

POLICY PROPOSALS FOR INTERACTION'S CHILDREN & YOUTH WORKING GROUP

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All young people—from infancy to adolescence to young adulthood—should have the chance to reach their fullest potential. However, global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, mounting food insecurity, and ongoing conflicts, are putting an entire generation of young people's health, wellbeing, and economic security at stake.

To meet this moment, there needs to be a common-sense approach to U.S. foreign assistance funding, policies, and programs that recognizes the critical and interconnected needs of children and youth regardless of where they live. Programs and policies that support children and youth must be more cohesive, integrated, and prioritized to invest in their most critical needs or the ramifications will be felt for generations to come.

For example, learning losses related to COVID-19 school closures could cost this generation of students close to \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings. An alarming 70% of 10-year-olds in lower- and middle-income countries cannot read a simple sentence, indicating a loss in global education gains that have already set back decades of progress in education. The root causes of these losses are not only in education systems—gaps in nutrition, protection, and health exacerbate lack of access to quality education. Renewing progress in education means supporting children's needs across sectors.

We believe that the U.S. Government (USG) needs a comprehensive, multisectoral, and multilevel life-course conceptualization of human capital development that puts the well-being and development of children and youth as a fundamental priority. It is built on the [Nurturing Care Framework](#) (NCF) that was initially developed for the foundational period of growth and development through the age of 3 years, but the principles of nurturing care apply from [preconception through adolescence](#) to mitigate adversities, enhance resilience, and promote well-being of children.

InterAction's Children & Youth Working Group—composed of InterAction Member non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with and for children and youth globally—urges the USG to promote and elevate the holistic, interconnected needs of young people throughout their lifetimes. To ensure that a focus on children and youth permeates USG approaches, we need to see a high-level initiative composed of relevant departments and agencies to recommend federal strategies to the U.S. President that support the health, safety, and wellbeing of children and youth globally. The following components must be part of this holistic and integrated approach:

1. TRACK AND RIGHT-SIZE INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Currently, there is no comprehensive accounting of U.S. investments in children and youth through development and humanitarian assistance. Available funding figures are not comprehensive, may include double counting to meet multiple directives, and do not accurately reflect the amount the USG invests in programs that directly and indirectly impact children. This lack of transparency makes inter- and intra-agency coordination difficult and has led to gaps in support for children and youth. For example, there is a funding gap across the humanitarian and



development sectors related to supporting children and youth in emergency settings. Comprehensive tracking will help determine where new investments or increases in existing investments are needed—resulting in more effective, sustainable programming and less wasteful spending in the process.

OUR RECOMMENDATION: The U.S. Department of State and USAID should report annually and publicly on the amount of money spent on children and youth. These reports, in addition to [foreignassistance.gov](https://www.foreignassistance.gov), should explicitly differentiate which expenditures in U.S.-funded foreign operations are intended to primarily or secondarily benefit children (ages 0-17) and youth (ages defined by USAID). The data should be disaggregated by demographics, including age range, gender, disability, minority, crisis-affected, and other categories of target populations. We encourage adopting terms such as “youth-relevant,” “youth-focused,” or “youth-led,” which align with USAID’s recent program typology and avoid classifying programs as youth-relevant based solely on participant age. Both the F.Y. 2023 reports from the House and Senate include the need for USAID to report steps to improve tracking, which is an important first step to increased transparency that will help implementers and policymakers better target interventions.

2. SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Existing and named USAID and Department of State positions focused on children and youth currently lack the authority and budget control to oversee multisectoral efforts and inter- and intra-agency collaboration.

OUR RECOMMENDATION: We recommend an empowered and expanded role for a senior-level official dedicated to children and youth. This could take many forms, such as an expanded mandate for an existing coordinator, but regardless of its form, this position needs policy and budgetary authority.

3. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Over 2 billion people are under the age of 18 globally. According to the United Nations, in 2019, there were 1.2 billion youth aged 15 to 24 worldwide. Yet, despite these numbers, youth are often overlooked by those in positions of power and left out of conversations regarding their futures. As youth experience firsthand the ongoing and traumatic impacts of events such as climate change, racial injustice, and the COVID-19 pandemic—as well as the mental health challenges triggered by these events—they are uniquely poised to offer solutions to these issues.

OUR RECOMMENDATION: The USG must meaningfully engage with children and youth from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities—including LGBTQIA+ youth, youth with disabilities, caregivers, girls, and young women—to ensure that their voices are centralized in decision-making processes. The USG should develop mechanisms and platforms, such as youth advisory councils, to facilitate the direct participation of young people on issues that affect them most intimately.

4. CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS

Around the world and in the United States, government entities use child impact statements to assess the impact that regulations, policies, and programs would have on children. Similar to the environmental and gender analyses the federal government currently uses, impact statements on children and youth would provide a systematic



process to answer fundamental questions about outcomes for health, education, safety, family and community unity, economic security and mobility, development, and identity.

OUR RECOMMENDATION: Current U.S. efforts to address the needs of children are fragmented. To clearly and explicitly integrate children and youth issues into the USG’s policymaking, we recommend agencies routinely include child impact statements as part of policy and decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION

Children and youth are bearing the brunt of current crises and development backsliding, and the USG needs policies, funding, and tools that work together to meet this moment. We look forward to working with the Administration and Congress to explore the proposals in this document and how the USG can respond to this pivotal generational moment.

ABOUT INTERACTION

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

InterAction’s Children and Youth Working Group works to better integrate and elevate children and youth issues in our coalition’s advocacy. The Working Group—comprised of over 30 InterAction Member NGOs working with and for children and youth globally—aims to bridge sectoral divides and elevate children and youth. By employing the Whole Child Development approach, this group advocates for U.S. Government programs, policies, and funding that are integrated, cross-sectoral, and support children and youth throughout all life stages. Within InterAction, children and youth issues span working groups, sectors, and teams. InterAction utilizes its platform to highlight children and youth issues and support advocacy by its Member NGOs.

For more information on InterAction’s Children and Youth Working Group, please contact [Daisy Francis](#) or [Caitlin St. Amour](#).

