

UNICEF Executive Board - 2022 First Regular Session

10 February 2022

Statement by the Director General, Planning Institute of Jamaica Dr. Wayne Henry

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been recognized as a significant shock to Jamaica's social development and to poverty reduction efforts. Just ahead of the pandemic, as evidenced by the data trend in child poverty since 2017, the prevalence had declined from 24.4 per cent to 13.3 per cent in 2019 (Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions). Measures and restrictions to curb the public health crisis created or exacerbated negative impacts on children. Poor children bear the brunt of this loss and the likely long term impact on their development and labour market capabilities. Other social negatives that have been coming to light include experiences of domestic violence, truancy, sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy, all threatening the rights of children.

In the context of the three 'Cs', the relevance and value of Jamaica's pre-emptive strategic focus on poverty reduction as articulated in the 2017 National Policy on Poverty and National Poverty Reduction Programme is notable. This policy framework for proactively addressing poverty at the family and community levels embodies full recognition of the rights of children, and targets efforts and resources at their families in several important ways. **The power of positive educational outcomes as the pivotal investment in breaking intergenerational transmission of poverty is fully recognized, and the thrust for dealing with deficits in this area is palpable throughout the society.** Of note, other policy frameworks in child development and protection, health, education and social protection also serve to buttress overall policy coherence.

UNICEF through its headquarters and the Jamaica office has been a consistent supporter of efforts to secure the rights of children for their survival and development. In this elevated moment of crisis the country has benefitted from ongoing support through humanitarian cash grants, care packages, technical assistance towards adaptive and shock-responsive systems, continued support to data-driven evidence creation, focus on child protection, conduct of informative studies, and continuing advocacy for the inclusive approach and broad partnerships for resource mobilization. These efforts have been in line with the strategic emphases of the poverty reduction policy and have complemented the Government's response.

As recovery progresses, these efforts will remain critical. Improved education outcomes at every level is the core of sustained reduction in child poverty. Strengthened institutional capacities at every level of education, and for the delivery of health and other social services is imperative. Much improved cadres of case management workers to address family-based limitations remains pertinent. Recognition of the specific interventions for children with disabilities and their families, as well as those with special learning needs must be given consideration. Equipping our social service agencies with appropriate technologies and materials will also be a game-changer. On an even more fundamental level, the capacity of families to have sustainable livelihoods, and labour market attachments, will support income security in the short to medium term, and has to be integrated with the educational investments.