REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

A new incubator programme to advance uninterrupted access to inclusive quality education for children and young people in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

AUGUST 2022
ABOUT THE INCUBATOR

Many children and young people, especially girls and those from traditionally marginalised groups, are still excluded from accessing and completing inclusive quality education. Exclusion is often due to a range of intersecting barriers associated with gender, poverty, location, class, disability, language, and ethnicity that prevent children and young people from accessing, benefiting from, and completing a quality education.

Further disruptions to education, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and global increases in crises associated with conflict, civil unrest and climate change, indicate that traditional approaches to the delivery of inclusive quality education are no longer sufficient. New, or innovative, approaches and solutions are needed to ensure that inclusive quality education is uninterrupted. We believe that children and young people themselves are best placed to drive innovative solutions to transform education and ensure that the right to education is never disrupted, no matter the circumstances. Through this incubator programme, Plan International seeks to foster innovative, youth-driven solutions that secure quality and continuous education for children and young people, especially those most marginalised.

After five years of experiencing, managing and funding innovation projects at Plan International, the Global Hub Innovation team is testing a new programme to incubate innovation within and outside of Plan International to support the 2030 Global Goals and strive for a just world that advances children’s rights and equality for girls.

In partnership with the Inclusive and Quality Education (IQE) and Education in Emergencies (EiE) teams and the Ghana and Sierra Leone country offices at Plan International, we are launching the ‘Education Uninterrupted Incubator’, a collaborative, virtual space for participants in Ghana and Sierra Leone to develop and test their own ideas to ensure continuous delivery of inclusive quality education.

Support for Participation: Participating teams will receive a subsidy in line with market rates to acknowledge their time and work commitments to the incubator. The programme will further cover costs such as data and transportation, and costs related to testing a team’s solution. Further details will be shared at the interview stage.

Timeframe of Incubator: October 2022 - April 2023

Who Can Apply: Diverse and inter-disciplinary teams from within and outside of Plan International, specifically including young people from the communities where the project is based. Each team should have between 3-5 members, with at least 1-2 members having a physical presence in Ghana or Sierra Leone.

Deadline: 31 August 2022 at 23:59 WAT

Apply via Google Forms: https://forms.gle/v69Wp5RGBYk16t9f6
Apply via WhatsApp: https://bit.ly/3J8N7Pg
THE CHALLENGE

Despite progress on access to education across the world, many children and young people, especially girls are still left behind. Those who have access to education suffer from irregular school closures due to insecurity, on top of the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Solutions supporting the continuity of quality education of those whose schooling is disrupted by crisis, disaster, insecurity and gender inequalities are urgently needed.

With this in mind, the Education Uninterrupted Incubator is seeking to support innovative ideas that ensure the continuity of quality education for children and young people affected by disruptions in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Solutions must have the potential to make a substantial impact on the lives of those most vulnerable and excluded, particularly girls and children from marginalised groups.

Focus Areas

To support the development of targeted innovation ideas/ solutions, we have provided some context on three focus areas for the incubator. We invite teams to address one or a combination of these focus areas by using innovative concepts that ensure education continuity.

Addressing disruptions to education caused by crises to create a continuous and safe learning environment that increases the resilience of children and young people to shocks and instability.

Solutions accepted under this area are expected to consider how children can still access inclusive quality education during and after an emergency or crises (i.e. climate induced disaster, conflict, civil unrest, health epidemic/ pandemic). Solutions should ensure that children’s immediate education needs are met, whilst also planning for longer-term provision, and resilience building of education systems. Solutions may also address barriers related to COVID-19, school drop outs as well as challenges faced by out of school children. These can include education-based psycho-social support that creates stable routines, providing opportunities for friendship and play, fostering hope, reducing stress, encouraging self expression, and promoting collaborative behaviour.

Read more >

Fostering a gender transformative approach to education to boost progress towards important social norm shifts, such as the reduction of gender-based violence and early marriage, increased participation of women in the labour market, the promotion of gender equality, and women’s and girls’ leadership in decision-making roles.

Solutions accepted under this area are expected to challenge gender inequality and harmful social and gender norms. Solutions can help to realise the potential in all children, tackling many of the inequalities and exclusionary practices societies perpetuate. Solutions may address the removal of gendered barriers to girls’ access to education. Solutions can also boost progress towards important social shifts, such as the reduction of gender-based violence and early marriage, promotion of positive masculinity, as well as the promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights, increased participation of women in the labour market, the promotion of gender equality, and women’s and girls’ (in all their diversity) leadership in decision-making roles.

Read more >

Championing inclusion of those who are traditionally excluded to ensure that all children and young people are receiving meaningful and relevant learning opportunities which have been adapted to their specific needs.

Solutions accepted under this area should prioritise supporting the most vulnerable and excluded children who are disproportionately affected. Targeted measures that ensure children from poor backgrounds and children with disabilities are supported, systems that are adaptable to meet the needs of all learners, and offer learning opportunities for every child and young person. They can also aim at fostering understanding within communities, and among caregivers, education officers/leaders and teachers about their learning needs, consequently fighting prejudices around disability.

Read more >
WHAT WE’RE LOOKING FOR

Across all three focus areas, we are looking for innovative solutions that:

- have an initial idea/solution that responds to the design challenge based in Sierra Leone and/or Ghana;
- have a vision for impact, regardless of the current stage of innovation;
- build on the existing knowledge and guidance around inclusive quality education. Innovative solutions can be new, or adaptations of existing solutions.

We welcome diverse applicant teams, including but not limited to: social innovators, Plan International staff, young people from the communities where the project is based, members of civil society organisations, any relevant government agency, etc.

- Teams **MUST** have 1-2 young people who are active and equal members embedded in the participating teams and available for 8-16 hours during the incubator. They will be a driving force in decision making on the incubator team. Preference will be given to applications with girls/young women as incubator team members.
- Each team should have between 3-5 members, we aim to end up with 6 teams total for the incubator from both Sierra Leone and Ghana.
- Applicants are encouraged to form inclusive and interdisciplinary teams (eg, youth from marginalised backgrounds, education specialists, country office staff, designers, community engagement experts, advocacy experts) to ensure a diverse combination of skills. (Wherever possible, support can be provided in the team building process.)
- Not all members of teams need to be based in Ghana or Sierra Leone; teams must have a presence in either country in order to conduct contextualised research and testing. Any teams which do not have Plan International staff embedded within the team will be assigned a Plan International staff ‘mentor’.
KEY EXPECTATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

The overall expectation for all incubator participants is to bring a mindset of openness, curiosity, creativity, and flexibility. Participants should be comfortable with their initial idea/solution changing and evolving based on the needs of young people and their communities. Team members should be able to commit between 30-40 days over the 7 month period of the incubator.

All teams are expected to actively participate in the incubator:
- The incubator runs from October 2022 to April 2023. Participants are expected to commit between 12-15 hours per week for the duration of the incubator.
- Please note that certain phases of the incubator (such as in-person research and testing) may require the team to participate between 15-20 hours per week.
- Collaborate with other teams to foster opportunities for cross learning and growth by leveraging their knowledge and networks.
- Participants are expected to provide periodical information and feedback to help evaluate the incubator.

All teams are required to follow the youth-driven design process. This means:
- Youth drive decision making: Young people’s voices and feedback drive decision making across the project process - through research, coming up with solutions, testing and implementation planning.
- Youth are engaged in the process: Participating teams include young people, whose opinions and perspectives are valued and sought out. Research findings and outcomes are shared back with youth research participants, in ways that are accessible, engaging and relevant to them.

All teams must attend online trainings & sessions provided during the incubator:
- Training dates and time commitment: Attend training sessions as communicated and complete activities and deliverables as required. Specific time commitments for online engagement is to be communicated.
- Connectivity: Team participants are expected to have access to a laptop or desktop for active participation and a stable internet connection throughout the process. In cases where access to a device and internet is not available, Plan International will explore options with participants and support based on the need.

All teams should have the ability to conduct in-person research and testing
- Participating team member(s) must be able to conduct in-person research and testing in Sierra Leone and/or Ghana (while observing all COVID-19 protocols.)
- Teams applying from outside the target locations must be willing and able to travel there especially for in-person research and testing sessions.
- Teams must be able to recruit participants (children, young people, community members) to participate in interviews and collaborative sessions during the three phases of testing.
**SUPPORT AVAILABLE DURING THE INCUBATOR**

Training sessions and coaching will be offered by YLabs, a global design and research organisation specialising in youth-driven design. Support from YLabs includes:

- Training sessions on - working with young people on teams, conducting youth-friendly research, synthesis of data collected and building & testing prototypes.
- Progress reviews at every phase of the incubator, while helping teams maintain the focus on their goals as well as providing guidance towards a viable solution.
- Continuous coaching and technical support with review of findings, support of iterations, design, evaluation, and technical support for the final design solution.

**Plan International** is a development and humanitarian organisation which works in over 75 countries across the world to advance children’s rights and equality for girls. To deliver the incubator programme, Plan International will:

- Provide subject experts who will be paired with teams to act as personal mentor and industry expert for participants.
- Support participating teams to reach communities during design research and prototyping through our offices and networks in Ghana and Sierra Leone.
- Connect teams with diverse key stakeholders, to offer expert inputs as well as explore opportunities beyond the incubator.
- Ensure that youth are compensated for their time, expertise and travel, including both youth team members and youth research participants.
- Work with teams to develop a plan for piloting with Plan International. The most promising ideas will have the opportunity to apply for further funding to test their solutions.

**Note:** Being selected to participate in the incubator does not guarantee that you will receive funding for solution implementation at pilot phase. All selected teams for the Education Uninterrupted Incubator will receive intensive capacity-building from YLabs and Plan International. Teams will be encouraged to apply for funding and technical support for the Pilot implementation phase.

**GET IN TOUCH**

If you have any questions or enquiries, please feel free to get in touch with us at innovation@plan-international.org. If you would like to be notified of any updates related to applications and the Education Uninterrupted Incubator, please register your email here: https://forms.gle/PS2z3ib7TbjRn4h88
All successful project teams, regardless of the focus area they are responding to, will be expected to participate in the following stages of work:

### Application (Aug 2022 - Sep 2022)

- **05 Aug 2022**: Challenge Launch
- **31 Aug 2022**: Deadline for Submission
- **Aug - Sep 2022**: Shortlisting of Teams
- **Sep 2022**: Screening and Interviews
- **19 - 23 Sep 2022**: Teams Are Notified

### Incubation (Oct 2022 - April 2023)

- **17 Oct - 21 Oct 2022**: Kick-Off Activities
  - Selected teams attend a series of kick-off sessions and get familiarised with the incubator.
- **24 Oct - 12 Nov 2022**: Design Research
  - Teams are trained in design research techniques. Teams conduct in-person research between 31st October 2022 - 11th November 2022.
- **14 Nov - 16 Dec 2022**: Synthesis
  - Teams are trained in synthesis in order to make sense of the data collected from in-person research.
- **Jan 2023**: Innovation Lab (Ideation)
  - Teams prepare to share their progress at the virtual Innovation Lab event, where they will brainstorm ways to refine or change their idea/solution with other education stakeholders.
- **Jan - Feb 2023**: Innovation lab (Prototype Development)
  - Based on ideas generated at the Innovation Lab, teams are trained in building low-fidelity prototypes. Teams conduct in-person testing of their prototypes between 30th January 2023 - 10 February 2023.
- **Feb - Mar 2023**: Prototyping
  - Teams are trained in refining their prototypes and building high-fidelity prototypes for further testing. Teams continue to refine and test their prototypes between 20th March 2023 - 28th April 2023.
- **Mar - Apr 2023**: Ongoing Coaching and Technical Support
  - Teams take part in a review of prototyping findings, support of iterations, design, evaluation, and technical support for the final designed solutions and overall reporting.
Focus Areas

All successful project teams, regardless of the focus area they are responding to, will be expected to participate in the following stages of work:

1. Addressing disruptions to education caused by crises

A growing number of people are being displaced by conflict and violence, natural disasters and other emergencies including public health crises. These can result in the breakdown of traditional social and economic safety nets and sometimes the collapse of state provision of education services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified an already pressing challenge of delivering inclusive education, causing the largest disruption of education in history. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 1.6 billion learners were affected by school closures across the globe. While children’s health appears less impacted by COVID-19 than older adults, the pandemic has interrupted children’s education, disrupted protective structures, and increased health and economic burdens for families and communities, impacting access to funds for education.

Globally, 35% of all out-of-school children of primary age, 25% of all out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary age, and 18% of all out-of-school youth of upper secondary age live in conflict-affected areas. During conflict, an increasing number of schools are targeted for attack, leading to education infrastructure being damaged or destroyed, losing materials, and teachers and students being displaced. Schools are also increasingly the focus of recruitment efforts by armed groups. Girls in conflict-affected states are two-and-a half times more likely to be out of school.

Adolescent girls face additional gender specific barriers to accessing and returning to education, and are likely to drop out of school during and following disasters. Girls are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and gender-based violence. They face child, early and forced marriage, trafficking and unpaid domestic labour and care work. They are also particularly affected by climate change, which is contributing to a deterioration of livelihoods and wellbeing, and is increasing the burdens of water and fuel collection that often fall to women and girls.

In summary, crises pose multiple problems for providing education to the children who are affected. Children and young people without education are less resilient and more vulnerable to shocks and instability. Not only do emergencies disrupt children’s education, but they also put children and youth at great risk of abuse, trafficking and forced recruitment into armed conflict.

Safe schools and informal learning spaces are some of the most beneficial environments for children and youth during a period of uncertainty. Intentional investment in education-based psycho-social support has proven to protect them against the negative effects of disasters by creating stable routines, providing opportunities for friendship and play, fostering hope, reducing stress, encouraging self expression, and promoting collaborative behaviour.

For more information on education during crises, visit: https://plan-international.org/emergencies/education-in-emergencies/

---

2. [https://plan-international.org/emergencies/education-in-emergencies/](https://plan-international.org/emergencies/education-in-emergencies/)
3. UN Women (2017) “Women in Crisis – vulnerable to risk, vital to recovery”, article, 7 April
2. Fostering a gender transformative approach to education

The potential of education is irrefutable. Some of the most important influences on children and young people are in educational spaces. Outside the home, the school is at the heart of socialisation and a space in which young people are exposed to role models. Gender-transformative education would remove barriers to education and boost progress towards important social shifts, such as the reduction of gender-based violence and early marriage, increased participation of women in the labour market, the promotion of gender equality, and women’s and girls’ leadership in decision-making roles.

Many girls in West and Central Africa face a disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities; early and forced marriage; adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood; and unsafe learning environments, including lack of sanitation facilities for girls\(^1\) or risk of gender-based violence in and around education spaces. An estimated one in ten African girls miss school during menstruation because of inadequate sanitation facilities.\(^2\) For those able to enrol in school, they face many challenges within the classroom and the wider school environment, negatively affecting their education. Curricula, textbooks, instructors and other learning materials may contain gender bias and stereotypes, and may not be inclusive or relevant. Furthermore, girls’ aspirations are often curtailed by attitudes and approaches that reinforce gender roles and discriminate against them. Girls in school are also often discouraged from pursuing science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM) subjects, which may exclude them from these career paths.

Boys and men are also affected by gender norms through harmful norms of masculinity. Expectations on boys stemming from pervasive gendered social norms may lead to heightened stress, disengagement from school and perpetuation of violence against girls. Current social and behaviour change communications and programs are predominantly targeted towards women, leaving men out of this critical discussion.\(^3\) Children and young people who do not identify themselves within the confines of traditional gender and sexual orientation norms often experience inequality and injustice in the education system. It is important that teams recognize the needs of gender diverse youth in developing gender-transformative approaches.

Gender transformative education must focus on the education system, not just the school. It seeks to utilise all parts of an education system – from policies to pedagogies to community engagement – to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression. Taking a systems-thinking approach is important because it not only improves access to education for girls and women, but also equips and empowers stakeholders – students, teachers, communities and policy makers – to examine, challenge, and change harmful gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls, women and persons of other genders.\(^4\)

For more information on gender transformative education, visit: https://plan-international.org/publications/gender-transformative-education/

---

\(^1\) [https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/downloads/Platform%20for%20Girls/REAL%2012%20years%20of%20Quality%20Education%20for%20All%20Girls%20_FULL%20report.pdf](https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/downloads/Platform%20for%20Girls/REAL%2012%20years%20of%20Quality%20Education%20for%20All%20Girls%20_FULL%20report.pdf)

\(^2\) [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7671624/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7671624/)

\(^3\) [https://www.ylabsglobal.org/work/all/men-stand-up](https://www.ylabsglobal.org/work/all/men-stand-up)

\(^4\) GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION: Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world (UNICEF, December 2021)
3. Championing inclusion of those who are traditionally excluded

Children and young people living with a disability, those living in poor and remote areas, and those from ethnic minority groups, are traditionally most affected by disruptions in education or excluded from educational opportunity. These groups have the most limited access to schools with trained teachers and adequate resources and facilities.

In many countries, poverty combines with geography and ethnicity to keep girls out of school, and the gender gap between girls and boys attending school from socially excluded groups is much larger than in the wider population.¹ Poor, rural girls and girls from indigenous populations are among those least likely to access education. In many countries less than 10 percent of girls and boys attend some form of early learning/education programme² with attendance rates for pre-primary education lowest in countries with the highest levels of child poverty.³

Globally, there are 150 million children living with disabilities. Disability is often associated with curses, disease, dependence and helplessness which cause social avoidance, stereotyping or discrimination. Consequently, children with a disability are more likely to be excluded and marginalised from education, due to the associated social stigma. Gender discrimination compounds this: girls with a disability stand a significantly lower chance of completing primary school than their male peers. Children with disabilities are 10 times less likely to attend school than those without. Even if they attend school, they are more likely to drop out early while the level of schooling they receive is frequently below that of their peers. Children with disabilities are often unable to go to school because of unsuitable school buildings. There is a limited understanding within their communities and among teachers about their learning needs, which is often fuelled by prejudices around disability.

For more information on inclusive education, visit: https://plan-international.org/education/inclusive-education-children-disability/

¹ UNESCO and UNICEF (2015). Fixing the Broken Promise of Education For All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children
## Definition of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End User</td>
<td>The people who will benefit directly or indirectly from interacting with the solution. End users can refer to children and young people between the ages of 10-24, in-and-out of school, especially those who are most marginalised and excluded, based in Ghana and Sierra Leone. The end user could also be or include stakeholders within the education sector like teachers and other school staff, parents, caregivers and other community members as well as education authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Research</td>
<td>This is a broad term for the process used to better understand the underlying and sometimes hidden desires, needs, and challenges of end users. This process helps in informing the design of products, programmes, communications, and services that might better meet the needs of the end user.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>This involves creatively putting research pieces together in order to form whole ideas. You organise, interpret, discover connections and patterns that will become the foundation of your design approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>This is the process of generating and developing new ideas based on the patterns that come up during synthesis. The ideas generated here are then turned into prototypes for testing with end users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prototype</td>
<td>A prototype is an early sample or model of a product/service/system built as a representation of the main idea. The goal is to test the prototype in the hands of the user and to gather the user’s reaction to the proposed idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prototyping</td>
<td>The action of testing low-fidelity and high-fidelity prototypes is known as prototyping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iteration</td>
<td>A cyclical process of changing your solution prototype(s) in response to user feedback in order to better meet their needs and constraints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Stage</td>
<td>An actual implementation of the working system with users on a limited scale to test viability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>