Written evidence submitted by Plan UK

1. Executive Summary

1.1 There is clear evidence that prioritising girls and women is one of the smartest investments that the UK government can make and critical to achieving progress in development,¹ and it is also the right thing to do. To ensure sustainable development within equal societies, girls must be able to access their rights, most critically to education, protection from violence and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Plan welcomes the Secretary of State’s recognition that girls and women must be at the heart of the UK’s future approach to development. This paper sets out Plan’s vision for the future UK approach to development, it is one where the rights of children and young people are realised and focus is on transforming the lives of the over 600 million adolescent girls in the world, of whom there are 65 million out of school,² and around one in ten experience serious sexual violence in their lifetimes.³

2. Introduction: About Plan UK

2.1. Plan is a global children’s charity. We work with children and young people in 50 of the world’s poorest countries across three continents to help them realise their rights and build a better future. For over 76 years we’ve been taking action for gender equality, preventing violence against women and girls and fighting for every child’s right to a healthy start in life, including access to education and support to prepare for and survive disasters. We are also inspiring girls and boys to take a lead in decisions that affect their lives and enabling families to earn a living and plan for their children’s future.

2.2. Plan welcomes the Secretary of States announcement that the UK’s future approach to development will require a focus on the missing issues from the MDGs. Our view is that the rights and needs of adolescent girls have been critically absent to date due to a combination of both their gender and age. We agree that achieving the new sustainable development goals (SDGs) will require a set of policies from a number of UK Government Departments that together provide a coherent, comprehensive approach, led by a standalone Department for International Development.

2.3. There is much debate about the future shape of global poverty, with some suggesting that by 2025 the locus of poverty will overwhelmingly be in fragile, mainly lower income and African states.⁴ Others have argued that poverty outside India and China - countries which have the largest concentrations of poor people in the world - will remain roughly evenly distributed across both middle income and low income countries.⁵ It is clear that whatever the shape of poverty, gender equality will remain a critical challenge to sustainable

development and that investments in ensuring girls and women can access their rights must continue to be at the front and centre of the UK’s approach to development.

2.4. In addition, it is clear that the development landscape is changing. Over the last decade new sources of development finance, such as corporate donors, have flourished and the diversification of actors, instruments and delivery mechanisms has continued to grow. Plan welcomes these changes and seeks to support the discussion and debate within the Beyond Aid inquiry which has implications for the future of development and the shape of a standalone Department for International Development’s assistance.

3. Beyond Aid

3.1. Beyond aid: What is development?
Processes of development are political and must tackle inequalities, particularly gender inequalities, and seek to secure social justice for citizens of developing countries, especially the most marginalised women and girls as rights holders, and their governments as duty bearers. This requires genuine empowerment for girls and women, alongside boys and men to be able to tackle the structural causes of poverty, to engage with local structures of power and to hold governments to account. The voices of girls and women and those living in the poorest communities must also be heard in decision making processes and influence state and global structures of power.6

3.2. Why the UK does development aid: DFID is respected globally as a leader on development assistance focussed on girls and women, education, humanitarian interventions, to name but a few. Importantly the strategic vision for girls and women puts girls at the heart of its approach.7 Programmes such as the Girls Education Challenge reflect this commitment within a portfolio of humanitarian and development assistance delivered efficiently and effectively. In addition to the moral obligation for rich countries to tackle global poverty, protect girls and women from violence, and ensure their rights to education and participation are protected, it is often argued that international aid supports the UK’s security interests, compliments trade interests and supports issues of migration, and climate change. Having a political position in cabinet specifically on development reflects the UK’s political commitment to tackling global poverty and gender inequality, and supports its position as a global leader on this area.

3.3. The future of UK development: Who will deliver development and how?
The Beyond Aid inquiry offers a chance to re-evaluate assumptions around which agencies can and should play a role in development. The traditional parts played by NGOs, consultants, fund managers, and corporates are changing within the new context of development, and these are dismantling the assumptions of traditional aid ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘donors’. Increasingly complex mechanisms of development cooperation and innovative partnerships between NGOs and the private sector offer exciting models for consideration to build gender equality and achieve sustainable development. While DFID’s focus on value for money, through the lens of the ‘4Es’ (economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity), has been challenging for many NGOs implementing DFID-funded programmes, it has inspired some progress in terms of understanding, demonstrating and improving how

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resources are best used to improve the lives of people living in poverty. Going forward, Plan hopes that equity is prioritised to the same extent as economy and efficiency.

3.4. Many International NGOs, such as Plan, have been working in developing countries for decades, have established roots in local communities and are overwhelmingly staffed by local people. It is through this established presence that we have developed the credibility to engage people in some of the most sensitive development challenges such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. These programmes require a long term vision, time and funds. Plan’s network of country offices, programme units and community based development facilitators reach out to the heart of communities and help to transform power structures around gender relations and discriminatory social norms. International Non Governmental Organisations are well placed to support the development of national civil society to demand that national governments practise good governance and ensure they support gender equality through legislation, and their responsibilities to provide services. It is clear from our experience that development is not a mechanical process, it’s about people – the upcoming 2015 World Development Report (WDR) has recognised this, stating that social emotions and social norms motivate much of what people do.  

3.5. **Aid mechanisms**: the range of types of aid and proliferation of actors will in future lead to new and innovative aid mechanisms. DFID’s Programme Partnership Agreements are an example of an existing effective mechanism, Plan’s PPA with DFID provides the agility required to alter course depending on changing political and economic contexts. We also see value in greater private sector engagement in future; particularly where approaches overlap and partnerships can provide greater reach, sustainability, innovation and dynamism. For example, Plan’s funding for a South Asia Programme in Bangladesh and Pakistan through the DFID WASH Results Fund sees us partnering with Unilever to deliver a sanitation and hygiene behaviour change programme. This programme aims to reach 6.5 million people in Bangladesh and Pakistan through a Consortium of Unilever, Plan International, WaterAid and Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor. NGO partnerships with private sector partners can bring complementarity. Plan UK’s Banking on Change partnership with CARE International UK and Barclays demonstrates this approach, through this partnership 25,000 village savings and loans groups have been formed, reaching over 750,000 people. The involvement of a global bank in the partnership has meant that we can experiment with linkages between Plan and CARE’s savings groups and formal financial services, and ensures that learning around innovative practice on financial inclusion reaches a larger and more diverse audience. Plan also welcomes DFIDs longer term approach to gathering evidence on development interventions, demonstrated in the recently announced research funding for eight years into violence against women and girls. We know that changing social norms takes time, and this is often longer than common three year donor grants cycles so we welcome the role of DFID in making longer term investments in learning on development and especially on the critically important area of preventing violence against women and girls.

3.6. **The role of DFID in facilitating other UK Government departments and other UK organisations to assist developing countries**: joint policies between DFID, Cabinet Office, FCO, Ministry of Defence, Department of Energy and Climate Change, DEFRA and BIS, demonstrate DFID’s close cooperation across government departments. We welcome this,
especially the close collaboration with the FCO on human rights issues in partner countries. Recent work on the Girl Summit between the Cabinet Office, Home Office and DFID has shown a cross departmental drive to protect girls in the UK and globally from violence by ending child marriage and FGM, an approach Plan UK strongly welcomes. Cooperation with the Department for Health includes for example the international emergency trauma register through which the Department of Health is sending NHS experts to provide medical support to the emergency response in Gaza. The future of DFID could incorporate this facilitation role more strategically, to ensure DFID is sharing learning and effectiveness across countries and the expertise of UK government departments are used to benefit developing country ministries.

3.7. The discussions around a post-2015 SDG framework will see universal goals and targets for all countries; this has already led to collaboration and cooperation across Whitehall. The post 2015 team was based in the Cabinet office for over a year, enabling the close supervision of the Prime Minister given his key role as a co-chair of the UN secretary-general's high-level panel of eminent persons on the post-2015 development agenda. Additionally the DFID education policy team have held discussions with the Department for Education on the implications of the post 2015 goals for the UK. Since the new framework will be universal i.e. setting standards and targets for the global north as well as developing countries, these goals will serve as a basis for greater cross governmental cooperation for years to come and the framework could see the beginnings of an intergovernmental approach to national and international social justice. The consensus around the SDGS is the driver for sharing knowledge and innovative methods within Whitehall and beyond to developing country governments.

3.8. A stand-alone Department for International Development – which has developed effective cooperation with other government departments, as evidenced above, remains critical to ensuring sustainable and accountable development funding for a number of reasons:

3.9. The UK has recently met its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on aid which Plan welcomes. It must be noted that recent years have seen growth in the UK’s aid funding, yet in future this will mean aid remains at the same level. Therefore it is critical a standalone DFID remains in place to ensure that this funding used efficiently and effectively – that is allocated and spent in line with principles of aid effectiveness and continues to place girls and women at the heart of its work.

3.10. The specialist expertise housed within DFID leads excellence in development assistance. For example, DFID’s education policy and global funds teams are using their influence and expertise to shape the work of the Global Partnership for Education, and to ensure its education systems strengthening in partner countries ensure gender equality and girls education are central to its work.

3.11. A standalone DFID must continue to ensure coherence of aid policy – the lessons and impact that DFID has demonstrated over the last 17 years illustrate the power of this approach. The merging of UK departments into one along the lines of the changes made to Departments for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in Canada and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia would reduce DFID’s flexibility and would risk instrumentalising development assistance in line with the UK’s trade priorities. An approach which risks compromising human rights principles for aid and also risks losing DFIDs focus

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on promoting social justice. While international development and economic development may be complementary, they are not synonymous. Effectiveness means producing expected or desired outcomes, like tackling violence against women and girls, preventing child marriage and ending FGM in a generation, and ensuring every girl completes at least nine years of quality education and makes the transition into work.