Investing in Children in Myanmar

### List of Acronyms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ATIPD</td>
<td>Anti-trafficking in Persons Division</td>
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<td>BB</td>
<td>Budget Briefs</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>GC</td>
<td>General Comment</td>
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<td>EPHS</td>
<td>Essential Package of Health Services</td>
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<td>ETVSCG</td>
<td>Education and Technical Vocational Education and Training Sector Coordination Group</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-based violence</td>
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<td>HLF</td>
<td>High Level Forum</td>
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<td>ISPS</td>
<td>Integrated Social Protection System</td>
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<td>MCCT</td>
<td>Maternal and Child Cash Transfer</td>
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<td>MNCH</td>
<td>Maternal, Newborn and Child Health</td>
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<td>MOALI</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MOHS</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Sport</td>
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<td>MOPF</td>
<td>Ministry of Planning and Finance</td>
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<td>MSDP</td>
<td>Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan</td>
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<td>MSWRR</td>
<td>Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement</td>
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<td>NAP</td>
<td>National Action Plan</td>
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<td>NHP</td>
<td>National Health Plan</td>
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<td>NIF</td>
<td>National Indicators Framework</td>
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<td>NESP</td>
<td>National Education Strategic Plan</td>
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<td>PFM</td>
<td>Public Finance Management</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Health</td>
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<td>MS-NPAN</td>
<td>Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action on Nutrition</td>
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Thirty years ago, world leaders made a historic commitment to all children by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This international agreement on childhood has become the most rapidly and widely ratified human rights treaty in history. It has transformed children’s lives.

Myanmar ratified the CRC in July 1991, making a commitment to do everything possible to promote and protect the rights of all children in Myanmar.

The national budget is a powerful instrument for realizing the rights of children and enabling them to achieve their full potential. It determines the resources that will be made available for health, education, social welfare, social protection, nutrition and other policies that provide essential services for children, adolescents and youth.

This short paper examines the General Comment (GC) 19 on Public Budgeting for the Realization of Children’s Rights.
Background to General Comment 19: Public Budgeting

General Comment 19, issued in 2016, guides States Parties on their legal obligations to invest in children, under Article 4 of the CRC.

It gives States Parties a framework with recommendations to ensure that public budgets contribute to the realization of all children’s rights, especially the rights of children in vulnerable situations. General Comment 19 promotes effective, efficient, equitable, transparent and sustainable public budget design, development, decision-making and implementation.

What does Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child say?

“States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation.”

Understanding the relationship between budgeting and the realization of children’s rights helps to advance responsible management of budget allocations and spending, in every area that may directly or indirectly affect children. It can mean real change in the way budgets are planned, enacted, executed and followed up.

Considering the successes achieved to date alongside the priorities for the next policy period can help countries to determine budget allocations that will advance child rights and achieve the country’s goals. This paper discusses the progress made in child rights in Myanmar since 2016. Inspired by the GC 19, it offers some practical suggestions around spending decisions and budget allocations, towards helping the country on its path to realizing children’s rights more fully.

To improve the realization of child rights in Myanmar, ask:

What budget actions could Myanmar take to increase its implementation of the CRC?
Progress Made for the Rights of Children in Myanmar

Myanmar has achieved considerable progress in child rights since the Concluding Observations on the Committee on the Rights of the Child were adopted in 2012.

‘Realizing Myanmar’s Development Vision for Every Child’, a high-level forum in January 2019 opened by H.E. the State Counsellor and attended by key ministries, noted the country’s advances and the child-focused elements of the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan.

Working in the critical areas of health, education, protection and legislation, among others, the Myanmar Government has shown the will to take action to promote the rights of children. Specifically:

Ensuring the best start in life for every child

- Maternal, newborn and child health services
- Nutrition interventions
- Vaccines success
- Immunization programme
- Water, sanitation and health plans and national investment

Meeting the right to quality education for every child

- Costed strategic plans
- Curriculum reform with frameworks, guidelines and minimum standards
- Structures and coordination mechanisms for National Education Strategic Plan
- "No-one-left behind, no dropout and no discrimination” initiatives
- Quality of education and student learning initiatives improving teacher quality and assessment
- Supporting out of school children and children in remote areas
- Technical vocational education and training programmes

Protecting the rights of children in conflict with the law, child victims and witnesses, including in contexts of violence, trafficking and exploitation

- Budget for reintegration and rehabilitation of children including trafficked victims, former child soldiers and mine victims
- Enhanced capacity programmes for judiciary and police; child sensitive judicial and police procedures
- Anti-trafficking via the National Plan of Action supporting children & women survivors of trafficking
- Migration programme with cross-regional cooperation to protect children in Southeast Asia
• Child friendly interviewing rooms in selected District Courts
• Child Rights Law adopted; incorporating CRC and Optional Protocols
• Strengthening the Anti-trafficking in Persons Law (2005)

Reducing social and economic vulnerabilities of children: The role of social protection child protection and disaster risk reduction (DRR)

• Child-Centered Risk Assessment (2017)
• Five-year costed Social Protection Sector Plan (2018)
• Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (MCCT), reaching over 100,000 beneficiaries.
• Integrated Social Protection System (ISPS)
• Trained and deployed social workers and case managers
• Information Management System for monitoring child protection cases
• Final review of the Child Rights Bill before its adoption
• Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement budget allocation increased from 0.09% in 2016/17 to 0.41% in 2018/19.

Generating evidence and budgets

• Birth and Death Registration Manual rolled-out (2018)
• E-platform for Vital Registration, networking across States and Regions
• Improved data on the children in Myanmar; priority SDG indicators for children (2018); Myanmar Living Conditions Survey 2018; National Evaluation Capacity Development working group (2018)
• Budget allocations to social sectors - Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Sport and Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement – increased from 12.2% in 2016/17 to 13.8% in 2018/19

Using Public Budgets to Realize Children’s Rights

General Comment 19 recommends helpful ways for public budget decision makers to realize children’s rights in each of the four stages of the public budget process.

(a) Planning  (c) Executing
(b) Enacting  (d) Following up

Below are 23 recommendations for public budget decision makers, based on the specific guidance contained in General Comment 19 (notes #67 to #111).

The first section on Planning, which is particularly important for Myanmar’s children, includes suggestions for assessing the situation; legislation, policies and programmes; mobilising resources; and formulating equitable budgets.
Children’s Advice to Budget Decision Makers

What children say

General Comment 19 was informed by a global consultation with 2,693 children from 71 countries. The children communicated messages to public budgetary decision makers.

- Plan well. There should be enough money in the budget to provide for all rights of children.
- It is impossible for you to invest in us if you do not ask us what to invest in! We know. You should ask.
- Recognize the rights of all citizens, both young and old. Listen to people’s opinions on governance.
- Spend money fairly and wisely. Don’t spend our money on something that is useless. Be efficient, save money.
- Make sure there is no corruption. Make sure the government is more accountable and transparent.

- Investing in children is a long-term commitment and it generates a lot. Remember to think of it.
- Investment in our families is also an important way of securing our rights.
- Do not forget to include children with special needs in your budgets.
- Publish records of how the money is spent.
- Provide budget information to all children in ways that are easily understood and in media that are popular with children, like social media.
(A) Planning

Assess the situation

1. Use the Sustainable Development Goals for children and the National Indicators Frameworks, within the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan to generate reliable, timely, accessible, comprehensive and disaggregated information, to keep track of the situation of children across Myanmar (#67).

2. Consider in detail the situation of different groups of children, especially those in vulnerable situations, taking into account the past (at least the last three to five years), current and future situations (at least the next five to 10 years) (#68); and particularly make user-friendly information and disaggregated data on the situation of children available in a timely manner (#68.c), for example, through Child-Focused Public Expenditure Measurement or sector Budget Briefs.

3. Investigate past and potential impacts of budget decisions on children (#69) and create opportunities for consulting with children, their caregivers and those working for their rights, for example, the impacts of the budget increases to social sectors in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Sport from 2016-2018.

Develop legislation, policies and programmes

4. Conduct child rights impact assessments of all legislation, policies and programmes, including those of a macroeconomic and fiscal nature, to ensure that they are in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, reflect the realities of children, especially those in vulnerable situations, and do not harm children or prevent their rights from being realized (#70, #71).

5. Make cost estimates of proposed legislation, policies and programmes that affect children, in order to ascertain the level of financial resources needed (#73).

Mobilize resources

6. Take concrete sustainable measures to mobilize domestic resources at the national and subnational levels, such as through taxes and non-tax revenue (#74). Seek international cooperation if the available resources to realize the rights of children are insufficient (#75). Make use of progressive targets identified in sectors strategies and plans.

7. Mobilize the full extent of the available resources in a way that is consistent with the obligations of implementation (#77). Safeguard the resources available to advance children’s rights by preventing waste of resources due to inefficiency or mismanagement and by combating corrupt or illicit practices at all levels (#77.d).

8. Protect children’s rights when making decisions related to mobilizing resources through natural resource extraction. Domestic and international agreements regarding such resources, for example, should take into consideration the impacts they might have on current and future generations of children (#80).

Formulate equitable budgets

9. Prepare budget-related statements and proposals that can be used by children to make effective comparisons and monitoring of budgets relating to children (#81).
10. Use pre-budget statements and budget proposals to explain, identify and present. Explain how legislation, policies and programmes affecting children will be funded and implemented. Identify which budget allocations directly target children. Identify which budget allocations indirectly affect children. Present findings from evaluations and audits regarding the impact of past budgets on children. Detail recent or upcoming measures taken to advance children’s rights. Present financial data and explanatory text regarding the past, present and forecasted resources available for spending on the rights of the child, as well as actual expenditures (#82).

11. Develop clear budget classification systems for monitoring how budget allocations and actual expenditures affecting children are managed in relation to the budget principles. This calls for budget lines and codes which, at a minimum, disaggregate all planned, enacted, revised and actual expenditures that directly affect children: age, gender, geographical area, categories of children in vulnerable situations, source of revenue, responsible units (#84).

12. Ensure the division of revenues is proportionate amongst different sectors and geographical regions in Myanmar to improve coordination between ministries and to reach children requiring special protection highlighted by the CRC, for example, displaced children, children in conflict or border areas and children in remote and rural locations.

13. Allocate adequate time and resources to scrutinize budget proposals from a child rights perspective (#88). Ensure legislatures have the autonomy and authority to question, review and, where necessary, request amendments to budget proposals, to ensure that they advance the rights of the child in a way that is consistent with the general principles of the CRC (#89).

14. States Parties should contribute so that members of legislatures are adequately prepared to analyse and debate the impact of budget proposals on all children prior to enacting budget legislation (#90).

15. Classify budgets enacted by the legislature in a way that enables comparisons to be made between planned and actual expenditures (#92). Provide access to the enacted budget as a public document (#93).

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1 In 2016 Myanmar implemented a multi-factor indicator-based system to improve the transparency and systematization of State and Region budget allocations. This model identifies six key factors to be considered in determining budget increments. These include three Development Needs Indicators (Total Population, Poverty Index and Area) and three Fiscal Constraints Indicators (Urban Population, Per Capita Tax Collection and Per Capita GDP). The Ministry of Planning and Finance recognizes that improvements to this system are possible and has welcomed input. A strong case can be made for further amendment towards a system based on children’s investment needs. Ideally factored into the zero-based budget, not considered as a budget increment.
(C) Executing

16. Ensure value-for-money when goods and services are purchased (#94).

17. Uncover and remedy the root causes of ineffective and inefficient public spending (#95), for example, strengthen Public Finance Management.

18. Track progress and highlight deviations between revenues and expenditures in terms of availability, quality, accessibility and equitable distribution of services (#96).

19. Regularly monitor and report on budgets and expenditure related to children in a manner that oversight bodies can track progress in advancing children’s rights as set out in the enacted budget (#97).

20. Establish public accountability mechanisms that allow civil society, including children, to monitor outcomes of public spending (#103).

22. Undertake dedicated audits in relation to the rights of the child to assist States in evaluating and improving public revenue mobilization and spending on children. States Parties should make the audit reports accessible and publicly available in a timely manner (#107).

23. Use past evaluation outcomes to inform future planning of public budgets for legislation, policy and programmes for the realisation of children’s rights (#111).

Focus on budgeting for children, now

In Summary

- Myanmar’s progress and achievements in child rights to date are acknowledged. Huge potential exists. Myanmar can benefit greatly from extra investment in children.

- Investing in children through budgets, resource planning, legislation, policy and programming are the themes of General Comment 19 and the CRC.

- Recommended areas for immediate focus in Myanmar are improved planning with a child-focused lens and formulation of equitable budgets.

- Listening to and including children’s ideas in the decision-making process will help to build policy coherence and public trust.

(D) Following Up

21. Provide comprehensive information in year-end reports, on all revenue collected and actual expenditures that affect children’s rights (#105).
National Health Plan 2017-2021 developed with an essential package of health services.


By 2017, out of 330 townships, 291 had more than 80% DTP3/Penta coverage. Introduction of Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (2016) and the upcoming Rotavirus vaccine (2020) will also contribute significantly to reduce pneumonia and diarrhoea-associated infant and under-five mortality that currently account for 20% of all under-five deaths.

The first National WASH Strategy on Rural Sanitation, WASH in Health Facilities and WASH in Schools (2016-2030) with Investment Plan was completed in 2016, through collaborative effort of the Ministries of Health and Sports with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation.

National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021; National WASH Strategy and Investment Plan (2016-2030), First Five Year Strategic Plan on Early Childhood Care and Development.

National Education Curriculum Framework; Alternative Education Sub-sector Framework; Teacher Competency Standards Framework; and Head Teacher Competency Framework; Safe School Construction Guideline; Minimum Requirements for WASH in Schools and Thant Shin Star Guidebook.

National Curriculum Committee and National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee; Private Sector Development Committee under which the Human Capital Working Group was established for Private Public Partnerships.

Bago, Ayeyarwaddy, Mon and Kachin.

Teacher mentoring program introduced to improve the quality of teacher learning; identification of ways to increase the recruitment of quality coaches in TVET is underway.

Focus is on early grades reading/mathematics assessment, with South-East Asia Primary Learning Metrics underway.

One male and one female officer from each Township police station from six prioritized Regions (Yangon, Bago, Mandalay, Sagaing, Ayeyarwaddy, Magwe).

Focus is on increasing cross-sectoral coordination between social welfare, justice and immigration authorities and addressing the needs of children on the move internally, across borders, facing detention or other protection concerns.

Programme undertaken in close collaboration with the Union Supreme Court.

These introduce higher standards for the law enforcement, justice and social welfare system to work with child victims and witnesses, as well as children in conflict with the law.

It articulated 23 expansion pathways for priority programmes including MCCT, social pension, Integrated Social Protection System (ISPS) and kinship care allowance.

Starting in Chin State in 2017 and by 2019 also covering Rakhine, Naga, Kayin & Kayah States.

Including 74 people working on MCCT and social pensions and 188 case managers handling child protection and gender-based violence cases on an individual basis, deployed in January 2019.

While this is the fastest increase within social sectors for this period, it is still extremely low by regional standards. As of 2018/19, almost 40% of the ministry's budget is allocated to the implementation of the MCCT.
Focus on budgeting for children NOW

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