

World Vision International

Input for the Compilation Document for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Prioritising the health of children for sustainable development

Preamble

As a child-focused development organisation, World Vision is concerned that environmental trends – including ecosystem degradation, unsustainable agricultural practices, excessive harvesting of natural resources, pollution and now climate change – pose increasing health risks to the world’s poorest and most vulnerable children. Around three million children under five die each year from diseases (such as acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea and malaria) due to a number of largely preventable environment-related causes. The effects of environmental risk factors are exacerbated by existing adverse social and economic conditions, including poverty, conflict, urbanisation and undernutrition.

While political commitment to addressing climate change and environmental degradation has risen in recent years, there remains a disconnect in the dialogue and strategies to deal with both environment and development issues. The health of the world’s poorest children continues to be severely compromised by ‘siloes’ approaches to aspects of sustainable development. A specific focus on children is largely missing from current discourse on the environment, climate change, and sustainable development.

We need a sustainable development framework which is truly concerned with integrating protection of the environment; the management and conservation of natural resources; and social development, with the health and wellbeing of today and tomorrow’s children at its centre.

We also need to move beyond aggregated global goals for tackling poverty, recognising that vast differences exist between countries, and between populations: for example, those living in poverty in middle income countries, and those in fragile states. National level goals and targeted approaches to sustainable development are urgently needed, tailored to such distinct contexts.

World Vision is particularly concerned about the effects of unsustainable practices on two of the largest contributors to child mortality – undernutrition and acute respiratory infections – and calls for a greater understanding of the links between these conditions, the natural environment, and sustainable development.

World Vision believes that two sectoral themes should be prioritised in the outcomes of Rio+20, with specific goals that should be launched and endorsed in the outcome document:

- Sustainable agriculture and better outcomes for child nutrition
- Household energy practices and better outcomes for child respiratory diseases

This submission outlines general recommendations for the outcomes of Rio+20, followed by specific recommendations in these two priority areas.

General recommendations on outcomes for Rio+20

World Vision urges member States to:

- Address the link between *health and sustainable development* at Rio+20 in 2012 by;
 - Highlighting the health implications of unsustainable development practices for current and future generations of children;
 - Accelerating the development of an action plan for sustainable development which prioritises the health of children and emphasises intergenerational equity;
- Increase *political will and ambition* to tackle the challenges of environmental degradation, climate change, chronic poverty, and child mortality simultaneously;
- Ensure that *fairness and equity* are at the heart of a sustainable development framework, based on the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’;
- Promote *local action and participation* of communities, including children, and ensure *accountability* to the poorest and most vulnerable people across the planning, assessment implementation and evaluation cycle;
- Acknowledge that all policies for sustainable development affect the health of children and communities, and prioritise *cross-sectoral governance and policy coherence* across relevant ministries at the international, regional and national levels;
- Reaffirm *internationally agreed development goals*, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and commence a dialogue to move towards a post-MDG 2015 framework which brings together the environment and development agendas: and
- Commit to the *development of national goals and targets*, recognising, for example, that increasing numbers of people living in poverty are emerging in two distinct contexts – fragile states and middle income countries.

Priority areas in the green economy

Sustainable agriculture and access to clean, household energy for cooking and cleaning are areas where the pillars of sustainable development can be successfully integrated. These two areas hold a central place in both development and environmental agendas and are crucial to children enjoying good health.

The food, energy, climate and environmental health crises must be tackled together, not as separate problems – pursuing separate solutions to these crises ignores their interrelationships, and fails to take advantage of possible synergies. Tackled in an integrated manner, these thematic areas would be the litmus test for what a new sustainable development paradigm could achieve.

Sustainable agriculture and child nutrition

Over a third of all child deaths each year – approximately two and a half million – are caused by the underlying factor of undernutrition.

Despite increases in global agricultural productivity, efforts to reach global targets on reducing hunger and undernutrition are not being met: current agricultural practices and infrastructure are

unsustainable and inequitable, and nutritious food is not getting to those who need it – often, not even to those who grow it. Food production and distribution, together with inadequate food utilisation at the household level (e.g. unsafe food preparation and handling, poor food choices, lack of access to clean water and sanitation), are failing to provide good nutrition for the world's poorest children.

Climate change, which contributes to food instability, presents a greater urgency to find ways to more sustainably produce and distribute food – agriculture is part of the climate problem as well as the solution.

World Vision welcomes UNEP's *Towards A Green Economy* report, which highlights agriculture as a major element in reorienting the way we manage the planet towards a sustainable future. We must consider how agriculture can intentionally and reliably ensure that the poorest children on the planet will have access to nutritious food.

Many organisations and governments are working on improving agriculture, land and water management practices to enhance world food supplies and increase food security for the world's poor. However, the health and nutrition sector is poorly linked to many of these emerging policies and practices.

Recognising that:

- There are inherent linkages between child undernutrition and health in the world's poorest communities, food and nutrition insecurity, unsustainable agricultural and water use practices, degraded natural environments, and climate change;
- The health and nutrition sector is poorly linked to many of the emerging policies and practices for agriculture and food production;
- Neither conventional nor traditional agricultural approaches on their own can meet the challenges of our changing climate and current injustices; and
- A decisive shift is needed to reorient agriculture and land use policies towards a new and common standard – of focusing on productive, sustainable and resilient agriculture while placing children's nutrition at the centre of our efforts;

World Vision calls on member States to:

- Make concrete commitments at Rio+20 for individual and collective actions towards sustainable agriculture and food security initiatives that are sensitive to nutrition and climate issues;
- Include child nutrition as a headline indicator for global goals on sustainable agriculture and food security negotiated at Rio+20;
- Incorporate child nutrition indicators in monitoring and reporting provisions around sustainable agriculture, food security and poverty reduction strategies and processes;
- Prioritise investments in agricultural adaptation to climate change in developing countries, allocating USD 7 billion a year for this purpose, and exploring the possibility of climate-related funding; and
- Support investments in ecological restoration, and facilitate the development of markets that value the regulatory services provided by ecosystems.

At the national, sub-national and local levels, governments, development agencies and programme managers should prioritise:

Integrated strategies and targets for child nutrition:

- Support the Framework for Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and support country scale-up of efforts to reduce undernutrition;¹ and
- Ensure that agriculture policies, programmes and development assistance support country-led strategies that include improved child nutrition as a key objective.

Support for small-scale farmers:

- Support small-scale farmers to combine productivity and conservation objectives (such as measures to improve soil fertility and soil carbon, measures to reduce soil degradation, and diversification of farming activities).

Participatory agriculture-nutrition initiatives:

- Promote participatory and gender-sensitive initiatives such as access to microcredit, especially for women farmers, recognition of land titles and female ownership, and community-based nutrition education programmes.

Clean household energy and child health

Worldwide today, approximately 1.3 billion people have no access to electricity. Almost 2.7 billion people are fully dependent on burning traditional solid fuels such as wood, dung, crop residues and coal to meet energy needs, but these forms of biomass are inefficient, unsafe and often non-renewable. These materials are typically burnt in simple cooking stoves with very incomplete combustion. Consequently, women and young children are exposed to high levels of indoor air pollution every day.

Children are becoming ill and dying as a result of the indoor air pollution created from using inefficient stoves. Approximately 57 per cent of deaths from indoor air pollution are due to acute respiratory tract infections (including pneumonia) in children under 5 years. Acute respiratory infections are the single most important cause of mortality in children, accounting for around 2 million deaths annually.

Inefficient and unsustainable household energy practices for cooking and heating also have serious implications for the environment, including local and regional air pollution, and local deforestation and land degradation where households are reliant on wood.

Expanding access to more efficient cooking stoves could help to prevent an estimated 2 million deaths annually from child pneumonia and adult chronic lung disease that are directly attributable to indoor burning of solid fuels.

Yet few countries have set targets for reducing the share of the population relying on traditional biomass for energy needs. Of 140 developing countries, 68 have established targets for access to electricity, but only 17 countries have targets for access to modern fuels. Access to clean cooking

¹ The SUN calls for action on both direct nutrition interventions and integrating nutrition objectives in other key development sectors, particularly agriculture and food security.

facilities has received significantly less government attention than electricity access, notwithstanding the significance of exposure to indoor air pollution, the increased risk of acute respiratory infections in children, and other health, environmental, and economic implications. Financing for cooking stove projects has been limited.

World Vision welcomes the recent estimates in the World Energy Outlook 2011 of investment required for household energy access. We also welcome the fact that Energy for Sustainable Development has been identified as a key issue by the Preparatory Committee for Rio+20, and the designation by the United Nations of 2012 as the *International Year of Sustainable Energy for All*. The international community needs to capitalise on this momentum at Rio+20.

Recognising that:

- Access to modern energy services² is fundamental for human development, from alleviating poverty, to promoting economic development, gender equality, food security, and health;
- Children are becoming ill and dying as a result of the indoor air pollution created from using traditional biomass and coal in inefficient stoves for cooking and heating;
- Modern household energy facilities such as fuel-efficient stoves for cooking and heating can cut child deaths by reducing exposure to indoor air pollution;
- Despite the negative health and environmental consequences associated with energy practices and fuel use in developing countries, clean, efficient and affordable energy access for poor households has received little attention;
- Improved health outcomes for children are not currently a particular focus of energy investment decisions, and health and environmental impacts are not always considered in the energy models of donors and companies;

World Vision calls on member States to:

Make commitments to energy access and child health:

- Adopt a clear statement that recognises the link between energy access and the MDGs, and demonstrates that modern energy access for the poorest and most vulnerable communities is a political priority where policies and funding will be reoriented accordingly. This commitment should prioritise the reduction of indoor air pollution and prevention of childhood respiratory infections as a key outcome.

Commit to developing national targets and indicators:

- Leaders of developing countries should commit to setting interim national goals, targets and indicators for scaling up access to household energy facilities, to reach the global goal of universal access by 2030;
- For countries with high dependence on traditional biomass, specific goals for access to fuel-efficient cooking stoves, with targets for improved health outcomes for women and children, should be set as part of national development and poverty reduction strategies; and

² Modern energy services are defined here as those which are reliable, affordable, sustainable and from low-greenhouse gas-emitting sources

- Goals, targets and indicators should be outlined by 2015 and reported on annually thereafter.

Prioritise community level capacity development and participation:

- National governments should involve affected communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of fuel-efficient stoves projects.

Ensure policies target the poorest and most vulnerable:

- National energy policies and plans should target the poorest and most vulnerable children and communities in developing countries. For example, funding should not focus solely on large-scale electricity infrastructure to the detriment of small-scale projects that will have a greater chance of reaching the poorest households and contributing to better local health outcomes.

Scale-up public funding for energy access and clean cooking facilities:

- The donor community should urgently mobilise additional investment to provide universal access to clean cooking stoves by 2030, estimated at \$74 billion, and \$17 billion for biomass cooking stoves (\$0.8 billion per year). The bulk of financing for fuel-efficient stoves should come from multilateral and bilateral sources, to assist the poorest countries and communities with start-up costs where adequate commercial return is not initially offered; and
- Donor governments should commit to making these funds available through the emerging Green Fund at the 17th Conference of Parties in Durban in December 2011.

Process considerations of the outcome document

The outcome document of the UNCSD should:

- Be a politically-binding document that recommits governments to achieve sustainable development;
- Adopt global goals and targets in the areas identified (agriculture and household energy);
- Establish a roadmap for working out the detail for the development and implementation of goals and targets at regional and national levels;
- Outline a pathway for the advancement of a post-MDG 2015 framework, which ensures the full participation of affected communities, recognising the differences between contexts such as middle income countries and fragile states, with consideration given to the development of Sustainable Development Goals.

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