



KEY ASKS

2021 • SDG National Reviews

SDG 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Sustainable energy is a critical enabler and dramatically improves the quality, accessibility and reliability of services that children rely on (e.g. health, WASH, education, nutrition) for their survival and well-being. For example:

- In homes, children need reliable access to modern lighting for their daily chores and to do homework after dark and need heating and cooling to stay comfortable;
- Low levels of electricity access are correlated with poor educational performance, lower attendance, and a decreased ability to attract and maintain teachers. Health centres and schools require energy for lighting, operating medical devices and life-saving procedures, cooking, heating, water delivery and purification, cooling and digital connectivity;
- Children, including those with disabilities, need safe, clean and affordable transportation to school;
- Street lighting is important for children's safety, especially girls, after dark;
- Amongst children, girls are primarily responsible for collecting fuel and are often at serious risk of sexual violence particularly in emergency contexts;
- Sustainable energy measures provide considerable benefits in reducing indoor air pollution and related health risks, particularly for children. Indoor air pollution, largely caused by the burning of solid fuels, contributes to over half a million deaths of children under 5;
- Reliable and affordable energy is also a prerequisite to accessing clean water and sanitation.

"Speed of deployment for solutions is critical in the eye of a pandemic. Off-grid decentralized renewable power can answer this challenge for many vulnerable communities. These energy solutions can not only allow people to access the healthcare they need now, but can also be an investment into the clean, sustainable energy infrastructure of the future for these countries. However, without this, the global community's efforts to contain COVID-19 may be hampered as the deadly explosion of cases continues across many parts of the world with little or no access to energy."

-- **Damilola Ogunbiyi**, CEO and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of UN-Energy

The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation, especially for the most vulnerable children. Lack of access to energy may hamper efforts to contain COVID-19 across many parts of the world. In addition, child population lacking electricity access cannot access digital learning which has negative educational impacts. Energy services are key to preventing disease and fighting pandemics – from powering healthcare facilities and supplying clean water for essential hygiene to enabling communication and IT services that connect people while maintaining social distancing. (UNICEF [Climate & COVID-19 Advocacy Brief](#)).



KEY ASKS

1. Energy can define a child's access to education, water, clean air and safety. As SDG 7 is implemented and monitored, we encourage countries to include children in policies and investments related to sustainable energy. UNICEF encourages governments conducting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to ensure their reports are: 1) informed by relevant, disaggregated data, including on children; 2) linked to national plans, budgets and accountability frameworks; and 3) inclusive of children's voices on SDG issues, for instance through conducting consultations with children and youth. In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic it is key to:
 - Prioritize energy solutions to power health clinics and first responders;

- Keep vulnerable consumers connected to electricity/internet;
- Increase reliable, uninterrupted, and sufficient energy production in preparation for a more sustainable economic recovery



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

Energy-related data on the sectors most relevant to children is scarce, specifically the health- and education sectors as well as infrastructure such as transport. Disaggregated data on children and their access to and benefits from energy is even sketchier, which also applies to specific data on access to sustainable energy. The following SDG 7 Targets and Indicators address the following priority areas for children:

7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity

7.1.2 Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology

While national and local governments collect targets and indicators related to SDG 7, we encourage where appropriate the collection of the following relevant SDG indicator areas:

3.9.1 Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution

4.A.1 Proportion of schools with access to (a) electricity.

Collecting and disaggregating this data is vital to understanding how and where children are being left behind in the context to energy access. For instance, it is through these statistics that we know to:

Reduce air pollution deaths. The health impacts attributable to air pollution, which are closely linked to the use of dirty fossil fuel such as diesel and petrol including in the transport sector, are estimated to have caused 4.2 million premature deaths globally due to outdoor air pollution and 3.8 million due to indoor air pollution in 2012 through the use of conventional fuels for cooking and heating (e.g. charcoal, kerosene). [Up to 94%](#) of these deaths occurring in low- and middle -income countries, these countries, which represent 82% of the global population, bear the brunt of the problem. [Around 300 million children globally, including 17 million babies](#) live in areas where the air is toxic – exceeding international limits by at least six times.

Improve access to electricity in households. Children living in electrified households spend an average of 274 more days at school than those living in households without electricity. Electricity in the home also helps reduce gender inequalities by providing girls, who are traditionally more engaged in housework than boys, opportunities to study after sunset.

Improve access to electricity for health facilities. An estimated 1 billion people rely on health facilities without electricity, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In a recent study over 120,000 facilities, almost 60% of healthcare facilities in low- and middle-income countries were estimated to lack reliable electricity, including lighting for child delivery and emergency night-time healthcare, refrigeration of vaccines or electricity for simple medical and diagnostic equipment.

Improve access to electricity for schools. Looking at primary school access to electricity, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest rate with 35%, followed by South Asia with 48%, and Latin America with 93%. Collectively, [291 million](#) children attend primary schools without electricity compromising educational and development outcomes. Schools with better access to sustainable energy can also be used to provide other community services, such as clean water, hygienic sanitation, and health and emergency services

Enhance street lighting. It is unknown how many communities in developing countries are without street lighting; however, it is reasonable to assume that most of those 1.3 billion people who have no access to electricity in their homes are also deprived of street lighting. The lack of street lighting leads to increased risk of harassment and assault.



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

Energy action plans and budgets should cover issues such as children's access to clean energy in households, schools and health facilities; protection against air pollution; and installing proper lighting in communities for children's safety. Improved reporting on expenditures and programmes that have direct and indirect impacts on access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy should be pursued. To improve public financing for clean energy, UNICEF supports governments to allocate public resources where the need is greatest; and pushes for improved programme design, monitoring and accountability.



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

Shifts in social norms and behaviours begin in communities and households and systemic sustainable energy practices can start with simple actions that children can take part in such as turning off lights and unplugging devices. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of awareness raising and encourage positive behaviours and more sustainable practices among children, not only as they transition from childhood to adulthood but as they participate in society now. UNICEF recently became a partner to the [Youth Sustainable Energy Hub initiative](#).

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, 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.

Provide spaces and/or platforms for children, adolescents and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including *Affordable and Clean Energy*. 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](#)*. [Voices of Youth and UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology](#) are also a platform from children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of medium.

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 behaviours 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 behaviours and social norms. It is important for UNICEF and UN agencies to listen and learn from young people so that we can continue to be led and inspired by them.

Finally, UNICEF stresses **the importance of sustainable energy education and encourages the inclusion of children's perspectives and voices in not only SDG consultations but in implementation efforts such as policy, budgeting and other decision-making.** Current and future investments in human capital will be integral to growing the sustainable energy industry. Educating generations of students as clean energy technicians and engineers, political activists and energy practitioners is vital to equip society with the future capability of meeting the demand for access to and affordability of clean energy.



For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>