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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 children. Each inequity sowing the seeds of tomorrow's inequalities.

Because inequality is often the result of a vicious intergenerational cycle. When children today are denied health care, nutrition, education and protection, they're also denied a full opportunity tomorrow to contribute to the development of their own children and of their countries' futures.

Development can only take hold and be truly sustained if we give every child a fair chance in life — to grow, learn and thrive...to carry himself as far as his talents and energies will carry him...to lend his energies and spirit to making his society stronger for the future.

This is a practical, as well as a moral, imperative. A 2010 UNICEF study, "Narrowing the Gaps," showed us that designing programmes and policies around the hardest-to-reach — the most disadvantaged and marginalized — is more cost-effective and results-rich than doing so for the easiest-to-reach.

And more. A Lancet study¹ published last year estimates that, in 74 high-burden countries, increasing health expenditures by just US\$5 per person each year until 2035 would do more than save and improve millions of lives. It would generate about nine times the value of that investment in social and economic benefits. Better health means improved productivity... improved productivity means greater GDP growth...and greater growth means more jobs and opportunities.

The reverse is also true. When we fail to invest in the most marginalized citizens, we fail their societies, too. For example, a 2012 World Health Organization report² found that poor sanitation and hygiene around the world results in a loss of around \$260 billion annually — nearly equivalent to the entire GDP of Chile.

We recently released a paper that reminds us that inequities are not inevitable — that the global community has narrowed a number of equity gaps in recent decades. In maternal mortality rates between high-income and low-income countries. In birth registrations in least-developed countries. In gender parity for primary education. And in HIV infection rates for children.

¹ Stenberg, Karin et al., *Advancing Social and Economic Developments by Investing in Women's and Children's Health: A New Global Investment Framework*, *Lancet*, April 2014.

² Hutton, G., "Global Costs and Benefits of Drinking-Water Supply and Sanitation Interventions to Reach the MDG target and Universal Coverage," World Health Organization, 2012

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 national averages that disguise the plight of the most disadvantaged.

But we cannot reach them without more innovative financing. As we're seeing through innovative partnerships like Power of Nutrition and UNITAID, public and private funds can be mobilized and targeted directly to the most disadvantaged. From cash grants for poor families so that they can afford health care and education for their children...to funding training programmes for front-line and community health workers...to expanding education programming in ethnic minority and indigenous communities.

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.
