A Future For The World’s Children?

A WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission
Commission co-chairs

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Helen Clark Foundation & PMNCH

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The Commission

This Commission is a science-led, multi-disciplinary international collaboration, aiming for transformational change.
“Our house is on fire”

– Greta Thunberg
Children are at risk today like never before

- Recent years have seen improvements in children’s health, education, and survival

- But millions of children around the world still suffer from hunger, sickness, and violence

- New threats have also emerged:

  **ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS**
  to children’s current health and future well-being

  **COMMERCIAL THREATS**
  via targeted marketing of harmful substances
Children and COVID-19

HEALTH: Kawasaki syndrome, anxiety, stress, loss of relatives, reduced health service availability and access to first responders, decline in immunisation rates

EDUCATION: Lack of schooling, widening of educational divide

ECONOMIC: Insecurity and poverty-related stress, risk of worldwide depression and mass unemployment

NUTRITION: Food insecurity and malnutrition

DOMESTIC ABUSE: Inability of women and children to temporarily escape abusive partners

CONFLICT: Unrest and instability in fragile states and others if food riots break out.

GOVERNANCE: Political instability and its consequences.
Progress on the child-related SDGs is stalled

- More than 2 billion people, including half the world’s poorest, live in countries affected by political fragility and conflict, problems increasingly linked with climate change

- Many countries are not reporting data on child-related SDG indicators
Why now?

- Under business-as-usual scenarios, there is a 93% chance that global warming will exceed 4°C by the year 2100

- The effects would be devastating:

  - **RISING**
    - ocean levels
  - **DISRUPTION**
    - of water and ecosystems
  - **INUNDATION**
    - of coastal cities and small island nations
  - **INCREASED MORTALITY**
    - from heatwaves
  - **PROLIFORATION**
    - of vector-borne disease
  - **A CRISIS OF MALNUTRITION**
    - because of disruption to food production systems
It’s an Emergency:

This event is low-carbon.
A future for the world’s children

Children need protection from every sector (1/2)

TRANSPORT
road injury is the leading cause of death for children and young people aged 5–29 years

AGRICULTURE & TRADE
subsidies, trade rules, and food policies expose children to under-nutritious and/or obesogenic diets

URBAN PLANNING
lack of “playable” spaces reduces physical activity

ENVIRONMENT
air pollution exposure reduces lung function; and increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome
Children need protection from every sector (2/2)

FAMILY SERVICES
violence against children violates their rights and is strongly linked with anti-social behavior as an adult

HOUSING
40% of children live in informal settlements, with risks of overcrowding, health hazards, poor access to services, poverty and social exclusion

EDUCATION
libraries, schools, and recreation centres are positively associated with child physical health, social competence, and wellbeing, and negatively with vulnerability to developmental delay
Commercial marketing of harmful products

The commercial sector exploits children’s developmental stage to sell harmful products: alcohol, tobacco, & unhealthy foods.

51M
Children in Australia viewed 51M alcohol adverts in a single year.

68%
of 5- and 6-year-olds in Brazil, China, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan could identify at least one cigarette brand logo.

24M
Adverts for e-cigarettes reach 24M children in the USA each year.
Industry self-regulation does not work

Studies in Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, the US and Australia – among others – have shown that self-regulation has not hampered the ability or propensity of businesses to advertise to children.

Photo Credit: World Bank
What children told us they value

- FAMILY TOGETHERNESS
- CLEAN ENVIRONMENTS
- ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND CULTURE
- THE OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY
Children are rarely consulted in decisions that impact their current & future well-being

[Being healthy] is playing with my extended family
Maōri boy, New Zealand

When other people are happy, we are happy.
Young girl, Lebanon

When people know each other, there’s less violence
Boy in poor community, Argentina

It’s fun to be a kid because you have the opportunity to play
Hearing impaired child, Nigeria
A future for the world’s children

A Plan of Action
1 Children at the centre of the SDGs

Governments, civil society and communities must put child health & well-being at the centre of the SDGs.

**COST OF INACTION**

Not improving child development through universal preschool, home visits, and improved nutrition, could reach >10% of GDP in some contexts.

**CURRENT ESTIMATED FINANCING GAP**

Just US$195 per capita in low-income countries.

Photo Credit: World Bank
Benefit cost ratios
very high returns on every dollar invested
… across the lifespan & across generations
2 Unified, multi-sectoral action

Heads of state and government must take leadership & have a long-term view

Coordinated multi-sectoral policies for children are needed across government

Children must be involved in decisions about their current and future well-being.
Act on climate – now

No sense working toward children’s health today – if they won’t have a future tomorrow

Stopping greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible is our most urgent priority

Collective action on climate is the duty of everyone who cares about children
Measure & rank country progress

- Countries that do well on indicators of child health and well-being have the highest excess CO2 emissions, threatening children’s future – and vice versa.

- The Child Flourishing & Futures Profile charts the performance of 180 countries on 1) a composite measure of children’s health & well-being and 2) excess CO2 emissions

- No country does well on both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excess CO2 emissions relative to 2030 targets (%)</th>
<th>Rating system of Child Flourishing &amp; Futures profile</th>
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<td>Dark red: 161-180</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;300</td>
<td>Black: &gt;300</td>
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5 Protection from commercial marketing

- To protect children from marketing of tobacco, alcohol, formula milk, sugar-sweetened beverages, gambling, and the inappropriate use of their personal data …

- The Commission proposes a binding treaty – an Optional Protocol to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child
Call To Action:

A Global Movement

A future for the world's children
A Call to Action

To ensure a healthy future for all children, collective action is needed:

- From political leaders,
- From civil society,
- From international agencies,
- From communities,
- From families,
- And from children.

Working together towards the SDGs, with children at the centre!
Read the Report

www.thelancet.com/futurechild
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In memory of …

Maharaj Kishan Bhan
(1947-2020)

Paediatrician, scientist, and tireless advocate for the health of children
Thank You

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Recommendations

Heads of state/government should create a high-level mechanism to coordinate work across sectors and assess the effect of all policies on children.

Heads of state/government should track budget allocations to child wellbeing and mobilise domestic resources for additional investment.

Government officials and research institutions should develop strategies to improve data reporting for SDG indicators measuring child wellbeing, equity, and carbon emissions.

Local government leaders should establish cross-cutting teams for child health and wellbeing, involving civil society.

Global children’s advocates should mobilise for child-friendly wellbeing and sustainability policies.

Leaders should reframe their understanding of the SDGs around children and the threat to their future from greenhouse gas emissions.

Children should be given high-level platforms to share their concerns and ideas and claim their rights.

Country leaders should work towards an Optional Protocol to the UN CRC to protect children from harmful commercial practices.

The UN should work towards a simplified, effectively multisectoral UN architecture.

Heads of UN agencies coordinate action to support countries to achieve the SDGs, with children at the center.