



Submission from UNICEF and Australia's National Committee to UNICEF to inform the Australian Government's International Development Policy

February 2020

ABOUT UNICEF

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, is a leading UN agency that promotes the rights and well-being of every child. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children. UNICEF uses a comprehensive programme approach to support governments in achieving their development objectives, rather than a one-off project approach. UNICEF also works closely with governments and has a convening role that brings government, the UN, NGOs and the private sector together to work towards common objectives.

UNICEF and DFAT have a Strategic Partnership Agreement (2016-2020) that provides the framework for the partnership. It outlines Australia's core contribution to UNICEF and identifies overarching priorities around strengthening the UN system, strengthening the humanitarian system, resilience, diversifying the funding base including more private sector engagement, and innovation. DFAT and UNICEF work on joint priorities for children around the world, such as gender equality, disability inclusion, and child protection, with the Indo-Pacific identified as the priority region.

UNICEF Australia (UA) is a National Committee of UNICEF, which advocates for the rights of all children and works to improve public and government support for child rights and international development. UNICEF Australia is a DFAT accredited Australian NGO and currently receives over \$2 million in direct funding via the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). UA a full member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNICEF:

- i. **Welcomes Australia's commitment to scaling up its contribution in the Indo Pacific region.** Australia's proximity and deep political, economic, and social ties enable the Australian Government to work in partnership with, and leverage the support of Australian companies, NGOs, and the Australian public;
- ii. Encourages Australia to also **prioritise its response to major global issues**, including **humanitarian crises** and **disease outbreaks**, by **working with UN agencies** with a demonstrated track record of delivering results to do so;
- iii. Encourages Australia to continue to **make substantial social capital investments** to assist states to **build healthier and better educated populations**, and to address the challenges which flow from **poverty and inequality**. **Lifting human development indicators** and **reducing inequality** is essential in ensuring that the related investments targeted at stimulating economic growth can be effective. Australia's International Development Policy should be aligned to the targets and indicators of the **Sustainable Development Goals**;
- iv. Encourages Australia to **specifically prioritise children and young people** in the International Development Policy, recognising that **investment in the early years** and in the emerging capacities of adolescents represents good value for money and contributes to sustainable futures and nation building;

- v. Encourages Australia to continue bringing **strong leadership** and a focus on results in **achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and disability inclusion;**
- vi. Encourages Australia to ensure that the International Development Policy is **responding to the challenge of climate change and environmental degradation** in a way which **effectively mitigates the worsening impacts and builds resilience** to withstand future shocks;
- vii. Encourages Australia to **involve children in relevant planning and decision-making** to **enhance the accountability and effectiveness** of Australian development and humanitarian assistance.
- viii. Encourages Australia to work with partners to **build public understanding of, and support for, the development program.**
- ix. Expresses concern about the overall **declining rate of Overseas Development Assistance** and its potential impact on Australia's ability to meet its stated objectives.

SCALE UP CONTRIBUTION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Australia's strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region and our proximity make us well positioned to strengthen the capabilities of regional partners to act in support of our shared interests. This includes stability, sustainable economic growth, safe and orderly migration, and a clean natural environment. Australia has a clear and strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific region, which, despite experiencing economic growth, also faces unique and persistent challenges. These include inequitable wealth distribution, changed migration patterns, natural disasters, environmental degradation, natural resource scarcity, rapid population growth, territorial conflict, gaps in governance, and ethnic tensions. UNICEF welcomes Australia's commitment to scaling up its contribution in the Indo Pacific region.

PRIORITISE RESPONSE TO MAJOR GLOBAL ISSUES INCLUDING HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND DISEASE OUTBREAKS

While welcoming continued focus on the Indo-Pacific region, UNICEF calls on Australia to continue to prioritise its response to major global issues, including humanitarian crises and natural disasters and disease outbreaks.

Children are among the most vulnerable in both natural and humanitarian crises, and their protection needs to be a cornerstone in both immediate and longer-term emergency response. Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, the number of countries experiencing conflict is at its highest.¹ In addition, extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and destructive, impacting on the lives of millions of children and families each year. UNICEF is especially concerned with the potential of disasters and global outbreak of diseases affecting children, to reverse the hard-won development gains of past decades.

In addition, low immunization rates are putting children at risk of mortality and morbidity from of ancient diseases such as polio and measles. For example, due to low immunization rates in neighbouring countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria's 32 million under-five year old children are at risk from the wild polio virus even though the country has not seen a single case in almost four years. On 21 June 2018 the Government of Papua New Guinea confirmed an outbreak of poliovirus and declared a national emergency to coordinate the polio response - 18 years after the country was certified polio free. In addition to the significant adverse domestic health impacts within PNG, the outbreak presents major health security risks for Australia and it is vital that Australia continues to provide technical and financial support

The financial cost of responding to humanitarian disasters and disease outbreaks, especially in reaching the most vulnerable and inaccessible, is significant and requires a concerted and coordinated effort of donors including Australia. For example: in 2020 UNICEF aims to assist 59 million children in humanitarian emergencies globally requiring over \$4.2 billion US dollars.

Flexible funding is essential for multi-year planning to rapidly and equitably reach every child at every stage of a humanitarian emergency and its aftermath.¹ Australia's commitment, including through the Grand Bargain, to provide flexible multi-year funding, is an important and welcome feature of the current approach to humanitarian support. Australia's commitment to financing vaccinations and polio outbreak responses is a key complement to humanitarian action.

UNICEF encourages the Australian Government to continue to provide flexible, multi-year emergency funding packages; to increase levels of funding to regions dealing with significant humanitarian emergencies and threats of natural disaster, and where responses remain critically underfunded; and, to channel funding through effective humanitarian partners with an ongoing presence in affected countries and proven track record of effective response.

INVEST IN SOCIAL CAPITAL TO LIFT HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS AND REDUCE INEQUALITY, ALIGNED TO THE SDGS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a global blueprint to work together towards shared prosperity in a sustainable world. Australia has committed to play its part in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it is critical that the SDGs remain a core framework to anchor and orientate Australia's aid investments in the coming decade.

Core to ensuring progress towards meeting the SDGs is targeted focus and investment in tackling poverty and inequality, empowering women and girls, and addressing the impacts of climate and environmental issues.² Equity is a critical and cross cutting component across all SDGs. Achievement and measurement of the SDGs also require availability of data. Data for over half of the child-related SDG indicators is unavailable, limited or poor,³ presenting a barrier to measuring progress for several goals.

Recognising the potential of Australia to provide leadership and make a significant contribution to the SDGs, UNICEF encourages Australia to continue to make substantial social capital investments to address the challenges in poverty and inequality through:

- Increasing the proportion of child-focused ODA in the Asia Pacific region and ensuring these investments are better targeted within a child rights framework;
- Directing funding to effective multilateral and UN agencies given their important role and mandate in strengthening systems to achieve human rights, address poverty and respond to emergencies;
- Investing in programming for, and monitoring, *equitable* development outcomes;
- Committing to support recipient states to strengthen data systems for children in alignment with SDG metrics.

PRIORITISE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE LIFECYCLE FOR HIGH IMPACT AND RETURNS

UNICEF's global experience demonstrates that children's rights are pivotal to achieving development gains. We propose that Australia adopts children as a thematic priority with investments concentrating on three areas: (I) Early Childhood Development; (II) Adolescence; and (III) preventing Violence against Children.

Early Childhood Development

Early childhood presents an unparalleled window of opportunity to make a positive difference in a child's life. The science is clear: the most important phase of human development is in the earliest years of life when the brain is developing at its most rapid pace. It is estimated that 249

¹ UNICEF, 2019, *Humanitarian Action for Children 2020: overview*, viewed at <https://www.unicef.org/media/62606/file/HAC-2020-overview.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2020).

² United Nations, 2019, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*, viewed at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2020).

³ UNICEF. 2016. *Is Every Child Counted?*, viewed at <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SDGs-and-Data-for-Children-Brochure.pdf> accessed 2 February 2017.

million children in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of missing critical development milestones.⁴ Early investment can, in practical terms, prevent children from living a lifetime of disadvantage and crisis.

Adolescence

The second decade of life presents an opportunity to build on gains made in childhood and invest in programs that contribute to healthy, safe, informed and empowered transitions to adulthood. However, it can also be a forgotten stage in which inequities frequently become starkly pronounced, with new vulnerabilities and risks for girls, and adolescents with a disability are more likely to face barriers in meaningful participation.

Adolescents report that they feel underprepared for the changing nature of the workforce and what this will mean for them as they transition into adulthood.⁵ UNICEF recommends that Australia prioritises support for adolescents, particularly girls, to access formal, non-formal, on the job and community-based learning to prepare them for life, work, civic engagement and life-long learning.

Preventing Violence Against Children

Violence against children, abuse and exploitation impedes the healthy growth and development of children and adolescents and have high costs across the lifecycle. Violence against young children results in long-term exposure to toxic stress which inhibits optimal brain development, which can lead to a failure to thrive among affected children. As reported in *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, close to 300 million children aged 2-4 worldwide regularly experience violent discipline by their parents or other caregivers at home.⁶ Rates of violence against children in the Pacific region are amongst the highest in the world.

CONTINUE AUSTRALIA'S STONG LEADERSHIP AND FOCUS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND DISABILITY INCLUSION

Gender

Australia has shown leadership in promoting the rights of women and girls and addressing gender inequality through the aid program under its current Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy targeted commitments for 80% of all aid investments to effectively address gender issues. Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women also recently accepted the invitation of the Global Polio Eradication Partnership, which includes UNICEF as one of the partners, to be a Gender Champion for polio eradication.

Adolescent girls are particularly impacted by gender inequalities, facing unique challenges which require specific focus in policy and programmatic responses. This includes "expectations to marry, the risk of pregnancy, violence, lack of access to dignified menstrual hygiene, and barriers to a quality education". These obstacles limit girls' lives and prevent them from reaching their full potential.⁷ UNICEF encourages Australia to continue its leadership and further expand its focus on gender equality by specifically recognising and responding to the issues unique to girls from the early years through to adolescence.

Disability Inclusion

Social inclusion is identified by the SDGs as a core element of sustainable development and achieving the SDGs requires targeted investment to ensure that all people benefit from progress made. People with a disability and, in, children with a disability, are often among the most

⁴ Black, Maureen M., et al., 'Early Childhood Development Coming of Age: Science through the life course', *The Lancet*, series 0140-6736, no. 16, 4 October 2016, p. 2.

⁵ UNICEF, 2017, *The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World*, viewed at https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2017_ENG_WEB.pdf (accessed 16 January 2020).

⁶ UNICEF, 2017, *A Familiar Face*, viewed at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-familiar-face/> (accessed 16 February 2020)

⁷ UNICEF, 2017, *Gender Action Plan 2018-2021*, viewed at: https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/2018-2021-Gender_Action_Plan-Rev.1.pdf (accessed 16 January 2020).

marginalised and face specific barriers to their effective access of services and participation in education and the community. The rights of children with a disability are articulated in Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability and the CRC.

Mainstreaming disability inclusion across all development and humanitarian is critical to ensuring that children and adults with a disability can participate fully in these activities. At the same time, targeted interventions are required to ensure that the particular needs of children and adults with a disability are met. Without taking such a twin track approach, the equitable outcomes of the SDGs cannot be achieved. UNICEF welcomes Australia's commitment to disability inclusive development in its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper and calls on Australian to maintain disability inclusion as a cross-cutting priority for Australia's human rights, development assistance and humanitarian response activities.

RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Environmental degradation and the effects of a changing climate are a major cause for concern. Even under optimistic scenarios, the evidence indicates that children will bear the brunt of the worst impacts of climate change. Concerted international efforts must prevent the triple threat of higher disease burdens, food insecurity and water scarcity from wiping out gains we have made in child survival over the past 30 years.⁸

UNICEF is concerned that the trajectory of climate change will present a grave threat to the world's poorest children. Children themselves see climate change as one of the biggest threats to their safety and are calling on governments to take immediate steps to respond effectively to the drivers and impacts of climate change. Amplifying the voices of children and young people from across Australia and the Pacific, UNICEF encourages Australia to ensure that the International Development Policy responds to the threats of climate change and environmental degradation in a way which effectively mitigates the worsening impacts and builds resilience to withstand future shocks.

RECOGNISE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AS A DRIVER AND DETERMINANT OF AID EFFECTIVENESS

The voices of children and young people have been invaluable for the development of the SDGs and will be equally important to (ground-up) monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Unlike other marginalized groups identified in Agenda 2030, children have no existing mechanism in the current ECOSOC system where progress on meeting child related targets can be tracked.

The Australian Government could support an annual, regional forum to focus on how children in the Asia Pacific region are faring with regard to SDG implementation.⁹ In addition to tracking progress, identifying data gaps and reviewing best practice, this exercise would track progress, identify gaps, review best practice, and contribute to a shared learning. Furthermore, it would enable early identification of emerging issues and build and maintain momentum on SDGs for children. Importantly, it can position young people at the centre of a dialogue as stakeholders, knowledge holders, leaders and entrepreneurs.

Children's participation in emergency response has not traditionally featured as a priority for relief agencies. UNICEF has significant global learnings in relation to the fundamental importance of

⁸ UNICEF, 2019, *For Every Child, Every Right: The Convention on the Rights of the Child at a crossroads*, viewed at <https://www.unicef.org/media/62371/file/Convention-rights-child-at-crossroads-2019.pdf> pp.27 (accessed 16 January 2020).

⁹ United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth 2016 High level political Forum. 2016. Leave No One Behind, viewed at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10112MGCY-HLPF_per_cent_20Paper_per_cent_202016.pdf (accessed 10 February 2020)

children being actively engaged at every phase of emergency response, particularly following the Asian Tsunami response in 2004.¹⁰

Children and young people make valuable contributions during crises as first responders (in their own communities), carers, peer support and social entrepreneurs. The voices of children have been critical generationally in maintaining peace in post conflict societies. Education is central to this process because it is identity forming for individual children and contributes to state-building over time. Involving children affected by crisis in relevant planning and decision-making should be a measure in enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid. Young people themselves can play a role in participatory monitoring through (I) providing input into what data should be collected and (II) being directly involved in data collection.

BUILDING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF, AND SUPPORT FOR, THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The mutual benefits of Australia's development program are not always commonly understood by the public. Numerous surveys demonstrate that Australians do not necessarily understand the amount spent on development assistance or how a strong development program, it is important that the Australian public has a good knowledge of the positive impacts and mutual benefits that flow back to Australian citizens in areas such as regional stability, economic growth, national security and health security. Partner agencies can assist DFAT to strengthen its communication with Australians. Often these organisations are trusted national brands and have large audiences and reach as well as communications infrastructure in place.

ADDRESS DECLINING RATE OF OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

UNICEF believes that achieving the significant challenge of the SDGs, addressing poverty and inequality in the region, and responding to increasing emergencies and the threat of climate change, requires a greater and more strategic investment of ODA than is currently committed. Australia's declining volume of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is currently discordant with the overall aid trajectories of many OECD countries.¹¹ In fact, Australia's ODA investment has continued to starkly trend downwards as compared to its OECD counterparts. We should reasonably expect over time that Australia's shrinking ODA investment may result in a reduction of our regional credibility and influence. UNICEF expresses concern about the overall declining rate of Overseas Development Assistance and its potential impact on Australia's ability to meet its stated objectives.

UNICEF FOCAL POINTS

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¹⁰ UNICEF. 2007. The Participation of Children and Young People in Emergencies: A guide for relief agencies based largely on experiences in the Asian tsunami response, viewed at: https://www.unicef.org/eapro/the_participation_of_children_and_young_people_in_emergencies.pdf (accessed on 10 February 2017).

¹¹ Davies. R. 2014. *Never dive alone: Australia's aid cuts in a global context*, viewed at: <http://devpolicy.org/never-dive-alone-australias-aid-cut-in-a-global-context-20141218-2/> (accessed on 10 January 2017).