

NEW REPORT ABOUT PROGRESS IN CHILD WELL-BEING

Children around the world are doing better than ever, according to a new report from UNICEF and Save the Children UK. Compared to just a few decades ago, fewer young children are dying each day, fewer children are living in poverty and more children are well-fed and in school.

The good news for decision makers is that there seems to be a path to extending these gains: Evidence suggests that they have resulted from strong, explicit national commitments to invest in children, supportive policies, and greater and well-targeted development assistance. Going forward, efforts will have the greatest impact if focused on the most disadvantaged, where childhood deprivation is increasingly concentrated.
<http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publications/Progress%20in%20child%20well-being.pdf>

A new report commissioned by UNICEF and Save the Children UK, and prepared in collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute, brings encouraging news: There has been remarkable progress in children's well-being throughout the world over the past few decades, and there is a path to extending these gains. Greater emphasis on the most disadvantaged children, where childhood deprivation is increasingly concentrated, offers a cost-effective and efficient way to make even faster progress toward internationally-agreed goals for children. Case studies examined in the report suggest that various factors have been critical in delivering positive outcomes for children: stronger and explicit national commitments to invest in children, supportive policies and programmes at country level, and greater and well-targeted development assistance.

Why invest in children?

Investing in children's well-being is not only right in principle but also right in practice: It has significant pay-offs in terms of economic growth and social stability. Such investment develops human capital and can lead to greater productivity – a critical component of stronger economies. There are indirect impacts on economic growth too because girls' education and women's empowerment lead to smaller families, healthier babies and more children in school. Focusing resources on the most marginalized children can also contribute to reducing inequality and foster greater social cohesion. Investments in children are essential to not only achieve child rights today but also to underpin the foundations for more stable and prosperous countries in the future.

Reducing child poverty and deprivation is a key commitment of both governments and the international community. In the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration, world leaders agreed to work together to reduce poverty and hunger and promote education and health in the developing world. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are all directly or indirectly relevant to children. With only four years left to reach the MDG target date of 2015, and in the wake of the global financial crisis, it is critical not to let this commitment falter. Indeed, this is the time to capitalize on the solid progress being made and intensify efforts to reach the finish line. The Convention on the Rights of the Child also commits States Parties to invest the maximum extent of their available resources in the survival, protection and development of children.

Some striking signs of progress

- 12,000 fewer children under five died every day in 2010 than in 1990.
- Stunting – damage to children's physical and cognitive development caused by malnutrition – declined in developing countries from 40 per cent to 29 per cent between 1990 and 2008, while underweight prevalence also fell.
- Fewer children, are becoming infected with HIV or dying of AIDS.
- The number of children enrolled in pre-primary education worldwide increased from 113 million to 157 million between 1999 and 2009.
- From 1999 to 2009 an additional 58 million children enrolled in primary school and the number of out-of-school primary-aged children decreased by 39 million.
- Globally, girls now make up 53 per cent of out-of-school primary-aged children, compared to 61 per cent in 1990.
- The proportion of adolescents of lower secondary age who were out of school worldwide fell by 21 per cent from 1999 to 2009.
- More children are being registered at birth, and rates of child marriage and child labour have gone down in many countries