

A POST-2015 WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN

ISSUE BRIEF: Children's Rights



Why children's rights must be at the center of the Post-2015 Agenda

Twenty-five years ago the United Nations General Assembly adopted the most widely ratified human rights treaty and comprehensive legal instrument for the promotion and protection of children's rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). With this, the world made a commitment to all children: That we would do everything in our power to protect and promote their rights – to survive and thrive, to learn and grow, to make their voices heard and to reach their full potential without discrimination.

It should therefore be unacceptable that while fewer children now die before their fifth birthday, **17,000 children under the age of 5 still die every day, often from preventable causes.**¹ Almost 230 million children under the age of 5 have not had their births registered, amounting to 1 in 3 children who do not officially exist and cannot access basic services.² On average, 6 in 10 children experience physical punishment.³ Almost 58 million children of primary school age remain out of school and 250 million still fail to learn basic literacy or numeracy, whether they have been to school or not.⁴ Children are also the most vulnerable to environmental degradation, pollution and climate change impacts. In fact, children make up 80% of deaths attributable to climate-related changes.⁵ In addition, too many children do not have access to adequate drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) which globally remains a leading cause of death among children under 5 years of age.⁶ Furthermore, almost half of the world's people living in extreme poverty are 18 years old or younger. That is nearly 570 million children who are deprived of their needs, their rights and their dignity. When children's rights are neither recognized nor fulfilled, society bears the burden of not only a moral failing to its children but also a costly reality for its future.

The new, universal Post-2015 Development Agenda provides the opportunity, now and in the coming years, to address the implementation gap between universal children's rights and inequitable results, including through addressing issues of governance, policy formulation and service provision. Linking the Post-2015 Agenda with the universal child rights agenda will provide increased accountability and strengthened coherence and alignment among various stakeholders (governmental, intergovernmental, private sector, etc.) that need to work and deliver together on child rights commitments. Conversely, the new Post-2015 Agenda can also make an innovative contribution to the child rights agenda, as it can enhance issues that are important to children, such as climate change, but that were not considered at the time that the CRC and other relevant international human rights instruments were developed.

Human rights and children's rights must therefore be at the center of the Post-2015 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

A people-centered agenda that is grounded in human rights and child rights, that addresses freedom from fear and freedom from want and promotes equity, must be infused throughout all of the goals and targets and the standard by which all implementation activities and progress are measured.

Critical issues for all goals, targets and indicators from a child rights perspective

A universal agenda for all children, everywhere

Human rights and children's rights are universal. A universal agenda that protects the rights of all children everywhere to get the best start in life, to survive and thrive, to receive a quality education, to live free from violence

and abuse and participate in decisions that affect their lives is essential and all countries must commit to pursuing the goals and targets through national action. Investments in early childhood development is one of the most critical and cost-effective ways to give all children an equal opportunity and can break the cycle of poverty to create a more sustainable and prosperous world. Furthermore, advancing child wellbeing depends on a holistic approach by the State in its policy formulation and implementation, and to that end, the CRC provides a key and relevant framework to be leveraged in terms of sustainable, intergenerational development and wellbeing.

Indivisibility of human rights and child rights

Human and children's rights are a comprehensive, mutually reinforcing, interdependent framework of economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights, and the right to development. The CRC confirms that civil and political rights apply to children, such as the right to freedom of expression and for children's views to be taken seriously. In fact, almost all articles of the Convention include elements which amount to civil and political rights. The new framework should therefore address civil and political rights as much as economic, social and cultural rights. Furthermore, the Post-2015 Development Agenda is an opportunity to insert child rights across all three pillars of development—the social, economic and environmental. While children and young people make significant contributions to society today, they are the future leaders, consumers, producers and inheritors of the earth.

Equitable results for all children: 'leave no one behind'

Dignity and human rights are the birthright of all, without distinction of any kind with regard to sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, location, disability, or other status. Specific measures for prioritizing and accelerating progress for the poorest and most vulnerable children, and to address discrimination, should be pursued to ensure the new sustainable development goals promote equal opportunity for all. Inequalities must be addressed both within and between countries.

Disparities and the 'data revolution'

Disaggregated data will be essential for monitoring equity gaps, strengthening social accountability and ensuring that the gaps between the most and least advantaged groups are narrowing. Data should also be disaggregated by all grounds of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law, including *inter alia* by sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, location, disability, and other grounds most relevant to specific countries and contexts, for example: caste, minority groups, indigenous peoples, migrant or displacement status.

Accountability

The human rights principle of accountability should be implemented via an effective accountability framework, based

on national and international human rights obligations, for governments and other actors—including the private sector. With the active and meaningful participation of civil society, this would allow for transparent monitoring of progress and accountability for action. People-led monitoring, in particular, could change the dynamics of accountability and bring in new voices and ideas about what is working, where and why, and, if things are not working, what is needed to change course. Making sure that all women, men, children and young people – especially those living in poverty – are included in all aspects of development will have an empowering effect as well as contribute to the fulfilment of their right to participation. It also makes development programmes and initiatives smarter and more effective.

Meaningful participation of children and young people, both girls and boys

When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. Member States agreed at Rio+20 that, "sustainable development must be inclusive and people-centered, benefiting and involving all people, **including youth and children.**" They also, "stress[ed] the importance of the **active participation of young people in decision-making processes...** [and noted] the need to promote intergenerational dialogue and solidarity by recognizing their views." In line with the human rights principle of participation, the voices of children and youth have been invaluable for the process of developing the new agenda and will be equally important to monitoring and accountability and the implementation of the new agenda.

Realizing the rights of the child is the foundation of a prosperous society and a sustainable future

Breaking the cycles of intergenerational poverty, violence and environmental degradation requires a future of healthy, safe, protected, well-educated and well-cared for children. When children do not have an equal opportunity to reach their potential as they grow into adulthood, it is not only these children but all of society who suffers the consequences. Child well-being is a direct reflection of the well-being of society as a whole. When we respect, protect and fulfill the rights of all children and invest in their cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, we are investing in the foundation of a sustainable world of progress.

A transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda will fulfil the rights of everyone, everywhere and place those hardest to reach as the highest priority. The tools to recognize the rights of all, including children, exist for governments to live up to standing commitments of the CRC and embed human rights and child rights in the future sustainable development goals, targets and indicators. The universal right to development can be fulfilled through the agenda's proper recognition of all human and child rights.

For more information

Please see UNICEF's webpage on Children and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: <http://www.unicef.org/post2015/>

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed, Progress Report 2014*, UNICEF, 2014.

² United Nations Children's Fund, *Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and trends in birth registration*, UNICEF, 2013.

³ United Nations Children's Fund, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, UNICEF, 2014.

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (UIS), *Out of School Children*, UNESCO, 2014.

⁵ Kumar, Sandhya, *Children Most Vulnerable to Climate Change*, UN Earth News, 22 April 2012.

⁶ WHO, 'Children: reducing mortality – Fact Sheet', September 2014.