

Save the Children's Recommendations for the 2019 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

This brief outlines Save the Children's recommendations for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), 9-18 July 2019. These recommendations focus on Save the Children's priority areas including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 16 and 17. If implemented, they will drive forward progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for all children. These recommendations are targeted to tackle the obstacles faced by the most deprived and marginalized groups of children, including children affected by conflict and girls, to ensure the transformational pledge to leave no one behind and endeavor to reach those furthest behind first is met.

Summary of Recommendations

To fulfil a child's participatory right:

- **Governments should include a child delegate within national delegations attending and participating at the HLPF** and provide space for that child delegate to express their views and recommendations.
- **Ensure children's views and recommendations are meaningfully reflected in national level statements and presentations** delivered at the HLPF.

To achieve the Leave No One Behind pledge:

- **Governments should use convergence to track and report on the pace at which disparities between socioeconomic groups are narrowing**, not just national and global average progress.
- **Resources should be aligned with need by embedding equity-based allocation criteria in budget processes** to reduce disparities in child survival outcomes

To achieve SDG 1:

- **Governments should routinely measure child poverty and recognize it as an explicit priority area** in national strategies, policies and programmes to eliminate poverty in all its dimensions.
- **Governments should expand social protection to cover all children, particularly the most deprived and marginalized, and be child sensitive**, including by ensuring that all policies and programs are explicitly designed to increase child well-being and avoid unintended harms.

To achieve SDG 2:

- **Governments must make a step change in investment to respond to the challenge of global malnutrition in all its forms** and to ensure national nutrition plans are fully financed.
- **Increase domestic and innovative resources to end malnutrition by 2030**, including by ensuring progressive tax reform and donor air support.

To achieve SDG 3:

- **Governments must increase domestic public health expenditure towards a target of 5% of GDP**, prioritizing spending at primary health care level.
- **Prioritize primary healthcare as a critical first step towards achieving UHC**, with a focus on ensuring accessible and quality health and nutrition services in reach of all communities, ensuring gender-responsive services and information, with a focus on the most deprived and marginalized.

To achieve SDG 4:

- **Governments must make progressive universalism a steering principle for all education planning and financing** and direct all finance towards the most deprived and marginalised, in order to close the learning gap.

- **Ensure that safe, quality education in emergencies and protracted crises is delivered across the humanitarian development divide** and that it is responsive to gender and the most marginalized, with a strong focus on learning outcomes.

To achieve SDG 8:

- **Implement national action plans that recognize ‘decent jobs’ in the informal sector and informal economy.**
- **Disaggregate data at a minimum by gender and age on adolescent and youth contributions to national economic growth** as well as national economic growth benefits for adolescents and youth, to account for their contributions and the necessity of ensuring ‘Youth Inclusive Economic Growth’.

To achieve SDG 16:

- **Governments should allocate adequate funding and investments in legal and child protection systems** and donors should increase funding for gender-responsive child protection services and gender-based violence prevention and response interventions including in humanitarian crises and during recovery and reconstruction.
- **Governments must protect children in conflict by delivering commitments to uphold the internationally agreed standards of conduct in conflict**, hold perpetrators of violations of child rights to account, and take practical action to effectively protect children and support their recovery.

Recommendations to Ensure Child Participation

A strong commitment to children’s participatory rights at the HLPF in 2019 is fundamental in the year that marks the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Child participation is both critical for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for achieving sustainable development for all, but also to fulfil a child’s right to have their views heard and given due weight, engage in civic action and participate in public decision-making and accountability processes in accordance with Article 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 of the UNCRC. The 2030 Agenda itself recognises children as **‘agents of change’** emphasizing the importance of their participation in SDG implementation and accountability, which in turn will accelerate the realization of their civil and political rights under the UNCRC.

To ensure children’s participatory right at the HLPF, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Include a child delegate within national delegations attending and participating at the HLPF** and provide space for that child delegate to express their views and recommendations. This will ensure a better understanding, awareness and representation of children’s perspectives and demonstrate commitment to engage and support children and wider civil society to play an active role in SDG accountability processes.
- **Ensure children’s views and recommendations are meaningfully reflected in national level statements and presentations delivered at the HLPF and all side-event and panel engagements.** Children have a unique body of knowledge about their lives and views which derive from their direct experiences. The inclusion of children’s perspectives, particularly those of the most deprived and marginalized, in national statements and presentation at the HLPF and as panelists and speakers at side-events will lead to more relevant and more effective input - this is fundamental if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030.

On the Leave No One Behind Pledge

At the heart of the SDGs is the pledge to Leave No One Behind. It is a commitment to put those furthest behind first and ensure that all targets are met for all segments of society. It is rooted in the idea of fairness, universal human rights and moral purpose. While it matters as an end in itself, it is also a way of achieving the SDGs. The current failure to narrow the gap between those children who are furthest behind and the rest of society is acting as a brake on overall progress and threatens to derail the whole agenda.

On current trends more than 4 million children will die under the age of five in the year 2030¹ with mortality rates children in the world's poorest 20% of households typically two to three times the level for the wealthiest 20% and 40% above the global average. The idea that a child should have less chance of survival because they are born into a poor household is inconsistent with the basic precepts of universal human rights.

To realise the Leave No One Behind pledge, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Track not just national and global average progress, but also the pace at which disparities between socioeconomic groups are narrowing.** Survey and other data should be used to report on inequality and convergence trends regularly and transparently. Reporting on convergence should be an important part of a Voluntary National Review when considering the progress made towards the Leave No One Behind pledge.
- **Enshrine equity-based allocation criteria in their budget processes to align resources with need and reduce disparities in child survival outcomes.** In practice this means that there should be higher levels of per capita spending for those children and districts furthest from the SDG targets. Spending should be aimed at narrowing disparities based on wealth, gender, ethnicity, and other markers for disadvantage.

Recommendations on SDG1: No Poverty

Children are more than twice as likely as adults to be living in extreme poverty. In absolute numbers there are an estimated 385 million children living on less than US\$1.90 a day. Children represent half of the global extreme poor while they only represent around 32% of the global population. Children living in poverty face a higher risk of death before age 5 and malnutrition that stunts their growth and development. They also are at greater risk of being out of school, being forced into harmful labour or child marriage, or giving birth while they are still children themselves.

Tackling child poverty is an investment that brings huge returns. It is also affordable. Investing equitably in boys and girls through better healthcare, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and social protection is essential to allow children to fully develop and thrive². These investments have demonstrated benefits for children with high returns, especially when started when children are very young.

To achieve SDG 1, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Routinely measure child poverty and recognize it as an explicit priority area** in national strategies, policies and programmes to eliminate poverty in all its dimensions. Measurement of child poverty is critical – without knowing how many children are living in poverty, we cannot assess SDG progress or understand the impacts of different policies and programmes on child poverty.
- **Expand social protection to cover all children, particularly the most deprived and marginalized, and be more child sensitive**, including by ensuring that all policies and programs are explicitly designed to increase child well-being and avoid unintended harms. Social protection is widely recognised as one of the most effective interventions in the fight against child poverty. Further, Child-sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) is a well-proven approach to help realise the rights of children and help families out of poverty, and to cope with stresses and shocks - enabling families to invest on an adequate and continuing basis in their children's well-being.

Recommendations on SDG2: Zero Hunger

Good nutrition is a matter of life or death and is the difference between surviving or thriving. Good nutrition is crucial not only to achieve SDG 2 but to achieve a country's inclusive and sustainable development for all and for spurring progress across a range of SDG targets, including those that impact children's chances of survival, good learning outcomes at school, and likelihood of being an active member of the workforce.

¹ <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/policy/still-left-behind-low-res.pdf>

² UNICEF and Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017) A World Free from Child Poverty.

Malnutrition is a critical indicator of poverty and inequality, offering insights into whether children's basic needs have been met in their early years. Malnutrition disproportionately affects deprived and marginalized children, including those who are discriminated against on the basis of wealth, geographical location, disability and ethnicity. There are more hungry people in the world today than there were when the SDGs were agreed³, and Save the Children's [research](#) forecasts that even by 2030 - the SDG deadline to end hunger in all its forms - 119 million children will still find their physical and cognitive development stunted by malnutrition. The [2018 Global Nutrition Report](#) reports no country is on target to meet the nine nutrition targets that it is tracking, and just five countries are on track to meet four. Most notably, globally we are significantly behind schedule on stunting, wasting, anemia and child overweight, which are four of the six World Health Assembly targets identified as mid-way targets for SDG 2.2.

Nutrition and women and girls' empowerment – and the benefits of gender equality for economies, food security and all individuals, families, societies and nations – are critically linked. Adolescence represents a critical window for improving girls' nutritional status, at a time when experiences and the consequences of gender inequality become more acute. This makes girls, and boys, crucial participants in the design and implementation of policies and programmes to address nutrition and related issues that impact nutritional status at community and national levels.

Nutrition remains consistently under-financed, despite estimates that malnutrition in all its forms costs society up to US\$3.5 trillion per year. The World Bank Investment Framework on nutrition indicates that an additional \$7 billion is required each year to deliver on four of the six World Health Assembly 2025 targets - stunting, wasting, anemia, and exclusive breastfeeding. Yet, that amount refers only to nutrition-specific requirements; far more and better directed funding is needed for nutrition-sensitive interventions in order to end malnutrition for all by 2030. Despite this, new analysis shows global donor investments in high-impact nutrition interventions is falling – more must be done⁴.

To achieve SDG 2, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Make a step change in investment to respond to the challenge of global malnutrition in all its forms** and to ensure national nutrition plans are fully financed.
- **Increase domestic and innovative resources, driven by progressive tax reform, and supported by aid to end malnutrition by 2030.** That increase in revenue must be spent to meet the basic nutritional needs of all children, particularly the most deprived and marginalized, and investment across sectors with nutrition-sensitive interventions. The Tokyo 2020 Global Nutrition Summit provides an opportunity for governments to lead that change for their people.
- **Address gender-related drivers and impacts of malnutrition, and ensure all interventions are age- and gender-responsive.**

Recommendations on SDG3: Good Health and Well-Being

All countries have committed through the adoption of Target 3.8 to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for all by 2030. The challenge now is to translate the target on UHC, which all SDG 3 targets are dependent upon, into actions that will provide quality health coverage for all.

UHC and the realization of people's right to health should be at the centre of all health systems. Governments have the core responsibility to fulfil this right, ensuring citizens have access to an essential package of quality healthcare, free at the point of use, prioritising those furthest behind. Yet, at least half the world's population still lack access to essential health service and increasing numbers face catastrophic out-of-pocket health payments. Save the Children's projections

³ <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>

^R <https://www.r4d.org/news/new-report-shows-global-aid-for-key-nutrition-interventions-is-falling/>

show that in 2030, 1.2 billion people will spend at least 10% of their household budget on healthcare and 282 million will spend 25%.⁵

This year's HLPF must continue to drive progress to achieve SDG 3 by 2030 but also build momentum ahead of the first-ever UN High-Level Meeting (HLM) on UHC taking place during the 2019 United Nations General Assembly. A strong focus on the importance of SDG 3 at this year's HLPF including its links to achieve all SDGs is critical to galvanize the political commitment and bold actions required from both governments and key stakeholders to ensure the HLM on UHC in September 2019 is a transformational moment.

To achieve SDG 3, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Increase domestic public health expenditure towards a target of 5% of GDP, prioritizing spending at primary health care level.** While UHC is ambitious, it is achievable and affordable.
- **Raise revenue for health systems in an equitable way,** including through progressive taxation, and remove out-of-pocket payments to accessing quality health and nutrition services, such as user fees.
- **Prioritize primary healthcare as a critical first step towards achieving UHC,** with a focus on ensuring accessible and quality health and nutrition services in reach of all communities, ensuring gender-responsive services and information, with a focus on the most deprived and marginalized, driving progress on the leave no one behind pledge.
- **Ensure that all aid provided by donors is transformative,** supports nationally-driven UHC plans and leads to an increase in domestic revenue.
- **Ensure strong accountability mechanisms to drive progress on achieving Target 3.8 on UHC,** including through UHC2030, meaningful civil society engagement, and the meaningful engagement of children.

Recommendations on SDG 4: Quality Education

The world is off track for achieving free, inclusive, quality education for every child by 2030. Today, 617 million children (58%) of primary school age do not achieve minimum skill levels in literacy and numeracy, and more than 260 million children are out of school. Many of these live in areas affected by crisis and conflict.

Discrimination, exclusion and a lack of funding lock the most marginalised girls and boys out of learning. Girls are still more likely than boys to never set foot in a classroom. This is our greatest challenge: we must urgently put the most marginalised first in line for learning. Moreover, early learning is a critical factor to promote equity and ensure learning for the most marginalised children.

If funding of education continues on the current trajectory, low- and middle-income countries will not be able to fulfil the rights to education for all children before in 2100. 97 percent of education financing will have to come from national budgets. Low tax revenues and large illicit capital outflows are major hindrances to domestic spending on education.

To achieve SDG 4, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Make progressive universalism a steering principle for all education planning and financing.** All financing must be directed towards the most marginalised, in order to close the learning gap.
- **Scale up and improve equity analysis, including ensuring a mainstreamed gender analysis and implementing equity-based stepping stone targets** to achieve SDG4 (and all SDGs) to incentivise a shift in policy and practice to ensure that the needs of those furthest behind are met first, and that gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged groups are reduced.
- **Invest in developing inclusive education systems at scale for all children** and meet the individual needs of left behind children, including needs driven and exacerbated by harmful social norms, disability status, and other intersecting individual characteristics.

⁵ <https://blogs.savethechildren.org.uk/2018/11/new-research-in-2030-214-million-more-people-will-suffer-catastrophic-health-payments-than-in-2018/>

- **Ensure that safe, quality education in emergencies and protracted crises is delivered across the humanitarian development divide**, is responsive to gender and the most marginalized, with a strong focus on learning outcomes.
- **Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration⁶ and support the implementation of the Global Compact for Refugees,⁷ and protect children from violence and natural and everyday hazards in their education.**
- **Give education higher priority in national budgets and increase total tax income, including through progressive taxation.**
- **Ensure financial transparency to curb illicit financial flows and increase ODA for education.**

Recommendations on SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

To promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all there must be a greater focus on the provision of market driven and sustainable decent employment opportunities for youth, particularly for the most deprived and marginalized.

Youth must be recognized as economic agents and agents of innovation in order to drive progress towards achieving SDG8 as their role is critical to the present and future economic growth of a country. By prioritizing 'Youth Inclusive Economic Growth', youth should be assured access to decent work and a greater income. This will improve their asset accumulation and consumption options and in turn, lead to an overall improvement in a country's living standards and reduction in inequality.

The key factors to drive Youth Inclusive Economic Growth include: providing better access to training; the provision of decent jobs; the recognition and acceptance of youth contributions to economic growth by labor market actors (e.g. trade unions, private sector); and, a gender-responsive enabling environment with better incentives for youth employment, better labor market policies and regulations (e.g. minimum wage), and policy and programmatic efforts that specifically identify and address gender-related barriers to economic empowerment.

To achieve SDG 8, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Implement national action plans to recognize 'decent jobs' in the informal sector and informal economy.** 80-90% of the jobs in under developed, least developing and developing countries are in the informal sector and informal economy. More than, 80-90% of those jobs are presently occupied by deprived adolescents and youth.
- **Disaggregate data at a minimum by gender and age on adolescent and youth contributions to national economic growth** as well as national economic growth benefits for adolescents and youth, to account for their contributions and the necessity of ensuring 'Youth Inclusive Economic Growth'.
- **Incentivize adolescent and youth led economic innovation, particularly for the most deprived and marginalized.** This will promote a culture of innovation, innovative mindset and acceptance of adolescents and youth as drivers of change to achieve the decent work for all agenda and inclusive economic growth.
- **Protect adolescents and youth in the formal and informal labor market** through gender-responsive employment guarantee, insurance coverage and protection schemes.
- **Develop national policy frameworks for broadening experiential learning (for example, Work2 Learn) for deprived adolescents and youth**, including by incentivizing apprenticeship systems and programs, on the job training and enterprise-based training.
- **Recognize 'Life Skills for Success' in the national decent jobs and economic growth agenda** to empower the most deprived and marginalized adolescents and youth to respond to the challenges in the current day labor market.

⁶ <http://www.protectingeducation.org/safeschoolsdeclaration>

⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

Recommendations on SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The in-depth review of SDG 16 at this year's HLPF and the specific target to end all forms of violence against children by 2030 (Target 16.2) must drive progress towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation, as enshrined in the UNCRC.

Violence against children, both within and outside of conflict settings, is a violation of their right to be protected from harm, abuse and neglect. Almost one fifth of children worldwide are now living in areas affected by armed conflict and are disproportionately suffering the consequences⁸. Every year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 years⁹, which deprive them of their rights to health, education and protection. These are just two of multiple examples of the daily violence that children experience.

Violence against children has a huge human and economic cost. It affects more than one billion children globally and already costs the world up to US\$7 trillion a year¹⁰. Violence affects children's development, health and education in an adverse way and weakens efforts to ensure sustainable development. If we do not end all forms of violence against children, we place at risk the investments made in essential children's services as well as jeopardising efforts to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

To achieve Target 16.2, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Invest in ending all forms of violence against children:** Governments should allocate adequate funding and investments in legal and gender-responsive child protection systems. Donors should increase funding for child protection services and gender-based violence prevention and response interventions including in humanitarian crises and during recovery and reconstruction.
- **Listen to and involve children:** Governments, international agencies and partners must formalize and fund processes to ensure safe, meaningful and active inclusion of children's voices in combating the violence in their lives, and empower child led organizations to bring children's voices, and views and experience, particularly the most deprived and marginalised, to the SDG 16.2 agenda to hold governments accountable.
- **Change harmful social norms and practices through legislation, public education and campaigns and social mobilisation:** All actors, including civil society, need to work together to end harmful practices and change the social norms that drive those practices. This should include promoting gender equality, positive parenting, early learning and inclusive quality education.
- **Leave no one behind:** Governments must ensure that actions to end all forms of violence against children are inclusive and gender-responsive by reflecting the needs of the most vulnerable children such as those living in extreme poverty, girls, LGBTQI children, children on the move and children in conflict and emergencies situations.
- **End Physical and Humiliating Punishment:** Governments should enact a law banning Physical and Humiliating Punishment (PHP) of children in all settings (where such law does not exist), and should enforce and monitor the implementation of the legal ban through relevant policies, programs and wider dissemination where PHP is already prohibited.
- **End child marriage:** Governments should develop, fully finance and deliver multisectoral national action plans to end child marriage and mitigate its consequences by taking initiatives to keep girls in school, providing high quality, child-friendly health services, mobilising families and communities, and empowering girls to hold governments to account

⁸ Save the Children (2019). Stop the War on Children: Protecting Children in 21st Century Conflict

⁹ Girls Not Brides. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

¹⁰ Perezniето, P., A. Montes, S. Routier, and L. Langston (2014). The costs and economic impact of violence against children. London: Child Fund Alliance

- **Protect children in conflict:** Governments should deliver their commitments to uphold the internationally agreed standards of conduct in conflict, hold perpetrators of violations of child rights to account, and take practical action to effectively protect children and support their recovery.

Recommendations on SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

SDG17 recognises the need for a revitalized and enhanced global partnership, bringing together all stakeholders and mobilizing resources to achieve the SDGs. Governments must set the tone by strengthening national public institutions at the local and national levels with the human and financial resources to deliver quality essential services, with a focus on reaching the furthest behind first.

The private sector can also make a significant contribution: stimulating inclusive economic growth, creating decent jobs, paying fair taxes, reducing environmental footprint, and producing products that are sustainable and ethical. By putting development objectives at the core of business models, private sector innovation and resources will accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs for all, particularly the most deprived and marginalized groups.

To achieve all SDGs by 2030, Save the Children calls on governments to:

- **Ensure sufficient, equitable, and effective financing to reach the furthest behind, including:**
 - Increasing public revenue through domestic resource mobilization, particularly through progressive taxation, supported by greater international tax cooperation and tackling illicit financial flows.
 - Increasing the volume, quality, and equity of public spending on good quality and equitable essential services and ensuring that all people receive the services they need without financial hardship.
 - Setting concrete timetables for relevant donors to meet ODA commitments (towards 0.7% global target), including targets on aid for least developed countries, and orienting donor assistance towards the furthest behind groups within countries.
- **Support private sector accountability through:**
 - Supporting, incentivizing or regulating companies to capture and measure non-financial information on their environmental, social and governance impacts.
 - Ensuring the effective implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Children's Rights and Business Principles¹¹.
 - Ensuring that workers are paid a decent wage.

¹¹ Developed by Save the Children, UNICEF and the UN Global Compact, Children's Rights and Business Principles are the first comprehensive set of principles to guide companies on the full range of actions they can take in the workplace, marketplace and community to respect and support children's rights: <http://childrenandbusiness.org/>