

# **Girls' education and COVID-19 research consultancy**

## **Terms of Reference**

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### **About Plan International UK**

Plan International UK strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And its girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

### **Background and rationale**

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the response from governments around the world, has had a significant impact on women and children. Gender inequalities have accentuated and the rights of adolescent girls widely infringed. The global pandemic is undoing decades of progress on children's rights, placing them at greater risk of violence, abuse and exploitation as schools close and livelihoods are lost. Girls are likely to suffer most.

School closures have been widespread throughout the pandemic. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services has been restricted. Girls and women have taken on additional caring and domestic responsibilities. Livelihoods have been decimated, disproportionately impacting women and girls who are overrepresented in informal, unpaid or low paid work. Spaces where girls could engage with decision makers have been closed. Cumulatively, this has severely impacted girls' access to quality education in 2020.

Therefore, 2021 is a critical year for girls' education and an opportunity to build back better. The UK Government is playing a leading role, leading on major moments: Generation Equality Forum (leading the Action Coalition on GBV); the G7 Presidency; hosting GPE replenishment and the COP presidency.

12 years of quality education for all girls is the UK Government's biggest development priority and the Prime Minister has said that he will use UK leadership to push its manifesto commitment of 12 years of quality education for all girls. The Government is also set to launch the Girls Education Action Plan, a roadmap to delivering the commitment through programming, advocacy and learning. Despite

this, recent cuts in the UK aid budget have cast doubt on the ability to achieve these goals.

## **Purpose and objectives**

The research will feed into an advocacy report that is intended to be disseminated ahead of high-level events (e.g. the G7) and used to support Plan International UK's influencing on girls' education.

The research undertaken through this consultancy will help us to:

- Better understand the medium-long-term impact of COVID-19 on girls' educational attendance and participation and the key barriers to their return.
- Better understand the extent in which girls, especially adolescent girls, have been meaningfully consulted or listened to in informing the COVID-19 response.
- The research findings will be used to help inform policy and programme responses.

## **Suggested research methods**

A mixed methods approach is suggested, comprised of the following elements:

Literature review: The consultant will be responsible for conducting a review of available evidence and data on the impact of COVID-19 on girls' and boys' education in low-and-lower-middle-income countries,<sup>1</sup> including barriers to access, learning and leadership / participation. Presented in a synthesis report, this should include analysis of how different government responses and prevailing gender norms and inequalities have affected access to a quality education, particularly for girls, throughout the pandemic.

Qualitative research methods: semi-structured interviews with a small number of adolescent girls will be conducted by Plan International country office staff and partners, where possible. The aim is to develop detailed insight into the impact of the crisis on individual girls and their education, including their ability to influence decisions about their education. The consultant will be responsible for developing the tools for the qualitative aspect of this research and supporting with analysis of the findings.

Quantitative research methods (survey data): Given the limitations on the availability of up-to-date education data and practical challenges associated with data collection, the consultant will work with Plan staff to develop a global survey aimed at gathering a snapshot of the impacts of COVID-19 on girls' education. The survey will be disseminated by Plan International and its partners. The target audience is young people, parents, teachers, girl's education networks and NGOs, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> Focus countries / regions to be determined in collaboration with Plan International UK staff, but a focus on fragile contexts – particularly those that are priorities for the UK government's FCDO, and countries with some of the greatest educational need are expected to be included where possible.

Mindful of the limitations of this approach, it is nevertheless our hope that this method will enable us to garner further information on:

- Understand and quantify the amount of schooling that has been missed by girls and boys in a range of countries, and the corresponding drivers (e.g. government policy, additional care responsibilities, domestic chores, financial pressure etc).
- Understand the range of barriers and challenges that children have faced in accessing / returning to a quality education, and whether, how and why these differ for boys and girls.
- Ascertain an understanding of the extent to which girls, and adolescent girls particularly, have been able to exercise leadership and participate in decision about their education and family life during the pandemic.
- Gather young people's recommendations for improved government and community responses, now and in the future.

In addition to developing the survey, in collaboration with Plan International staff, the consultant will be responsible for analysing the response data. The analysis should be presented in a narrative report with accompanying data (e.g. spreadsheets) and data visualisation (e.g. graphs, charts etc).

## **Outputs**

- Literature review of available research and evidence of the impacts of COVID-19 on girls' education, and their barriers to access and learning. Focus should be placed in the literature review on a gendered analysis of the evidence and data collated from a range of sources (government, academic, UN agencies, media and NGO reports and statements)
- Research tools (interview questions and guide, consent forms etc) for qualitative interviews with girls
- Survey design and build
- Narrative report summarising the findings of the survey with accompanying quantitative data.

## **Audience and purpose of the research**

The research will feed into an advocacy report that is intended to be disseminated ahead of high-level events (e.g. the G7) and will be used to support Plan International UK's engagement with, and influence of, decision makers, civil society and other actors in policy making and programming working in this field. These include government officials, civil servants, UN agencies and other actors. The research will also be helpful to inform Plan International's own programme responses.

## **Timeframe**

The final advocacy report will be due for completion by the end of May. To meet this timeframe, the consultant would be expected to work to the following schedule:

- February 2021: Tools / survey design complete
- February - March 2021: Survey out for response and qualitative interviews conducted. Literature review complete.
- March 2021: Analysis of interviews and survey data. First draft of reports and analysis complete.
- Mid-April 2021: Final reports complete.

## **Risks**

While in-country qualitative research will be undertaken by Plan International, the consultant will be required to develop tools and guidance that are relevant and respond to the different constraints that exist when conducting research during a global pandemic. Additional guidance will need to be developed to ensure that interviews with girls can be conducted in a safe and secure environment to avoid the transmission of COVID-19.

This research will be undertaken within a very short timeframe. The consultant shall be required to deliver against a set of specific milestones.

## **Protection and Ethical Standards**

Any research commissioned by Plan will need to abide by our set of international and country office child protection standards and research ethics before commencing data collection.

It is suggested that prior to the finalisation of data collection tools they should be reviewed by Plan's in-house team of gender and child protection experts who will ensure questions are both sex and age appropriate.

It is expected that at a minimum the consultant(s) will ensure that they abide by Plan International's Research Policy and Standards.

## **Skills and Qualifications**

- A commitment to promoting and supporting child and girls' rights
- Excellent understanding of education, gender equality and children's rights, including in fragile settings and humanitarian contexts.
- Strong experience in devising and conducting online surveys and developing tools for qualitative research
- Track-record of published research (whether peer-reviewed or grey literature)
- Demonstrably strong analytical, writing and communication skills, with an excellent track record of writing high quality research reports for consumption by external policy and programme audiences
- Ability to deliver on tight time frames and meet deadlines
- Experience of conducting research related to development implications of COVID-19 would be an advantage.
- Fluent spoken and written communication skills in English. Knowledge of French / other official UN languages would be an asset.

## **Budget**

The total budget for this research must not exceed £15,000. Applicants are requested to submit their proposed budget along with their application.

## **Application Process**

Plan UK welcomes a response to these Terms of Reference, with a CV and short written statement including:

- The consultant(s)' suggested approach including methodology, schedule and proposed research matrix
- An outline of costs & timescales
- A capability statement demonstrating how they meet the required qualifications and competencies;
- Examples of relevant previous work
- Copies of all relevant Curriculum Vitae (CVs). Only CVs for the specific individuals that will form the proposed evaluation team should be included.
- Two references (including one from your last client/employer).

N/B: The entire bid should be a maximum 10 pages including the budget. Examples of previous work should be included in an Annex.

Expressions of interest should be sent to: [anthony.davis@plan-uk.org](mailto:anthony.davis@plan-uk.org) and [anna.darling@plan-uk.org](mailto:anna.darling@plan-uk.org) no later than Sunday 24 January 2021.