How does CCCD Affect Program Effectiveness and Sustainability? A Meta Review of Plan’s Evaluations

Final Report

Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Uwe Gneiting, and Hans Peter Schmitz

Transnational NGO Initiative, Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBO: Community-based Organization

CCCD: Child-Centered Community Development Approach

CLTS: Community-led Total Sanitation

CSP: Country Strategic Plan

IMCI: Integrated Management of Childhood Illness

INTRAC: International NGO Training and Research Centre

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

(T)NGO: (Transnational) Non-governmental Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children’s Fund

WHO: World Health Organization
Executive summary

In 2003, Plan International adopted a Child-Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach as its international framework for its programmatic work. CCCD reframes some familiar tools of Plan’s work, including capacity-building and participation, while also expanding into new strategic areas, such as addressing national level policies and legislation and developing more holistic cross-level activities and partnerships. Plan’s shift to CCCD represents a significant shift in the organization’s approach to its development work. This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how CCCD enhances Plan’s program effectiveness and sustainability by reviewing all available single-program, external evaluations completed between 2007 and 2010 in the areas of water and sanitation, education, and health.

This study first assessed the implementation practices of CCCD and then evaluated the effects of CCCD on program outcomes and sustainability. It identified specific preferred targets and strategies used in CCCD programming. Plan primarily engages with communities and state institutions, while relatively less attention is focused on other civil society actors or linkages between local stakeholders. At the community level, strategies of capacity-building and participation are dominant. When interacting with government institutions, Plan also emphasizes capacity-building of front-line government personnel while advocacy strategies challenging governmental decision-making are much less prevalent.

With regards to the effects of CCCD on program outcomes, this study defined four main program outcome dimensions (behavior change, service access and quality, sustainability, and equity) and placed its analytical focus on specific patterns and mechanisms linking CCCD strategies to these outcomes. Overall, the study found that CCCD did have a positive impact on program implementation although effects on behavior change and service access and quality have been more pronounced than those on sustainability or equity.

Behavior change. Plan supports a variety of distinct behavior change processes aimed at changing the self-perception of community members, appealing to their self-interest, or taking advantage of peer pressure mechanisms. The effectiveness of these mechanisms is enhanced when community groups actively participate in program implementation using CCCD strategies. The main limitations
identified in this review point to gaps between awareness and practice, mostly when programs only include one-time interventions and when cultural barriers are high.

**Service access and quality.** Plan’s work with community-based organizations (CBOs) was the most frequently mentioned CCCD-related strategy that enhanced program effectiveness in the area of improved service access and quality. In addition, Plan has seen some success in using community-level experiences to successfully influence policy decisions at the national level, thereby scaling up its programming. The main challenges to using community-based approaches in enhancing services include deficits in quality due to a lack of resources and capacity on the community level.

**Sustainability.** The study found that Plan does not advocate or implement one single sustainability strategy. Instead, country programs either prioritize community capacity or state capacity as their main focus to achieve sustainability (depending on local context and program characteristics). In addition, Plan has had some success in enhancing the sustainability of its results by linking communities with state institutions, for example, by integrating community volunteers into state-run planning and implementation processes. The main challenges identified in this area are weak state capacity and political will to assume program responsibilities, the fragility of CBOs, and a certain lack of formal emphasis on sustainability strategies.

**Equity.** The evaluations indicate inconsistency in Plan’s approach towards equity and show that equity concerns, while visible in program planning stages, frequently get lost during the implementation phase. Plan’s attention to equity is more consistent on gender issues and the rights of children more generally, while CCCD efforts are rarely directed at more distinct vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities or migrant children.

The most positive effects of CCCD emerge when it is implemented consistently across different levels using multiple strategic categories (i.e. participation, capacity building, advocacy, and governance and accountability.) This finding points to the complementary character of the different CCCD strategies in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of Plan’s programs. Plan’s comparative advantage in pursuing CCCD is most visible when it not only works with communities, but extends its efforts across a variety of levels to address development issues more effectively. This multi-level approach allows the organization to create linkages and synergies between different
actors and ties its experience from its community-level engagement to policy-making processes at the national and international levels.

In further advancing its CCCD strategy, Plan faces two main challenges. First, CCCD implementation practices vary widely across country offices. While some variation due to different local and national circumstances is appropriate, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of Plan’s programs requires greater consistency in the application of CCCD. To do so, Plan internally should enhance shared understanding of CCCD by staff (1), provide specific guidelines for CCCD implementation within particular programs (2), clarify the relationship between CCCD and the sponsorship approach (3), and dedicate more resources to measuring community changes over time in order to better understand the effects of CCCD (4). Second, CCCD faces more inherent limitations associated with increasing reliance on local actors with limited resources and capacities.

This study represents an initial attempt to systematize the relationship between CCCD and Plan’s program outcomes. The research team recommends building on the lessons learned from this project and to further invest in efforts to document and trace the effects of CCCD on Plan’s contribution to the improvement of children’s lives in its program countries. The results presented in this report represent hypotheses whose validity could be further strengthened with subsequent research systematically comparing cases where components of CCCD were applied with cases where no such intervention took place.

**Response from Plan International USA:** Plan provided the Maxwell researchers with unrestricted access to our archives of third-party evaluations in order to gain new insights into the effectiveness of CCCD. We welcome the generally positive findings of this independent review of our field work since 2003. Plan also welcomes the insights provided by the study, which we intend to incorporate into our future programming.

Plan International USA will share this study widely throughout the Global Plan Federation, which spans 60 countries and three-quarters of a billion dollars annually. The findings of this report may have relevance to other development actors working with children, communities and Rights-based Approaches to development more generally. We welcome further dialogue.