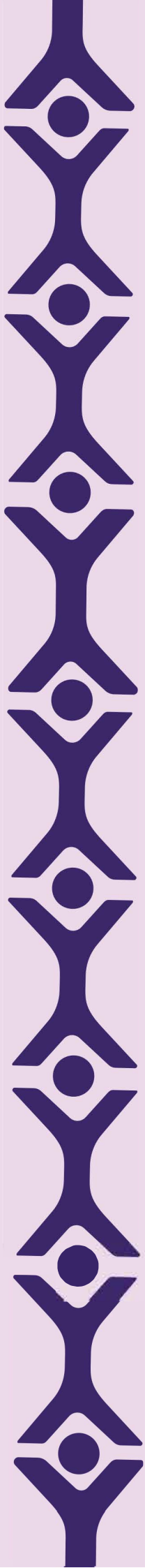




**YOUTH CHALLENGE FUND:
REVISED MODEL FOR
INCREASED IMPACT,
INFLUENCE AND FLEXIBILITY**



LEARNING PROCESS AND KEY FINDINGS

The YCF pilot in 2020-2021 provided over 100,000 euros to 23 groups in 9 WACA countries, reaching over 19,000 and community members and over 100,000 people with social media. Primarily framed as a youth-led response to Covid-19, projects focused on a variety of topics linked to fighting the pandemic.

















In August 2021, Plan International established a facilitated learning process to ensure that the YCF aligns with its foundational principles and reflects the needs and interests of youth activists. Based on this people-centered, youth activist driven learning process, key components of the Youth Challenge Fund were re-visioned and ‘prototyped’ by youth activists themselves. Additional input was given from Plan International Country Office staff and executive and technical level staff. Models and approaches from other Plan International regions (like Equality Accelerator) were also considered.

The focus of the learning process was on proposing specific ways that Plan International could better align the implementation of the YCF with the principles at its foundation.

Some keys findings of this learning process include the following:

- All people interviewed (including grantees, focal points and Plan International strategic team) mentioned that the project duration was too short and should be increased
- All people interviewed also noted that the grant amount should be increased and that Plan International should consider a longer-term engagement with youth activists for ensuring sustainable growth and scaling of their organizations. Youth activists specifically added a proposed funding range between 7,000 – 10,000 while focal points mentioned a 3-year funding mechanism with an evaluation after each year to select groups that will be refunded.
- Focal points, in particular, felt that the non-financial support should be provided based on an initial needs assessment, should be standardized across countries, and Plan International training and support materials should be developed and adopted specifically for this purpose.
- Additional support to mainstream gender, protection and safeguarding was requested by activists to professionalize their activities and ensure the quality of their efforts.
- Grantees noted that the application should include more information including the grant amount, the timeline of the selection process and length of implementation – in general that the application process should be more transparent and clear
- The focus group with the Plan International strategic team noted that administrative and financial procedures should be more flexible. In line with this, youth activists and focal points mentioned that the pilot was not as flexible as expected and some procedures should be reviewed to align with youth activists’ realities. Some flexibility aspects include:

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- The number of proforma requested to be reduced or eliminated as suggested by focal points and to align with the Equality Accelerator process
- Grantees and focal points noted that YCF groups were expected to report as if they were senior professionals. Reporting requirements were not clearly explained at start-up and the Equality Accelerator provides a less complicated model and format for reporting.
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements were significant, and grantees mentioned that they had to respond to many questionnaires and felt that the same questions were asked multiple times. Again aligning to the Equality Accelerator model, where data is standardized and reported once, complimented by one qualitative data collection process.

THE REVISED YOUTH CHALLENGE FUND MODEL

The revised model maintains that the Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) is an inclusive, competitive, flexible and participatory fund for girls and youth led groups (15-30) to strengthen their organizations, to ensure they continue to flourish and are able to respond to needs in their communities. It also maintains the foundational principles of the approach, while proposing new elements that allows for greater and more meaningful alignment, specifically related to flexibility, reporting and ownership:

- **Ownership:** the YCF call girls/young people to drive the initiative and lead the selection process and the YCF network.
- **Respect:** the YCF will respect that girl and youth-led groups know best about what they need to survive and flourish. Plan International will be a flexible partner and will adapt our own procedures to their realities as is needed.
- **Gender transformative:** the YCF will fund groups and organizations that align with Plan International in terms of transforming gender inequality. An intersectional gender and inclusion lens must be evident.
- **Boldness:** the YCF speaks girls and youth language, is designed for creative and non-conventional projects and challenge status quo in meaningfully engaging youth through its model, principles, procedures and mechanism.
- **Empowerment:** the YCF will encourage girls/youth to design creative local solutions to change the outcomes for the most vulnerable.
- **Influence:** with a huge scale up potential, the YCF showcases inspirational girls/young role models to leverage partnerships and resources.

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- **Flexibility:** it not just for funding projects, but a mechanism enabling to strengthen their groups and organizations and ensuring they survive this crisis. Adapt internal mechanism to fit the YCF modalities and model.
- **Reporting:** it should be light and youth friendly.

Key reasons to scale the YCF include:

- Opportunity to reach youth directly and create impact especially with grassroots autonomous youth and girls-led groups located in both urban and rural areas
- Amplification of girls and youth-led solutions / actions to support localized, responsive and inclusive programming
- Increasing opportunities for funding of youth-led initiatives as youth activism and engagement grows in the WACA region
- Opportunity to raise youth voices, create influence, and generate long-term peer-to-peer support
- Possibility of catalyzing transformative change on gender and protection, with youth-led groups
- Leveraging Plan International’s position as a leader in the field of meaningful funding of youth-led initiatives, with a focus on establishing networks and encouraging scaling and sustainability of youth-led groups. This can be done through advocacy toward public, private and multilateral donors, using Plan International’s strong relationships with these donors, for more flexible funding procedures that will ensure access to funding for youth led organizations
- Providing an adapted funding mechanism with proven alignment in terms of flexible administrative and financial procedures that responds to youth’s realities

KEY CHANGES

Based on feedback from youth activists and Plan International focal points, the steps within the model were revised, as well as the content of some of the steps.

STEPS	INITIAL YCF PILOT MODEL	PROPOSED REVISED YCF MODEL
Discovery	YES	YES
Application	YES	YES

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STEPS	INITIAL YCF PILOT MODEL	PROPOSED REVISED YCF MODEL
Decision-Making	YES	YES
Due Diligence	YES	YES – due diligence combined with risk assessment for a more streamlined approach, following Equality Accelerator
Risk Assessment	YES	
Signing Agreements	YES	YES – Signing agreements and fund disbursements combined for a more streamlined approach, following Equality Accelerator
Fund Disbursement	YES	
Start-Up	NO	YES – includes the new steps of “Kick-Off,” “Training” and “Capacity Assessment”
Implementation	NO	YES – includes the existing steps of “Reporting,” “Learning” and the new steps “Networking” and “Non-Financial Support”
Reporting	YES	YES – included in “implementation stage.” Networking has been added to learning
Learning	YES	
Close Out	NO	YES – provides for final financial and activity reporting

In this revised model, there are recommended revisions and additions to specific steps in **italic bold text**. Additionally, new steps have been added, these are indicated as “new step.” While some “new steps” encompass parts of the pilot model, like non-financial support, these were developed into deliberate steps in the new model.

One of the key changes to the model is to describe “Phases” instead of steps. The following phases of the revised model are:

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PHASE	STEPS	TIMING
Application and Selection Month 1 & 2	1. Discovery	3 weeks
	2. Application	
	3. Decision-Making	3 weeks
	4. Due Diligence and Risk Assessment	2 weeks
	5. Signing Agreements and Fund Disbursement	
Start-Up Month 3	6. Kick-Off Meeting	1 month
	7. Training on Reporting	
	8. Capacity Assessment	
Implementation Months 4-9	9. Reporting	6 months
	10. Learning and Networking	
	11. Non-Financial Support	
	12. Activities	
Close-Out Month 10	13. Final Reporting	1 month
	14. Close out activities	
Internal Plan International reporting, learning and planning Month 11 & 12		2 months

Activists proposed lengthening the project period from three months to 12 months, with 2 months for start-up, 8 months for implementation and capacity building, and 2 months for close-down and reporting. Activists felt a specific start-up period is important to give groups the time to learn and understand Plan International’s expectations and requirements and get to know each other. They also reported feeling intense pressure that was not aligned with the idea of ‘flexibility’ or their ways of working. A clear close-down phase allows groups the time to report, but also to document learning and impact.

However, given Plan International’s internal requirements and the preference to align with Plan

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International’s fiscal year, a shorter project period (during which direct engagement with youth activists occur) was required. **Therefore, AEI proposes two months for application and selection (which is aligned with Equality Accelerator timing), 1 month for start-up, 6 months for implementation, and 1 month for close-out. This allows two months for internal Plan International reporting, learning and planning.** Illustrative timing is provided in the table above.

The revised model presented in this document places greater emphasis on 1) achieving impact through scale 2) ensuring sustainability and increased organizational and technical capacity through longer term support and 3) a greater focus on fostering influence and peer-to-peer networking and support. As a result, three new concepts are included in this model:

- Three-tiered funding approach
- Youth Laureates and
- Youth network

The need for a network and the need for peer-to-peer coaching were top priorities for youth activists.

THREE-TIERED FUNDING APPROACH

In response to both youth activist and focal point feedback, we are recommending a three-tiered funding approach, which provides groups the opportunity to receive up to three rounds of funding of increasing size, each implemented over a year. The funds could be requested do not have to be requested back-to-back, rather the group can apply for them as needed over time. The objective in providing more resources to the same groups over time is to help support their scaling and sustainability, as they will receive not only financial support but a compliment of non-financial support each time. The non-financial support is critical here, as groups grow and change they will need different kinds of support over time. Therefore, this three-tiered funding approach allows for more financial support while also facilitating greater access to the necessary organizational and technical support that youth activists need to grow, strengthen and scale for greater impact. The three tiers of funding, available to the same organization at three different moments in time, are:

- Proof of Concept: 5,000 Euro per group
- Scaling: 7,000 Euro per group
- Laureate: 10,000 Euro per group

Not all groups that receive Proof of Concept funding will receive Scaling or Laureate Funding. To be eligible for Scaling and Laureate, Proof of Concept grantees will need to demonstrate impact, communicate their success and provide on-time financial and activity reporting. The Scaling application will require applicants to demonstrate how their proposed project will help the organiza-

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tion achieve scale, and the Laureate application will require applicants to demonstrate how their proposed project will help them achieve sustainability. Scaling grantees who apply for Laureate funding will be assessed on whether or not they reached scale as a key criteria for their Laureate application to be considered.

In addition, one possibility to consider is that at the Laureate stage, groups are required to provide a certain amount of “match” – perhaps 500 to 1,000 Euro – to demonstrate a necessary level of independence, scale and fundraising/resource mobilization capacity. **It is important to note that youth activists felt that it was important, within a round, for each group to be eligible for – and receive – the same amount.**

YOUTH LAUREATES

Youth groups successfully completing three funding rounds with a demonstrable level of capacity and scale become YCF Laureates. They will provide mentoring and coaching to current YCF grantees on reporting, communication and a variety of other areas of technical support. In addition to mentoring and coaching, YCF Laureates could be engaged – depending on their skill set – to provide some of the capacity building support, for which Plan International could identify potential motivations (for example, exchange trips). New grantees can be assigned coach/mentor organization from the same country ideally to ensure proximity and effective communication, but it can also be considered to assign coach/mentor from different countries depending on each group’s thematic focus. An advantage of involving previous grantees in coaching and mentoring new grantees is the practical experience sharing opportunity among groups in the form of peer-to-peer learning. Also, previous grantees can act as a source of inspiration to new ones, guiding them through the process, answering questions and helping create a transparent process.

Youth Laureates can be compensated in different ways, for example, by being eligible for scholarships to attend workshops or conferences; through exchange opportunities; or by benefitting from training or other opportunities. Plan International should also consider some level of compensation for Laureates, especially as they take on more important roles with greater impact. Compensation levels could be established with past grantees as a way to establish transparency and equity.

YOUTH NETWORK

The YCF Network brings together current and past grantees in an online portal for influence, advocacy, voice-raising and learning opportunities. The portal could incorporate ideas from the pilot like a YCF Library and peer-to-peer learning space which were not fully operationalized. In the case of peer-to-peer learning, activists felt that Plan International could have done more to facilitate learning or exchange, including face to face opportunities like meetings and conferences. Clear, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Plan International’s ability to bring together youth activists. AEI recommends that in addition to some face to face opportunities, Plan International engages youth – especially those who become Laureates – to provide non-financial support and overall support to

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new groups during the YCF, while also working with them to network and influence.

The Youth Challenge Fund provides a unique opportunity for Plan International West Africa and Central Africa to catalyze, elevate and network youth power for greater impact, while also supporting movement creation in the region. Likewise, Plan International WACA can federate its efforts with other Plan International initiatives like Equality Accelerator, focused in South America. The international, multi-regional nature of Plan International provides a strategic opportunity to federate youth activists across regions and countries.

THE REVISED MODEL

PHASE 1: APPLICATION AND SELECTION

Step 1: Discover

Activists recommended aligning the age limit in the selection criteria to the definition of youth provided by the African Youth Charter: 12 to 35 years old. They also felt Plan International country offices could better disseminate information through their local implementing partners and should clearly present the funding level and implementation period. Note: Plan International decided to keep the age criteria at 10-30.

The eligibility criteria remain the same with one small, suggested modifications: the YCF model is inclusive of all girl-led and youth-led groups ages 10-30: small, registered or non-registered, without digital skills, in rural or **urban** communities.

- Call for application with clear information about the fund, the flexibility, the eligibility criteria, the thematic interests and ways to apply, sent via email, social media, partners of national offices and peer groups
- Discovery sessions on social medias in French, Portuguese and English with Q&A
- Visuals to support outreach and explain the application process

Step 2: Application

- The application step remains the same, except slightly modified applications would be required to take into consideration the different rounds of funding (**proof of concept, scaling, laureate**)
- Online application for each round of funding
- Application form in Word and online in French, English and Portuguese

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- Applicants received an automated notification after submission of their form via email or from MS
- Download all applications in excel, added the word applications manually, and sort them by age, country, thematic and category (girl led, youth led)
- This phase needs direct support and involvement at Plan International country levels to manage high number of applications

Step 3: Decision-Making

The YCF selection is designed to be fair, based on the quality of ideas, potential of impact, and ability to reach the most vulnerable, using gender/responsive or transformative approaches and ensuring child protection.

Plan International strategic team recommended more involvement of national offices in all processes adding that more time should be planned for managing the high number of applications. Activists proposed the following re-think to the selection process:

- ***In-country panel of 2 Plan International staff and 3 YCF laureates (or previous grantees unless there is a pool of laureates) provides initial pre-selection of predetermined number (5,10, etc)***
- ***Pre-selected groups sent to WACA selection committee. Plan International should also include laureates on the WACA selection committee***
- ***WACA committee selects grantees based on availability funding per round, keeping in mind geographic distribution and different funding rounds***

Note: Plan International used a structured tool to manage the selection process, with clear categories, scoring criteria, and cumulative scores. In addition, AEI would recommend tracking each scorer’s scoring, and then calculating an average, indicating the names of the scorer for transparency. In addition, AEI would recommend that Plan International consider publishing or presenting the results of the selection process for maximum transparency.

Step 4: Due Diligence/Risk Assessment

Revised step: It is recommended that Due Diligence and Risk Assessment are combined into a single step to create a more streamlined process.

Due Diligence should be carried out after preselection by the WACA selection panel to inform the final selection decision. The below process comes from Equality Accelerator:

- ***Social media check***

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- *Criminal record*
- *Check age, nationality, consent, registration / not*
- *Church or government affiliation / sponsorship*
- *Leadership (girls, women, youth) and alignment with Plan International's vision*
- *Reference calls*
- *Budget submission and review*
- *Documentation review*
- *Selection of disbursement modality*

Step 5: Signing Agreements and Fund Disbursement

Once due diligence completed along with budget review, grantee is considered approved. The process below comes from the Equality Accelerator. Adapting this process is important as youth activists did not feel YCF was flexible.

Note: Signing agreements step was combined under here.

- **MOU/Agreement signed**
- **2 disbursements**
- **No proforma need to be approved, budget is flexible to use as long as related to project. Grantee must keep a clear record of expenses including any loss of funds or fraud. Any fraud must be reported.**
- **Receipts and invoices should be kept for any expenses over 30 euro, and receipts can be requested at any time by Plan International.**
- **Twice over the funding cycle groups had to report on their progress. The second disbursement is dependent on the first report. Recommend at month 6 and month 9.**

The current YCF MOU should be compared against the Equality Accelerator MOU and adapted as needed.

PHASE 2: START-UP

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Step 6: Kick-Off Meeting

Note: this is a new step – in general, youth activists asked that Plan International be much more intentional during the start-up phase to ensure that grantees had time to get to know each other, to understand Plan International’s requirements and expectations. This includes Step 7 which is a training on reporting

Youth activists proposed the idea of a kick-off meeting, once the grantees are selected. The idea of the kick-off meeting is to:

- **Bring everyone up to the same level of information**
- **Introduce grantees to each other and start forming the “network”**
- **Introduce new grantees to “laureates” who will support them**
- **Discuss concepts like protection and gender transformation, and ensure awareness/adherence to Plan International’s safe-guarding policy**
- **Cover tips on communication over social media**
- **Map out the process and calendar for disbursements, reporting, capacity assessments, self-assessments, etc**
- **Set date for training on reporting requirements**

Step 7: Training on Reporting

Note: This is a new step

Youth activists requested, in addition to the kick-off meeting, a specific training on Plan International’s reporting requirements. Youth activists all felt that it is necessary and important to provide all grantees with the same training on expectations regarding reporting. They also ask that expectations reflect the target group, and that Plan International approach reporting as an opportunity for coaching. The training will cover:

- **How to use the budget to guide finances**
- **Financial reporting and requirements**
- **Activity report**
- **Simplified M&E template to collect and disaggregate data, collected at the end (month 10) (to be developed)**

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- Review reporting timeline

Note: see step 5 on disbursement for some of the more flexible financial reporting requirements.

Step 8: Capacity Assessment

Note: This is a new step

Youth activists and Plan International staff both felt that non-financial support should be more structured and more responsive. Therefore, a participatory assessment process is proposed at YCF start-up (tool needed). The assessment will provide the grantees the opportunity to reflect on their needs and also prioritize where they would like support. Potential areas identified are:

- Leadership
- Organizational Management
- Project Management
- Project monitoring and evaluation
- Coaching and mentoring
- Gender equality and inclusion
- Social Entrepreneurship
- Institutional audit
- Strategic plan development
- Financial management systems
- Governance (board selection, training, manuals)
- Proposal writing

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Step 9: Reporting

Simplified, streamlined activity and financial reporting requirements are recommended. Templates

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Three-tiered Funding Approach	7	◆	Step 5: Signing Agreements and Fund Disbursement	11	◆	Step 11: Non-Financial Support	14
Youth Laureates	8	◆	Phase 2: Start-Up	11	◆	Step 12: Activity Implementation	15
Youth Network	8	◆	Step 6: Kick-Off Meeting	12	◆	Phase 4: Close-Out	15
The Revised Model	9	◆	Step 7: Training on Reporting	12	◆	Step 13: M&E reporting	15
Phase 1: Application and Selection	9	◆	Step 8: Capacity Assessment	13	◆	Step 14: Close out activities	15
Step 1: Discover	9	◆					

can be adapted from Equality Accelerator.

Training on Plan International’s reporting requirements is part of Phase 1: Start-Up. AEI proposes that each organization receive two disbursements, with the second disbursement tied to reporting on activity and financial reporting in Month 6.

Step 10: Learning and Networking

Youth activists proposed several different ways for YCF to facilitate learning:

- Create a YCF network, of current and past grantees, to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange
- Activists felt that network is critically important, and an opportunity for groups to come together for influence and advocacy
- A learning library, with online resources as well as access to online courses, would be part of a digital networking platform.
- A kind of scholarship fund could be created to facilitate youth activist participation in events, conferences and exchanges
- Laureates can be appreciated for their mentorship and coaching through opportunities for exchange visits and participation in regional events
- Create voluntary participatory learning events

Networking opportunities – specifically the Youth Network as detailed in the first section of the model – can be combined with learning opportunities. For example, the Laureates provide an opportunity for both peer-to-peer learning and networking and influencing opportunities. Likewise, a digital networking platform can host an online library, webinars and other learning events, while also creating a digital space for youth activists to meet, working together, create advocacy campaigns and influence.

Step 11: Non-Financial Support

Note: This is a new step

Based on the results of the participatory assessment, grantees would, from the areas needing improvement, select three that are top priorities for the group. Then, the grantee would receive a mix of support from Laureates and from Plan International staff. Plan International strategic team as well as focal points noted the need for more involvement of all departments at Plan International national offices, to support youth activists selected for the YCF. Some recommendations for this support include:

BROWSER

Learning Process and Key Findings	2	◆	Step 2: Application	9	◆	Phase 3: Implementation	13
The Revised YCF Model	3	◆	Step 3: Decision-Making	10	◆	Step 9: Reporting	13
Key Changes	4	◆	Step 4: Due Diligence/Risk Assessment	10	◆	Step 10: Learning and Networking	14
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Step 1: Discover	9	◆					

- Plan for and schedule this ‘learning’ and exchange time
- Develop some modules on key principles and approaches for each of the potential non-financial support areas (i.e. Leadership, Governance, Project Management) so that support is consistent across countries and across grantees
- Train Laureates in the different modules and provide them with mentorship internal or external to Plan International. This will provide the Laureates with support, while also giving them continued learning/growth opportunities
- Grantees should self-assess progress in their prioritized areas at month 6 and month 9

Step 12: Activity Implementation

While this is not a new step, the timeline and milestones on the timeline are new (see calendar at beginning). Activity implementation now constitutes a greater portion of the YCF time period with clear start-up and close-out periods.

PHASE 4: CLOSE-OUT

Step 13: M&E reporting

The simplified M&E template (Annex 1) should be used in Month 10, at the close of implementation, with participation in qualitative data collection (interviews, focus group discussions, etc) made optional for youth groups. Inconsistencies in data reported should be reviewed and clarified with groups at the time of reporting.

Step 14: Close out activities

Plan International should encourage youth groups to “close-out” activities if they will not continue after the funding period and document any learning from the experience. This step is also an opportunity for Plan International to hold a closing meeting, and document any learning at their level as well.

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Learning Process and Key Findings	2	◆	Step 2: Application	9	◆	Phase 3: Implementation	13
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About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world for children and young people, working with them and our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls, exclusion and vulnerability.

We support children's rights from when they are born to when they reach adulthood. Using our reach, experience and knowledge, we drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels and enable children and young people to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We have been building powerful partnerships for children for over 80 years, and are active in more than 75 countries.

We are independent of governments, religions and political parties.



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