PLAN INTERNATIONAL:
HISTORY, MISSION, CASE STUDIES

REPORT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AID CONSORTIUM

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Dear members of the International Development Assistance Consortium,

We are so honored to have been invited to participate in this consortium and look forward to working with you all to reach your development goals. We have worked with many of you before in some capacity and are thrilled to find new ways to collaborate and create change towards a more equal world for girls and empower youth.

The following information has been provided to give you a more in-depth view of who we are and what we do. We have provided examples of our work and our philosophy regarding aid as concise and descriptive as possible. We look forward to getting to know you all and hearing what your goals are for development.

Sincerely,

Representatives of Plan International
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Who we are

Our Mission and History

John Langdon-Davies (pictured in figure 1) and Eric Muggeridge founded Plan International (Plan) in 1937, with an initial intent to provide “food, accommodation, and education” to children affected by the Spanish Civil War. Now, Plan operates as a humanitarian-driven development organization. Plan’s mission is to empower children and adolescents, change policy at every level of government, respond to disasters and crises, and facilitate the healthy development and upbringing of children from birth to adulthood (Plan International n.d.d).

Plan, based on its Global Strategy, has shifted from working exclusively with conflict-affected children to addressing systemic drivers and individual instances of gender inequality and child poverty (Plan International n.d.d).

2022 marks the 85th anniversary of Plan’s Founding. From the beginning, Plan has used sponsorship of individual children as a model that centers the child, connecting individual donors directly to the lives Plan impacts. Plan had an ambitious goal of affecting the lives of one hundred million girls over the five years of 2017-2022. In 2021 alone, Plan served 26.2 million girls and 24.1 million boys (Plan International n.d.d). Figure 2 summarizes the transformation of Plan since its founding and its expansion from Spain to seventy-five countries.

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Figure 1 Founder of Plan International
John Langdon-Davies, Plan International,
(Plan International n.d.d)
Plan International Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>“Foster Parents Plan for Children in Spain” is founded, to assist children impacted by the Spanish Civil War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Plan broadens its operations, renaming it “Foster Parents Plan for War Children,” resettling refugees in England during WWII. After the war, Plan delivered aid to France, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Greece, with temporary operations in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1950s:</td>
<td>Plan renames again to “Foster Parents Plan Inc.,” reflecting a shift in focus from those affected by war to children in general. Plan in this era began moving the bulk of operations from Europe to less developed countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1960s:</td>
<td>Plan extends operations to Asia and South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1970s:</td>
<td>Plan adopts its current name, Plan International, active in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1980s:</td>
<td>Plan is recognized by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, as donors expand from Canada, the US, Australia, and the Netherlands to include Belgium, Germany, Japan, and the UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1990s:</td>
<td>Plan opens offices in France, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and the Republic of Korea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 2000s:</td>
<td>Twenty-one countries now donate to Plan, and offices open in Colombia, India, Ireland, Italy, Hong Kong, Spain, and Switzerland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizational Structure

The Global Hub, in Woking, United Kingdom, oversees Plan International operations. The Global Hub is home to the Leadership Team which provides leadership and coordinates Plan’s operations (Plan International n.d.d).

Country Offices constitute most of Plan’s operations, numbering over fifty. Each Country Office, led by a Country Director, conducts the actual program work. Country Offices operate independently in terms of governance but are managed by one of four Regional Hubs (Plan International n.d.d).
Regional hubs reside in Panama for the Americas, Bangkok for Asia, Nairobi for Eastern and Southern Africa, and Senegal for West and Central Africa. Regional Hubs provide technical assistance to Country Offices and ensure regional cooperation between Country Offices for shared goals. Each Regional Hub is led by a Regional Director, who also has a position on the Leadership Team (Plan International n.d.d).

Plan also operates four Liaison Offices, in Geneva, New York, Addis Ababa, and Brussels. These offices coordinate with and play an advocacy role with large, multilateral organizations such as the UN (Plan International n.d.d).

Finally, National Organizations, located in donor countries, work to fundraise for Plan’s operations and ensure effective management (Plan International n.d.d).

**Governance**

The ultimate governance of Plan comes from the Members’ Assembly, comprised of delegates from each of Plan’s 20 National Organizations. The Members’ Assembly decides Plan’s Global Strategy, annual budget, financial statements, and Global Policies. Presently, Gunvor Kronman serves as the Chair of both the Members’ Assembly and International Board (Plan International n.d.d).

The 11-member International Board oversees the management of Plan and conducts financial auditing and other administrative tasks. Seven of the members must sit in the governing bodies of National Organizations (Plan International n.d.d).
What we do

Our purpose
Everything we do works towards equality for girls and empowering youth.

Plan works towards this goal with seven main program types: education, protection from violence, youth empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, early childhood development, skills and work, and emergencies (Plan international n.d.b).

Plan International’s Global Strategy 2017-2022 (Plan International n.d.e)

100 MILLION REASONS

As introduced in Who We Are, Plan had a goal of changing the lives of one hundred million girls worldwide.

Plan, in a five-year period, worked to:

"Deliver greater impact for vulnerable children, especially girls"

• Plan works in the where there is the highest amount of inequality.
• Plan operates with transparency to maintain accountability.
• Plan works within the global framework to synchronize its efforts with other international actors.

"Lead on girls’ rights"

• Plan understands the SDGs need an emphasis on gender equality to succeed.
• Plan works across gender to contribute to the girls’ rights movement.
• Plan serves as a role model in the international community.

"Transform girls’ lives"

• Plan empowers children and girls to lead the policy dialogue.
• Plan advocates on behalf of children within recipient countries to address systemic drivers that harm girls.
• Plan roots its work in gender equality by tackling underlying causes of discrimination.
"Leave no one behind"

- Plan works to increase its work in conflict-affected regions.
- Plan's policies are implemented globally, independent of development status.
- Plan adapts to changing circumstances

"Deepen partnerships"

- Plan partners with local organizations and leaders.
- Plan works in every level of government
- Plan's total reach spans to 100 countries

"Influence greater change at local and global levels"

- Plan knows there must be local buy-in to create global change.
- Plan influences policy change at a local level
- Plan empowers communities to self-advocate with their own governments to keep them accountable
- Plan collaborates with other organizations that work to advance children's rights.
Priority Areas of work and how they relate to the global SDGs

To meet Plan’s 2030 Global Goals, Plan’s work focuses on the seven areas displayed in Figure 3, which map to the six following SDGs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>SDG Goal</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive, Quality Education</td>
<td>4 Quality Education</td>
<td>The COVID-19 pandemic could reverse the progress made in reproductive health, maternal health, and child health (United Nations n.d.). Now, more than ever, Plan must strive to protect the health and well-being of children worldwide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection from violence</td>
<td>3 Good Health and Well-Being</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual and reproductive health and rights</td>
<td>3 Good Health and Well-Being</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood development</td>
<td>3 Good Health and Well-Being</td>
<td>Schools in less developed countries often lack access to even safe drinking water and electricity (United Nations n.d.). With this in mind, Plan promotes free and equal access to education, particularly for girls and children with disabilities, and in the wake of disasters and emergencies (Plan International 2018a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth empowerment</td>
<td>16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergencies</td>
<td>16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and decent work</td>
<td>8 Decent Work and Economic Growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 Priority Programs and Corresponding SDGs, Plan International
Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

One in three women is the target of violence, which has been intensified by the pandemic (United Nations n.d.). Plan firmly states, “violence against girls is epidemic.” Plan focuses on girls in particular because they face a distinct risk of violence, which is often overlooked by programs that target children or women (Plan International 2018b). Additionally, gender inequality prevents girls from advocating for their sexual and reproductive health, leaving them vulnerable to a range of human rights violations (Plan International 2018c).

Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Plan’s origins in helping children displaced by war have situated it well to engage with SDG 10. There are 311 refugees for every 100,000 people (United Nations n.d.). Plan now additionally advocates on behalf of youth, as the international community often overlooks their voices. Plan seeks to empower youth, particularly girls, to advocate for their political rights and increase their civic participation (Plan International 2020).

Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

As stated previously, Plan hopes youth will drive activist movements and advocate for their well-being. This can only happen if children have a safe, quality upbringing. The pandemic has intensified children’s risk of exploitation, with a third of children being victims of trafficking (United Nations n.d.). To address this, and the other humanitarian issues youth and children face, Plan will increase collaboration with youth and women-led organizations. Plan also seeks to serve as a platform to boost the reach of local organizations and ensure Plan and Plan’s partners meet quality and accountability standards (Plan 2022f).

Training

Plan International, to ensure high-quality programs and outcomes, trains employees based on programs Plan offers. Figure 4 displays the number of employees trained in Plan International Uganda. Mukibi, in the International Journal of Technology and Management, has found that employee training was an essential factor in the reception of Plan’s activities by local communities and government (2017, p. 12).
Good governance is not necessarily limited to the government but can apply to organizational structure as well. By providing quality, programmatically specific training to employees, Plan ensures its employees can deliver on its promises.

**Summary**

Plan aligns its vision with the goals identified by the international community. In turn, Plan hopes to change the culture of the international community by giving youth a voice within the donor space. Training helps keep employees accountable as they work to advance
Where we work

PLAN INTERNATIONAL OPERATES

Plan International has expanded from Spain to operate in over seventy-five countries, as displayed in Figure 5. Plan has offices in 27 countries in Africa and the Middle East, fourteen countries in the Americas, nineteen countries in Asia and the Pacific, and thirteen in Europe, with UN offices in New York and Geneva (Plan International n.d.c)
Funding and Financing

This section will display how Plan International receives financing, and where Plan distributes the funds, historically and today.

Plan International receives funds from two main sources: individual donations in the form of child sponsorships and donations from institutions and corporations in the form of grants. Additional funding comes from “other sources such as disaster appeals” (Plan International 2021). Figure 6 displays the income sources, the efficiency of funding, and expenditure for the fiscal year 2021.

In 2010, Africa received the largest share of funding, followed by Central and South America, then Asia, as shown in figure 7. Asia received a similar amount of funding to Central and South America in 2009, but funding increased significantly for Central and South America in 2010.
Expenditure is reported differently for 2021 and includes the total amount spent on programs and staffing. Figure 8 shows 2021 expenditure by region, in thousands of Euros. Total expenditure for 2021 was €937m (Plan International 2022b). Africa, combined, still receives the largest amount of funding. The two most funded regions are West Africa, and Eastern and Southern Africa. Asia receives the next largest amount, followed by Central and South America. Over time, the funding priorities by region have not drastically changed.

Figure 8 Expenditure by Region, Plan International, 2021, in €thousands (Plan International 2022c)

Figure 9 indicates expenditure by program type. Disaster response and mitigation include food and medicine distribution, psychosocial support, and other related activities. Protection from violence programs focus on both individual instances of violence and the systemic drivers of violence. Education programs have an emphasis on girls’ education. Youth empowerment programs teach self-advocacy and teach how to engage in collective civic action. Early childhood development programs deal with healthcare, food security, malaria prevention, and
related activities. Sexual and reproductive health programs related to family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, and sex education. Finally, the skills and opportunities program deals with vocational training, life skills, and community engagement. The remaining expenditures relate to administrative tasks such as fundraising, communication with donors, and other operating costs (Plan International 2022c, p.10-11).

Best Practices and Case Studies

Cash and Voucher Assistance

Women’s Refugee Council (WRC) has assessed the efficacy of Plan International’s cash and voucher assistance (CVA) projects using case studies from two countries: Egypt and the Central African Republic (CAR). WRC worked with Plan International to implement the projects, and funding was obtained through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). CVA involves a direct monetary transfer to caregivers of adolescent refugees. The funding is administered conditionally, requiring the attendance of the caregiver in bi-weekly parenting classes and a set of seventeen goals they must meet. (Women’s Refugee Council and Plan International 2020)

The CVA program targeted adolescents affected by conflict, intending to improve the “protection, education, and wellbeing” of adolescents aged 10-19. The CAR project was meant to enhance protection, whereas the Egypt project focused more on education. WRC found that cash transfers improved education enrollment, basic health, and food security within CAR, but gender-based violence did not see a decline. Egypt saw similar success regarding education, but refugee groups encountered a barrier when providing documentation, and those with disabilities saw slower enrollment growth. Cash transfers further contributed to hostilities between refugees and host families (Women’s Refugee Council and Plan International 2020).

WRC recommends CVA is not enough alone but is a helpful part of a larger, more comprehensive solution to meet education, basic health, and food security goals. Direct financial assistance can be a useful tool to improve the lives of children.

Community Engagement and Accountability

Plan Indonesia has focused more on disaster response in recent years. Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) programs are used to foster collaboration amongst stakeholders, and to enable all voices to be heard within collaborative processes. In the case of Indonesia’s disaster response, Plan International uses CEA working groups to coordinate between emergency response teams in both governmental and non-governmental positions (Plan International 2022a). Information sharing and feedback mechanisms ensure accountability and build inclusive systems that are sensitive to the needs of a wide variety of individuals.

Lembata, Indonesia experienced a volcanic eruption in December 2020. In response, Plan conducted a Rapid Needs Assessment, which found gaps in water/sanitation services, education during emergencies, and child protection during emergencies. Then, Plan coordinated with
emergency response stakeholders to create open communication channels between groups. Plan categorized received feedback into nine categories, ranging from expressions of gratitude to suggestions for improvement to reports of a breach of code of conduct (Plan International 2022a).

The CEA program in Lembata, Indonesia was effective in soliciting feedback about Plan services. No feedback regarding sensitive issues (e.g., a breach of code of conduct) was reported, but the opportunity to discuss sensitive issues is important should the need arise. In this specific instance, Plan received feedback about elderly and women-led families preferring certain emergency toolkits over others, which helps shape future policy (Plan International 2022a).

Plan found that CEA only works as much as those involved in the process want it to work, coordination can prevent avoidable problems, COVID-19 has stretched local resources, CEA significantly contributes to a quality feedback mechanism, and community engagement requires engagement with local leadership (Plan International 2022a).

**Violence against Children: Lack of funding in Timor-Leste and the Pacific**

When addressing violence against children, individual instances of violence are the result of systems and structures that beget violence through a lack of societal, community, and family support (Suthanthiraraj 2019). Ending violence against children (EVAC) programs seek to address the root causes of violence. Kavitha Suthanthiraraj, the principal author of a report on EVAC programs in Timor-Leste and the Pacific, details the need for a socio-ecological framework to address the primary drivers of violence against children, in addition to specific instances of violence. This strategy educates children through school programs about resources they have if in an abusive situation, educates families about non-violent discipline, educates communities about rules for bystander intervention and how the community can prevent violence through mutual accountability and encourages societies to implement laws, policies, support services, and safe community spaces (2019, p. 30-31). The report makes four recommendations to address violence against children: increase funding to programs that specifically target violence against children, adopt a clear policy...
platform, measure child violence-specific program expenditure, and focus on the intersectionality between violence against women and children (2019, p. 32-35).

Australia, as a major presence in the Pacific, was the target of the report. EVAC programs are chronically underfunded or non-existent, accounting for .1% of Australian ODA (2019, p. 25). Figure 10 shows Australian ODA by sector, highlighting the lack of funding for EVAC-specific programs. Plan participated in the report to call upon donors to expand EVAC funding, playing the role of a policy advocate.
Decolonizing the aid sector

“To truly decolonize the aid sector, organizations must be honest and transparent about the history and structure of international aid, and the inherent cycles of privilege and power” - Mariama Deschamps, Director of Global Safeguarding.

The international aid sector has been both a project of liberal values and national self-interest by global powers to ensure their own economic and military goals (Plan International 2022d). To truly decolonize the aid sector, we must radically question the very foundations and values that our sector holds onto. We need to decenter our understanding of the world and the processes that lead to injustice for those we work for and with. We should prioritize methods that originate from the communities we work with and for (Plan International 2022d).

What is colonialism in aid?

The current paradigm within the aid sector has continued to maintain power imbalances between aid receiving countries and aid-giving countries that are remnants of the colonial era. Aid receiving countries are not viewed as important stakeholders and are instead objectified. Aid receiving countries are not allowed voice their ideas that would help them sustain development on their terms, but rather are ensnared by the metrics of the aid-giving countries and their agenda. The interventions, activities, and proposals serve to keep the power status quo (Plan International 2022d).

What figure 11 shows is that aid is effectively flowing in reverse. Rich countries are not developing poor countries; poor countries are developing rich ones. In other words, “for every $1 of aid that developing countries receive, they lose $24 in net outflows” (Plan International 2022d).

The reasons for the outflows from developing countries:

- Interest payments on debt
- Foreigners make money on their investments in ‘developing countries which they then send back home
- Unrecorded ‘capital flight’ (such as multi-nationals stealing money by invoice faking, etc.) (Plan International 2022d)
Examining and changing approaches

Success must be defined by the community receiving the aid.

Decolonization requires radically examining and changing the approaches of aid and involving and elevating the people, systems, and methods that originate from communities side-lined by colonialism and white supremacy. The aid-receiving people and country must be acknowledged, important, included, and centered in proposals and solutions. (Plan International 2022d)

What follows are five starting points for decolonizing the aid sector from within.

There must be an understanding of the cycle of dependency that has been created in aid recipient countries and populations. This understanding should result in a relinquishing and sharing of power at all levels of its structure.

1. Review leadership and governance

Historically, senior leaders in the aid sector are white males or individuals who have had to emulate white males to solidify legitimacy within this space. Although there have been more women leaders, this still does not affect the diversity of the people the aid sector claims to serve as governing boards continue to remain white or from the white/European diaspora. To decolonize aid, INGOs should start by addressing the lack of diversity in leadership and governance. Increasing ethnic diversity is a key step to decolonizing INGOs. But it is not enough to merely be diverse. Leadership and governance should be genuine, equitable, welcoming, inclusive, and respectful of difference. Power holders must understand their power and privilege. (Plan International 2022d)

2. Assess how we carry out programs and interventions

Currently, INGOs primarily prioritize the needs of the white, Western, or white majority affluent country donor(s) as they choose the projects and provide the funding while defining what development and success look like. INGOs often have little to no knowledge or understanding of the colonial and imperialist histories of the countries in which they run programs, the global nature of ‘white supremacy and the white /colonial lens,’ and the impact this may have on the authenticity of relationships, perceptions, or interventions. Such approaches are colonialist, as they side-line the needs, history, and even the culture of the people their programs serve.

Every program should be centered on, co-created, and co-implemented with the people who the project directly serves so that management of the project can be based on a local context. (Plan International 2022d)
3. Act in true partnership

“White supremacy and colonization will always prefer western academic ways of knowing over traditional forms of knowledge and lived experience.”

Can we honestly say we are working in partnership when those partnerships are often rooted in models which uphold colonialist power structures? Usually, the information given to locally-based partners is limited, and accountability is one-way, i.e., from locally-based partners to the partners based in white-majority affluent countries. Furthermore, the white-majority affluent country-based NGOs, donors, or offices usually have the budgetary power and the last say in many, if not all, areas. More trust is often placed in organizations based in the white-majority affluent countries than local organizations. However, local experience and expertise are far greater, and more trust should be placed in traditional forms of knowledge and lived experience, rather than Western academic ways of knowing (Plan International 2022d).

4. Elevate national and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) expertise

Those who are not from white-majority affluent countries or from the European/white diaspora, e.g., Indigenous, Black, people of color, or other people local to the countries we operate in, are often not held as credible or are seen as ‘less than.’ In humanitarian response teams serving to respond to emergencies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, it is not uncommon to find all members of the management staff to be from white-majority affluent countries. Often, they oversee ‘capacity building’ for local staff, while far greater expertise is required for the humanitarian response. Another way to help in the decolonization of INGOs is through advancing local and BIPOC skills, giving them the opportunity and ability to create local leaders that will sustain development at the local level (Plan International 2022d).

5. Consider language

“Describing the recipients of aid as beneficiaries or as ‘the third world’ creates a power imbalance.”

We must ask:

- What are the important needs stated by those we work with and for and how do they wish to fulfil them?
- Who would be able to execute and implement the programme in its totality?
- Are we listening to all parties involved?
- How do we ensure that our work is sowing the seeds of these communities’ autonomy and self-sustainability?
INGOs do have a vital role to play in the world today, but it means being more aware of and accountable to those we work with and for. We need to move away from frameworks that support power imbalances to ones that share power, enable equitable relationships, and are centered around the people we work with. Power is hidden in the language that we speak. Some terms should never be used when talking to donors. The power imbalance that words like ‘beneficiary’ or ‘the third world’ create a mindset of dependency and internalized oppression for aid recipients. Instead, we can use terms such as ‘program participant.’ It is important not to shy away from the difficult conversations about decolonizing our work. We must engage honestly on this topic with both those we work with and for, and with donors and funders. These conversations should be had openly and objectively so we discover for ourselves where our limitations are. From there, we can act from a place of honesty and integrity (Plan International 2022d).

**Case study conclusions**

Plan focuses on programmatic solutions that directly support individuals or provide meaningful feedback to enhance policy decisions. CVA provides direct financial assistance to families supporting refugee children. CEA programs ensure Plan policies are meeting the needs of the community they are meant to assist. Feedback mechanisms prevent Plan operations from becoming a “black box” by building transparency and trust with the communities Plan serves. Particularly when dealing with children, accountability and feedback help prevent further hardship and abuse by having multiple points of contact and oversight to prevent someone from trying to further exploit a situation. Furthermore, programs alone are not effective in meeting the needs of the community. While any individual project can provide some benefit, creating local support for the intended outcome of a project, and empowering the community to continue working towards their goals is essential to enacting actual change. As shown through the Timor-Leste report, Plan also focuses on policy recommendations to donor agencies.

To summarize, Plan International has a wide array of programs focused on improving the well-being of children, with an emphasis on gender equality. Plan adapts to the needs of local communities, whether it be disaster relief in Indonesia or direct financial assistance in Egypt. Strategies include programmatic assistance, project assistance, and advocacy. Plan understands the problematic history of aid, and partners with local organizations to decenter Western ideas and elevate indigenous thought. This is a task that never ends, requiring continual reflection on the role Plan plays in the communities we serve.
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