

# FINAL REPORT

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## Humanitarian Learning Review

# Humanitarian Learning Review

Plan International

01   BACKGROUND	3
02   LEARNING REVIEW QUESTIONS	5
03   METHODOLOGY	5
04   SYSTEMS AND READINESS	6
05   RISK APPETITE AND MANAGEMENT	10
06   WORKING IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS	12
07   MOVING FORWARD	14

## — — Background

The current scale of humanitarian need is at an unprecedented level. Over 45 million people are on the brink of starvation and more than 247 million people require humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian sector reaches approximately 183 million through appeal mechanisms that require over \$41 billion. Against this backdrop of a deteriorating global humanitarian situation, Plan International recently updated its global strategy, emphasising the need for an increased focus, and scale up, of humanitarian work to address the impact of these crises on children, and girls in particular. It is vitally important to undertake this Learning Review in this context to help move the new global strategy forward. The purpose of the Learning Review is to learn from the current phases of Plan International's emergency responses in Ethiopia, Myanmar and Mozambique and use the lessons to improve Plan's response programming in the three countries and beyond.

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### OBJECTIVES

Assess the ability of the organisation's technical know-how and general readiness to work in high-risk environments.

Reflect on Plan International's risk appetite and the ability to be bold in challenging contexts.

Assess Plan International's agility in dealing with complex security situations, by being conflict sensitive.

## — Context

### Ethiopia

Fighting in Tigray, Afar and Amhara has resulted in widespread displacement of over 1.8 million. An estimated 2.7 million children in northern Ethiopia have been affected by the demolition of schools and the housing of internally displaced people in schools. 3 million children under the age of five and pregnant and breastfeeding women in Tigray and Amhara need malnutrition prevention and treatment. The delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance has been hampered by access restrictions due to insecurity and the limited presence of humanitarian partners on the ground. Plan Ethiopia has so far secured €19 million out of a funding target of €20 million to promote drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), including Non-Food Items (NFI), nutrition and health, protection of girls, adolescent girls and young women from violence and abuse, including education and livelihoods/food security.

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### Mozambique

The conflict erupted in Cabo Delgado in 2017 and has resulted in over 854,264 people being displaced across the province and neighbouring provinces, 48.2% of those displaced are children. The conflict has disrupted school operations, affecting more than 123,000 students, 4,000 of whom have been forced to continue their studies in other counties far from where they live. Plan Mozambique has revised its Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Crisis Response Plan. €3,958,609 have been secured, representing approximately 79% of the target of €5,019,491.

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### Myanmar

Conflicts and political violence have further worsened the humanitarian situation in the country. In Myanmar, millions of people have been pushed into poverty due to a combination of factors: COVID-19, military coup, civil unrest, escalating conflicts and a weak economy leading to an economic downturn. According to the United Nations, around 50% of the country's population could fall into poverty, doubling from 2017. Since 2015, Plan has been a key provider of Education in Emergencies (EiE), Child Protection in Emergencies (CPIE), Peacebuilding and Food Security Assistance in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), host communities and surrounding communities. Plan Myanmar's current programming, staffing, partnerships and infrastructure in Rakhine and Kachin states allow for immediate availability, participation, and readiness, all essential for a timely response to local needs.

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# — · Learning Review Questions

## SYSTEMS & READINESS

What is Plan International's capacity (technical know-how), confidence and readiness to work in high-risk environments?

## RISK APPETITE & MANAGEMENT

How are risks in complex contexts managed?

## COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

What does it mean to be agile in complex security environments at Plan International?

## Methodology — ·

The primary mechanism for responding to the Learning Review questions was a Desk Review of approximately 100 documents which included: Crisis Response/Risk Mitigation Plans, Advocacy Briefs and Influencing Plans, Needs Assessments, Reports (Baseline, Midterm, Final), Country and Global Strategies, Analysis Reports (Gender, Situational), manuals, and guides.

The Desk Review utilised Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) to code each document to a corresponding area of inquiry, enabling the rapid categorisation of documents and relevant data.

Key Informant Interviews were also conducted with five individuals (4 Plan International Country Office/1 Multilateral Agency). However, the number of respondents was insufficient to draw any generalisable conclusions for each of the Country Offices.

# — SYSTEMS AND READINESS

“Plan does not ensure that it has the capacity and capability at Country Office level to meet its programme objectives.”

In general, the Learning Review found a misalignment between the capacity of Plan International and its overall ambition. Technical Expertise in key areas, especially Gender in Emergencies (GiE), was identified as an area needing significant investment. Given Plan International's mandate to advance children's rights and equality for girls, the absence of technical expertise, sufficient to address growing and evolving needs, should be addressed with immediacy. Two Learning Review participants perceive that a lack of gender expertise to date has been due to limited funding and call for more strategic investment. Where capacity for gender exists, there are still reported struggles when applied in emergency settings. Relatedly, there was a call to improve the quality of needs assessments through greater contextualisation by donors which may be addressed through improvements in gender expertise.

The geographic concentration of technical expertise requires consideration, ensuring capacity is deployable when needed, in the case of in-person support. COVID-19 presented opportunities for remote support to Country Offices. The challenges associated with obtaining visas and availability were less apparent in this context. However, two Learning Review participants also referred to difficulties in obtaining virtual support and challenges with time differences. Some Country Offices still operate on models where remote capacity development is made use of, in the case of Myanmar, where entering the country has become significantly constrained.

The Learning Review recommends twin investments: Internal Capacity Development and expanding sub-regional rosters.

**Internal Capacity Development:** Country Office capacities were highlighted throughout the Learning Review as an increasingly critical area for growth and investment.

“It's very important that we have local level capacities who can help think through gender norms and then try in changes and rather than bring in someone from the outside who may not fully understand the context.”

**Expanding Sub-Regional Rosters:** Some Country Offices maintain a preference for in-person support which interacts with complications of obtaining visas for some individuals. Across all three countries, there are practical challenges in obtaining visas; impacting the deployment of staff based elsewhere. Participants report that in many cases, it can be easier to obtain visas where capacity is based sub-regionally. Some respondents suggested that improvements in relationships with government may make this process somewhat more expeditious, though this finding also highlights the value of investing in the internal capacity of Country Offices.

“...this is becoming difficult to maintain countries really need to be prepared for that. We need to create internal capacity.”

# Ethiopia

Plan Ethiopia conducted a Capacity Gap Analysis which included a review of external capacity to temporarily support the Country Office as well as recruitment of new staff with specific technical expertise. An area of focus at Plan Ethiopia is the deployment of technical expertise, enhancing the speed, quality and reach. Tackling evolving contextual challenges is constrained by the following:

- Unavailability of emergency preparedness/stock-prepositioning
- Limited access/supply
- Poor market situation
- Time-consuming internal processes/not yet designed for emergencies, and
- Personnel-related challenges

Plan Ethiopia is aware of global technical resources and access them frequently for example, Regional Office support, Global Hub support and surge capacity. However, necessary adjustments requiring a strong funding base to adequately respond to emergencies in a timely manner include: Deploying international personnel at the onset of emergencies, improving the system/flexibility to respond to emergencies, improving access situation, prepositioning to improve response, better hibernation and evacuation/relocation plans.

The capacity to meet programme commitments are, at times, constrained by key positions being vacant for extended periods, staff not trained in emergency management at the time of a humanitarian response, heavy workloads, and an unwillingness of staff to travel to and stay in Tigray.

Readiness and capacity is at times limited by how much Plan Ethiopia can absorb and implement in terms of standards, policies and guidelines. While Plan's Global Hub demonstrates a sustained commitment to rolling out its new and improved Quality Standards and Policies though the capacity of the Country Offices to absorb and implement the volume of new global quality initiatives is limited, and the capacity of the Global Hub to ensure that new standards and guidelines are used is limited. Relatedly, the timeline for new quality initiatives has also been hampered by COVID-19 disruptions.

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## Myanmar

The Myanmar context is likely to have benefited from the build-up of technical expertise over a lengthy protracted crisis and the presence of international organisations and the United Nations. This was emphasized by staff in the Learning Review:

“The use of internal and external support, because of the protracted crisis, has been happening for quite a long time, more than three or four years”.

A new initiative on cash-based programming was an example of external support provided by the Global Hub until the Country Office achieved the required capacity to manage it internally. Capacity gaps in social cohesion and conflict sensitivity were similarly addressed in partnership with a Myanmar-based institution supporting the development of training materials. Through the Desk Review, additional areas for improvement were identified. Evaluations previously conducted highlighted Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and information management as areas of weakness.

“In terms of planning and M&E, partner organisation staff reported several weaknesses. The lowest score was recorded in the area of M&E plans and frameworks. While some M&E planning documents were in place, partner staff did not feel accountable for the M&E plan and felt that it was not being consistently used to monitor progress.”

During a learning exercise, all project staff mentioned that they would like to receive Training of Trainer sessions and refresher training on gender, disability, online safety, resilience, youth policy and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) key messages. The Learning Review was unable to identify to what extent these areas have been addressed.

# Mozambique

Gaps in technical capacity were identified through the Learning Review. In particular:

- Cash transfers
- Logistics
- Procurement for specialists
- Photography/gathering stories

In 2019, Plan International Mozambique reported limited capacity on Disaster Risk Management (DRM), though the Learning Review was not able to identify whether this specific capacity gap still exists. Thematic specialisation appears to be an area in need of increased capacity and capability. Specifically, the availability of staff 'conversant with issues related to emergencies', including technical expertise in Education in Emergencies (EiE) programming. Location-specific support was also raised as an area for improvement as Plan Mozambique's geographic footprint may not be sufficient to meet the needs and expectations of rights-holders during an emergency.

"Even if you're not working there, we are supposed to support. I think the first thing we need is to have the right people. We need to start training people and create systems that can help us address those issues."

Expectations for delivery of programming may not be calibrated for the capacity of staff. The Learning Review identified the sentiment of staff feeling overburdened by the logistics required to deliver programme objectives which are out of sync with budgetary constraints.

"The team in Mozambique were overwhelmed by the logistics involved in such a large consignment and the costs had not been accurately budgeted. The distribution of the Non-Food Items (NFI) were meant to be in collaboration with Logistic cluster led by the World Food Programme (WFP) who had funding to distribute Non-Food Items (NFI) from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO). However, by the time the NFIs arrived in Beira, the window to benefit from logistic cluster in terms of free warehouse, free transportation to beneficiaries was over. As such, Plan were compelled to hire warehouse and invest into logistic activities to distribute the items whose cost came higher than anticipated."

The influence of Surge Teams was identified during the Learning Review with Plan Mozambique noting the value of knowledge transfer, particularly in relation to the use of emergency procedures and access to global resources. However, the profile of roster members may not meet the appropriate or needed level of expertise or training, specifically on how to work within Country Offices.

"We have good people on the roster but cannot always be released/not always willing to deploy. Therefore, further work to be done on communications from senior management to Country Directors and National Directors and Global Hub Management. [There is] more work to be done to have the right levels of experience of staff on the roster. The Learning & Development Business Plan for the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Unit has this as a task with regards to developing a skills gap matrix for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) then to look at and develop a plan with the Roster Team as to how to attract the right staff with the right skills. And/or develop a programme of learning activities to develop staff in Country Offices, therefore increasing the capacity on the roster."

There appear to be different interpretations of responsibility for managing skills gaps. According to a different respondent:

"The Learning & Development Business Plan for the Humanitarian Team is not currently tasked with this. In light of the new strategy, a 5-year workplan is in development and as part of that a 5-year Learning & Development Humanitarian Plan should be developed to support."



Some of the programmatic deployments to Mozambique (technical and accountability) were deployed too early and were due to leave either before or at the time when the implementation was starting. As a result, some of the technical staff were under-utilised.

“Operations deployments were too late while programmes deployments were too quick. Within the first 3 weeks, procurement, logistics and finance were the main areas where capacity was required. Realistically, the technical specialists were not required until the activities started. If input to proposals was needed, this could have been done remotely. The result is that a number of technical specialists will be leaving around the same time that the programmes are getting under way. In some cases, this has meant that they have been under-utilised.”

More experienced Surge Capacity were a valuable source of support for Country Offices. For example, in Mozambique, surge staff were aware of the emergency procedures and policies and were able to share their experience with their Country Office colleagues. The simultaneous benefit of and dependency on external staff and surge capacity is a tension Country Office staff raised. A key learning from the Idai response was the need for timely deployment of surge staff in programmes, logistics, procurement, and finance.

Managing incoming staff is a challenge, even when teams are well-prepared.

“People coming and going ...is not easy. We need to be prepared not just to intervene on the fields, but also to manage all the people coming and going”.

There is an overall desire to strengthen internal capacity, making Plan Mozambique better able to respond without the need to wait until surge capacity arrives in country. However, the challenges associated with strengthening internal capacity involve rapid staff turnover, within Plan and other agencies, which impacts continuity, coordination, learning and potential relationships.

While there is an appreciation of the funding and surge support from the National Offices, there exists a sentiment that the majority of discussions between National Offices and Country Offices relate to funding despite the National Offices having much more to offer, for example, technical expertise.

# — RISK APPETITE AND MANAGEMENT

In its Global Policy on Risk Management, Plan International articulates a need to be bold in complex environments. While the sentiment expresses an appetite for more balanced and bold risk appetites, Learning Review participants perceive Plan International as inherently risk-averse. The Learning Review identified limited examples of Plan International adopting a bold or balanced risk attitude in complex environments, primarily constrained by complicated and evolving contextual dynamics. There were limited examples of Plan International increasing its operational risk profile. Relatedly, managing uncertainty was limited, focused primarily on mitigating harm as opposed to leveraging opportunities. In the context of the Learning Review, risk was principally interpreted as negative with positive risks (uncertainty) absent. The Learning Review recommends a reorientation of risk management to address both positive and negative risks; positive risks being those areas where “innovative thinking across the business” can be harnessed. The Global Policy on Risk Management articulates the areas where Plan International has a positive attitude to risk. Practically, this will depend on different situations and tolerances. Therefore, a standardised approach cannot be applied globally as leveraging bold risk appetites may be better described as a behaviour/attitude to managing risk.


While a Global Policy on Risk Management exists, there is a gap between the guidance and approaches articulated within the policy and uptake among Country Offices. The Global Policy on Risk standardises risk attitudes related to specific areas (Advocacy & Influencing, Compliance, etc.) ranging from Bold, Balanced, and Averse. However, Country Offices were unfamiliar with the categorisation. While risk appetites should be influenced by contextual considerations, with Country Offices best placed to categorise areas of work with the most appropriate risk appetite, familiarity with the Global Policy on Risk Management should form the foundation from which Country Offices articulate a context-responsive approach.

“In this external context, realising Plan International’s ambition is inherently risky. Fulfilling our ambition requires bold and innovative thinking across the business, and our focus on influence and partnerships enhances our reputation. The organization will remain geographically dispersed and culturally diverse, with an expanded footprint in complex environments, increasing our operational risk profile.”

## Myanmar

Plan Myanmar operates in a volatile and evolving environment with its risk appetite highly responsive to the political context. With banking systems largely inoperable, Plan Myanmar has worked with the Global Hub to channel funds while simultaneously managing risk. The initiatives taken forward in this area have been a model for donors and other cluster systems operating in Myanmar. Additionally, one participant noted that security assessments and analyses are conducted by Plan Myanmar weekly as a mechanism to better understand the risk landscape. However, the Learning Review was not provided with these assessments and analyses and therefore assess their content.

# Ethiopia

 Due to lack of cash, fuel and supplies, the humanitarian space has shrunk to the point where partners were forced to significantly reduce or completely suspend operations, leaving millions of people without adequate access to lifesaving assistance and protection services.

For Plan Ethiopia, there is a disconnect between the emphasis placed on the Humanitarian Principles and the risk and reality of operating in high-risk environments. In complex environments the Humanitarian Principles may be compromised or challenged. Further analysis into the application of the Humanitarian Principles in Ethiopia may be useful should a nexus approach be considered.

# Mozambique

Plan Mozambique appear to have a primarily bold appetite with regards to some areas of the business. One participant perceived Plan International to be bold demonstrated through their vertical partnerships strategy which is enabled through the policies and regulations for reciprocal accountability. Additionally, there were perceptions that Plan Mozambique is taking positive risks in terms of working in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas following careful assessments of safety and security.

“Some of the colleagues were there for a security assessment to see if we can really work there. We recognise that there are people in need where the conflict is taking place.”

Managing risk in Plan Mozambique is also conducted in collaboration with other partners and UNDSS on security which has been a potential enabler in the response preparation for Cabo Delgado:

“We monitor the security situation areas where we operate and we collaborate with UNDSS together, regular updates of the security situation in the areas where we are.”

The primary consideration at Plan Mozambique is to the safety and security of staff. However, challenges were expressed about ensuring staff are suitable for working in high-risk environments. Suitability interacts with staff and partners going through procedures related to the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; considered through criminal background checks, inductions, and training. Plan International Mozambique deploys pre- and post-testing to track uptake. For partners, this takes place through a safeguarding self-assessment to ensure compliance, though the Learning Review was not able to determine the efficacy of these self-assessments. According to one participant, there have been no reported situations of staff acting inappropriately with rights-holders including children. However, challenges were identified by Plan International Mozambique:

“People suffer in silence and do not report or speak out because of cultural aspects. They seem to think: if I report a case, they might sideline me in the list of benefits.”

With Plan International's Global Policy on Risk Management articulating an averse, negative risk attitude indicating taking limited or no risks around Child Protection, it will be necessary to ensure more robust practices for safeguarding to overcome barriers associated with a perceived fear of backlash or other social factors which may constrain reporting.

 “We are part of the security network that has been established in Cabo Delgado where we attend regular coordinator security coordination meetings where most of the security updates are shared.”

# WORKING IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

Perceptions among participants suggest that Plan International is well-positioned to coordinate and collaborate in complex environments, for example on strategic advisory groups, technical working groups, and within the humanitarian cluster system. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) related to hiring thematic leads across different humanitarian groups and acquiring funding from cluster groups were perceived as unique selling points for Plan International and its future strategic positioning. There have been efforts to create flexible funding arrangements, though the Learning Review was not provided with information on how these arrangements have progressed.

## Ethiopia

At Plan Ethiopia, regular Situation Reports, clear guidance on advocacy, the ability to collect data from Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and social media use were found to be supportive of agile and adaptive working. However, areas for further action include the improvement of guidelines and protocols within emergency contexts, for example:

“A media and communication plan for crises, strengthen system and structure, scale-up promising initiatives (e.g., Gambela), and work on post-conflict issues with National Organisations on campaign and content development (monthly/quarterly bulletins/magazines and session preparation).”

## Myanmar

Constantly evolving power dynamics among actors in Myanmar require regular conversations on adaptation and agility. Barriers to responsiveness and agility require consideration for the practicalities of geography and language:

“Without a clear vision of social cohesion and bridging activities at the design phase of the project, the distance between communities was not considered in the selection of target villages. As a result, the villages selected were geographically far apart, which made bridging activities more challenging.”

While language barriers in training Muslim youth facilitators were, to some extent, overcome by project staff providing interpretation, issues remained with youth or community level facilitators and volunteers being able to access locations during emerging conflict or at the time of COVID-19 restrictions:

“There was a decrease in the participation of Rakhine communities during periods of conflict due to concerns over safety and security. Furthermore, the project staff required a Travel Authorization to enter the Minbya Township, which was not always approved. In this case, it was essential to have trained community-based youth facilitators who were able to lead and continue peer-to-peer and community activities.”

Agility requires continual adaptation in response to contextual considerations. Examples, where Plan Myanmar was particularly agile, are derived from its work at the height of COVID-19:

“The project was able to keep the activities and reach the risk group through community volunteers. In addition, the design for sharing health awareness was swiftly adapted to ... such as conducting individual sessions by using more pamphlets, organizing community-led cooking and responsive feeding sessions and using more visibility items instead of usual activities as in past years.”

In some instances, Civil Society Organisations scaled-down training, delivering basic courses in selected areas, due to rising tensions. Agility also necessitates regular reprioritisation and adjustments of budgets to ensure financial resources align with expectations and need within Plan and among partners:

“The staff are well trained and experienced, but sometimes due to lack of reliable data, planning did not go well. For example, the project plan underestimated the workforce, for that reason Plan staff were provided one computer each, but the project was not able to provide one local partner with adequate computers.”

Procurement thresholds create some limitations to responsiveness, though emergency thresholds are less static and restrictive. During emergencies, thresholds and requirements for example those related to minimum quotations are amended based on the nature of the emergency, enabling Country Offices to quickly procure items for emergency projects.

## Mozambique

At Plan Mozambique, preparedness translates into a rapid response at the onset of a disaster in the first wave. The Desk Review found that preparedness and clarity on strategy and organisational intentions are essential considerations.

“The organisation was not prepared for the cyclone, particularly at country and regional level”.

While there is a sentiment that a definition of ‘preparedness’ would be valuable, Plan Mozambique maintains confidence in their response:

“A yellow alert sitrep was released before the cyclone made landfall in Beira and search and rescue activities began within 48 hours. This was a courageous decision given that the Country Office had no experience but, working with a local partner organisation, they were able to save lives immediately”

Plan Mozambique were among the first to respond to Hurricane Idai. Some staff volunteered to go by boat to assess the situation, signalling agility for Plan Mozambique as part operational and part attitudinal:

“We just discovered that we could, we could just be ready to do that with staff that are willing to do that”.

These attitudinal or ‘mindset’ shifts were raised by one Learning Review participant, described as a growing willingness to undertake activities in high-risk locations.

Operationally, availability of funds such as the Early Action Fund/Emergency Response Fund from the Global Hub is a mechanism for immediate distribution. One participant felt the speed of deployment of these funds was ‘very satisfactory’ and noted that Plan Mozambique’s peer agencies have made acknowledgement of this mechanism as well as Plan Mozambique’s agility in mobilising human and financial resources for a rapid response.

The Learning Review notes however a contradiction between these perceptions and the Desk Review which highlights that Plan was not prepared for the cyclone and the sentiment of staff being readily deployed as among the first to respond. The Learning Review was not able to resolve this contradiction.

Information management also needs to be considered when it comes to being agile, needs heightened during a crisis and appeared to limit agility and responsiveness:

“The process to launch an appeal seemed to be quite difficult and was late. The need for information, both for the appeals as well as for donor proposals. [It] creates a lot of pressure on the Country Offices. Quick deployment of communications and Business Development staff should be considered a priority.”

While procedures impact Plan Mozambique’s agility, financial systems are also reportedly challenging with SAP described as an unfriendly system. There are dependencies on budgets being set up in SAP at the start of an internal chain which can take between 2 – 3 days.

“Timeliness is a weakness due to financial, administrative and procurement processes, lacks rigour in monitoring systems and responding to emerging risks, does not adapt quickly enough.”

To address the challenges associated with SAP, one participant reported that finance students, geographically dispersed, had been trained on the system to enable the in-person deployment of teams with the capacity to utilise the platform and maintain financial continuity during a response. Furthermore, Plan Mozambique has adopted some approaches to address delays related to the dispersal of funds, for example the use of mobile money where banks are impacted.

Overall, there was a sentiment shared that:

“There are no standard procedures to deal with an emergency because each is different from the other one.”

This perception may indicate Plan Mozambique has a relatively agile approach to responding during emergencies and that their internal systems and ways of working have a sufficient level of flexibility to allow for context-specific adaptations.

# MOVING FORWARD

Moving forward, new global and country level strategies may present opportunities to cement and fully invest in what it means to work in complex environments. Plan International's new global strategy discusses scaling up humanitarian work. Prioritising recruitment and diversity of skills will be essential to not only meet this ambition but also, where integrated humanitarian and development approaches are also prioritised, focus on the longer-term needs of programming and rightsholders.

Furthermore, according to one respondent, Mozambique's new strategy has a target and ambition that "75% of activities will be implemented through partners". This presents an opportunity to assess and determine what mutually beneficial partnerships look like in complex environments. Plan International may want to consider the power dynamics in this framework and situate its role as an enabler for partner-led decision making. The Learning Review was also made aware of the move away from disaster preparedness plans to ready to respond plans with Mozambique as a pilot country. This may further present an opportunity to reassess capacity, timing and quality of support available to respond in a crisis.



## 01. SYSTEMS AND READINESS

Overall, the Learning Review found a tension between internal versus external capacity, the timing of when this capacity is available and across which thematic areas. Gender and information management were noted as thematic gaps across the information shared, however more contextually specific gaps were also identified, for example Education in Mozambique.

Plan International's capacity and readiness to work in high-risk environments is limited by this tension. Furthermore, one Learning Review participant suggested COVID-19 may have changed what is traditionally considered surge capacity, e.g., from individuals with short term deployments in contexts to remote support. This might suggest that some learning around the timing and placement of surge capacity is limited where COVID-19 has shown remote support is possible remotely.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in building technical expertise in gender, with particular attention to how gender in emergencies can be prioritised. Where funding remains a limitation, a focus on internal capacity or strengthening the capacity of partners in gender may limit the need for external expertise.

Implement a 'twin investment' approach; Internal Capacity Development and expanding sub-regional rosters. Sub-regional rosters may alleviate pressures on in-country staff when it comes to proposal development for example. Internal capacities could then focus on elevating contextual needs, conflict and gender assessments. As Plan International considers nexus approaches, building internal capacity will be essential to also respond to communities needs as they change and span across humanitarian, development and peace pillars. Sub-regional rosters may also address visa issues where there are visa agreements across borders in southern Africa for example.

Continue to explore how technology can enhance or support humanitarian response. Kobo (a data collection software) is used in some countries for data collection, but considerations for satellite imagery and other visual evidence may support contextual and needs assessments. This is, however, highly dependent on government permissions and must be applied with the lens of determining who could be excluded by using technology.

Review available surge capacity in relation to where remote support is better placed after learning from COVID-19, and in addition the diversity of the capacity available. With consideration for range of languages, cultural diversity, representation of women and sexual and gender minorities.

Create systematic sharing points between countries two or three times a year with a focus on learning about operating in complex contexts.





## 02. RISK APPETITE AND MANAGEMENT

Risk appetite in complex environments, requires an iterative and power-sensitive assessment of Plan International's positionality and potential for harm. Working with or alongside dynamic, evolving, and unconventional State and Non-State Actors may be necessary. Decision making behind who Plan International works within complex environments was not uncovered during this Learning Review. However, state actors across all three contexts (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar) were reported to have paused

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Working with cluster systems, strategic groups and networks was considered a significant achievement for how Plan International is placed and viewed as a leader in the humanitarian space. However, what is needed for this coordination and collaboration could also be reflected in job descriptions, to enable the continuation of knowledge and skill sets to continue this kind of work.

Reorient risk management to address both positive and negative risks; positive risks being those areas where “innovative thinking across the business” can be harnessed.

Where ambitions in future strategies increase the funding going directly to partners, teams will also need to assess what transferring risk looks like and how that can be managed so as not to cause harm. Systems and processes may not be fit for purpose for all partners, in all contexts. Therefore, an adaptive and flexible operational approach which includes co-designing and active participation may be more appropriate.



## 03. WORKING IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

The Learning Review uncovered the following ways in which Plan International is demonstrating agile ways of working:

- Relying on youth and community volunteers when access is not possible due to conflict or COVID-19.
- Adapting to the intensity of the activity depending on the scale of the crisis
- Re-allocating and adjusting budgets quickly.
- Demonstrating a confidence to respond to the Idai crisis in Mozambique

Moving forward, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (Triple Nexus) is the emerging and dominant framework applied by sector actors operating in complex environments. The aim of a nexus approach is to strengthen and reinforce collaboration, coherence, and complementarity across the pillars of humanitarian, development, and peace. Perceptions among participants suggest that Plan International is well-positioned to coordinate and collaborate in complex environments with lessons on agile ways of working drawn from operating during COVID-19. With these foundations, Plan International may want to explore further a nexus approach that enables long-term thinking when it comes to what capacity will be needed to address not only emergency response, but development and sustainable peace needs of rights holders and other stakeholders.

A globally led agenda for nexus programming may open up more discussion about the placement of humanitarian principles and conflict sensitivity. However, one Learning Review participant reported that “conflict-sensitivity programming and transformative and “nexus” oriented programming are demanding requirements to those in country working in complex environments”. A call to balance the burden on countries when moving towards new and transformational approaches.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Working with cluster systems, strategic groups and networks was considered a significant achievement for how Plan International is placed and viewed as a leader in the humanitarian space. However, what is needed for this coordination and collaboration could also be reflected in job descriptions, to enable the continuation of knowledge and skill sets to continue this kind of work.

Information management, procurement and financial systems via SAP were the most referenced limitations to agility and responsiveness. If Plan International is moving towards a nexus approach, and with consideration for integrated programming in general, these systems may need to be revisited alongside the need to connect humanitarian and development programming. The Learning Review proposes a more targeted review or assessment of the blockages within these systems towards greater agility and responsiveness.



