Children's Health Care as a Human Right: The Impact of Poverty on the Health of the Most Vulnerable

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“In everything we do, the most disadvantaged children and the countries in greatest need have priority.”
— UNICEF Mission Statement
Highlights

Major challenges facing our world

• Poverty

• **Humanitarian crisis:** War and natural disasters

• **Impact** on children within the context of human rights

• Implications for policies and programs

The focus is on the most vulnerable children.
Our International Commitments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>UN Millennium Declaration</td>
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<td>Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities</td>
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<td>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</td>
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<td>Paris Agreement (Climate Change)</td>
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<td>Bonn (Climate Change)</td>
<td>2017</td>
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Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“The recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

- Defines a child as a person up to the age of 18
- Legally binding document once ratified
- Children are entitled to their own rights but also have responsibilities
- Compliance is monitored by UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: Submits a report to the General Assembly once a year
“Article 24: **Right to health care and health services**... Children have the right to good quality healthcare, safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy.”
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000-2015

The world made much progress, but MDGs failed the most vulnerable children.

“In 2015, 5.9 million children died before reaching age 5 due to preventable diseases.”

UNICEF (2016), The State of World’s Children:

MDGs
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal education primary
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 
Agenda 2030

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life on Land
16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals
EQUALITY

EQUITY
Human Rights-Based Approach

This is the conceptual framework used by UNICEF.

The Key Elements

1. Addressing disparities, inequalities and inequities

2. Building local capacity, local participation and local ownership to better guarantee sustainability

3. Instilling accountability

4. Advocating for the rights of the most vulnerable: Making their voices heard

5. Using human-rights language
“If you’ve come here to save us, then go on home. But if you’ve come to struggle with us on our common problems, then let’s get to work.”

-- Aboriginal woman to concerned Australians
(Davidson, 1994, p. 195)
The Major Challenges We Face

Poverty
- Lack of access to basic services: healthcare, education, clean water, and legal protection

Humanitarian crisis
- War and conflict: resources being spent on war and armed conflicts
- Natural disasters, environmental injustice, and climate change

Societal/Cultural
- Discrimination, bias against girls and women, lack of control over resources

Political
- Governance, lack of political will, corruption

Climate change
- Half a billion children live in flood prone areas
- 160 million live in high drought risk regions
The Magnitude of the Problem
Poverty

- 2013: Estimated 767 million people live on less than $1.90 per day, half of them under the age of 18
- Almost 50% in Sub-Saharan Africa; 36% in South East Asia-- World Bank (2017)
Child Mortality

Compared to the richest children, the **poorest children** are:

1.9 times as likely to **die before age 5**

Child Mortality

2016 highest Under-5 Mortality Rates (U5MR)*

- Chad: 127.3
- Somalia: 132.5
- Sierra Leone: 113.5
- Central African Republic: 123.6
- Mali: 110.6

*Per 1000 live births

Malnutrition

- Underlying cause of 1/3 of child mortality
- Climate change destabilizes already fragile food production system
Gender Inequalities: Twins
Impact of War

Estimated **230 million children** live in countries affected by war

10 million child refugees

Between 2005-2015 number of child refugees under UNHCR mandate doubled

UNICEF 2016, Uprooted

Impact of War on Children

Child protection issues

- Children are recruited as soldiers
- In 2010, over 1,200 children died due to land mines
- A majority of recruits and child deaths by land mines are boys
Monitoring Child Rights Violations in Conflict Situations

Six violations as starting points for monitoring abuses:
- Killing or maiming of children
- Recruiting or using child soldiers
- Attacks against schools or hospitals
- Rape or other sexual violence against children
- Abduction of children
- Denial of humanitarian access for children

Ref: United Nations Office the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed conflict
Impact on Education

1 in 4 of the world’s school-aged children live in countries affected by crises

Attacks on Hospitals and Schools

Hospital attack in Yemen
Environmental Factors Impacting Children

Around 2 billion children live in areas where outdoor air pollution exceeds international limits.

Fig. 23: Satellite derived PM 2.5 level (global annual average), 2012-2014

Globally...

300 million children live in areas where outdoor air pollution exceeds 6 times international limits

UNICEF (October 2016). “Clear the Air for Children.”
Deaths Caused by Air Pollution, 1990-2015

**Fig. 5:** Deaths caused by outdoor and indoor air pollution, 1990 - 2015

- Outdoor air pollution pollution related deaths
- Indoor air pollution related deaths

**Source:** IMHE, Global Burden of Disease, 2016

UNICEF (October 2016). "Clear the Air for Children."
Child Mortality Due to Air Pollution

Nearly 1 in 10 under-5 deaths is linked to air pollution

Fig. 7: Regional breakdown of deaths from outdoor and indoor air pollution, 2012

- **Europe**
  - 117,000 deaths
  - 482,000 deaths including
    - 3,000 under-5 deaths
    - 1,000 under-5 deaths

- **Eastern Mediterranean region**
  - 201,000 deaths
  - 250,000 deaths including
    - 73,000 under-5 deaths
    - 24,000 under-5 deaths

- **Americas**
  - 81,000 deaths
  - 152,000 deaths including
    - 8,000 under-5 deaths
    - 1,000 under-5 deaths

- **South East Asia**
  - 1,620,000 deaths
  - 1,738,000 deaths including
    - 28,000 under-5 deaths
    - 14,000 under-5 deaths

- **Western Pacific**
  - 1,692,000 deaths
  - 936,000 deaths including
    - 133,000 under-5 deaths
    - 41,000 under-5 deaths

UNICEF (October 2016). "Clear the Air for Children."
What Is Being Done:
The Response to Humanitarian Crisis
Humanitarian Response: Cluster System

Sector Clusters: Collaborative, immediate response among local government, UN agencies, NGOs, and other aid agencies.

- Health
- Nutrition
- Shelter
- Emergency telecommunications
- Early recovery
- Education
- Donors
- Logistics
- Protection
- Water, sanitation and hygiene
- Food security
- Recovery and regular programming
- Before trigger
- First 8 weeks
- Beyond 8 weeks
- Threshold
Example of Health Cluster

- **Activities:**
  - Conduct rapid assessment
  - Deliver packages of services rapidly
  - HIV prevention and treatment services (e.g., measles vaccination, insecticide-treated nets, de-worming medication)
  - Mental health services, particularly for survivors of sexual violence and child abuse
  - Dissemination of health messages (e.g., breastfeeding, safe motherhood, hygiene and sanitation)
  - Supply distribution and essential items to affected communities (winterization kits)

- Clusters transfer responsibilities to locals
- Clusters are deactivated after emergency response
Path to Equity

- Identify the poorest children and communities; disaggregate data
- Using national averages ignores the most vulnerable
- Invest in proven, low-cost, high impact interventions
- Strengthen health systems
  - Focus on deadly preventable diseases: Malaria, diarrhea and respiratory infections
  - Training of health workers
- Use innovative approaches to reach the hardest to reach
- Monitor results for equity

Preparedness

- Preparation and response-planning include:
- Delivery of services, human and financial resources requirements, supply (e.g. vaccines, bed nets, antibiotics)
- Training of local health workers
- Appropriate communication strategy
- Data collection, analysis, monitoring and evaluation plan
- Assistance in placing Early Warning Systems, with focus on most vulnerable children and women requiring immediate care, including food, shelter, health care and psychosocial support, clean water, legal and physical protection
Recovery

- Link emergency or humanitarian response to long-term development (e.g. national health systems; support national and local stakeholders in national and local ownership)
- Establish/Re-establish routine health services, e.g., routine immunizations
- Build local capacity in disaster risk reduction
Light at the End of the Tunnel

- Building back better
- Emergencies are opportunities to improve infrastructure
- Children and young people as partners
Examples: Response

- **Mexico**
  - High density population centers have shifted to using ultra low sulphur diesel

- **Chile**
  - Ministry of Environment exchanges old cook stoves with new & clean cook stoves to minimize pollution from residential wood burning

- **Rwanda**
  - Banned non biodegradable plastic bag to reduce the amount of burnt plastic
Think Globally. Act Locally.

Sean N. Parker Center for Allergy & Asthma Research

- Advocating, supporting and treating the most vulnerable
- Expanding to areas with large underserved populations (Houston, New Orleans)
- Improving access and delivery of care
- Fostering community partnership
Long Beach/Los Angeles – 2006 Clean Air Action Plan

- The United States largest port complex
- In 2006 developed an action plan that resulted in a reduction of 85% for diesel particulate matter, 50% for nitrogen oxides, & 97% for sulfur oxides

Long Beach/Los Angeles – 2017 New Clean Air Action Plan

- **Goal:**
  - By 2050 will phase out diesel trucks in favor of natural gas and ultimately zero-emission trucks and cargo handling equipment
  - Freight moving trucks, trains, and ships will shift to cleaner technologies through 2035
  - Reduce greenhouse gas emission 80% and ease asthma by 2050

- **Projections:**
  - By 2024 most of the 17,000 trucks serving the port will be near zero or natural gas fueled
  - By 2036 zero emission trucks will be the majority

- **Action**
  - Expanding the use of emission capturing devices to reduce pollution from docked cargo ships
  - Clean Trucks program
    - Fees on trucks entering port terminals to phase out the oldest dirtiest diesel trucks transition
    - Cost: $7-14 billion.

- Ref: [https://lbpost.com/images/stockintros/POLB_PierA.jpg](https://lbpost.com/images/stockintros/POLB_PierA.jpg)
A Few Comparisons Across Industrialized Countries
## Child Well-Being in Industrialized Nations

### Report Card

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
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Relative Child Poverty Rate
Housing & Environment

Assessing housing and environment

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENTS</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Rooms per person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of households with children reporting more than one housing problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental safety</td>
<td>Homicide rate (annual number of homicides per 100,000)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Air pollution (annual PM10 [µg/m^3])</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In the U.S.

- 1 in 10 US low-income families live in inadequate housing with exposure to allergens and air pollution
- Native American children have asthma rates 6 times higher than white children
- South Bronx, asthma rates 4 times higher than national average
- African American children 2 times more likely to visit ER for asthma and 4 times more likely to die from asthma than white children.

American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine "Health Disparities In Asthma."
Air Pollution

Findings

- The lowest levels of air pollution are found in Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg and the United States (all below 20 parts per million).
- The good result for the United States is influenced by legislation on air pollution (1997, revised in 2006) which enforced stricter limits than in most European countries.

- The highest levels are found in Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Romania (all higher than 30 parts per million).
Need for More Effective Response
## Addressing the Root Causes

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Poverty</td>
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<td>Societal/Cultural</td>
<td>Discrimination, bias against girls and women, lack of control over resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Crisis</td>
<td>Natural disasters, environmental injustice and climate change; resources devoted to war and armed conflicts</td>
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<td>Political</td>
<td>Governance, lack of political will, corruption</td>
</tr>
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</table>

“Reaching the Unreached” Farzanegan, UNICEF (2005)
Building the Future

1. NO POVERTY
2. ZERO HUNGER
3. GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
4. QUALITY EDUCATION
5. GENDER EQUALITY
6. CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7. AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
8. DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
9. INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
10. REDUCED INEQUALITIES
11. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
12. RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13. CLIMATE ACTION
14. LIFE BELOW WATER
15. LIFE ON LAND
16. PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
17. PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

— Henry David Thoreau
Addressing Poverty

- SDG #1: Eradicating extreme poverty for all
- Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty
- Current rates of progress are insufficient to interrupt those cycles and close gaps in equity by 2030 – the target year for reaching the SDGs
Outcomes of Investing in Children

Use equity-focused budgeting to reach the most excluded children

Outcomes of Investing in Children

Figure 4: An equity-enhancing approach saved more lives and was more cost-effective
For every US$1 million invested, the number of deaths averted was 1.8 times higher among poor than non-poor groups in 24 countries.

Source: UNICEF analysis.

Example: Sierra Leone Investing in Poor

- Introduced a package of basic services in 2010 targeting major killers of vulnerable children & women
- Insecticide treated nets, promotion of early & exclusive breastfeeding, immunization, & birth attendance
- Government trained 15,000 community health workers between 2000-2015 & provided on the job training for primary health care workers at each of the country’s 1,200 primary health care centers
- Conducted mass malaria prevention campaigns every 2 years distributing insecticide treated nets to pregnant women & children
- In 2010, launched the Free Healthcare Initiative to improve access to health care for mothers & children

Results
- Between 2008 and 2013 under 5 mortality fell annually by an estimated 14 deaths per 1,000 live births among the poor, compared to 9 deaths per 1,000 live births among non poor groups
- 2014-2015 Ebola virus outbreak was devastating- potentially set back decades of progress in the country
  - Showed need to scale up resources & staff hospitals for most deprived in crises

“the WORLD is OVER-ARMED and PEACE is UNDERFUNDED”

ANNNUAL EXPENDITURES

$1630 BILLION
Military Expenditures Worldwide

DAILY MILITARY EXPENDITURE WORLDWIDE
How much has been spent today starting at midnight?
$2,547,755,355

ANNNUAL EXPENDITURES

$128 BILLION
Official Development Assistance

ANNNUAL EXPENDITURES

$44 BILLION
Official Development Assistance to Least Developed Countries

ANNNUAL EXPENDITURES

$2.7 BILLION
UN Regular Budget for Peace and Security, Development, Humanitarian Affairs, Human Rights, and International Law

ANNNUAL EXPENDITURES

$0.65 BILLION
International Disarmament and Non-proliferation Organizations

https://www.un.org/disarmament/over-armed/
What Should Be Done

Make the most vulnerable and marginalized a priority

- **Fight inequity with human rights**: use the CRC and SDGs as advocacy tools
- Build alliances with government officials, civil society, lawmakers, businesses and academic institutions
- Increase investment in equity-focused policies and programs
- **Integrated approach** to service delivery: safe water, health, psychosocial support, nutrition, education, legal protection
- Put in place **social protection** measures
  - Social safety nets/cash transfers
- Combat discrimination with education, laws and non-violent action
What Should Be Done

**Political accountability**
- Advocate with the U.S. government to ratify the CRC Work with other countries to implement the CRC
- Advocate with government officials and lawmakers to adopt Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

**Address root causes of humanitarian crises**
- War, environmental injustice and climate change
- Put in place measures to protect displaced and refugee children
- Foster community partnership and ownership
- Long-term vision
- Monitor for equity
What You Can Do to Help Give Vulnerable Children a Good Future...

- Interdisciplinary research to identify who is left out and why
- Use research results to advocate for policies and programs
- Academic/Community partnerships
- Training/Capacity building
- Foster innovation to reach the underserved and hardest to reach
- Help make the most vulnerable peoples’ voices heard
- Advocate for ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child CRC and adoption of SDGs

Be a voice for those who are not heard
YOU MUST ACCEPT FINITE DISAPPOINTMENT BUT NEVER LOSE INFINITE HOPE

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Thank You