

## ChildFund Alliance's Response to the Secretary-General's synthesis report:

**The Road to Dignity by 2030:**

**Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet**

ChildFund Alliance is a worldwide alliance of children's development organizations, working in 58 countries to improve the lives of vulnerable and excluded children, help them overcome poverty and achieve their rights.

We welcome the release of the Secretary-General's synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*, and highly commend his efforts to synthesize and pull together the different tracks of this process to facilitate the discussion between Member States.

We thoroughly support the vision of a universal, people-centred and planet-sensitive agenda to end poverty and fight inequality. Particularly, we warmly welcome the explicit acknowledgement of the need to ensure equality, equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination for children, and of the need for safe educational environments; as well as the call for the promotion of safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions.

To achieve sustainable development, it is vital that the prevention and elimination of violence against children remains a priority across the post-2015 agenda.

**Moving forward, ChildFund Alliance calls upon Member States to ensure that the post-2015 sustainable development agenda aims for zero tolerance of violence and exploitation of all children, including through child, early and forced marriage, and other harmful traditional practices; child labour, particularly in its worst forms; any form of violence in schools; or by denying children their fundamental human right to a legal identity.**

Specifically, we recommend that the post-2015 sustainable development agenda:

- addresses violence against all children not only across the different goals, but also through a standalone target;
- aims for the elimination of all harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and cutting, and others;
- realises the level of ambition expressed in the proposal of the Open Working Group on SDGs regarding the elimination of child labour, especially in its worst forms;
- ensures that children's right to education is fully realised in safe and non-violent environments and schools; and
- ensures that all children, irrespective of ethnicity, class, gender or race, have access to free legal identity –i.e. through birth registration.

## Introduction

The Secretary-General's report rightly acknowledges that sustainable development should be underpinned by freedom from want and freedom from fear.

Unfortunately, throughout the world, children are subject to the worst forms of child labour and exploitation; to harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage, and female genital mutilation and cutting; to sexual abuse; to the impact of armed conflict, including the use of child soldiers by armed forces and groups; to lack of access to justice, and to unnecessary institutionalization, among other injustices.

Violence against children hinders economic growth and the development of safe and just societies, weakens democratic governance, perpetuates poverty, and accentuates inequalities. Preventing and responding to all forms of violence and exploitation, in all contexts, is essential to ensuring children's rights to survival, development and well-being. This has been recognized throughout the post-2015 process, in the proposals from the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN), and the Open Working Group on SDGs; all of whom have heeded the call from thousands of citizens –including and particularly children– from across the globe, including through the MY World survey.

At a critical juncture in the process, the report acknowledges the prominent place that violence against children has had throughout the post-2015 discussions.<sup>1</sup> However, it recants from the bold vision advanced by the Open Working Group on SDGs, which called for the elimination of violence against all children and drew particular attention to the issues of harmful traditional practices, of child labour, and of birth registration.<sup>2</sup>

Further, and despite its call for more, and more reliable and robust data to support monitoring and evaluation, the report does not seem to acknowledge the fundamental and increasing role that citizens, including children, are playing in holding their Governments to account.

Finally, we call upon Member States to be cautious when referring to children and youth as young people, or when conflating children with youth. We encourage Member States to adhere to the parameters set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and use the terminology children to refer to anyone under the age of 18.

## Eliminating *all* violence against *all* children

"All must be free from fear and violence, without discrimination," states the Secretary-General in the report, recognizing also that "people have called for an end to all forms of [...] violence against women and against children and young boys and girls."<sup>3</sup>

We wholeheartedly agree with the report's vision of ensuring that every person on the planet lives free from fear and violence. In 2012 alone, violence claimed the lives of 95,000 children and adolescents under the age of 20, while 60 per cent of all children worldwide – almost 1 billion– between the ages of 2 and 14 are regularly subjected to physical

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2014), *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*, para 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, para 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 77 and 51.

punishment by their caregivers.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, over 220 million children have been subjected to sexual violence in a year alone, and 85 million children are engaged in hazardous work.

Given the sheer size and scale of the problem, the prevention of violence and exploitation against children would have been better served by a standalone mention, as in the Outcome Document from the Open Working Group on SDGs. Given its negative effects on health, education and gender equality outcomes, on the achievement of employment and decent work for all, on the promotion of equality, on the creation of peaceful and non-violent societies, and on the rule of law and governance, it is imperative that the post-2015 sustainable development agenda addresses the issue across the different goals, and also through a standalone target that aims for the elimination of all forms of violence against all children.

### **Eliminating all harmful practices**

In his report, the Secretary-General rightly acknowledges the need to end the practice of child, early and forced marriage everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

According to UNICEF, girls who marry before the age the age of 18 tend to drop out of school and the education system, in addition to being at risk of violence and exploitation, and lacking freedom to engage and participate in the life of their communities. Also, pregnancy and childbirth are an important component of mortality for girls between the ages of 15 and 19 –accounting for more than 70,000 deaths each year.<sup>6</sup>

We support and welcome the advancement of the elimination of child, early and forced marriage, as set out in the proposals from the High-Level Panel, UNSDSN, the Open Working Group on SDGs, and the Secretary-General. But to truly achieve gender equality, the post-2015 sustainable development agenda cannot afford to ignore the whole spectrum of harmful practices that affects both boys and girls.

### **Eliminating child labour**

The Secretary-General's report remains silent on the issue of child labour, in which according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 168 million children are involved, 85 million of them in hazardous work, endangering their health, safety, and moral development.

The worst forms of child labour can result in child enslavement, family separation, exposure to serious hazards and illnesses, and isolation –often from a very early age, leading to adverse consequences for the child's health, to exposure to other forms of violence, to consequences for his or her future income-generating activities, and even to death.<sup>7</sup> For the post-2015 sustainable development agenda to deliver on the promise of employment and

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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF (2014), *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children*.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2014), *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*, para 78.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2009), *State of the World's Children: Maternal and Newborn Health*.

<sup>7</sup> Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and ChildFund Alliance (2014), *The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence against Children*.

decent jobs for all, the issue of child labour –particularly the worst forms of child labour– needs to be addressed.

While not all forms of work done by children are considered prejudicial for the well-being of the child, in some cases it can deprive children of an education and the opportunity to acquire skills. Sustainable development will simply not be achieved if the elimination of child labour, with a priority on its worst forms, is not included as a standalone target.

## **Ensuring safe learning environments for all**

The Secretary-General in his report rightly acknowledges the safe educational environments. Indeed, schools and other learning environments should be by definition places where children feel protected and safe, and where their dignity and development are upheld.

Violence is amply recognised as an obstacle to achieving education outcomes, both in terms of coverage and quality, as it hinders effective learning and has a negative effect in school attendance and enrolment –for example, it has been proven that violence in schools has a direct impact on dropout rates. But despite the need for children’s right to education to be realised in a safe environment, schools are settings where children are exposed to violence, subjected to violence, and taught violence.

Violence against children in schools ranges from physical and psychological violence – including bullying and peer-to-peer violence, but also corporal punishment– to sexual violence –to which both boys and girls are subjected. For example, physical punishment is a particularly significant problem. According to the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, only 113 countries have fully prohibited teachers to cause pain on children as a form of punishment; and in some cases, even when physical punishment is banned, the law is rarely enforced. Evidence shows that boys are more likely to be subjected to physical punishment than girls.<sup>8</sup>

It is imperative that the post-2015 sustainable development agenda fully realizes children’s right to education in safe and non-violent learning environments.

## **Ensuring free birth registration for all**

The report is also silent on the issue of birth registration. Despite the legal obligation contained in Article 7 of the CRC, 51 million children are still not registered at birth every single year.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, only 57 countries –out of the 192 members of the WHO– have registrations systems that reported on births and deaths for at least 90 per cent of the population.<sup>10</sup> The absence of birth registration not only hinders access to other identity

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<sup>8</sup> Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, at <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org>. Accessed on February 10, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF (2007), *Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children Statistical Review*. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2007n6/index\\_41401.htm](http://www.unicef.org/progressforchildren/2007n6/index_41401.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Lexi Bambas (2005), ‘Integrating Equity into Health Information Systems: A Human Rights Approach to Health and Information,’ in: *PLoS Med* 2(4): e102. Available at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/fetchObject.action?representation=PDF&uri=info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.0020102>

documents, it also constitutes a barrier for children to access the education and healthcare systems, and other essential services for the realisation of their human rights. Access to justice and the realisation of the rule of law are also significantly affected under these circumstances: children that have been not registered at birth cannot have their rights protected in courts of law.

To further advance the progress on the current MDGs and to successfully implement and monitor the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, all children, irrespective of ethnicity, class, gender or race, must be registered at birth. Guaranteeing free and universal birth registration across all sectors of society contributes to achieve healthy democracies, and thriving economies, polities and societies.

Registering a child at birth is the gateway to citizenship and to the realisation of that child's rights. A birth certificate not only is proof of age, nationality, parentage and place of birth, but it is also considered in many instances a fundamental identity document, required to apply for other documents as children advance into adulthood –i.e. a driver's license, a national identity card, a passport.

## **Engaging children in the review and monitoring framework**

“Young people will be the torch bearers of the next sustainable development agenda through 2030,” states the Secretary-General in the synthesis report.<sup>11</sup> And later on, he adds: “It should by now be recognized that no society can reach its full potential if whole segments of that society, especially young people, are excluded from participating in, contributing to, and benefiting from development.”<sup>12</sup>

We thoroughly support the foresight of the Secretary-General in calling for the engagement and participation of children and youth in development. ChildFund Alliance calls on UN entities and Member States, as well as other stakeholders in development, to ensure that children across life stages not only participate in the agenda-setting process, according to their evolving capacities, and enjoy the dividends of its outcome, but are also given their due place in the implementation and the monitoring of the new framework.

## **Distinguishing between children and youth**

Whilst we acknowledge that the Secretary-General's report attempts to include children by the use of the term “young people,” this can often be interpreted as pertaining only to youth, and could be misinterpreted as excluding children. We define children as outlined in the CRC as persons up to the age of 18 years.

It is necessary to distinguish between children and youth, and acknowledge the commonalities, but also the divergences in their claims and needs. As the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is negotiated, we recommend that when issues directly impact children differently than youth this be made explicit for both population groups.

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2014), *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*, para. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 68.

Children should be acknowledged as a specific group of stakeholders for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, with related targets that specifically address their needs and ensure that they are able to live up to their potential –for example, on the elimination of child labour, and on the elimination of all forms of violence against children.

## **Conclusions**

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have brought significant benefits to the lives of billions, our call to the international community is to continue to build on the progress achieved for children, but also to address with the same commitment and vigour the issue of violence and exploitation against children.

For sustainable development to be achieved, the post-2015 agenda must address the issues of violence and exploitation against children across the different goals, and also through a standalone target with measurable indicators.

Moving forward, we call for Member States to maintain and build upon the level of ambition of the proposal of the Open Working Group on SDGs, and ensure zero tolerance for all forms of violence and exploitation against children. This includes all forms of violence in schools, and additional standalone targets on child labour, particularly in its worst forms; on child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and cutting, and other harmful practices; and on free legal identity for all.