FULFILLING ALL RIGHTS OF EVERY CHILD: LINKING CHILD RIGHTS AND THE SDGS

Presently, we stand at a crossroads and particularly important moment in time for the world’s children. Against the backdrop of children, adolescents and youth around the world demanding to be heard and taking action for their future through climate strikes in over 170 countries, it is fitting that 2019 was also the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – the most widely ratified human rights treaty in existence – which guarantees every child the right to a healthy, safe and sustainable future as well as the right to be heard on issues and decisions that will affect that future. At the same time, the year 2020 marks 10 years until the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are set to be reached. The SDGs – which call for inclusive economic, social and environmental progress for all people and the planet – are the blueprint for creating the world that all of us need, and that children are demanding.

The realization of child rights and of the SDGs are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. The CRC puts forth all the rights that Governments must respect, protect and fulfil for all children under their jurisdiction, while the SDG is a universal, timebound call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The two frameworks have a strong potential for mutual advocacy and implementation.

As we mark the 2020 “Decade of Action” to accelerate progress on the SDGs between 2020 and 2030, this linkage between the realization of child rights and the successful achievement of the SDGs take on further and increased importance. UNICEF encourages countries participating in a Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the 2020 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to include the following aspects in their respective reports:

KEY ASKS

1. Reaffirm Government commitment to accelerating implementation of the CRC as a cornerstone of national SDG implementation and attainment efforts. This could include a public announcement of the Government’s alignment to the CRC Voluntary Global Pledge, For every child, every right? and followed-up with additional national commitments made by leaders at subnational levels (e.g. parliamentarians, mayors, etc).

2. Provide explicit and comprehensive reporting on the situation of children and the actions taken by the Government towards the realization of child rights in the Government’s 2020 SDG VNR Report, as well as in other reporting mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

3. Conduct meaningful and inclusive consultations with children and youth as part of the Government’s 2020 VNR Report and include specific and actional recommendations from those consultations in said report. A young representative of the consultation with children and youth should also be part of the Government’s official delegation to the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2020 where the main findings of the report are presented at the United Nations.

4. Expand child, adolescent and youth awareness of child rights and the SDGs through the use of CRC- and SDG-related education materials in schools and beyond.

MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

All SDGs are relevant to the fulfillment of the rights of children, not only those which explicitly reference children. UNICEF conducted a detailed mapping of the articles of the CRC to the SDGs goals and targets, illustrating the many linkages and synergies between the two frameworks. That being said, UNICEF has identified 44 indicators out of a total of 232 in the global SDG monitoring framework, that most directly concern children. On the positive, there has been a notable increase in data coverage between 2018 and 2019; however, significant challenges remain. A first step in the realization of child rights is to know who these children are, where they live and the challenges they face. Therefore, we encourage Governments to:

Ensure that national SDG monitoring frameworks includes child-focused indicators. Unless the national SDG monitoring framework contains child-focused indicators, the issues around child development and well-being might get lost in policy discussions. Thus, it is essential that the national SDG monitoring and indicator framework is reviewed and updated to include child-focused indicators. As a starting point, the 44 indicators in the global monitoring framework can guide the review and possible updating of the national SDG monitoring framework.

Strengthen national capacity to improve the collection, dissemination and use of high-quality, comprehensive and up-to-date disaggregated data to adequately monitor and report on progress for all children including those most vulnerable and left behind.

Leverage existing national monitoring and reporting mechanisms for reporting on the CRC and other relevant human rights obligations to reflect progress on child rights within the context of the SDGs (the mapping can assist).
Use statistical data from a variety of sources in assessing SDG progress, including censuses, sample surveys and administrative records, as well as perception data collected through participatory monitoring activities.

Measure child poverty in all its dimensions, and monitoring progress towards “ending child poverty in all its forms”, as a universal and cross-cutting issue that can help to dismantle the indivisibility of the SDGs and avoid compartmentalization.

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

Delivering on the obligations articulated in the CRC and prioritizing the education, protection, health and well-being of children constitutes the best and most robust investment we can make to fulfill the promise of Agenda 2030 – for children and young people themselves and for peace, human security and sustainable development. UNICEF encourages Governments to:

- Improve reporting and efficiency on expenditures and programmes that have direct and indirect impacts on child and adolescent well-being. Relevant approaches include Public Expenditure Reviews (PERs) with a focus on children and child-focused areas such as immunization or nutrition programmes, child spending markers and taxonomies, as well as established reporting practices on child-focused allocations under the CRC.

- Monitor and increase investments on new child- and adolescent-focused SDG priorities that are of a cross-cutting nature but sit less easily within traditional sectoral budgets. Interventions in areas like child protection, gender equality, adolescent development, nutrition and early childhood development cut across sectors and are not always classified under sectoral budgets, which often results in their omission.

- Adopt principles of results-based reporting to spending on children and adolescents, with a particular focus on equity and effectiveness, including gender equality. Examples include tracking of spending that explicitly addresses geographic disparities of services for children and adolescents (both quality and access), as well as inequities among different population groups and gender in service provision or other matters.

- Carry out systematic equity gap analyses to understand better which children are not being reached and where progress for children is lagging and determine the underlying causes and bottlenecks.

ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

The CRC asserts that children have the right to have their voices heard in all matters that affect their lives. It is, therefore, their right to learn about their rights as a child and to engage in learning about and taking action on the SDGs. UNICEF encourages Governments to involve children and adolescents in learning about their rights and the SDGs through participatory means:

- The process for preparing the 2020 national review should directly involve children and adolescent girls and boys, especially the most marginalized or excluded. For example, through consultations (on and/or offline), surveys or polls [e.g. U-Report6], focus group discussions, etc. UNICEF together with civil society, child-focused organizations and other partners could support the government in that process. The results of these efforts as well as the methods employed should be described in the VNR report, including the number of young people involved in the process.

- Children and adolescents should be made aware of their rights and the SDGs through the use of child-friendly and interactive education and learning materials. To inspire action and initiate meaningful consultation, children must become aware of both their rights, and the relationship of those rights to their daily lives, communities and the SDGs. UNICEF’s and Project Everyone’s global campaign to increase SDG awareness and action among young people – the World’s Largest Lesson7 – has developed a lesson plan for teaching children about the relationship between fulfillment of child rights and the SDGs.8 Materials such as these and other child-friendly CRC materials9 can help bring awareness of child rights and the SDGs to young people and inspire their creativity and action on the Global Goals.

- Awareness-raising and participation should be seen as part of a continuum to regularly, meaningfully and consistently engage children, adolescents and young people as agents of change to influence behaviors and social norms amongst themselves, their households and their communities. This goes beyond engagement just for the purposes of reporting periods, but rather creating standing mechanisms and spaces for young people to engage and have their perspectives heard in decision and policy-making processes as well as across media and communications channels for the purpose of solidifying long-term positive changes in behaviors and social norms. UNICEF’s Youth Activate Talk Methodology10 is also a platform from children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of mediums.

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10. Youth Activate Talk Methodology: [https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/teams/PPD-2030ASD/DL1/Youth_ActivateTalkMethodology_v3.pdf?csf=1&e=Q5VHzN](https://unicef.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/teams/PPD-2030ASD/DL1/Youth_ActivateTalkMethodology_v3.pdf?csf=1&e=Q5VHzN)