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for every child

KEY ASKS FOR 2019 SDG VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

SDG TARGET 4.2: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, CARE AND PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) starts with our youngest citizens. Healthy, educated and resilient children grow up into productive adults who can fuel sustainable economic growth for nations.

At the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the overarching theme will be *Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*. Additionally, Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), are two of the six goals being examined in depth.

Within these goals, achieving the targets on “access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education” (4.2), “end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age” (3.2), “end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving agreed targets on stunting and wasting for children under 5 years of age” (2.2), “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children” (16.2), and “decent work for all women and men” (8.5) are essential for ensuring that every child gets the best start in life.

UNICEF encourages countries participating in a voluntary national review (VNR) during the 2019 HLPF to consider the following messages and asks in the development of their respective reports:

Investing in the human capital needed to achieve the SDGs starts with our youngest citizens. The science is clear: the most important phase of human development is in the earliest years of life when the brain is developing at its most rapid pace. For optimum brain development, children need nutrition, stimulation and protection. Therefore, early childhood development (ECD) is the foundation for sustainable development because this once in a lifetime investment pays off for life -- and for future generations.

Supporting parents is essential in this endeavor. When parented with love, nourished and cared for in safe and stimulating environments, children start life with a fair chance to grow, thrive and contribute to their communities and the world. *Parents want the best for their children.* But many work long hours in both formal and informal sectors, compromising their ability to provide the right nourishment, loving environment and stimulating care that strengthens a baby’s developing brain.

Governments and the private sector can redesign the workplace of the future to better support parents in caring for their children. Investing in family-friendly policies can give parents the time and support they need to give their children the best start in life. These policies are good for children, good for women, good for businesses and good for the economy.



KEY ASKS

- **Invest urgently and increase investments that support early childhood health and learning and the psychological wellbeing of parents by creating a supportive environment.** Increasing the overall share of budgetary allocations for ECD programming is a critical step government can and should take. For example, allocating 10 per cent of all national education budgets to pre-primary education will greatly expand the number of children with access to early learning opportunities, which can improve their educational attainment and increase future earnings. In addition to education, key sectors such as health should commit to investments that advance early stimulation and enhance nurturing care for the young child, especially those 0-3 years of age, through both existing and new platforms. Innovative financing can also help governments reach more children with more effective programming. Approaches can include earmarking taxes to pay for ECD services or instituting ‘payment by results’ frameworks that tie investment to outcomes. Lack of investment in ECD is estimated to cost countries more than what they spend today on health. Therefore, establishing spending targets and/or better tracking of spending on ECD-related programmes/interventions is critical.
- **Expand access to effective, comprehensive and essential ECD services in homes, schools, communities and health clinics.** This can be done by integrating early childhood interventions into existing services such as routine health screenings at preschools and parenting support as part of home-health visits for new parents. To well-known and effective services such as antenatal care, nutrition support and community-based childcare, these interventions can be added: breastfeeding counselling, guidance on responsive stimulation, early learning, and parenting programmes to protect children from violence.
- **Make family-friendly ECD policies and plans a national priority – and a private sector imperative.** Policies, programmes and other support that enable parents and caregivers to provide the best start in life for their children pay off in healthier, better educated children, a better equipped

workforce and more sustainable growth. Building on recommendations to enhance breastfeeding support (for example, the ILO calls for a minimum of 14 weeks of breastfeeding support), emerging research and evidence points to the importance of bonding for brain development and father involvement in child development. These policies and programmes need to support (a) breastfeeding; (b) bonding and nurturing care for early stimulation; and (c) involvement of all primary caregivers, including fathers. Key workplace policies should include at least 6 months of paid parental leave that is available to both parents; breastfeeding facilities and paid breastfeeding breaks for the first six months; and onsite childcare and early learning programmes for the children of employees. In addition, all countries should provide two years of tuition-free pre-primary education, which is critical for early cognitive development and also enables working parents to generate more family income. These investments can contribute to progress on multiple SDGs relating to poverty alleviation, gender equality, health and education.

- **Provide dedicated leadership for ECD programmes and coordinate efforts more effectively across sectors.** ECD programmes cut across sectors including health, nutrition, education, protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene. Policies and programmes also need to be integrated. Strong monitoring mechanisms with high-level political commitment and oversight should be in place and should facilitate and track coordination across sectors.



MONITORING THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTHⁱ

Early childhood development encompasses many dimensions of a child's well-being, so measuring it is an imprecise science. Collection of disaggregated data in these three vital areas of measurement is essential for closing the knowledge gap:

The quality of care within a child's home environment

- Percentage of children aged 36-59 months who have been engaged in activities to promote learning and school readiness (adult support, by sex and household wealth quintile; and fathers support);
- Percentage of children 0-59 months left alone or in the care of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than one hour at least once in the past week (by sex and household wealth quintile);
- Percentage of children aged 0-59 months who have learning materials at home (children's books and playthings, by household wealth quintile);
- Ratio of richest to poorest children engaged in early learning activities.

Access to early childhood care and education

- Percentage of children aged 36-59 months who are attending an early childhood education programme (by sex and household wealth quintile).

The overall developmental status of children

- Percentage of children aged 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development and learning.



INCLUDING CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Through the #EarlyMomentsMatter campaign, UNICEF aims to help parents and partners better understand the importance of the earliest years of life on a child's developing brain – and what they can do to support that critical process. In addition, the campaign seeks to generate demand from parents for greater time and support in the workplace by calling on governments and the private sector to redesign the workplace of the future by helping families with young children. For more information, please see: <https://www.unicef.org/parenting>.

ⁱ For further information please see UNICEF's SDG Data Brief on ECD. https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SDG-briefing-note-8_early-childhood-development.pdf