



Girls first

BEING **BOLDER** FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS!

Plan International Netherlands Strategy 2021-2025

November 2021

Debaka, 12, lives in a displacement camp in Ethiopia with her aunt

Introduction

In recent decades, the world has seen unprecedented progress in the fight against global poverty, inequality and injustice. Progress that is however now at stake: the impacts of humanitarian prolonged crisis, climate change and COVID-19 are exacerbating poverty and inequality. Globalization and polarization increase disparities, often impacting girls and young women the hardest. At the same time, activist movements of youth leadership are coming up as positive forces of change, demanding their role and speaking up on social issues such as racism, economic inequality and climate change. Global discussions about power and privilege also challenge our own views on our role and position to bring about this change.

In this context we at Plan International Netherlands developed our strategy for the years to come. We reflected on the external world and how that affects our work, but we also took a deep dive to self-reflect: on our purpose, our strengths and our legitimacy. We concluded that we need to be bolder to realize our goals, and that we need to adapt and change our ways of operating to be fit for the future. At the same time, we joined our colleagues around the world to shape Plan International's global strategy, which is to be released around the same time.

Executive Summary

As Plan International's Dutch office, we are aligned with Plan International's global strategy. In our strategy, we have defined our specific focus areas, strengths and added value within the Plan International family. We especially aim to play a leading role in Plan International's ambitions to **shift power** to our partners and local offices in the countries in which our programs are implemented, to work with **youth advocates** on gender equality and to ensure that Plan International **child sponsorship programs** and community work are appropriate and effective for future generations.

The strategic shifts that we have set out in our strategy are more about **how** we work rather than what we work on. With the Plan International Netherlands focus on **Girls First!** we remain committed **to our purpose to strive for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls and young women.**¹ We believe that achieving girls' rights and having youth's and girls' voices heard is not only a matter of justice, but also crucial for bringing about lasting change for a more equal society. The **Plan International Netherlands ambition** for the coming strategy period is to support **over 2 million girls and young women around the world facing crisis, inequality and injustice, to LEARN, LEAD, DECIDE and THRIVE.** To realize this ambition, we work with our partners and allies around the world to improve the position of girls and young women by gender transformative programming. The themes we focus on include access to quality education, Skills and Opportunities for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (SOYEE), strengthening young advocates, ensuring Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), as well as protection from violence.

¹ As the Dutch office we have added "**young women**" to our purpose statement to highlight our focus on adolescent girls.

In the process of this strategy, we identified our key strengths that we want to build on - our gender transformative approach, our global network of country offices, professional dedicated and passionate staff, our strong lobby network, and our sponsors and partnerships. Considering the challenges we face, and reflecting our values, we developed objectives and priorities for the coming years.

Plan International in the Netherlands is currently in good shape in many aspects: our program portfolio for the coming years is substantial and we have recently started to slowly bend the decade long declining trend in donations from the general public, an indication that our audiences see our work as relevant and urgent. We intend to use the four years ahead to ensure that by 2025 (our 50th anniversary in the Netherlands) our organisation is ready to continue to play a strong role in a world in which **the role of INGOs like ourselves will have shifted: from program developers heavily involved in implementation to innovative global partners building strategic relationships, sharing knowledge and learnings and providing platforms for (youth) advocacy.**

Our first objective is to increase our impact – to effectively focus our efforts where they are most needed to realize girls’ rights and supporting them to LEARN, LEAD, DECIDE and THRIVE. Our priorities for the coming years will be to adapt to the current realities such as the **climate crisis** and the overlap of long-term development and emergency humanitarian relief needs through a **nexus** way of working. We will also prioritize our learning and innovation agenda and improve our systems and processes to be as efficient and effective as possible.

Our second objective centres around shifting power closer to impact. This will mean that **local partners and Plan International country offices** will play a leading role in projects and programs. Therefore making projects as local as possible and international when necessary. We will also work towards offering a platform for young leaders. Through self-reflection we will also improve our own understanding of power and biases and cultivate a way of working that is **youth-led, gender transformative, anti-racist, feminist and inclusive**. This objective includes adapting and improving our sponsorship model.

Our third objective is that we want to focus on **improved sustainability** which will prioritize diversifying our funding streams, and building on a strong brand as well as working on our own carbon footprint in our office.

Our priorities have consequences, in that in the course of the next few years, we will develop new ways of working with our partners, some new and changed roles and responsibilities and some additional skills. We are ready for the challenge as we feel strongly that this will ultimately improve our ability to achieve our purpose.

STRATEGY AT A GLANCE



Plan International Netherlands purpose is **CONTRIBUTING TO A JUST WORLD THAT ADVANCES CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN**

OUTCOME AREAS

Vulnerable children, especially girls:

<p>are educated and have the skills for work and life</p> <p>LEARN</p>	<p>take action on issues that matter to them</p> <p>LEAD</p>	<p>have control over their lives and bodies</p> <p>DECIDE</p>	<p>grow up cared for and free from violence and fear</p> <p>THRIVE</p>
In development and humanitarian response			

PLAN INTERNATIONAL NL OBJECTIVES FOR 2025

<p>Increased Impact We are increasing our impact for girls and young women by adapting our focus and way of working</p>	<p>Shifting Power We are working in a way that respects our principles and values. With decisions being made closer to impact and by those we work with and for</p>	<p>Improved Sustainability We are improving our sustainability through diversified funding and improving our carbon footprint</p>
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PLAN INTERNATIONAL NL PRIORITIES

<p>Learning & Innovation Nexus/climate & environment programming Effective systems & processes</p>	<p>Localization and anti-racist Next gen sponsorship Feminist principles Youth led</p>	<p>Financial sustainability Reducing our carbon footprint Branding</p>
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PLAN INTERNATIONAL NL RESPONSIBILITIES

<p>Raise funding to achieve impact in the communities we work in</p>	<p>Engage and influence donors, stakeholders and the Dutch public</p>	<p>Project compliance, program development, alliance & network building, and knowledge sharing</p>
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FOCUS ON GIRLS RIGHTS AND YOUTH CENTERED

1 CRC: "Convention of the Rights of the Child"

2 CEDAW: "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women"

Contents

Introduction	2
Executive Summary	2
Chapter 1: The world we live in	6
Chapter 2: Who we are	11
Values of Plan International Netherlands	13
Feminist principles	14
Key strengths of Plan International Netherlands	15
Chapter 3: Being bolder for girls' rights	16
Ambition	17
Where we want to be in 5 years	17
Areas to improve and prioritize	17
Objective 1: Increased impact	17
Objective 2: Shifting the power	18
Objective 3: Improved sustainability	18
Chapter 4: How we work	20
Theory of Change	22
Our gender-transformative approach	23
Specific focus areas of Plan International Netherlands	23
Our primary impact groups	24
Our Outcome Areas	25
Where and who we work with	28
Appendix One: How we are contributing to the SDGs	29
Appendix Two: The development of the Strategy	32



CHAPTER 1: THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

Chidera Eggerue, aka the Slumflower blogger, speaks at the Global Girls Summit in Brussels

Chapter 1: The world we live in

The world has made steady progress in the fight against global poverty, inequality and injustice. Momentum was confirmed by the worldwide commitment in 2015 to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to end extreme poverty by 2030. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a dramatic setback to the accomplishments of these goals. Lockdowns have exacerbated inequality and destroyed livelihoods especially among the poorest. Girls and women have been hit disproportionately hard, with increased rates of education dropout, gender-based violence, child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Meanwhile, further global challenges are imminent, with climate change's threatening impact on all aspects of society, especially affecting the most vulnerable. A hopeful development in the face of these great challenges is the rise of youth-led activism and advocacy to bring about change and call for justice.

Globalization and polarization

Globally we are more connected than ever – as COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated. Political attitudes are becoming increasingly polarized and characterized by extremism, fundamentalism and conservatism. This has serious consequences for women's and girls' rights, livelihoods and access to quality services such as education and sexual and reproductive health. Despite progress towards ending extreme poverty, economic inequality is increasing: the world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as the other 99% (7.9 billion people).² Growing tensions between movements and elites holding onto power, along with increased conflict over scarce resources, are hardening authoritarian tendencies and shrinking civic space. These developments have at the same time increased the relevance of civil society organisations in countries where Plan International implements programmes.

The world in crisis

Conflict often impacts children the hardest – especially girls and young women – as conflict often leads to an increase in dropouts from education, child marriages and gender-based violence, and a lack of sexual and reproductive health services. When schools in conflict-affected areas are shut, children have fewer economic opportunities later in life. As conflicts have become longer and more protracted, humanitarian crises are growing more chronic and complex, with a dramatic increase in climate-induced disasters.³

States are becoming more fragile due to inequality, poverty, unstable markets, population growth and limited civic space. More people are displaced now than at any time since World War II. In this world in crisis, humanitarian response funding is falling short of what is needed,⁴ especially for responses in areas that are besieged, hard to reach or otherwise pose high risks for humanitarian workers. The traditional division between humanitarian and development cooperation is becoming inadequate – calling for new 'nexus' approaches integrating both humanitarian and development interventions.

2 Oxfam 2021. "5 shocking facts about extreme global inequality and how to even it up"
<https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-shocking-facts-about-extreme-global-inequality-and-how-even-it>

3 The New Humanitarian (20 January 2021). "Ten humanitarian crisis and trends to watch in 2021."
[The New Humanitarian | Ten humanitarian crises and trends to watch in 2021](https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2021/1/20/ten-humanitarian-crisis-and-trends-to-watch-in-2021)

4 ALNAP (2018) The State of the Humanitarian System: <https://sohs.alnap.org> (in this report, coverage is the only performance measure to have shown consistent decline since 2012).

COVID- 19

The impacts of COVID-19 will take time to become fully apparent, but they go far beyond public health. Billions face an increased risk of insecure livelihoods, conflict and violence. As work and school have moved online, the divide between those with and without digital access has widened inequalities further. Many children whose schools closed have no hope of resuming their education. As poverty rises so do the numbers of girls that are married off. Gender-based violence has also worsened, and child abuse has gone under the radar – without the usual oversight of schools and other public spaces, case reports plummeted.⁵ The pandemic has laid bare how power imbalances prolong poverty and exploitation. At the same time, crises have historically offered opportunities for innovation and solidarity. Like many other organizations, Plan International has found new ways to work together online and donors are seeing new opportunities in funding digitalization programs. As COVID-19 disrupts the business landscape, there are also opportunities for workers who develop the required skills.

Power and privilege

Global activist movements addressing power and privilege have been on the rise. #MeToo called attention to what most women were already painfully aware of – gender-based violence and abuse is commonplace – and sparked conversations about power imbalances, patriarchal dominance, gender, diversity and inclusion policies. Black Lives Matter has also brought attention to structural power imbalances as a root cause of poverty and inequality. The murder of George Floyd triggered discussions on race around the world, with INGOs confronting their own structures and behaviours and recognizing the ways international humanitarian relief and development cooperation are rooted in the colonial past.

Youth leadership and voice

Many adolescent girls and young women lack the voice, agency and autonomy over their bodies to make their own decisions and are subjected to coerced sex, sexual violence and other harmful practices. For example, it is estimated that 200 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation or cutting. More than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday and every year around 2.5 million girls aged 12 to 15 give birth in low-income countries, with the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, globally, youth are speaking up, and getting more space to make themselves heard. Adults increasingly see youth as active participants in society, rather than “adults in waiting”. Youth are also being taken more seriously by governments and donors, with a growing consensus that they should take the lead in global issues that concern their future. Youth movements are often better equipped to participate in a digital society. They are very cognizant of intersectionality and the importance of inclusion. While some youth movements need support and strengthening, at the same time we recognize that they have much to teach their adult advocates.

“We are the next generation that needs to be heard. ... Meaningful participation is related to freedom of speech.”

Faza from Indonesia. Young person consulted in the strategy process.

5 Martins-Filho, Paulo R. Nicole P Damascena, Renata CM Lage, Karyna B Sposato.

Decrease in child abuse notifications during COVID-19 outbreak: A reason for worry or celebration?

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jpc.15213>

Education, Skills and Employment

Education has the power to transform lives. Yet 132 million girls are out of school⁶, and girls are 1.5 times more likely than boys to be completely excluded from primary education – more so in countries in crisis. In the coming decade, over 1 billion young people will enter the labour market. But many lack access to quality education to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes they will need to find a decent job. The economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the challenges facing young people even more urgent, as shrinking labour markets leave low-skilled young people with fewer choices and make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Young women are disproportionately excluded from full economic participation and face higher risks of vulnerable employment.

Climate change and environment

Youth advocates are also rising for climate justice worldwide, demonstrating the intersection between gender, climate, power and leadership. Climate change and environmental degradation are intergenerational and amplify gender injustices. There is increasing recognition of their disproportionate impact on women and girls, who bear the brunt of natural resource depletion and degradation and are underrepresented in the debate on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Intergenerational justice means we need to consider how to balance the rights of people alive today against those of future generations.

“Women are often depicted as being vulnerable. But actually , they are the face of resilience, the backbone of the family and the community.”

Shaila Sahhid and Rokeya Khatun, Interview Gender and Water Alliance (Bangladesh), 18 May 2015

Presented as gast lecture March 2021.

Digitalization and innovation

In only two decades, digital technologies have reached around 50 percent of the populations in low and middle income countries. Technology can be a great equalizer, enhancing connectivity, financial inclusion, access to trade and public services.⁷ However, digital technologies can also threaten privacy, erode security and fuel inequality. Lack of access, opportunities and skills prevent many girls and young women from getting online, particularly in low-income countries and rural areas. So does a fear of discrimination, as girls and young women increasingly face cyber bullying, online sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. To address the gender digital divide, girls and young women need equal access to digital tools, information and skills and safe online access. As gender stereotyping occurs from an early age, girls and young women should be supported to build their self-confidence and foster a growth mindset. Through digitalisation, civil society and young people can communicate to the rest of the world and can access information that was previously not available to them. They work on a more equal level playing field with organisations in wealthier contexts.

6 World Bank. Girls Education. Found: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation#1>

7 United Nations (2021) “Shaping our future together” <https://www.un.org/en/un75/impact-digital-technologies>

Donor landscape and branding

Technology has changed fundraising, with opportunities to communicate with private donors through online and social media. While traditional grants are still an important component of development cooperation, more and more donors and NGOs are exploring how to achieve their missions through other business models such as impact bonds. Economic insecurities resulting from COVID-19 have affected budgets and strengthened the tendency to shift political focus to domestic issues. With international solidarity under pressure, institutional funding is expected to continue shifting towards fragile contexts, compelling civil society organizations in more 'stable' countries to look for alternative funding sources and models. Institutional donors increasingly express interest to contract local partners directly yet still count on the compliance-, reporting- and monitoring systems and expertise of INGOs. Private fundraising and support from business partners and institutional donors complement each other. For Plan International, private funding not tied to one project, creates space to stay independent in our programmatic choices and enables country offices to respond directly to communities' needs. Some institutional donors are recognizing the drawbacks of restricted, earmarked program funding in an ever changing and uncertain environment, and are exploring ways to provide more unrestricted funding, coupled with strong due diligence and vetting of the recipients at organisational level.



CHAPTER 2: WHO WE ARE

Youth reporter Nathaly, 18, interviews children about gender equality

Chapter 2: Who we are

Plan International's office in the Netherlands is part of the Plan International global family, which works in over 75 countries. Plan International was founded in 1937 by John Langdon-Davies, a journalist and a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War; Esme Odgers, an Australian humanitarian worker and Spanish Civil War activist; and Eric Muggeridge, a refugee worker. Plan International's office in the Netherlands was established in 1975 and is one of 20 National Organizations (NOs) around the world. The NOs are, among other things, the Plan family's main fundraising arm and at this point in history still play an important role in the governance of the organization. They engage with sponsors, governments and other stakeholders in their respective countries. The NOs work closely with the Country Offices (COs), which are responsible for managing and implementing programs that work for and with children, young people and communities, especially girls and young women. Some offices – such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Colombia – are considered both NO and CO as they do both implementing and fundraising⁸ and sit in the global members assembly (the highest decision making authority within Plan International). Plan International is working towards having more country offices become registered members of local civil society in order to build further legitimacy and have a more equal balance of votes in the Plan International's Members Assembly.⁹

When Plan International was founded, its aim was to provide food, accommodation, and education to children whose lives had been disrupted by war. From the start it used a child sponsorship model to support children and their families and communities. Plan International's focus has shifted over the years: from wartime relief in Europe to long-term community development and humanitarian relief across the globe, and a focus on the rights of girls and young women. In 2020, we reached over 50 million children and young people (54% of them girls) as a global organization, and Plan International Netherlands within this larger number reached over 600,000 children and young people (55% of them girls or young women). While our approaches have evolved, our strong dedication to children's rights has remained, as reflected in our purpose statement: striving for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International Netherlands strives for equality for girls and young women, with special attention for the unique needs of adolescent girls. We use the tagline Girls First to explain that we need to focus on the rights of girls in all our projects in order to bring positive change for all.

Our vision is a world where girls and young women have equal opportunity to gain an education, earn a decent living, make decisions about their own lives and bodies, and live without poverty and violence. We work towards four outcome areas that we call **LEARN, LEAD, DECIDE and THRIVE**. Within these outcome areas we aim to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and exclusion to realize girls' rights and contribute to a better society where both boys and girls can realize their full potential. **Plan International Netherlands** works collaboratively within the Plan International family and with national and international partners to develop, fund, monitor and support implementation of development and humanitarian programs that work towards our purpose and ambition.

⁸ When this document was written India and Columbia are voting members in the global members assembly. Brazil and Indonesia are currently observers and they will become voting members in the coming year.

⁹ For more information check out: <https://plan-international.org/organisation/structure>

Values of Plan International Netherlands

As a development and humanitarian organization, our work is grounded in fundamental human rights¹⁰ and humanitarian relief principles – particularly participation, universality and non-discrimination.¹¹ Our values are our compass. Through this strategy process we took time to further validate and sharpen our values, so they guide us through our work. Our key values are all aligned with Plan International's global values. We have given them meaning in the context of our Dutch office and we have added environmental consciousness as a core value to live up to in all that we do.

We strive for lasting impact (impact-driven)

To achieve significant and lasting impact on the lives of children and young people, and to secure equality for girls and young women, we challenge ourselves to be bold, courageous, responsive, focused and innovative.

We are open and accountable

We create an inclusive environment of trust by being open, honest, inclusive and transparent – within our organization and to our sponsors, donors, project participants/beneficiaries and partners. We are accountable for our decisions and actions, and we are open to learn and improve.

We work well together (team players)

We succeed by working with others, building bridges inside and outside the organization. We actively support our colleagues to achieve their goals. Together, we co-create and implement solutions in our teams across Plan International, with children, girls, young people and communities, and by engaging our sponsors, partners and donors.

We are inclusive and empowering

We respect all people, appreciate differences, reflect on our own behaviours and challenge inequalities whether they are based on gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation and/or ethnicity. Our drivers are solidarity and justice. Our work is locally driven, aiming to empower children, youth and their communities to take the lead in changing their lives. We strive for our internal and external communication to be inclusive and sensitive to imbalances in power and privilege. We invest in our staff to realize their potential.

We are environmentally conscious

We act to mitigate climate change and build climate resilience. We will work on reducing our carbon footprint as an organization and incorporating climate change and environmental sustainability into all our outcome areas where possible.

10 Particular focus on Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

11 These principles are embedded in the human rights laws and treaties which provide the normative basis for our work, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), international humanitarian and refugee law, humanitarian principles and standards including the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

“Collaboration and cross-sectoral/silo conversation allow for creativity and that has knock-on effects to everywhere we work! Feminist leadership principles and innovation principles share some similarities, especially the importance of self-reflection! And having it be OK to not succeed right away.

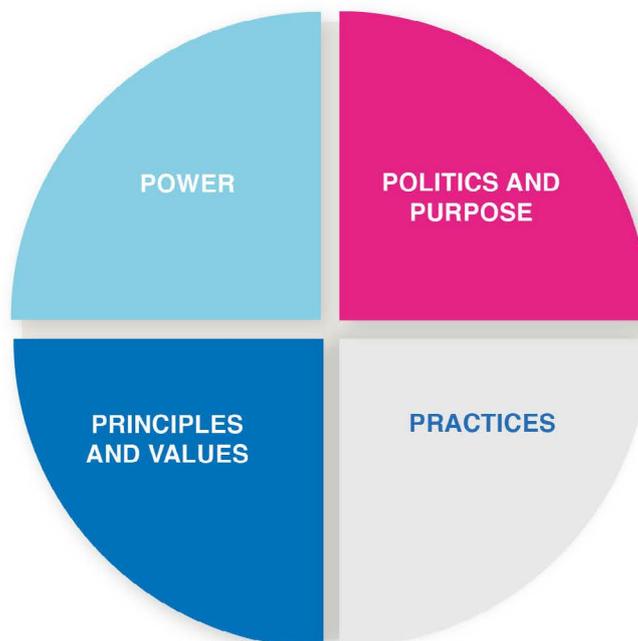
“With more focus on southern ownership we’ll have to be very clear about our role and added value.”

Quotes are from participants at the Plan International Netherlands Strategy Development Workshops
March 2021

Feminist principles

Plan International believes that when girls and young women are supported to thrive, their families and communities’ benefit. As a global organization we need to live the change we want to see, so we have adopted a feminist approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequality. Feminist leadership demands that we transform our own systems and structures to promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion. This means looking not just at our programs’ outcomes on gender equality and girls’ and women’s rights, but also at our ways of working including design, implementation, values, staffing and governance. Plan International’s commitment to feminist leadership principles includes promoting shared and collective power and decision making, self-reflection and openness, supporting local women’s rights actors and tackling power imbalances and patriarchal structures in all our interventions and in our organization. This should result in improved outcomes for marginalized groups, especially girls and women. We are committed to continuously work on our policies and practices and with our partners and colleagues to become more inclusive and empowering. This includes shifting power, so our projects and programs are led more by our local partners and Plan International country offices and supporting the move towards more youth leadership. As Plan International Netherlands we have a responsibility to play a facilitating and advocacy role, including within the Plan International federation, to initiate and support these changes, recognizing that decisions should be made closer to the point of impact of our projects.

**Feminist leadership for social transformation
contains 4 essential components**



Key strengths of Plan International Netherlands

Reflecting on our strengths and weaknesses, we have identified the strengths we want to build on.

In the next chapter, we highlight the areas we wish to improve.

<p>Gender transformative and intersectional</p> 	<p>Our projects and organisation address the root causes of gender discrimination and with an intersectional approach.</p>
<p>Community Driven</p> 	<p>We work at community level, with our grants and sponsorship programs, involving the local community, working with parents and community leaders to collaboratively contribute to unlocking the power of children – especially girls – across all transitions in life.</p>
<p>Rights-based</p> 	<p>We work from a holistic and rights-based approach. Our work spans all key transitions from childhood to adulthood, supporting young people's capacity to claim their rights and duty-bearers to meet their obligations.</p>
<p>Empowering & youth centred</p> 	<p>We support initiatives led by youth and girls, building their capacity and skills so they can thrive and take the lead, and working via local partners to strengthen their role.</p>
<p>Frontrunner in Child Safeguarding</p> 	<p>We have stringent policies and practices to ensure that children and young people remain safe, and no harm will come from participating in our projects or working with or within our organization.</p>
<p>Connected</p> 	<p>We have a wide network which supports our work in the community, nationally and globally to influence legislation, policies and practices including donor and private sector engagement.</p>



CHAPTER 3: BEING BOLDER FOR GIRLS' RIGHTS

Girls and boys in Vietnam need to work together to achieve gender equality

Chapter 3: Being bolder for girls' rights

Plan International Netherlands acknowledges that while our programs often have deep impact on individual lives, we need to **broaden our reach and scale**. We must keep striving to further improve our ways of working and sharpen our focus to meet the challenges of our time. In developing this strategy, we thought about the 'story' of development and humanitarian cooperation. How can we work together for a better future? And how will we address the challenges of our time? We took the time to reflect on **power and privilege**; on **how we can walk the talk and really do things differently**; and **how to work more effectively together**. At the end of this strategy period, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Plan International in the Netherlands. In 2025 we want to be able to look back and say we have positively contributed to realizing children's rights and equality for girls and young women. To make this happen, we must shift up a gear now. The following chapter outlines our ambitions, goals and priorities to reverse **the negative trends on gender inequality, while adjusting to new realities to create more opportunities for girls and young women**.

Ambition

In view of the global challenges and the priorities of Plan International globally, Plan International Netherlands defined the following **ambition** that guides our work for the coming years:

Support over 2 million girls and young women around the world facing crisis, inequality and injustice, to LEARN, LEAD, DECIDE and THRIVE.

Where we want to be in 5 years

In five years, we want to be: a stronger network and knowledge partner for our partners in the countries where the programmes are implemented, an increased learning and knowledge-based organisation, with an even more integrated way of working with our feminist leadership principles, with a strong youth-led focus in our ways of working and programming.

Areas to improve and prioritize

From December 2020 to June 2021, Plan International Netherlands went through a period of extensive consultation and consideration (See Appendix 2). Through this dialogue we identified areas that we wanted to improve and prioritize. The following objectives have been developed for the Plan International Netherlands office. However, they are linked and connected with the global priorities.

Objective 1: Increased impact

The world we live in is more complex and so is our work. So, we must adapt our programming in line with the latest developments to improve the impact of our work. To do this, we have identified key priorities we want to focus on:

Learning & innovation

We are committed to strengthen ourselves further as a knowledge-based and learning organization, investing to be more evidence based, learning from our successes as well as mistakes to ensure that our work continuously improves and that we effectively focus our efforts on where they are most needed. We promote innovation in order to remain distinctive and competitive and be more efficient in reaching our purpose.

Nexus and climate & environment programming

We want to improve our nexus way of working, i.e. by including crisis modifiers in our development projects. We also want to mainstream climate resilience and mitigation, environmental sustainability and awareness in all our thematic areas, partnering with expert organizations in these fields.

Effective systems & processes

We will work to improve our processes and systems as well as linkages through the organization, specifically focusing on fundraising, project management and influencing and communication processes. We will ensure that our systems support our processes to achieve our strategic priorities. We will also strengthen the people in our organization so that staff are optimally able to collaborate and work in an agile project-based manner.

Objective 2: Shifting the power

Plan International supports the global trend of empowered and globally interconnected civil society. As an organization we are dedicated to creating a more inclusive culture and making sure that the decisions are being made with the communities we serve and that the work we are involved in is routed in the context. Our priorities in this area are as follows:

Localization and Anti-Racism

Our priority is to make our (organisational and programmatic) governance more inclusive and our team more diverse and informed on power and bias. We will work with our global colleagues and partners on governance models to find the best ways of working to change the power dynamics. We are committed to challenging our own power and bias through reflection, training and policies. Local partners and Plan International country offices will play a leading role in projects and programs, thereby making projects as local as possible and international when necessary.

Next generation sponsorship

We will work with our global colleagues to improve and modernize our child sponsorship program and ensure it is aligned with our localisation and decolonisation ambitions. The process to review and innovate child sponsorship will be led by the Global Hub, the office of the Plan International that provides leadership, alignment and services to field operations and supports National Organization.

Feminist Principles and Youth Leadership

In order to really live our values, we will invest in training and reflection on feminist principles and encourage leadership that is inclusive and empowering. We will work further with youth organisations to shift the power closer to impact, increase youth leadership in our programs and in our office.

Objective 3: Improved sustainability

To improve our sustainability, we have formulated three priorities:

Financial Sustainability and Branding

In order to operate we need to ensure that we are financially fit for purpose. We aim to strengthen our current funding streams and to explore new funding opportunities. We will invest in our online fundraising, but also in exploring new fundraising products. We will grow by continuous testing, ensuring that offline and online marketing interact together and constantly analysing the effectiveness. In our institutional funding we want to ensure a sustainable funding base to realize our current and future ambitions, increase the share of nexus programming and diversify our donor base. With our business partners including the lottery we hope to strengthen relationships, build this portfolio but also create joint learning especially around gender justice and innovation. As part of this priority, we will also explore other fundraising mechanisms. An enabling factor for all our areas of fundraising is to work on a cohesive brand strategy.

Carbon footprint

We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint within our office by improving the choices we make around our building, what we purchase (or don't purchase) and on our actions (for example by becoming a meat free office and reducing international air travel).



CHAPTER 4: HOW WE WORK

Children's groups in Vietnam are working together to achieve gender equality

Chapter 4: How we work

Theory of Change

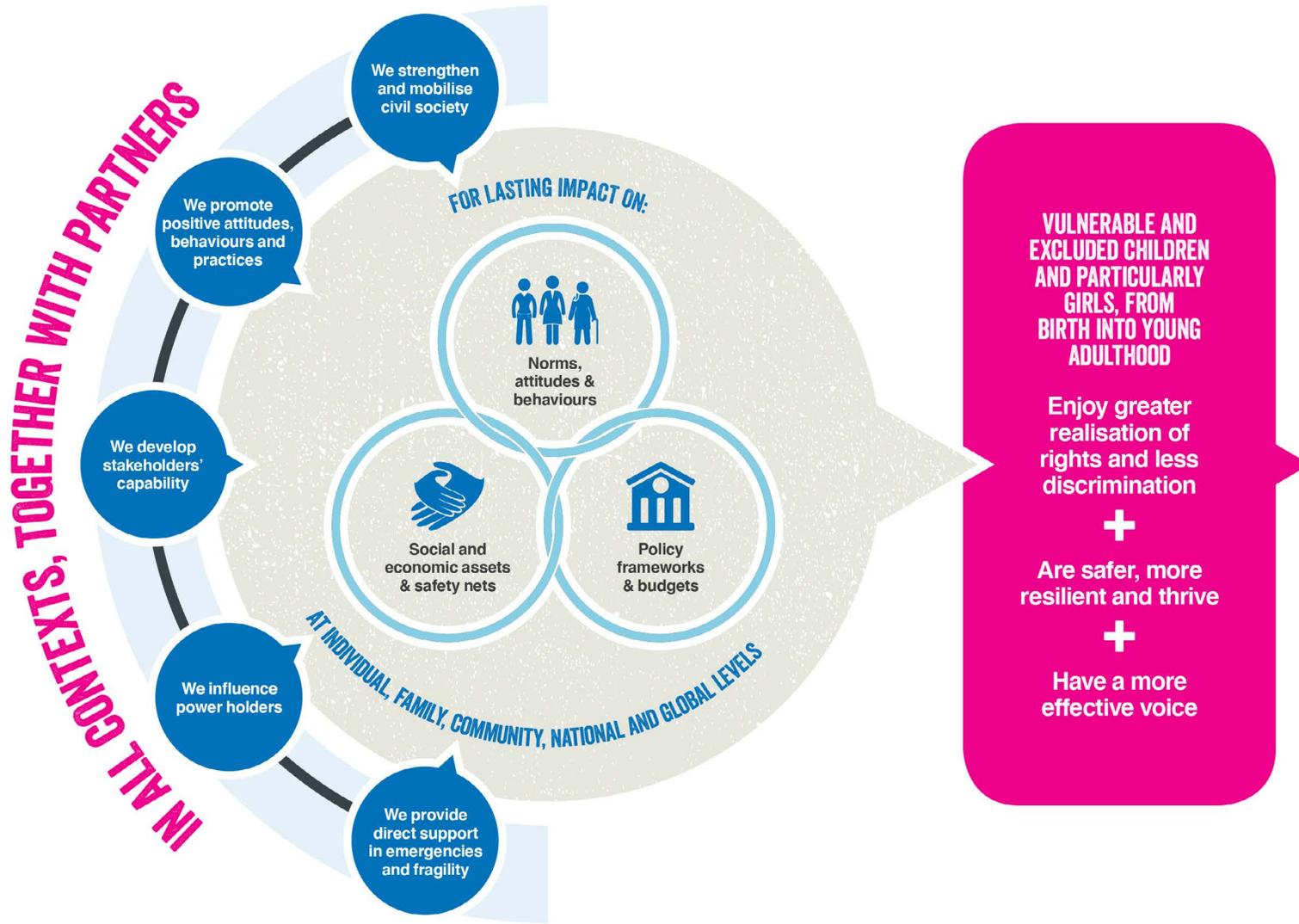
Plan International in the Netherlands uses the global [Plan International Theory of Change](#)¹² to achieve lasting improvements in the lives of children especially girls. We have **added young women** to the global purpose statement to emphasize our offices focus on adolescent girls.

We contribute to more enabling environments for the realisation of the rights of children and youth, especially girls and young women, by making sure that all our projects trigger change in three interdependent and interconnected dimensions:

- by influencing social norms – particularly harmful gender norms – and related attitudes and behaviours;
- by strengthening people’s personal, social and economic skills, assets and safety nets; and
- by contributing to better policies, legislation, budgets and government services at various levels that affect the lives of children and youth, particularly girls and young women.

¹² Plan International (June 2018). “Advancing Children’s Rights and Equality for Girls – our global approach to programme and influence” Found: https://plan-international.org/sites/default/files/media_wysiwyg/glo-our_global_approach_to_programme_and_influence_approach-final-io-eng-jun18.pdf

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S THEORY OF CHANGE

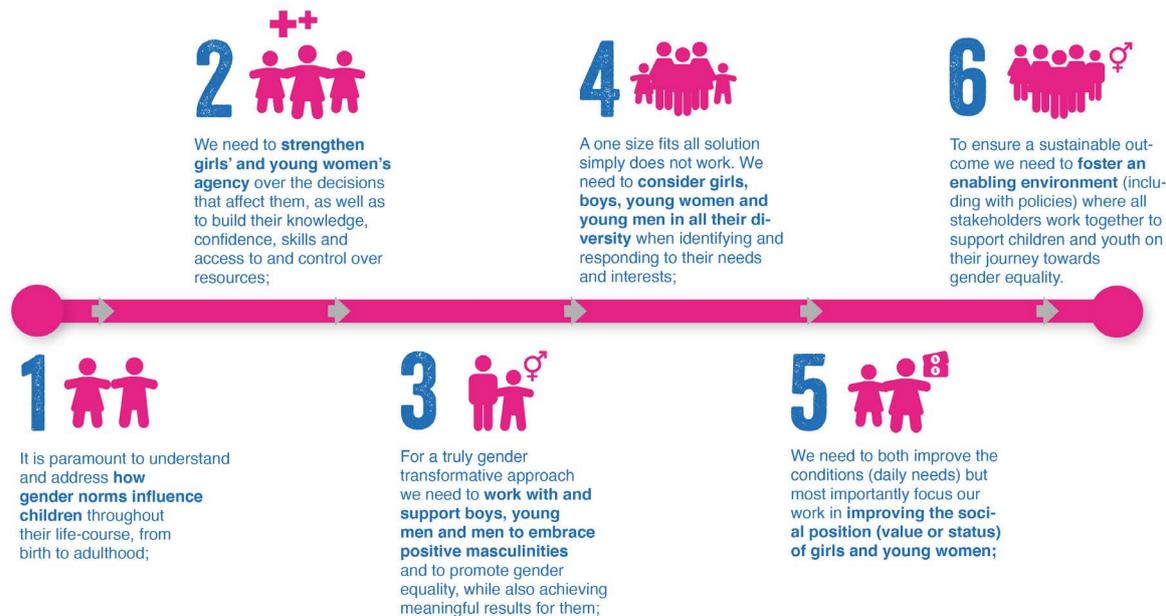


OUR PURPOSE

WE STRIVE FOR A JUST WORLD THAT ADVANCES CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY FOR GIRLS.

Our gender-transformative approach

We use our gender-transformative approach in all our work, to tackle the underlying causes of discrimination and inequality. We aim not only to improve the daily lives of girls and young women but also to advance their position and value in society, while actively working with boys and young men to champion gender equality. This approach has six interconnected and mutually reinforcing elements:



Specific focus areas of Plan International Netherlands

Plan International Netherlands works collaboratively within the Plan International member organizations and with national and international partners to develop, fund, monitor and support implementation of sponsorship- and grant-funded development and humanitarian programs that advance children's rights and equality for girls and young women. The Dutch office focuses on the following activities:

- Raise funds to support impact in the communities we work in
- Engage and influence donors, stakeholders and the general public
- Project compliance and program development
- Alliance and network building
- Building and sharing knowledge

Our programs focus on the four global outcome areas. Within this global thematic framework we focus on:

- LEARN:** Inclusive quality education and skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship (SOYEE)
- LEAD:** Youth-led lobby and advocacy
- DECIDE:** Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- THRIVE:** Protection against violence

These outcome areas are described in more detail in the next section.

We have specific expertise and programming also in gender transformative Water and Sanitation (WASH). **Gender transformative water and sanitation** contributes to quality education for girls and is an important component within SRHR (especially around combatting taboos around menstrual health).

Over the past few years, we have also started to build expertise and a small portfolio of climate change related programming which we aim to expand in the coming years, both in the humanitarian area and in the area of youth economic empowerment. Programming related to climate change is a relatively new theme for the Plan International Netherlands office, with a small portfolio of projects, e.g., in disaster risk reduction and green jobs. The Dutch office is committed to forging relationships with other organizations that specialize in climate and integrate more environmentally friendly practices within our organization, and programming that promotes climate adaptation, mitigation and actively exploring pre-emptive approaches.

The Dutch office has also worked more and more with a nexus approach, where we integrate both humanitarian and development relief interventions. Plan International is well placed to do nexus programming with our dual development and humanitarian mandate. We will champion the inclusion of crisis modifiers in development projects and programs. We will focus specifically on transitional education, SOYEE, protection and SRHR.

Plan International Netherlands has built up strength in (youth-led) lobby and advocacy over the last decade. In the coming years we see opportunities to add value by:

- Developing advocacy messages based on human (and more specifically, girls') rights and combining evidence from partners and providing technical support on international lobbying.
- Providing access to international fora and spaces for youth and youth-led organizations.
- Using our knowledge on Dutch policy and our position in an open civic space to provide actors in implementing countries with access to opportunities to advocate towards the Dutch government.

Our primary impact groups

We are committed to making a lasting impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and excluded children and youth while creating greater equality for girls and young women. While the United Nations defines youth as age 15 to 24, factors such as poverty and conflict prevent some young people from exercising their rights so our work may directly impact young people up to the age of 29.

Our Outcome Areas¹³

The following section outlines our four key outcome areas LEARN, LEAD, DECIDE and THRIVE and the focuses of the Plan International Netherlands office within these themes.



Inclusive Quality Education

Skills and opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship

Under our outcome area LEARN, we improve the education, skills and employment opportunities of marginalized young people in development and crises-affected contexts. This also includes a **nexus approach** that create an enabling environment for internally displaced people, host communities and refugees, creating social cohesion. In the coming strategy period, we will focus on the following themes:

- Encourage girls and boys to continue their education and to strive for a career of their choosing. This includes supporting access to transitional as well as non-formal quality education. Moreover, futureproof skills to build gender-equal career perspectives for girls (e.g. science, Technology, engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills, a growth mindset, financial and digital literacy, green skills) and the use of technology and innovation.
- Work with schools and governments to improve access to menstrual health and WASH services and education in schools to prevent menstruation causing girls to drop out.
- Work with governments, training providers and young people on market-relevant vocational training for marginalized young women and men. As well as engaging with the private sector and supporting organizations to link young women and men to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in a just transition to a greener and digital economy.

Climate and our outcome areas

Climate change affects poor people the most – especially women and girls, for example through scarcity of resources such as food, and a resulting increase in child marriages. Our new strategy focuses on incorporating climate change and environmental sustainability into all our outcome areas where possible. For the LEARN outcome, this means including climate and environment modules in our education projects, building skills for green jobs and promoting green entrepreneurship through incubation and acceleration. For the LEAD outcome, it means supporting young women leaders who are advocating for reducing our climate footprint. In our WASH projects we will partner with environmental organizations to work collectively on water conservation. We will work on climate resilience and mitigation in our projects and ensure families receive the information they need to prepare for the coming impacts of climate change and help protect the planet.

¹³ See Appendix 1 on how these link to the SDGs.



Youth advocacy

Our programs, lobbying and advocacy support youth to amplify their voice by leveraging Plan International's network to open up decision-making spaces for the traditionally excluded. Plan International supports youth to take full ownership of their advocacy strategies and LEAD, guiding them where necessary. We use our infrastructure and global forum to connect youth advocates globally and provide safe spaces in which they can jointly learn, connect and reflect.

Within this theme we focus on:

- Contributing to well-resourced feminist and youth-led (especially girl-led) organizing, activism and advocacy.
- Building youth's ability to take collective action and influence governments and other duty bearers to realize young people's meaningful participation in national, regional and international institutions and human rights mechanisms. In supporting youth as human rights defenders, we also need to integrate self-care mechanisms.



Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Adolescents around the world find it challenging or impossible to access education, information and services on sexual and reproductive health due to harmful social norms, gender stereotypes, power imbalances and the perceived need to control female sexuality. Our outcome area DECIDE aims to give children and young people, especially girls, control over their own lives and bodies. We focus on the following themes:

- Female genital mutilation or cutting
- Child, early and forced marriage and unions¹⁴
- Adolescent pregnancies
- Improving access to affordable menstrual products and WASH facilities at schools, and lobbying governments to include menstrual health and hygiene in their national policies.

“Youth engagement or youth advocacy is an opportunity to contribute to development. In my opinion, young people have great and fresh ideas so that when involved they will provide positive energy and ideas related to policies for equality for girls”

Anita from Indonesia. Youth consulted as part of strategy process.

¹⁴ A term including any marriage or informal union – whether under civil, religious or customary law, with or without formal registration – where one or both spouses are under age 18 and/or the full and free informed consent of one or both parties has not been obtained.

WASH and SRHR: WASH plays a significant role in the quality of sexual and reproductive health services and the realization of SRHR. Where water and hygiene facilities and services are weak or missing, health outcomes are compromised. Inadequate infection control in healthcare facilities increase risks to women and new-borns and puts people off seeking care. Poor access to gender-sensitive WASH facilities limit women's ability to manage their periods hygienically with dignity. The SDGs that address WASH, health and gender equality are interlinked, and combining interventions creates opportunities to bolster health and human rights outcomes.



Protection against Violence

Protection against violence is integrated across all our programs, including efforts to register all children so they can claim their rights. We strive for children and young people, especially girls, to grow up healthy, cared for and free from violence and fear. To THRIVE, children need a safe and healthy environment to grow up in and a supportive environment to continue their education. We focus on the following themes:¹⁵

- Contribute to **eliminating the sexual exploitation of children and youth.**
- **Protect children and especially girls and young women from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation,** through appropriate prevention and response interventions.
- Contribute to the elimination of harmful practices and protection against gender-based violence.
- Gender transformative WASH for **healthier communities** and to enable girls to thrive.

“We don't just want to be invited to speak; we want to be invited to co-create.”

Thubelihle from Tanzania. Youth consulted as part of strategy process.

¹⁵ See Appendix 2 on how these link to the SDGs.

Where and who we work with

The Dutch office works closely with offices and partners in all regions of the world to implement projects, with a strong focus on the Horn of Africa, MENA region and Southern Africa and build up our work in West Africa and the Sahel. In Asia and Latin America, we strive to maintain a stable portfolio. In around 20 countries, we are committing to a more intensive relationship of programming and support, to facilitate exchange of practices and learnings while upholding the humanitarian imperative “to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed”. We have chosen not to have programs in the Netherlands, as we feel there are sufficient organizations working on our themes in this context.

As a development and humanitarian organization, we aim to support affected children and youth before, during and after crises. We work at individual, family, community, national and global level for long-lasting impact in both humanitarian and development settings. We work closely with boys and men on gender equality as well with parents and caregivers, teachers, community leaders and other influencers. We work with communities and duty bearers (often government), civil society and the private sector, combining diverse types of funding (e.g. sponsorship, individuals, corporates, institutional, foundations). We also work with knowledge institutions such as universities to strengthen the evidence around our ways of working. We especially seek partnerships with organisations of children and young people. Based on an understanding of other stakeholders and on the knowledge of our own strengths and limitations, we develop strategic relationships to enhance our reach, influence and capability at all levels.

We recognize our key roles in fundraising; programme development and support; alliance building; engaging and influencing donors, stakeholders and the Dutch public on issues relating to our work; and project compliance and knowledge sharing.



**APPENDIX ONE: HOW WE ARE
CONTRIBUTING TO THE SDGS**

Maya, 19, from Indonesia attended Women Deliver as a youth influencer

Appendix One: How we are contributing to the SDGs

In September 2015, the member states of the United Nations adopted the aim of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. In line with our work towards a world in which girls and boys can fully develop and have the same rights and opportunities, Plan International endorses the SDGs and contributes as much as possible to achieving them.

Plan is committed to the following goals:



SDG 3: Good health and well-being

- 3.1: By 2030, reduce global maternal mortality to less than 70 per 100,000 births.
- 3.7: By 2030, ensure access to sexual and reproductive health care for all, including family planning, information and education and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.



SDG 4: Quality education

- 4.4: By 2030, significantly increase the number of young people and adults with relevant skills (including technical and vocational skills) for jobs and entrepreneurship.
- 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender inequalities in education and ensure equal access at all levels, including education and vocational training for people in vulnerable situations, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.



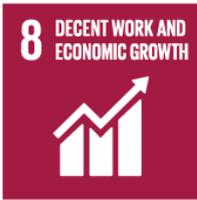
SDG 5: Gender equality

- 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual – and other types of exploitation.
- 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child marriage, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (this target corresponds with 16.7)



SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation

- 6.1: By 2030, universal and equal access to safe and affordable drinking water.
- 6.2: By 2030, access to decent sanitation and hygiene for all and an end to public defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and people in vulnerable situations.



SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth

- 8.5: By 2030, full employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and people with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- 8.6: By 2020, significantly reduce the proportion of young people who are not in work, education or training.



SDG 10: Reducing inequality

- 10.2: By 2030, enable and actively promote social, economic and political inclusion of all, regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic status.
- 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and eliminate inequality, including by abolishing discriminatory policies, laws and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action.



SDG 13: Climate action

- 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related disasters
- 13.3: Build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change



SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong public services

- 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, torture and all other forms of violence against children.
- 16.7: Make decision-making representative and inclusive at all levels, including for children and young people.
- 16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.



APPENDIX TWO: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

Sarita, 15, is campaigning to stop the trafficking of girls in Nepal

Appendix Two: The development of the strategy

We would hereby like to thank all the international colleagues, partners and other relations that have contributed to the making of this strategy.

Background:

As Plan International Netherlands' previous strategy was developed in 2015 for the period 2016 - 2020, it was clearly due for an update. Beyond the fact that the world has changed in many regards in the last five years, in 2017 the Plan International Global Hub had launched the first actual global strategy for all the global members, formulating its bold ambition to take action so that [100 Million girls can Learn, Lead, Decide and Thrive by 2022](#). Therefore, Plan International Netherlands was working with a sort of hybrid strategy from then: while moving towards alignment with the newly formulated global goals, we were awaiting the results of the Strategic Partnerships for strengthening Civil Society granted by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for the period of 2021-2025). Furthermore, the Plan International Global Hub started updating A 100 Million Reasons in the spring of 2020 (ending November 2021) and the Dutch office wanted to ensure that their new strategy was aligned.

The assignment:

In November 2020 the new director of Plan International Netherlands, Garance Reus developed a memo that she shared with the management team on how to start the strategy process. She outlined three phases: in the first, the organization would reflect on what was going on externally and internally within Plan International; the second phase would focus on what the Dutch office would like the new strategy to be; and lastly the third phase would address the How: translating the formulated goals and priorities into a concrete plan of action. A core strategy group was created to implement the strategy process led by Olloriak Sawade, and supported by Danielle Pattiasina, Caroline van den Ende, Jeroen Bolhuis and Edith van Berkum.

Best laid plans

In more than one way, the process was unique for Plan International Netherlands. First of all, due to COVID-19 restrictions the process had to be conducted almost completely online. And second, it was set out as an inclusive process engaging the whole organization. Overall, the strategy process stayed true to the phases outlined in Garance's original memo. However, delays occurred around the COVID lockdowns and making sure that the Dutch strategy aligned with the global Plan International strategy.

Phase 1:

In December 2020 a survey was sent to all the Dutch office colleagues to get advice, understand key themes, and see who would like to be involved further in discussions. The following groups were then created with guidance from the managing board:

- Youth engagement and youth advocacy (in the countries we work with)
- Leveraging child sponsorship and programming
- Power and leadership: working closer to point of impact
- Climate as a cross cutting theme
- Nexus (humanitarian/development)
- Lobby and advocacy: portfolio and priority
- Sparking innovation - an innovation mindset and digital innovation
- Feminist leadership and gender

These groups along with all the current existing groups (anti-racism; safeguarding; office of the future) as well as existing departments all worked on creating SWOTs based on online research and interviews with stakeholders ranging from country offices; other (I)NGOS; youth advocates in the countries we work with; think tanks; government colleagues; academics; and corporates.

The first phase was also kicked off by a presentation to the organization and memo by Garance.¹⁶ During this first phase severe lockdowns were in place in the Netherlands which did make it more challenging for the groups especially for colleagues who were juggling children without school and childcare. This phase was therefore extended until March (initially scheduled till the end of January).

The following keynote speakers were organized for webinars for the whole Netherlands office:

- January 19th, 2021 a lecture by Dr. Althea-Maria Rivas, who is a senior lecturer in Development Studies at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London. This webinar gave us more understanding on how historical structures continue to influence our existing work.
- January 27th, 2021 a presentation by our Global Hub colleague Rebecca Sorusch who filled us in on the strategy development process through Plan International.
- February 9th, 2021 a lecture by Julia Wouters, who is a political scientist, political advisor and speech-writer and author of the book 'The Sides of Power' that looks at the lack of women in politics. She presented and facilitated a discussion around feminist leadership.
- February 16th, 2021, a lecture on climate and gender by Irene Dankelman, who has a long history in climate and gender advocacy.
- April 13th, 2021, a discussion around decolonizing aid delivery held by Arbie Baguios, who is a humanitarian and development professional and the founder of Aid Reimagined. He challenged our views on racism, colonialism, and unequal power relations in the aid sector.

The outcome of this phase were documents created from the diverse groups that described the influences of current events and trends within the development and humanitarian sector.¹⁷

Phase 2:

In the second phase we focused on collective strategic discussions within the organization. We facilitated 4 interactive workshops with the whole organization on the following topics:

March 8th (Monday) 14h: What kind of an organization are we and what do we want to become?

March 16th (Tuesday) 14h: Looking on the external context and the themes from phase 1

March 18th (Thursday) 10h: Looking at our current purpose and themes that we want to work on

March 23rd (Tuesday) 14h: How can Plan International Netherlands be fit for the future

The outcome of this phase was a first draft of the strategy based on the work done in phase 1 and the discussions in the workshops. This first draft was then shared with the managing board and colleagues through the organization.

¹⁶ All documents referred here are internal documents and can be found on the NLNO internal drive under the Strategy 2021 folder.

¹⁷ See above folder mentioned for the overview of documents developed.

Phase 3:

As the first and second phase focused more on the **'what'**, the third phase looked at **'how'** we will reach our goals. Work groups were again formed to look at our goals and how we could make them a reality. The following groups were created:

- Localization and partnerships
- Internal organization (e.g. values to processes, HR policy, competencies, office of the future)
- Strengthening processes and systems
- Innovation and learning
- Fundraising and branding

The outcome of this work was the development of a ways of working document for this strategy and a GANTT chart was created.

This last phase also involved having Plan International colleagues of various partner offices (Indonesia, Ethiopia, Dominican Republic, Global Hub) give input into the document.



Marie, 15, is an advocate against the harmful practice of FGM