



KEY ASKS

2021 • SDG National Reviews

© UNICEF/UN1315897/ Frank Dejongh

SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

SDG 12 pertains to children in two critical ways. First, unsustainable and unsafe consumption and production patterns lead to **toxic waste and limited resources which disproportionately harms children's health, development and environments**. Second, decades of evidence show that widespread **changes in positive societal behavior often begin with children becoming aware of the problems they observe in their own communities**. This applies to sustainable consumption patterns where for instance, recycling and reducing the use of plastics has gained support due to the efforts and involvement of children in campaigns. Children and youth should be both protected from harmful pollutants and engaged in sustainability awareness and action.

"The COVID-19 pandemic presents the greatest test the world has faced since the Second World War and the formation of the United Nations... What started as a public health emergency has snowballed into a formidable test for global development and for the prospects of today's young generation."

--Policy Brief by the UN Secretary-General: [The Impact of COVID-19 on Children](#)



KEY ASKS

- 1. Reduce food waste and improve food production, consumption and allocation to better preserve the planet and provide for people, including children who disproportionately suffer from hunger.** Current production and consumption patterns are not only polluting resources, but improperly allocated to children and families living in hunger. For instance, of the 4 billion metric tons of food produced each year, one third is wasted or lost¹ while 52 million children suffer from and 3 million children die from wasting, the life-threatening result of hunger.² Meanwhile, demand for already constrained natural resources will reach the need of three planets worth of resources by 2050.³ As the world's population currently uses about 50 per cent more resources than the Earth can support, consumption patterns must be altered to better preserve the planet and provide for people.
- 2. Reduce the emissions of harmful pollutants to prevent and mitigate their effects on children.** Emerging and alarming evidence is beginning to show the direct impact of chemicals and wastes on children. The size of children's bodies, the developmental stage of their internal organs and systems, and their characteristic habits make them far more vulnerable to health risks from pollution and toxins than the same exposure by adults.⁴ As children breathe, they take in more air per unit of body weight than adults, resulting in greater exposure to pathogens and pollutants. When children play on the ground, their potential intake of polluted soil and dust increases. They are more exposed to dietary sources of pollution because, compared to adults, they drink more water and eat more food in proportion to their body weight. If water contains residues of pesticides or other chemicals, for example, infants will receive more than double the dose taken in by an adult drinking the same water.⁵ Fossil fuels, wastewater, and other pollutants reportedly have physical and mental effects on children especially. For instance, communities in close proximity to industrial areas report that children born healthy begin showing signs of mental and physical deterioration due to toxic wastewater.⁶ Polluted wastewater also damages farmland, depleting sources of food and income, therefore perpetuating poverty and hunger. Harmful pollutants, in other words, are costly to child development and in turn, social and economic progress. [Hundreds of millions of children are poisoned by lead](#). Childhood lead poisoning should command an urgent international response. But because lead wreaks its havoc silently and insidiously, it often goes unrecognized.
- 3. Recognize the role businesses have in protecting child rights and role young people have in holding businesses to account.** Given that business practices across industries will need to shift in order to meet SDG criteria, there is opportunity for smart growth in corporate economic, social and environmental responsibility. As companies adapt, explicit guidance is available on what it means for business to respect and support children's rights.

- Working closely with the Chamber of Commerce, UNICEF disseminated practical guidance on COVID-19 preparedness and response [across its network of 12,000 local chambers and millions of business](#), including a co-branded complement to the '[Business Engagement Guide](#)' and [UNICEF's guidance for business on Family Friendly Policies and Other Good Workplace Practices in the Context of Covid-19](#). In addition, UNICEF led on the development of the Business Engagement Guide which outlines how **businesses can help reduce the impact of COVID-19 on children and families, identifying concrete actions they can take on the response, while also supporting efforts in the workplace, across supply chains and in communities.**
- More [Recommendations for businesses](#) – the Child Rights and Business team joined Programme Division to develop recommendations on how to strengthen support for workers and their families in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The technical note was co-published with the ILO and UN Women and launched with a global [press release](#). The document builds on important work initiated by EAPRO and ESARO and supports businesses to mitigate the socio-economic consequences (job loss, school closures, and unavailability of childcare) of the crisis on working families and children. There has been such demand for this, that several country offices, regional offices and National Committees are currently developing national dissemination and business engagement plans.
- The United Nations Global Compact, Save the Children and UNICEF worked together to develop a set of principles, launched as [Children's Rights and Business Principles](#) in March 2012. Of the ten principles, one specifically reads that **all businesses should 'respect and support children's rights in relation to the environment and to land acquisition and use.'** To aid the implementation of the principles, UNICEF has an accompanying set of tools including [Children are Everyone's Business Workbook 2.0](#).⁷ In addition to industry business practices that affect the environment, **socially responsible practices must also be taken into corporate consideration in order to advance the SDGs.**
- While businesses have a significant role to protect children's rights and the environment, young people have also been on the forefront of holding businesses accountable for improved corporate social responsibility. As both current and future consumers, children and young people are increasingly shaping brands and the social and environmental roles that businesses thrive in. Thanks to younger generations entering the consumer market, over fifty-five percent of global online consumers across 60 countries are committed to positive social and environmental impact. According to a study by Nielsen, Millennials report interest to check consumer goods for sustainable labeling and willingness to pay extra for sustainable products. In developing regions, Millennial respondents in favor of sustainability actions are three times more agreeable, on average, to sustainability actions than Generation X (age 35-49) respondents and 12 times more agreeable, on average, than Baby Boomer (age 50-64) respondents. In summary, these trends will bend company practices as more young people both become leaders of companies and the majority of consumers.



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

UNICEF encourages the following [SDG 12 Targets and Indicators](#) to be monitored and disaggregated wherever possible, as they address priority areas for children as outlined by the key messages above.

- **12.3** By 2030, halve per capita **global food waste** at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses
- **12.4** By 2020, achieve the **environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes** throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment
- **12.5** By 2030, substantially **reduce waste generation** through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse
- **12.6** Encourage **companies**, especially large and transnational companies, **to adopt sustainable practices** and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
- **12.8** By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and **awareness for sustainable development** and lifestyles in harmony with nature
- **12.8.1** Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) **education for sustainable development** (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment



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

Through education and empowerment, raise the awareness of children and young people to inspire positive action and sustainable lifestyles. SDG 12 specifically calls for national governments to mainstream global citizenship education and sustainable development education in its education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment. UNICEF encourages governments to implement SDG-focused learning throughout schools in their countries and consult children and youth on their perceptions as to how to make systems and societies more sustainable:

- **The process for preparing the 2021 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 for children, adolescents and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including Responsible Consumption and Production.** 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 Lesson⁸](#) and [Comics Uniting Nations⁹](#). Specific lesson plans pertaining to SDG 12 include a full 'Exploring the Circular Economy' set produced in partnership with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and a set about food production, consumption and waste called 'Every Plate Tells a Story.' [UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology¹⁰](#) is 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 knowledge **producers and agents of change to influence decision-making processes and outcomes as well as 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.



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

¹ UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 2011.

² UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group. Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates, May 2017.

³ World Wildlife Fund, 2012.

⁴ <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42506>

⁵ www.who.int/ceh/risks/en

⁶ [Changing Markets](#), June 2017.

⁷ https://www.unicef.org/csr/css/Workbook_2.0_Second_Edition_29092014_LR.pdf

⁸ <http://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/global-goals/responsible-consumption/>

⁹ <http://www.comicsunitingnations.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/media/60596/file>