

FINAL AS DELIVERED
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Executive Board Special Session on Equity
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Before I begin my formal remarks, I must mark an important milestone — the final Board session for our colleague and friend, Martin Mogwanja.

Martin joined UNICEF nearly 40 years ago, in 1977, as a junior National Officer in Nairobi. Since then, he has served UNICEF — or more precisely, served children — in 10 duty stations at the country and regional levels, and at headquarters.

It would take another special session to cover his long list of accomplishments. I must thank him, in particular, for his service as UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director for Management. We've greatly benefitted from his work. I'll continue to value his friendship.

Please join me in applauding his past at UNICEF, and also his future as he returns to Kenya to dedicate his energies to serving his community and country — and especially spending time with his family, who have supported him so well over the years.

Please also join me in congratulating Martin's successor, Fatoumata Ndiaye. Fatoumata has had a distinguished career in both the private sector and the United Nations — including most recently as UNICEF's Director of Internal Audit and Investigations, where her recommendations have helped us all get better while strengthening our internal controls and accountabilities.

She has some big shoes to fill. I have every confidence that her high competence, experience, leadership and knowledge will be a great fit. I look forward very much to our work together.

Today also marks another milestone. Almost exactly five years ago, I arrived at UNICEF — feeling like the “new kid in school” — challenged by the learning curve, but eager to work with new colleagues to advance that most consequential cause of all: children.

And more specifically, the cause of achieving lasting results for those children still being left behind in the march of progress. Children denied nutrition, education, health care and opportunities — simply because of their parents' wealth or skin colour. Because of their gender, neighbourhood, ethnicity or religion. Because they live with disabilities. Because they live in a conflict zone. The most disadvantaged. The hardest-to-reach. The hardest-to-serve.

I was grateful for your warm welcome then. And grateful for the support, advice and guidance the Board has given to our common cause in the five years since — and to our staff members, who are pursuing it so well around the world.

But I do not suggest that we use our annual session, or this morning's special session on equity, as a time for commemoration or celebration. Rather, it's an opportunity to take stock of, and learn from, our progress and setbacks as we've refocused our efforts on equity.

- Progress in understanding equity's importance, as a guide for our work;
- Progress in narrowing the gaps between children and the help they need — results achieved by governments and communities, with international support, as we enter the post-MDG era;
- Progress in bringing a stronger equity focus to our programmes — to what we do;
- And progress in changing who we are as an organization — including through results-based management and updated human resources policies.

Why did we conclude five years ago that an equity agenda is so vital? The basic answer was, and remains, that pursuing equity is simply right. An expression of the right that every child has to health, education, protection — survival. I repeat: every child. And I repeat: rights...not favours, not charity or expressions of pity — but rights.

And because too often, development progress was being achieved by concentrating efforts on some of the world's people...and some of the world's children. But not all. By continuing to fail so many children — by failing to uphold their rights...by failing to incorporate equity across all of our development efforts — the development community was also failing itself. As our 2010 “Narrowing the Gaps” study made clear, designing programmes and policies around the hardest-to-reach — the most disadvantaged and marginalized — would be more cost-effective and results-rich than the course we all were on.

Now, five years later, the strategic importance of an equity focus is also all the more apparent. The blight of inequality is being diagnosed and debated in virtually every society. How can it not be, when the facts and faces of inequality are so visible — when we see children born in the same city, including this one, mere blocks apart, living vastly different lives, divided by seemingly immutable economic, ethnic and social lines?

Over the last five years, we've seen a growing global understanding of the scope — and the cost — of a highly unequal world. A scope measured in widening gulfs between the rich and the poor...the haves and have-nots...those who want for so little, and those who live with so much want. And a cost tallied in missed opportunities, lower productivity, slower growth, social resentments and, too often, lives. In developing countries, on average, children in the poorest households are twice as likely to die before the age of five as children in the richest households... nearly twice as likely to be denied a proper birth registration...more than twice as likely to be stunted...and five times as likely to be out of school. This is wrong — and very damaging to our common future.

As global understanding of inequality has grown, the voices calling for action and change have been amplified.

Questions about redistributionist policies have often been at the fault line of macroeconomic debates — and, historically, at the heart of the most basic ideological differences.

But there should be no ideological debate about investing in the world's most disadvantaged children as a path to reducing future inequalities. Inequities are not only violations of their right to a better life now. They deny these children the fair start in life that would allow them to fulfill their ambitions and contribute all they can to their societies, as they are held back by sickness...lost school days and reduced capacity to learn...teenage pregnancy...HIV. Each inequity a loss not only to that child — but also to her society — and to her children. Each inequity sowing the seeds of tomorrow's inequalities.

The disease of inequality is the product of a vicious intergenerational cycle, in which children denied education, health care, nutrition, and protection are also denied a full opportunity to contribute to their own children's development...and thus to the narrowing of inequalities...and thus to the defeat of poverty in all its dimensions.

For how can an economy spark or sustain growth if its citizens are uneducated, or if government services are overwhelmed by illness or unemployment? If at an early age, its children fail to develop their full cognitive capacity?

Highly unequal societies are more unstable and grow more slowly and erratically. An IMF study¹ found that, globally, a 10 per cent decrease in inequality increases the expected length of an economic growth period by 50 per cent. And another recent IMF paper² confirmed that “lower net inequality is robustly correlated with faster and more durable growth.”

Sustainable economies can grow if we give every child a fair chance in life. If we reverse the vicious cycle of inequity and inequality by setting in motion a virtuous cycle, by working to invest in every child, everywhere, from the beginning of her life. Greater equity in opportunity today producing fewer inequalities tomorrow.

The Conference Room Paper — available on our PaperSmart website — reminds us that inequities are not inevitable. Over the last few decades, global progress has shown that we can narrow equity gaps.

- The maternal mortality gap between high-income and low-income countries fell by half between 1990 and 2013.
- Birth registrations have increased by more than 30 per cent in least-developed countries — more than the global average — between 2000 and 2010.

¹ *Inequality & Unsustainable Growth* (2011), Berg and Ostry

² *Redistribution, Inequality & Growth* (2014), Berg, Ostry & Tsangarides

- Gender parity for primary education has increased in every region.
- Least developed countries are making faster progress on ending open defecation than the global average.
- And HIV infection rates are dropping faster for children than for the general population.

But the Paper also shows that so much work remains — that in some cases, progress is stalled or, terribly, even slowing. For example, the gap between rich and poor has not changed in accessing skilled birth attendants. The gap between child marriage rates for the richest and poorest girls has actually doubled in the past three decades. And adolescent girls remain shamefully over-represented in HIV infection rates.

It is especially clear that we cannot reverse the vicious intergenerational cycle of inequality without quality education — without getting more children into school, and, critically, making sure that the children who do attend school are learning. Because today, an estimated 130 million children still cannot read, write or do mathematics — despite reaching Grade 4. The cost of this crisis? We're condemning millions of children to a life of disadvantage, from the very start of their lives.

And we must target the most disadvantaged children through better data. Without disaggregated data, inequalities will be overlooked, as nations focus on overall progress on national averages. Consider the striking example of the MDG target for improved access to water — a global target that was met five years ahead of schedule, despite one in nine countries reaching the target while, in fact, widening the “access gap” between rural and urban communities. A finding that must shape our programmes to improve water access for rural communities as well as urban slums.

UNICEF works closely with governments to improve the quality of our data across multiple sectors. For example, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys — or MICS — have helped us break down data by household wealth, geography, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, age and many other key factors. Since we launched our equity agenda, we’ve supported countries to undertake over 100 surveys, the better to shape our programming. And the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis — MODA — is helping us better track and address the compounding effects of the various challenges each child faces...challenges to her health, safety and education.

The transformative MoRES system — Monitoring Results for Equity — is helping us track the progress in overcoming barriers and bottlenecks that are keeping children from the support they need.

Surprisingly, our “Narrowing the Gaps” study found that the chief barriers to progress often weren’t on the supply of services — but on the demand side. Barriers like low social acceptance of vaccines or a poor understanding of the importance of birth registration. Barriers like the inability of poor people to pay for school fees or medical care — or even reach schools or medical care, with facilities hours or even days away. Barriers erected by weak enabling environments, in which government policies or lack of investment keep children from the support they need.

MoRES helps us monitor programmes and policies and collect evidence about — and overcome — these barriers to reach the most marginalized children and shape our programmes more precisely around their needs.

UNICEF has worked closely with governments and partners to design, deliver and monitor new approaches, while building demand in disadvantaged communities.

From helping train 60,000 front-line and community health care workers in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique and Niger to bring services closer to those who need them...to innovative technologies like U-Report, the SMS-based system that enables communities in Uganda and, now, more than a dozen other countries, to report directly to UNICEF and to their governments on what their needs are, or M-Trac, which health workers can use to keep track of diseases and the stock of medical supplies across the country...to expanding multilingual and intercultural education programming in ethnic minority and indigenous communities, to get more children into school, learning in their own language...to supporting cash grants for poor families so that they can afford health care and education for their children.

But so much more work remains to be done. We must go farther, and work harder to reach the children still being left behind.

- We need strengthened national health and other service-delivery systems built from the “bottom-up” as well as the “top-down.”
- We need to find new ways to tackle financial barriers, so more families can afford health care and to send their children to school.

- We need to improve our work with communities to end the practices, habits and prejudices that perpetuate inequities — like discrimination and the exclusion of certain groups, building on lessons learned in our community work in the Ebola response.
- We have work to do in bringing emergency response efforts into line with longer-term development needs — as in the case of the Ebola response, where we worked to strengthen community primary health care while helping create Ebola community care centres.
- We need to bring greater strategic focus to our many initiatives to harness technology to reach the children left behind, and also to help them reach us with their needs and ideas.
- And we need to address more systematically specific areas where our greater attention is needed to close equity gaps:
 - Adolescent girls, whose rights to health, protection and education are not getting the attention and action they deserve; and
 - Disadvantaged areas susceptible to climate change, including coastal communities, but also densely populated urban areas where natural disasters or water shortages would have catastrophic consequences for children.

As we continue improving our programmes — what we do — we must continue to improve who we are as an organization.

This means, always, managing for results, including improving our ability to target resources, and to measure their impact across our programmes and services.

And it means better managing our most precious resource: our staff members. UNICEF is our staff, as we were brutally reminded once again in April, when we lost four of our staff members following an attack in Somalia, with others wounded. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. What happens to one of us affects all of us. We best honour the bravery and dedication of all our staff members not only by remembering our fallen colleagues — and not only by re-dedicating ourselves to our work — but to meeting staff needs with the same sense of commitment that we devote to our mission.

In this afternoon's session, we'll discuss not only our current financial situation, but also our efforts to update our Human Resources policies. We cannot do all that we must do for children without doing all we must do for our people.

As the world seems, every day, to become more chaotic and brutal, the current and future stakes for the children continue to rise.

Especially with an additional 2.2 billion children projected to be born over the next 15 years.

Especially as we cope with a rising tide of humanitarian emergencies — conflicts and natural disasters.

Especially as the impacts of climate change are most keenly felt in the communities that can handle them the least, and by the people who can handle them the least — the children.

Especially when two crucial windows of opportunity to make a difference in a child's life — in the first five years of life, and in adolescence — close so quickly, and often permanently.

And especially as we prepare to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. After all, development is only sustainable if it can be effectively and equitably pursued by the next generation as well as this one.

Our next session will be a special focus session on equity, in which we'll discuss ways in which we can all accelerate our work for the world's most disadvantaged children — not only governments and organizations like UNICEF, but our partners in civil society and non-government organizations, many of whom are here with us today. We will all fail — if we fail to work together.

We're fortunate to have with us a very special guest: my friend, Rebeca Grynspan — Secretary General of the Ibero-American Secretariat. Rebeca is a longstanding advocate of children, and a constant, close friend of UNICEF. Many of you know her from her distinguished service as Associate Administrator at UNDP, as well as Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean.

I'm sure you share my enthusiasm in welcoming her to our Board session as we discuss how we can work together to support children today, as they prepare to shape the world and support the children of tomorrow.
