INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH

Prioritizing the education, protection, health and well-being of children constitutes the best and most robust investment we can make to fulfil the promise of Agenda 2030 – for children, adolescents and youth themselves and the fundamental rights that they have – and for peace, human security and sustainable development for all of us and the planet we inhabit.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) recognizes the link between child- and youth-focused investments and growth by treating children and youth not just as passive recipients of social services and assistance but as active agents of inclusive development. Specifically, the Agenda:

- Recognizes that investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations (AAAA para 7);
- Recognizes the need to support countries that face particular challenges to make the requisite investments in children and youth (AAAA para 7);
- Reaffirms the vital importance of promoting and protecting the rights of all children, and ensuring that no child is left behind (AAAA para 7);
- Commits to promote national youth strategies as a key instrument for meeting the needs and aspirations of young people (AAAA para 16).

Countries have also made several commitments as part of the SDG Means of Implementation (MOI) indicators (see IAE report on SDG Indicators to the UN Statistical Commission). These include to regularly monitor: the proportion of resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes (MOI indicator 1. a.1); the proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection, (MOI indicator 1. a.2); the proportion of government recurrent and capital spending to sectors that disproportionately benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups (MOI indicator 1. b.1); as well as on programme coverage and results achieved in major SDG priority areas, such as education, health and WASH.

Countries are also encouraged to introduce “nationally appropriate spending targets for quality investments in essential public services for all, including health, education, energy, water and sanitation, consistent with national sustainable development strategies” and to “provide fiscally sustainable and nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, with a focus on those furthest below the poverty line and vulnerable groups, including children (Addis Ababa Action Agenda, para 12).

KEY ASKS

UNICEF encourages the following actions to improve understanding of social spending on children, adolescents and youth and endeavors to support governments on these actions:

1. Improve reporting on expenditures and programmes that have direct and indirect impacts on child, adolescent and youth well-being.

   A country’s budget, in particular, reflects how well political commitments under the Agenda 2030 and Financing for Development (FFD) agreements are being translated into direct actions to benefit the most excluded children, adolescents and youth. Yet, under current reporting practices most government budgets are organized by sector and functional area, but do not provide timely and detailed measurement on public spending on health, education and social protection that addresses the human capital potential of young people. Relevant approaches to improve government reporting on child-focused spending include: 1) Public Expenditure Reviews (PERs) with a focus on children and child-focused areas such as immunization or nutrition programmes (these reviews are often implemented in collaboration with the World Bank); 2) child-spending markers and taxonomies developed by countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Mexico, Peru, Uganda, Wales and Yemen; and 3) established reporting practices on child-focused allocations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Public dissemination of results of the monitoring exercise should also be considered.
2. **Monitoring and increase investments on new child, adolescent and youth-focused SDG priorities that are of a cross-cutting nature but sit less easily within traditional sectoral budgets.**
   For example in the area of child protection, investments in family or foster care; response to and prevention of violence against children; and justice for children are distinct from social protection and not always classified under such budgets. Interventions in areas like gender equality, adolescent development, nutrition and early childhood development similarly cut across sectors, ranging from health to education to agriculture to water and sanitation. Investments that support the school-to-work transition are also commonly captured by education, labour, business development and social protection budgets. Public dissemination of results and spending by age group and gender would facilitate local authorities and other stakeholders to monitor how conditions for young people improve over time.

3. **Adopt principles of results-based reporting to spending on children, adolescents and youth, with a particular focus on equity and effectiveness, including gender equity.**
   Examples include tracking of spending that explicitly addresses geographic disparities of services for children, adolescents and youth (both quality and access), as well as inequities among different population groups and gender in service provision or other matters. Possible criteria for spending effectiveness include the degree to which budget programs intended for children, adolescents and youth (directly or indirectly) succeed in achieving their objectives.

4. **Carry out public advocacy around the budgeting process.**
   Public participation in the budgeting process can lead to the improvement of the frameworks capable to demonstrate transparent processes and also track sectoral spending on specific SDGs. Such practices include routine budget briefs, fiscal space analysis and related advocacy with Members of Parliament, civil society, media (for relevant examples and country case studies see [here](http://www.unicef.org/sdgs) and [here](http://www.unicef.org/sdgs)).

5. **Carry out systematic equity gap analysis to understand better which children, adolescents and youth are being left behind and where progress for these young people are lagging and determine the underlying causes and bottlenecks.**
   The policy and programmatic response to this analysis should focus on integration of service delivery platforms, systematically support the participation of community and strategies to reduce vulnerability and linking budgets and spending to results.

6. **Support the introduction and dissemination of blended finance solutions.** Innovative mechanisms and approaches such as blended finance have a critical role in catalyzing contributions from different sources for financing the SDGs. The mobilization of combined efforts and good practices from the public and the private sectors can enable the provision of partnerships and financing instruments such as venture capital, impact bonds, brain trusts and other public-private financing models to deliver investments in children, adolescents and youth and in support of achieving the SDGs.

7. **Scale-up the adoption, integration and deployment of new technologies to support progress across the SDGs.**
   New digital technologies are emerging as opportunities to address long-standing development challenges across the SDGs that directly impact young people—from child protection to nutrition to access to education to healthcare. Technological innovations in programme implementation, service delivery, etc. can assist in reducing inefficiencies and costs in the public sector and in removing some important barriers that constrain the development of sustainable finance practices.