

Hear my voice

Plan's child media program



Shonu Chandra

“Being part of this program means having new adventures, new dreams, new goals, which little by little and with patience are turning real.”

María, a child participant in Plan's 'Aquí los chicos' radio project in Ecuador



Plan
Be a part of it.

Plan's Vision

Plan's Vision is of a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity.

Introduction

Plan's media programs in the developing world provide children with a platform to express themselves. They support young people in taking concrete actions to improve their lives and the lives of other children in their country. The programs help provide positive role models for both children and adults. They assist young people in developing a relevant range of non-technical vocational skills such as communication skills, team work, creativity, confidence and powers of self-expression – skills that have relevance in whatever field of work they will eventually find themselves.

The media projects aim to contribute to changing mentalities and behaviour, and the image of children in their community. Children's voices are and will be heard not only 'on air' but also in the decision-making process. Information and participation will in the long run empower children, prevent exploitation and help them become active members of society.

All of Plan's media projects intend to meet these challenges.

Mimi Brazeau

Media Programs Adviser
Plan West Africa

With the aim of involving children in the development process and promoting their rights, Plan first began to implement child media programs in the mid 1990s. By enabling this involvement, children were no longer just recipients of development projects but participants.

"The child has the right to express his or her views, obtain information, make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers."

**United Nations Rights of the Child, Article 13:
Freedom of expression**

Plan's Mission

Plan strives to achieve lasting improvements in the quality of life of deprived children in developing countries through a process that unites people across cultures and adds meaning and value to their lives by:

- enabling deprived children, their families and their communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in and benefit from their societies
- building relationships to increase understanding and unity among people of different cultures and countries
- promoting the rights and interests of the world's children



Speaking out through video

Video film can be one of the most powerful ways of speaking out in any circumstances. For children and young people working to change their environment and challenge behaviour and practices that threaten their development, it can represent a powerful means of visualising specific issues. Film, too, can be shown repeatedly, reaching different audiences with vital messages.

“Children do have a voice and a unique way of thinking that is different to adults,” says 17 year-old Sonu, one of the Indian children involved in Plan’s ‘Children have something to say’ video project to raise awareness of issues that the children felt most urgent. “They do have potential to understand their problems and to solve them, but most don’t get the opportunity to express their concerns,” she added.

Through the project, children aged between 13 and 17 from throughout India were encouraged to identify issues affecting young people’s lives – from child labour to early marriage and prostitution, from rag pickers to addiction. They then learned the skills needed to make campaigning videos calling for change.

By the end of 2003, they had made 36 such videos, each one produced entirely by the children, from researching the scripts to the filming and editing. These have been shown at children’s film festivals, on international television channels including BBC World Television, and where perhaps they matter most – to the communities of the children who made them.

Impact

The films have had a genuine impact. One, on the Jogini village temple prostitutes, for example, prompted the government to review its laws. Another, entitled ‘Mrituchakra’ (Circle of Death), led to the shutting down of a paper factory in central India that was contaminating the local water supply.

Another of the young filmmakers, 15 year-old Saroj, describes the impact of the film ‘Addicted Innocence’:

“After showing our film on the growing trend of children addicted to chewing tobacco at a children’s film festival, a group of children sent a petition to their local government pressurising them to do something about this hazardous trend. As a result, street sellers have been banned from selling chewing tobacco within 100 metres of the schools.”

International recognition

Such was the success of the project that it received a special award at the 2003 United Kingdom One World Media Awards in recognition of its unique contribution to the communication of children’s rights.

At the ceremony, Tony Young, Chair of One World Broadcasting Trust, said: “In placing a microphone in the hands of children, they [Plan] have given them the authority to question the practices about them, to challenge their treatment and the treatment of their neighbours. The extraordinary quality of the films is a tribute to the undoubted talent of these children, and the benevolent, almost non-existent, guidance of the few adults involved. Films by children for adults of the highest calibre.”

Sonu was one of four children chosen to collect the award. “Today is a very big day for all the children in the world,” she said. “Their voice has been given recognition.”



Radio is by far the most popular medium through which children and young people get their messages across. In many areas, it is the only form of mass media and children participating in Plan's media programs across the world have embraced its power to reach out to whole communities and demand change.

Speaking out through radio

"Children don't even know that they have rights here," explains a 14 year-old girl in Senegal. "Children have the right to know. The radio campaign tells children good things and adults should start to listen to what they say."

Plan's radio campaign in West Africa, 'I am a child but I have my rights too!', covers seven countries (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Togo, Mali, Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Benin) and involves some 600 children aged from six to 18 in raising awareness of and promoting the rights of the child. Based on a series of 30 five-minute 'stories' adapted to each country's culture and produced predominantly by the children themselves, the radio shows demonstrate how children can become eloquent advocates and effective agents for change.

The stories are based on the concept of 'edutainment' (entertainment and education) and are rich in sound effects, music and magic. They also include animal characters taken from the folklore of each country (as with the hyena in the extract right) to develop a comfortable atmosphere in which sensitive issues such as AIDS, violence, exploitation and child trafficking can be

addressed. Also included are members of a child's community, such as the parents, traditional healers and village leaders.

Close to 600 productions of the stories have been made and thousands of broadcasts have been heard throughout the region. The show is broadcast by up to 20 radio stations in each country.

The children are not only involved in the production but also participate in the radio broadcast through interviews, debates, contests and contributing poems, letters and drawings. They are learning about child rights and the problems facing children. They are increasing their ability to speak out and they are learning how to make their voices heard in the media. As one of the team leaders in Senegal explained: "In every child there is a sleeping capacity to express him or herself – they just need help to get it out."

Influence

The campaign is influencing children and adults alike. In Burkina Faso, the number of adults who said that they had been informed about child rights through the radio campaign rose from 17 per cent in 1998 (the first year of the campaign) to 60.7 per cent in 2002. A further evaluation concluded:

"With its child perspective and its regular broadcast, [the campaign] makes a substantial contribution to the limited supply of media for

children in West Africa. Being both entertaining and informative, the campaign seems to have been a great success among both children and adults. The interesting feature...is that it is not only addressing children, it is also involving them in production and in broadcast. Children have active roles in this project and they serve as important examples for others."



International recognition

The success of Plan's radio campaign in West Africa has received recognition at an international level. Last year, the project was awarded a Finalist Certificate in the Children/Young Adult Programs category at the International New York Festivals 2003. 'I am a child but I have my rights too!' was also granted a finalist award at the UNICEF/One World Radio contest.



Victor Brott/fotojournalisten

Extracted from 'Girls education: a priority!', part of the 'I am a child but I have my rights too!' series:

Ami: My papa and mama never went to school. They say it's not important. They're right.

Yacine and Aicha: What! Not important? Your head must have fallen to the bottom of the well for you to be able to say such a stupid thing.

Buki (the hyena): Hello girls. What are you talking about?

Yacine and Aicha: School. It's important!

Ami: School. It's not important!

Yacine: Let's go and ask the village chief's advice.

The village chief invites them to sit down. He holds a sheet of paper towards Ami.

Ami: Chief, I don't know how to read.

Chief Mor: That's too bad. This sheet of paper holds precious and marvellous secrets. And you can't discover them.

Yacine, if your father had five sacks of rice and your mother takes them to market and sells them for 10,000 francs each, how much will she earn?

Yacine: I don't know, Chief. I don't know how to count.

Chief Mor: That's too bad. It's a lot of money. If you don't know how to count your profit, how will you know how much you can spend? And you, Aicha, read to me what is written on this bottle of medicine.

Aicha: I can't, Chief.

Chief Mor: Too bad. If you can't read the labels, you could poison yourself with your medicine.

With Ami now convinced that school is important, Chief Mor persuades her parents that it is important for girls to get an education. Several months pass.

Ami: Chief Mor! Do you remember the paper that I couldn't read last year? I'd like to try and read it again and discover all of its treasures.

Chief Mor: Bravo Ami. Sit down under the mango tree. I'm proud that you go to school. It's your right, it's your choice!

The most traditional of child media projects are those involving the written word. Encouraging children to share experiences, address issues and build relationships through newsletters and magazines not only develops their skills as writers and communicators, but also increases their knowledge of children's rights.

Speaking out through print



Plan's child media project in Colombia is less than a year old but already the children are making a real success of their magazine, 'Caja Mágica' (Magic Box).

Apart from textbooks, children in Colombia have very little to read. Produced for and by children – even its name was chosen through a children's competition – 'Caja Mágica' aims to stimulate their imagination, educate through entertainment and build relationships through finding pen friends in other parts of the country.

Children's magazines supported by Plan in other countries like Senegal, Indonesia and India have proven that, with the right support, children as young as 12 are fully capable of developing all the skills to publish a magazine. Several child editors have grown up to become distributors of the magazines or have established community-based organisations promoting child or human rights. Others have continued to work towards becoming professional reporters and photographers.

In Colombia, core groups of child editors have been established in each of Plan's program units. These groups organise training of other local children and discuss issues important to them, such as nutrition, violence, drug addiction and the lack of green spaces. Each has between 12 and 40 members and each is represented at the national editors' committee.

"It is amazing but not unexpected how well 'Caja Mágica' has been received," says Chris Soebroto, Plan's Sponsorship and Grants Support Manager in Colombia. "It has also begun to play a role in helping children come to terms with the traumas they have experienced in the ongoing war and violence in this country. One of the problems of marginalisation and deprivation is the lack of access to information – the children's magazine helps to change that."

Plan's aim is for 'Caja Mágica' to become a commercial enterprise in two or three years, generating funds through sales across Colombia.

"'Caja Magica' taught me that it is not only adults who can write down their thoughts. Children can do so too," explains 11 year-old Eliana Patricia, who is involved in Plan's magazine project in Colombia.



Media projects using the internet have recently been introduced and have to be very carefully planned and monitored to protect children. Projects to date have primarily aimed to link groups of children in different countries, enabling them to share experiences and gain a deeper understanding of each other's lives and the issues that affect them.

Speaking out through new technology

America: (responding to a question)
"We basically eat anything we want."

Kenya: "Aren't you lucky. We have to plan what is to be eaten."

America: "What do you mean? Is food scarce?"

Kenya: "There is no money so we have to plan. At holiday time, we might eat the one chicken we have saved the whole year."

This exchange took place last year between students in Providence, USA, and their peers in Nairobi, Kenya. The Kenyan children are members of a Plan media project in which they are trained in journalism, interviewing skills, magazine layout and using video equipment. For many, it was the first time they had used a computer or 'chatted' via the internet.

A similar exchange was arranged between children in Kenya and children in Albania. Here, the four children involved had never seen a computer, let alone used one. Yet, after an intensive course on using a mouse and keyboard (and with the help of an interpreter), they were able to share jokes and experiences for two and a half hours.

In both link-ups, the children were not only discovering new technology and learning the basic skills to operate it, they were also finding out and making contact with others in countries a world away from their own. As one Albanian child wrote: "We are looking forward to talking again. We hope that day will be soon."

Liba Taylor

Plan's child media projects across the world also include:

Senegal 'Radio gune yi': created in 1995, this was one of Plan's first ever child media projects. 'Radio gune yi' is run in collaboration with national broadcaster, Radio Television Senegal (RTS).

Vietnam 'Young media clubs': since 1998, hundreds of children have been trained in journalism and radio/television broadcasting. With their articles and broadcasts, these young journalists have gained the affection and admiration of readers and listeners.

"The best means we can use to educate on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, gender and environment is to communicate with our articles," explains Tran, one of the child reporters.

Philippines 'Bidang bulilit' (Children are the stars): established in 1999, 55 children aged between 10 and 15 work in partnership with a local radio station to prepare, manage and produce one-hour weekly shows about children's rights.

Bangladesh 'Agami': children make 20-minute documentaries on issues affecting their lives. Each episode has been broadcast on national television twice a week – reaching an estimated audience of 20 million.

Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti and Dominican Republic 'Childmedia': since 1999, some 2,000 children have been involved in producing radio programmes, videos and printed materials promoting the rights of the child.

"'Childmedia' offers different perspectives to the environment of these children, bringing not only media technical training but also a space where they can develop other skills that will open up opportunities to have a better and more dignified life."

Comment in an evaluation of the project in 2003.

Malawi 'Rights of the child' radio programme: since 2001, a weekly radio programme is broadcast on Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), the most accessible radio channel in the country. Anchored by an MBC journalist, the programme involves children in round-table discussions and interviews.

Ecuador 'Aquí los chicos': a production team of 40 children supported by a network of 300 community reporters who prepare and edit reports on child rights issues for a weekly live radio programme. They interview a wide range of local people, including local dignitaries, and take telephone calls during the show.

Kenya 'Sauti ya watoto wa dida' (Give children a voice): a video magazine project promoting child rights and encouraging child participation. Children are involved in the preparation and production of each film, both in front of and behind the camera. Each film focuses on an issue chosen by the children; including child labour, early marriage and street children.

Awards

One World Media Awards 2003, UK

Special Recognition Award given to Plan India's 'Children have something to say' video magazine project.

New York Festivals 2003, USA

Finalist Certificate in the Children/Young Adults Programs category awarded to Plan West Africa's regional radio project 'I am a child but I have my rights too!'

The Communications Initiative - Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Stories Competition 2003, Canada

Finalist Award given to Plan West Africa's regional radio project 'I am a child but I have my rights too!'

UNICEF/One World Radio 2002, UK

Finalist Award for outstanding children's radio programmes given to Plan West Africa's regional radio project 'I am a child but I have my rights too!'

New York Festivals 2000, USA

Silver World Medal in the Children/Young Adults Programs category awarded to Plan West Africa's regional radio project 'I am a child but I have my rights too!'



Contact Us

To find out more information about Plan's child media programs and other areas of work, visit www.plan-international.org or contact Plan's media office, based at its international headquarters in the UK on: +44 (0) 1483 733 285.

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