



ADDRESSING INEQUALITY THROUGH EU DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION¹

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes the reduction of inequality one of the key goals to be achieved by the international community by 2030. In particular, the Agenda includes a specific goal, SDG 10, which is about “Reducing inequality within and among countries”. Beyond SDG 10, inequality permeates throughout the entire 2030 Agenda, as a key underlying principle of the Agenda is the commitment to “leave no one behind”.

The new European Consensus on Development puts eradicating poverty, tackling discriminations and inequalities and leaving no one behind at the heart of the development cooperation policy of the European Union. It calls on the EU and its Member States to “act to reduce inequality of outcomes and promote equal opportunities for all, directly assist the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society and to promote more inclusive, sustainable growth”. The Consensus also calls on the EU and its Member States to “assess the determinants of and trends in economic and social inequalities and to strengthen their tools and approaches to make them more effective in addressing inequality”, as well as to “mainstream the reduction of inequality in their development cooperation and support innovative social practices”.

The EU is already working with its partner countries to tackle the drivers of inequality, for instance through initiatives promoting social protection and decent work, strengthening education systems to ensure they provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all, promoting inclusive and universal health coverage, and in many other areas of intervention. However, in light of the commitments taken in the Consensus and on strong evidence that high levels of inequality are an obstacle to sustainable development, the EU recognises that the reduction of inequality needs to be integrated more strongly and systematically in EU development cooperation going forward.

In this context, the Commission is currently preparing a Staff Working Document with the following objectives: (i) analysing how inequality hampers the objectives of EU development cooperation; (ii) taking stock of existing work within the framework of EU development cooperation in areas that are related to drivers of inequality in partner countries; and (iii) identifying opportunities to improve the impact of our interventions, through the systematic integration of inequality in our development cooperation, in existing tools, approaches and delivery modalities.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S VIEWS ON HOW THE EU APPROACHES INEQUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND EXTERNAL ACTION. IS IT SUFFICIENTLY PRIORITISED?

Inequality should be addressed in its broadest sense: it does not only concern income inequality but may touch on every part of a person's life. Today, we are witnessing billions of people facing deplorable inequalities of opportunities, choices, resources, security, freedom and power, with women and girls being particularly affected. Girls and women face social, economic and political marginalisation and, owing to harmful social and gendered norms, they are also confronted with violence and discrimination.

Plan International acknowledges and appreciates that **EU development cooperation is contributing to fighting gender inequality**, even if not always framed as such – for example through support to public education, projects to tackle discrimination, an emphasis on women's rights, women's access to land, etc. The **European Consensus on Development** (hereafter, the Consensus) represents an important step forward, in its acknowledgement that inequality is a root cause of poverty, conflict, fragility, forced displacement and migration (paras 64 & 71). It also pays considerable attention to gender inequality. However, a lot remains to be done to implement the Consensus in a consistent manner. In addition, the EU adopted a revised **Gender Action Plan (2016-2020)**, which touches on many of the key concerns girls and women face. However, as the EU's own recent evaluation of its implementation of the GAP II shows, the EU is not always meeting its own targets, while a large proportion of EU development cooperation fails entirely to address inequality.

Within DG DEVCO, there are considerable differences in how the various units of the Directorate take inequalities into consideration – for example in uses of funding instruments and ODA. EU Trust Funds and the External Investment Plan are important modalities where gender inequality – and inequalities in general – are insufficiently addressed. Nevertheless, how the EU approaches inequalities in other external policy areas, such as trade and investment or EU foreign and security policy, is quite different to how this is done in development cooperation, since the former often serve to exacerbate inequalities, not reduce them.

¹ This publication is based on Plan International EU Office's responses to the European Commission's stakeholder consultation on the joint synthesis report in October 2018.

OUR ASSESSMENT OF HOW INEQUALITY HAMPERS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE EU'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OBJECTIVES

There is ample evidence that inequalities not only undermine efforts to realise human rights, address poverty and to achieve sustainable progress at a national level, but also increase social tensions and can lead to political instability. One of the main inequalities which must be addressed is **gender inequality**, which affects half the world's population. On current rates of progress, it will take 100 years to close the gaps between men and women and boys and girls.

Inequalities are interlinked. Some of these linkages are well-known and considerably written about, such as those between education, health and livelihoods. However, one particular form - namely inequality in the distribution of wealth - fuels many others. Economic inequality particularly translates into reduced access to resources, but also – and often overlooked – to reduced access to decision-making processes for people living in poverty. Much more needs to be done to address the capture of power (economic, social, and political) by wealthy elites. For this reason the EU should **support open governance and democratisation processes and strengthen civic participation and local civil society organisations**, with a focus on ensuring that girls and women can participate in decision-making which concerns them, at all levels.

HOW OUR EU FUNDED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OR PROGRAMMES SUCCESSFULLY TACKLE INEQUALITY IN ALL ITS FORMS IN EU PARTNER COUNTRIES

Plan International has many projects and programmes which are focusing on gender equality around the world. We are still gathering feedback in terms of the impact of those that are funded by the EU. We would be happy to share this information subsequently if that could be helpful. Of particular note, in terms of real impact for girls and women are our programmes called 'Champions of Change' and 'Safer Cities'². Champions of Change focuses on addressing harmful social and gender norms and working with girls and young women to develop their leadership skills, while Safer Cities aims to make cities more sustainable, secure and accessible for girls and young women through a combination of advocacy and awareness-raising with and by the girls and young women themselves towards decision-makers.

The success of these programmes comes at least in part from the fact that they operate at three levels of change, beginning with the individual, expanding to the family and community and working up to the local authority, municipal or government level. They promote social norm change in four ways: empowering girls; engaging boys; ensuring peer-to-peer dialogue and mobilisation; and supporting intergenerational dialogue. We work with girls to build their agency and to support them in acquiring leadership skills and assets. And this is put into practice directly by programmes such as Safer Cities, which also address the harassment and violence that girls and women often face in urban areas.

Lastly, the fact of working with the boys and girls themselves to make the change ensures that such change is more sustainable. Plan International is creating youth-led social movements which will transform unequal power relations between girls and boys and women and men, thereby contributing to achieving gender equality.

HOW EU DEVELOPMENT CAN BE IMPROVED TO MORE SYSTEMATICALLY AND EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS INEQUALITY IN PARTNER COUNTRIES. HOW OUR EU FUNDED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES CAN BE IMPROVED AND WHICH OTHER RELEVANT AREAS IN EU-DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION COULD CONTRIBUTE TO REDUCING INEQUALITY

First and foremost, the EU must apply a **human-rights based approach** to all its policies and programmes, and not only in development cooperation since many other EU policies also impact on sustainable development in EU partner countries. This includes recognising the link between discrimination and inequality, as it is most commonly discriminatory norms and attitudes which underpin inequality. Ex-ante impact assessments must thoroughly address human rights and their results should be duly taken into consideration, whether through mitigation, remediation or a change of approach.

² For more information on these programmes, please see: <https://plan-international.org/youth-activism/champions-change>; <https://plan-international.org/ending-violence/safer-cities-girls>

Secondly, the EU will not be able to ensure that it 'leaves no one behind' unless it puts a specific focus on marginalised and excluded people in every policy, programme and action it is responsible for and until intersectionalities are addressed. Clearly, key here is a focus on girls and women. The gender inequality facing a girl is multiplied if that girl lives in a rural area, has a disability or is from a minority, for example. In each instance, a detailed analysis is needed to ensure that the factors impinging on equality are truly addressed.

It is crucial to look at whether **power imbalances could be exacerbated by a project** and to make sure that support goes to those with the least power in order to right the balance. For example, in light of the MFF negotiations, it is crucial that the **EU adopts a gender-responsive budget** to ensure that money is spent in a way that will impact positively on women and girls. Systematic gender analysis, gender-sensitive planning and allocation of funds, including gender budgeting, should be promoted going forwards.

Thirdly, the EU should invest more in collecting disaggregated data and in supporting partner countries to do likewise. Otherwise it is impossible to know whether the results of one's policies are reaching the furthest behind. Gender and age are key categories for which the EU must collect data.

In terms of concrete areas that the EU should engage more, in order **to support gender equality in partner countries, Plan International would once again emphasise the need to work on social and gender norms.** Gender discrimination and socialisation start early and continue throughout a person's lifetime. During early childhood, all children develop a sense of self-worth, identity and belonging. They learn gendered attitudes and expectations about how girls, women, boys, and men should behave, and about their value and role within society. Gender norms and expectations shared by families and communities drive this socialisation process, which continues throughout childhood and adolescence. It shapes the way that girls and boys are treated and their expectations for the future. These gender norms are limiting for all children, but particularly limiting for girls, and can lead to significant inequalities. Solutions should engage different actors that shape children's lives including parents, caregivers, educators, community representatives, government officials, religious leaders, the media and other children.

OUR SUGGESTIONS TO THE EU BASED ON OUR WORK ON REDUCING INEQUALITY IN DEVELOPMENT COUNTRIES

Gender inequality and exclusion vary in their expression from place to place but, in all countries where Plan International works, we encounter different forms of gender-based discrimination, gender stereotyping and an unequal distribution of power between women, men, girls and boys, and other genders³, as well as exclusion based on multiple factors. These factors include identities such as race, class, ethnicity, ability, language, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among others. We recognise that individuals have multiple identities that shape their experiences. For this reason, we believe that work on **tackling gender inequality can be strengthened by examining how these identities intersect.**

One expression of gender inequality to which we have not yet referred and which holds girls and women back in many other aspects, such as their economic and political empowerment, is their unequal share of unpaid care work. Not only does this hold girls and women back, but it also holds countries back in their sustainable development. Such gender inequality is exacerbated when essential public services are unavailable or inaccessible, as women often compensate for the lack of public services by increasing their own unpaid workload.

The EU, through its development cooperation, could support countries more in their domestic resource mobilisation, especially as regards fiscal policy and the taxation system, to raise much needed revenue for such public services. Furthermore, partner countries should be persuaded to focus on progressive taxes in order to ensure that women (and men) living in poverty are not disproportionately impacted by national tax policies.

³ We recognise that many individuals identify as male or as female. We also recognise that gender is not binary, and includes a continuum of possibilities. To facilitate ease of reading here we refer to women, men, girls, and boys throughout. This does not in any way diminish our commitment to and work with individuals with other gender identities.