



**Plan International Inc.'s submission for OHCHR's Human Rights Council report on the  
"Protection of the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"**

October 2016

The 2030 Agenda holds great promise to improve the lives of children, as it aims to tackle the root causes and consequences of inequality and discrimination to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable groups—as for example girls, children living with disabilities and other minority groups.

Plan International welcomes the level of ambition with which the 2030 Agenda has been adopted, and especially embraces the Agenda for being firmly grounded in international human rights standards and its goal to 'leave no one behind.' As a global organization with offices in more than 70 countries, we are committed to work with all actors, including children and young people themselves, to make sure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will really transform the lives of children, and especially girls, worldwide.

The true test of the visionary 2030 Agenda, however, will be implementation. Special efforts are needed to ensure that children and young people realize their rights within the new sustainable development framework, and to enable the world to deliver on its promise to 'leave no one behind.' This submission outlines a number of approaches to accelerate progress on all SDG commitments, including through increasing the amount and quality of data against which to measure progress, strengthening accountability frameworks to hold governments to their global commitments, and allowing for child-participatory budgeting processes when allocating sufficient resources to rights-based national action plans.

**1. Implementing the 2030 Agenda with a children's rights-based approach**

The momentum around the 2030 Agenda provides a window of opportunity to secure more ambitious action and better outcomes for children. In order to give effect to the human rights content and promise of the Sustainable Development Goals, governments should in the first place use the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other human rights conventions as a guiding framework when implementing the SDG framework into national action plans.

Similarly, it is vital that governments undertake reviews of their existing national policies and approach to children's rights against the ambition of the SDGs and international human rights framework. The recommendations stemming from past treaty body and Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) can inform this process, as can extensive consultation with civil society and those living in poverty. It is at this stage, as well as during monitoring processes, that special attention can be given to ensuring the most excluded and vulnerable are being reached with existing policies and that funding and plans can be amended as needed.

**2. Allocating sufficient resources to SDG implementation and child-participatory budgeting**

The 2030 Agenda envisages "a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognizes that "investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (2015), para. 8.

and future generations.”<sup>2</sup> There is thus a clear link between the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda and the obligation to advance better investment in the rights of the child.

States should allocate sufficient resources to ensure successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda commitments for children. Quality education (goal 4), access to universal health coverage (goal 3), or protection from all forms of violence (goal 16) for instance, cannot be achieved without resources. When developing national action plans, States should also consider the voices of children – as boys and girls have the right to be heard in all matters affecting him or her.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the SDGs emphasise the fundamental importance of people’s participation. Children’s participation can assist governments to design more relevant policies and allocate resources more effectively to achieve the SDGs.

Child-participatory budgeting is one approach to implement the 2030 Agenda and to ensure that no one is left behind. Recent research undertaken by Plan International and Queen’s University Belfast shows that, where there is meaningful engagement, children’s views have directly influenced public spending decision-making in ways that have increased spending on children and/or resulted in existing allocations being directed to areas that they identified as a priority.<sup>4</sup>

For example, in Kenya, children spent two days preparing a report on what spending was needed in their communities. They presented it to the director of budget of their county council who said that the council had taken on 80% of their views and would spend more on security, leisure and pre-school education. In Togo, children took part in a training workshop to learn about their rights and identify priority issues to present to decision-makers in the City of Sotouboua. The next year the budget spent on children increased. In Guatemala, children conducted a study of the important issues in their communities and presented it to the municipal authorities. Subsequently, three municipalities adopted their municipal public policy on children and adolescents, allocating a total of \$12,662,620 in a four-year budget.<sup>5</sup>

For child participatory budgeting initiatives to be successful, the following features are key: children are provided with accessible information; support for children to develop and express their views freely; time for them to process the information and prepare inputs; adults who listen to their views and engage with respect; feedback on what happened to their input.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, investing in children’s rights contributes to “long-lasting positive impacts on future economic growth, sustainable and inclusive development, and social cohesion.”<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Delivering on the 2030 Agenda’s promise to leave no one behind through collecting, analyzing and disseminating quality data highlighting the previously invisible**

The 2030 Agenda contains commitments to children and young people which, in both scope and ambition, go far beyond those found in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Though considerable gains were made during the MDG era, while working to achieve those goals, countries largely used national averages to measure success.<sup>8</sup> Strategies to achieve broad coverage often focused on the people who were the easiest to reach or whose situations were most easily improved. Many of the poorest, hardest to reach and most excluded – including millions of girls and women – were left invisible and struggling on the margins of society.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Third International Conference on Financing for Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015), para. 7.

<sup>3</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Chelsea Marshall, Professor Laura Lundy and Dr. Karen Orr, *Child-Participatory Budgeting – A review of Global Practice*, Centre for Children’s Rights, Queen’s University Belfast and Plan International (2016).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children’s rights (art. 4)*, CRC/C/GC/19, para. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Plan International, *Counting the Invisible: Using data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030* (2016), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

With the Sustainable Development Goals, we have the potential to do better. Global agreement on the Agenda represents an opportunity to intensify efforts to strengthen universal birth registration and vital statistics development,<sup>10</sup> while also making sure to measure progress by looking at more than statistical averages to make sure no one gets left behind, least of all those who face major disadvantages due to factors such as their gender, age, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, disability, migratory or economic status. Only with robust, reliable, disaggregated, and timely data and corresponding comprehensive civil registration systems will the ambition to reach the most excluded and leave no one behind achieved.

For example, current data and statistics, to a large extent, fail to include girls and women properly.<sup>11</sup> Most official sources collect data only about girls and women aged 15-49, so very little is known about the 2 million born to girls under age 15 each year in low and middle-income countries.<sup>12</sup> Young adolescent mothers are virtually invisible to decision makers. By increasing the visibility of girls' and women's lives, credible and timely data can inform more effective programmes and policies.

Closing the gender data gap will be crucial to help uncover both the needs for and the opportunities that arise from investing in girls and women and achieve SDG 5. Governments should therefore be called upon to invest in and strengthen national statistical capacities to fill data gaps and to strengthen, analyse, disaggregate, and supplement the data that already exists. Governments should embrace different types and sources of data collection and analysis. Official SDG indicators can be made stronger if they are complemented by perceptions-based data, qualitative data and citizen-generated data, as well as data from reliable non-governmental institutions and organisations.

To support governments with such efforts, Plan International is leading a multi-sectoral partnership that will produce an independent, global 'data tracker' to measure progress for girls and women to ensure governments deliver on their promises for equality by 2030.<sup>13</sup> Complementing official statistical data, the partners will draw on original qualitative and perceptions data to more fully reflect girls' and women's realities.<sup>14</sup> Partners will work directly with girls' and women's movements in selected countries to ensure that the results, insights and recommendations motivate policymakers, decision makers and others to take action.

#### **4. Strengthening SDG accountability through establishing linkages with existing human rights mechanisms**

Monitoring and accountability will be central to the realization of the SDGs. 15 years ago, the creation of the Millennium Development Goals held promise as an incentive to action and an instrument of accountability. However, its pledge of accountability proved to be more rhetorical than real. Achieving the effective implementation of the SDGs will therefore depend on the operation of a strong, transparent, inclusive and participatory accountability framework at local, national, regional and international level—one which includes building upon existing human rights principles and mechanisms, given the close relationship between the Sustainable Development Agenda and the international human rights framework.

Weaving such a web of accountability will be crucial to realise the level of ambition with which the SDGs were adopted, to strengthen SDG accountability and to counter any possible threats of weakened enforcement. For this reason, governments should be encouraged to utilize the existing UN human rights

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<sup>10</sup> OHCHR, *Strengthening policies and programmes for universal birth registration and vital statistics development* (A/HRC/33/22), para. 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Population Fund, *State of the World's Population 2013: Motherhood in Childhood; Facing the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy* (2013), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Plan International, *Counting the Invisible: Using data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030* (2016), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*, p. 10.

monitoring mechanisms in synergy with the SDG-specific follow-up and reviews, and systematically integrate reviewing progress on realizing the SDGs in periodic reporting to treaty bodies and the UPR. States should also continue to involve civil society, including children, in monitoring the SDGs, and ensure a safe and enabling environment in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity.

#### **5. Working in partnership and enabling meaningful civil society and child participation**

Civil society will be crucial partners as national governments fulfill their commitments to localize the SDGs and aim to achieve the ambition of the SDGs at national level. A diverse group of civil society actors who are engaged in dialogues on SDG implementation can provide an expert voice on programming and service delivery, on the lived realities of those being left behind, and on how best to reach those who are excluded. Civil society also plays a critical role as a watchdog and quality check on government and other actors, including by checking that implementation commitments are acted upon, funded, and achieve the desired results.

Any government who wishes to achieve the SDGs but exclude civil society from crucial implementation and monitoring processes will fail, both because participation in decision-making is a commitment of Goal 16, but also because the solutions and energy of civil society are vital to keep the momentum to achieve the 2030 Agenda at local and national levels. Governments should therefore create and maintain a safe and enabling environment in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity as they assist States in fulfilling the commitments of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

Just like civil society, children and young people should be consulted in decision-making processes. Governments should effectively include boys, girls, and young people's voices and views in the implementation, monitoring, and accountability processes to ensure that national plans and strategies work to meet their needs, realize their rights, and fulfil the ambition of the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, there is ample evidence that a number of global partnerships helped to accelerate action on key MDG issues, and this will be even more vital for the achievement of the vast SDG framework. The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children is an example of a new partnership for SDG target 16.2, and the Global Financing Facility linked to Every Woman Every Child is another. These partnerships allow for concerted and collective action and funding toward particular issues and governments should welcome participation in such initiatives.

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#### **About Plan International**

*Plan International, Inc. is an independent, with no religious, political, or governmental affiliations, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1981, and in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 2011.*

*Founded in 1937, Plan International is one of the oldest and largest child rights and development organisations in the world. Plan International strives for a just world that advances children's rights and*

*equality for girls. To achieve this, we seek to empower children, young people and communities to make vital changes that tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls, exclusion and vulnerability.*