

October 2019

A Second Revolution

Thirty years of child rights,
and the unfinished agenda

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



CHILD RIGHTS NOW!

ChildFund
Alliance

PLAN
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Save the Children

SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL

Terre des Hommes
International Federation

World Vision



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) is a landmark in the struggle to recognise children's rights; a contributor to the unprecedented progress made for children over the last thirty years; and a benchmark against which we can measure how far we must go to ensure the rights of all children are fully realised.

The UN CRC has played a vital role in transforming the lives of millions of children since its adoption in 1989. But for all the extraordinary advances made since then, too many children have been left behind. The task ahead is clear: we must focus on the unfinished agenda and 'the second revolution' that will be required to realise the rights of all children.

THE UN CRC AT 30

Adopted in 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) established the principle that children have rights, equal to those of adults, and recognised the link between the well-being of children and the strength of societies. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. The UN CRC is now the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history: 196 countries have endorsed it.

Incredible Change – More to Do

Against a backdrop of incredible social and economic change, the UN CRC has spurred national legislation to protect children, encouraged investment in children and the systems they need to survive and develop, and allowed more children to have a say in shaping their future. We can say today that children are healthier, better nourished, more educated, and more protected in law than at any point in human history.

Governments and civil society should celebrate this progress as we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the UN CRC. But we cannot ignore the uneven progress and failure to implement the rights of all children in two key areas. First, the children who still face early death, hunger and who are unlikely to receive a basic education are those living in conflict-affected areas or fragile states, and those belonging to excluded social groups. All too often, the rights of these children are ignored by governments; in some cases, it is politically convenient to do so, and in others the lack of resources or conditions on the ground act as barriers to progress. Second, progress has stalled on key issues such as protection from violence and the implementation of

Realising the rights of children everywhere is central to achieving the SDGs

children's civil and political rights because governments have failed to translate the UN CRC into policy or practice.

If governments are serious about delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is our promise to the children of today, they must recognise that the UN CRC is indivisible from the SDGs. With their broad approach to economic and social development, peace, security and environmental sustainability, the SDGs offer a powerful springboard for implementation of the UN CRC. In turn, the SDGs and their promise to leave no-one behind will not be met without the full implementation of the rights of all children.

A Different World

The UN CRC has lost none of its urgency or relevance, but it exists in a remarkably different world to 1989. Climate change arguably poses the single biggest challenge to the fulfilment of children's rights and threatens to undo much of the hard-won progress of recent decades. Conflict has always been a barrier to progress, but the ways today's wars are being fought puts children firmly on the frontline. The rise in attacks on safe spaces such as schools and hospitals and the killing of children in attacks on civilian communities represent a direct assault on children's rights.

While the broader social and economic shifts of thirty years ago helped drive progress for children, the political headwinds of today run counter to children's rights. Across the world, civil society space is shrinking. Where civil society cannot function, governments and

institutions will not be held accountable to their commitments to child rights, and the space in which to defend and uphold these rights will be eroded. On the global stage we see powerful countries routinely question the underlying principles at the heart of the UN CRC; whether by downplaying the rights of girls and women or promoting the rights of parents at the expense of the rights of the child. These trends – whether political or environmental – serve as a reminder that the progress we have achieved in recognising and implementing children’s rights is all too reversible.

While there are significant challenges ahead, we also have better data, more expertise, and an established child survival community to help reach the most marginalised and deprived children than ever before.

The UN CRC has lost none of its urgency, but children face dramatic new threats compared to 1989

THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

- More than 5 million children die every year from preventable causes.
- Around 150 million young children worldwide suffer from malnutrition and the effects of stunted growth.
- Around 64 million children still lack access to primary education.
- An estimated 15 million adolescent girls aged 15-19 have experienced forced sex.
- 12 million girls under 18 are married each year.
- 95,000 children a year – 70% of them boys – are murdered.
- Around 152 million children, aged between 5-17, are still engaged in child labour.



Call to Action

The time to act is now. It took a revolution in how we think about children's rights to achieve the UN CRC, and it will take a second revolution to achieve the rights of all children. The policies, investments and practices we put in place in the next decade must be transformational for all children to break the vicious intergenerational cycles of poverty, and exclusion and lay the foundations of the fair, prosperous and sustainable future that we have committed to deliver. The consequences of inaction will be grave. We are calling on all governments to:

➔ Embrace the UN CRC in its entirety.

- Reaffirm political commitment to children's rights by fully embracing the UN CRC, including its Optional Protocols.
- Adopt and implement legislation, policies, and budgets which are inclusive of all children, reflect the distinct needs at all stages of childhood, and the different experiences of boys and girls.
- Identify and address all forms of discrimination and violence preventing children from realising their rights.
- Ensure that the best interests of all children are given primary consideration in political decision-making.

➔ Invest today in the sustainable future of tomorrow.

- Raise revenues and spending on essential services, infrastructure, and systems that safeguard the rights of children, in a way that prioritises the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable children.
- Governments of wealthier countries should, in line with their international obligations, support the efforts of poorer countries to invest in children.

➔ Track and demonstrate progress for all children.

- Demonstrate how spending benefits all children and their families in an equitable and effective way.
- Take additional measures to include groups who are all too often left out of regular data collection exercises such as migrant, refugee and homeless children.

➔ Listen and respond to children's voices.

- Ensure that all children know and understand their rights; give them the space to freely participate and express their views at family and community level; and uphold their rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and access to information.

➔ Make clear, concrete and ambitious commitments that will result in change for children in the next decade.

- Apply a child rights approach to Agenda 2030, ensuring that no child is left behind, by adopting laws, policies and budgets that promote gender equality, and drive convergence between the poorest and most marginalised children and their better-off counterparts, while building universal coverage of services, systems and infrastructure.
- Adopt time-bound plans to end violence against children, in line with SDG target 16.2, by passing and enforcing laws, investing in child protection systems, and working with civil society to change attitudes and behaviours that expose children to violence.
- Urgently tackle the climate crisis and environmental threats, which threaten the realisation of all children's rights, by meeting existing international obligations on climate change and taking steps to mitigate its already irreversible impact.
- Prioritise strategic windows of opportunity in early childhood and adolescence through policies and budgets which support interventions in nutrition, education, health and protection. This will have a positive lifelong impact on individuals and society, and is the only way to break the generational cycle of poverty and exclusion.

“LISTEN TO US”



“Listen to us. Many people think that when you are a child your opinion will be ridiculous, or that it doesn’t make sense or that it isn’t worth it, even if it’s good”

Child, 10, Spain

“The culture that views children as incapable and inexperienced in participating in “adult” meetings is what is excluding children from participation”

Child, 14, Zambia

“There can be ways to help and contribute to the community by socialising with adults who have some power within the community, and to see and teach them...that we need to be heard, that our voice is important’

Child, 12, Honduras





“A Second Revolution: Thirty years of child rights, and the unfinished agenda”
is a product of Child Rights Now!, an initiative of the Joining Forces alliance of child-focused agencies.

Joining Forces works with and for children and young people to secure their rights and end violence against them.

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