

# Putting Children First for Sustainable Development

**The return on  
investment from  
child-related  
Official  
Development  
Assistance**





### **Acknowledgment:**

This report was prepared by World Vision International drawing on an economic analysis quantifying the return on investment from investing Official Development Assistance in children, conducted by Ernst & Young Australia for World Vision International February-December 2023, and briefings developed from this analysis.

We wish to thank World Vision colleagues who provided leadership throughout this research project: Lisa Bos, Chris Derksen Hiebert, Martin Fischer, Erica Hall, Simon Lewchuk, Teleri Jardine, and Tamara Tutnjevic. We are grateful for financial support from World Vision International and World Vision offices in Canada, Ireland, Finland, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

We are grateful to Ernst and Young Australia for partnering on the overall research project, performing data analysis, developing the methodology, and producing technical reports.

We are indebted to Dr Melissa Kaltner and Mark Galvin from Partner Lumenia for their technical input and contributions to the study.

### **Disclaimer:**

World Vision International and EY Australia have considered and relied upon information obtained from variety of sources believed to be reliable and accurate. World Vision International and EY Australia have not been informed that any information supplied to it, or obtained from public sources, was false or that any material information has been withheld from it. World Vision International and EY do not imply, and it should not be construed that World Vision International or EY have performed an audit, verification, or due diligence procedures on any of the information provided to us. World Vision International or EY Australia has not independently verified, nor accept any responsibility or liability for independently verifying, any such information nor does World Vision International or EY Australia make any representation as to the accuracy or completeness of the information. Neither World Vision International or EY Australia nor any member or employee thereof undertakes responsibility in any way whatsoever or liability for any loss or damage to any person in respect of errors in this document arising from incorrect information provided to World Vision International or EY Australia.



# WORLD VISION FOREWORD

We are in the midst of a devastating crisis for children. Decades of progress on survival, education, nutrition, and protection has stalled – and even been thrown into reverse.

Multiple crises conspire to threaten children's futures. According to ILO, more than 1 billion children worldwide have limited access to health services, education and basic needs including shelter, food and water.

These conditions have lifelong consequences for children's physical and mental development, opportunities and rights. They rob girls and boys of their God-given potential in life.

With the 2030 deadline looming, the only way to get the SDGs back on track is to put children at the very heart of our efforts.

Aside from moral imperatives, investment in the development and wellbeing of children is an investment in the future of their community, their nation and beyond. It can help break the cycle of poverty and shape long-term stability, security and prosperity.

It is also necessary to achieve the SDGs and meet government commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other human rights treaties.

Our new research is a game changer. We have long known that investing in children is the moral thing to do; now we can see that it makes sound economic sense too. It offers value for money and is the best way to achieve donor objectives and the SDGs, as well as to advance the human rights of children and their communities.

Yet, as the research shows, despite the high returns, only a fraction of ODA (12%) currently targets children compared to their significant representation within the population of ODA-receiving countries – shockingly translating to less than one penny of ODA per person in each country.

Investing in children – and not just individual sectoral priorities - fosters lasting improvements to their welfare and living standards, along with their communities. It ensures every girl and boy can achieve their God-given potential in life.

**Andrew Morley**  
President and CEO

# EY FOREWORD

EY has been pleased to work in partnership with the World Vision International (WVI) and measure the return on child-related Official Development Assistance (ODA) at a global level. The economic appraisal undertaken by EY aims to support ODA donors and recipients in better understanding the current levels and value of investing in children and to serve as a tool for advancing progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Over 1 billion children across the globe are living in poverty, without their basic needs such as shelter, food and water met and with inadequate access to health services and education, resulting in lifelong consequences. The aim of the SDGs is to achieve sustainable development and cut poverty in half by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

There are limited existing approaches to quantify the benefits attributable to ODA and support investment decision-making. Quantifying the level of child-related ODA and understanding the social and economic benefits of these investments can serve as a compass for the global community in its strides towards the achieving SDGs.

Using a unique and robust methodology (summarised on page 11), the economic appraisal analysed the ODA flows between 2017-2021 and attributed and evaluated benefits from ODA targeting children and broader communities. This WVI policy report draws on the economic analysis that quantified the return on investment from investing in children, conducted by Ernst & Young Australia for WVI between February-December 2023. The conclusions and recommendations have been developed by the WVI and informed by EYs analysis.

EY found that a total social value of \$10 is generated for every dollar invested in children through ODA. These benefits comprise of health and wellbeing benefits, increased opportunities from schooling and further indirect benefits delivered through increased knowledge and awareness in the broader community.

Despite these high returns, only 12% of ODA were found to be child-related, of which 5% is specifically targeting the welfare of children through improved access to child-specific needs and services. With targeted ODA focused on children and aligned to localized needs, we can empower children and their communities to thrive.

**Ernst & Young Australia**

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (n.d.) Child poverty. Retrieved on 21 March 2024 from <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>; Thévenon, O., et al. (2018), Child poverty in the OECD: Trends, determinants and policies to tackle it. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 218, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c69de229-en>; UNICEF. (2022). SDG global indicators related to children, UNICEF. Retrieved on 19 June, 2023 from: <https://data.unicef.org> › SDG-Briefing-Notes-web

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New research by Ernst & Young Australia and World Vision International has analysed the economic benefit of Official Development Assistance (ODA) programming that directly or indirectly targets children. The research found that every **\$1USD of child-related ODA directly or indirectly results in a \$10USD return**, meaning that the impact of an investment in children is 10 times what you put in. Investing in children is a way to maximise the benefit that donors see from their ODA programmes.

The analysis quantified the impact child-related programming has on children's well-being and development, as well as the longer-term benefit it has on communities. For example, programmes to change attitudes towards child marriage may have the short-term impact of more girls staying in school (and reducing health complications and costs from early childbirth). But they also have a longer-term impact of children growing up healthier and being able to contribute to their family and society's living standards as adults.

The research also analysed global ODA spend and found that **only 5%** of all ODA is used for child-specific interventions – programmes directly focused on children including, for example, immunisation, education programming and initiatives to end violence against children. An **additional 7%** of ODA was spent on child-benefitting interventions – broader programming for communities that were not specifically focused on children but had a considerable indirect impact on them. This includes, for example, infrastructure projects that improve access to hospitals and schools, as well as building local services and healthcare or protection systems.



**Shockingly, this means that only 12% of development assistance is either directly or indirectly child-related. And yet, children make up 46% of the populations of aid-receiving countries.**

This report also draws on World Vision's 70 years of experience and what we have learned about and from children, including:

- Children, due to their age and position in society, are often invisible to donors when they are making funding decisions, and so are more likely to be left behind by development programmes. Because the Sustainable Development Goals include commitments to leave no one behind in efforts to achieve them, investing in children contributes significantly to promoting equity and inclusion.
- The impacts of investments in children transcend generations, with huge returns for societies, resulting in higher lifetime income levels, and reducing expenses for healthcare, protection and welfare services.
- Childhood poverty can have lifelong consequences and breaking this cycle of intergenerational poverty requires putting the child at its heart.
- Children are critical agents of change in their communities now. Children themselves are taking action to build peace, combat climate change and raise awareness of the challenges they face.
- Children do not live in sectoral silos. Therefore, prioritising ODA investment in every aspect of children's lives (their health, nutrition, education, protection, empowerment etc) is vital for their futures and to achieve truly sustainable development.

Based on the research, this report outlines specific recommendations for governments and donors:



**Increase child-related investment:** More funding is needed to adequately address the threats children face and ensure long-term sustainable solutions. A minimum of a 10% increase in child-related investment by each ODA-contributing country each year has the potential to double the impact of current funding.



**Put a child lens on all diplomatic and development policy and strategies:** Children are an important part of achieving the SDGs, global peace and sustainable futures and so they should be a priority for funding and political influence.



**Be accountable to children:** Children must be able to meaningfully participate in donor policy making processes, and national and global forums discussing development issues.



**Promote locally-led systemic change** that creates space for greater partnership between governments and citizens, as well as donors and recipients.







# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to inform ongoing aid investment and guide the global community in its strides toward the achievement of long-term development goals. Investing in children (defined as individuals under the age of 18) promotes equity and sustainability. It also makes economic sense. A child-sensitive approach to ODA is cost effective and, as this report demonstrates, would strengthen the return on investment of limited funds.

In our current global context, the importance of investing in children has never been greater.<sup>2</sup> The combined crises of climate change, conflict, Covid and the increased cost of living have created a perfect storm. The needs of children are increasing rapidly, at the same time as ODA investments and government domestic funding are stagnating and child rights are being eroded. Children's wellbeing requires investment in the whole child not just some aspects of their lives.

The importance of children to achieving sustainable development and human rights is not new. When development actors committed to the SDGs in 2015, they specifically recognised that "investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development for present and future generations."<sup>3</sup> With 28 targets and 44 indicators across the 17 SDGs<sup>4</sup> directly related to children, the Goals won't be reached without prioritising children and children will lose the most if the SDGs are not achieved.

Investment in interventions that protect children from violence support their participation as citizens, or transform gender relationships and norms, not only benefit children but also transform societies, making them more peaceful, inclusive and democratic.

<sup>2</sup> World Vision International (2021). Counting Pennies 3: Assessment of Official Development Assistance to end violence against children, [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Counting%20Pennies%203\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Counting%20Pennies%203_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, endorsed by General Assembly Resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015, [https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA\\_Outcome.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2018), Progress for Every Child in the SDG Era, [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Progress\\_for\\_Every\\_Child\\_V4.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Progress_for_Every_Child_V4.pdf)

## Box 1: Importance of ODA

International development assistance aims to contribute to reducing and eliminating the root causes and effects of poverty in those countries facing the greatest structural barriers to sustainable development and being most vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks.<sup>5</sup> Poverty reduction and sustainable growth go hand-in-hand with addressing global issues such as climate change, conflict and pandemics like Covid.

ODA, the main source of donor financing for development, supports a range of key areas including social development, economic production, conflict prevention and emergency assistance. It spurs global development, supporting increased stability and peace and the ability of governments in ODA-receiving countries to meet the basic needs of their citizens.<sup>6</sup> ODA works hand-in-hand with domestic investment in ODA-receiving countries, freeing up money to build domestic infrastructures, systems and services.

ODA is therefore a catalyst for sustainable development that:

- Builds on domestic efforts of ODA-receiving countries, cooperating to improve peace, democracy and the protection of human rights.
- Addresses direct global threats of conflicts, disasters, and pandemics.
- Promotes fairness, reducing the gap between rich and poor.
- Enables partnership and collaboration for sharing experience and expertise.

If done well, international aid is a valuable way of reducing inequality within and between countries, which can reduce global crises and their impacts. However, for development to be sustainable, it must be equitable, inclusive and community led – which includes the involvement of children.

Governments' other international commitments, be they focused on gender equality, addressing climate change, preventing conflict or improving the global order, will not be sustainably achieved without children. As the Mozambican politician and humanitarian Graça Machel said:



***“In a world of diversity and disparity, children are a unifying force ...[their] needs and aspirations cut across all ideologies and cultures. The needs of all children are the same: nutritious food, adequate health care, a decent education, shelter and a secure and loving family. Children are both our reason to struggle to eliminate the worst aspects of warfare, and our best hope for succeeding at it.”***

The same can be said for children in any context.

As governments, donors and development agencies grapple with the current global context, we must look towards what is equitable, sustainable and cost effective. That children are amongst those likely to be left behind is not disputed, nor is their vulnerability to the long-term impacts of poverty. However, while child-related interventions are known to deliver benefits to generations beyond,<sup>8</sup> the ability to monetise the benefits attributable to ODA has been limited.

Until now. This joint Ernst & Young Australia/ World Vision International economic analysis quantifies the level of ODA directed towards children and the social and economic benefits of these investments to support investment decision-making.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Least Developed Countries', <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category.html>

<sup>6</sup> Development Initiatives (2012). Official development assistance: an essential guide; OECD. 'Financing for sustainable development', <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/>

<sup>7</sup> Graça Machel (1996). The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children.

<sup>8</sup> International Labour Office (2003), An Economic study of the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour. ILO; World Vision UK (2023), Eliminating child labour, achieving inclusive economic growth.



Investment must take account of children in all their diversity, prioritising the most vulnerable children and centring gender equality and social inclusion. Investing in children does not mean other vital areas for sustainable development and rights should be neglected. It must also go hand-in-hand with investment in wider community

issues, such as empowerment of women and reducing climate change and its impacts. How ODA is spent is important – not just on what. A sustainable future fit for children will only happen if we also address power imbalances in communities, in countries and in development that impact the ability of every child to live life in all its fullness.







# PRIORITISING ODA FOR CHILDREN IS A GOOD INVESTMENT

Putting a figure on how ODA can generate real, lasting impact on the lives of children is a challenging task. The research analysed ODA flows between 2017-2021<sup>9</sup> and identified child-related investments, including both those that are **child-specific** (directly and solely aimed towards the welfare of children) and **child-benefitting** (broader investment that has significant indirect benefits for children by strengthening infrastructure and services affecting children).

<sup>9</sup> The data for ODA captured in the OECD DAC, which the analysis drew from, includes ODA spent domestically (for example, spent on supporting refugees in the first year of their arrival in the country).

Using a robust analysis of the economic impacts of these investments, the research identified a total return on the investment of \$10 for every dollar invested in children through ODA. Investing \$1 is expected to return \$10 in benefits through health, education and other relevant direct benefits and additional social value to children and the broader community.

The analysis provides a unique and innovative view on the real-world benefits that such investments create, including direct health and wellbeing, education and living standards benefits, increased opportunities and further indirect benefits linked to empowerment.

The total of \$10 return includes direct benefits of more than \$7. In addition, there is a 'social multiplier' benefit of nearly \$3 – the additional value of indirect benefits delivered through programming that supports and empowers children, their families, friends and wider communities.<sup>10</sup> For example, an interaction within families and communities, as a result of a child health programme, can help change negative social norms around child protection and gender equality.<sup>11</sup>



Centring local communities and incorporating their leadership in decision-making provides additional returns, enabling sustainable and community-driven change. Investing in children and young people offers the opportunity to elevate their voices in local areas and regions, enabling additional indirect benefits to the broader communities. Targeted and community-based interventions, including elevating the voices of children and community leaders, further amplifies the benefit of ODA.

## Box 2: Research Methodology

A unique algorithm tool was developed by Ernst & Young to identify and classify child-related ODA. The tool estimated the probability that a project or programme funded by ODA targets the development and welfare of children and, using a derived threshold, categorised such investments into two types:

**Child-specific ODA**, capturing investments that are wholly related to children and specifically target the welfare of children through improved access to child-specific needs and services.

**Child-benefitting ODA**, capturing broader investments that benefit children indirectly in a significant way by focusing on general improvements in infrastructure and health, education and social services affecting children and other members of communities.

An analysis of the economic impacts of these investments was then undertaken which attributed and monetised benefits of projects and programmes funded by ODA. These benefits were quantified in the areas of improved health and wellbeing, increased education and empowerment of children and communities, encompassing a broad spectrum of benefits arising from ODA.

This approach enabled the estimation of the return on investment generated through child-related ODA, providing a unique and innovative view on the real-world benefits that such investments create.

The detailed methodology of this economic appraisal is outlined in a technical appendix, which is available on request.

<sup>10</sup> See, for further information on social multipliers, de Martí, J. and Y. Zenou (2011), "Social networks", In: I. Jarvie and J. Zamora-Bonilla (Eds.), Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science, London: SAGE Publications, Chap. 16, pp. 339-361.

<sup>11</sup> See Eg List, J. et.al (2023). Neighborhood Spillover Effects of Early Childhood Interventions. CEPR Discussion Paper No.18134.





# PRIORITISING ODA FOR CHILDREN SUPPORTS LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Children, due to their age and position in society, are often invisible in this process and thus more likely to be left behind. The risks of exclusion are even greater for those facing multiple barriers, such as gender or disability. Thus, investing in children contributes significantly to promoting equity and inclusion. For donors, this means that investments go further towards achieving their priorities and objectives. And the impacts of investments can transcend time,

improving the lives of future adults and the next generation of children. Investing in children therefore supports truly sustainable development<sup>12</sup>:



**Children are a barometer of poverty.** Children are the most vulnerable in any society and poverty impacts them most profoundly, while at the same time, they lack political and economic status in society. The well-being of children reflects the overall situation of the family, community, and society in which they live.



**Childhood poverty can have lifelong consequences.** Children are especially vulnerable to shocks, trauma and poverty. Household education and empowerment levels, conflict and climate crises, and inequality, increase the likelihood that poverty will be passed from one generation to the next. Breaking this cycle of intergenerational poverty requires putting the child at its heart.



**Focusing on children brings communities together.** Concern for children can unite communities in ways that other issues cannot. Communities working for the most vulnerable children sustain their actions over longer periods of time than those connecting over economic or social concerns.<sup>13</sup>



**Investment in children at an early age can generate huge returns to society.** It leads to greater educational outcomes, higher lifetime income levels, reduction in expenditure on welfare services, and improved governance.<sup>14</sup> Investing in children and families is the best way to foster sustained change for individuals, communities and nations. In humanitarian contexts, the imperative is even greater.



**Children are critical agents of change in their communities now.** Children themselves are taking action to build peace, combat climate change and raise awareness of the challenges they face.

<sup>12</sup> World Vision, Child well-being reference guide (2015), <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/ChildWell-beingReferenceGuide.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> J Donahue, L Mwewa, Learning from Community Experiences and Perceptions, USAID DCOF (2006)

<sup>14</sup> P Engle, Strategies for reducing inequalities and improving developmental outcomes for young children in low-income and middle-income countries, The Lancet, Volume 378, (October 2011)





# CURRENT INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN DOES NOT STACK UP

© World Vision

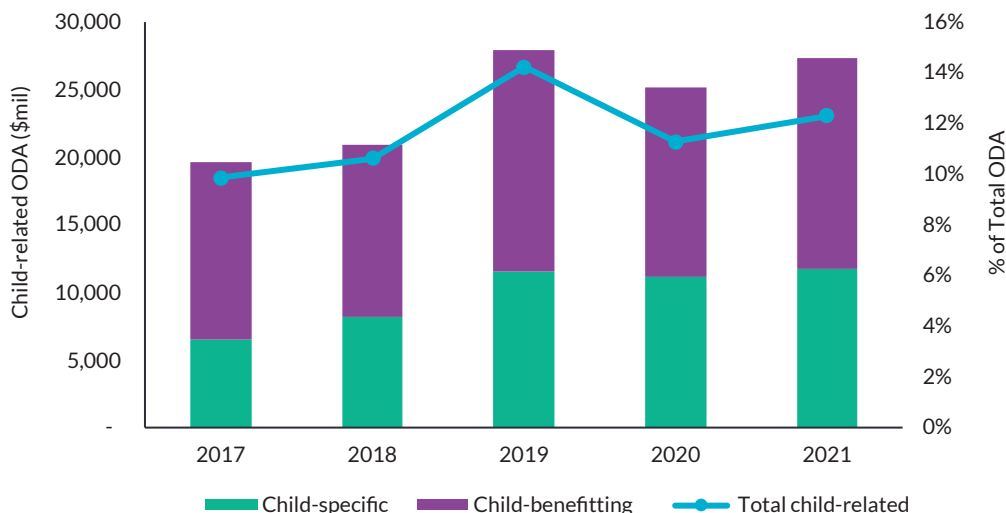
Despite these high returns, only 5% of the approximately \$207 billion of annual global ODA investment<sup>15</sup> is spent on child-specific programming which has an exclusive objective to address issues affecting children. Only another 7% is allocated to broader child-benefitting programmes, which have clear indirect impacts on children but are not specifically aimed at children and their needs. The total figure of 12% of child-related ODA is shocking as children make up 46%

<sup>15</sup> Based on analysis of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) data from 2017-2021.



of the population in low, and low-middle, income countries receiving ODA between 2017-2021.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 1. Multilateral and Bilateral Child- related ODA**



**Figure 2. Multilateral and Bilateral ODA targeting children**



Source: EY, OECD Creditor Reporting System

\*Some countries/islands such as Kiribati, Marshall islands, Nauru, Palau, Tonga estimated to received higher than >\$30 ODA targeting children per capita and the statistic is driven by small population numbers.

While most development assistance will ultimately benefit children in some way, the need to prioritise them is urgent, given their proportion of the population and the lasting impact of generations who have not been sufficiently invested in.

Through targeted ODA investment, which is related to children and aligns to localised needs, we can empower children and their communities to thrive. In 2021, child-related ODA amounted to \$27 billion, translating to less than one penny per capita on average in each country. An annual uplift of only \$2.7 billion in child-related ODA (10%), distributed equally across different sectors and countries, has the potential to ignite a transformative chain reaction. This modest increase in investment can deliver immense benefits, averaging 10 times the initial investment (\$27 billion) for children, local communities, and future generations.

<sup>16</sup> The statistic is based on a mapping of the countries in the low, and low to middle income countries in the World Population Prospects data, with the countries receiving ODA in the OECD data. The World Population Prospects data's categories include 15 - 19, while the definition of children is those aged less than 18. An assumption was made to assume 18-19 years olds made 1/5<sup>th</sup> of this category, this number was extracted across relevant years. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

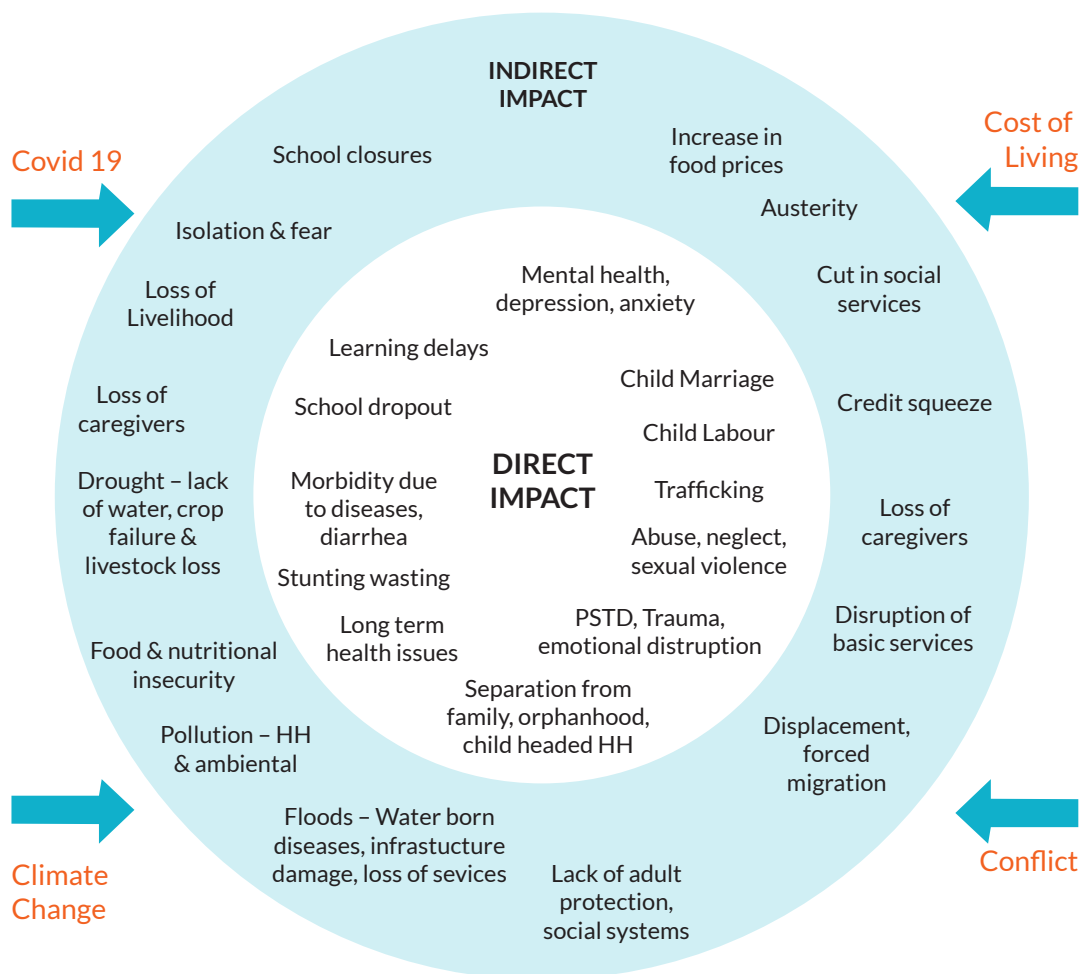


© World Vision

# INVESTING IN THE WHOLE CHILD

The world is currently facing a child-rights crisis due to the compounded impacts of climate change, conflict, the cost-of-living crisis and the legacy of Covid. While investing in child-related ODA may not directly address the causes of these global issues, it does mitigate and help address their impacts.

**Figure 3. Impacts of Critical Global Challenges on Children**



A child-related approach to ODA is cost effective and strengthens the return on investment of limited funds, maximising human capital and unlocking the long-term sustainable growth and wellbeing for future populations. There is a clear line between health and education investment and human capital development. Moreover, child-related investment is linked to increases in productivity, stability and public safety that come from the transformational investments in child protection, gender equality, inclusion and child participation. These transformations are at the core of SDG 16, which highlights the centrality of peaceful and inclusive societies to sustainable development.

As they face the impacts of global issues, children do not live in silos. Therefore, prioritising ODA investment in the whole child – in a cross-sectoral approach – is

vital for their futures and to achieve truly sustainable development. As communities and World Vision know, children’s educational achievement, safety, health and nutrition are all interdependent. Therefore, investing in one sector without a recognition of this limits the impact the investment can have.

There is need for urgent investment in a package of essential and accelerator services for children that have proven effects on reversing the impact of crises on children and achieving child-wellbeing. World Vision has systematised research developed by Accelerator Hub and has identified a framework for integrated interventions that, in combination, will have a cumulative effect across a range of SDG targets and accelerate progress in addressing problems facing children (“accelerators”).<sup>17,18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For more informations please see Accelerate Hub <https://www.acceleratehub.org/news/accelerators-what-they-are-and-how-our-work-contributes-to-this-field/#>

<sup>18</sup> Mebrahtu et al. 2022; Accelerating Achievement for Africa’s Adolescents (Accelerate) Hub



While such a package needs to be context specific, the central factor is that it focuses on ensuring essential services to address learning deficits, morbidity, nutrition, safety and mental health – at both national government investment and ODA levels. It must be scalable and fundable, recognising the limited resources and difficult choices faced by governments and ODA

providers. The package should combine both interventions – such as delivery of essential nutritional actions, mental health support for children and families and social behavioural change programmes – as well as transformative accelerator services, such as positive parenting, universal child benefits and school accountability.



### **Box 3: Promoting Locally-led Systemic Change for Greater Sustainable Impact**

Addressing the most urgent global challenges – climate change, conflict, the cost-of-living crisis and the legacy of Covid – through development programming cannot happen in isolation.

As the sector recalibrates the development mindset, decision-making and funding must shift to local actors and communities who know best how to implement solutions to their development challenges. And addressing these challenges often requires changes to development systems change as well as funding.

It also requires redressing power-imbalances and structural changes in communities. The social multipliers mentioned above are strengthened by investing in children. They can in turn enhance positive structural changes. They strengthen an inclusive community voice and structures, empower local organisations, create capacity for engagement with the State, strengthening systems through accountability and policy change.

# CONCLUSIONS

Children make up nearly half of the population of low, and low to middle income countries receiving ODA. Furthermore, the regions with the highest projected growth in the number of children are also some of the least developed.

Prioritising ODA investment for children makes sense. Investing in children impacts more than just a single life; it creates lasting improvements to the development and welfare of children, communities and nations. It offers value for money and is the best way to achieve donor objectives and the SDGs. Investing in children benefits the child today, enables the best future for them and gives the greatest chance of sustainable development for the entire community.

However, levels of child-specific and child-benefiting ODA are insufficient. More ODA investment is needed in projects that are specifically related to children and targeted to their holistic needs. Additionally, all ODA should be child-sensitive, mainstreaming the well-being and rights of children throughout programming.

In order to maximise the long-term return from investing in children, the investment must enable a paradigm shift away from historic power imbalances and take account of children in all their diversity, prioritising the most vulnerable children and centring gender equality and social inclusion.

Prioritising ODA investment in the whole child – in a cross-sectoral holistic approach – is vital for their futures and to achieve truly sustainable development. Children who are healthy, safe, learning and heard are key to unlocking the world's potential.

Without additional child-related ODA, the prevalence of child mortality, stunting and lack of education will persist and an opportunity to address gender inequality and reduce violence in childhood will be lost. The challenges that vulnerable children face today will be exacerbated, placing a greater burden on communities and families in the years and decades to come. The global responsibility to support children is ever-present and the ability to create meaningful change is in our hands now.



© World Vision

# RECOMMENDATIONS

ODA-contributing countries must:



## Increase child-related investment across ODA mechanisms

More funding is needed to adequately address the threats children face and ensure long-term sustainable solutions. A *minimum of a 10% increase in child-related investment by each ODA-contributing country each year* will demonstrate the commitment to children and have the potential to magnify that additional return on investment up to ten times.

Furthermore, the ODA funding that is currently committed must be used in the most effective way possible. Demonstrating the positive impact of ODA for children, to keep children safe, happy, healthy, and learning, can counteract some of the negative perceptions of investing in ODA while also facing domestic funding crises.

Specifically, in addition to gender equality impact assessments, which have become standard, *child rights impact assessments (CRIAs) should become requirements for programme funding*. CRIAs would require consideration be given to the impact any project would have on the well-being and rights of children. They are powerful tools that can help prevent potential harm, minimise the risks of costly policy failures and mistakes, while serving the best interests of the child – as well as enhancing compliance with commitments to child rights. They should be included as a component of funding applications as well as of project impact reporting.

In order to more effectively and transparently track funding, we strongly recommend the *adoption of a new 'child-related aid' marker within the OECD-DAC's*

*database*. This could mirror the existing 'gender equality' marker and screen expenditure – both project-related and core institutional support – to check for activities that aim to improve the lives and/or promote and protect the rights and well-being of children.



## Put a child lens on all diplomatic and development policy and strategies

The ODA-contributing countries must see children as among those most likely to be left behind, rather than seeing them as just another classification of people, a 'special interest group' being promoted by civil society. They are a key contingent of those most likely to be left behind, so they should be a *priority for funding and political influence*. This should include both child rights-focused moments (such as the 1st Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children taking place in Colombia in November 2024) and moments that would benefit from a child lens (such as the World Bank's International Development Association replenishment meetings (IDA21) which will run through 2024 and the Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2025).



## Be accountable to children

Under the UNCRC, children have a right to participate in decisions affecting them. They also have a unique perspective and innovative ideas on how to address the global challenges of the day. ODA-contributing countries should both



- *Commit to consulting with children* through systematic mechanisms as part of their policy making processes and
- *Support children's participation* in national and global arenas.

Children must not only be heard but they must be listened to, and their opinions taken into account. In World Vision's experience, Children's Parliaments provide one avenue for national governments to involve children in policy making. Systematic meaningful two-way consultation and communication through child and youth advisory groups can be effective means for government ministries, embassies and organisations to demonstrate leadership in accountability to children.



### **Promote locally-led systemic change**

We must shift our approach to development to redress power imbalances and increase

localisation in ODA by creating space for greater partnership between governments and citizens as well as donors and recipients.

ODA-contributing countries, national governments and the development sector are generally agreed that shifts must be made in the approach to development and development assistance. However, consensus on how remains elusive. In addition to investment, intentional spotlighting and involvement of children to address power imbalances in a child-sensitive way are key to creating a future fit for children.

World Vision believes that *gender and age-sensitive participation by communities* in deciding how funds are spent is crucial to sustainable development. Enabling sufficient time for meaningful co-creation and greater flexibility within funding mechanisms for ongoing participation will also reap benefits, provided indicators on child, youth and community participation are embedded in programme plans. This should include funding to local child-focused and youth-led organisations.



© World Vision

**World Vision International Executive Office**  
Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road,  
London, England SE1 7JB

**World Vision Brussels and  
European Union Representation**  
Rue Marie-Thérèse 21, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium,  
EULO-info@wvi.org

**World Vision International Geneva and United  
Nations Liaison Office**  
Rue de Varembe 1, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland,  
geneva@wvi.org

**World Vision International New York and United  
Nations Liaison Office**  
777 United Nations Plaza. 5th floor. New York,  
N.Y. 10017  
WorldVision\_UNNy=Y@wvi.org



World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.