

# SUMMARY REPORT

## LEARNINGS FROM CSE OPERATIONAL RESEARCH IN EL SALVADOR, LAOS AND ZIMBABWE



# BACKGROUND

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a significant area of Plan International's SRHR and Inclusive Quality Education work. We are a member of the UNESCO-UNFPA Global Partnership Forum on CSE, and we are continually strengthening and growing our work. In 2020, we launched our [CSE Standards](#) to align our programme and influence work with international technical standards, adopting an approach that is human rights-based, gender-transformative, inclusive and sex-positive. This approach emphasises that CSE practitioners need to work on 1) Content, 2) Delivery and 3) Enabling Environment. In 2021, we launched a [CSE accountability tool](#) to support governments to turn their commitments into meaningful action.

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 responsible for designing and delivering national level programmes. Plan International works in over 50 countries. Our offices frequently request support on the *how* of CSE. [How can we take high-level recommendations and adapt them in varied and challenging contexts, without losing our rights-based, gender-transformative, and sex positive approach?](#)

This summary report is based on the full report Learnings from CSE Practitioners in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe: Operational Research Report 2022.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was undertaken from March – December 2021 by the Torchlight Collective, with a team of international research consultants supported by in-country researchers in the three focus countries. The consultants were supported by teams from Plan International's local offices. Ethical approval was received from Overseas Development Institute's Research Ethics Committee (REC). All Plan International procedures were followed in relation to safeguarding and informed consent.

Data collection was conducted through a literature review, external key informant interviews and internal investigation of CSE programmes in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe. Data collection took place between June-September 2021 and collection methods included: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, validation workshops and a programme discovery tool.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research provides learnings for consideration in the implementation of CSE programmes and influence by Plan International country offices and others. It focuses exclusively on operationalisation – *the how of CSE*. 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. This learning will inform our ongoing programme development and implementation.



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

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



# COUNTRY PROFILES



## 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 unintended pregnancies, prevention of second pregnancy, HIV prevention, and sexual and reproductive rights in humanitarian settings. CSE is implemented in schools and in out-of-school/ community settings with a broad range of community members ranging from 10-29 years old. The programme is implemented in more than 400 communities and since starting in 2016, has reached approximately 30,000 10-29-year-olds.

Plan International El Salvador runs a course directly with young people (implemented online since 2020 due to COVID-19). The 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. The country office also trains teachers on integrating CSE into the school curriculum.

Plan International El Salvador's CSE programme includes a strong advocacy component. Plan is a primary partner of the Ministry of Education to implement CSE 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 provide training to teachers/educators and healthcare providers to develop their knowledge and skills on CSE. To date, Plan International El Salvador has trained more than 5,000 educators in CSE.

## LAOS

Plan International Laos has supported CSE advocacy and programming since 2017, when the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) with support from the UNFPA country programme first developed a CSE curriculum for secondary schools. From 2017 to mid-2019, the MoES and UNFPA engaged Plan International Laos to provide inputs into the specific learning objectives and modules and to conduct technical reviews of the curriculum materials for the following topics: gender equality and child rights; human reproductive system; changes during 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 established to help bolster the efforts of the MoES in Houn district, Oudomxay province. This programme is implemented exclusively with in-school adolescents in Houn district's 15 secondary schools. Plan International Laos provided training and support to teachers to deliver CSE and also initiated extra-curricular student clubs to complement CSE classroom learning. They developed a toolkit [Merlin Phahoo](#) for these clubs, together with a youth-led social enterprise using human-centred design.

## 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 implemented in Harare, Kwekwe, Chiredzi, Bulawayo and Mutare and aims to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs amongst adolescents and young people.

Plan International Zimbabwe has been working in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) to expand the life-skills education curriculum for young people in primary and secondary school, in line with UNESCO's [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 to adapt the teaching and learning materials to relevant CSE standards and guidelines. Plan International Zimbabwe also offers ongoing support to teachers and provides monitoring tools.

For young people out-of-school, the programme uses [Champions of Change](#) modules that include information on sexuality and gender, 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 providing links to services through mobile outreach

# OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. ENGAGEMENT / PLANNING

Engagement and planning for CSE programming and influencing includes establishing the foundations for successful implementation. These include understanding the context<sup>1</sup> and key issues to consider in relation to CSE delivery, building an enabling environment, and ensuring relevant stakeholders are involved so that interventions are relevant, accepted, and of high quality.

It is important to understand **contact with 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 different community institutions and leaders. As relevant stakeholders and potential partners are identified, they should be given the opportunity to contribute to 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.

*“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.”*

Plan International El Salvador.

It is critical to engage **parents, caregivers, school leaders and teachers as key gatekeepers**, to discuss CSE topics and materials and allay any concerns.<sup>2</sup> There is **no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach** and engagement should be informed by a situational analysis. Activities for parents and caregivers must fit their schedules and be as open and inclusive as possible to different family configurations. Many are unable to attend multiple meetings but **parents and caregivers can engage in an ongoing and strategic way through diverse communication channels**. Including caregiver offers, transportation and other incentives within programme plans and budgets and integrating activities within existing school-events like parent-teachers’ meetings and recurrent school calendar events helps to strengthen parents’ and caregivers’ engagement.

*“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.”*

Plan International Laos.

*“[the parents] were invited for the first informative meeting, they were explained the process of the [CSE] workshops and they were given material specifically for parents to support their children [...] [the parents] sent pictures working together, some were able to do it.”*

Plan International El Salvador.

<sup>1</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 1

<sup>2</sup> Plan International CSE Standards 10, 12

*“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.”*

Plan International Zimbabwe.

The research found that Plan International has a “trustworthy reputation” because of broader work in child protection and development, and long experience supporting children, adolescents and young people. This was seen as an asset for CSE partnerships and external relations. Plan International was found to have diverse partnership networks for its CSE work including: government agencies, youth-led organisations, LGBTIQ+ organisations, religious organisations and leaders, parent-teacher associations, women’s collectives and health professional bodies.

Plan International partners often described youth engagement in programme design and delivery, including young people as researchers and establishing feedback mechanisms.<sup>3</sup> But sometimes it felt constrained:

*“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 six months to design is crucial to ensuring that young people have meaningful participation.”*

Plan International Laos.

The research found that Plan International staff rarely mentioned policy or legal reform, or accountability processes for CSE.<sup>4</sup> Study participants saw communications as a crucial advocacy tool for creating favourable social and political environments for CSE. In Zimbabwe, programme outcomes are shared through social media. In El Salvador, programme objectives were communicated to link clearly to the national strategy for adolescent pregnancy prevention (which Plan had also supported young people to influence in development). In Laos, Plan works in partnership with others using the *Noi Framework*, which is an advocacy tool focused on the rights of girls and the fulfilment of the SDGs, as a hook for their CSE advocacy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allocate sufficient time and human resources to the context assessment.
- Use the context assessment as a trust-building opportunity with the community.
- Make the context assessment an ongoing element of programme implementation.
- Develop robust political and organisational mappings and keep them updated.
- Complement needs assessments with participatory and capacity building processes with key stakeholders, so that different stakeholders can be “CSE ready.”
- Include a diverse range of stakeholders in mapping and context assessment activities.
- Assess the digital environments accessed by young people and communities in order to consider how these will be relevant in the programme.
- Build and nurture diverse partnership networks to support CSE – including youth-led organisations and specialists for LGBTIQ / disability inclusion.
- Exercise flexibility to engage parents and families.
- Communicate clear objectives and outcomes of CSE to target audiences.
- Develop a plan to address potential backlash and opposition for CSE.

<sup>3</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 11

<sup>4</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 14

## 2. DESIGN

The design phase includes planning for the delivery and implementation of CSE which includes ensuring that the budget and resources are in place. Stakeholder engagement should continue during this stage to encourage community participation and support for the programme. This is also the time to agree and develop the monitoring, evaluation, research and learning plan for the programme as well as planning for sustainability and scale-up. These issues are explored in more detail below.

It is useful to identify context-specific entry points for CSE that link to agreed priorities and targets. For example, addressing high rates of unintended pregnancy amongst adolescents, or child abuse should have buy-in from a range of stakeholders.<sup>5</sup> **Linking CSE to the context and ensuring buy-in will help prevent backlash and opposition and can support programme sustainability and scale up.** Plan International 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.
- In **Laos**, child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFMU) and school dropout were cited as entry points for CSE.
- In **Zimbabwe**, adolescent pregnancy, STIs, and the need to reach underserved populations informed programme objectives.

It was noted that contexts and understandings of needs change over time, for example during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**In all three countries, Plan International has developed Memoranda of Understanding with relevant Ministries including Ministries of Education and Health to support their CSE programming and influencing work.**

CSE 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. Research suggest that when recruiting CSE educators and facilitators, ideal profiles include<sup>6</sup>:

- expertise in sexual health and trained in sexuality and relationships education,
- confident, unembarrassed, straightforward, approachable,
- experienced in 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.

<sup>5</sup> ShareNet Netherlands (2021); External experts (EO5, EO8, EO10).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

Similarly, the creation of CSE content and materials is important. In Laos, a **human-centred design 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.

All three countries have used digital tools for educator/ facilitator training and with young people themselves, due to Covid-19 restrictions. Study participants in all countries noted that online approaches are not always possible, and there is still a digital gap in many programme areas and experienced by many young people. This 'digital divide' can further exclude young people's access to CSE.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop programme objectives that align with national objectives and can serve as entry points for CSE.
- Facilitate and support input from key stakeholders during the planning and design stage.
- Provide feedback to consultation participants, especially adolescents and young people, about how their participation influenced programme design.
- Invest in values clarification training for educators, facilitators and staff and monitor CSE delivery to ensure they convey the agreed messages, values and perspectives, aligned with Plan's CSE standards.
- Ensure that any resources developed address and correct local myths and misconceptions, as well as building on local knowledge and perspectives.



### 3. IMPLEMENTATION / DELIVERY

Implementation and delivery focus on the activities and interventions for CSE. This is the “how” to do CSE which has increasingly seen digital CSE emerging as a new theme and an increased focus on how to support educators and learners alike.

The methodology of teaching is as important as content.<sup>7</sup> To encourage the implementation of participatory methodologies in the sessions, educators and facilitators must receive training in group dynamics, facilitation techniques, and approaches such as use of demonstrations, brainstorming, group discussion, cooperative learning, role-plays and independent study and consider using different media and storytelling. Plan International has experience in this.

*“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.”*

Plan International El Salvador.



According to a UNESCO evidence review on CSE implementation, most effective school-based interventions involve multiple sessions, are interactive, and provide a variety of activities.<sup>8</sup>

CSE programmes can only be delivered if organisations have a well-trained and supported group of teachers, educators and facilitators that renews periodically<sup>9</sup>:

*“Significant investments have been made for the in-service training for teachers over the past three years, however CSE is new for the schools. Therefore there is a need to invest in refresher programmes for schools.”*

Plan International Zimbabwe.

Plan International staff noted that training was conducted but it was not always completed comprehensively. A few mentioned that there could be minimum standards for training expectations and diverse ongoing development opportunities for staff and educators / facilitators.

**Online CSE has the potential to expand access to CSE for young people in out-of-school settings.** During the Covid-19 lockdowns, the app developed by Plan International El Salvador – *EISpacial* – included an “online SRHR school” that proved critical to continue supporting young people out-of-school. However, digital CSE is not a silver bullet nor an intervention that replaces in-person CSE. Before jumping on the ‘digital bandwagon,’ Plan International 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, including an assessment of access. Where it is deemed appropriate, consideration should be given to addressing all barriers experienced by marginalised groups in accessing digital networks and the internet.

<sup>7</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 9

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO (2016a). Review of the Evidence on Sexuality Education. Report to inform the update of the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education.

<sup>9</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 8

# SPOTLIGHT:

## CREATING SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Plan International's multi-sectoral approach enables the organisation to focus on creating safe learning environments, where learners feel free to explore sensitive topics freely and openly. This starts with an approach where everyone involved with the programme understands its objectives, is aware of what is being taught and is supportive of the colleagues and programme participants. Training and support should be provided to all involved in the programme – not only those who are directly responsible for CSE delivery.

A whole school approach<sup>10</sup> recognises that schools exist within a community and reflect the values and norms of its members with regard to gender equality and the role, rights and duties of children, adolescents and young people.<sup>11</sup>

CSE needs to **balance safeguarding with respect for young people's evolving capacity and autonomy**. Learners need safe spaces where they can express themselves freely. Staff need to recognise local, contextual factors and acknowledge young people as sexual beings.

In all three countries, study participants felt that school environments make CSE learning environments safe. This was related to the structure of schools and teacher training and preparedness to address discriminatory speech, harassment and bullying. Safeguarding practices are also 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."*

Plan International El Salvador.

Plan International staff emphasise that consent agreements and facilitation methodologies must make the privacy and confidentiality terms clear. For example, learners must be aware that any personal information discussed in the sessions will not be shared outside the group. Likewise, all participants should be aware that information that threatens the personal safety of others must be communicated to competent authorities with the utmost care to protect personal identities. Robust protocols are in place.

Alongside positive CSE messages, we need to understand "trauma-informed approaches"<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, trauma-focused interventions often neglect the prospects for positive

<sup>10</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 11

<sup>11</sup> 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>

<sup>12</sup> "Trauma-informed approaches" take into account the children who are actually traumatised or suffer from PTSD, but it is important to acknowledge that not all individuals who experience harmful events and stressful ordeals will need trauma-therapy or specialised mental health care.

<sup>13</sup> 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>

and nurturing sexuality-related experiences and relationships among children, adolescents and young people who have experienced abuse.

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<sup>14</sup>.

Some study participants felt that support for educators and facilitators does go beyond the curriculum and extends to areas such as self-care and conflict resolution strategies and skills. Educators and facilitators need outlets to strengthen their own mental health and resilience and to discuss concerns with others, including their peers.

An important part of creating a safe environment is providing linkages to other health services, particularly, SRHR<sup>15</sup>. This practice was observed in all three countries. Similarly, children, adolescents and young people need a direct contact to report violence or abuse and to seek counselling.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote a whole-school approach to safety and safeguarding in schools.
- Balance safeguarding with autonomy and evolving capacity to create spaces where learners can express themselves, strengthen their decision making and life skills.
- Prepare educators/facilitators to resolve conflicts and address discriminatory speech or behaviours in the moment.
- Address specific details relating to privacy and confidentiality in educators'/facilitators' training.
- Make informed consent a consistent practice within CSE activities.
- Include “trauma-informed” approaches to CSE.
- Do not discount the utility of traditional audio-visual materials to deliver or reinforce aspects of CSE delivery.

<sup>14</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 7

<sup>15</sup> Plan International CSE Standard 13

## 4. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

Monitoring, evaluation, and research is vital to ensure that programme and influencing work is effective and of appropriate quality that is aligned to international standards. It also provides important learning for the institution to continue to strengthen its work on CSE. Monitoring and evaluation takes place throughout all stages of the programme cycle.

There is a need to better document and measure CSE implemented. 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. In addition to traditional output measures, there is a desire 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, there is a specific tool to measure the implementation of their family education methodology for CSE. **Plan International Laos** uses assessment forms that are completed by learners, educators/facilitators and principals, as well as questionnaires in **Ombea** to assess learners' knowledge. In **Plan International Zimbabwe**, the linkages between CSE and access to SRHR services for young people is being monitored through referral forms, and young people are providing feedback on the usefulness of each CSE session.<sup>16</sup> The table below provides examples of some of the methods commonly used within country offices and by other external organisations participating in this study.

### EXAMPLES OF METHODS USED FOR MONITORING AND/OR EVALUATING CSE PROGRAMMING

El Salvador	Laos	Zimbabwe
Pre/post-tests for learners	Interview forms for learners, school principals and educators/facilitators	Baseline survey
'Monitoreo de contenidos y competencias EIS desarrolladas en el aula' tool	Questionnaire for learners to assess knowledge levels	Midterm evaluation
	Forms to monitor increases in SRHR service utilisation	"Positive deviance" research
	Activity trackers	In-classroom observations
	Monitoring reports	Attendance registers
	Expenditure reports	
	MoES checklist for CSE monitoring	

<sup>16</sup> Programme discovery tool, Zimbabwe.

Study participants in the three countries expressed a belief that **there is inherent value in institutional learning processes**. They are keen to share this learning 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 challenging situations with learners; several expressed this as a need. However, 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 integrated into existing processes, rather than create new, time-consuming activities that place extra burden on staff members. Operationally, learning within CSE programmes could be incorporated into established meetings: during management meetings or teacher council meetings, as is currently being done in El Salvador, Laos and Zimbabwe country offices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide the space and resources to test out innovative CSE indicators and tools.
- Invest in documenting CSE programmatic operations and processes.
- Invest in more qualitative measurements that centre around the perspectives of young learners, as well as educators/facilitators, principals, community leaders and parents/caregivers.
- Engage young people in monitoring, evaluation and research as partners and invest accordingly in their training.



## 5. SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE-UP

There is no one model for sustainability, and country offices should continue to have the flexibility to define this as they see fit within their contexts and in response to geopolitical, legal, financial and other environmental changes that affect programming. 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.”<sup>17</sup>

Planning for scale-up must start early.

Across countries and organisations, **study participants agree that government involvement in CSE is a key factor in its sustainability**. Two ways that government support is desired are: 1) integrating CSE into the national curriculum, which ensures it is built into school timetables; and 2) delivering pre-service teacher training on CSE, which ensures that all educational facilities are equipped with the human resources needed for CSE.

Many believed that programmes can only be sustainable if they are taken on by the government. Some study participants suggested working with Ministries of Youth, Gender, and Social Development in order to develop sustainable out-of-school CSE programming.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt a flexible definition of sustainability for CSE programming, relevant to each context.
- Advocate for the integration of CSE into national curricula and pre-service training of teachers.
- Research and develop sustainability models for out-of-school CSE programming.
- Document examples of scaled-up models of NGO-led CSE programmes.



<sup>17</sup> ExpandNet (no date). Our definition of scaling-up. Available at: <https://expandnet.net/scaling-up-definition/>

# CONCLUSIONS

The research highlights that there are extensive and diverse examples of CSE programming in the three participating Plan International country offices. While their experience and practices are diverse, there are striking commonalities that build on Plan International's CSE standards:

- There is **not one CSE model**: context is crucial.
- The **participation of, and the accountability to young people** for whom CSE programmes are so vital, underpins their success. This requires a shift in emphasis to ensure that programmes become primarily accountable to young people – rather than parents, teachers or experts. They must be at the centre of programme and project design; must be involved throughout the process; and should reflect young people in all their diversity, including those who are often marginalised and /or excluded.
- **Partnerships** – buy-in from all levels of society from parents to governments is crucial to ensure effectiveness, funding and sustainability. They should include youth and community organisations that reach out to marginalised groups, as well as schools and government ministries. Conducting a comprehensive mapping exercise will help to identify potential partners. Within Plan International, it is important to engage with and seek support from a range of colleagues, including those working on gender, child protection – in addition to SRHR and education in order to consolidate, strengthen and expand CSE approaches. Partnerships need maintaining throughout the process.
- **Ongoing support for educators and facilitators** is crucial, as is the safeguarding of all participants in all spaces. Safeguarding must be balanced with young people's evolving capacity to make informed decisions. Educators must be trained in CSE methodologies as well as the core content. Investing in values and attitude training for staff and partners promotes self-reflection and learning and helps to ensure an evidence-informed and rights-based approach to CSE.
- **Make use of digital tools and spaces** to complement in-person CSE.
- **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 young people and marginalised groups is often underestimated; as is time spent building and maintaining partnerships to ensure sustainability.
- **Share learning** - CSE practitioners must find time and space to do this, including sharing what does not work, to strengthen organisational learning and practice.

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 context assessment and planning and design of a programme are critical** but will not bring to light all the potential challenges that will arise throughout a programme. 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.

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Readers are requested to take a moment to pause and honour the memory of Nilda Pineda Rios, the El Salvador in-country researcher. Nilda passed away suddenly in September 2021 during the research period. She was a well-known, fierce, feminist activist in her country and region. She will always be remembered by the members of this research team but, beyond that, by the movement for human rights in El Salvador. This report is dedicated to her, with the hope that the young people of El Salvador will see her life's work bear fruit.

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