PROGRESS FOR EVERY CHILD IN THE SDG ERA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

unicef
for every child

'survive+thrive'

'learning'

'protection'

'environment'

'fair chance'

Are we on track to achieve the SDGs for children?

Executive Summary

The extent to which the world delivers on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will directly affect the future of millions of children – and thus, our shared future as a global community.

The SDGs are universal in scope, and their call to leave no one behind puts the world's most vulnerable and marginalized people – including children – at the top of the agenda.

But two years since world leaders committed to achieving the SDGs, are we on track to achieve the goals for children? Do we even have enough information to know?

Progress for Every Child in the SDG Era assesses the world's performance to date, focusing on 44 indicators that directly concern the 2030 Agenda's most vulnerable constituency: children.

The current outlook is foreboding:

- **Over half a billion (520 million) children are effectively uncounted, living in countries that have insufficient data to assess whether they are on track for at least two thirds of the global targets.** This paucity of data is greatest in assessing children's learning, their protection from violence, exploitation and other harmful practices, and their equality of opportunity.

- **An additional half a billion (533 million) children live in countries where the promise of the SDGs remains out of reach, as their current trajectory will leave them short of at least two-thirds of the targets on which they can be assessed.** Countries are most off track on goals concerning children's protection from violence. Countries fare relatively better in providing a safe and clean environment for children – though still far short of the progress envisaged by the SDGs.

- **The need for accelerated progress against the SDGs is universal, but among regions, sub-Saharan Africa is the most off-track.** On average, African countries report being off track on twice as many child indicators as countries from all other regions.

- **Within countries, children from poorer households, those living in rural areas, and adolescent girls are found to be at greater risk of being left behind.** Other vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and migrant children, are difficult or impossible to assess with existing data monitoring.

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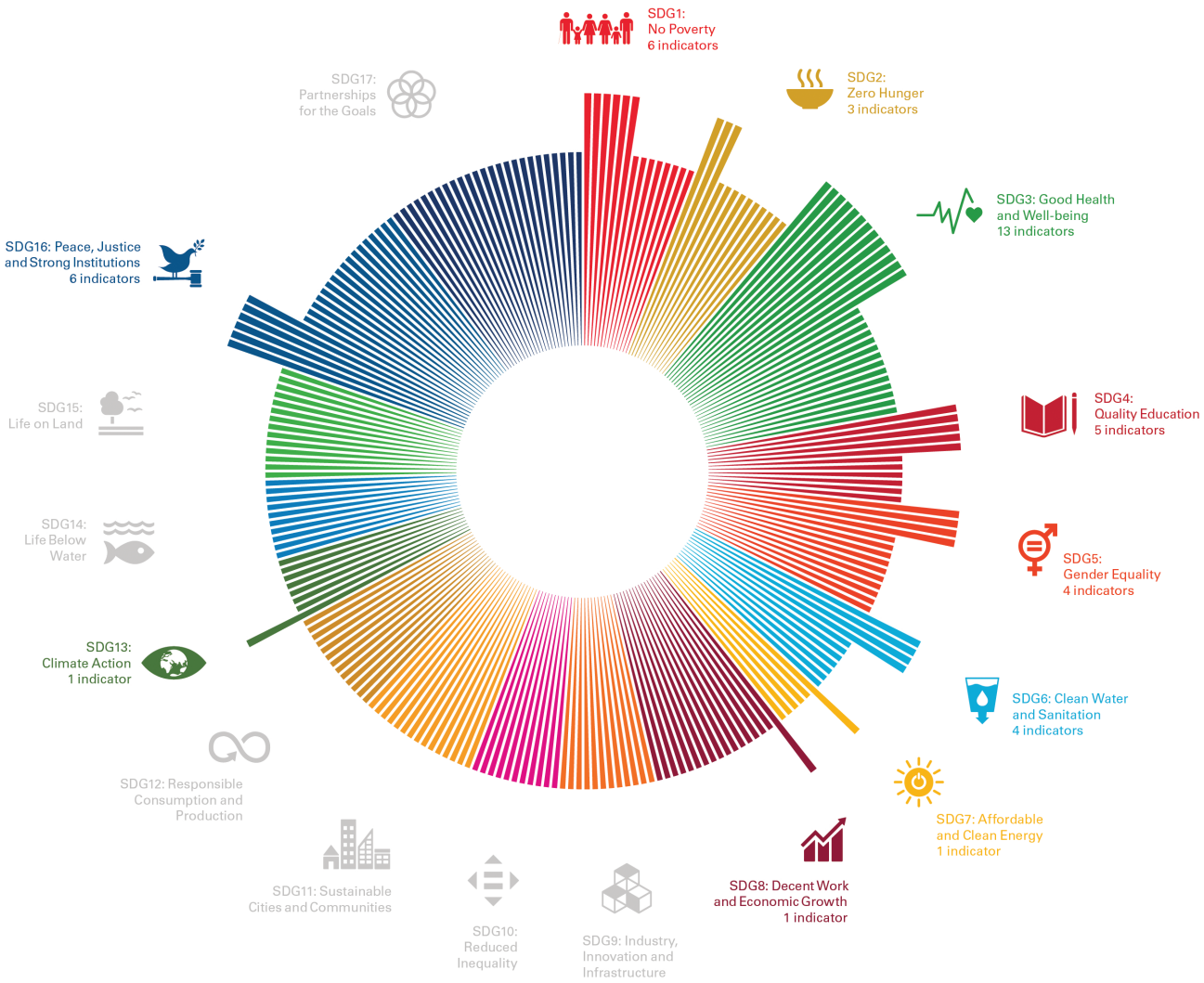
The SDG agenda is universal in scope, speaking to the range of challenges facing the world's countries, rich and poor alike.

It covers a broad array of topics – with an expansive monitoring framework of 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators.

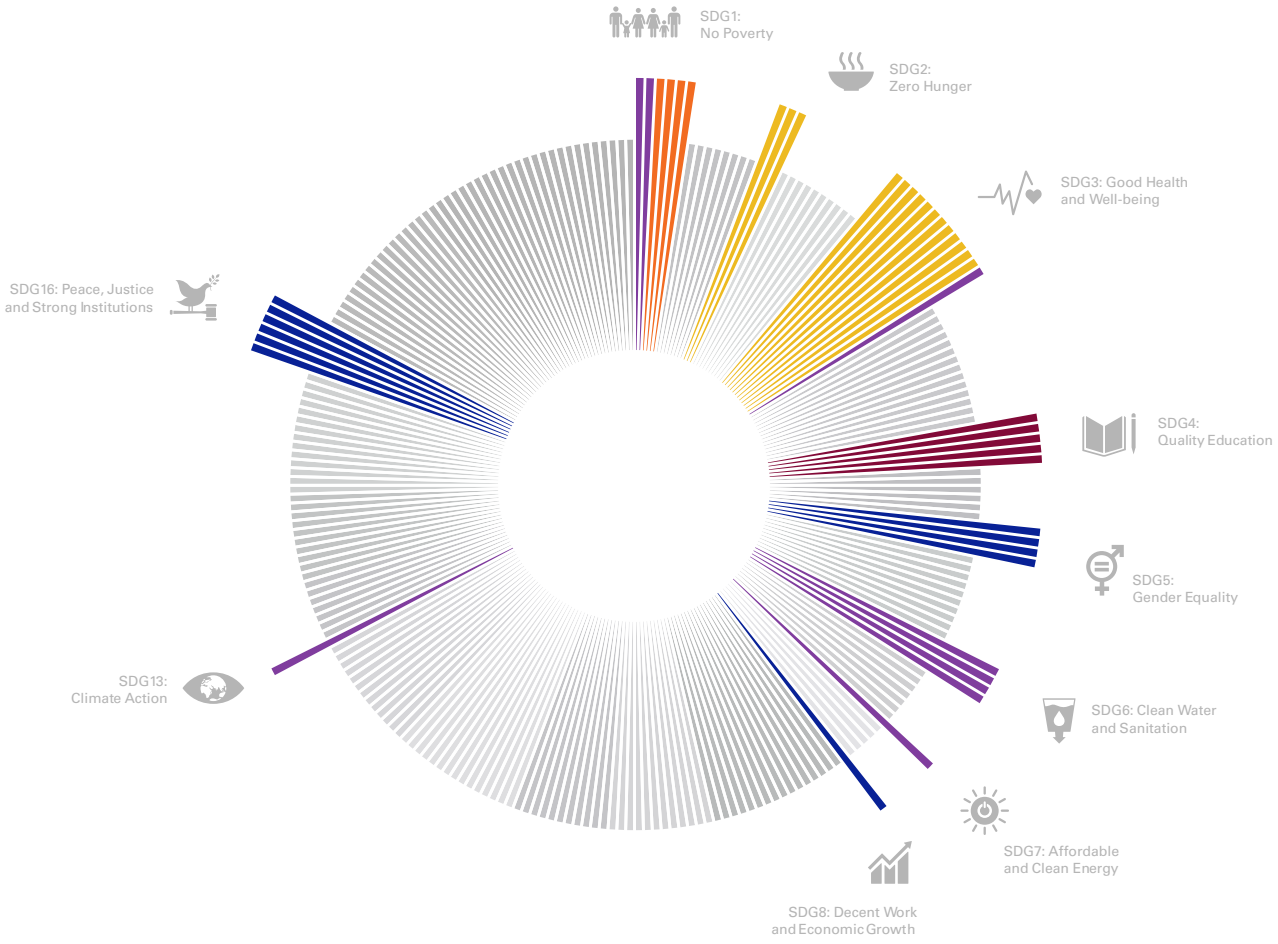
44 child-related indicators are integrated across the 17 goals.

44 priority SDG indicators concerning children



Notes: The official list of SDG indicators includes 232 indicators on which general agreement has been reached. Please note that the total number of indicators listed in the global indicator framework of SDG indicators is 244. However, since nine indicators repeat under two or three different targets, the actual total number of individual indicators in the list is 232 (see <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>). While all 44 indicators covered in this report relate to the SDG agenda, some marginally differ from those adopted in the SDG monitoring framework.

This report arranges the 44 indicators into 5 dimensions of children's rights



5 dimensions of children's rights

Every child survives and thrives

SDG 2: Stunting, wasting, overweight

SDG 3: Births attended by skilled personnel, under-five mortality, neonatal mortality, new HIV infections (children under 5, adolescent girls and boys 10-19 years), essential health services, MCV1, DTP3, *maternal mortality ratio, malaria incidence, adolescent birth rate**

Every child learns

SDG 4: Minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics in lower secondary, children under-five developmentally on track, participation in organized learning one year before primary, proportion of schools with access to WASH

Every child is protected from violence, exploitation and harmful practices

SDG 5: Violence against girls by intimate partner, violence against girls by someone other than intimate partner, child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting

SDG 8: Child labour

SDG 16: Intentional homicide, *conflict-related deaths**, violence from caregiver, sexual violence on girls and boys under 18, birth registration

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

SDG 1: Basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services

SDG 3: Mortality rate from household/ambient air pollution

SDG 6: Safely managed drinking water, safely managed sanitation services, handwashing facilities, open defecation

SDG 7: Clean fuels used

SDG 13: *Deaths from natural disasters**

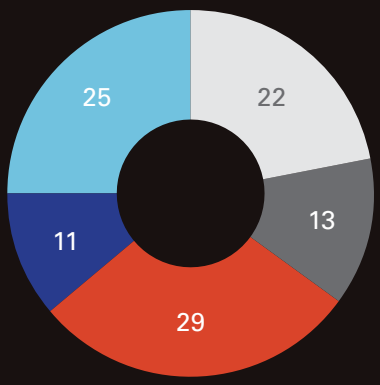
Every child has a fair chance in life

SDG 1: Extreme poverty, below national poverty line, multi-dimensional poverty, social protection floors/system

* Five italicized indicators are excluded from a full assessment due to methodological or measurement challenges.

Progress towards the global targets

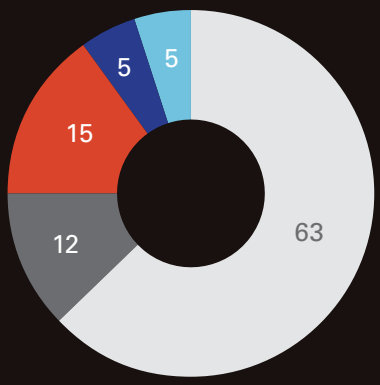
Share of countries assessed on progress towards global SDG targets, averaged across indicators grouped into five dimensions of children's rights.



Survive+thrive

Progress against global 2030 targets is relatively strong in this dimension, with a slim majority of targets already met or on track, among those for which there are sufficient trend data. Though far from complete, data coverage is also strongest among the five dimensions – with most countries reporting on most indicators.

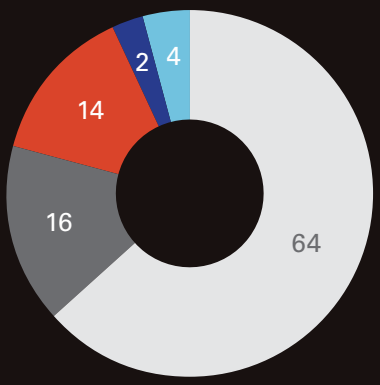
The 12 indicators assessed here include tracking under-five mortality, malnutrition and new HIV infections, as well as interventions such as delivery care and immunization.

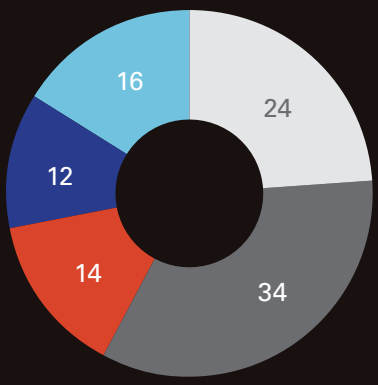


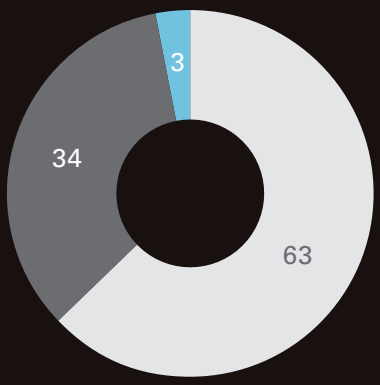
Learning

Only a minority of countries can claim to be on track on this dimension – while data are insufficient to draw trends for the bulk of countries and indicators, reflecting the urgent need to institutionalize new measurement methodologies for learning.

The 5 indicators assessed here include measuring completion of education from pre-primary to secondary; the attainment of adequate learning outcomes; and access to WASH in schools.







Protection

Very ambitious global targets and a relatively immature monitoring framework for this dimension mean that a very small number of countries are on track to achieve only a few of the indicators analysed here. In most cases, data are insufficient to uncover trends.

The 10 indicators assessed here include sexual and intimate partner violence against girls, violent discipline, child labour, female genital mutilation or cutting, child marriage, and birth registration.

Environment

Progress on this dimension is mixed, with a majority of indicator targets met or on track, among those countries and indicators with data. Still, many countries have insufficient or no data.

The 8 indicators assessed here include reliance on clean fuels, deaths from air pollution and disasters, and access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

Fair chance

With many countries only now establishing baselines for standardised child poverty measures, it is almost impossible to assess progress on this dimension, so far.

The 4 indicators assessed here include monetary and multidimensional poverty rates and social protection coverage.

How to read the dials

The summary 'dials' used in this report illustrate progress in each of the five dimensions of children's rights, by country. Each dial represents a vast aggregation exercise, combining the performance of each country on each indicator in that dimension. For each indicator, countries are assigned to one of five categories, based on their progress towards the global SDG target and availability of data:

- **No data** – data of sufficient quality, international comparability, coverage and recency are not available in UNICEF global databases.
- **Insufficient trend data** – there are not enough data points to establish a trend and project to 2030.
- **Acceleration needed** – based on current trends, the global target will not be met by 2030.
- **On track** – based on current trends, the global target will be met by 2030.
- **Target met** – the country has already achieved the global SDG target.

Double dials illustrate progress on one indicator but where populations and performance are disaggregated, including by household wealth, urban/rural residence, or gender.

The children at greatest risk of being left behind

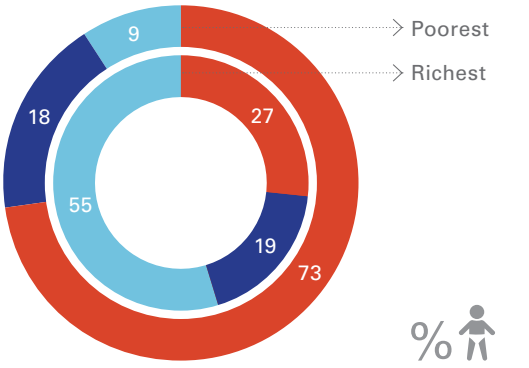
The SDGs' guiding principle to leave no one behind demands a look beyond national averages to see which children and communities are missing out, and why. But data quality and collection practices are often not up to the task. Internationally comparable, disaggregated data are available for relatively few indicators – especially in some areas, such as for learning.

Existing disaggregated data reveal stark inequities related to household wealth, urban or rural residence, or gender. Other relevant stratifiers, such as ethnicity, disability or migration status, are not captured here given data limitations. And there are very limited data on some of the world's most vulnerable children – like those living in institutions or on the streets – as they may not be captured in household surveys.

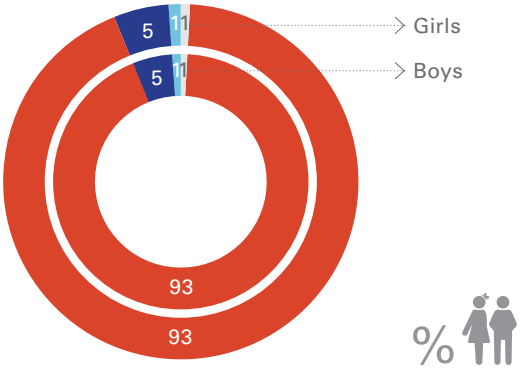
Based on current trends, three quarters of children living in the poorest fifth of households in their country will miss the SDG target for **under-five mortality** rates. By contrast, only a quarter of children living in the wealthiest fifth of households will miss the target.

While girls currently account for two thirds of **new HIV infections** among adolescents aged 15-19, projections to 2030 show that the prospects of ending AIDS among this age group are no better for boys.

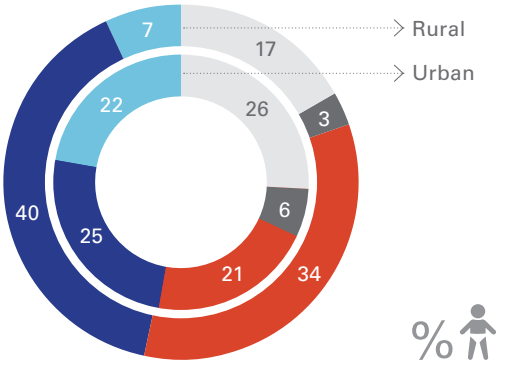
Universal **birth registration** is less likely to be achieved by 2030 in rural areas with acceleration needed for over a third of countries' rural populations, compared to a fifth of their urban populations.



Under-five mortality for the poorest and wealthiest quintiles in each country, based on data for 99 countries



Prospects for ending AIDS among girls and boys aged 15-19, based on data for 202 countries



Prospects for reaching universal birth registration for under-five population in urban and rural areas, based on data for 119 countries

Universal agenda, universal challenge

Progress for Every Child in the SDG Era reveals the magnitude – and the urgency – of the challenge: On average, 75-80 per cent of child-relevant indicators in each country either have insufficient data or show insufficient progress to meet global SDG targets by 2030.

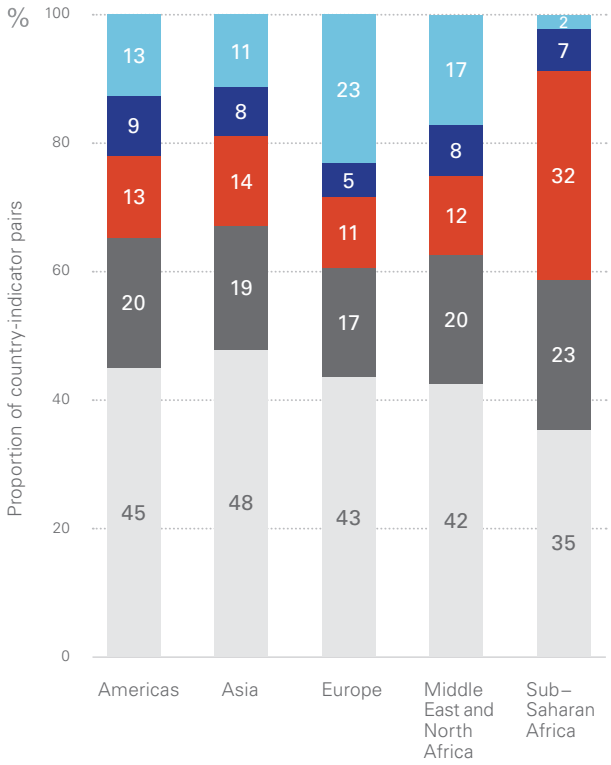
The fundamental problem of inadequate data is the same everywhere, but it manifests itself differently in different places.

Consider two contrasting regions at either end of the income scale: sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Compared to other regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the most complete data across all indicators – an impressive feat – for which good survey coverage can be credited. But it also is most off track towards meeting the targets.

By contrast, Europe has a larger share of indicators where its countries are on track than any other region but also a larger share of indicators where data are missing. There is more data on children in the global SDG database from countries in West and Central Africa than from Western Europe.

Data gaps in high-income countries are attributable to a combination of factors. Some SDG indicators measure problems that largely do not exist in these countries (e.g. female genital mutilation/cutting) or the data may not be collected even though the situation exists (e.g. child marriage). Conversely, data may be collected, but in a non-standard way that is not internationally comparable (e.g. violence against children), or the data may be collected in a standard way, but not be reported to the custodian agencies for SDG indicators – something that custodian agencies like UNICEF and governments need to address.

Data from many developing countries are unavailable for different reasons. In some cases, countries are constrained in their data collection efforts by capacity or other technical challenges. But whatever the reason, a paucity of data about the situation of children will also constrain countries in their efforts to achieve the SDGs. And if incomplete data mask poor performance, the challenge is even greater than it appears in this report.



Proportion of country-indicator pairs (39 indicators for each of 202 countries) according to data availability and progress towards global 2030 targets

To change the situation of children, count them

There is much talk among the global development community of a data revolution already in the making that can enable transformational change for the world's most disadvantaged and vulnerable people. But the data in our report tell a different story: The gaps in our knowledge are vast, and progress is too slow to achieve the SDGs. And despite the aspirations of Agenda 2030, at this stage, a great many children are being left behind.

To avoid retelling this same story over the next 12 years, we need to make a step-change now – both in assessing the situation of children everywhere, and using data to target our efforts to reach those at greatest risk of being left behind.

We know that progress is possible on data. Some countries, regions and sectors have shot ahead, advancing new data initiatives that make the most of often limited resources. These positive outliers demonstrate that much can be done to remedy the data deficiencies that keep the most vulnerable children invisible and unreached. We identify four common factors that lie behind these successes:

Global leadership

In 2011, global stakeholders in the WASH sector began work on developing an ambitious new monitoring framework to move from measures of simple access in the MDGs to quality of service for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for the SDGs. The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) subsequently coordinated a massive global effort to discover and align available national data sources, and to establish global baseline estimates for the new indicators. The results are impressive: All 232 countries, areas and territories now contribute to the new indicators – including in the availability and quality of drinking water, the treatment and disposal of excreta from on-site sanitation systems, and the availability of handwashing facilities. Between 2015 and 2017, the number of data sources employed by the JMP increased by over 50 per cent, including a stunning increase in reports from administrative data sources which almost quintupled.

Regional cooperation

The Latin America and Caribbean region is a recognized leader in household income surveys both in terms of survey coverage and shared data norms, including open data. This is in large part because of close cooperation across the region among both producers and users of surveys. In the 1990s, MECOVI, a multi-year joint donor initiative succeeded in building institutional and implementation capacity of National Statistical Offices, including through horizontal cooperation across countries. These efforts have been complemented on the data user-side through SEDLAC (the Socio-economic Database of Latin American and the Caribbean) – an on-going initiative focused on the accessibility of survey data employing common methodologies across countries. Both initiatives benefited from a long regional tradition in high quality graduate programs in the social sciences, which cultivated a deep pool of technocrats and data analysts.

Technological innovation

Accompanied by other changes, digital technology has brought new hope to the challenge of birth registration – especially in hard to reach and underserved communities. For example, a mobile phone-based registration system, coupled with central analytical capacity, allows the registration of births to be devolved to the local level, making it much easier for parents to register their children. Ease of registration, coupled with the removal of fees, and streamlining of the number of people who need to verify and authorize each registration, have resulted in the number of registrations increasing dramatically. While these are still early days, in Uganda the number of children being registered in a year in pilot districts increased from 17,000 in 2012 to 2.5 million in 2017; in Pakistan from 1,000 births in 2015 to 78,000 births in 2018; and in Tanzania from 175,000 births in 2013 to almost 2 million in 2017.

Advocacy

Programming for children with disabilities has historically been hampered by a lack of sound data on the lives of these children and those who care for them. But advocacy on data is helping to turn this around. The Washington Group on Disability Statistics, a UN-sponsored group, and UNICEF, in partnership with Disabled People's Organizations, developed a new way of gathering information on child disability. Mothers or caregivers are asked questions that go beyond labels and diagnoses to gather information about children's actual experiences and the difficulties that they encounter in performing daily activities. These questions are now in a survey module and available in nine languages. Within one year of its release, the module had been used in more than 10 disability surveys. It is now incorporated into UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) that will be fielded in more than 40 low- and middle-income countries over the next two years, allowing countries to report on a number of child-relevant SDG indicators disaggregated by disability status for the first time. Mexico was a pioneer in implementing this module, testing it in their 2015 National Survey on Children and Women. Children with disabilities were found to present worst outcomes in terms of nutrition, early childhood development and child labour.

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Practical principles to strengthen data for children

These four examples show that progress can be made – and made rapidly – to collect and use SDG data in support of children. Governments are ultimately accountable to generate the data that will guide and measure achievement of the 2030 Goals. But their partners in the international community have an obligation to support their efforts drawing on their individual strengths. This is the basis for SDG 17, which calls for a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, including to develop countries' statistical capabilities.

We identify three principles that should underpin this effort and that will guide UNICEF's work over the next 12 years:

- **Data as the spine of system strengthening.** The effort to improve data collection and capacity is inseparable from the broader effort to build strong service delivery systems, whether in health or education, social services or border control. We will invest in long-term efforts to improve the quality, coverage and coordination of governments' administrative data systems that concern children.

- **Leave no country behind.** Global support to data monitoring and capacity resembles a messy patchwork. We will urge systematic and coordinated efforts to ensure all countries have minimum data coverage for children, irrespective of their resources and capabilities. This will require greater cooperation with industrialized economies to ensure reporting to custodian agencies, and investing in new data solutions in conflict- and disaster-affected areas, where reliance on regular surveys and routine data systems may not be feasible.

- **Shared norms, beginning with open data.** The monitoring framework of the SDGs represents a formidable exercise in agreeing on universal approaches to measurement, while still recognizing the value of local adaption for country ownership. The need for stronger shared norms on data remains great, especially when it comes to children. We will advocate for common approaches to measuring emerging threats facing children, capturing missing child populations such as those in institutions or migrating, and to sharing data to enable vulnerable children to be more effectively identified, while protecting children's privacy.

In 2015, the global community committed itself to achieving the SDGs, including bold goals for children. Three years later, the scale of the task represented by the goals has come into sharp relief. We cannot sleepwalk to 2030, assuming business as usual will realize our ambitions for children. Rather, we must stride with purpose to ensure every child is counted, and no child is left behind.

For full report visit uni.cf/sdgreport

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