

## UNICEF Strategic Framework on Environmental Sustainability for Children 2016 - 2017

### Introduction

- Climate change and environmental degradation are already harming children, especially those that are most disadvantaged. Unless action is taken, future impacts will be far more dramatic, undermining much of the progress made for children over the last decades. Each of the seven Outcomes Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014 – 2017 – health, nutrition, HIV, water and sanitation, child protection, social inclusion and education - is affected in some way by climate change and/or environmental degradation. Fortunately, each stream of UNICEF work also presents opportunities to take action on climate or the environment in order to deliver more sustainable results (see Annex 1). Given the major implications of climate change and environmental degradation for children and given UNICEF’s potential to strengthen the response to these issues, UNICEF must do more.

*“Climate change both feeds on and accentuates inequality”.*

*Anthony Lake, Executive Director,  
UNICEF (2014)*
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are built around the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The global community has recognized that for many decades, insufficient attention has been given to the environmental pillar. The SDGs reflect a common agreement that this needs to be rectified. Climate change and environmental degradation must be addressed to achieve sustainable development.
- It is virtually certain that climate change is caused by human activity and that it is already having an impact. Children, especially the most disadvantaged, are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts (e.g. increasing incidence and frequency of heat waves, droughts and floods) and are already suffering the consequences. Although many governments and development partners have on-going programmes to develop policy, raise awareness, build institutional capacity and support communities to adapt to climate change, very few pay sufficient attention to the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on children.

*“Children are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The specific nature of their vulnerability is multidimensional, shaped largely by the physical, social, and emotional changes that take place over the course of childhood.”*

*UNICEF (2011)*
- When listening to children and youth themselves, it is clear that concerns about the environment, climate and a “green planet” are very high on their agenda. Children and young people have a stake in their own future and want to get engaged in promoting a “green planet” and “green communities”.

5. Current commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are unlikely sufficient to stay within the globally agreed maximum temperature increase of 2°C<sup>1</sup> relative to the pre-industrial level. If the required additional efforts are delayed another 15 years, this will become even more difficult and expensive. Therefore, the global community must step up its ambitions and embark on low carbon socio-economic development. This has major implications both for today's children and for the next generations, whose leadership on mitigation efforts will be critical in the coming decades. Paradoxically, many children in developing countries have little or no access to modern energy services, and this impedes their well-being in many ways, especially with regard to their health, education and safety.

*“Evidence shows that energy at household level, in the education, health, and water sectors, as well as for infrastructure services, has a great influence on development results for children”  
UNICEF (2015)*

6. The most disadvantaged children are the most likely to live in poor and degrading environments. Household air pollution is a major concern. Other concerns include ambient air pollution particularly in urban areas, risks from chemicals, waste, polluted water and the lack of green and clean areas for children to play safely.

*Household air pollution is linked to 534,000 child deaths under 5 years old from acute respiratory infections in 2012 (WHO 2014a). Ambient air pollution is also seriously affecting children, with 127,000 child deaths under 5 years old reported for 2012 (WHO 2014b).*

7. UNICEF brings multiple strengths and comparative advantages to take action for children on climate and the environment. Our communication and advocacy capacity, along with solid data and analysis, are crucial assets in this respect. Using its network of Country Offices and National Committees, UNICEF can reach out and work with children, governments, civil society and the private sector in all countries. UNICEF's Country Programmes are effective vehicles to incorporate and address children's needs in terms of environmental sustainability, as already reflected in a growing number of countries around the world. UNICEF will build on these strengths to enhance its engagement.

## Objective

8. The objective of this strategic framework is to significantly strengthen UNICEF's policy, programmes, advocacy, research and engagement on environmental sustainability to deliver better results for children, especially the most disadvantaged.

## Priorities

9. UNICEF is committed to increase its contribution to environmental sustainability, given both the importance of the issue to children and the global commitment to the

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<sup>1</sup> The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), is calling for the inclusion of “below 1.5°C” as a long-term temperature goal.

Sustainable Development Goals. Five priorities have been identified for the initial period 2016 – 2017:

**10. Priority 1. Strengthen UNICEF policy and guidance on environmental sustainability as a cross-cutting issue.**

UNICEF will further develop guidance on environmental sustainability in the Situational Analysis and on mainstreaming environmental sustainability in all UNICEF outcome areas including in relation to gender, humanitarian and innovations. Methodology will be developed to assess climate change risks for the UNICEF outcome areas and to incorporate climate resilience. Guidance on environmentally sustainable approaches (such as the use of sustainable energy), materials and equipment to be used during UNICEF programme implementation, including in humanitarian settings will be developed. A toolbox on how to access global funding for climate and environment for child specific interventions will also be made available.

UNICEF will strengthen monitoring and reporting on environmental sustainability, including through an annual progress report. Consistent with the commitments of the UN system as a whole, UNICEF will improve the sustainability performance of its programmes by developing UNICEF's Environmental and Social Standards Policy and Procedures. Headquarters will step up technical support to field offices and knowledge exchange about environmental sustainability.

**11. Priority 2. Strengthen the inclusion of environmental sustainability in UNICEF programmes.**

Building on the guidance developed under priority 1, UNICEF will undertake analysis on environmental sustainability issues affecting children to inform Country Programme development, sector specific interventions and humanitarian operations. Climate resilience will be incorporated in relevant UNICEF interventions and programme/ outcome areas and so will the application and promotion of environmentally sustainable approaches, materials and equipment. The UNICEF Environmental and Social Standards will be piloted and gradually rolled out. Subject to country specific needs and availability of resources, UNICEF will design and implement climate and environmental interventions for children. In the context of climate change, the focus will be on adaptation. Limited but strategic opportunities to engage in climate change mitigation and low carbon development will also be considered.

With regard to other environmental issues, addressing air pollution will be given high priority because it is a major contributor to under 5 mortality. UNICEF will also assess possible country programme action on issues related to the extractive industry, waste in urban areas and exposure to harmful substances. Activities may include data collection, analysis, technical assistance to governments, capacity development (of staff as well as local partners) policy advocacy, awareness raising, training, education and supporting youth and their communities to take action.

**12. Priority 3. Advocate for full recognition and inclusion of children in the policy discourse on environmental sustainability.**

UNICEF will deepen the evidence base via data collection and analyses on important topics such as climate change adaptation, DRR, the reduction of greenhouse gas

emissions, air pollution and environmental sustainability awareness and education. UNICEF will step up global, regional and country level advocacy through involvement in international and national policy processes related to climate change and environment, social media campaigns and strengthened child and youth engagement. UNICEF will invest in awareness raising and capacity development of practitioners to address children's environmental needs. UNICEF will support children and adolescents to strengthen their awareness, knowledge, skills and engagement to promote environmental sustainability among their peers and in their community.

**13. Priority 4. Strengthen opportunities for children's development and well-being to benefit from environmental sustainability related public and private finance.**

UNICEF will engage and work with public and private partners, and children to develop innovative approaches and partnerships for children as beneficiaries of climate and environmental related finance. This includes pursuing accreditation to the Green Climate Fund and accessing other major sources of climate finance and developing in-house capacity and guidance to mobilize funds for climate change adaptation and sustainable energy for children. UNICEF will also support governments to integrate financing for reduction of climate related risks for children into national and local budgets.

**14. Priority 5. Incorporating environmental sustainability management (ESM) in the organization.**

UNICEF will "walk the talk" on environmental sustainability and systematically integrate ESM across the organization. UNICEF is committed to work towards climate neutrality by 2020 at the latest. This will include issuing policy and guidelines, reporting annually on its environmental footprint, identifying and implementing measures to reduce the environmental footprint of the organization, undertaking cost-benefit analysis, awareness raising and training, offsetting unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions from its facilities, vehicles and air travel, and including ESM aspects in audits and evaluations where relevant. Moving forward, UNICEF will continue to explore sustainability in its procurement operations and will consider the creation of a sustainable supplier's database as well as ISO certification.

*"It is my expectation that the United Nations system reaches full compliance with the United Nations Climate Neutral Strategy and becomes effectively climate neutral by 2020 at the latest. To reach this goal, I urge all United Nations Agencies, funds, and programmes to continue to reduce their climate footprint and report greenhouse gas emissions annually from this year onwards, so as to enable a complete picture of the climate footprint for the entire United Nations system by 2015. In addition, I encourage all to commit to achieve a net-zero climate footprint (climate neutrality) by 2020 and consider to accelerate this to become climate neutral by the end of 2015, including by reducing emissions in-house and offsetting remaining emissions."*

*Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General, United Nations  
Letter to the CEB members, 3 September 2014*

15. Gender, disability and ethnicity will be an integral part of all analyses and actions addressing environmental sustainability issues.

### **Coordination and implementation**

16. The Division of Data, Research and Policy (DRP) will coordinate the implementation of the strategic framework in close cooperation with the Field Results Group and other divisions, field offices and the National Committees. Involvement, roles and responsibilities of divisions and subsequent sections will vary depending on the priority area. To the extent possible, existing mechanisms for planning, decision making, reporting and coordination will be used.
17. Potential sources of finance will be explored in order to strengthen the required policy and technical guidance and capacity development and to provide financial support to country and regional offices to address environmental sustainability.
18. Progress will be monitored and reported through UNICEF's annual reporting on the benchmarks related to environmental sustainability, the Country Office Annual Reports, and the annual reporting on greening UNICEF.
19. In 2017, a review of the implementation of the strategic framework will be undertaken to assess progress made and lessons learned. This will inform the environmental sustainability strategic framework for 2018-2021 that will be developed in the context of the next Strategic Plan.

### **Partnerships**

20. The UNICEF strategic framework on environmental sustainability for children will build on and catalyze ongoing interventions by UNICEF and other development partners and will be coordinated through existing coordination mechanisms at global, regional and country level. To work effectively on environmental sustainability issues affecting children, UNICEF will strengthen existing partnerships with governments, civil society, private sector and youth organizations as well as explore new partnerships.

## Annex 1. Linkages between environmental sustainability and UNICEF Outcome Areas

| Outcome Area | Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Impact Indicators  | Climate Change Impacts  | Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions  | Environmental degradation   | Incorporating Environmental Sustainability leads to improved results: some examples   |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Health       | 1a. Under-five mortality rate<br>1b. Mortality in children under 5 years due to pneumonia<br>1c. Mortality in children under 5 years due to diarrhoea | Increased health risks from storms, floods, droughts; water-borne and vector-diseases | If ambitious emission reduction targets are not agreed and delivered in the coming years and decades, climate change impacts on health will seriously increase. | Annually around 534,000 and 127,000 child deaths under 5 are attributed to the effects of household and ambient air pollution[WHO, 2012 estimates] ; they are exposed to chemicals and microbes in e.g. water, air, food and soil, not only affecting mortality, but also early child development which can result in long term damage. | Introducing improved (cleaner, more fuel efficient) cook stoves will contribute to lower burden of disease and mortality<br><br>Incorporating waste management and improved access to clean water leads to reduced deaths due to diarrhoea.<br><br>Facilitating use of sustainable energy for storing vaccines for children<br><br>Integrating climate risk assessments and undertaking environmental impact assessments in programming will contribute to better design and sustainability of interventions. |
| HIV/AIDS     | 2a. Number of new HIV infections among children and adolescents   | (there are indirect linkages, not yet well-defined)                                   |   | Degrading environments including (e.g. waste, poor sanitation) in urban areas put HIV infected children and adolescents at higher risk of disease   | Improving environmental and sanitary conditions in the most degraded urban environments will contribute to a lower burden of disease.   |

| Outcome Area | Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Impact Indicators   | Climate Change Impacts  | Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions   | Environmental degradation  | Incorporating Environmental Sustainability leads to improved results: some examples  |
|--------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| WASH         | <p>3a. Proportion of population practicing open defecation</p> <p>3b. Proportion of population using an improved source of drinking water</p> <p>3c. Percentage of households with hand-washing facilities at home</p> | <p>Water scarcity (freshwater, groundwater, surface water)</p> <p>Increasing Floods leading to contaminated water, sanitation and hygiene issues for children</p>   | <p>If ambitious emission reduction targets are not agreed and delivered in the coming years and decades, climate change impacts on WASH will seriously increase.</p> | <p>Water sources are contaminated with microbes and chemicals such as arsenic, fluoride, endocrine disruptors, heavy metals, pesticides, and nuclear waste.</p> <p>Over-extraction and wasteful use of water resources, deforestation and desertification is affecting water resources.</p> <p>Dumping of solid and liquid waste is affecting water quality.</p> | <p>Less open defecation leads to less contaminated water sources</p> <p>Reducing the contamination of water sources with microbes &amp; chemicals (solid waste/waste management) leads to improved sources for drinking water.</p> <p>Increasing the availability of surface/ground water (water management plans) leads to improved number of households with hand-washing facilities.</p> <p>Innovative sustainable energy and climate resilient solutions (such as solar powered water pumps and distribution systems) can help with providing access to safe water.</p> <p>Integrating climate risk assessments and undertaking environmental impact assessments in programming will contribute to better design and sustainability of interventions</p> |
| Nutrition    | <p>4a. Percentage of children under 5 years who are moderately &amp; severely stunted</p>  | <p>Diminished food and livestock production in poor regions will lead to under-nutrition</p> <p>the IPCC states that “malnutrition linked to extreme-climatic events may be one of the most important consequences of climate change”, IPCC, 2007</p> | <p>If ambitious emission reduction targets are not agreed and delivered in the coming years and decades, climate change impacts on nutrition will worsen.</p>        | <p>Food production and safety is affected by chemicals and contaminants in soil and/or water, depletion of cultivable land due to over-farming and over-grazing</p>  | <p>Addressing climate change impacts and environmental degradation improves production of crops and livestock that will contribute to nutrition outcomes for children.</p> <p>Advocacy about the importance of food safety can contribute to child nutrition.</p>  |

| Outcome Area | Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Impact Indicators  | Climate Change Impacts   | Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions  | Environmental degradation   | Incorporating Environmental Sustainability leads to improved results: some examples   |
|--------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| Education    | <p>5a. Number of primary school-age children out of school/gender parity</p> <p>5b. Primary completion rate/gender parity</p> | <p>Disrupted schooling and higher drop-outs due to disasters, migration to safer areas, damage to schools and infrastructure to get to school, illness; rehabilitation costs drain national education budgets; need to earn income due to crop loss; need to spend more time fetching water; impacts likely to be gendered</p> | <p>If ambitious emission reduction targets are not agreed and delivered on the coming years and decades, climate change impacts on education will seriously increase.</p> <p>Also, education will be key to successfully helping children to become climate resilient and embrace a low carbon lifestyle. Improving the quality of education, including in sciences and non-cognitive skills (e.g. empathy, problem solving). Students with higher levels of education express more concern for the environment than those with lower levels of education. Increased scientific literacy and strong higher education capacity facilitates technological transfer.</p> | <p>Children do not go to school / cannot concentrate well / due to illness; exposure to chemicals can result in learning problems; exposure to lead can result in lowered IQ;</p> | <p>Assessing where schools are sited and undertaking climate risk assessments and environmental impact assessments when school construction is being planned allows identification of risks and issues such as floods, landslides, access to water, avoidance of e.g. dump sites and polluted areas. This would then help in proper selection of location, design and selection of building materials.</p> <p>Adapting the school system seasonal changes – school year, exam calendar, textbook distribution to minimize disruption.</p> <p>Context specific curriculum, assessment, teacher education, pedagogy, whole school approaches.</p> <p>Sustainable energy interventions at schools can help with preparing meals and electricity for lighting and equipment. At the household level this can help with reducing time children (often girls) spend collecting fuel and improves possibilities to study after dark. This can contribute to improved school attendance and better learning outcomes.</p> |

| Outcome Area     | Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Impact Indicators  | Climate Change Impacts  | Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions  | Environmental degradation   | Incorporating Environmental Sustainability leads to improved results: some examples   |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child Protection | 6a. Percentage of women who have experienced physical violence/rape or other sexual assault during the year                           | It is expected that climate change impacts will result in an increase in displacement of people, increase risks of violent conflicts by amplifying drivers of conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks | If ambitious emission reduction targets are not agreed and delivered on the coming years and decades, climate change impacts on child protection will seriously increase. | Because of deforestation and desertification, girls need to walk long distances to collect water and/or firewood sometimes in unsafe environments, increasing the risk of gender based violence   | Addressing climate change can reduce drivers of conflict, which leads to less women/girls experiencing violence.<br><br>Improved access to sustainable energy will decrease need to collect water and firewood and thus lower the risk of exposure to gender based violence.            |
| Social Inclusion | 7a. Number of countries with social protection systems that cover children and women in the most vulnerable and excluded populations. | Climate change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, prolong existing and create new poverty traps, leading to more inequality  | If ambitious emission reduction targets are not agreed and delivered on the coming years and decades, climate change impacts on social inclusion will seriously increase. | Socially excluded communities tend to live in or near areas which are environmentally degraded (e.g. polluted sites, industrial areas, mining, landfills, power plants, landslide / flood prone areas) and this adds to their marginalization | Advocate for national policies to recognize that children/women are especially vulnerable to impacts of climate change and environmental degradation can contribute to improved social protection systems that are flexible and responsive to environmental and climate related events. |

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