

Plan International, United Kingdom

Dr. Unni Krishnan

Organisation Profile

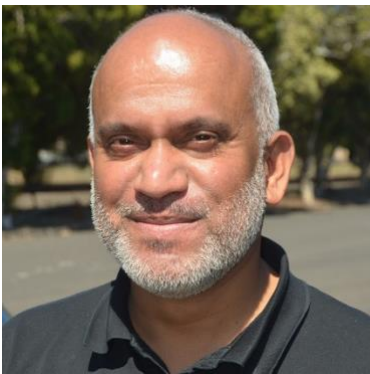
Founded in 1937, Plan International is a humanitarian and development organisation that works together with children, young people, supporters and partners to strive for a just world, where we are all equal.

We are an international NGO with presence in approximately 80 countries. Working with and through partner organisations, we are operational and implement programmes and advocate for children's rights and equality for girls.

Nominee Information

Dr. Unni Krishnan

Video presentation



Gender: Male

Job title: Global Humanitarian Director

For the past 25-plus years, I have worked in and on humanitarian, development, and health issues- on the frontlines where people encounter hostile forces- disasters, military, mobs, microbes, bad governance, human rights violation, ill-planned development, and extreme weather and so on.

I have worked in senior management, leadership, representational, governance/ board, and advisory positions for humanitarian, health, and development agencies (such as Oxfam, ActionAid, Plan International, Save The Children, War Child and the People's Health Movement), inter-agency and UN initiatives, academic and technical teams. I currently work as the Global Humanitarian Director, at Plan International. Currently, I am also on the board of humanitarian initiatives (e.g. CALP -Cash Learning Partnership).

I have demonstrated an unflinching commitment to the idea of humanity, humanitarian charter, safe guarding and accountability and promoted and advocated for human dignity and human rights at the local, national, and global levels. I have also championed principled and effective humanitarian action and promoted ICVA's mission to enable, support, and guide constituents of the humanitarian ecosystem. Most importantly, fostered collaboration within agencies in the 'global south' and between them and international agencies.

Practical experiences have strengthened my understanding of the ways of working of community-based local organisations, national and international agencies, and civil society- how things work and how to make things work. I can find a reasonable balance between passion and patience. As a board member in forums, I have demonstrated clarity in such roles in comparison with the day job (by often unlearning from the nature of the day job).

Good understanding of ICVA's values, principles, mission, and strategy – and to use it to relate with the evolving contexts in which we work and engage. Good listener. I have worked with and for ICVA and ICVA's board on previous occasions. E.g.

- Representing ICVA (ActionAid) as a Sphere board member (2006-2010)
- Representing ICVA and ActionAid on IASC Task Force
- I was elected as a board member and as Vice Chair of ICVA briefly in 2021 (had to give up the positions as I changed jobs at that moment). However, continued to support ICVA's mission.
- Worked directly with the Chair of the Board of ICVA and the Executive Director to promote collaboration between Sphere and ICVA (while I was working as the Chair of the Board of Sphere, when Sphere was hosted by ICVA).

I have several years of experience working on boards and as a chair and vice chair.

- Sphere board: Chair, member, and vice chair (between 2006-2016).
- CALP- Cash learning network: Board member
- Board member: Swayam Shikshan Prayog, a grassroots women's cooperative/ movement (India); Clowns Without Borders (UK).

Trained as a physician (Madras University). Studied Masters in Humanitarian Action (University of Geneva) and conflict management, mediation, and negotiation (Selly Oak colleges, UK). I believe I learned equally from ordinary people and children during my work, spread over 70 plus countries in 6 continents - many of them hostile settings.

Author, editor, and media commentator on humanitarian, public health, social movements, and human rights issues. I worked as the lead author for the 2018 edition of the Sphere Handbook (health chapter); co-author of 'Psychological First Aid' (WHO), a Task Force member to develop the (UN/) Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings and as the co-editor of 'India Disasters Report' series (Oxford University Press). Blogs: www.unniverse.in .

Effective communicator. Able to demystify complex dynamics in the humanitarian ecosystem through easy-to-read blogs, OPEDs, memos and talks to fulfil ICVA's approach to the humanitarian sector- i.e. support humanitarian actors to understand, engage and influence the humanitarian ecosystem.

More about me:

1. A [profile story](#) that was published in the Australian Medical Journal.
2. Der Spiegel (German Magazine)' s "People Of The Year" feature [published this personal profile](#).

Please indicate whether, if elected as a member of the Board, you would be willing to stand for election for

- ***Chair –Yes***

If yes, what qualities would you bring to the position of Chair?

A genuine commitment to principled and effective humanitarian action. Ability to articulate a compelling vision, mobilise diverse actors, and nurture a collective approach. Ability to listen and facilitate an informed conversation, often by bringing diverse, different or polarised opinions together and by appreciating dissenting voices. While working as the chair of inter-agency initiatives (e.g. Sphere board), I also learned not to take more than 10-15% of the airtime during board meetings, to make sure that the Executive Director/ CEO and staff are given time and fellow board members are encouraged to listen, reflect and form ideas and consensus around complex issues.

Availability and time commitment not just during board meetings, but also to do the preparatory work before and after board meetings. My employer, Plan International, recognizes the responsibility that comes with the board chair position and is ready to make provisions to prioritise ICVA's work as and when needed. Be accountable and take the board matters seriously and prioritise.

Encourage all board members for input and foster collaboration between humanitarian actors and civil society across continents. Ability to mobilise all board members and thus optimise the full human capital of the board in its entirety. Facilitate a culture where board members are (and not just the chair) taking responsibility to represent ICVA in forums. Able to strengthen trust and collaboration, manage risks and generate specific, actionable, clearly formulated resolutions—and confirm every board member understands and supports such resolutions.

Good understanding of what I don't know and openness to seek support from subject matters experts.

Good understanding of ICVA's values, principles, mission, and strategy – and to use it to relate with the evolving contexts in which we work and engage. Active listener.

I have several years of experience working as chair, vice chair and on boards. E.g.

- Sphere board: Chair, member, and vice chair (between 2006-2016)
- CALP- Cash learning network: Board member
- ICVA - Elected as a board member and as Vice Chair (for a brief period in 2021).
- Board member: Swayam Shikshan Prayog, a grassroots women's cooperative/ movement (India); Clowns Without Borders (UK).

I have worked with and for ICVA and ICVA's board on previous occasions. E.g.

- Representing ICVA (ActionAid) as a Sphere board member (2006-2010)
- Representing ICVA and ActionAid on the IASC Task Force
- I was elected as a board member and as Vice Chair of ICVA briefly in 2021 (had to give up the positions as I changed jobs at that moment).
- Regular interactions and worked directly with the Chair of the Board of ICVA and the Executive Director to promote collaboration between Sphere and ICVA.

Able to spot early warnings of low engagement and take proactive remedial measures through active listening, effective communication, creative approaches to collaboration, and continuous engagement and improvement. I recognize the decisions that the board makes (for which the chair and the board are accountable for) may shape ICVA for decades. I recognise that while the quality of the outputs cannot be accurately measured in real-time and in specific metrics when decisions are made, the quality of the inputs and discourse matter. Constantly reminding the chair and the board to be accountable for the decisions.

Ability to understand that the Chair is not the Executive Director! Recognize that the task of the chair is to make sure the entire board is functioning well and provides the vision, goals, resources, rules, and accountability the executive director needs. Most importantly to motivate, advise, and mentor the board and ICVA team.

Effective communicator and time management. Able to excite people to participate, contribute, and make meetings useful and interesting events.