

## INTRODUCTION

This guidance is developed to be read in conjunction with the guidance to Seven Key Steps to Building Better Partnerships. It suggests ways in which Plan International staff might have to adapt their practice so that they can build better partnerships with youth-led groups/organisations – both formal and informal and at community, local and national levels.

**Youth-led:** We use the word youth-led if young people are the principle decision-makers in the organisation and are the ones who Plan International negotiate the partnership with. Adults may be involved in the organisation but they are not the principle actors. It does not refer to organisations which have a youth advisory group or which work for youth and consult them but do not engage them fully in decision-making.

**Age –** this guidance focuses on organisations mainly led by those aged 18 to 24. A separate document will address partnerships with organisations or groups led by children between 10 and 18 years. While youth may be defined differently in different countries, Plan International focuses on this age group. However, we recognise that youth-led organisations are very diverse in age and believe that this guidance is still relevant to those that include young people outside this age group.

Partnerships may look very different depending on who we are partnering with and what for, but the principles underpinning the partnerships are the same. This guidance makes some suggestions about how youth-led organisations might be different from other organisations that Plan partners with, and what we can do to build strong and effective partnerships with them.

The most important guidance is to be open to learning what the organisation/group is like and how it operates. The most important skill needed is **deep and empathetic listening and observation**. Ask yourself what your own prejudices and biases might be. If you find yourself thinking ‘well, that’s typical of young people!’ ask yourself what evidence you have for that. Be prepared to have your assumptions and your ideas of what an organisation can be challenged! Be FLEXIBLE and OPEN TO LEARNING – the way we do things is NOT the only right way.

**We will engage effectively with organisations of children, youth and young activists; and learn to mitigate the risks this might bring.**  
**100 MILLION REASONS**

To be read in conjunction with the guidance to the Seven Key Steps to Building Better Partnerships

## KEY STEP 1: IDENTIFYING PARTNERS AND DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

### 1.1 Partner mapping

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



You may not have heard of a youth group or organisation if:

- Adults do not know about them.
- They don't have formal registration.
- They use ways of communicating their presence that you are not connected to, e.g. youth-orientated social media platforms.
- They meet in different places to adult organisations.

What could you do differently?

As with all partnerships, being clear about the potential purpose of the partnership and why you need to partner before you start mapping is crucial.

Do an internet search.

Consider getting younger staff who are active on social media involved.

Ask your Youth Advisory Panel, youth groups and children/school clubs youth groups that you know.

Ask organisations that already have a track record of working with youth groups.

Look for organisations that are regarded by young people as representing them.



Things to consider



Do you have staff with experience and skills in working with youth?

Keep initial criteria to a minimum — don't inadvertently exclude by using criteria such as financial management capacity

Have you identified youth groups/organisations that you haven't heard of before? If not, try harder!

On first contact, be clear about the process of selecting partners – don't build up false expectations.

Include all the youth groups you find out about.

**Useful tools:**  
**How to map a youth network**  
**Youth Networking Tool**

## 1.2 Finding out more

### How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Youth groups/organisations may have different ways of communicating and organising to those you are used to:

They may not have an office or be available in Plan working hours.

Their policies and practices may not be written down.

They may be suspicious of people who contact them because they have had negative experiences of working with adults.

They may be uncomfortable in formal meetings.

Leadership and membership may be fluid and change often.

### What could you do differently?



First contact could be through social media.

Ask them how, where and when they would like to meet/give further information.

Explain what you are doing and the selection process.

Ask open questions and listen to them – be clear about what you will do with the information they give you.

Answer their questions simply and honestly.

Don't assume that young people have less ability and competence than adults – ask them how they would best like to be presented with information about Plan.

Have information about Plan available in a variety of media.

Use simple jargon-free language to describe what Plan does.

### Things to consider

There may not be any formal leadership.

Gender & inclusion – ask about the make up of the organisation, who do they represent? If there is more than one person present, make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

Ask what you need to do to make sure all groups represented by the organisation are included at this stage.

Agreeing how long the meeting together will last may be helpful.

The young people will be looking at you – what picture of Plan are you giving by your clothing, mode of transport, gender and age mix, behaviour, selection of words and overall engagement?



## KEY STEP 2: MUTUAL APPRAISALS

### 2.1 Mutual organisational assessment

#### How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Youth groups/organisations may organise themselves differently from other civil society organisations or they have chosen to have a very formal structure:

Their governance may be very informal or very formal.

Their policies and practices may not be written down.

They may have very different ideas from you about what makes a strong and legitimate organisation.

They may be suspicious of large organisations wanting sensitive information about them.

They might have had negative experiences of working with large local organisations or INGOs.

#### What could you do differently?

Start by sharing values and looking at where these connect.

Decide together what areas you are going to cover and why (including non-negotiables on both sides) and who will be involved – agree the questions you will ask together.

Focus more on quality of the work rather than systems.

Ask how they manage finance rather than asking for specific documents.

Mutuality: decide together where you are going to do the assessments – in each other's offices, in a neutral place.

Make sure there is equal time for the young people to ask questions about Plan International.

Doing a single activity together might be a better way of getting to know each other than a long written assessment.

Before carrying out mutual appraisal, make sure that (in)formal communication has already taken place and there is good understanding /rapport about both organisation.



#### Things to consider



Consider the purpose of the exercise – this is not about seeing whether the group/organisation is 'good enough' to work with Plan, it is about finding out more about each other and how you can work effectively together.

If you are going to work with a number of youth groups/organisations, it might be worth putting together an assessment in a quiz format that you can use as a basis for assessments.

Safeguarding – make sure you have discussed what this is and found out how they address it in their organisation, since being youth led organisation there might be risk associated with risky behaviours.

Who does the organisation/group want to represent? How are they doing this?

Ask critical questions about gender and inclusion – and be prepared to be asked them too. While many youth-led organisations are more diverse and sensitive to intersectionality than we are, they, like everyone may have blind spots.

## 2.2 Capacity Assessment

**How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?**



The capacities that youth groups/organisations need may be different from those of other civil society organisations. Young people may not have had exposure to different ways of organising or thought much about their future requirements – they may be more concerned with the here and now.

Youth organisations often have a large membership base (formal and informal) and thereby different and sometimes stronger accountability structures.

Youth organisations are sometimes not organised as the type of NGO plan normally partners with.

Spend time on surfacing the young peoples' aspirations.

Encourage them to learn from their peer organisations / groups those have excelled.

Don't impose your own idea of what a 'good' organisation should be like on them.

**What could you do differently?**



**Things to consider**



Consider potential risks and be open about them.

Avoid over emphasising compliance.

Be clear about Plan's non-negotiables but be prepared to invest in building the group's capacity to meet them.

Do the capacity assessment thoroughly and make sure it not only focuses on skills that are necessary to make the project a success, but also addresses their aspirations and opportunities for organisational growth more broadly.

## 2.3 Partners Strengthening / Capability reports and plans

**How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?**



Young people may get information and learn new skills in different ways.

Young people may have limited time to attend traditional face-to-face courses.

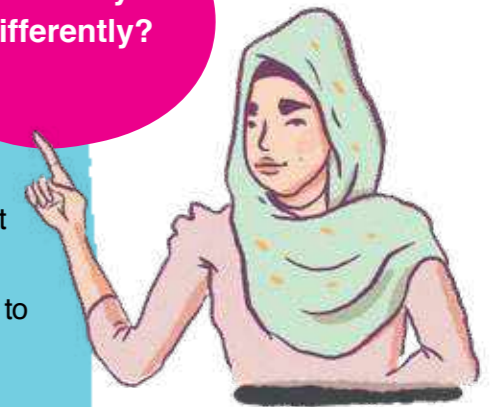
Long-term and complicated plans may seem daunting and boring.

Young people will have skills and capabilities that are not found in traditional assessment forms!

See how they are using ICT4D and social media /networks.

Young people often like to hear from and share experiences with other young people.

**What could you do differently?**



Ask how they have learnt new things/changed in the past and where they get their information from.

Listen to what they think they are good at and why.

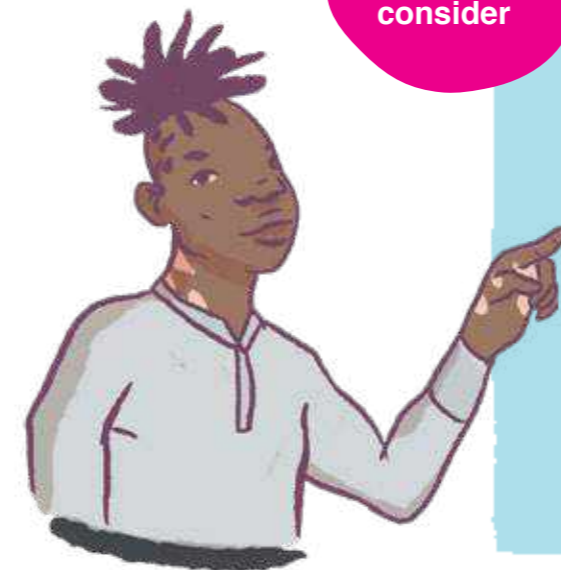
Introduce them to different ways of building capacity that they may not be familiar with.

Consider doing one thing at a time, then reviewing and deciding what to do next rather than having a long term plan.

Consider linking them with other similar groups (both nationally and internationally) to share learning.

Come up with clear areas where they can build the capacity of Plan International in short and long term.

**Things to consider**



Consider non-traditional ways of learning – social media, video, peer support.

How will they know that their capacity has been built? Consider how they want to measure progress and creative ways you could do this.

Ask them how they think Plan International should measure progress.

Think about how the youth-led group can share their skills and expertise best with Plan staff – this may not always be formal training.

Be realistic about how much Plan can support organisational development.