality education in teacher training in Eastern and Southern Africa.
174. Rutgers (2018). Comprehensive Sexuality Education Knowledge File; UNESCO (2015). Comprehensive sexuality education in teacher training in Eastern and Southern Africa.
175. Staff, El Salvador (E4ES)
176. Billowitz, M., Evelia H., Menard-Freeman, L., and Watson, K. (2020) Asking the Right Questions: Existing evidence and the research agenda for youth peer education in SRH programming.

177. Young Leader, Laos (YL5L).
178. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS9L).
179. UNESCO (2017). CSE scale-up in practice. Case studies from Eastern and Southern Africa. Available at: https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/cse-scale-practice-case-studies-eastern-and-southern-africa
180. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19; Ghana Education Service (2018). Comprehensive sexuality education guidelines. Available at: https://www.npc.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/427871647-National-CSE-Guidelines-Final.pdf
181. Young leader, El Salvador (YL5ES).
182. Young person, El Salvador (YL5ES).

According to a UNESCO review of evidence on CSE implementation, **most effective school-based interventions involve multiple sessions, are interactive, and provide a variety of activities**.[183]

Educators/facilitators also require a safe space

Safe environments for CSE are not only important for learners, **educators and facilitators also require a safe space to explore their strengths and points of improvement**.[184, 185] Some study participants recommended the following:

- **Support educators/facilitators to know their limits** and ask for another professional to step in if needed.[186]
- **Prepare educators and facilitators to be flexible** and adjust activities if they are triggering or cause discomfort.[187]
- **Understand that teachers are overburdened**, alternatives like mentor-led groups wholly dedicated to exploring doubts surrounding CSE facilitation can give educators/facilitators a space to explore their doubt without feeling judged.[188]

It is also valuable to include on-going self-care practices like providing educators/facilitators with outlets to address their own mental health and to discuss concerns with other educators/facilitators.[189]

C DELIVERING CSE

This section examines how to **provide clear, comprehensive, accurate, non-judgmental information about sexuality, relationships and consent and sexual health – including contraceptive choices and abortion care.**

Context analysis should inform decisions about session delivery

Programmatic decisions about whether a specific CSE session is integrated or standalone; whether it is examinable or not; the ages to which it is delivered; the composition of groups of participants; the cultural, social and religious norms that exist; the time allocated in the curriculum used and the access of educators/facilitators and students to digital resources and platforms should all be informed by context assessments:

> **THERE'S NO ONE ANSWER – IT'S EXTREMELY CONTEXTUAL. ... TO ASK AND LISTEN TO ALL WHO ARE ENGAGED IS KEY. WE NEED A PARTICIPATORY ANSWER. WE KNOW THAT PARTICIPATORY LEARNING WORKS – IT'S ABOUT BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER AND SAYING 'HOW SHOULD WE SOLVE IT TOGETHER?'**[190]

Consider that appropriate CSE dosage can change according to the programme participants

There is little in the way of granular guidance regarding the number and length of sessions. General guidance is given by UNESCO in the updated technical guidance on sexuality education, all of which is aimed at government audiences and in-school programmes.[191] **Many context-specific variables come into play when deciding about session dosage.**

183. UNESCO (2016a). *Review of the Evidence on Sexuality Education. Report to inform the update of the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education.*
184. Nelson *et al* (2018).
185. de Haas, B., & Hutter, I. (2019). Teachers' conflicting cultural schemas of teaching comprehensive school-based sexuality education in Kampala, Uganda. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 21(2), 233–247.; External expert (EO11).
186. External expert, (EO5).
187. External expert, (EO2).
188. de Haas, B., & Hutter, I. (2019). Teachers' conflicting cultural schemas of teaching comprehensive school-based sexuality education in Kampala, Uganda. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 21(2), 233–247.; External expert (EO11).

189. External expert (EO11).
190. External expert (EO5).
191. UNESCO (2017). CSE scale-up in practice. Case studies from Eastern and Southern Africa. Available at: https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/cse_scale_up_in_practice_june_2017_final_.pdf
    UNESCO (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770/PDF/260770eng.pdf.multi

However, there is a common understanding that skipping, modifying, or eliminating potentially sensitive topics like masturbation, sexual and gender diversity, abortion, or contraception are detrimental to educational outcomes concerning safer sex practices.[192]

Several recommendations can be identified from the literature:

- **Ensure programme fidelity,** avoid cutting content or activities arbitrarily. However, adaptation based on context is a good practice.[193]

- **Allow for enough time to deliver the sessions**, generally, the few studies that exist show that more sessions increase desired outcomes: *"to maximise learning, multiple topics, addressing sexuality, need to be covered in an age-responsive manner over the course of several years ... "* [194]

- **Do not overload content**, adapt the frequency and amount of content to the target group's preferences and needs.[195]

There is very little evidence in the literature about the length and number of sessions. Plan country offices have been implementing as much as one hour a week for 50 weeks in out-of-school programmes, like Champions of Change in Zimbabwe, where staff are confident that this dosage is meeting the programmatic objectives.

Include content sessions related to SRH services

To promote health-related outcomes, the programme needs to give clear and easy access to SRH services. Educators/facilitators can invite service providers to the programmes so they can serve as a referral and focal person for services, SRH supplies and information. **This practice was seen in all three country offices.**

In some country office settings, educators/facilitators are partnered with a health provider so that they can make effective referrals to young people. **El Salvador country office** offers an interesting case of linking education, services and advocacy by promoting SRH services among young people but also encouraging them to take part in social monitoring in their communities:

> *WE HAVE A SESSION WHERE FRIENDLY SERVICES ARE EXPLAINED AND EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON THE PROMOTION OF SERVICES. SIMILARLY, COORDINATION WITH SCHOOLS IS STRENGTHENED, AND IN THE CASE OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE, THEY ARE ENCOURAGED TO BE PART OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S STRATEGY OF YOUTH PROMOTERS OR IN THE SOCIAL MONITORING COMMITTEES.* [196]

D. CSE IN A DIGITAL ERA

Much emphasis has been placed on digital platforms for CSE. All three country offices included in this study made efforts to move CSE content online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While recognising that the pandemic presented unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities for innovation, it is important to note that **the data suggests that digital CSE should not be a standalone effort, nor an intervention that replaces in-person CSE**.

Ensure that CSE does not exacerbate the digital divide

Online CSE has the potential to expand access to CSE for young people in out-of-school settings. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, in El Salvador, the app, *ElSpacial*, that Plan International developed and its online SRHR school were cited as important strategies.[197] However, **many young people across the world, particularly those living in rural areas, continue to experience challenges in accessing digital platforms**. One external expert warned:

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192. LSE (2020). Delivering Successful Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
193. de Haas, B., & Hutter, I. (2019). Teachers' conflicting cultural schemas of teaching comprehensive school-based sexuality education in Kampala, Uganda. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 21(2), 233–247; Rutgers (2018). Comprehensive Sexuality Education Knowledge File.
194. Rutgers (2018). Comprehensive Sexuality Education Knowledge File.
195. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19.
196. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
197. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.

> **TO MAXIMISE EFFECTIVENESS, DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND TOOLS AND OTHER OUT-OF-SCHOOL CSE RESOURCES NEED TO FORM PART OF BROADER EFFORTS TO PROMOTE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ... THE DIGITAL DIVIDE NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED, AS DIGITAL ACCESS AND DIGITAL LITERACY DIFFER AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS AND CAN EXACERBATE THE GENDER DISPARITIES THAT MANY YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS EXPERIENCE.** [198]

The existing challenges have been further magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic as schools across the world moved to remote learning. In Zimbabwe, Plan International used various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, to reach young people with information during lockdowns. Staff members were well aware of the challenges inherent in this approach:

> **TECHNOLOGY WAS ONLY USED DURING COVID LOCKDOWNS, MOST OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE COME FROM POOR BACKGROUNDS AND DO NOT HAVE GADGETS TO GO ONLINE. COVID-19 INTRODUCED DIGITAL LEARNING, WHICH IS QUITE DIFFICULT AS THE MAJORITY OF YOUTHS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO PHONES OR THE INTERNET.** [199]

These challenges were also common in El Salvador and Laos. During COVID, at least one educator noted a drop in learners' participation due to the virtual nature of CSE.[200] In Laos, several study participants mentioned that digital CSE would be desirable but not possible due to the lack of network connectivity in the programme's target areas and young people's lack of access to mobile data.[201] Even when access is available, it is important to analyse if digital efforts comply with comprehensiveness, especially if only key messages are being offered or interactivity is limited.

Likewise, online and offline should not be considered as two mutually exclusive strategies. Young people, adolescents, and other populations of interest navigate CSE through several types of media. Therefore, the two methods complement each other, even during session delivery. Staff from El Salvador country office highlight the importance of equipping CSE educators with hybrid facilitation methodologies and strategies:

> **WE USE WHATSAPP FOR SOME DIGITAL INTERVENTIONS BECAUSE IT HAS LOW DATA REQUIREMENTS ... THEN WE CAN PICK UP IN CLASS OR AT SCHOOL ... OR ALSO RECOMMEND INTERNET RESOURCES WHILE HAVING SESSIONS IN PERSON.** [202]

Before jumping on the digital bandwagon, Plan and its partners should think carefully – especially during planning stages – about the extent to which digital methods of delivery are appropriate for any given context.

Where it is deemed appropriate, consideration should be given to all barriers experienced by marginalised groups in accessing digital networks and the internet. **Costs for young people's access** to the hardware (phones, tablets, computers) plus the ongoing cost of mobile data for phones or internet access **should be built into programme budgets**.

Do not discount the utility of traditional audio-visual materials for CSE delivery

Digital CSE is not a silver bullet.'[203] In fact, study participants thought that more traditional modes of communication such as radio and TV might still be the most effective way of reaching young people (and their parents), particularly in rural areas.

Participating educators/facilitators and learners alike expressed great appreciation for audio-visual materials that allow them to learn about sensitive information before discussions. Video clips shown on an educator's/facilitator's laptop or a classroom TV were mentioned across all three countries as desirable. In **El Salvador**, a young leader noted that short, animated video clips and those with real-life stories generated great discussion.[204] In **Laos**, one stakeholder found that the flipcharts, audio clips and videos for use by educators/facilitators in schools were particularly useful, though they commented that videos should be made with professional actors.[205]

198. External expert (EO17).
199. Programme discovery tool, Zimbabwe.
200. Educator, El Salvador (E3ES).
201. Programme discovery tool, Laos; Stakeholder, Laos (CLS7L); Stakeholder, Laos (CLS1L); Educator, Laos (E1L).
202. Field diaries, El Salvador.
203. External expert (EO17).
204. Young leader, El Salvador (YL6ES).
205. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS4L).

Finally, in **Zimbabwe**, an educator said that learners commented that videos help them learn better.[206] This suggests to the researchers that **there are alternatives for the digital age** – sending USB drives to young people with videos, gathering in central spaces with good access – that do not depend on individual devices and access.

Most participants in this study were positive about the potential of digital CSE. At the same time, it is clear that educators/facilitators and learners in many contexts are not ready for it. At the very least, as one educator in Laos commented, **programmers should be considering complementary, mixed media approaches**.

> **USE SMART PHONES AND THE INTERNET TO FIND MORE KNOWLEDGE. WE ADVISED STUDENTS HOW AND WHERE TO SEARCH FOR MORE INFORMATION WHEN AT HOME, WHICH ARE MOSTLY THAI YOUTUBE ... , WEBSITES ... FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE SMARTPHONES, THEY ARE RECOMMENDED TO SHARE AND LEARN FROM THEIR FRIENDS. WHEN THEY ARE BACK TO SCHOOL, WE FOLLOW UP WITH THEM, CHECKING THEIR UNDERSTANDING, ALLOWING TIME TO ASK QUESTIONS AND HELP CLARIFY.** [207]

Extend the focus on safe environments to CSE digital spaces

In Zimbabwe, one educator pointed out that when engaging in digital CSE, learners may be using parents' or other family members' phones; in these cases, there is the potential for breaches of confidentiality.[208] Parents may also be listening in to conversations that their children are having during virtual CSE sessions.[209]

Crucial for ensuring safe environments for digital CSE is training for all educators and facilitators in cybersecurity and online safeguarding.[210]
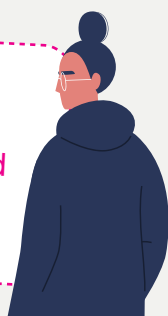
It is also a good idea for those involved with CSE programmes to be aware of the digital platforms where young people are getting their information and the harmful messages or inaccurate information that they may be receiving. In response, CSE programmes should correct, supplement and complement that content with accurate, rights-based information.[211]

E LINKAGES

Include service providers early, allowing input into assessment and planning, and contributing to reducing stigma around adolescent sexuality

Programmes need **strong referral networks**, with non-judgmental, gender responsive and youth friendly providers. **All three country programmes not only have these networks they have also involved the Ministry of Health** in the programming and some have signed MOUs or similar collaboration agreements that link CSE to health services.

Service providers from different specialities (primary healthcare, sexual and reproductive health, social services and mental health), including from the private sector and NGOS, should be drawn into the CSE programme from an early stage:

> **SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMES HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE A VERY COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO HIV PREVENTION AND TO ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO SRH EDUCATION AND SERVICES. AT THE SAME TIME OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAMMES MAY BE BETTER ABLE TO PROVIDE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH COMMODITIES AND LINK CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO SERVICES, MENTORS AND OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT.** [212]

206. Educator, Zimbabwe (E4Z).
207. Educator, Laos (E5L).
208. Educator, Zimbabwe (E2Z).
209. Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS6Z).

210. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19.
211. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19.
212. External expert (EO17).

Include a referral network within the CSE curricula package

Part of creating a safe environment is providing linkages to other health services, particularly, SRH. Similarly, young people and adolescents need a direct contact to report, or look for counselling, regarding violence or abuse. If the implementing organisation cannot provide this support, a referral system needs to be established.

Engage service providers to ensure that referral services are gender-responsive and youth-friendly.[213] This supportive environment allows adolescents and young people to make use of what they have learnt in the programme.[214] Include guided visits to local health centres as part of a CSE session on SRH, ensuring that young people know where they can access services and the professionals involved in service delivery.[215]

Ensure linkages with menstrual health and hygiene management, including referrals to services and the provision of sanitary products within the CSE venue.[216]

Link the CSE programme with other youth development initiatives

Consider linking to innovative and non-formal programming for young people that already exists: for example, income generation or vocational training programmes for out-of-school youth, and use these as entry points to deliver CSE.[217] Link CSE to GBV-prevention programmes, programmes focused on eliminating harmful practices, such as CEFMU, HIV prevention and treatment programmes and to youth leadership programmes.[218]
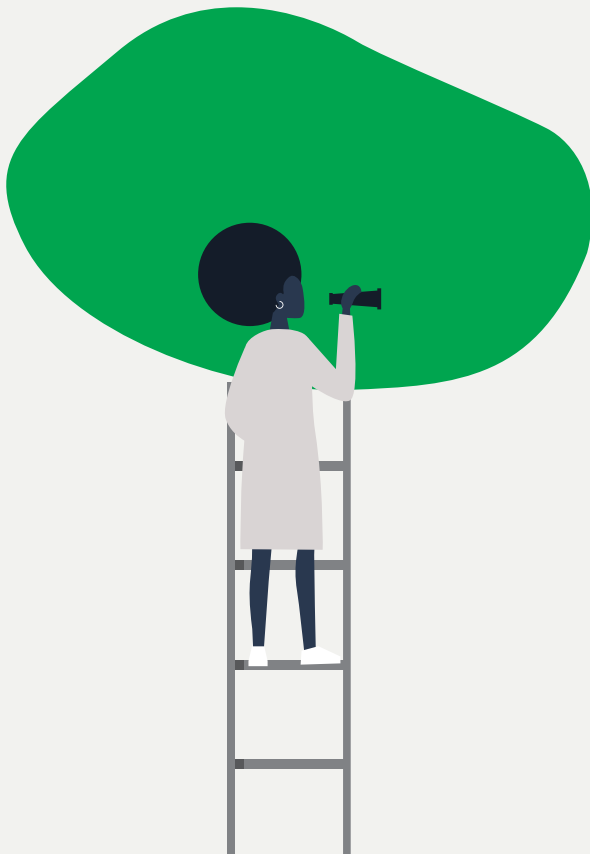
04
MONITORING, EVALUATION AND INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

Monitoring, evaluation, and research is vital to ensure that programme and influencing is effective and aligned to international standards. Monitoring and evaluation should occur throughout all stages of the programme cycle.

213. External expert (E017)
214. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19; Rutgers WPF and Stop AIDS Now (2009). Improving the quality of SRHR education programmes for young people.
215. Fonner, V. A., Armstrong, K. S., Kennedy, C. E., O'Reilly, K. R., & Sweat, M. D. (2014). School Based Sex Education and HIV Prevention in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. PLOS ONE, 9(3), e89692; 2014); External expert (EO5).

216. External expert (EO5).
217. External experts (EO8; EO2).
218. External expert (EO17).

(A) PROGRAMMATIC MONITORING AND EVALUATING

Across organisations and contexts, there is no one-size-fits-all model of monitoring and evaluating CSE programming. However, findings from this study offer adaptable operational guidance on *what* is measured (monitored and evaluated) as well as *how* CSE programming is monitored and evaluated within Plan International.

Evaluations should include analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data and incorporate feedback from key stakeholders.[219]

Provide the space and resources for testing out innovative indicators and tools within CSE programmes

With regard to what is measured in CSE programming, this study illustrates that **globally and within country offices, there remains a focus on the requirements of distinct, timebound projects and donors.** Traditional indicators used for CSE programming within country offices include: number of CSE sessions held; the number of young people in attendance at those sessions; knowledge levels amongst young people and/or educators/facilitators; and population-level reductions in child marriages, school dropouts, teenage pregnancies and STIs.[220]

Many study participants continue to stress the importance of these traditional CSE measurements for monitoring and evaluating their CSE programmes,[221] but at the same time, advocate for expanding and innovating with regard to measurement frameworks for CSE programming. In **Plan International Laos**, for example, one study participant expressed **a desire to measure the quality of CSE teaching and the importance placed on girls' higher education by parent**s. In **Zimbabwe**, study participants spoke of wanting more **measurements of change for marginalised groups of young people and young people's comfort levels in asking for support** with the challenges they face.[222]

Outside of Plan International, there are similar calls for change, with experts globally suggesting a greater emphasis on measurements related to the longer-term, social and emotional impacts of CSE.[223] An external expert from a UN agency explained:

> ❝ *FIRST, LET ME SAY I DON'T LIKE WHEN PEOPLE COMPARE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE THEORIES AND APPLY TO CSE; IT'S MORE COMPLEX THAN AN INDIVIDUAL SMOKING. BUT, THE UNDER-MEASURED ASPECT OF CSE IS ITS PREVENTION POTENTIAL. IF YOU DO IT WELL AT YOUNGER AGES – LIKE IT'S MEANT TO BE – YOU'RE NOT HAVING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE, YOU'RE DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING THEM … . MOST PROGRAMMES ARE NOT LOOKING LONG-TERM; THEY WANT TO KNOW IF THE KNOWLEDGE WAS RETAINED, BUT NOT [TAKING] THE CUMULATIVE LIFE CYCLE APPROACH.* ❞ [224]

Regarding the tools and methods for monitoring and evaluation, the picture is much the same. Whilst many study participants still value the more traditional approaches, there is evidence of many valuing or desiring the space and resources to **test out more innovative, context and programme-specific tools**.

Plan International El Salvador has a set of M&E tools, including a tool entitled *'Monitoreo de contenidos y competencias EIS desarrolladas en el aula'* [*'Monitoring of CSE content and competencies developed in the classroom'*], which rates the development of competencies amongst learners at each stage of CSE implementation. In addition, the country office has developed a specific tool to measure the implementation of their family education methodology for CSE.[225]

Plan International Laos uses assessment forms that are filled in by learners, educators/facilitators and principals, as well as questionnaires in Ombea[226] to assess learner's knowledge.[227] In **Plan International Zimbabwe**, the linkages between CSE and access to SRH services for young people is being monitored through referral forms, and young people are providing feedback on the usefulness of each CSE session.[228] Table Three provides examples of some of the methods commonly used within country offices and by other external organisations participating in this study.

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219. Plan International (n.d.). Monitoring, evaluation, research and learning policy.
220. Educators, Zimbabwe, Laos, and El Salvador (E6Z, E4L, E3ES, E4ES); Stakeholders, Laos (CLS7L, CLS5L, CLS6L); Programme discovery tools, Laos, Zimbabwe.
221. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS9L); Educators, Zimbabwe (E5Z, E6Z).
222. E5Z, Programme discovery tool, Zimbabwe.
223. External esports (EO5, EO6, EO8, EO11).

224. External expert (EO8).
225. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
226. OMBEA (n.d.). Available at: https://www.ombea.com/
227. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS8L).
228. Programme discovery tool, Zimbabwe.

TABLE 3: EXAMPLES OF METHODS UTILISED FOR MONITORING AND/OR EVALUATING CSE PROGRAMMING

EL SALVADOR	LAOS	ZIMBABWE	EXTERNAL
• Pre/post-tests for learners • *Monitoreo de contenidos y competencias EIS desarrolladas en el aula* tool (see above for more information)	• Interview forms for learners, principals and educators/facilitators • Questionnaire for learners to assess knowledge levels • Forms to monitor increases in SRH service utilisation • Activity trackers • Monitoring reports • Expenditure reports • MoES checklist for CSE monitoring	• Baseline survey • Midterm evaluation • Positive deviance research • In-classroom observations • Attendance registers	• In-depth interviews and focus group discussions[229] • Baseline/endline surveys[230] • Participatory action research[231] • Storytelling[232] • Epidemiological time-series analysis[233] • Population-based survey analysis[234] • Cross-sectional surveys[235]

At the same time that space needs to be created for innovation, overall monitoring and learning needs to be improved and space created for **reflection on the utility of newly-developed measurements and methods**. Whilst country offices point to many interesting initiatives, **what is lacking is data on how they are being applied and their utility in increasing the effectiveness of CSE programming**. Across the three countries, this may be a function of the delays and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and of CSE being a relatively new area of programming. Continuous monitoring and learning needs to be acknowledged at the design stage and budgeted for.

Invest in more qualitative measurements that centre the perspectives of young learners as well as educators/facilitators, principals, community leaders and parents

Across the board, in both the literature reviewed and the qualitative data collected for this study, there is agreement that **quantitative and qualitative methods are equally important** in programmatic monitoring and evaluation and given the historical focus on quantitative data, a **greater focus on qualitative methods is merited**. In order to realise this operationally, **monitoring and evaluation must be adequately resourced**. Without the requisite human and financial resources CSE programmes run the risk of being deprioritised.[236]

Invest in documentation of CSE programmatic operations and processes

This study identified that there are significant gaps in research and evaluation related to the operationalisation of CSE globally. With few exceptions, programme evaluations, NGO publications and the academic literature have all largely focused on the outcomes of CSE, rather than operations. This also rings true within the country offices. However, this study illustrates the richness that results from taking the time to understand not just *what* happened within a programme but how it happened.

229. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/
230. ShareNet Netherlands (2021). Delivery of CSE in non-conventional settings during COVID-19; Rutgers WPF and Stop AIDS Now (2009). Improving the quality of SRHR education programmes for young people.
231. External expert (EO17).
232. External expert (EO2).
233. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/
234. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/
235. UNESCO (2021). CSE implementation toolkit. Available at: https://csetoolkit.unesco.org/
236. LSE (2020). Delivering Successful Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

Critical lessons for institutional and programmatic learning are often unearthed by answering the questions '*how?*', '*why?*' and '*what would you do differently next time?*' So, rather than merely documenting that there were x meetings with parents of young CSE learners, process documentation would seek to understand how those parents were contacted and engaged in the first instance; how the team prepared for the meeting with the parents; and what worked during the meeting itself to facilitate dialogue.

The programme discovery tool used in all three countries for this study proved to be a useful starting point for monitoring, evaluation and research.

When filled in collaboratively and completely, it yields a rich overview of the programme or project. For outsiders, it acts as a useful 'go to' information sheet that clarifies not only the history of the programme's implementation but, also, the strategies used at both programme and project level for engagement and planning, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and learning, sustainable scale-up and more. Once compiled, this information can be used in innumerable ways: as a discussion tool during team meetings, as a resource for developing interview or FGD guides for research, as a shareable information sheet for external parties wanting to learn more about the programme and as part of training and orientation for new staff members and volunteers.

Invest in CSE research on topics identified as missing from the literature

Given Plan International's research capacities, commitment to MERL and country-level programmes, it is well placed to fill some of the gaps that exist globally in CSE documentation and research. Topics identified for further research are listed in the *Conclusion and Recommendations* section of the report which follows.

Engage young people in monitoring, evaluation and research, as partners and invest accordingly in their training

The findings of this study indicate that **young people need to be more integrally involved in monitoring, evaluation and research:** they were not mentioned by any of the country level study participants as having been involved in this part of any CSE programme. One external study participant

spoke of the importance of involving young people as researchers, including in participatory action research and working together *with* them to assess programmatic effectiveness and outcomes.[237] Other potential options for their involvement include: inputting into the initial measurement frameworks, training young people as evaluators and researchers, creating a fund for young people to develop their own methods for monitoring and evaluation.

B INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

By ensuring that learning experienced by one individual, group, programme or region is shared and utilised, we safeguard the continual evolution, co-creation and responsiveness of CSE programming. Without this, institutions and their programmes remain static, preserving a potentially antiquated status quo. No operational guidance on institutional learning can be found in the external literature. However, the **findings from the in-country research indicate that it is happening in a variety of formal and informal ways** that provide a starting point for Plan International's operations globally.

Invest further in existing learning spaces within programming and continuously evaluate their utility

Study participants in the three countries expressed a belief that there is value inherent in institutional learning processes. They are keen to share with colleagues across geographical regions, stakeholder groups and technical areas. **Educators/facilitators in particular are enthusiastic about having the time and space to learn from each other and discuss how to handle tricky situations with learners;** several expressed this as a need.

> **WE HAVE CONSTANTLY BEEN PERFECTING AND REFINING THE CURRICULUM BASED ON THE ON-THE-GROUND LEARNING WE HAVE GATHERED. WE ARE CONSTANTLY RECREATING AND CO-CREATING THIS WITH THE FEMALE STUDENTS.** [238]

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237. External expert (EO17).

238. External expert (EO4).

At the same time, the research team's observations indicate that **country level staff are stretched thinly**, leaving little time or space for reflection. As such, it is important to look and budget for learning spaces that can be built into existing processes, rather than create new, time-consuming activities that place extra burden on staff members. Operationally, **learning within CSE programmes could be built into established meetings**: during management meetings or teacher council meetings, as is currently being done in **El Salvador**, **Laos** and **Zimbabwe** country offices.[239] Whilst using existing spaces, the **focus on learning should be deliberate**, continuously evaluated and adapted accordingly.

In addition to meetings, **Plan International El Salvador** is using other existing platforms for institutional learning, including: **NotiPlan**, a magazine that is shared with all staff and recounts the activities of each programme, **Workplace**, the internal Plan International platform for sharing and learning with other country offices and an internal programme management and finances dashboard.[240]

Create new learning spaces and tools with commensurate funding and support for country offices

The validation workshops held to discuss the preliminary findings from this study illustrated the appetite amongst staff members for discussion and learning. Where

funding and time allows, new spaces for institutional learning should be created, particularly those that involve **face-to-face discussion and joint problem solving for CSE programming**. Consideration could be given to CSE surgeries, whereby educators and other programme staff use anonymised case studies across a variety of topics. Other strategies include: buddy systems between educators/facilitators, field diaries for educators/facilitators and programme staff that are used to facilitate discussion and observation tools that allow for constructive feedback.

> **WHEN THE PROJECT HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED FOR SOME TIME, [THERE] SHOULD BE A SESSION FOR INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING WHERE ALL INVOLVED PARTIES CAN MEET AND SHARE WHAT THEY HAVE DONE – WHAT ARE THE SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES THAT THEY HAVE FACED AND HOW DID THEY OVERCOME THEM AND WHAT WILL THEY SUGGEST TO DO IN THE FUTURE?** [241]

Some of the proposed learning tools – field diaries and observation tools – were not fully assessed by country offices. As a follow-up, staff members could be further supported to pilot them. The programme discovery tool, another learning tool developed for this study, was used by all three countries.

05 SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE-UP

Adopt a flexible definition of sustainability for CSE programming in each context

In **Laos** and **Zimbabwe**, study participants understood sustainability as government support and integration of CSE into the national curriculum. **Plan El Salvador** took a slightly more expanded definition for its CSE programming, considering it sustainable when the following are in place:
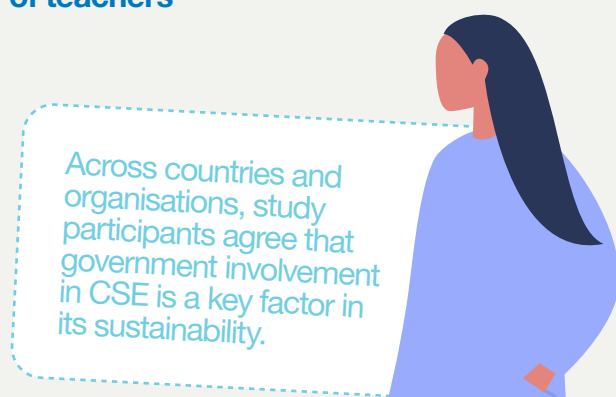
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239. Programme discovery tools, Laos, Zimbabwe; Stakeholder, Laos (CLS6L); Educators, Laos (E2L, E5L).

240. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
241. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS9L).

- **Teachers** trained in CSE apply the training in the classroom and use the curriculum to update in-classroom planning
- **Families** demand CSE programmes and there is no resistance to offering it to their sons and daughters
- **Alliances** are in place with health facilities that allow for young people's access to friendly services
- **Organised youth** promote CSE actions among peers
- The **municipality** provides financing for CSE programmes.[242]

There is **no one size fits all model for sustainability**, and country offices should continue to have the flexibility to define it as they see fit within the contexts. **Flexibility should also be afforded for the concept to change over time** with geopolitical, legal, financial and other environmental changes that affect programming.

Advocate for integration of CSE into national curricula and pre-service training of teachers

> Across countries and organisations, study participants agree that government involvement in CSE is a key factor in its sustainability.

Two of the primary ways that government support is desired are: **integrating CSE into the national curriculum**, which ensures it is built into school timetables and **pre-service teacher training**, which ensures that all educational facilities are equipped with the human resources needed for CSE.

In **Laos**, all study participants who commented on this area of inquiry expressed a belief that having CSE integrated within the national MoES curriculum and backed by government funding and support

makes it sustainable.[243] One participant from Laos added that aspects of CSE that are not in the formal curriculum will die out after the funding ends.[244] Similarly in **Zimbabwe** study participants mentioned that, integration into the national curriculum, making CSE examinable, and ensuring that government officials are trained in CSE, all ensure sustainability after Plan International's programme ends.[245] In addition, two study participants in Zimbabwe highlighted the importance of community involvement for continued buy-in.[246] Plan International staff members who filled in the programme discovery tool agreed:

> **" BECAUSE CSE IS A MOES OBJECTIVE, IT IS TAKEN FORWARD BY THEM AND THE CSE STANDARDS ARE SOCIALISED AMONG EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS MUCH MORE STRONGLY. "** [247]

The in-country research findings resonate with data collected from external study participants, who also emphasised the importance of government involvement. One participant reinforced that the government has a definite role in ensuring sustainability, saying that **pre-service teacher training in colleges does need to be ensured to sustain CSE in the long-term**.[248] Another external study participant also mentioned the need to **build buy-in and expertise for the CSE programme across teams within organisations and government ministries** to avoid reliance on one or two staff people who may eventually leave. A good example of how country offices have addressed this is **Plan El Salvador's** close partnership with the Ministry of Education that has invested significantly in teacher training.[249]

Research and develop sustainability models for out-of-school CSE programming

Overwhelmingly, study participants focused their responses on in-school CSE when asked about sustainability. Indeed, there was a belief amongst several study participants that any programmes not taken on by the government are not sustainable.

With regard to out-of-school CSE programming, more evaluation and research is needed to fully understand what sustainability means in those programmes and to determine Plan International's role in each context.

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242. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
243. Programme discovery tool, Laos; Stakeholders and educators, Laos (CLS1L; CLS4L; CLS9L; E2L; E6L).
244. Stakeholder, Laos (CLS9L).
245. Educators, Zimbabwe (E4Z; E5Z); Staff, Zimbabwe (PFGD1Z); Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS10Z).

246. Educator, Zimbabwe (E4Z); Stakeholder, Zimbabwe (CLS4Z).
247. Programme discovery tool, Laos.
248. External expert (EO8).
249. Staff, El Salvador, personal communication.

A starting point is study participants' suggestions to **piggy-back on community-based and other out-of-school initiatives and to initiate partnerships with ministries of youth, gender, social development**, amongst others, rather than working solely with ministries of education.[250] Lessons may also be drawn from CSE programmes implemented in educational facilities (like the private schools in Sri Lanka, cited below) that are not government-sponsored.

> ❝ ONE OF THE MOST SUSTAINABLE IS ONE CALLED SOUND BODY, SOUND MIND BY GRASSROOTED TRUST IN FOUR SCHOOLS … IT'S IN ALL LANGUAGES. CURRICULUM IS GREAT. THEY HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION TO FUND IT; IT'S SUSTAINABLE FINANCIALLY. THEY'VE MANAGED TO GET THE PRINCIPALS TO INCLUDE ONE SUBJECT IN DAILY LESSONS, TOO. THEY HAVE TRAINED TEACHERS IN SINHAL AND TAMIL TO DELIVER, AND THE TEACHER IS PAID BY PTA. THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR FOUR-FIVE YEARS VERY SUCCESSFULLY. ❞ [251]

Expand the concept of scale-up beyond coverage of CSE programmes

Scale-up, like sustainability, is an evolving concept. ExpandNet defines it as: *"Deliberate efforts to increase the impact of innovations successfully tested in pilot or experimental projects so as to benefit more people and to foster policy and program development on a lasting basis."* [252] Key within this definition is the term deliberate, which resonates with guidance given by UNESCO and others that **planning for scale-up must start early**.[253] Further guidance indicates that **scale-up for CSE programmes should happen within existing policies, systems and budgets** and **avoid dependence on a particular political figure or party**.[254]

Within country CSE programmes in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe, the understanding of 'scale-up' is focused primarily on coverage – the programmes' ability to reach numbers of young people and communities with CSE. For **Plan**

International El Salvador, this includes **training partner organisations to implement their methodologies** in other parts of the country.[255] In **Laos** and **Zimbabwe**, study participants across the board mentioned that, for them, scale-up means **expanding the CSE programme to other regions, districts or educational institutions**.[256]

A publication by Rutgers, IPPF and other partners entitled *'Scaling Up Sexuality Education: Lessons learned and considerations for civil society organisations'*,[257] disseminated after the literature review for this study was conducted, provides civil society organisations with a tool for determining how and whether they should be involved in CSE scale-up. Its key lessons and case studies of scale-up may provide insights for Plan going forward.

Produce documentation of scale-up models of NGO-led CSE programmes

Given that several country offices are accompanying and supporting governments in distinct ways, including in relation to scale-up, this is **an area ripe for further study and documentation. Plan International Laos**, for example, has recent experience supporting the government scale-up of CSE. Following the pilot and evaluation of the government's CSE curriculum in Bokeo Province, it was scaled-up to Houn and three other provinces. In the scale-up process, Plan International has played a role in educator/facilitator training sessions as well as monitoring for the government.[258] Understanding the ways that NGOs complement and fill gaps in government scale-up efforts will support country offices looking for partnership with their respective governments.

> Both sustainability and scale-up need to be planned and budgeted for at the programme design stage and advocacy and influencing strategies should be in place.

250. Chandra-Mouli, V., Plesons, M., Hadi, S., Baig, Q., & Lang, I. (2018). Building Support for Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health Education and Responding to Resistance in Conservative Contexts: cases from Pakistan. Global Health, Science and Practice, 6(1), 128–136; External expert (EO8); Educator and stakeholder, Zimbabwe (E4Z; CLS4Z).
251. External expert (EO7).
252. ExpandNet (n.d.). Our definition of scaling-up. Available at: https://expandnet.net/scaling-up-definition/
253. UNESCO (2014). Comprehensive sexuality education: the challenges and opportunities for scaling-up.
254. UNESCO (2016). Strengthening comprehensive sexuality education for young people in school settings in Zambia: A review and documentation of the scale-up process. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/ pf0000247268; External expert (EO17).
255. Programme discovery tool, El Salvador.
256. Stakeholders, Laos (CLS8L; CLS7L; CLS6L; CLS5L; CLS4L); Programme discovery tools, Laos and Zimbabwe.
257. Rutgers (2021). Scaling up sexuality education: Lessons learned and considerations for civil society organizations. Available at: https://rutgers. international/resources/scaling-up-sexuality-education-lessons-learned-and-considerations-for-civil-society-organizations/
258. Programme discovery tool, Laos.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

This study analyses the extensive and diverse nature of CSE programming in three Plan International country offices. Based on this analysis, a literature review and in-depth interviews with a variety of experts the current report provides practical guidance for practitioners.

The research is designed to fill a key gap in the implementation of CSE. The study reveals some of the excellent practice already underway in **El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe**; it also looks closely at ways to improve CSE delivery, highlighting some of the pitfalls to avoid. Plan International offices and other CSE practitioners can learn from these experiences, and should be allowed the resources and space to experiment, adapt and discover what works within their respective contexts to best serve the needs of their communities.

An important finding of this study is that **CSE is contextual in every way imaginable, at every stage of the programming cycle and across all areas of inquiry.** Any attempt to make universally-applicable recommendations will be fairly top level and subject to interpretation and application within each country, province, district, town, community and school. The initial context assessment, the programme planning and design are critical but will not bring to light all the potential challenges that will arise during implementation. As such, **weaving a web of support within each community is of utmost importance** – one that is buoyant, adaptable and strongly committed to be able to withstand the challenges that come with CSE delivery in every setting.

From the **current research** it is clear that:

The **participation of and the accountability to the young people** for whom CSE programmes are so vital underpins their success. These young people need to be from diverse population groups and they must be involved throughout the process.

Partnerships – buy-in from all levels of society from parents to governments – are crucial for funding and sustainability. Partnerships need maintaining throughout the process. A comprehensive mapping exercise will help identify potential partners.

Ongoing support for educators and facilitators is also crucial, as is the **safeguarding of all participants** in all spaces, though this safeguarding must be balanced with evolving capacity. Educators must be trained in methodology as well as content.

Advocacy and influencing are central to the programme's longevity and impact and must be planned and budgeted for.

Budgets must be realistic, detailed and cost both time and resources for each programme phase. The time it takes to be genuinely participatory and reach out to marginalised groups is often underestimated; as is time spent building and maintaining partnerships to ensure sustainability.

» Detailed practical suggestions, across all programme phases, emerging from the research, are laid out in the the Findings and Operational Recommendations section of this report.

Additionally, the study also reveals **other operational aspects that merit further research** which are outlined below, including evaluations that measure the outcomes of practices around:

- The **costing of CSE programmes** and how to provide concrete guidance, linked closely to sustainability and the longevity of CSE implementation, particularly in coordination with the public sector. The study revealed significant reliance on donor funds to implement CSE, without clear guidance on how governments can begin to take responsibility for implementation costs.

- **Exploring sustainability and scalability models** for both in- and out-of-school programmes which look at examples of funding that do not rely on 100 per cent subsidy from either Plan International or national governments.

- Further exploration of **strategies to address backlash, opposition, or religious fundamentalism** in different contexts. It was surprising that backlash was not mentioned more among study participants, but precipitating and addressing backlash may become more important as CSE implementation becomes more widespread across different organisations.

- **Locally-led curriculum development** that draws on indigenous expertise in sexuality and gender as well as being informed by international evidence and standards. There is significant SRHR expertise on the ground in most countries, and there is room to explore more country-led curriculum development in collaboration with youth-led organisations, feminists and others already versed in CSE.

- **What dosage is needed** both for teacher training and for the delivery of CSE to be effective. Further research is needed to explore if certain outcomes require more time that others to achieve what is desired.

- The **effects on educators/facilitators themselves** from engaging in CSE. What are the benefits and perhaps unexpected outcomes? How does CSE affect the teaching methodologies for other topics?

- **Further understanding of young people's perspectives of safe learning environments;** there was limited data on young people's perspectives of what constitutes a safe learning environment. It would be relevant to explore youth perspectives on protection, autonomy, and evolving capacities as they relate to their experience participating in CSE.

- **Linkages to health services in general, including SRHR, and to mental health services;** underlying this study, the researchers and participants sensed and expressed awareness of the COVID-19 context, which has elevated the importance of mental health care. Aside from mention of trauma-awareness, this study did not produce data on how CSE can be linked to mental health or psychosocial services. An exploration of this topic is merited.

- **Specific considerations for ensuring diversity and inclusion** within CSE. Though this study revealed inclusion of a diversity of young people and the particular efforts made by Plan International country offices to do so, there was no data on the particularities of how to incorporate a diversity and inclusion lens throughout the CSE programming cycle.

- **Gender-transformative measurements** that show that gender-transformative approaches are successful in norm change, to add to knowledge generation around the effectiveness of CSE in changing gender norms and attitudes and contributing to gender equality.

- **Good practices on institutional learning;** there is little information in external literature that is specific to CSE. Further research could explore how the internal learning and reflection processes mentioned in this study are benefitting CSE programmes, and what are other good practices in this area.

Plan International is committed to implementing best practice in its CSE programming and influencing and looks forward to both continuing to develop resources and to exploring the issues emerging from this research.

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About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.