

PROTECTING A GENERATION FROM COVID-19

In March 2020, following the WHO declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, we published 'Protect a Generation' to encourage the UK Government to use its global influence to uphold children's rights and ensure the most deprived and marginalised children aren't left behind. Six months on we have reviewed what the government has done and what is still left to do in five key areas.

The economic impact of the pandemic has left countries around the world with reduced fiscal space to build back better. The UK Government, facing economic pressure, is looking at budgetary cuts that include reducing aid spending. In addition, a significant proportion of attention is focused on leading the domestic response to COVID-19 and trade negotiations with the European Union. Despite this, as chair of the G7 in 2021 and as one of the world's largest economies, there is a critical need for the government show global leadership and galvanise support from donors, national governments and private sector partners to build back better in the pursuit of the global attainment of the SDGs.

1. DISEASE CONTAINMENT AND MITIGATION

The UK successfully hosted the Global Vaccine Summit which raised \$8.8 billion and made a significant contribution to the Coronavirus Global Response fund for a coordinated global plan.

- **Support health and nutrition services for all, free at the point of use for the duration of the crisis, including the recovery phase**, as poverty levels are rising and expected to rise further. This should include financial and technical support to the public health sector in low- and middle-income countries to enable the requisition of private health services to create a unified approach and achieve equity in access and outcomes.
- We welcome the UK's contribution to the [Coronavirus Global Response](#) which raised resources for a coherent and coordinated global plan, supporting the WHO, Governments and well-placed partners to quickly mobilise responses in each country. Any global and national response plans must now **prioritise marginalised and vulnerable populations**. The UK must operationalise its commitment to 'ensuring a future vaccine is truly available to all' and **show solidarity rather than nationalism in the procurement of commodities**; continuing to be a strong voice for equitable access as a key board member of organisations leading on [Access to COVID-19 Accelerator \(ACT-A\)](#).
- **Critical services preventing maternal, new-born and child deaths must not be neglected**, including infant and young child feeding, immunisation, sexual and reproductive and maternal health services. The UK should push for strong and resilient health and nutrition systems, engage civil society and support government-led country strategies which prioritise marginalised and vulnerable populations at the primary care and community level. We welcome the UK's successful hosting of the Global Vaccine Summit which raised \$8.8 billion – well above the expected amount – and their urging of United Nations members to protect vital immunisation programmes. To ensure sustainable change it is vital that the UK renew their pledge to tackle malnutrition which expires this year. This would mean investing, at a minimum, £600 million over the period 2021-25 in nutrition-specific programming (equivalent to £120 million per year).

2. EDUCATION AND LEARNING

The UK announced £5.3 million for UNHCR to pay teachers' salaries in refugee-hosting countries. With the threat of almost 10 million children not returning to school and the Prime Minister's leadership on

girls' education, the UK is uniquely placed to play an active part in ensuring quality learning for the most marginalised children. However, our analysis of the recent UK aid budget cuts shows a worrying downward trend in education spending that could jeopardise the UK's ambition to be a world leader in getting children – especially girls – 12 quality years of education.

- At the height of the pandemic 1.6 billion children were out of school. Our new research has indicated that up to 10 million children may never return, with the poorest and most marginalised girls at greatest risk. **The UK is uniquely placed to bring world leaders behind a global plan to get all children back to school.**
- **The UK should lead by example**, meaning the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office should produce an education strategy to set out the role it will play in providing quality education for all children. To prioritise this challenge, it must ensure that UK aid spending on education is not cut as a proportion of its budget, and education programming continues to be focused on supporting the poorest and most marginalised children.
- We welcome the UK's additional £5m for Education Cannot Wait, which is adapting education programmes in countries affected by conflict and displacement to ensure the most marginalised children can access distance learning. **To continue securing long-term support there is an opportunity for the UK to host the GPE replenishment conference 2021** and not only make its own financial pledge, but urge other donors to do so too. The GPE will launch a new case for investment at the UN General Assembly in September ahead of the replenishment conference.

3. SUPPORT FOR FAMILY FINANCES

In addition to longer-term systems strengthening, the UK must prioritise providing direct and inclusive support for the most vulnerable children.

- **Invest in scaling up national social protection schemes and systems** where available to deliver a rapid response, alongside providing complementary humanitarian cash, voucher and in-kind assistance as appropriate. The UK must ensure that all responses delivering direct support are inclusive and fulfil the rights of the most vulnerable, including women and girls, people with disabilities and marginalised groups.
- **Prioritise nutrition**, ensuring that children and other nutritionally vulnerable groups have support to enable them to access appropriate, safe and nutritious food. The period from conception to a child's 2nd birthday is critical to avoid life-long negative impacts. Along with the vital focus on nutrition-specific programming, the UK should ensure that, at a minimum between 2021 and 2025, £3.4 billion of nutrition-relevant programming is tailored to tackle the underlying causes of malnutrition, equivalent to £680 million per year. In particular it should look to do this through programmes focused on climate-sensitive food systems, health, economic development, education and WASH.

4. SUPPORTING GOVERNMENTS' FISCAL SPACE TO PROTECT A GENERATION

The UK committed to suspending debt service payments to the poorest countries until the end of 2020 as part of the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative. The UK also allocated £150 million to support the IMF's Catastrophe Relief Fund, which has so far provided short-term debt relief to 28 of the world's poorest countries. However, these measures only support countries this year. The implications of the COVID-19 crisis are only just beginning to be felt.

There is an urgent need for additional, quality financing to enable countries to protect the world's poorest children from the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. The UK must use its influence in multilateral and financing institutions to achieve this, building coalitions of support to unlock finance and channel it to where it is needed most. This should include:

- Working with other G20 governments towards a continuation of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) to support the poorest countries through the crisis and in the recovery period.
- Exerting influence in the G20, World Bank and IMF to help address the critical issue of lack of private creditor participation in the DSSI, working with partners to develop a framework for restructuring private debt including exploring provisions for buying back commercial debt.
- Supporting innovative solutions to build support for debt relief, such as converting debt liabilities into child investment funds to support countries' own development strategies.
- Working with members of the IMF and World Bank to ensure adequate resources are in place for a longer-term programme of support.

The UK should also support governments with their budgetary challenges through targeted technical assistance, continuing to provide technical expertise to the world's poorest countries on taxation, debt and other aspects of public financial management when requested, including supporting negotiations with other creditors.

5. CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND PROTECTION

Following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2532, the UK should push for progress on ceasefires in Yemen and Myanmar, for which it is the penholder.

- **Support the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire, using its position on the UN Security Council to ensure that Resolution 2532 is implemented in good faith**, including by adopting country specific resolutions as required, so that parties to armed conflicts immediately cease hostilities to enable the safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of lifesaving aid.
- The UK should:
 - Ensure the Global Humanitarian Response Plan is adequately resourced** by both pledging more funds and pressing other states to do the same, while making sure that chronically underfunded sectors like Child Protection, Education, Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and Gender-based violence (GBV) are prioritised.
 - Ensure that those funds are disbursed promptly** and at scale to agencies on the ground, including local and national actors.
 - Press parties to conflict to ensure a neutral and impartial humanitarian space and uphold humanitarian access.**
- **Ensure that all interventions work to mitigate against confinement, school closures and disrupted care arrangements increasing risks of gender-based violence, child abuse, neglect and exploitation.** The UK should also prioritise targeted interventions and include safeguarding, child protection, mental health and psychosocial support, as well as sexual and reproductive health response measures, for child survivors.

WORKING WITH INGOs TO DELIVER

In delivering on these priorities, we fully support a coordinated response through UK Government's support of UN agencies. However, the UK Government should also consider sufficient funding to INGOs who have the ability to operate at scale as well as have country-level ownership and roots through their local partnerships. For instance, in the immediate COVID-19 response by UK Government we saw the majority of funding being channelled through UN agencies. However, this has been slow to materialise in disbursement to NGOs and frontline agencies in-country that are able to operate at community level. In regards to the FCDO influencing the UN on this, we ask that the FCDO supports 1) more rapid funding mechanisms for NGOs to be able to access the UN funding so that preparedness & mitigation work in communities can get underway quickly in emergency situations, and 2) fairness and transparency in the way the UN disburses the funds to NGOs.

We have welcomed the UK Government applying flexibility in funding with its partners through this challenging period. We have seen, however, that guidance around flexibility in current programmes is sometimes applied inconsistently at country level.