

## **1. Introduction**

Founded 75 years ago in 1937, Plan is one of the oldest and largest children's development organisations in the world, working to lift millions of children and their families out of poverty in 50 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Plan Ireland was established in 2003 and receives tremendous support from the Irish public, over 8,000 of whom sponsor children. Plan is an independent, not-for-profit organisation without political agenda or religious orientation.

As a child centred organisation, Plan Ireland's submission primarily focuses on the realisation of the rights of girls and boys. Within this framework, Plan Ireland advocates for the inclusion in the forthcoming White Paper on Irish Aid of three key commitments:

- 1. A Commitment to the realisation of Children's Rights, and in particular the right to Education and the right to Protection**
- 2. A Commitment to gender equality and girls' empowerment**
- 3. A Commitment to the inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised children**

The importance of including these is evidenced not only by Plan's experience in 50 developing countries, but also from other actors and global institutions. For example, based on World Bank research and economic data and UNESCO education statistics, it estimates the economic cost to 65 low and middle income and transitional countries of failing to educate girls to the same standard as boys is a staggering US\$92 billion each year. This is just less than the \$103 billion annual overseas development aid budget of the developed world.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this, Plan Ireland has contributed to and would like to reiterate the points highlighted by a number of submissions recently made on the White Paper, such as the Children's Rights Coalition, the Irish Coalition for Global Campaign for Education, the Disability Inclusion Task Force and the Dochas' submissions. In particular, the present submission strongly complements the submission from the Children's Rights Coalition, to which it is referred to for information in relation to the session 2, 3 and 4 below.

Plan Ireland remains available to provide further information to support the below asks or any other supportive documentation related to the present submission.

## **2. Progress Made**

\* Please, refer to the submission from the Children's Rights Coalition

## **3. Changing context**

\* Please, refer to the submission from the Children's Rights Coalition

## **4. Key Issues**

\* Please, refer to the submission from the Children's Rights Coalition

## **5. Ways of Working**

Plan Ireland strongly advocates for the inclusion of the following commitments in the forthcoming White Paper on Irish Aid:

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<sup>1</sup> See '*Children in Focus: Paying the Price, the economic cost of failing to educate girls*', Plan, 2008.





## 1. *A Commitment to the realisation of Children's Rights, and in particular the right to Education and the right to Protection*

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society, experiencing multiple disparities and violations especially in developing countries. Children in poor countries rarely have the opportunity to demand their rights or to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. An explicit focus on children's rights is essential for Ireland's ODA and is very much in line with its commitment to focus on the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised. This focus will reinforce Ireland's commitment to its human rights based approach and its obligations under international law to contribute to the realisation of children rights globally. These are backed by Ireland's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>2</sup> and the signature of the United Nation Millennium Declaration.<sup>3</sup>

Children constitute roughly 50% of the population of developing countries.<sup>4</sup> Denying girls and boys their basic rights will have an immediate impact on children themselves as well as a long-term impact on the future generations and leaders. Focusing on children is therefore essential to enable new generations to become actors of change towards a healthy and dynamic development.

### **Plan Ireland recommends Irish Aid to:**

- Include in the forthcoming White Paper a **specific commitment to the realisation of children's rights**, with clear indicators, outcomes and targets to measures progresses for boys and girls as well as an adequate budgetary allocation.
- Ensure that **the rights of girls and boys are taken into consideration** in relation to all policy areas of the forthcoming White Paper.
- Establish a position of **Child Rights Advisor** within the framework of Irish Aid with sufficient expertise to ensure children's rights mainstreaming throughout all programming as well as to provide strategic advice in all matters relevant to children rights.

Within the general umbrella of children's rights, Plan Ireland strongly advocates for maintaining and deepening a focus on **children's rights to education and protection**.

### → **The Right to Education - Art. 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Education is a fundamental human right, an MDG commitment and an essential means to realise other basic human rights. Education is the primary vehicle to meet other policy objectives of Irish Aid related to health, hunger and gender equality. It is an essential tool for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and enable economically and socially marginalised adults and children to lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.<sup>5</sup>

Education is a cross-cutting strategy for the achievement of Irish Aid's core goals of promoting gender equality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, fighting hunger and malnutrition.

### **Plan Ireland recommends Irish Aid to:**

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<sup>2</sup> See the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', General Assembly Resolution 44/25, November 1989. Specific articles that provide for such obligation include: Art. 4, 19 and 28.3.

<sup>3</sup> See the 'United Nation Millennium Declaration', A/55/L.2, 2000. Specific reference to such obligation is provided by comma 2 that states '(...) Signatory states have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level, (...) a duty to all world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular children'.

<sup>4</sup> See the 'State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World', UNICEF, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> See 'General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education', the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, E/C.12/1999/10, 1999.



- Categorise the **right to education as a core goal of Irish Aid policy**, with clear indicators, outcomes and targets to measure progress for boys and girls as well as an adequate budgetary allocation.
- Ensure an **increased focus on the quality of education** - particularly in ensuring that girls and boys attending school develop core functional skills. Support for teacher education is vital in this regard.
- Ensure the **continuity of education**. While getting girls and boys to school is the first step, the real challenge is minimising drop-out, especially of girls and marginalised groups of children (e.g. children with disabilities, children belonging to ethnic minorities). Given that benefits of education are higher with every year of schooling, transition to secondary school is to be included as a policy priority, with a focus on gender equality in secondary education.
- **Focus on education governance**: increased priority should be given to promoting community engagement in education governance (including the participation of children).

➔ **The Right to Protection – Art 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Child protection from all forms of violence is a key component to a child rights' framework and instrumental to the best interest of the child principle.<sup>6</sup> The fulfilment of this right is a precondition to the achievement of the full set of children's rights provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, the establishment of a child protective environment, free from violence, supports the realisation of children's individual personalities and fosters the development of social, responsible and actively contributing citizens in the local community and larger society.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child states that 'child protection is a strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies and for promoting social progress and better standards of life and freedom, justice and peace in the world for the human family in which children have a place and a value equal to that of adults'.<sup>7</sup>

With Irish Aid's focus on hunger, it is essential that Child Protection principles are considered in all its programming. There are too many examples of children being pulled out from school to tend farms when seeds and tools are distributed, or to go to the market instead of sitting in the class room to help parents sell their new produce. Ensuring that programme strategies consider such issues, as well as other violations of children's rights should be core to Irish Aid's way of working.

**Plan Ireland recommends Irish Aid to:**

- **Mainstream child protection throughout all Irish Aid funded programmes.**
- Create an exclusive **Child Protection Policy**.
- Institute the **application of the Child Protection Policy** (or an equivalent of this policy) as a mandatory **requirement** for receipt of funding.

**Best Practice on how to mainstream child protection into programming**

- At all stages of programme design and implementation decisions are taken in a way that does not result in jeopardising their physical, mental, social, and cultural development.
- All children participating in or benefiting from programmes feel safe and protected from all forms

<sup>6</sup> The best interest of the child principle is one of the four principles that underpin the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to this principle decisions affecting children needs to be taken according to what the best possible option to increase the well-being of the children is without resulting in jeopardising their physical, mental, social, and cultural development.

<sup>7</sup> See 'General Comment No. 13: The Right of the Child to Freedom from all Forms of Violence', the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/GC/13, 2011.



of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

- Child protection training should be mandatory for all partner staff.
- Programmes should embed an advocacy component to lobby for an adequate legal framework on child protection at all levels.

## **2. A Commitment to gender equality and girls' empowerment**

The 2006 White Paper sporadically referred to the Girl Child. A specific commitment on this was on girls' education (p 44). Girls in developing countries are the most vulnerable and discriminated against in their societies. Girls experience high levels of sexual and labour exploitation, discrimination in the provision of basic services, such as education, health care and social protection, are forced to marry early – which further prevents them from completing their education and enjoying their development as well exposing them to health risks. In short, **girls experience a double vulnerability**: they are vulnerable because they are children and they are vulnerable because they are girls. This was recently acknowledged by the UN in a General Assembly Resolution on the Girl Child (December 2011).<sup>8</sup>

**Given this double vulnerability an explicit consideration of girls' rights, girls' empowerment and gender equality** should be an imperative for Irish Aid. Regarding this, Plan Ireland welcomes the publication of Irish Aid's Annual Monitoring Report on gender equality and the opportunity it presents for a more structured process of community-based organisations' engagement on gender issues.

### **Plan Ireland recommends Irish Aid to:**

- Continue to **prioritise the issues of gender inequality and gender based violence**, with consideration of the specific needs and vulnerabilities of girls.
- Continue to **strengthen mainstreaming of gender equality across the Irish development programme**, including the provision of support to partners to mainstream gender.
- Ensure that **gender is taken into consideration** in relation to all policy areas of the forthcoming White Paper.
- **Broaden the current commitment to education for girls** to ensure that girls achieve adequate learning outcomes, participate equally in school and have equal access to further education.

## **3. A Commitment to the inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised children**

There is a concerning lack of focus on 'inclusion' of the most vulnerable and marginalised people within the 2006 White Paper. While the overarching goal of Irish Aid is to focus on the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised, extremely vulnerable groups such as children, people with disabilities, girls and women, people belonging to minority groups, etc. are not adequately included as direct beneficiaries of Irish Aid programmes.

This is all the more concerning in light of the fact that disparities between the richer and poorer strata of societies are progressively widening. This can seriously hinder progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal agenda.<sup>9</sup> According to UNICEF, focusing on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups is instrumental for long term sustainable development.<sup>10</sup> Evidence shows that

<sup>8</sup> See UN General Assembly Resolution 'The Girl Child', 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See 'Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals', UNICEF, 2009 and 'Leading Edge 2020. A Critical Thinking on the future of International Development', Trocaire, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See 'Narrowing the Gaps to Meet the Goals', UNICEF, 2009 and 'Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity', UNICEF, 2010.

focusing on the poorest segments of the population will contribute to reducing economic disparities within societies and is instrumental to enhance the potential for the development.<sup>11</sup>

**Plan Ireland recommends Irish Aid to:**

- **Adopt an 'inclusive approach' to international programming.** Irish Aid should consider more thoroughly its approach to reaching the most vulnerable, with a priority given to vulnerable and marginalised children. This means considering the selection of beneficiaries, geographical areas of intervention, the provision of services and the selection of partners.

**On behalf of Plan Ireland:**



**Plan  
Ireland**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Dalton".

**David Dalton**  
Chief Executive Office

<sup>11</sup> See the Lancet Report Series, 'Child Development 1' and 'Child Development 2', DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60555-2, published online, 2011.