Why addressing child poverty is a critical component of the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Children are more likely to be poor
Eradicating poverty in all its dimensions remains one of the world’s most important and urgent tasks. More than 1.2 billion people around the world survive on less than $1.25 a day.1 Nearly half of them – about 569 million – are 18 years old or less2 (Figure 1).

Poverty hits children hardest. Poverty deprives children of the capabilities needed to survive, develop and thrive as well as access to adequate nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation, healthcare services and education. These deficits often cannot be overcome later. Child poverty denies children the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Child poverty is widespread, and children are vulnerable to poverty anywhere in the world (Figure 2). In fact, approximately 30 million children3 are growing up poor in the world’s richest countries.

Child poverty does long-term damage to children and societies
Poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood. Impoverished children often grow up to be impoverished parents who in turn bring up their own children in poverty. While the heaviest cost of growing up in poverty is borne by children themselves, societies also pay a very significant price, with lower levels of education and health and reduced productivity and economic growth.

Despite unprecedented progress through the MDGs, huge inequalities remain with the poorest and most vulnerable often left behind. Children in the poorest quintile are twice as likely to die before the age of five as those in the wealthiest quintile, and are nearly three times as likely to be underweight.4 They are also more likely to be out of school and engage in child labour.

How to include child poverty in the Post 2015 goals and targets

Explicitly include child poverty in the Post-2015 agenda
The world has an historic opportunity to end poverty and lay the foundation of a more prosperous, sustainable and equitable future. The Post-2015 Development Agenda should make an explicit commitment towards ending extreme poverty and reducing child poverty within the poverty goals and targets. Recognizing child poverty would be a first step to redress the disproportionate concentration among children, address root causes and intergenerational poverty, and accelerate sustainable development progress.

Prioritize the poorest children across all goals to meet the new goals with equity
It is widely recognized that equity was not adequately incorporated in the MDGs. To address this and ensure the poorest children are reached, it is crucial to have a standalone goal on equity, as well as a focus on the poorest children across all goal areas. To do this requires consistent monitoring of disaggregated data to assess progress of the poorest children and other vulnerable groups across all goals and targets.
Suggested targets

1. By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day.
2. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
3. Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.
4. Build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations, with special attention to households, women, children and those with disabilities, and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.
5. Take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, eradicate forced labour, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms including recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Figure 1: Children constitute nearly half of the world’s people living in extreme poverty

People living on less than $1.25 a day by age, % of total

- 12 years or younger: 34%
- 13 to 18 years old: 52%
- 19 or older: 13%

Sources:
1. World Bank: Extreme poverty is defined as average daily consumption of $1.25 or less and means living on the edge of subsistence.

Figure 2: Children are at disproportionate risk of poverty in most regions of the world

Poverty rates among children and the total population by region, %

- Sub-Saharan Africa: Child poverty 59.7%, Population poverty 54.4%
- South Asia: Child poverty 46.7%, Population poverty 40.5%
- East Asia and Pacific: Child poverty 24.2%, Population poverty 19.1%
- Middle East and North Africa: Child poverty 13.0%, Population poverty 13.8%
- Latin America and Caribbean: Child poverty 10.7%, Population poverty 7.3%
- Europe and Central Asia: Child poverty 0.3%, Population poverty 0.2%

Developing countries:
- Child poverty (0-17): 38.5%
- Population poverty (All ages): 31.4%

Industrialized countries:
- Child poverty (0-17): 13.3%
- Population poverty (All ages): 11.3%

For more information
Please see UNICEF’s webpage on Children and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: http://www.unicef.org/post2015/

Sources: