

Child health and well-being dashboards: Accountability for children's rights

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In February 2020, The World Health Organization-United Nations Children's Fund Lancet Commission on Child Health and Well-being (Commission) launched its report (1) calling for renewed commitment to children's fundamental rights as enshrined in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2), an international legal framework adopted in 1989 and ratified by all but two states. The Commission report, and the Commissioners' July 2020 Lancet comment on the potential for the COVID19 pandemic to reverse gains made in children's health (3), stressed the uncertainties facing children including climate change, political instability, inequities perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty, and predatory commercial practices. The report also makes recommendations for building a better future for children by placing them at the center of global, regional, and national development agendas and by holding governments to account for fulfilling children's rights through a robust monitor, review, and act cycle. This cycle depends upon the availability of an accountability mechanism that showcases country performance across the four dimensions of the CRC – children's right to be healthy, protected, educated, and fairly treated and heard (2).

To assess country progress on the CRC, the Commissioners developed a child flourishing and futures composite index, which showed that wealthier countries perform better on child health and development outcomes but are imperiling children's futures through excessive greenhouse gas emissions and industry practices contributing to environmental degradation (1). These results compelled the Commissioners to propose the development of an additional accountability mechanism, a user-friendly dashboard that helps countries to regularly monitor their progress and make evidence-based decisions about priority areas for action and resource allocation. In response, WHO and UNICEF led a multi-step consultative process between February 2020 and February 2022 to create a simple, innovative dashboard that built on existing frameworks from related initiatives such as the African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) (4), Countdown to 2030 (5), the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health (6), the Integrated Global Action Plan for Prevention and Control of

Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD) (7), the WHO-UNICEF Child Health Redesign (8) and the Nurturing Care Framework (9).

The first step of the consultative process was to reach consensus on basic parameters of the dashboard including format, domain areas, and age categories. Discussions were held with the Children in All Policies 2030 (CAP2030 – an initiative derived from the Commission (10)) Data & Learning working group and consensus was reached to: 1) use a scorecard template similar to the ALMA scorecard with a traffic light style classification system for the indicator data, 2) use the four domain areas in the CRC and label them as survive, protection, development, and participation plus the cross-cutting domain of contextual and policy factors, and 3) use the standard age categories recommended by WHO for children and adolescents (11). The second step involved selecting indicators to populate the dashboard, which required selecting one indicator for each of the four domains for each age grouping and agreeing on a core set of contextual and policy indicators most relevant for influencing children’s life chances. Working closely with the CAP2030 working group and with experts at WHO, UNICEF, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, indicators were chosen through a combination of prioritizing indicators included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Framework (12) plus the frameworks listed above, and for which data is regularly collected (appendix shows the indicators p. 1). The third step entailed setting thresholds to be used for assessing progress on each of the indicators and color coding them accordingly. Agreement was reached to ensure the thresholds take into consideration the distribution of the indicator data values and are consistent with existing global or regional targets such as SDG targets, targets set by global initiatives like the Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP), and existing benchmarking processes such as those undertaken by the nutrition and education communities.

In parallel with the consultation process, WHO and UNICEF worked with a design team (Lushomo) to develop dashboard prototypes that were refined through a series of iterations informed by feedback from the CAP2030 working group and WHO and UNICEF regional colleagues. The online dashboards are interactive and include a pop-up function that shows the meta-data (e.g., definition, data source and year, information on threshold categories and targets) when users hover over any indicator (appendix shows dashboard prototype p. 1).

The child health and well-being dashboards will be officially launched during the first week of May 2022 and then undergo user testing with key audiences to ensure they fit the purpose of equipping country decision makers, donors, and civil society members with the evidence needed to better target resources for realizing children’s fundamental rights. Although there has been progress in improving child survival in the past few decades, the ongoing existential threats of climate change, conflict, and inequities in access to social and health services can rapidly undo these gains. These dashboards are a tool to keep us vigilant, keep children in the spotlight, and to guide the allocation of resources to where they are most needed.

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