



# Working Together

## An unprecedented opportunity

Let us consider a scenario – one in which the world has gone that extra mile to ensure that children, regardless of the country in which they live, their household income, gender, ethnicity or location, have access to essential services and are protected. Countries have made the efforts to reach the last 5 or 10 per cent of children who had been excluded or invisible and are, in many cases, the hardest to reach. Every single child is in school, with all the empowerment and protection against abuse that this implies. Every child is immunized against the main killer diseases, benefiting from the new vaccines currently considered too expensive to be offered to all.<sup>1</sup> No infant loses their life for want of a few simple, inexpensive doses of oral rehydration salts. No child is locked away from the world in a workshop, labouring in conditions approaching slavery.

The benefits of such a world accrue not only to the children but to the whole of humanity. Premature death or debilitating diseases become altogether less of a drag upon the momentum of development. The despair of extreme poverty and the disruption and destruction wreaked by conflict are markedly reduced. Economies benefit as workforces become healthier and more skilled, more adaptable to the challenges of technology and modernity. Democratic systems become more vibrant and sustained as more literate, informed voters demand to have an active voice in the decision-making processes in their countries and keep corruption and authoritarianism in check. Above all, the energy and creativity of children and young people can be channelled into their own development and into their full, active participation in society instead of dissipated in a desperate struggle to survive.

This would indeed be a world fit for children. It may seem impossibly far away, but

## SUMMARY

**ISSUE:** Creating a world fit for children may seem impossibly far away, but achieving it is as simple as this: We must do everything in our power to keep our commitments to children. These commitments are clear and unambiguous. What is now required is the understanding that a commitment is a pledge with both moral and practical obligations. In a moral sense, a commitment signifies a relationship of duty. In practical terms, a commitment binds those making it to a course of action. This was implicitly recognized at the Millennium Summit in 2000, which translated fine words and noble aspirations into time-bound development objectives in the Millennium Declaration – against which the world's leaders undertook to be measured and held accountable.

**ACTION:** The Millennium agenda for children is eminently attainable. What is needed now is firm and decisive action on three key fronts over the next 10 years.

- **Meet the Millennium Development Goals:** At the September 2005 World Summit, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Achieving the MDGs must be the first step towards providing universal access to essential services, protection and participation for children. Those countries falling behind on the goals must redouble their efforts, with ample support from donors and international agencies, while those currently on course must strive to go beyond the goals to meet the challenge of eliminating disparities in children's health, education and development.
- **Reach out to the excluded and the invisible:** Our commitments to children demand that we reach out to those most in need of care and protection – the poorest and the most vulnerable, the exploited and the abused. We must confront unpalatable truths about the many disparities and abuses suffered by excluded and invisible children within our countries, societies and communities, and across borders, and do our utmost to eliminate them.
- **Work together:** Making this possible will require more than political will or well intentioned strategies. No government, agency or organization can meet any of the goals by itself; the Millennium agenda will not be achieved without effective, creative and consistent partnerships. We must all not only acknowledge our responsibility to be part of the solution, but also be ready and willing to work together on behalf of children. We must be their partners – seeking to empower them as well as to include and protect them, with the knowledge that realizing the Millennium Declaration's vision of a world of peace, equity, tolerance, security, freedom, respect for the environment and shared responsibility depends on ensuring that no child is excluded or invisible. The children of the world, especially those who so often miss out on the opportunities they need to grow and thrive, are counting on us.



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Politics has been described as the art of the possible. The wonder of the Millennium agenda is that politicians and international organizations have embraced the pledge to make it possible – by 2015 – for every child in the world to complete primary schooling, to cut child mortality rates by two thirds and maternal mortality rates by three quarters, and to not only halt, but send into retreat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases. In a world with a global economy worth US\$60 trillion<sup>2</sup> and rising, all these goals and the other aims of the Millennium agenda are eminently attainable. As humanity continues to push through the frontiers of knowledge, and science advances further every day – from mapping the human

genome to comprehending the origins of the universe – could it really be impossible during the next 10 years to banish child hunger or to keep children from dying of something as easily preventable as diarrhoea?

### Reaching all children depends on creative and effective partnerships

Making this possible will require more than political will or well-intentioned strategies. No government, agency or organization can achieve these goals by itself; the Millennium agenda will not be realized without effective, creative and consistent partnerships. Partnering means working in solidarity, not just theoretically but practically. And it requires, as the United Nations Secretary-General’s report on enhancing cooperation between the UN and all relevant partners outlines, “voluntary and collaborative relationships in which all parties agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and to share risks, responsibilities, resources, competencies and benefits.”<sup>3</sup>

There are thousands of people and organizations working on behalf of children around the world, each with its own focus, strength and orientation. But a growing global constituency is uniting around the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Millennium Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals and ‘A World Fit for Children’. Only by pooling strengths can we create a movement with a global voice and political weight that reflects the depth and breadth of these commitments. The children of the world, especially those who so often miss out on the opportunities they need to grow and thrive, the excluded and the invisible, are counting on us.

The concept of partnership is fundamental to UNICEF, whose history provides a powerful illustration of how people and organizations working together, sharing resources and building on one another’s ideas can create synergies that produce larger – and more effective – results than might otherwise be imagined. In its founding resolution from the General Assembly,<sup>4</sup> UNICEF was charged to work with relief and child welfare organizations, relation-

## UNGEI: Making the goal of gender equality in education a reality

The majority of the 115 million children out of school are girls. Sustainable development and the eradication of poverty will only be achieved with quality education for all girls and boys alike. A 'business as usual' approach is not an option if universal primary education and gender equality in education are to be achieved by 2015. Since girls face much greater obstacles, additional efforts are needed to get them in school and ensure that they complete their education. One such effort is the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI).

Launched at the World Forum on Education for All in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, this global movement for girls' education is an unprecedented partnership that embraces stakeholders and actors at all levels. The movement is being convened by UNICEF and encompasses a broad spectrum of partners who share the same commitment, including governments, UN agencies, donors, development agencies, NGOs, civil-society organizations, the private sector, religious groups, parents, teachers, communities and student organizations.

Rather than creating separate mechanisms and programmes, UNGEI's working principles are based on coordination, pooled resources and strategic alliances that create the synergy needed for maximum impact of girls'

education interventions. UNGEI advocates at global, regional and country levels to influence decision-making and investments that ensure gender equity and equality in national education policies, plans and programmes. The partnership mobilizes resources for projects and country programmes as well as large-scale initiatives targeted at the education system. Its efforts complement and are integrated into existing development structures such as poverty-reduction strategies, sector-wide approaches and United Nations development assistance frameworks.

### Making UNGEI work at the country level

Strong partnerships and effective participation in sector-wide processes are required to bolster girls' education at the national level. This process begins with the creation of an UNGEI task force within a country to articulate the importance and effectiveness of its projects and programmes in achieving gender parity in education. UNGEI's plan of action for girls' education includes multiple interventions and initiatives to engage the government and local partners in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes and projects.

National strategies to narrow the gender gap in education and to ensure all children obtain their right to quality basic education fall into

two major categories: targeted and systematic interventions.

- Targeted interventions are usually small scale and focus on particular population groups, geographic regions or specific areas of the education system. They often are piloted by civil-society organizations with stand-alone or coordinated funding mechanisms. Targeted interventions may also be large-scale projects that are conducted nationally or across multiple sites within the country.
- Systematic interventions are usually larger in scale and are designed to influence the education system and to serve most population groups. They are frequently joint projects between donor agencies and governments and are usually implemented countrywide or regionally.

Engaging partners is essential to achieving gender equality in education. UNGEI partners work together on targeted and systematic interventions with the goal of building national capacity rather than creating parallel structures. Partner agencies strive to be transparent and realistic about their comparative advantages. Each partner aims to be clear on what it has to offer the initiative, based on its strengths and resources.

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ships that have been instrumental in sharing information, raising funds and contributing to policy decisions to benefit the world's children. National Committees for UNICEF were established to partner with civil society. In the 1960s, NGOs influenced UNICEF policy decisions related to maternal and child health, education and nutrition. And in the 1970s, it was UNICEF's civil-society

partners who pushed for an International Year of the Child (IYC) – an idea that eventually resulted in the proposal for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With the firm establishment of children's rights, UNICEF took on the challenge of moving beyond charity-based partnerships – seeking out children and their families as partners and rights-holders to be empowered



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and enabled in making their capacities and vulnerabilities known and acted upon.<sup>5</sup>

As part of the United Nations, UNICEF is engaged in the reform process that is redefining the ways UN agencies will work together at all levels to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. This reflects a new and growing recognition throughout the world that development must involve all actors to be truly effective and sustainable. Boldness and speed are required to strengthen existing partnerships, build new ones and create new mechanisms of accountability. Time is of the essence, not only because the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals is only a decade away, but because millions of children today will miss out on a childhood if we do not act now.

**The lives of excluded and invisible children will depend on the actions we take now**

Effective partnerships will provide the foundation for achieving the Millennium agenda, which will bring a marked improvement to the lives of millions of children and is a step towards our ultimate aim: creating a world in which every child enjoys a childhood – protected, cared for and loved by their parents, families and communities. This is

possible, but only with the support of national and global partners working together to ensure that children's needs are met and their rights protected under all circumstances. Links between partners will be strengthened as each actor responds to the challenge – from government leaders establishing budgets to voluntary agencies working in slums, from the media as they influence social priorities to communities caring for their children, and from entrepreneurs showing social responsibility to the children themselves, whose talents and energies are just waiting to be released.

It is a bitter irony that the children most at risk of being bypassed by the global march against poverty and disease, illiteracy and exploitation are those whose rights are most abused and undervalued. It is time to reach out to them – not just to those already living on the margins but also to future generations. We must be their partners – not only seeking to include and protect them but also to empower them – with the knowledge that realizing the Millennium Declaration's vision of a world of peace, equity, tolerance, security, freedom, respect for the environment and shared responsibility depends on ensuring that no child is excluded or invisible.