

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in response to the 2023 call for inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

1. Introduction

This submission is made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) as a response to the invitation extended to various functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums by the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to provide inputs to the 2023 HLPF on its review of a number of SDGs under the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

It is indicated that the HLPF in 2023 will “also review in-depth Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals”¹ and that the forum will take into account the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across these SDGs and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals”.

It is to be recalled that the CRC Committee has provided inputs in previous rounds focussing on various SDGs.² This submission is on SDG 9 with a focus on business and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals.

2. SDG 9 (Business)

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have seriously affected children’s rights in many ways. This includes the loss of jobs or reduced income of their parents, which put their families in poverty as well as the cutbacks in public expenditure aimed at ensuring the realization of children’s rights. This experience reaffirms the importance of building resilient infrastructure of industry aimed by SDG 9 from the child rights point of view as well. When accelerating the economic recovery from the COVID-19, resilience of industry should be strengthened to be prepared for economic shocks from future pandemics, natural disasters and other crises.

Business can be an essential driver for societies and economies to advance in ways that strengthen the realization of children’s rights through, for example, technological

¹ Letter of the President of the Economic and Social Council, (11 January 2023) inviting the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to provide inputs to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2023.

² The 2022 input of the CRC Committee focussed on SDGs: 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, and 17 on partnerships.

advances, investment and the generation of decent work. However, the realization of children's rights is not an automatic consequence of economic growth, and business enterprises can also negatively impact children's rights (CRC/C/GC/16, para. 1). In particular, accelerating economic recovery from the COVID-19 needs to be compatible with sustainable industrialization, another element of SDG 9, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes (SDG target 9.4), as children are disproportionately negatively affected by environmental harms. In this regard, the obligation of States under article 3, paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention) to make the best interests of the child a primary consideration is particularly crucial when States are engaged in weighing competing priorities, such as short-term economic considerations and longer-term development decisions (CRC/C/GC/16, para. 17).

States should provide stable and predictable legal and regulatory environments which enable business enterprises to respect children's rights. It includes clear and well-enforced law and standards on labour, employment, health and safety, education, environment, anti-corruption, land use and taxation that comply with the Convention and its Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. It also includes law and policies designed to create equality of opportunity and treatment in employment; measures to promote vocational training and decent work, and to raise living standards; and policies conducive to the promotion of small and medium enterprises (CRC/C/GC/16, para. 29). Such business environments will enable industries to flourish in a resilient, just, inclusive and sustainable way.

Children need to be recognized as important stakeholders in building resilient and sustainable industries as they are consumers, legally engaged employees, future employees and business leaders and members of communities and environments in which business operates (CRC/C/GC/16, para. 2). When business consults communities that may be affected by a potential business project, child participation should be included. States should provide businesses with specific guidance emphasizing that such processes must be accessible, inclusive and meaningful to children and take into account the evolving capacities of children and their best interests at all times (CRC/C/GC/16, para. 23).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization including information technologies has rapidly developed and the use of internet has expanded. The innovation and technological advancement in this sector should contribute the realization of children's rights including by increasing their access to online, services, information. However, the expansion of the online space and use of technology should not affect the existing inequality among children. It should improve digital inclusion by promoting equality of access to, and affordability of, services and connectivity (CRC/C/GC/25, para. 28).

It is crucially important that sufficient attention is paid and necessary measures are put in place to ensure protection of children from possible negative impacts of new and rapid technological development related to the digital environment, as the business sector affects children's rights directly and indirectly in the provision of services and products relating to the digital environment. Businesses should respect children's rights and prevent and remedy abuse of their rights in relation to the digital environment. States have the obligation to ensure that businesses meet those responsibilities (CRC/C/GC/25, para. 35). In particular, States should require the business sector to undertake child rights due diligence, in particular to carry out child rights impact assessments and disclose them to the public, with special consideration given to the differentiated and, at times, severe impacts of the digital environment on children (CRC/C/GC/25, para. 38).

In addition to developing legislation and policies, States should require all businesses that affect children's rights in relation to the digital environment to implement regulatory frameworks, industry codes and terms of services that adhere to the highest standards of ethics, privacy and safety in relation to the design, engineering, development, operation, distribution and marketing of their products and services. That includes businesses that target children, have children as end users or otherwise affect children. They should require such businesses to maintain high standards of transparency and accountability and encourage them to take measures to innovate in the best interests of the child (CRC/C/GC/25, para. 39).

3. SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

In many parts of the world, children have relatively been spared most of the direct health impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has also shown the many challenges that remain especially in respect of special protection measures, such as in the case of children in street situations; migrant children; refugee children and children in conflict with the law.

Three years after the COVID-19 pandemic, the realisation of many rights of the child – the right to education, the right to the highest sustainable standard of health, the right to food and adequate nutrition and the right to a satisfactory standard of living – continue to be heavily impacted for many children around the world. These will weigh negatively on the future of millions of children.

In 2021, nearly 25 million children were either not vaccinated or not completely vaccinated. The mental health of children and adolescents has been heavily impacted, revealing the weakness of the inadequate investments made in this respect.

The right to education was also one of the sectors which from the start of the pandemic was affected. And while almost all State parties tried to find alternatives to face-to-face education, this has created inequitable access, mainly due to social and economic factors

of children and the digital divide. It is also notable that the suspension of preschool education has significantly impacted the development of early childhood.

Moreover, anti-COVID 19 measures have often not taken into consideration the impacts of such laws and policies on children with disabilities. Also, in 2020, more than 45 million children suffered from acute malnutrition, with an increase in child victims of malnutrition in Africa from 54.4 million in 2000 to 61.4 million in 2020.³

During the examination of the State parties' reports, the CRC Committee attaches great importance to review the measures taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its continuing impact. It urges States parties to ensure that such measures are in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and in furtherance of the achievement of the SDGs, necessarily promoting the participation of children in the design and monitoring of the strategies and actions undertaken in this area.

The CRC Committee considers that investing in upholding children's rights is key to accelerating COVID 19 recovery efforts and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. This requires the creation of strong and sustainable partnerships and the prioritization of children's rights in the strategies, policies and actions of all actors, especially the United Nations. Children's rights must feature as a major consideration at the World Summit for the Future, where no future can be envisaged without a clear vision and a sincere commitment to children and their rights.

4. Recommendations

- When accelerating the economic recovery from COVID-19, the resilience of industry should be strengthened to prepare for economic shocks from future pandemics, natural disasters and other crises. Sustainable industrialization must be ensured and the best interests of the child must be given primary consideration when States are engaged in weighing competing priorities, such as short-term economic considerations and longer-term development decisions.
- Innovation and technological advancement should contribute to the realization of children's rights, including by increasing their access to online services and information. The expansion of the online space and use of technology should not affect the existing inequality among children. Necessary measures should be put in place to ensure protection of children from possible negative impacts of new and rapid technological development related to the digital environment.

³ Levels and trends in child malnutrition: UNICEF/WHO/The World Bank Group joint child malnutrition estimates: key findings of the 2021 edition (5 May 2021).

- The CRC Committee aligns itself with the declaration of the United Nations Secretary General that: "Our failure to deliver is due to our failure to address the inequalities that lie at the heart of global crises, from pandemic to conflict to climate emergency".
 - Partnerships for the realization of the SDGs constitute a critical component for their attainment, reducing inequality and exclusion and enabling states to meet their commitments to protect the human rights of all children.
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