



Input from a child rights perspective to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development review of ‘eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world’

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This report has been prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in consultation with the UN system, civil society, national human rights institutions, and other stakeholders.¹ It is submitted pursuant to the resolution of the Human Rights Council on the rights of the child (A/HRC/34/L.25), which requests OHCHR to contribute to the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development by providing inputs from a child rights perspective to the yearly thematic reviews of progress at the forum.²

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the rights of the child

The Sustainable Development Goals and targets have been defined above all to inspire action to safeguard the needs of present and future generations. A key commitment expressed in the 2030 Agenda is that no one will be left behind and those furthest behind will be reached first. Governments thereby commit to prioritize reaching all children everywhere by focusing on those most excluded and at risk of being denied their rights. As such, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a historic opportunity to promote the realization of the rights of all children in all countries to get their best start in life, to survive and to thrive, and to live free from violence and abuse.

The realization of children’s rights is the foundation for securing a sustainable future and realizing all human rights. When children do not have equal opportunities to reach their potential, all of society suffers the consequences. When children’s rights are respected, protected and fulfilled, dividends are returned in the form of global security, sustainability and human progress. Children experience disproportionate levels of persisting global poverty, and due to their particular life-stage and phase of development suffer broad and deep consequences of growing up in poverty throughout their lives,

¹ The present report builds on the OHCHR report to the Human Rights Council entitled ‘Protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (A/HRC/34/27)

² See Human Rights Council resolution 34/L.25, available at: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/L.25

hampering the fulfillment of all of their human rights.³

Children's rights are reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda by setting forth a vision for a world that invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. The Agenda should serve to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity for all children, especially those in vulnerable situations and most at risk of being left behind, including girls, refugees, ethnic minorities, children without parental care, children with disabilities, and indigenous and migrant children.

In the Agenda States make key commitments to children, in particular to promoting children's lifelong learning opportunities, to ending child labor in all its forms and to accelerating progress in reducing newborn, child and maternal mortality, and ending all such preventable deaths before 2030. Crucially, children are defined as agents of change, in recognition of their capacities to be active partners in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Given that the 2030 Agenda is to be implemented in a manner consistent with international law, State obligations pertaining to the rights specified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be protected and promoted throughout implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as reflected in its four general principles on non-discrimination (art. 2), the best interests of the child (art. 3), their right to life, survival and development (art. 6), and their right to be heard (art. 12).

Those commitments emphasize that no targets of the Sustainable Development Goals may ever be pursued to the detriment of children's rights.

An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of ensuring that no child is left behind;

Lessons learned and emerging issues likely to affect the eradication of child poverty

The 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind has great transformative potential, including to bring about necessary change and poverty reduction for the world's poorest and most excluded children. This pledge contains a crucial operative commitment that SDG targets should be met for all nations and segments of society, and that the furthest behind should be reached first. From the perspective of realizing children's rights, this calls for identification and prioritization of those children at greatest risk of being left behind, including those from the poorest households, living on the streets or separated from their parents or caregivers, those in remote and rural areas, those living with a disability, or affected by conflict and emergencies, and those discriminated against on the basis of their sex or identity.

In fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda to end poverty and promote prosperity, national strategies should aim above all to ensure that those children who are furthest behind are made the first priority of implementation efforts. All of the SDGs are relevant to children and reflective of aspects of their rights, and as such the fulfillment of the Goals in a manner in which children's corresponding rights are respected and upheld can be seen as mutually supportive of ending child poverty and realizing the rights of the child. Moreover, all governments should review existing national

³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human rights dimension of poverty - A/65/259, 9 August 2010 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/DimensionOfPoverty/Pages/Index.aspx>.

policies and approaches to ensure their consistency with children's rights and the corresponding ambitions reflected in the 2030 Agenda framework.

It is crucial to take stock of the key lessons from implementing the predecessor framework of the 2030 Agenda, the Millennium Development Goals, to inform the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in a manner which contributes to the realization of children's rights. The Millennium Development Goals were supportive in focusing political will and investment in the social sectors and contributed to substantial progress in reducing poverty and expanding access to health and education. Particular improvements were achieved through the MDGs in the overall global rate of under-5 child mortality, access to education, absolute poverty, and HIV infection rates among children under 14 years of age.⁴ This progress has contributed to the overall improved enjoyment of economic and social rights by children in the countries and regions that benefitted from these results.

In spite of these gains, however, the most critical lesson of the Millennium Development Goals was that progress was highly uneven, with services and rights continuing to be denied to children from marginalized groups and those living in the worst forms of poverty and deprivation. As such, the right to survive and thrive, to learn and grow has still not been realized for millions of children around the world, with the most disadvantaged children being left behind.

The available data on shortfalls in achieving the Millennium Development Goals reflect a harsh reality for those who were left behind, and children are over-represented among those living in poverty today. While children represent approximately one third of the world's population, almost half of persons surviving on less than \$1.25 per day are children and young people under 18 years of age. This means that close to 570 million children continue to be deprived of their dignity and the right to an adequate standard of living. Although fewer children today die before their fifth birthday, about 17,000 under the age of 5 still die every day, including from preventable causes.⁵ As many as 230 million children under 5 years of age do not officially exist, owing to failures in registering their births, and close to 58 million children of primary school age are not in school, with as many as 250 million failing to learn basic literacy or numeracy owing to poor quality of education.⁶

Poor development outcomes for children from the most marginalized communities are closely associated with inequality and discrimination, compounded by intergenerational cycles of poverty. A lack of accountability and the monitoring of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on the basis of average and aggregate national progress rates further contributed to unequal outcomes for children, by masking the situation of those being left behind within countries.

In implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing childhood poverty must be addressed as an urgent priority, as it is damaging to development outcomes and can lead to the lifelong denial of multiple rights. Addressing child poverty requires the guarantee of minimum essential levels of economic and social rights for all children in all countries, and the fulfillment of key related commitments to equality, social protection and investment in children. Moreover, ensuring equal access for all children to quality essential services is a crucial building block for ending child poverty and the fulfillment of multiple rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to an adequate standard of living.

Gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges pertaining to the

⁴ A/HRC/34/27

⁵ UNICEF, "Committing to child survival: a promise renewed. Progress report 2014"

⁶ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, "Out of school children and youth" (2014).

protection and realization of children's rights

A number of wider challenges at both global and national levels risk compromising the realization of children's rights and must be considered in efforts towards poverty eradication and the promotion of prosperity for children. For example, the global impacts of climate change and natural disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity, and children disproportionately suffer the consequences due to their particular life stage and heightened physical vulnerability.⁷ Similarly, children living in situations of conflict or humanitarian crisis are at heightened risk of being subject to violence and multiple further rights violations, and increased migration worldwide places children and their families on a precipice, with children potentially facing separation from their caregivers, alongside heightened economic insecurity, marginalization and discrimination.

Financial crises, economic uncertainty and associated austerity measures have also had a major impact on children and pose an ongoing risk to rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In accordance with the principle of non-retrogression and State obligations under article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States should not take retrogressive measures or allow the existing level of enjoyment of children's rights to deteriorate in times of economic crisis or slow-down. In addition to the challenges discussed here, specific factors particular to different national contexts have the potential to pose risks and barriers to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a manner in which child rights are protected, and should be assessed within each national context.

Inequality and discrimination

All forms of discrimination against children should be addressed in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Inequalities are often perpetuated on the basis of multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, including, inter alia, gender, age, race or ethnicity, majority or minority groups, migration status, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability and income level. In addition to the challenges faced by children from marginalized and excluded groups, certain children face particularly heightened risks specific to their life phase and circumstances, including, inter alia, children with disabilities or chronic illness; migrant children; minority and indigenous children; children in street situations, children in institutions or children without parental support; child victims of economic exploitation, including those performing work that is harmful to their health; child victims of violence, sexual exploitation and abuse; asylum seeking and refugee children and children affected by conflict, foreign occupation or emergencies; children who have not had their births registered; children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or intersex; children living in families and communities where drug abuse is common; children subjected to harmful practices; and children living in remote areas, in socioeconomically disadvantaged urban areas and in situations of extreme economic deprivation.

The 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind and reach those furthest behind first is strongly aligned with the human rights imperative to tackle inequality and discrimination as a central pillar for the realization of children's rights worldwide. Inequality and discrimination are caused by policy decisions that do not prioritize the realization of children's rights in situations of the most extreme poverty, marginalization and vulnerability.

In the 2030 Agenda there is a crucial reaffirmation of the obligation of all States to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status. In addition, States make critical commitments under target 10.3 to ensure equality of opportunities and reduce inequalities of outcomes, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices. This is consistent with international human rights law including article 2

⁷ See UNICEF Office of Research, *The Challenges of Climate Change: Children on the Front Line* (Florence, 2014).

of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on non-discrimination. States further commit to combating income and wealth inequalities and detail specific objectives to address inequality and discrimination under Goal 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries, and under Goal 5 which contains the crucial commitment to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Furthermore, there are targets to promote greater equality in outcomes and universal access throughout all the Goals, as well as commitments to end discrimination under Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies.

Discriminatory norms and practices tend to be strongly entrenched in societies and can be a central determinant of unequal outcomes for children in vulnerable situations. For example “son bias”, whereby boys are advantaged with respect to educational and other opportunities over and above girls, reinforces the multiple other forms of gender discrimination that girls face. Similarly, in communities where it is common for parents to avoid registering children born with disabilities, these children face multiple deprivations of their rights and particular challenges to accessing essential services.

In order to combat stigmatization and discriminatory social norms and practices, including in particular those based on gender discrimination, it is necessary to adopt proactive policies and measures in this regard. In many contexts, a review of existing policies and legislation will be necessary to ensure a supportive environment for the protection of the rights of the child in the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This will require legislation to be reviewed from the perspective of child rights and the principles of equality and non-discrimination, to ensure that it does not allow for discrimination on any grounds. New legislation may also be needed in some contexts to provide adequate protection against discrimination. To achieve substantive equality, temporary special measures intended to bring about greater equality in outcomes for those who have been previously disadvantaged due to discrimination may be required.

Violence, exploitation and abuse of children

Living a life without violence is the right of all children. It is essential to their development and wellbeing throughout their lives. Moreover, protecting children from violence is an explicit obligation set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols. The protection of children and the promotion of their well-being are closely linked to poverty reduction and the development and well-being of their societies. Violence against children takes place in every country and can have devastating long-term impacts on the wellbeing of girls and boys. Victims of violence are also more likely to become future perpetrators.

In the past year up to 1 billion children have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence. One in four children suffers physical abuse and nearly one in five girls is sexually abused at least once in their lives. Violence is often a core dimension of inequality and protection against violence is both central to ensuring greater equality overall and as a foundation to support children’s access to services. For example, violence, exploitation and abuse affect children’s physical and mental health in both the short and long term, compromising their ability to break out of intergenerational cycles of poverty, including by achieving a good level of education.

The inherent link between the prevention of violence against children and human development must be recognized as a core priority for the 2030 Agenda implementation, recognizing the intersections between eradicating violence against children as called for under Target 16.2 and the fulfillment of all related targets and overall sustainable development outcomes across generations. The inclusion of a specific target to end violence against children in the SDGs is a crucial step forward in the struggle to end violence against children worldwide, and the fulfillment of this human right and 2030 Agenda commitment should be seen as central to ending poverty and promoting prosperity for children and

the societies in which they grow up. In accordance with the UN Study on Violence Against Children recommendations for the elimination of all forms of violence,⁸ no violence against children is justifiable and all violence against children is preventable.⁹

Violence against children can be perpetrated in both the public and private spheres and takes many different forms including, inter alia, armed violence, trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, gender-based violence, bullying, female genital mutilation or cutting, child marriage, violent child discipline practices and other harmful practices. Children in certain circumstances are more vulnerable to violence, including those in detention or living in institutions, children with disabilities, children living or working on the streets, those in situations of conflict or displacement and children who are internally displaced, refugees, or migrants, in particular those who are unaccompanied.

The fulfillment of all relevant targets under Sustainable Development Goals 16 and 5 addressing protection from violence against children and related fundamental freedoms should be a priority for the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda and the objectives under review of ending poverty and promoting prosperity. Commitments under target 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children in all circumstances; and targets under Goal 5 to eliminate violence against women and girls (target 5.2) and to end harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (target 5.3), are particularly important in this respect. Further to these, Goal 16 contains a crucial target for children with respect to target 16.3 to promote the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, which should in its implementation include children's access to juvenile justice systems.

States should implement the 2030 Agenda commitments in these respects in accordance with general comment No. 13 (2011) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, as well as the related general comments.¹⁰ At national level both preventive and remedial action are needed, and child protection systems must be strengthened in an integrated manner, including through the transformation of legislation and policies to prohibit all forms of violence against children, alongside supportive measures in relation to services and social norms.

Exposure to hazardous chemicals and toxic wastes

The Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes has highlighted that the levels of environmental prevalence of toxic chemicals has created a "silent pandemic" of disease and disability affecting millions of children worldwide.¹¹ Children are exposed to toxic chemicals in many circumstances, even before they leave their mother's womb. They are also exposed through the use of hazardous pesticides in food production or when engaging in agricultural work, or when playing in nearby fields that have just been sprayed, but also at home because of the cooking facilities, the pesticides/herbicides used, and through the substances used in toy production. The Special Rapporteur has also stressed that "Children in low-income, minority, indigenous and marginalized communities are more at risk, as exposure levels in such communities are often higher and are

⁸ Pinheiro, Independent Expert for the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, World report on Violence Against Children, 2006. Available at: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>.

⁹ Ibid. at p. 6.

¹⁰ See, inter alia, Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comments No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment and No. 10 (2007) on children's rights in juvenile justice; and joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014) on harmful practices.

¹¹ Baskut Tunsak, Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, report on Impact of Toxics and Pollution on Children's Rights, A/HRC/33/41, 2 August 2016, available at: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/33/41.

exacerbated by malnutrition, with the adverse effects inadequately monitored.” According to the World Health Organization, over 1.7 million children under the age of 5 are still dying from modifiable environmental factors, such as air pollution and water contamination.¹² The Convention of the Rights of the Child explicitly requires States to provide “adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution” (art. 24). In its General comment No. 15, the Committee urged States to take measures to address the dangers and risks that local environmental pollution poses to children’s health in all settings.¹³

Access to justice

Children living in poverty are disproportionately affected by the challenges they face in accessing justice. According to a report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the UN General Assembly, major obstacles impede those living in poverty from accessing justice, including the cost of legal advice, administrative fees and other collateral costs. In addition, many laws are inherently biased against those living in poverty.¹⁴ Access to justice is a fundamental right in itself and an important basis for accountability and the fulfillment of all the SDGs. It is also an essential prerequisite for the protection and promotion of all of the rights of the child and wider human rights.¹⁵ Access to justice for children means that children, or their appropriate advocates where applicable, must be able to use and trust the legal system to protect their human rights. As such the legal system must provide children the means to protect their rights through a transparent and efficient process, in which mechanisms are available, affordable and accountable.

Private sector accountability

Private actors including business have the potential either to support or undermine child rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Business activities that do not respect children’s rights pose a risk, including for example in the case of business enterprises that have adverse impacts on the rights of local and indigenous communities, or on the environment. Certain business activities can pose a particular risk to children in relation to their role in labor standards, income inequality, land use and rights and environmental impact. While the private sector is seen as a crucial partner for the financing and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the prominent role that it has been given in the 2030 Agenda is likely to further increase its participation in the provision of public services in many national contexts. This may pose a considerable risk to the safeguarding of children’s rights, as the privatization of essential services is seldom regulated effectively, potentially allowing for commercial interests to dominate over and above the rights of children to such services regardless of their or their families’ ability to pay.

In its General Comment 16, the Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that: “States are not relieved of their obligations under the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto when their functions are delegated or outsourced to a private business or non-profit organization. A State will thereby be in breach of its obligations under the Convention where it fails to respect, protect and fulfill children’s rights in relation to business activities and operations that impact on children.”¹⁶ Further to this, the Committee recommends that States should require businesses to adopt child-rights due diligence measures to ensure [they] identify, prevent and mitigate their impact on children’s

¹² Figures for 2012: WHO, Preventing Disease through Healthy Environments (2016).

¹³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24), 17 April 2013, CRC/C/GC/15.

¹⁴ Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Extreme poverty and human rights, A/67/278, 9 August 2012, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/Accessstojustice.aspx>.

¹⁵ OHCHR, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Access to justice for children, A/HRC/25/35, 16 December 2013, para. 3.

¹⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children’s rights, CRC/C/GC/16, 17 April 2013, para. 25.

rights including across their business relationships and within global operations.¹⁷ As the 2030 Agenda does not specify adequate mechanisms to ensure the accountability of private sector implementation partners, it is essential that all States create such mechanisms. These should include legal requirements on businesses to take steps to identify, prevent and address human rights abuses, with special attention to the needs of children; and to hold businesses to account for any human rights abuses committed, enabling those whose rights have been violated to access justice and effective remedy. It is especially important that States proactively implement such measures specifically for children, as they frequently lack legal standing, knowledge of and access to remedy mechanisms, financial resources or adequate legal representation.¹⁸

Child rights considerations pertaining to Goals under review

All Sustainable Development Goals and targets should be implemented in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the general comments and recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child relevant to each Goal and target area. While not all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets refer to children, they are all relevant to children's well-being, the fulfillment of their potential and the protection and realization of their human rights. For example, bringing about free primary and secondary education for all children relies upon access to safe water and sanitation facilities, and requires environments that are safe and free from violence against children. Adequate investment in health and education services can be dependent on combating corruption to ensure that sufficient domestic resources are available. Similarly, ensuring that children survive and grow up in good health relies upon adequate air quality and on other basic needs, which are undermined by the impacts of climate change.

The integrated and holistic nature of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets thus reflects the indivisible, mutually reinforcing nature of the rights of the child and all human rights. Poverty is multidimensional and often intergenerational, and when rights are denied in one area (such as access to services), they are frequently also denied or violated in other respects, including for example, in exposure to violence and abuse, trafficking or child labor.

A human rights-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda therefore requires a wide-ranging approach in which States ensure (a) the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, including access to quality services; (b) civil and political rights, including protection from all forms of violence; and (c) the implementation of key economic and environmental goals that reinforce progress in achieving more sustainable and equitable development for all children, regardless of where they live. Implementing the 2030 Agenda in accordance with the cross-cutting commitments to the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination will also be central to the fulfillment of the aim to ensure that no one is left behind.

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Children represent a disproportionate proportion of the world's poor, and in nearly every country in the world they are more likely to live in poverty than any other group. While children represent approximately one third of the world's population, almost half of those surviving on less than \$1.25 per day are children and young people under 18 years of age. Child poverty is also an increasingly global challenge, with growing numbers of children in comparatively rich countries living in poverty as

¹⁷ Ibid, paras. 62.

¹⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights, 17 April 2013, CRC/C/GC/16, para. 4(c).

a result of economic instability and austerity policies.¹⁹ By focusing on children governments can thus address poverty more effectively and build the foundation for sustainable and inclusive development outcomes. Moreover, addressing childhood poverty must be a priority for all countries as its consequences for development are far-reaching, and lead to the lifelong denial of multiple child rights. For example, the consequences of growing up with inadequate nutrition, poor healthcare, water or sanitation, and without going to school lead to lifelong deficits, such as in physical and cognitive growth, learning and protection, that are difficult or impossible to overcome later in life, sustaining poverty across generations. Conversely, when children grow up free from deprivation and want, they and their countries are more likely to escape poverty and experience sustainable and equitable development.

Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims crucially to end extreme poverty, including for children, and to halve the proportion of children living in poverty in all its dimensions. These commitments are strongly supported by cross-cutting commitments to addressing inequalities, gender inequality and discrimination, ending violence and harmful practices against children, and by targets to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and to upgrade slums. A core agenda for action to address child poverty should include tackling wider economic and social inequality and discrimination, improving inclusive access to quality social services, expanding child-sensitive social protection, addressing the interrelated causes of child poverty, in particular violence against women and children, and collecting reliable disaggregated data on the multidimensional aspects of child poverty.

Inequality and discrimination take the form of unequal access to essential goods and services, which are the foundation of basic rights enjoyed by all children, including rights to food, water, health and education. Ensuring equal access for all children to quality essential services is a crucial building block both for addressing child poverty, and the fulfilment of all goals and multiple rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to an adequate standard of living. Furthermore, the promise in target 1.3 pertaining to social protection including “social protection floors” (minimum guarantees for those families and individuals in situations of the greatest need) provides an essential foundation for addressing child poverty by guaranteeing minimum essential levels of economic and social rights. In its implementation the focus should first and foremost be on the poorest children living in situations of greatest vulnerability, and on the expansion of child-sensitive social protection programmes.

For key SDG indicators aimed at monitoring child poverty in its various dimensions (1.1.1 - Proportion of children living on extreme poverty on less than US\$1.90 a day; 1.2.1 - Proportion of children living below the national poverty line; 1.2.2 - Proportion of children living in multidimensional poverty, according to national definitions), data is available for less than an estimated 50% of all countries, and disaggregated data is not consistently available for the remainder.²⁰ As such, extensive investment in data and monitoring of development outcomes for children will be essential to ensure that children, and especially those at greatest risk of being left behind, are counted. Close monitoring of outcomes for children for other closely related indicators, including 1.3.1 on social protection system coverage, and 1.a.2 addressing government expenditure on essential services, will be critical.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable

¹⁹ See UNICEF, Save the Children and others, “Child poverty: indicators to measure progress for the SDGs” (March 2015).

²⁰ UNICEF

agriculture

Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity will rely on addressing the root causes of poverty and breaking the cycle across generations, which will only be possible through investment in children's nutrition and overall health. Making progress on childhood nutrition is critical not only to achieving Goal 2 but also many other SDGs and targets, and ensuring that children have good nutrition sets countries on the path to development. According to UNICEF, although there has been progress in reducing stunting due to malnutrition globally, almost one-quarter of children under five years old were stunted in 2015. If the current global trajectory continues, 119 million children under five years old will be stunted in 2030.²¹ Poor nutrition in early childhood has far-reaching adverse impacts, including on a child's cognitive development, damaging their educational abilities and future life chances, including their income-earning potential and chances of breaking out of cycles of poverty.

Underpinning early childhood development and the fulfillment of the right to health, Goal 2 commits to ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition, and has the potential to support realization of the right to food, as specified in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 24 and 27). The achievement of targets 2.1 (by 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round) and 2.2 (by 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons) are especially important in this regard.

Moreover, a gender perspective is essential to ending hunger. It is essential to address discrimination against women in order to end hunger and address the nutritional needs of children, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women (2.2), as women's empowerment and control over resources reinforces the nutritional health of their children (2.1). Ensuring women's rights and improving their access to land, resources and incomes (2.3; also 1.4) will be critical to achieving SDG targets in this respect and childhood nutrition status globally. Adolescent girls in poor countries face particularly high risks of anemia and malnutrition, which can have long-term consequences for their health and that of their children. In addition, the economic activities and resources of small-scale women food producers should in particular be supported. A significant share of women work in the agri-food sector in developing countries, but these predominantly rural women's potential contribution to sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition is often constrained by gender-based discrimination in accessing economic and productive resources – including land and finance.

Integrated, inclusive and equitable approaches to addressing nutrition for children will be key, with multi-sectoral approaches spanning water, sanitation and hygiene, gender, social protection, agriculture, health and education sectors. Interventions in these and related sectors should be implemented in conjunction with context-specific child nutrition-sensitive interventions, with the support of increased investment as needed. Moreover, relevant nutrition commitments already undertaken by States beyond the 2030 Agenda framework should be upheld, including Nutrition for Growth, the 2015 G7 pledge at Elmau to lift 500m out of hunger and malnourishment by 2030, and World Health Assembly 2025 nutrition targets on stunting, anaemia, low birth weight, childhood overweight, breastfeeding and wasting.

An equity-based approach to nutrition must be implemented for all children in particular those at greatest risk of being left behind, with support for initiatives that promote education on nutrition and

²¹ FACTSHEET: UNICEF Progress for Children 2015 Report, available at: https://www.unicef.bg/assets/Annual_Reports/Progress_Children_Report/Fact_Sheet_ENG.pdf

adequate and equitable infant and young child feeding at the household level for both girls and boys. National statistical systems should provide regular disaggregated data on the prevalence of stunting and malnutrition among children under age five, and key nutrition indicators such as breastfeeding and anemia in adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months of life, low birth weight, anemia indicators related to complementary foods and feeding for infants 6-23 months, should be monitored consistently.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Children's health and well-being is critical to eradicating poverty and realizing human rights. Child health and wellbeing is both an outcome and a determinant for development, and child and maternal mortality rates are among the most important indicators for development progress, as the survival of newborns, young children and women during delivery is dependent on a host of different facets including, but not limited to; access to health, quality of care, sanitary conditions and access to essential medicines. Fulfilling Goal 3 and key relevant targets will therefore be central to fulfilling the aims to end poverty, promote prosperity and bring about equal outcomes for all.

The comprehensive nature of Goal 3 on health is supportive of the right to health, and for all children to survive and to thrive. It addresses the multiple health risks faced by children throughout their life course, including under-5 mortality and both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Target 3.2 makes key commitments pertaining to the right to life, including to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age by 2030, and to reduce neonatal and under-5 child mortality. Further targets under this goal addressing the social and economic dimensions of health services recognize factors affecting the health outcomes of the most marginalized children, particularly target 3.8 to achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

The broad objectives of ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing are highly synergetic with achieving gender equality. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (target 5.6) and sexual and reproductive health services (target 3.7) is directly linked to the reduction of maternal mortality (target 3.1), and reinforces ending communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS (target 3.3). Despite being among the most important indicators of progress, child and maternal mortality rates remain unacceptably high. Among adolescent girls, maternal mortality remains the second leading cause of death of girls aged 15-19 with 70,000 adolescents in developing countries dying annually of causes related to pregnancy.²² Further, according to the World Health Organization self-harm and suicide is now the leading cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15-19.

States should implement Goal 3 commitments in accordance with article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and related general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in this regard. This requires inequalities in health outcomes to be addressed by ensuring an approach based on equality and non-discrimination for children, for example prioritizing the most disadvantaged children and population groups with the highest burden of morbidity and mortality. It is crucial that universal health coverage on the basis of a continuum of care for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health is developed in all contexts. The major gaps and inequities in health outcomes that exist for different groups of the population must be closed, by prioritizing the policies and services that benefit the most marginalized and strengthen national and community health systems. States should further take special measures to address bottlenecks in health service delivery, ensuring quality maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services that do not discriminate. Quality health care services for all births to protect the survival and rights of the newborn child is particularly

²² http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/newsletter/mps_newsletter_issue6.pdf

important, given the particularly heightened risk of mortality that newborns face.

States and stakeholders should further consult the guidance available on the application of a human rights-based approach to policies and programmes to reduce and eliminate preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age (see A/HRC/27/31).

All health targets are dependent to substantial extent on attaining the key target 3.8 on universal health coverage. In the implementation of this target the children and families who are consistently excluded from health-care systems must be reached first. It is vital that governments address both coverage and access to essential health services, and are accountable for upholding the right to health in this respect for children from all groups and regions, regardless of their or their families' ability to pay for health services. In many contexts national expenditures are far below the necessary levels to realize the right to health for children, and substantial investment will be required, with a focus on sustainable public financing, in accordance with the human rights principle of investing the maximum available resources to realize the right to health. Governments should report on how they are financing and structuring health services to reach those furthest behind first with quality health coverage, with out-of-pocket payments for these services being reduced and measured on the basis of indicator 3.8.2 to monitor the proportion of household income spent on healthcare.

Moreover, improving children's health and well-being will require integrated service delivery and interventions beyond the health sector. There is a particular need for a more integrated approach in which related SDG targets, including on peace and stability, violence against children and against women and girls, water and sanitation, and the prevalence of hazardous chemicals in the environment, and gender and age-related barriers to healthcare including lack of access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, among others, are addressed. National and community health systems in the context of emergency preparedness, response and resilience must be strengthened; and increasing attacks on health systems in situations of conflict are a major human rights concern which are seriously undermining children's right to health in such contexts. Violence against children also contributes to poorer health outcomes, as survivors are more likely to experience multiple mental and physical health problems, such as diabetes and substance abuse.

Target 3.9 to substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination is especially important for the realization of children's right to health, as their exposure both in utero and at a young age to such chemicals causes augmented rates of mortality and /or serious lifelong consequences for their health and wellbeing, due to their vulnerable stage of physical and cognitive development. Current levels of the prevalence of toxic chemicals in the environment are leading to a pandemic of disease and disability affecting millions of children worldwide,²³ and are disproportionately affecting children in low-income, minority, indigenous and marginalized communities, as exposure levels in such communities are often higher, and are exacerbated by malnutrition, and a lack of adequate monitoring. In accordance with the Convention of the Rights of the Child, States must provide "adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution" (art. 24), and should take measures to address the dangers and risks that local environmental pollution poses to children's health in all settings.²⁴

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

²³ Baskut Tunsak, Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, report on Impact of Toxics and Pollution on Children's Rights, A/HRC/33/41, 2 August 2016, available at: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/33/41.

²⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24), 17 April 2013, CRC/C/GC/15.

Gender responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents an enormous opportunity to support the realization of children's rights, achieve gender equality and girls' empowerment, and to achieve multiple objectives of the SDGs including ending poverty, combating inequalities, building peaceful, just and inclusive societies and protecting wider planetary sustainability. While gender equality is a stand-alone goal of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, it must also be viewed and implemented as a cross-cutting theme which is essential for the enjoyment of children's rights and all human rights. Furthermore, gender stereotypes are at the root of discrimination, harmful practices, violence against girls and women and other obstacles to the realization of children's rights, including poverty and lack of equal economic and other opportunities. Goal 5 is particularly crucial to the realization of human rights for girls, including through the implementation of existing commitments made in this respect via major United Nations conferences and Summits such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and sustained implementation of international human rights legal frameworks.

Goal 5 includes numerous commitments that should be considered supportive of the realization of the rights of the child and girls' rights in particular. These include to remove all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere (5.1), to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls (5.2), including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, as well as eliminate harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (5.3). There are also key targets intended to correct gendered economic imbalances, by valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies (5.4), and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household. It aims to give women and girls control over their bodies, and whether they wish to have a family, by ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (5.6). Agenda 2030 further offers a chance to address the particular challenges and barriers faced by adolescent girls, including child marriage and unwanted pregnancy, protect against HIV transmission, staying safe from female genital mutilation, and acquiring the education and skills they need to realize their potential.

To achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2030, progress must be accelerated significantly. While progress has been made towards reducing discrimination, girls and women continue to face extensive discrimination and human rights violations in law, custom and practice. According to the World Health Organization pregnancy and complications during childbirth continue to be the second leading cause of death of adolescent girls, and while child marriage is on a downward trajectory, this is subject to major regional disparities. Violence against girls and women in private and public spaces is a challenge across all countries and regions. The latest comparable data from 87 countries (including 30 from developed regions) shows that 19 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months.²⁵ Violence against girls undermines their self-esteem, their opportunities to finish school, their freedom of movement, and as a result has major adverse impacts on their ability to escape poverty.

The prevention of violence against girls and women including trafficking and exploitation requires working with girls, boys and youth to provide them with the information and skills they need to stay safe. The engagement of parents and communities in awareness-raising activities and community-driven early warning initiatives to monitor and report violence, exploitation and trafficking cases, is also essential. Child protection systems, service providers, security and law enforcement agencies need to be enabled to respond to identified concerns and provide adequate services to address the associated challenges. Members of the emergency response system, police and judiciary at local, regional and national levels should be trained in detection and response to gender-based violence and

²⁵ OHCHR input to HLPF

gender sensitivity to ensure appropriate judicial and other response mechanisms to incidences of harmful practices, sexual violence and exploitation. Furthermore, governments should ensure effective linkages and coordination between relevant sectors with a child protection remit, including the health, education and justice sectors, to effectively prevent and respond to violence against girls and young women. Universal access to and gender-responsive services and support for all survivors of violence should be provided, and all relevant stakeholders should be engaged to take effective action to challenge social norms that accept violence against girls and young women.

While the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation has been gradually declining over the past three decades, rates remain high. At least 200 million girls have been subject to such practices in the 30 countries with representative prevalence data, and over 750 million women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday.²⁶ Recognizing the complex and multiple causes of child, early and forced marriage, a holistic and multi-sectoral approach is needed. Girls must be empowered with the skills and capabilities necessary to determine their own futures (skills building, education, health information and services, etc.). It is also crucial to transform gender norms and practices that drive child marriages through community-based and social movements. This includes working with communities, traditional leaders, families as well as engaging men and boys. Moreover, the legal and policy environment must protect girls from child marriage. It is also important to provide particular support to already married girls, and girls at greatest risk of child, early and forced marriage.

Female genital mutilation is a harmful practice that violates the human rights of girls and women. Gender inequality and discriminatory social, cultural and religious norms relating to girls' and women's positions in the family, community and society underlie such practices and prevent girls and women from enjoying their human rights.²⁷ Tackling gender discriminatory views, social norms and attitudes toward girls and their sexuality is critical to eliminating female genital mutilation. Governments should put in place effective legislation banning female genital mutilation, including the medicalization of the practice, and such measures should be effectively enforced. There is also a need for investment in awareness-raising about girls as rights holders, about the laws that protect them from female genital mutilation, and engagement with communities in transforming social norms and gender roles to address the root causes of female genital mutilation. Behavior change needs to be supported by working with traditional, community and religious leaders as well as parents, teachers, girls, boys and community members. The health sector response to female genital mutilation should be strengthened through the provision of appropriate guidelines, training and support to health professionals on how to detect and provide appropriate care to girls and women affected by female genital mutilation.

Women and girls do the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work, including caregiving and household tasks, in every region. On average women spend 19 per cent of their time daily on unpaid labor, compared with 8 per cent for men.²⁸ As a result of this burden, coupled with paid labor, women and girls work longer hours and have less time for rest, self-care, learning, employment and other activities, such as political participation. An increase in the number of hours spent on household chores also correlates with a decline in school attendance for girls, and therefore holds them back from the enjoyment of their rights and future opportunities to break cycles of poverty.

Girls' access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights is often limited by legal and other barriers, particularly restrictions by marital status, third party authorization and age.²⁹ The impact of these legal frameworks is evidenced in girls' ability to make their own decisions regarding

²⁶ OHCHR input to HLPF

²⁷ United Nations General Assembly (2014). Report of the Secretary General on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations. A/69/211

²⁸ OHCHR input to HLPF

²⁹ Sexual Health, Human Rights, and the Law." World Health Organization. (2015).

sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care. According to data available from 45 countries, only one in two girls and women, aged 15-49 years (married or in union), make their own decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care.³⁰ Girls and young women are disproportionately affected by and vulnerable to SRHR violations due to entrenched gender inequalities and the lower value attributed to girls and women in many societies. This is particularly true for girls and young women who live in poverty, in crisis or emergency settings or who belong to vulnerable and excluded groups,³¹ who often face additional risks to their health and wellbeing due to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination. While complications due to pregnancy and childbirth is a leading cause of death for adolescent girls globally,³² younger adolescents face even higher risks related to pregnancy and childbirth³³ and it is estimated that 2 million births occur among this younger age group in low-resource countries each year.³⁴

Comprehensive sexuality education and information for all children, adolescents and youth in and out of school is crucial to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge about relationships, gender equality and decision-making to enable girls to make their own informed choices to protect their sexual and reproductive rights. There is a need for youth-friendly, safe, comprehensive, sexual and reproductive health services and information, accessible to all children, adolescents and youth, free of any requirements for spousal or parental consent, or other legal or policy restrictions. SRH services and information must also be accessible in humanitarian settings, when girls are at a greater risk of unintended pregnancy.

As governments and other stakeholders continue to implement SDG 5, concerted efforts will be instrumental to addressing existing gaps in implementation, particularly in the areas of structural barriers to gender equality, strengthening accountability mechanisms at the national levels, increasing investment and financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and increasing data collection capacity. Governments should place greater focus on policies that address the structural, power and political dynamics that push girls, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, further behind and deepen inequalities.

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Children are at heightened physical vulnerability to environmental degradation and pollution, with children in the poorest countries and from the most disadvantaged communities being particularly affected. Children have a right to nutritious food and clean drinking water, “taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution,” including of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Hazardous substances in the oceans and wider ecosystem have a disproportionate impact on children due to their developing physiology and higher exposure levels. Children living in poverty are particularly affected, for example, by the impacts of depleted fish stocks due to commercial over-fishing, where their families and communities depended on smaller scale fishing as a source of nutritious food and income. National and international actions to protect ecosystems, and to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, are thus essential to underpinning the protection of children’s rights. Protecting the oceans, seas and marine resources is a matter of equity,

³⁰ DHS/MICs 2015

³¹ Defined as individuals and groups who are systematically blocked from accessing rights, opportunities and resources.

³² WHO Fact sheet Adolescents: health risks and solutions, Updated May 2017. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs345/en/>

³³ WHO Fact sheet, Maternal mortality, Updated November 2016. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/>

³⁴ Neal, S., Matthews, Z., Frost, M. et al. Childbearing in adolescents aged 12–15 years in low resource countries: A neglected issue. New estimates from demographic and household surveys in 42 countries. *Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand.* 2012; 91: 1114–1118

and failures to do so risk extensive adverse impacts on the rights and wellbeing of children.

Moreover, the oceans produce most of the clean oxygen on the planet, and the depletion of marine life and high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere leads to ocean acidification, putting at risk the main source of clean air that is sustainably available. Because of their life stage and physiological development, children are also especially vulnerable to ingesting harmful chemicals affecting the marine life food chain as a result of increasing levels of ocean pollution, such as mercury and other substances. States should take action to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources, and children and youth can play an important role in bringing about the behavior change required to do so, for example by being informed on and engaged in the reduced use of plastics, recycling and the imperative not to dump harmful chemicals and other wastes into oceans and other water systems. Moreover, effective legal frameworks, regulation and frameworks for accountability are needed within all countries to ensure that all actors support rather than undermine the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources.

Recommendations to accelerate progress for children at greatest risk of being left behind: Cross-cutting issues including Goal 17

Financing approaches, as well as data, monitoring and accountability can be considered as key cross-cutting issues addressed in Goal 17 targets, however also underpin the overall implementation of the framework in a manner in which child rights are protected and poverty is addressed. To accelerate progress for children at greatest risk of being left behind it is crucial that specific child rights obligations in these areas are respected and fulfilled by all States in their national planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This calls for adequate financing and investment in children, prioritizing those in situations of greatest vulnerability and marginalization; participation throughout the implementation and follow-up and review processes, with effective measures to bring about accountability; and a human rights approach to data and monitoring, including through transparency and quality disaggregated data to reflect the situation of all children, particularly those who are too often uncared for, yet also at greatest risk of being left behind.

Ensure a child rights-based approach to financing and investment in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Insufficient public spending on children, which is also not adequately inclusive, is a central barrier to the realization of the rights of the child. Sustainable, equitable and broad-based investment in children is essential to fulfill the obligations of States to implement their rights, as are the relevant commitments contained in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and throughout the 2030 Agenda, including its vision of “a world which invests in its children”. This is consistent with the obligation for States under article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to dedicate the maximum available resources to investment in children.

Moreover, investing in children is essential to fulfill key Goal 17 targets, and States make several related commitments as part of the cross-cutting means of implementation indicators throughout the 2030 Agenda framework, including to: regularly monitor the proportion of resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes (indicator 1.a.1); the proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection, (indicator 1. a.2); the proportion of government recurrent and capital spending to sectors that disproportionately benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups (indicator 1.b.1); as well as on programme coverage

and results achieved in major SDG priority areas, such as education, health, water and sanitation.

As is further elaborated in the general comment No. 19 (2016) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights and in Human Rights Council resolution 28/19, States must ensure effective, efficient, equitable, transparent and sustainable public budget decision-making to realize all children's rights, especially for those in vulnerable situations. Thus, in implementing the 2030 Agenda, all States should improve reporting on expenditures and programs that impact children and increase investments on child-focused SDG priorities, supported by results-based reporting for equitable spending on children. This requires that States make equitable investment in all children within their jurisdiction the priority in budget and fiscal decision-making, ensuring prioritization of the rights of the most excluded groups of children first, without discriminating against any child or group of children. Where resources are limited children's rights should be given precedence, with special funds directed towards the most marginalized and vulnerable groups of children and families, in accordance with the international obligations of States in this regard.

Mobilizing adequate international and domestic resources and combating corruption

Domestic resource mobilization is a key source of revenue for implementing the 2030 Agenda and, as set out in target 17.1, States should mobilize domestic resources through progressive tax and non-tax revenues. In order to allocate the maximum available resources for investment in children it is vital that States take all necessary measures to combat corruption, illicit financial flows and tax avoidance, including through global partnerships and cooperation. As specified in general comment No. 19 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and in target 16.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, States must either seek or provide international cooperation in accordance with their national resources. International development assistance and cooperation will continue to make an essential contribution to mobilizing the resources needed, and States must honour their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national income for this purpose.³⁵

Transparent, participatory and accountable public finance management systems

Public finance management systems must be transparent and accountable on the basis of both internal and external monitoring and audit processes, which include compliance measures and mechanisms for remedy and redress. States should enable public budget monitoring by civil society, including by children themselves. Key budget documents should be made public during the annual budget cycle in a timely manner and financial systems should be designed in a manner in which clear and transparent budget lines for spending on children, including those in vulnerable situations, are specified. Information should be disaggregated to enable stakeholders to identify and track budget line items intended to benefit children.³⁶ Additionally, children should be empowered to track and provide views on public expenditure in accordance with their evolving capabilities and States should ensure child-friendly, age-appropriate and safe mechanisms for them to provide such input.

Bring about accountability for delivering on the 2030 Agenda and realizing the rights of the child

Successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the overarching aims of ending poverty and promoting prosperity, will depend on strong accountability through which Governments are answerable for delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals for all children everywhere, and children, youth and civil society have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.

³⁵ see A/HRC/28/33

³⁶ See A/HRC/28/33 and Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 19, para. 84.

Accountability for the 2030 Agenda must be substantially more comprehensive than that which existed for the Millennium Development Goals. It should promote the implementation of the SDGs by going beyond simply monitoring, to the creation of a system of robust, regular, effective, open and inclusive accountability. In the 2030 Agenda Governments promise that follow-up and review will be guided by the principles of universality, transparency, participation and respect for human rights, and will have a particular focus on those furthest behind. Leaving no one behind in accountability processes means addressing the financial, linguistic, logistical, technological or age barriers that prevent the participation of children and of specific groups; and engaging all people, especially excluded groups, in regular and continuous interactive dialogue to assess progress. Access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms are explicitly committed to in SDG targets 16.7 and 16.10.

Social accountability and the participation of stakeholders including children

Participatory approaches to accountability help generate crucial information on gaps in implementation and on those being left behind, and can thereby inform the need for course correction throughout the implementation process. They are also important for the empowerment of children as rights holders. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the children's right to express their views freely in matters affecting them in accordance with their evolving capacities (art. 12). The Committee notes that States should budget for and provide contextually appropriate materials, mechanisms and institutions to enable the meaningful participation of children.³⁷ Proactive measures are needed to support participatory forms of social accountability, for example through the provision of safe spaces online and offline for children to prepare their inputs; timely, accessible information in formats and languages that children can understand; and formal mechanisms at all levels through which their input on the realization of their rights can be heard and acted upon by decision makers.

Creating safe and enabling environments to support engagement

States are responsible for ensuring an enabling environment for accountability, and must guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms and support both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms for remedy and redress. In the 2030 Agenda this is underpinned by specific commitments under Goal 16, including target 16.3 on equal access to justice for all and target 16.10 to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms. Civil society engagement should be protected by legislation and measures ensuring respect for the rights to association, assembly and freedom of expression in both law and practice. States should also take proactive measures to address the financial, linguistic, logistical, and technological or age barriers that could prevent the participation of specific groups.

Transparency and access to information

Transparency is essential, and disaggregated data and information should be made freely available in a timely manner and broadly disseminated in formats that are comprehensible for children and all other stakeholders. Data and information should address, both progress and set-backs towards the achievement of the SDGs, in particular with a view to reaching those children at risk of being left behind, as well as public revenues and expenditures relevant to promoting the protection of children's rights.

Integrating input from existing rights monitoring mechanisms

It is vital that the follow-up and review process for the 2030 Agenda integrates the wealth of

³⁷ See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comments No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard and No. 19, para 54, and working methods for the participation of children in the reporting process of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/66/2).

information already generated at national and international levels on human rights, including on the situation of children in especially vulnerable circumstances. This requires the consideration of information from national institutions and public oversight monitoring bodies, and information at the global level from United Nations human rights monitoring mechanisms to inform the annual reviews taking place under the high-level political forum on sustainable development. At the level of national reviews, States should establish participatory processes or mechanisms whereby they can benefit from the input of parliaments, national human rights institutions, labor inspectorates, children's ombudspersons and ombudspersons for persons with disabilities, among others.³⁸

Ensuring private sector accountability

Considering the scope of impact of the activities of the private sector on development outcomes, both positive and negative, business is seen as a key development actor and is expected to play a critical role in achieving the SDGs. However a prominent and further expanded role for the private sector in the development agenda through foreign direct investment, public-private partnerships and other implementation activities is not without risk. It is crucial that private companies are held to account to ensure that they “do no harm”, and that the incentive for profits does not come before the public good or at the expense of children's rights. States are under an obligation to ensure that businesses respect the rights of the child in all their activities and that all implementation initiatives delivered by both public and private actors protect and promote child rights. The implementation and monitoring process at all levels should address the alignment of the national regulatory framework, multi-stakeholder partnerships and private sector activities with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Children's Rights and Business Principles and general comment No. 16 (2013) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights. Moreover, in the 2030 Agenda States made an explicit commitment to its implementation in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which must be fulfilled and monitored.

Integrate a child rights-based approach to monitoring progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Data and accountability are inextricably linked, and to bring about accountability States must strengthen the collection of quality, disaggregated, relevant and timely data. With access to better quality and more reliable data and other public information, children, youth and other stakeholders can monitor progress towards goals and targets, make informed decisions, and hold governments accountable for their commitments. Without such data it is also impossible for governments to track progress for children, or address the complex challenges facing excluded groups of children. Lack of disaggregated data by age and sex, in particular, impedes the assessment of how policies, including those aimed at eradicating poverty, reach or affect children in situations of vulnerability. In addition, data that does not reflect the realities of excluded groups of children can inadvertently become a factor for further exclusion, as was the case during the implementation and monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals.

According to a recent UNICEF report, *Is Every Child Counted?*, sufficient disaggregated data is available for only half of the child-focused SDG indicators. In the case of SDG 1 indicators directly relevant to children living in poverty, data is available for less than 50% of all countries, with no relevant stratified

³⁸ See Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comments No. 2 (2002) on the role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation of the Convention.

data available for factors such as location, wealth, age or sex.³⁹ For vulnerable groups of children, official data is too often not collected, making them invisible to policy makers. A human rights-based approach to data will be central to the identification of children being left behind in more systematic and reliable ways, and international cooperation is vital in this regard to support countries with limited available resources.

States should prioritize efforts to improve the availability and quality of child-focused disaggregated data in line with Target 17.18, by investing in the alignment with the SDGs and disaggregation of existing data sources, including household surveys; investing in new forms of child-focused data collection, applying special approaches to capture the situation of children living in situations of particular risk of exclusion and vulnerability, and ensuring a human rights approach throughout all aspects of data collection and management. Above all, data and indicators used to monitor progress must never bring about perverse incentives undermining children's rights. It is also important to consider that not all child rights issues can be captured by quantitative data. The monitoring of child rights-based implementation of the framework must therefore also include qualitative monitoring⁴⁰

Counting the uncounted — strengthening birth registration and vital statistics

The development of comprehensive civil registration systems to gather accurate, timely, disaggregated data is vital (see A/HRC/33/22), as well-functioning civil registration systems are an essential basis for monitoring multiple SDG targets, including child mortality rates. Under target 16.9, States have committed to providing legal identity for all, including birth registration, which is a right under article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Global data reflect the fact that while it is possible to bring about substantial overall progress, the remaining unregistered children are frequently those in situations of the greatest vulnerability and marginalization. Targeted measures are needed to ensure the universal registration of all children, in order to achieve target 16.9 and to monitor progress in relation to multiple Sustainable Development Goal targets.

Applying a human rights-based approach throughout the monitoring and data collection process

As State institutions, national statistical offices are human rights duty-bearers with an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, including the rights of the child, and independent statistics that are free from political interference are crucial to ensuring accountability. Respecting child rights in the monitoring and data-collection process of the 2030 Agenda requires a human rights-based data revolution, whereby core human rights principles and standards are prioritized throughout the collection, production, analysis and dissemination of data. These include:

(a) Ensuring the participation of children and all population groups in data collection exercises, including the most marginalized; (b) Ensuring that data is disaggregated by age, sex and other factors based on the grounds of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law, to enable the assessment of disparities in outcomes for children, and discrimination against children from certain groups; (c) Ensuring transparency and the right to information, while respecting the right to privacy, whereby civil society organizations are free to make use of, publish and analyze statistics.

³⁹ UNICEF, 2017, *Is Every Child Counted?* Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/every-child-counted-status-data-children-sdgs/>

⁴⁰ Detailed operational guidance on identifying and making use of both quantitative and qualitative human rights indicators is available in the guide to the measurement and implementation of human rights indicators prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Summary recommendations

In order to end poverty and promote prosperity reaching marginalized children and those at greatest risk of being left behind is essential. Human rights including the rights of the child should serve as the compass to guide effective delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals for all children, and the global review process of the High Level Political Forum should play a central role in promoting the implementation, follow-up and review of the Agenda in a manner in which children's rights are protected and realized.

Delivering on the pledge that no one will be left behind and those furthest behind will be reached first is central to the realization of children's rights. It requires taking stock of which children and groups are in situations of greatest risk of being left behind in different national contexts, placing the elimination of violence, discrimination, including gender discrimination, and the reduction of inequalities at the heart of all programmes and policies to implement the 2030 Agenda, and prioritizing those designed specifically to reach the children at greatest risk of exclusion.

A universal, integrated approach is needed in this regard, recognizing the relevance of all Sustainable Development Goals to the realization of children's rights in all countries. States should ensure that no 2030 Agenda implementation activities are undertaken that would risk undermining children's rights, including as a result of unintended consequences. In accordance with States' obligations under international law, the protection of children's rights should be integrated as a core consideration in national planning, implementation and monitoring and review, and not as an afterthought. States should foster a supportive environment in this regard by ensuring that legislation, policies and measures to promote equality and non-discrimination are in place.

Finally, specific child rights obligations pertaining to financing, national planning and the monitoring and review process should be respected and fulfilled. This requires adequate financing and investment in children, prioritizing those in situations of greatest vulnerability and marginalization; participation throughout the implementation and follow-up and review processes, with effective measures to bring about accountability; and a human rights approach to data and monitoring, including through transparency and quality disaggregated data to reflect the situation of all children, particularly those who are too often uncoun ted yet also at greatest risk of being left behind.