



Study on International Development Cooperation for Children: **A Brief Overview**

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INTRODUCTION



As the COVID-19 pandemic moves into its third year, global economic growth remains sluggish, and inequities in child development continue to be exacerbated. Against the backdrop of food insecurity, spread of infectious diseases, climate change and humanitarian crises, children increasingly face multiple deprivations, putting their health and wellbeing at significant risk. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires further strategic actions to uphold and safeguard child rights globally.

With support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation conducted a study on international development cooperation for children through examining case studies in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and China. The study examined the key trends and characteristics of international development cooperation for children, assessed the needs and challenges related to child development, and provided policy recommendations for China's support to international development cooperation for children.



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IMPORTANCE OF
CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Investment in child development is a key approach to build human capital and interrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The study has shown that **the earlier the investment in child development, the lower its costs and the higher its returns**, promoting the development in widespread social and economic aspects.

Moreover, child development is relevant to all aspects of the SDGs. Without the protection of child rights and interests, the SDGs on poverty reduction, gender equality, and a peaceful and prosperous society cannot be achieved.

As the world faces complex development challenges, further investment in children is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FOR CHILDREN

Through literature review and interviews, the study revealed several notable characteristics of international development cooperation for children.

The importance of child development is recognized globally.

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With increasing consensus among governments on the importance of investing in children, child development has not been a politically sensitive topic. Moreover, the importance of child development is highly recognized by the international community and aligned with global development goals. The SDGs aims to leave no one behind and puts children and other vulnerable groups at the center of advancing global development. Synergistically, international development cooperation for children promotes the achievement of the SDGs, including the improvement of people's livelihoods, and is in line with the development priorities of recipient countries.



Investment in child development has strong spillover effects.

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Child development is a cross-cutting discipline that encompasses several different fields, including health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, child protection and social policy. Study has shown that cross-sectoral improvements in these fields can also help combat poverty and promote economic growth. For example, investing in compulsory education can contribute to improved results in nutrition, water safety, and child protection. These spillover effects highlight the far-reaching positive impacts of international development cooperation for children.



Top-level policy design for child development has improved.

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In the past few decades, child development has received increased attention from the international community. Countries have formulated top-level policy frameworks and strategies to ensure a multi-sectoral, non-fragmented approach to support child development. Top-level policies on international development cooperation for children have been developed by the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan, along with sector-specific development policies for child health, basic education, the development of girls, and nutrition for children.



Priorities on international development cooperation for children have diversified.

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Due to differences in national contexts and development advantages, countries have developed different priorities and strategies on international development cooperation for children. For example, the United Kingdom places emphasis on strengthening basic education and girls' education in recipient countries, while Japan's education assistance focuses on using international platforms to support the improvement of education in the Asia Pacific region. In general, maternal and child health, water and sanitation, basic education, infrastructure, and democratic governance are among the prominent topics of international development cooperation for children.



International development cooperation for children engages a variety of partners.

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Most countries pursue international development cooperation for children through bilateral and multilateral organizations such as the UN agencies and International Financial Institutions. For example, Germany actively partners with various multilateral organizations, and it was the second largest donor to the UNICEF in 2020.



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CHINA'S INVESTMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FOR CHILDREN

China's international development cooperation model for children has evolved substantially in the past few decades. It has transitioned from bilateral aid to a combination of multilateral and bilateral aid, with a focus on comparative advantages of multilateral organizations in supporting child development. The model has transformed from traditional infrastructure investment to provision of infrastructure and technical investment, attaching greater importance to technical assistance and capacity building on child development. In terms of financing, China has also transitioned from primarily bilateral aid funds to providing diversified funds, including the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, the China-UN Peace and Development Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization-Government of China South-South Cooperation Trust Fund, and private funding complementary to these efforts.

China has yet to develop a dedicated foreign aid policy or development agenda for children. Foreign assistance provided to children is often at the request of the recipient countries, rather than driven by a specialized policy or strategic plan. In addition, the management of China's foreign aid for children is led by multiple government ministries, and there is no designated entity responsible for projects focused on children. At present, infrastructure development accounts for a relatively large proportion of China's foreign aid, while investments in "soft aid" such as capacity building remains comparatively small. It is necessary in China's foreign aid policy to further strengthen capacity development in health and education in child development.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHINA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FOR CHILDREN

China has primarily focused on poverty elimination and the improvement of livelihoods in support of international development cooperation for children, with special emphasis on maternal and child health, education, and humanitarian assistance. Specifically, China invested in social welfare projects that were urgently needed by recipient countries, including construction of hospitals and schools, provision of emergency food aid, response to infectious disease outbreaks, and support to prevention and mitigation of natural disasters that directly benefitted recipient countries with visible quick wins.

China's investment in international development cooperation for children can be strategically strengthened by expanding from project-based support; and further optimizing

the combination of infrastructure building, supply provision, and technical assistance in long-term sustainable and strategic development programming. The country's investment in international development cooperation for children is primarily through bilateral aid, while multilateral and civil society support remains at a smaller scale. Moreover, Chinese technologies and experiences with proven track records have not been fully explored for South-South Cooperation.

In 2021, China proposed the Global Development Initiative to contribute to the SDGs and provide a basic policy direction for strengthening international development cooperation. Considering the new demands and challenges in child development, this report proposes six recommendations for China's contribution in international development cooperation for children.

1

Accelerate the formulation of policy propositions for child development, and mainstream child related issues in top-level policy design.

Child development should be mainstreamed in top-level policy frameworks, and special policy guidance should be developed to facilitate targeted investments in children. It is also important to take into account social issues related to women and children when designing and managing projects. For example, in the development of infrastructure projects, capacity building to provide relevant quality services for women and children should receive special attention and consideration.

2

Strengthen bilateral and multilateral exchanges to ensure alignment on child development strategies.

Bilateral communication with recipient countries should be strengthened to better understand their development and planning systems, as well as the needs of children in specific regions of the country to ensure programmatic alignment. Engagement with international and regional organizations should be bolstered to support coordinated investment in children, with attention to the United Nations' strategic priorities on child protection and maternal and child health. Lastly, cooperation and dialogue on children should be enhanced with both developed countries (e.g., the United States and Japan) and developing countries (e.g., Brazil and India) to share experiences and best practices and ensure consensus on child development strategies.

3

Leverage the strengths of UN development agencies to build synergy.

Multilateral organizations, such as UNICEF, have unique expertise and perspectives on child development, which can help to mitigate the shortcomings of technical assistance when extending bilateral aid. China has accumulated rich experiences in rapid economic development and poverty reduction. Thus, China should deepen its cooperation with multilateral organizations such as UNICEF in knowledge sharing and technology transfer for child development to jointly advance the SDGs.

4

Increase financing for child development and mobilize resources from different stakeholders.

Child-related SDGs face a huge funding gap, and more funding is urgently required. First, existing aid policies and funds should also be geared towards child development. Furthermore, investments in poverty reduction, public health, climate change, and food security should also prioritize the rights and interests of women and children. Second, development resources should be mobilized from a broader range of stakeholders, including international financial institutions, domestic and foreign enterprises, non-profit foundations, and trilateral cooperation with other donor countries to also amplify the results for women and children. Third, the Government of China could further enhance its overall planning to allocate resources in a targeted and synergistic manner.

5

Infrastructure development and in-kind assistance should be supplemented with technical support to ensure sustainable results.

To ensure hospitals, schools, and other facilities constructed through foreign aid can be sustainably utilized by children and communities, greater emphasis should be placed on 'soft' assistance such as capacity building and people-to-people exchanges for sustainable results. Capacity building components can be integrated into project development plans to amplify the overall results. Taking education as an example, 'soft' assistance such as support to education planning, teacher training, education informatization, and campus nutrition improvement can be provided in schools constructed through China's foreign aid. Partnership building in developing countries should be strengthened to jointly conduct needs assessments and coordinate resource allocation.



6

Leverage China's comparative advantages to facilitate the development of quality technical products to support child development.

China has accumulated valuable experiences and developed reliable technical products and technologies to support child development that can be potentially adopted internationally. Specifically, technical products on maternal and child health, sanitation facilities, child nutrition, pre-primary education, and safe drinking water have demonstrated effectiveness in advancing child development. Efforts to document these technologies and contextualize the technical know-how in partnership with agencies such as UNICEF can benefit other developing countries.