

UNICEF'S KEY MESSAGES FOR RIO+20

Message 1: The survival, development and protection of children is central to sustainable development

Global commitment and action to protect children's rights and enhance their wellbeing should be put at the center of sustainable development plans and strategies.

By definition, sustainable development is about intergenerational responsibility – the collective responsibility to ensure a safer, cleaner, healthier and more inclusive world for today's children, and for their children. A sustainable future requires that children have the opportunity to grow-up healthy, well-educated, and protected from violence and neglect. It also requires that they have access to key ecosystem goods and services such as clean water, clean air, and food. Yet, today these requirements are far from being met: 180 million children under five are irreversibly affected by stunting (low height for age); 99 million children remain without access to improved sources of drinking water, and 208 million without access to safe sanitation. This dire situation is further exacerbated by growing environmental degradation and resource scarcity.

Message 2: Improving equity is the right and smart thing to do for sustainable development

Equity should be put at the center of the sustainable development agenda and be a core principle of sustainable development goals.

Broad-based inclusive growth improves the livelihoods of children and families living in poverty. In addition, there is growing evidence that investing in the health, education, and protection of a society's most disadvantaged citizens – addressing inequity – is more likely to lead to sustained growth

and stability. A pro-equity approach represents a cost-effective investment in the future. Finally, strong empirical weight is given to the argument that inequity is bad for the environment and economic development. Therefore, improving equity is not only right intrinsically, it is the smart thing to do for delivering cost-effective results for people and the planet. Putting equity at the center of the agenda requires increased investments in all social sectors, as well as the allocation of sufficient resources to collect disaggregated data to effectively monitor equitable progress.

Message 3: Transition to a green economy should be a powerful lever for tackling and reducing existing inequalities

An inclusive transition to a green economy needs global commitment to safeguard and empower the most vulnerable.

Transformation to a greener model of growth is imperative, but it must also be inclusive. The most vulnerable currently pay the highest price of unsustainable development patterns. They cannot be asked to bear the costs of an inequitable transition to a green economy. Examples of inclusive green solutions include: social protection schemes connected to environmental conservation and restoration in which everyone derives equal economic benefits from natural resources management; policies that guarantee transparent information and community-participation in decisions related to extractive and energy industries; and policies that allocate a fair share of green technology investments to provide disadvantaged people with opportunities to build local capacity and fully engage in the green economy.

Message 4: Sustainable development must include investing in community, family and children's resilience to shocks and stresses

Global investments in the safety and resilience of communities - especially the poorest communities - must increase.

This is essential for effective humanitarian action, but also for sustainable development, and requires long-term commitments, including financial support.

Disasters and conflicts seriously jeopardize children's well-being, growth and development. For instance, about 375 million people per year are estimated to be at risk of climate-related disasters alone and countries affected by conflict and fragility already account for two out of three children dying before the age of five. Disasters and conflicts also perpetuate cycles of exclusion, vulnerability, gender inequality, and poverty – increasing risks and posing a threat to development. For example, climate-induced natural disasters are predicted to disproportionately affect the poor and disadvantaged in the world, including indigenous and minority children and children with disabilities.

While global and national efforts are critical to improve resilience, a stronger focus is needed on collective action in communities and cities as well as on improved local governance to identify, prevent, and mitigate risk while preparing for possible emergencies. Strengthening the resilience of disadvantaged urban children is key as they increasingly are on the front line of natural disaster hazards, with poor access to basic services and lack of safe housing. Community early surveillance and treatment of severe acute malnutrition; development of flood proofed water points; local collaboration over water management; disaster-proofing health and school facilities; and building capacities for peace-building through schools to strengthen social cohesion can make a significant contribution to resilience.

Message 5: Children and young people are agents of change who contribute to sustainable development

Meaningful youth participation in the conceptualization, planning and execution of sustainable development solutions must be a necessary component of the local sustainability mandate.

Today and tomorrow's children and young people will be the leaders of sustainable development for future generations. They should be empowered to influence their future, claim their rights and voice their concerns at international, national and community levels. Engaging children and young people is not only good in principle; it also improves results for sustainable development. While the virtual participation in international negotiations should be supported, the focus of children and young people's engagement should be to engage the most vulnerable, at the community level. For example, mapping by children and young people of local hazards in neighborhoods prone to climate-related risks has demonstrated results for climate adaptation and engaging and involving children and young people in developing and accessing green technologies – e.g. small-scale energy development - can directly benefit their well-being and create better prospects for future job opportunities.

For more information, please contact Katell Le Goulven at klegoulven@unicef.org or 212 326-7757.