

**FINAL**  
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Let me begin by welcoming a particular line in the draft outcome document for this conference. It reads: "...investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations..."

To this, one might add the single word "therefore" — inclusive, equitable and therefore sustainable development. Because if development is not inclusive and equitable, it is not sustainable. How can it be sustained if tomorrow's adults are today being denied nutrition, health care and opportunities? Because of their parents' wealth? Because of their gender, neighbourhood, ethnicity or religion? Because they live with disabilities — or in a conflict zone?

Consider their lives. Born into urban slums, remote villages or refugee camps that lack proper sanitation, clean water or health-care facilities, they eat less nutritious food. At a young age, their cognitive capacity may not develop fully. They'll walk farther to classrooms — if they attend school at all. Missed school days. Teenage pregnancy. HIV. Lack of opportunity.

Each inequity a loss to that child, her society, and one day, her



But the paper also shows that, in some cases, progress is stalled or even slowing. The gap between rich and poor has not changed in accessing skilled birth attendants. The gap between child marriage rates for the richest and poorest girls has actually doubled in the past three decades. And adolescent girls remain over-represented in HIV infection rates.

Compelled by our unfinished business, this conference is an opportunity to support the next, practical steps we must take to turn the promise of the SDGs into progress.

Which is why, for example, we welcome the draft outcome document's recognition of the need for data disaggregated by gender, age, and other socio-economic factors. Without this data, inequalities will be overlooked, as nations measure progress only through a single

As we invest together in these children, these families and these communities, we also invest in the future of their nations. Each investment that supports a child's health and ability to grow and learn — from the earliest days — also supports her ability to one day become the adult her society, and indeed, the world, needs her to be: a woman ready, willing and able to help build and sustain her country's development into the future...and perhaps a parent whose children will do the same for the generations to follow.

Reversing the vicious cycle of inequality, and creating instead a virtuous cycle of health and opportunity, will require putting the hardest-to-reach, the hardest-to-serve children first. It will mean giving them the tools and support they need today to carry on their societies' progress tomorrow.

Reaching them represents our best chance at securing a truly inclusive, equitable, and therefore sustainable future for their societies — and for us all.

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