



The Second World Summit for Social Development

Round Table 2: Assessing Progress and Addressing Gaps and Challenges in the Implementation of the Commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the SDGs
Statement by Ms. Inger Ashing -Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children International.

Agenda Item: Moderated Panel Discussion

Wednesday, 5 November 2025, 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Question 1: What are the most persistent gaps and challenges that continue to undermine progress in the Copenhagen Commitments and the SDGs at all levels? 4 minutes (580 words)

Thank you, Madam Moderator, Excellencies, colleagues,

Thirty years ago, the Copenhagen Declaration set out a bold vision: that people and their dignity must be at the centre of social development. It called for a partnership between governments and civil society to eradicate poverty and achieve social justice. Yet three decades later, as reaffirmed in the Doha Declaration, progress remains uneven, and for many children it has stalled or even reversed.

From Save the Children's perspective we recognize children's rights and well-being as a key barometer of social progress. Regrettably, what we see from our presence in over 100 countries, by that measure the world is failing.

Our latest internal analysis of 90 child-relevant indicators across 17 SDGs shows that only 1 in 5 targets for children is on track to be met by 2030.

At the current pace of progress, an estimated 750 million children will still live in multidimensional poverty in 2030, while 224 million will remain out of school and 3.4 million children under five will continue to die every year from preventable causes¹

These are not numbers, they are stories of missed opportunities and unfulfilled promises. Each one represents a broken promise of the Copenhagen Declaration, in which Member States laudably committed to give special priority to the needs and rights of children.

Why is it then that we are so far off track from our commitments? From Save the Children's perspective and experience, the most persistent gaps stem not from a lack of knowledge of what works, but from gaps in political will, financing, and willingness to hold ourselves accountable for not just our commitments but obligations.

¹ [Gaps in SDG progress for children.docx](#)

For instance, take social protection. Right now, children represent more than half of the world's population living in acute multidimensional poverty.² Despite basic income security for children being one of four national social protection floors, more than 1.77 billion children worldwide have no access to social protection.³ And only a small proportion of public spending for social protection globally is targeted to children.

While global needs have increased, social investment has not kept pace. COVID-19, conflict, the climate crisis, economic shocks and debt distress, and now global aid cuts are taking a toll on countries' public budgets. As children are hit hardest, we can no longer continue to treat economic and social policies as separate.

Another area impacting progress is the shrinking space for civil society, which reduces accountability and erodes the social contract. Civil society organizations face increased restrictions on funding, registration, and speech, while community voices – including children – are often absent from the rooms where commitments are monitored or decisions made.

As reaffirmed in the Doha Declaration, accountability, transparency, and inclusive participation are essential to achieving social development. Yet these principles are rarely realised in practice. Without them, social development risks remaining a vision not a lived reality.

Excellencies,

Around the world, children tell us they are frightened of what the future holds, but they also tell us that with the right support they can lead change in their communities. Their determination shows us what is possible when commitments are matched by action.

The gaps we face are not inevitable; they reflect choices. As we look ahead, the world must choose to expand social investment, embed accountability through civil society, and ensure that every policy, budget and partnership is judged by its impact on the lives of children. When we put children first, we deliver on every promise made in Copenhagen, in Doha, and in the 2030 Agenda.

² [2024 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index \(MPI\) | Human Development Reports](#)

³ [ILO-UNICEF_executive_summary.pdf.pdf](#)



Question 2: How do inequality, insecurity and distrust in institutions affect progress on the Copenhagen Commitments and the SDGs? 4 minutes (525 words)

Thank you, Madam Moderator,

Inequality and insecurity are not only economic conditions; they are lived realities. They shape how people, especially children, see the world and their place in it. When institutions fail to protect people's basic rights, trust is the first casualty.

Across our work globally, Save the Children sees that inequality, insecurity, and distrust form a vicious cycle, one that holds back progress on the SDGs and weakens the social fabric that the Copenhagen Declaration sought to build, and that the 2030 Agenda and now the Doha Declaration have reaffirmed.

Dalton, a child from Kenya, told us: "We are experiencing a prolonged drought and people are struggling to get maize because of high food prices. I also note that the gap between the rich and poor is increasing."⁴

His words capture what millions of children see every day, that inequality is not abstract, it is lived. It drives insecurity, undermines faith in institutions, and threatens the very social contract these declarations were meant to strengthen.

Consider that a child born into the poorest 20 percent of households is three times more likely to die before their fifth birthday and five times more likely to be out of school than one born into the richest. This stark gap shows not only how deeply unequal our world remains, but also how far we are from fulfilling the commitments of Copenhagen and the 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind⁵.

Insecurity deepens these divides – but inequality also deepens insecurity. Conflict, climate change and displacement push children out of school, into poverty, child marriage, labour or recruitment and use. Put frankly, they are pushed away from the promise of a safe childhood.

More than 460 million children live in fragile or conflict-affected contexts, where public systems are stretched ⁶ institutions are increasingly mistrusted, and the future feels uncertain. When schools and hospitals fail, when promises go unkept, the foundation of the social contract erodes.

⁴ [Listen-And-Act- | Save the Children's Resource Centre](#)

⁵ [Gaps in SDG progress for children 633570b95a.pdf](#)

⁶ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/sowc-2023/>

<https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/launch-2025-humanitarian-appeal>



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Save the Children

This loss of trust is not inevitable.

Civil society has a crucial role in rebuilding that trust. Local organisations, children and youth networks, and community leaders are the bridge between people and power translating policy into impact. Yet, as civic space shrinks, this bridge is being dismantled. When civil society is silenced, inequality grows, insecurity spreads, and trust collapses.

The Copenhagen Declaration called for societies to be built on cooperation and partnership. The Doha Declaration reaffirms that accountability, transparency and inclusive participation are essential to achieving social development.

Rebuilding trust begins with genuine inclusion, recognising that progress cannot be achieved for people but with them. Children and youth must be seen as partners in shaping their futures, not passive recipients of policy or services. Civil society must have the space and freedom to hold institutions to account, as well as the space and resources to partner with governments to deliver our shared goals.

If we are to restore faith in the social contract, we must rebuild it from the ground up rooted in participation, fairness, and shared responsibility. When institutions listen, when civil society is trusted, and when children's voices are heard, trust becomes the foundation of lasting social progress.

Thank you.

One Minute Concluding Remarks (after floor interventions)

Thank you,

What we've heard today reinforces one truth: progress is possible only if it is shared.

Children cannot wait another generation for promises to be kept.

Let us leave Doha committed to a renewed social contract that puts children, and the most marginalized, at its heart and leaves no one behind.

Civil society stands ready to partner, to push, and to hold us all to account in turning words into action.