

State of the World's Children 2016 - A Fair Chance for Every Child

Media Script

Unless the world accelerates progress and addresses the plight of its most disadvantaged, left-behind children, by 2030:

- Over 167 million children will live on no more than US\$1.90 a day, nine out of 10 of them in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Almost 70 million children under the age of 5 will die of largely preventable causes.
- 750 million women will have been married as children, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Millions of children's lives around the world are blighted for no reason other than the country, gender or circumstances into which they are born. Failure to reach the most disadvantaged children fuels intergenerational cycles of disadvantage that imperil their future, the future of their societies – and the future of the world. We have a clear choice to make: Invest in accelerated progress for the children being left behind, or face the consequences of a far more divided and unfair world by 2030, the end-date of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The State of the World's Children 2016 argues that breaking this vicious cycle demands that the world treat its most disadvantaged children as it does its luckier ones, providing them with decent education and health care - and a normal childhood. That investing in the most disadvantaged is not only the right thing to do, but an economically sound and strategic decision.

The report includes country-by-country data, disaggregated to show disparities between the richest and poorest 20 per cent of the population, as well as disparities based on gender and geography. It argues that intergenerational cycles of poverty and deprivation don't just hold back individual children and families, but entire societies and economies.

UNICEF calls on every country to develop a concrete, time-bound plan for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that specifically focuses on reaching the most disadvantaged children first – including interim equity targets to level the playing field so that all children – particularly those who have been left furthest behind, have a fair chance in life.

Key messages

The world has made tremendous progress in reducing child deaths, getting children into school and lifting millions out of poverty, including in some of the world's poorest countries.

- Global under-five mortality has been more than halved since 1990. In 24 low- and lower-middle income countries, the child mortality rate has plummeted by two-thirds or more.
- Vaccination programmes resulted in a 79% drop in measles infections, preventing over 17 million deaths between 2000 and 2014. Malaria deaths among children have fallen by 58% since 2000.
- Four regions¹ have achieved gender parity in primary education. In 2012, 15-year-olds in Viet Nam

¹ Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States; East Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; and South Asia.

performed on par with peers in Germany and better than students in the United Kingdom and United States.

But progress hasn't been even, or fair.

- Compared to the richest children, the poorest are almost twice as likely to die before turning 5.
- In 2015, more than 80 per cent of mostly preventable child deaths occurred in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and almost half occurred in just five countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia.
- In the United States in 2013, infants born to African American parents were more than twice as likely to die as those born to white Americans.
- In Pakistan, children in the richest quintile get nearly nine more years of schooling than children in the poorest quintile.
- The richest children are more than twice as likely to have skilled attendance at birth.
- The rate of chronic undernutrition among children under the age of 5 in the poorest households is double that among under-fives in the richest households.
- Girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to be married as children than those from the wealthiest households. Worldwide, the level of child marriages among the poorest girls has remained unchanged since around 1990.
- Almost a quarter of a billion children live in countries and areas affected by conflict. Thirty million children are displaced.
- Over 300 million children who live in extremely high flood occurrence zones – making them especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change – are also in countries where more than half the population live below the poverty line.

Education has the power to end intergenerational cycles of inequity and improve the lives of children and their societies – but progress in expanding access and improving quality has stalled.

- The number of children who do not attend school has increased since 2011. About 124 million children today do not go to primary and lower-secondary school.
- 2 in 5 children (38%) leave primary school without learning how to read, write and do simple arithmetic.
- The likelihood of violent conflict doubles in countries with high levels of inequality in education.
- Across much of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, children born to mothers with no education are almost 3 times more likely to die before age 5 than those born to mothers with a secondary education.
- Educating girls leads to reduced fertility, later marriage and childbearing, and better health care practices. Children born to educated mothers are more likely to attend school. Yet the poorest, rural girls are almost six times as likely to be out of school as the richest urban boys.
- Education systems can entrench inequities when resources do not go where they are most needed. UNICEF research in low-income countries shows that children from the richest 10% of the population received around 46% of public spending on education.
- On average, each additional year of education a child receives increases her or his adult earnings by about 10%.

Business as usual is unthinkable. At current trends, by end-2030:

- 69 million children under 5 years of age will have died due to mostly preventable causes. Five countries will account for more than half of the global burden of under-five deaths.
- 167 million children will still be living in extreme poverty, 9 out of 10 of them in sub-Saharan Africa.
- More than 60 million primary school-aged children will still be out of school, more than half of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

- Almost 120 million children will suffer from stunting.
- 750 million women will have been married as children, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Investing in the most disadvantaged is not only right in principle, but a practical and strategic imperative

- In Africa and Asia, 11% of GNP is lost due to poor nutrition.
- An analysis from 2012 showed that spending an extra \$30 billion annually – a 2% increase – on improving maternal, prenatal and child care in 74 countries with high under-five mortality rates would avert 147 million child deaths from 2013 to 2035, and bring economic benefits of US\$9 for every US\$1 spent.
- Every US\$1 spent on immunization interventions returns US\$16 in economic gains.

Inequity is not inevitable, nor insurmountable. For the most part the constraints on reaching these children are a matter of political commitment, of resources and of collective will. The State of the World's Children report is UNICEF's call to action, urging governments and development partners to translate 2030 commitments into concrete plans for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including interim equity targets to reach the most disadvantaged children first.

We know what to do. Better information on the most vulnerable children, integrated solutions to the challenges children face, innovative ways to address old problems, more equitable investment and increased involvement by communities – all these measures can help level the playing field for children.