

# Transformative Change for Children and Youth in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Office of Research - Innocenti Working Paper  
WP-2019-02 | March 2019



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For readers wishing to cite this document, we suggest the following form:

Hujo, K. and Carter, M.

Transformative Change for Children and Youth in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *Innocenti Working Paper 2019-02*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

Research assistance and written inputs from Ira Mataj, copy-editing support from Alberto Parmigiani, and design of infographics by Sergio Sandoval are gratefully acknowledged. We also thank Innocenti staff for useful comments received at a joint workshop in March 2018.

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eISSN: 2520-6796

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## TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a new opportunity to address the key development challenges of our time with the aim to improve the well-being and rights of all people while protecting the natural environment. Children are important agents and beneficiaries in this process: many children are not only among the most vulnerable groups affected by poverty, inequality, conflict and climate change, they are also the generation that will reach adulthood during the realization of the 2030 Agenda. To create the sustainable, long-term transformation ambitiously laid out in Agenda 2030, new transformative approaches to policy must be implemented and applied to children and youth—approaches that target the underlying generative framework of social injustice as opposed to implementing affirmative remedies that simply seek to alleviate the symptoms.

The objective of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework to help assess the transformative potential of policies – particularly with regard to their impact on children and youth – and how these are meaningfully integrated and represented in decision-making processes. It will shed light on the policy space for transformative change by analysing a range of relevant factors which present both challenges and opportunities for fostering child rights and well-being through the implementation of Agenda 2030. The paper then applies the framework to a selection of policy areas that are of high relevance for child development, such as social policy and care policy assessing necessary means of implementation such as resource mobilization and governance systems and looking at economic and environmental impacts in a cross-cutting way. The aim is to stretch boundaries and invite new thinking on how to grasp the numerous opportunities offered by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to approach development challenges holistically and from a child-centred perspective. This involves integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of development and fostering cross-sectoral approaches.

## ACRONYMS

CBHI	Community-based health insurance
CCT	Conditional cash transfer
CGP	Child Grant Programme
CHW	Community health workers
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
GHC	Ghanaian Cedi
ILO	International Labour Office
KES	Kenyan Shilling
MCTP	Multiple Category Targeting Programme
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MWK	Malawi Kwacha
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational education and training
WHO	World Health Organization
ZMW	Zambian Kwacha

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: AGENDA 2030 AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE FOR CHILDREN

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a new opportunity to address the key development challenges of our time—with the aim of improving the well-being and rights of all people while protecting the natural environment. Children are important both as agents and beneficiaries in this process: they are often among the most vulnerable groups affected by poverty, inequality, conflict and climate change, and they are also the generation that will reach adulthood during the realization of the 2030 Agenda. A new development agenda that is concerned with *transforming our world* and shaping a better future is an agenda for children and future generations.

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs represent a marked shift from the approach to development engendered by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite their successful mobilization of efforts to reduce poverty and to invest in social development, the MDGs had been criticized for being silent on the challenge of rising inequalities and the shortcomings of mainstream market-led approaches, as well as for the absence of clear social, environmental and economic goals that would apply to both developed and developing countries.<sup>1</sup> The new agenda has, in many ways, turned the traditional development approach upside down: it is no longer an agenda from the North for the South, but rather a universal programme that needs to be implemented in all countries, including those that have traditionally funded and implemented agendas elsewhere rather than at home. The new agenda is equally challenging but also promising for traditional aid actors that have designed and delivered programmes for specific groups, such as children. They are now required to stretch the boundaries of their work and to pay greater attention to the interlinkages between sectors and policy areas. This not only creates more complexity but also offers more, and more effective, entry points for interventions and advocacy.

The holistic and universal vision of the 2030 Agenda, along with its comprehensive set of goals and targets – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – is therefore an important step forward, but also a challenge. To create the sustainable, long-term change ambitiously laid out in Agenda 2030, new approaches to policy must be implemented—approaches that target “the underlying generative framework” of social injustice as opposed to implementing “affirmative remedies”, which simply seek to alleviate the symptoms (Fraser 1995: 82).

Based on this definition, we understand **transformative change** as a process that attacks the root causes of poverty, inequality and unsustainable practices through integrated and synergistic policies and reforms, thereby generating an “eco-social turn”<sup>2</sup> which can transform economic, social, ecological and political structures with the aim of achieving sustainable development (UNPISD).

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