SDG 4: EVERY CHILD LEARNS

As the SDGs are interdependent, achieving the education goal (SDG 4) will have transformative effects on other goals. Educating children gives the next generation the tools to fight poverty and prevent disease and build more resilient and peaceful societies. The adoption of SDG 4 was both a recognition of the importance of education and a commitment to achieve more ambitious outcomes in education access, learning outcomes, and skills development. UNICEF's own goal "Every Child Learns," is fully aligned with SDG 4 and other education-related targets and seeks to ensure that this applies in all country contexts, including humanitarian crises and development settings, regardless of wealth, location, gender, disability, migration status, language or minority status. For every child to learn, all girls and boys should gain access to and participate in education and education should lead to learning and the development of relevant skills for full participation in society.

KEY ASKS

- **A demonstration of how the SDG 4 global ambitions are being nationalized into plans, policies, budgets, data collection efforts, and reports.** SDG 4 articulated higher ambitions for governments that often require a review and update to existing sector plans. Updated plans should be context-based and realistic in terms of pace of education system development. "Business as usual" at the national level will not result in progress towards greater ambitions at the global level and will require innovations in education.

- **A continued commitment to improving access to pre-primary, primary and secondary education for all, including for children from minority groups and those with disabilities.** Globally, 262 million children and adolescents do not have the opportunity to enter or complete school. To achieve SDG 4, national and local governments must accelerate action plans to close the access gaps and ensure all children are in school, with a focus on marginalized children and children in emergency settings. Too often, a child's access to education is predetermined by their geographic location, sex, gender, disability status, economic status, or other criteria. Meanwhile, an education is instrumental to improving a marginalized child's social and economic opportunity, yet education accounts for less than 4 per cent of total humanitarian aid. The SDGs and the Habitat III commitments require schools, materials, transport and public places to be made accessible for children with disabilities.

- **A renewed focus on learning outcomes and their enablers, including learning in safe and adequate environments, supported by well-trained teachers and structured content**. Even for those in school, a combined 617 million students in primary and lower secondary institutions are not achieving the minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics. The number of illiterate adults remains stubbornly high at 774 million. Capacity building to monitor learning outcomes is therefore essential: examples of existing and growing tools include a new Multiple Index Cluster Survey (MICS) module on child foundational learning skills, which assesses reading, comprehension and numeracy competencies of children aged 7-14 years old, both in and out of school. Improved data collection on learning must be met with policy response and coordination that focuses on learning outcomes and their enablers, including a school's safe and inclusive infrastructure and facilities, quality teaching, structured content, and available resources. A recent global baseline report on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene also indicates the need to ensure schools have basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services.

- **Attention to skills development should be a core component to education: giving all children and adolescents the skills, competencies, knowledge and values necessary to lead healthy and productive lives from early childhood through basic and secondary education and beyond.** Adolescents and young people should have access to opportunities to develop skills for empowerment, learning, employability and active citizenship. This includes support for the transition to work, such as through apprenticeships and internships, as well as skills for the future of work and technology, skills for a green economy and sustainability, and skills that promote leadership, resilience and tolerance among young people.

- **The implementation of SDG-focused learning throughout schools to raise awareness and inspire positive action.** Best practices include local and national governments and other school systems formally integrating SDG education in national curricula where students can learn about the importance of the issues articulated in the SDGs and how to think critically about barriers to and solutions for achieving the goals. Through schools, students should also be consulted as stakeholders on SDG plans, progress and reports.

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

Achieving the globally agreed SDG 4 Targets and Indicators will require expanded data collection and disaggregation. SDG 4 is comprised of seven targets and three means of implementation. These are operationalized through a set of 11 global indicators recommended for global monitoring of progress on key targets. In addition, 32 thematic indicators have been identified by a UNESCO-led, UNICEF- supported body of member states, multilateral agencies and civil society called the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG). Thematic indicators are optional and complementary to the global ones, allowing for a more comprehensive picture of SDG 4 achievement. Countries may customize the targets, as well as choose their own indicators to monitor SDG 4, including country-specific indicators not part of the 11 global or 32

thematic indicators, but it is recommended wherever possible to align national indicators to the internationally agreed SDG 4 indicators.

Not all of the 11 global SDG 4 indicators (as well as many thematic indicators) have established methodology and/or widespread availability, either at national level or when disaggregated by priority groups such as children with disabilities and ethnic and linguistic minorities. To fill these gaps, Member States are encouraged to:

- **Carry out a data mapping exercise to identify SDG 4 data gaps**, identify existing data sources, identify indicators based on national priorities, sets national targets, and develop data strategy to monitor progress towards SDG 4 goals.
- **Collect and analyse data from different sources** to generate baseline estimates for SDG 4 indicators.
- **Mainstream SDG 4 monitoring within national education sector plans/strategies**.
- **Collaborate with partners to implement new MICS household survey modules** including early child development, early learning and child functioning (disabilities).
- Improve capacity to **collect and disaggregate data for disadvantaged children** to ensure no child is left behind. For example, UNICEF is improving the coverage and quality of data and statistics on child functioning and disability through its new MICS module and guidance on inclusive EMIS questionnaires.

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

Research shows that proper resource allocation and financial investments in education yield some of the strongest economic and social returns. Every year of schooling raises an individual's earnings by 10 percent. This rate of return is, in fact, higher than alternative investments, including bonds, stocks, deposits, and housing. UNICEF recommends that Member States:

- **Meet agreed education budget quotas and minimum spending thresholds.** As the GEM Report shows, the international community is not meeting the education financing benchmarks to meet SDG 4 by 2030. One in four countries do not reach the two key targets on public financing of education appear in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which proposed that governments should be allocating "At least 4 to 6 per cent of GDP to education, and/or at least 15 to 20 per cent of public expenditure to education".
- **Apply the Education Commission's recommendation of "progressive universalism."** Recognizing the scarcity of public funding compared to the needs, the Education Commission recommends that, when balancing spending across different levels of education, decision-makers should prioritize the poor and early years where social returns are highest, and minimize household spending on basic education by the poor. In many countries, current patterns of public education spending favors the upper levels of education and disfavors the poorest children due to high disparities in terms of access to primary education and of progress to upper levels of education.
- **Spend more on early childhood, care and education**. Empirical evidence shows that quality pre-primary interventions increase educational success and adult productivity. Yet low-income countries spend an average of less than 2 percent of their education budgets on pre-primary education and lower middle countries only 5 per cent. External financing for pre-primary education is also extremely limited: less than 1 percent of international aid for education is spent on pre-primary. Tackling the learning crisis requires greater investments from governments, donors and partners to quality early learning programmes, especially for the poorest children.
- **Adopt principles of results-based management, with a focus on equity and effectiveness.** Policies that allow for the equitable targeting of resources and improve the efficiency of overall education spending are needed. With limited resources and a long way to go before every child has access to education and learning, it is essential to identify and support country-specific, cost-effective policies and interventions. Given the magnitude of the learning crisis, we need strengthened learning assessment systems, particularly for the early grades, and strong accountability structures to improve the way in which investments are transformed into actual learning. The SDGs also provide an opportunity to ensure education sector plans and strategies include context-based and evidence-based cross-cutting policies that relate to learning environments and outcomes such as child protection, gender equality, adolescent development, social inclusion, nutrition, health, water sanitation and hygiene and early childhood.

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

- **Actively involve children, adolescents and youth, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, in local and national planning processes in development and humanitarian contexts** through consultation and other participatory means, and as part of ongoing efforts to make children, adolescents and youth aware of these issues, inspire their positive action and expand the space for their participation in accountability mechanisms and activities. This should be part of a continuum to regularly, meaningfully and consistently engage children, adolescents and youth as agents of change to influence behaviors and social norms amongst themselves, their households and their communities. It goes beyond engagement just for the purposes of reporting periods, but rather systematizing the engagement of young people in a variety of ways and across media and communications channels, including for example: digital platforms (including U-Report), participatory theatre, intergenerational community dialogues, community & children's radio, participatory video, school clubs, TV Edu-tainment and child-participatory research.

- **Establish institutionalized mechanisms for promoting participation and implementing recommendations from children, adolescent and youth** by ensuring that there is a responsive audience, dedicated budgets, accountability mechanisms and feedback loops.

- **Provide spaces for children, adolescents and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including *Quality Education*.** UNICEF can support this effort due to our existing work in this space and creating child-friendly education and entertainment materials through our foundational partnerships on the *World's Largest Lesson* and *Comics Uniting Nations*. *UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology* is also a platform from children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of mediums.