At the 2017 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the overarching theme will be *Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world*. Six additional named goals will also be receiving special attention, one of which will be *SDG 14: Life Below Water*.

The issues within the *Life Below Water Goal* impact the rights and lives of many children. Agenda 2030 offers a chance to recognize and address how the development and degradation of the planet impacts the environment, economies and societies in which a child grows up. There is also an important opportunity to engage children and young people as the current and future generation of change agents for healthier oceans and a prospering, sustainable planet. To this end, the ability for children and young people to take *action* and hold relevant decision makers *accountable* starts with their *awareness* of the issues at stake.

**HEADLINE MESSAGES**

- **Protecting the planet is a matter of equity and the degradation of life below water has an impact on the well-being of children.** Children living in poverty are disproportionately affected by the demise of natural resources, including oceans. For instance, when large scale commercial fishing depletes the fish stocks, there is little or nothing left over for coastal communities and their children who depend on small scale fishing for income and a significant part of their *nutrition*. In addition, high levels of CO2 emissions leads to intense ocean acidification, killing ocean life — in turn, depleting sources of nutrition and incomes. As oceans produce the majority of the planet’s oxygen, the protection of life below water protects the air children — and all of us — breathe. Furthermore, ocean pollutants can lead to humans ingesting harmful substances such as mercury to which children are particularly vulnerable. Measures to protect our oceans are therefore key to addressing *poverty* and *nutrition* for children, among other issues.

- **The awareness and participation of children and young people in preserving the planet** — including the protection of oceans — will be instrumental in achieving the SDGs as well as preparing the future generation to inherit the agenda’s legacy. Raising awareness of environmental sustainability and good practices among children and young people will be a direct investment in the future of the earth, its natural resources and its people. Furthermore, *social-wide behavior change often begins with children and youth*. Large-scale social behaviors -- such as reducing the use of plastics, recycling and not disposing of waste into the ocean -- become wide-spread practices by targeting children at a young age. Not only do these practices become ingrained in the behaviors of children throughout their lives, but children are often best positioned to bring such practices to households, including adults.

**CHILD RIGHTS AND LIFE BELOW WATER (SDG 14)**

As demonstrated in the *mapping of the Sustainable Development Goals to the Convention on the Rights of the Child* done by UNICEF, every SDG relates to the rights of the child, including the goals addressing environmental sustainability. SDG 14, and its associated targets relate to numerous CRC articles which emphasize the role of a child’s rights to information and education, including the right to have access to science and technology and the right to nutritious food and clean drinking-water, “taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.”

**RAISING AWARENESS**

Achieving the SDGs starts with educating and involving children through participatory means, including the poorest and most vulnerable. UNICEF is asking countries going through voluntary national reviews to utilize the review of the SDGs including *SDG 14: Life Below Water* as an opportunity to strengthen the awareness-building and participation among children and young people in conserving oceans, seas and marine resources.

For example, the *World’s Largest Lesson* and *Comics Uniting Nations* are existing child-friendly resources for governments and communities to adapt and use for raising the awareness of and activating children and young people.
on the issues articulated through the SDGs both within and outside of the classroom.

Such educational efforts are a cross-cutting means to achieve all issues in the SDGs, but sustainable development-focused education efforts are also explicit SDG indicators including:

4.7.1 and 12.8.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including climate change education, gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment.

INSPIRING ACTION

The educational and entertaining materials of the World’s Largest Lesson and Comics Uniting Nations specifically aim to inspire action in the lives of children and communities. In the context of SDG 14, children and young people learn about and are inspired to:

- Use fewer plastic products and produce less garbage;
- Reduce their carbon footprint, for instance through energy consumption;
- Protect ecosystems;
- Make safe, sustainable seafood choices.

Comics Uniting Nations’ one page Comic on SDG 14