EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL CHILDREN

Drivers and barriers of change for a just and equitable world

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INTRODUCTION

Plan International is currently developing a new global strategy and making new commitments to help realise child rights by focusing on reducing inequalities experienced by girls and boys – particularly those from excluded groups. This paper aims to help the organisation reach a common understanding of what drives persisting and widening inequalities, what strategies exist to address them and who needs to contribute. Against the backdrop of opportunities arising from the new global Sustainable Development Agenda, the paper also formulates key insights to serve as a compass as we set out to develop a global theory of change and take strategic decisions about our future work.
SECTION 1

Childhood, child rights and their link with inequality

1.1 Who is a child and what does the definition mean for our work?

In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children in most countries are legally defined as human beings under the age of 18. While understanding the legal implications of the CRC definition of a child is important, so is acknowledging that childhood encompasses different stages and ends rarely when one turns 18.

Beyond the legal definition, cultural concepts of childhood and adult beliefs of what girls and boys can’t or shouldn’t do, shape the inequalities that children experience as they grow into adulthood. Children themselves have an acute sense of these factors and the status change that comes for example with age when referring to themselves from adolescence onwards as “teenagers”, “young people”, or “youth”.

Girls’ and boys’ capacities develop throughout and beyond childhood. This development is heavily influenced by those closest to them in different stages of childhood: mothers, fathers and other caregivers, teachers, coaches, peers. It is also enshrined in the CRC under the concept of “a child’s evolving capacities”. Rights-based, child-centred programme work must take this concept into account and be sensitive to these dynamics to effectively help girls and boys transition through the most critical stages of childhood and adolescence, and into full autonomy.

1.2 Child rights are human rights

Human rights enshrine people’s legal entitlements. The CRC acknowledges children’s particular need for protection, their evolving capacities, the responsibilities that parents have and the obligations of states towards girls and boys equally, and towards their families. Human rights are inalienable, indivisible, universal, inter-related and inter-dependent – there is no right that is more important than another.

Together, they should constitute the basis for the development of policies and legal frameworks that effectively combat inequality and protect children of different ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds or physical abilities, from unjust treatment. Equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting principles of international human rights law. The rights of a girl with disabilities, for example, are protected by the Child Rights Convention, the Convention of Persons with Disability, and the Convention of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

1.3 Rights bring obligations and responsibilities

The global human rights framework sets out clear obligations for State Parties to respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights. In addition, the CRC spells out the responsibilities that parents, caregivers and families have with regards to children, and the role the state plays if families are unable to meet these. Ensuring that states meet their obligations and that parents or caregivers are supported and strengthened to fulfil their responsibilities towards girls and boys equally is a critical goal for Plan International as a child-centred and rights-based organisation.

1.4 Child rights and inequalities

Inequality is a threat to the realisation of all human rights. Discrimination based on factors such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, disability, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or another status is a human rights violation. It nullifies or impairs the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms. Discrimination creates inequalities that permeate social relations, structures, institutions and often legal frameworks. It undermines the ability of individuals to enjoy their human rights and participate equitably in society.

Realising children’s rights involves combating all forms of inequalities – social, economic, political and legal. Inequalities can be diverse and multi-faceted. Income inequality, for example, is directly linked to the erosion of human rights such as education, health or other social and economic rights. Poverty is therefore at the same time a cause and a consequence both of denying and failing to realise rights – and of inequalities. The OHCHR’s (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights clearly state that most of those living in poverty are children, and that poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood.
Poverty stems from unequal power relations that result in the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities between girls and boys, women and men; between power holders and excluded groups and communities; and between countries. Poverty renders children – in particular girls – vulnerable to exploitation, neglect and abuse, all of which exacerbate childhood inequality. States must respect and promote the rights of all children. This includes strengthening and allocating the necessary resources to child protection strategies and programmes, with a particular focus on marginalised girls and boys.4

Children experience these multi-faceted inequalities differently from adults, as their needs and abilities are not the same. Household poverty, for example, disproportionately affects children as they do not have power and control over the household’s resources.5 Gender norms and their socialisation processes, coupled with adult beliefs of what children of different ages should and can do, compound inequalities. They can create barriers that prevent girls or boys from transitioning into healthy and productive adulthood. They also reduce their chances to live an equitable life once adult. Other factors, such as disability, can exacerbate these dynamics and determine children’s vulnerability within the household.

Unpacking the multiple factors behind economic and social exclusion and the different barriers to rights faced by excluded girls and boys is fundamental to any effort aiming to achieve equal rights for all children. A broad-brush approach to tackling exclusion by focusing on wide population groups, such as “poor children”, “girls” or “children with disabilities” only, will be insufficient to address inequalities. Putting a gender lens on other forms of inequality and exclusion that children suffer – such as experienced by those with a disability, those living in conflict or in extremely remote settings – is likely to be the most effective way of reaching those furthest behind first. In addition, to ensure greater gender justice, it is vital to highlight the most severe human rights violations of girls, such as female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage or legally enshrined discrimination against girls and women.

SECTION 2

Trends and gaps in realising children’s rights and inequalities

The proportion of people around the world who live in extreme income poverty (on less than US $1.25 a day) has more than halved, falling from 47 per cent to 22 per cent between 1990 and 2010.6 Statistically, children today are far more likely to be healthy and to go to school than ever before. Nonetheless, half of the world’s children are living below the international poverty line of US $2 a day and suffer from multiple deprivations and violations of basic human rights. More than 8 million children die each year from preventable diseases. Hunger, malnutrition and lack of safe drinking water contribute to at least half of child mortality.7

Global statistics can be deceiving as they mask inequalities between people, and within and between households, regions and countries. Global-level statistics do not always reveal the full extent of inequalities occurring among people, households, regions and countries; girls and women in rural areas are still up to three times more likely to die while giving birth than women living in urban centres. Many deaths are the result of inequities and other social conditions, including poverty; harmful stereotypes about gender, ethnicity and age; violence; lack of access to quality education; malnutrition; and disadvantaged geographical location.9

These key indicators below for children’s wellbeing reveal how gender, ability or location contribute to the inequalities experienced by girls and boys along their life course. The figures send a simple message – to reach those children left furthest behind first, it is essential to unpack who is made most vulnerable by various forms of inequality and discrimination.
**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION**

Girls and boys have equal chances of being registered at birth. But those from the richest households are more than twice as likely to be registered as those from the poorest households.\(^{10}\)

Birth registration levels may vary across ethnic groups. This chart shows that a lower percentage of children from families who speak an indigenous language or belong to a minority ethnic group are registered at birth (top bar) compared to children from majority population groups (bottom bar).\(^{11}\)

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**NUTRITION**

In terms of nutrition, 78% of households favour boys, and 22% of households favour girls.\(^ {12}\)

Globally, girls and boys are almost equally likely to be stunted.

But in sub-Saharan Africa stunting afflicts more boys (42%) than girls (36%).\(^ {14}\)

Child malnutrition is more prevalent in fragile and conflict-affected states. The estimated number of conflict-affected residents (172 million) represents 21% of the estimated number of undernourished people (805 million). Conflict is a significant cause of hunger.\(^ {13}\)

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The proportion of stunted children living in low- and lower middle-income countries has increased by 20% since 1990, from 7 in 10 to 9 in 10 (2015).\(^ {15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underweight prevalence</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Ratio of rural to urban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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EARLY CHILDHOOD

PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Global enrolments in pre-primary education have increased by two-thirds since 1999. This reflects significant progress for girls: 70% of countries now demonstrate gender parity in pre-primary enrolments compared to 55% in 1999.

CHILDHOOD

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Of the 124 million children who were out of school in 2013, almost a quarter (28.5 million) were from fragile or conflict-affected states.

The percentage of children who finished primary school in low and middle-income countries rose from 77% in 1999 to 81% in 2008. It is forecast to reach 84% in 2015. This reflects significant progress for girls: 70% of countries now demonstrate gender parity in pre-primary enrolments compared to 55% in 1999.

The gender gap decreased from 29% in 1999 to 13% in 2012, but still 4 million more boys than girls are enrolled in primary school globally.

Of all children attending school in 2011, only 51% of boys with a disability completed primary school compared to 61.3% of boys without a disability, and 42% of girls with a disability completed primary school compared to 52.9% of girls without a disability.
More than one-third of young women in the developing world were married as children.\textsuperscript{23}

9 out of 10 adolescent births occur within marriage or a union.\textsuperscript{25}

95\% of adolescent births occur in low- and middle-income countries.\textsuperscript{27}

There are 7.3 MILLION births to girls under the age of 18 every year in developing countries.

2 MILLION OF THESE ARE TO GIRLS AGED 14 OR YOUNGER.\textsuperscript{26}

Many more adolescent girls than adolescent boys are NEET.\textsuperscript{30}
The percentage of women in parliament has nearly doubled since 1995. This still means that only 22% of people in parliament today are women. Only 17% of government ministers are women, with the majority overseeing social sectors.

Most women enter politics when they are aged between 45 and 50 (often when their youngest child is school-aged) – so they are not necessarily representative of the voices of girls.
Drivers of inequalities, compounding factors, and consequences

There is enough money and food in the world to keep all girls and boys healthy and out of poverty. Why, then, is it so hard to narrow the existing and often widening equality gaps? Causes and consequences of inequality are complex and interconnected. They create a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion that is hard to break. Discerning what triggers and drives inequalities is useful for identifying who and what can help bring about change.

3.1 Critical drivers for inequalities affecting girls and boys at different levels

Drivers of inequality can have multiple causes: social exclusion and gender inequality, for example, have at their roots social norms or expectations concerning particular social groups and the status this group is given by society. Unequal power relations and the use of violence to enforce them are at the heart of pervasive inequalities.32 Drivers originate and manifest themselves at different levels where they are often compounded by other factors. 

At individual level: Inequalities are not created by anonymous forces. They are generated by individuals who act based on their personal beliefs, values, interests, desires and perceived ability to make a difference. The norms, belief systems and expectations of society towards particular groups of people determine social relations – including who is valued, who counts and who does not.33 They also deeply influence a person’s sense of self-worth and whether that person perceives herself or himself as having the power to realise personal aspirations or engage as an active citizen to influence change.

At household level: Families’ economic situations and their ability to overcome shocks and disturbances frame child poverty. Social norms, beliefs and attitudes determine how children of different sexes, ages, or abilities are treated within a household and how much time, nurturing, care and resources are invested in their development. This leads to inequalities between girls and boys within the same household.34 Mothers’ and other female caregivers’ limited access and control over resources and social services, combined with men’s lack of involvement in childrearing, create additional barriers and compound household inequalities. Child poverty cannot be eliminated without addressing intra-household inequalities.35

At community level: Geographic location (which often determines the provision of public services, access to employment, or susceptibility to disaster) and social structure are additional drivers for inequalities at community level. They are underpinned by socio-cultural attitudes and identities that define who has the power to decide and who is considered worthy of the benefits from investments and decisions. Dualist legal frameworks (where traditional law and national legal frameworks co-exist and are not harmonised within the spirit of global human rights commitments) can compound these dynamics and increase inequalities and injustice affecting girls and boys throughout their lives. These factors often sustain harmful practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, or child labour. These are rooted in gender norms that dictate that women and girls are less valuable than boys and men, thus reinforcing their subordinate position.

At national level: Non-inclusive growth and development plans,36 unfair political representation, unfair distribution of wealth coupled with ineffective taxation systems, unfair policies and ineffective social protection measures create and compound inequalities at the national level which State Parties must be held accountable for. Worldwide, inequalities within countries have increased and these determine which
children and adults have access to health, education or other services and assets. The lack of legal recognition of equal rights remains a critical barrier to narrowing inequalities. The absence of the rule of law linked to a climate of impunity also exacerbates inequalities – corruption, bribery, theft and tax evasion cost developing countries around US $1.26 trillion per year. The rule of law and development are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing. This makes justice a critical factor for sustainable development at the national (and international) level.\textsuperscript{38}

**At international/global level:** Unfair trade and subsidy policies that undermine the ability of poorer countries and local producers to compete in the market, combined with the actions of large multinational companies,\textsuperscript{39} transnational crime, and conflict are all important drivers of inequalities with profound impact on children. Climate change, for example, is largely caused by developed countries that produce more than 75 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in the drive to satisfy consumers’ ever-increasing appetite for cheap energy, food, clothing and excessively high levels of comfort and convenience. Much of the environmental and social damage that goes with this is happening in developing countries. Here, children and adults generally share the health burden arising from a degrading environment – but not the economic benefits. These go mainly to big multinationals that actively influence economic policy and tax conditions in developing countries, often to the benefit of company leadership or major shareholders over workers. Their supply chains reach around the world, which directly link communities in poor producer countries to consumers in rich countries with limited regulation or oversight.

Insufficient transnational justice compounds the situation. The global illicit flow of goods, guns, people and natural resources, often linked with legitimate economic actors, is estimated at approximately US $650 billion annually. This money largely benefits organised crime networks which take advantage of weak regulations and justice systems, particularly in poor countries. Children are significantly affected by this because crime networks often resort to forced or child labour and dodge environmental and safety regulations.\textsuperscript{40}

The legitimacy of the UN Security Council is constantly tested, and international humanitarian law is regularly flouted with impunity. International bodies are too often seen as incapable of regulating action by individual states, or are associated with the ‘old powers’ and therefore seen as lacking legitimacy for the new global order and redistribution of power to the south.

**3.2 Compounding factors – the vicious cycle**

The foremost consequence of inequality is the massive unjustifiable loss of human potential, both for individual children whose lives are stunted, and for society as a whole. Inequality creates substantial health and social problems, generates political instability and reduces economic growth.\textsuperscript{41} These conditions in turn can create further inequalities for girls and boys and impede the enjoyment of their rights. The most significant and inter-related consequences from inequalities for girls and boys include:

**Ill health:** Children in sub-Saharan Africa are more than 15 times more likely to die before the age of five than children in developed regions.\textsuperscript{42} Children are at a greater risk of dying before the age of five if they are born in rural areas, within poor households, or to a mother who has been denied basic education. HIV disproportionately affects young people, and especially girls – in 2013, girls and young women accounted for 60 per cent of new HIV infections among young people.\textsuperscript{43} Ninety per cent of the world’s HIV-related deaths in adolescents occur in Africa.\textsuperscript{44} Adolescent girls and young women often do not have the final say on matters related to their own healthcare. Punitive and age-restrictive laws and policies present barriers to young women accessing health services. Inequitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene compounds the burden of ill health, particularly for young children and mothers – 16 per cent of neonatal deaths and 11 per cent of maternal deaths are attributed to sepsis, resulting from giving birth in locations without adequate access to clean water and soap. A wide range of social and cultural determinants influences healthcare inequalities. Inequity in access to timely and quality health services on account of financial, physical, social and cultural barriers is leaving significant numbers of children, particularly the most excluded, behind in the development agenda.

**Violence:** Every five minutes, a child dies as a result of violence. An estimated 120 million girls and 73 million boys have been victims of sexual violence, and almost 1 billion children are subjected to physical punishment on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{45} Violence against children permeates all social institutions: families, education and work settings, the care and justice system, and communities.\textsuperscript{46} This is a result of complex interactive processes and the interaction between several risk and protection factors at individual, family, community and society levels.\textsuperscript{47} Children who are experiencing higher inequality are at greater risk of
violence – such as younger children, children from unwanted pregnancies, or children with disabilities. Children from families with a history of inter-partner violence are at a greater risk of being exposed to violence, and to repeating it. High unemployment rates and the lack of social and community services also correlate with an increased risk of violence against girls and boys. Countries in which levels of inequality have risen also experience higher crime and violence rates. Adolescents and young people who are out of school, training and employment are particularly susceptible to involvement in criminal and violent activity. Violence against infants and younger children is a major risk factor for psychiatric disorders and suicide in later life stages. It brings lifelong suffering, including depression, anxiety disorders, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, aggression and violence towards others, risky sexual behaviours and post-traumatic stress disorder. Girls are subject to sexual, physical and emotional violence, inside the home and within the wider community, including intimate partner violence, honour killings, forced marriage and trafficking. Worldwide, for example, nearly 50 per cent of all sexual assaults are against girls aged 15 years or younger. Among those whose first experience of sexual intercourse was forced, 31 per cent were younger than 15 years at the time, and an additional 14 per cent were between 15 and 17.

**Population growth and dynamics:** The world population of 7.2 billion in 2014 is projected to increase by almost 1 billion within the next 12 years; virtually all of this growth will be in developing countries. If this population growth is not coupled with parallel increases in capital and government spending, inequalities will deepen while service provision diminishes. Population growth is also directly linked to the rapid depletion of the world’s natural resources, to climate change and environmental degradation, and to States’ ability to provide essential services. Population dynamics can play a powerful role in driving governmental decision-making in the interests of majority groups. This can work in favour of important segments of society, but rarely does it result in justice to excluded minorities if their interests and needs are not protected and ring-fenced in development plans and budgets. The “youth bulge” that many developing countries are currently facing results mainly from falling infant mortality rates while mothers’ fertility rates remain the same. Where large numbers of young people are unable to find employment, the likelihood of social and political instability increases.

**Conflict:** Large social, political and income inequalities between different population groups – based on religion or ethnicity, for example – raise the likelihood that a country will experience conflict and civil war. Girls and boys are often hit the hardest by conflict. The 1996 report for UNICEF by child rights defender and former Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Graca Machel, on the impact of armed conflict on children is still relevant today when it states that

> Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.

At the same time, conflict widens inequalities: 39 million children in countries affected by conflict were out of school in 2008, more than half of them girls. Girls’ vulnerability to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) violations is significantly exacerbated during conflicts, both from intimate partners and non-partners. They are at increased risk of sexual violence, which also carries an additional risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, and they often experience a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in conflict situations, as well as support for mental health needs.

**Climate change, disaster risk and environmental degradation:** Climate change is a result of richer nations, individuals or companies over-consuming and depleting the world’s resources to the detriment of poorer countries and population groups. Climate change contributes to a range of impacts including the frequency and intensity of weather-related hazards and disasters, and the burden of disease. It can also become a source of conflict as people compete for scarce resources, such as water. As the world warms, girls and boys, particularly those in developing countries, increasingly suffer from hunger and malnutrition, have reduced access to water or are forced to leave their homes and communities. This has a profound impact on children’s health and wellbeing – due to their particular vulnerability they bear the brunt of the effects of global warming. Climate change compounds inequalities, as it exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities, and assistance can often be discriminatory. Environmental degradation is an inter-related factor: more than half a million children under the age of five die each year.
from household air pollution and general air pollution in urban areas. Risks from chemicals, waste, polluted water, and the lack of green and clean areas to play are most likely to affect the most disadvantaged children.

**Migration**: Migration is recognised as an enormous potential driver of development, with remittances from migrants back to home countries running globally at three times the level of aid. Despite the economic benefits that it can bring, migration renders girls and boys vulnerable and in need of special protection. In-country and international migration are driven by inequalities within or between countries or regions. Millions of people move across countries, borders and continents each year in search of a better life in other, wealthier places. Or they are fleeing from the impact of climate change, conflict and war. Globally, an estimated 33 million international migrants are under 20, of whom 34 per cent are aged between 15 and 19 years. It is estimated that 750 million people migrate within their own countries. Unsafe or illegal migration and the lack of sound labour migration management systems also expose millions of vulnerable, unemployed young people searching for better jobs to the risks of trafficking and labour exploitation. Children are affected in different ways by migration, depending on whether they are left behind by one or both migrating parents, whether they leave with their parents (or are born abroad), whether they migrating alone – and whether they are a girl or a boy. Accessing services can be particularly difficult for migrant populations.

**Urbanisation**: The prospects of higher standards of living, employment opportunities and better services drive increasing numbers of people into cities. More than half of the world’s population today lives in cities – in 2015, the figure was 54 per cent; by 2050 it is estimated to reach 66 per cent. While statistically, children in cities seem to be better off, comparing urban and rural averages is deceptive. Because in most countries cities have the richest, healthiest and most well-educated people living there, this makes average figures for child mortality, malnutrition or school attendance, for example, look better there. This can mask the extent of the inequalities and disparities within cities, which disproportionately affect children from the poorest families, illegal dwellers, or children in and on the street. Girls in cities, for example, must contend with the duality of increased risks and increased opportunities. On the one hand they face sexual harassment, exploitation and insecurity as they navigate the urban environment, while on the other hand, they are more likely to be educated, less likely to be married at an early age, and more likely to participate in politics. Inequality is a particular concern in urban areas where the poorest live side-by-side with the most affluent because it is most visible, contributing to social tensions. Good governance is a significant factor in reducing these inequalities.

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**SECTION 4**

Who and what drives change?

4.1 What can be done to address key drivers and consequences of inequality affecting children?

**Tackle gender inequalities and exclusion**: Changing the attitudes and behaviours of adults, young people, boys and girls is the starting point for reducing prevailing inequalities. The attitudes, beliefs and prejudices of caregivers, teachers, government officials and policy makers – and girls and boys themselves – determine the actions and decisions they take concerning children and their rights. Sustainable institutional changes can only happen if the people within them change. Without champions for gender equality and inclusion within families and communities, discrimination and inequalities within households will persist. Without those champions, government or private sector institutions, laws, policies, strategies and investments will not become equitable and just, or be applied. At the national level, particular focus should be given to girls’ legal rights, equitable political representation and access to economic resources. Policy makers must also focus on mainstreaming non-discrimination, gender and inclusion throughout all policy, and on investing in particular gender/inclusion targeted work where the greatest inequalities prevail or are on the rise. Relevant actors also need to strengthen disaggregated data collection and establish data sets that can help compare trends and progress over time.

**Developing capacities, assets and income opportunities for vulnerable girls, boys and young people**: The psychological, physical, political, financial, economic and social assets of children and the people closest to them are critical for their wellbeing and success in life. Effective parenting and quality education and training in formal and non-formal settings are crucial contexts for building these assets.
They forge the fundamental life skills that girls and boys need to overcome barriers, embrace and promote change, and transition through critical stages of childhood into productive adulthood. They are essential to build further general and vocational capacities that help young people succeed in education, work and family life.

Building household economic assets and economically empowering children and adolescents is critical too as this increases their ability to overcome shocks and reduces their vulnerability. Savings groups, including those for young people, are effective mechanisms for this purpose. They provide young people with the chance to build financial assets, technical knowledge and competencies, and to experience belonging to a group. They can also provide them with opportunities to participate in training and orientation that provides them with other foundational life-skills such as communication, negotiation, or problem-solving skills. These groups can become stepping stones for self-employment and meaningful socio-economic participation in society. They can also be a starting point for gaining access to other financial services in support of youth entrepreneurship and other income-generating activities.

Ending violence: Violence against girls and boys represents the worst consequence of inequality and is a violation of their human rights. Preventing and responding to violence must be thus a top priority if inequalities are to be reduced. Child protection systems must reach at-risk girls and boys within households, and must change behaviours and attitudes condoning violence as much as offering victims redress.

Improving access to quality education, information and communication: Change needs a critical mass of informed opinions. The education sector plays a fundamental role in enabling children to develop such opinions. But this is only possible if education is of good quality and fulfils the aims of education outlined in the Child Rights Convention. Education must ensure girls as much as boys are able to develop their cognitive and socio-emotional abilities, develop healthy attitudes and values, all free from gender bias. Investment in girls' education is known for its long-term social and economic benefits.

Education happens in many ways, not only at school. The media plays a pivotal role in providing children and young people with information. It can also be pivotal for cementing and reinforcing norms that lead to gender inequality and exclusion. Whether on radio or television, through social media or access to a mobile phone, the media offers girls, boys and young people opportunities to access and share information that is relevant to them and their lives. It can provide practical information that helps children through the critical phases of childhood, distance learning to connect young people with job opportunities, or call on the world to address injustices and human rights violations. Working with the media at different levels – from community radio to private television, from social to state media – is essential to ensure that relevant, appropriate and useful information reaches children, adolescents and adults – and to make actionable information available to people to help them hold decision makers to account.

Strengthening civil society including that involving young people: Civil society can be an effective space where young people – particularly those from excluded groups – can defend their interests. Making civil society at local, national and global level more inclusive, legitimate and effective in general, as well as particularly for and with children and young people, is therefore important. This includes trade unions, which can help adolescent and youth workers to negotiate better working conditions in the formal and informal sector. Young people can play a key role as change makers and thought leaders. However, they, just like younger children, are often excluded from civil society organisations (CSOs) and networks due to their youth and relative inexperience, and also because of legal regulations that don’t protect their association. It is critical that regulatory frameworks in law and practice guarantee children’s and young people’s rights to association and that there is an enabling environment in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity. Civil society is rapidly changing the forms of and tools for engagement, providing opportunities to organise and effect change, particularly for young people.

Strengthening the rule of law and governance: Justice is an enabler for equality and inclusion for all children. Universal and equal access to justice is also a basic indicator of the other major aspiration of the new global development agenda – to have a truly "transformational" impact on society and on people’s daily lives. Justice systems must be made as effective in addressing discrimination as the major financial drivers of inequalities (illicit money flows and corruption). These systems need to ensure that girls and boys, and young people – and particularly those from excluded groups – have access to justice and have a say in decisions on policies and investments. Student councils, youth parliaments and municipal youth representation platforms can be effective places for this participation to happen. Better governance for
children starts with inclusive and transparent political processes and decision-making, and continues with holding governments to account. It includes periodic governmental reporting on human rights commitments and legal obligations, as well as other commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This requires the collection of adequately disaggregated data that makes inequalities affecting girls and boys visible. Effective civil registration and vital statistics systems play a key role in providing such data in a time-sensitive manner.

**Making policies, strategies and development plans child-sensitive, gender-equitable, sustainable and inclusive:** State Parties have the obligation to develop inclusive and sustainable (“green”) development and growth strategies to combat discrimination and to reduce inequalities in a lasting way. These strategies need to take into account the question of who benefits from growth; the balance between the state and the market; and how to measure progress, going beyond averages. An insight into how people fare in the bottom two quintiles of the population gives a very different perspective than does a mere overview of per capita income. Duty bearers need to systematically question if and how development and social policies benefit excluded groups, different sexes and people at different stages of their life course. This will require the systematic engagement of citizens of different ages and backgrounds in policy and strategy development and in civil society efforts to hold public officials to account.

**Ensuring quality public services, particularly for the hard-to-reach:** Essential services can help to break the continuation of poverty through generations and reduce inequalities, particularly for girls and women. Early childhood development services and quality formal and non-formal education play critical roles – for example, because they develop children’s potential and bring a high return on investment for individuals and society as they enable other rights. Quality is important, though. Education services coupled with reproductive and sexual health services have the potential to curb population growth, but are less effective if education services are of low quality and don’t meet the aims of education, which include developing the potential of children while promoting concepts of equality, tolerance and peace. Protection and social services, child and adolescent health services, and also information services are essential for closing inequality gaps for poor and excluded children at different stages of their life course. Privatising public services can improve service offerings and accessibility, but can equally create inequalities for children. In the case of education, for example, privatisation exacerbates inequalities. Where private schools cater for children from more affluent families, while poor girls and boys rely on frail public education, the poorer children are disproportionately disadvantaged. They tend to do better when interacting with and learning from children from higher socio-economic groups. To ensure services are relevant and meet the diverse needs of girls and boys, and particularly those from excluded groups, duty bearers must define quality delivery standards and establish public accountability mechanisms that help to feed back on their quality.

**Strengthening social protection:** Social security is a child right enshrined in Articles 26 and 27 of the CRC. Social insurance, social assistance, social services and social equity measures that target vulnerable and excluded families are critical to achieve it. They are the key elements of social protection. Publicly provided child-sensitive social protection plays a vital role in reducing inequality and increasing opportunities for particularly vulnerable children and their families. Such social protection strengthens families’ resilience and ability to overcome shock. When delivered with an inter-generational approach, it can most effectively help to reduce children’s vulnerability within households. Social protection floors must be established to ensure that vulnerable and excluded children, particularly those with disabilities, and their families have access to essential healthcare and have income security, at least at a nationally defined minimum level. Social protection floor policies should aim to facilitate effective access to essential goods and services, should promote productive economic activity and should be implemented in close coordination with other policies enhancing employability, reducing informality and precariousness, creating decent jobs and promoting entrepreneurship.

**Making public (financial) resources work in children’s best interests:** Government at central and decentralised levels have the obligation to make budgets and expenditures child-sensitive, equitable and inclusive. Children and their rights must be given a fair share in the budget. Investments must focus on those policies and programmes that reduce inequalities and create more social justice – such as for early childhood services, protection or (girls’) education. Making the budget work for children requires:

- strengthening taxation to more effectively support wealth redistribution and address tax evasion
- ensuring transparency and accountability in monitoring expenditure and preventing wastage
- making girls and boys of different ages visible in the budget
- giving girls and boys and young people from excluded groups their say in critical decisions throughout the budget cycle to ensure budgets and expenditures reflect their priorities.

**Influencing business practices to be ethical and sustainable:** Alongside this, there should be action to stimulate responsible consumer behaviour and the adoption of sustainable lifestyles by more affluent populations, particularly in high and middle-income countries. Initiatives like UN-Compact can help to stimulate the adoption of sustainable business practices that meet human rights standards across the entire company supply chain. This is necessary to reduce climate change and labour exploitation in poorer countries and regions. Consumer preference and action can put pressure on multinational companies that depend on the trust of their consumers and can reinforce ethical and sustainable business practices. Making the links and mechanics of injustice visible can trigger consumer action. Wealthier citizens need to be informed and recognise that their prosperity and aspirations are intimately linked to the opportunities of poorer people in the world – global citizenship should be part and parcel of educational curricula.

**Strengthening international institutions:** Global institutions are critical forces for improving global policies and regulatory frameworks. Their governance must be improved to give less developed countries greater say in their decisions and thus reduce inter-country inequalities. They should play a greater role in regulating the actions of multinational companies, for instance, through implementing fair global tax rules. They should also address some of the major global drivers of inequality, such as unilateral migration regimes, the arms trade and the lack of accountability for breaching international law.

**Building resilience:** Climate change, conflict and disasters bring increased unpredictability to children, families, communities and countries. To counteract this, children, families, communities and countries must develop strategies to adapt, to overcome shock, and to manage risks – in other words, to be resilient. When children are resilient, their chances of growing out of poverty increase. When families are resilient, they are better able to support their children through times of extreme hardship and stress. When communities and countries are resilient, their governance and institutions are strong, promote participation of citizens, equality and inclusion, and are able to promote and lead preparedness, planning and readiness to deal with disturbances. Building resilience requires measures such as: incorporating preparedness across all sectors; building the capacity to be flexible and innovative within all development and humanitarian programmes; and making information about disaster and climate risk accessible to children and communities.

People are the starting point for change to overcome inequalities and address their consequences. Whether they are parents and caregivers, consumers, community leaders, government officials, makers or implementers of laws, leaders of multinational companies or civil society, or children and young people themselves, they all have a role to play in creating greater equality and realising child rights. All of them will have personal incentives to help or hinder change. This vision must also underlie all development efforts. Outcomes of development projects and programmes should be formulated around the changes in actions, behaviours and attitudes of all those who have a role in changing inequalities, and obligations and responsibilities towards the realisation of children’s rights and the right of all people.

**SECTION 5**

**Equal rights for every child: Who needs to do what?**

Actors in this model can be situated at different levels: families, communities, district, national and global.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS</th>
<th>LAW AND POLICY MAKERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Engage for human rights, and with accountability processes and child-sensitive, equitable and inclusive development strategies and practice</td>
<td>• Develop and implement inclusive, sustainable development strategies, policies and budgets</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Support improvements of social protection, resilience, services and opportunities for hard-to-reach children and their families</td>
<td>• Meet and monitor human rights commitments and SDG progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote and support involvement of children and young people in public, civil society and community decision making</td>
<td>• Establish effective judiciary and taxation systems, combat corruption and crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote human rights and inclusion and highlight corrupt and illicit practices</td>
<td>• Ensure access to quality social and financial services, prioritising hard-to-reach children and families</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Adopt responsible social and environmental corporate practices including paying fair taxes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create decent local jobs with equitable pay for (young) women and men</td>
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<tr>
<th>GOAL ALL GIRLS AND BOYS HAVE EQUAL</th>
<th>PUBLIC SERVICES OFFICIALS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote human rights and inclusion and highlight corrupt and illicit practices</td>
<td>• Deliver inclusive, child &amp; youth friendly and safe services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effectively prevent and address corruption and waste</td>
<td>• Actively support and involve hard-to-reach families, children and young people in planning and monitoring</td>
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<th>MEDIA PRODUCERS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Promote human rights and inclusion and highlight corrupt and illicit practices</td>
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SECTION 6

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: opportunities ahead

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) bring unprecedented opportunities to address inequalities and injustice at all levels. Bringing together the social development agenda with that of sustainable development and environmental protection, they have at their heart the rights-based vision of “leaving no one behind” while emphasising the need to “reach the furthest behind first”. They call for all data used for measuring SDG progress to be disaggregated by “income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts”, and they highlight that development is brought about and sustained when it is people-centred, equitable and inclusive.

After the long-standing criticism of the Millennium Development Goals for their lack of a human rights focus, the SDGs are in contrast calling for surprisingly radical changes in communities and societies. SDG 10 calls particular attention to inequalities, but equality objectives are at the core of a significant number of specific goals and targets of several SDGs. Girls, women, children and young people are particularly highlighted as groups of importance in several goals.

The SDGs also articulate how law can be deployed and administered to enable greater social justice. They see law as a key instrument for promoting equity and protecting citizens and resources. This approach to the rule of law encompasses issues of due process and access to justice, and of the reform and strengthening of relevant institutions. These correlations are addressed in Goal 16, which holds protection and governance (two of Plan’s current global programme strategies) at its centre. The same goal also speaks more broadly to “outcomes” — to the contribution of law to further “substantive” justice and to advancing the equity objectives running throughout the SDGs.

Girls, boys, young people and their rights in the SDGs

While referencing and reinforcing human rights commitments and understanding itself as “grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [and] international human rights treaties”, the Sustainable Development (SD) Agenda does not make any specific reference to children’s rights. It does, however, highlight children in several goals as a particular impact group distinct from adults. For example, Goal 1, *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*, sets the target: “By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”. The SD Agenda adopts a life-course approach by emphasising that development concerning basic rights such as health and education must be guaranteed for all ages, or be “lifelong”. It articulates the concern to ensure that all age groups benefit from critical services. However, it does not necessarily drive a push for investments in childhood, which are critical to break the cycle of poverty.

Particular attention is given to children in Goal 16, which seeks to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children” and to “provide legal identity for all, including birth registration” — the latter being given in most countries soon after birth. The rights of girls are explicitly recognised in the agenda, including in Goal 5 (*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*). Girls are recognised as being a group in need of particular support within targets on education, discrimination, violence, harmful practices, malnutrition, and sanitation and hygiene.

Given the global population dynamics with “youth bulges” and high youth unemployment in many countries, young people’s issues were given high attention in the SD Agenda. Children and young people are recognised as “critical agents of change” and “torchbearers” for achieving the SD Agenda. They are included as a group in need of support in targets on education, employment and climate change.

The ambition contained in the SD Agenda is high, but the amount of money that donors and governments themselves have committed remains relatively unchanged. The outcome of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015 outlined a “business as usual” approach to development financing. In the context of some donor countries cutting aid budgets, such as Finland and Denmark, it is particularly clear that governments have raised the bar without explicitly committing to pay more to reach it.
However, the 2030 SDG Agenda has had an impact on the way funding is framed – if not on the overall amount. Early indications suggest that some big foundations and donors are reconsidering how to frame their funding to ensure that it is contributing to achieving the SDGs. Focus on excluded children and how gender exacerbates the inequalities they experience along their life course will place the federation well within the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

SECTION 7

Implications for Plan International

Plan International’s new global strategic plan will need to prove how serious we are about addressing children’s rights, discrimination and the ensuing inequalities. Like other development actors, we will need to think hard about how we can best tackle inequalities so as to make change happen, particularly for those hardest to reach. We will also need to think carefully about how a focus on girls can translate into meaningful and impactful programmes that enable equality rather than deepen it. Broad-brush approaches tackling only one type of inequality will not combat pervasive exclusion, the gender dynamics that aggravate it, and the hidden power dynamics that undermine the realisation of child rights. Reaching particularly disadvantaged girls and boys will require more sophisticated ways of analysing context and determining who best to target, and how. It will require working better and in more diverse partnerships with groups and organisations that have access to those most difficult to reach and that know how best to support them – and to connect with social movements driven by vulnerable and excluded groups themselves. Finally, it will mean improving the way we monitor and evaluate our work to give assurance that our work effectively reaches those furthest behind. This will have cost implications. Interventions that reach the most marginalised children are generally more expensive because they require greater, more skilled human resource and logistical efforts.

National governments are primary actors in creating environments that either protect or undermine children’s rights. They are the signatories to global agreements such as the CRC and the SDGs. They set policy frameworks that determine the major opportunities open to children and their families; and they determine the political representation and justice available for their citizens. More often than not, they have the financial resources to take on key development challenges on their own. Insufficient political will or a lack of other capacities often impedes their ability to change. Working with a rights-based approach to development, building the capacities of rights holders and duty bearers, and strengthening their relations and social contract, is more relevant than ever. This rights-based approach makes implicit assumptions about how change happens.

However, it is becoming clear that the biggest challenge ahead will be to find efficient ways to reach individual children experiencing the greatest inequality and to break the cycle of poverty, while finding the most important policy levers to enable and sustain change at multiple levels. We need to scrutinise our work approach and our fundamental beliefs about how development operates. A bottom-up approach to development alone will not shift the world’s inequalities. An approach that addresses power dynamics including political and economic dynamics, at household, national and global level, and that holds duty bearers to account while strengthening their capacities, has the potential to make the difference.

When choosing our strategies and deciding who to target, where, how and with whom, Plan will need to bear in mind the following points.

1. Eradicating child poverty requires tackling inequalities and violence within households. Age, gender and disability are the most powerful and intersecting factors behind these inequalities.
2. Gender inequality intensifies the negative effects of all other forms of exclusion experienced by children sharing a similar social identity – for instance, being a child with disabilities and from an ethnic minority; or living in an illegal urban settlement. In fact, within any excluded group, girls often face the strongest barriers to rights. Girls should, however, not be considered as an excluded group in themselves and in general.
3. Addressing child poverty and gender inequality from the earliest age onwards and helping girls and boys to transition through the most critical stages of their life course is a non-negotiable part of preventing inter-generational transmission of poverty and inequality.
4. Geographic choice is only one factor that determines our ability to reach those children who are most vulnerable due to inequalities and child rights violations. Expanding work into fragile states is one way to increase this reach. Shifting location to poorer communities or deepening penetration to reach the most excluded groups, particularly children with disabilities and from ethnic minorities, are two other valid choices. None is mutually exclusive.

5. Sustainable change for greater social justice will require addressing unequal wealth distribution between countries and the underlying political and economic dynamics.

6. There is still a substantial way to go to ensure that legal frameworks protect equal rights for girls, boys, women and men, and that policies and budgets support their equal realisation.

7. Building the capacities, social and economic assets, and the resilience of children, their families and their communities is critical. This must start in earliest childhood and continue through the most important moments of their transition to adulthood. Integrated approaches to this should include:
   - early childhood development, which can tackle dynamics of poverty, ill health, exclusion and violence at the earliest stage in life
   - inclusive, quality education approaches that provide children of all social backgrounds with the chance to learn skills needed for life and to get a basic education that equips them with the skills to move into work
   - children's and youth savings groups that teach money management and build financial assets while serving as platforms for financial education, entrepreneurship development and livelihood-related life skills, and introduce young people – particularly vulnerable adolescent girls – to the world of formal financial services
   - school-to-work transition or labour market transition interventions targeting excluded groups of adolescents and youth, such as young mothers, through work readiness training and appropriate career guidance, information and support services
   - gender- and inclusion-sensitive youth employment initiatives focusing on vulnerable adolescent girls, such as teenage mothers
   - participatory governance work with children and young people that strengthens their social assets while strengthening relations between those in power and young citizens
   - digital birth registration that addresses barriers to registration at the community level through the appropriate use of technology, while strengthening national-level civil registration and vital statistics systems that contribute to better national and decentralised planning.

8. New manifestations of inequality will require Plan to think about which issues to address as much as how to address them. This includes critical topics that Plan has little or only emerging experience with, particularly,
   - causes and consequences of climate change and environmental degradation
   - working with migrant populations and stateless children, and in urban environments
   - strengthening governance and formal justice
   - engaging more substantially with budgeting and taxation
   - strengthening the interplay between child protection and social protection
   - working more strategically with the media and the private sector.

There are many other development actors out there – Plan is only one player. Despite our relative financial strength, our contribution could be a drop in the ocean if not used in the most strategic way. Analysing Plan’s strategic assets is critical to supporting our programmatic choices.
1 Or children who are undecided about their gender identity or expression.

2 Or other caregivers.

3 http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/302002.html#Children_and_hunger

4 http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/302002.html#Children_and_hunger


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14 UNICEF (2015). Progress for Children: Beyond averages: learning from the MDGs, Number 11


20 UNESCO (2015) op. cit.

21 ibid.


25 ibid.

26 ibid.

27 ibid.


31 ibid.

32 Plan International (2015). Getting it right for all girls and all boys.

33 ibid.

34 Rodríguez Takeuchi, L. (2015) op. cit.

35 ibid.

36 Sustainable Development Goal 10 : Reduce inequality within and among countries. [online] www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/


38 ibid.

39 37 out of 100 richest economies in the world are corporations.


44 World Health Organization (2014). Health for the world’s adolescents
Drivers and barriers of change for a just and equitable world: a working paper

56 UN World Urbanization Trends 2014,
57 Worldbank - migration, remittances, diaspora
60 Or violence against intersex children or those who are undecided about their gender identity.
61 Civil society’s significant contribution has been recognised on several occasions in UN Human Rights Council Resolutions, including Resolution A/HRC/27/L.24 which noted the “crucial importance of the active involvement of civil society, at all levels, in processes of governance and in promoting good governance, including through transparency and accountability, at all levels, which is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies.”
67 Ibid.