Recommendation Document for the G20/C20: Integrating Mental Health into Sustainable Development Strategies

As a global leader, the G20 can spearhead this effort by creating a **G20 Mental Health Fund of Funds** focused on early intervention, school-based mental health programs, digital solutions that make mental health support accessible to all children, as well as sustained social policies that are the foundations of lifelong psychological resilience, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Prioritising mental health not only improves the well-being of millions of young people but also fosters **sustainable economic growth**, **reduces inequalities**, and **builds more resilient and vibrant societies.**

Investing in mental health, especially for children, youth, and their caregivers, is not just a necessity but an opportunity to enhance human capital and socioeconomic efficiency and productivity, fostering a more resilient and prosperous global society and planetary sustainable development. When we support the mental health of children, we advance their capacity to learn, work, build meaningful relationships, and contribute to the world . Similarly, when we advance the mental health of parents and caregivers, we ensure nurturing care for children to survive and thrive.

Call to Action for G20 Leaders:

- **Mental Health is a Human Right**: Universal access to mental health support and services Safeguards human rights and contributes to achieving global health and well-being impacting all SGDs international development agenda. Commit to granting Universal Health Coverage and integrating evidence based mental health policies into all sectors, settings, agendas and policy planning.

- **Prioritise mental health and psychosocial wellbeing as an integral part of enhancing climate change resilience** and responding to climate change impacts to protect people, communities, and economies. Integrating climate change considerations into mental health policies and programs, embedding mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) within climate and health policies, building on global commitments, adopting multisectoral and community-based approaches to reduce vulnerabilities.

- **Financing:** Allocate adequate funding towards mental health services to expand access and quality following the Lancet Commission guidelines on mental health investment allocation of at least 5% of Health Budgets to Mental Health in LMIC. We therefore urge governments to increase their domestic spending on mental health within relevant budgets including health, education and social services, as well as scale funding for mental health and psychosocial support within international development assistance. This includes targeted financing for children and youth.

Incorporate Mental Health into Global Economic Policies: Mental health should be integral to reducing inequality and promoting sustainable growth. G20 leaders must ensure that mental health is included especially in **education, labour market, and social protection policies** to minimise social and economic burdens.

Establish a Dedicated Mental Health Fund for Children and Adolescents: A **G20 Mental Health Fund** should be created to scale up mental health services, focusing on **early intervention** and education. This fund can be supported by innovative financing mechanisms such as **debt-for-health swaps** or **SDG-aligned bonds**, helping to finance **community-based interventions**, **school programs**, and **telehealth initiatives**.

- **Global Collaboration for Social Innovation**: Implement a Mental Health Global Fund to bridge the investment gap and assist LMIC mental health prioritisation, to catalyse intersectoral collaboration and social impact ecosystems for the research and development of social innovative mental health systems and solutions based on mental health indicators and monitoring systems.

Create Cross-Sectoral Frameworks for Mental Health: Promote coordination across sectors, including healthcare, education, and labor markets, to build an integrated mental health approach across the lifespan.

- Financial Framework and Policy Support: Implement and support evidence generation for public policies monitoring and improvement. Co-Design innovative financing strategies and models to support investment deployment especially in LMINC and underfunded settings. Include Mental Health in existing programs on maternal health (focus for most LMICs), Primary health services, GBV, Social benefit schemes. Design and implement a framework to support public policy implementation and translational transparency e efficacy.

Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) for Mental Health Solutions: Encourage public-private partnerships to drive innovation and technology that support mental health for young people. G20 countries can scale **digital health solutions** like mental health apps and telemedicine platforms by collaborating with governments, private companies, and civil society, improving care access in underserved areas.

Now is the time for bold action. G20 leaders must commit to funding and scaling mental health initiatives for children and adolescents. Together, we can build a healthier, more equitable future. **The cost of inaction is far greater than the cost of action. Let's invest in our future by investing in the mental health of our children today.**

The case for investing in children’s and adolescents' mental health is clear: it is both an economic necessity and a social imperative. By prioritising mental health, the G20 can significantly reduce inequality, enhance human capital, and prepare the next generation to face future challenges. **The time for bold, transformative investments in mental health is now.** Let’s build a more just and sustainable future by investing in the mental well-being of our children today.

Enhance Data Collection and Research: Prioritize investments in **data systems and research** to track mental health outcomes, ensuring efficient resource allocation.

While global income inequality has decreased since 2000, this progress has slowed in recent years. Necessary, **climate transition policies** may worsen inequality if not paired with appropriate measures to mitigate negative distributional impacts.

Debt Vulnerability: Many low- and middle-income countries face growing debt vulnerabilities, limiting their ability to finance social policies. Effective **debt management** and innovative mechanisms like debt-for-development swaps are needed.

Reducing Global Inequalities: The **G20** emphasizes that reducing inequality is key to achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The creation of the **Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty** offers an opportunity to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on poverty and hunger reduction while addressing social inequalities.

Strengthening International Tax Cooperation: The **OECD Report on Taxation and Inequality** highlights global coordination on implementing progressive tax systems, particularly to combat tax evasion among high-net-worth individuals (HNWI). Creating a fair global tax system that encompasses **HNWI** and eliminates tax evasion practices remains a significant challenge. Progressive tax reforms, such as the **OECD's Pillar Two**, are crucial for equitable wealth distribution. Implementing progressive income taxes and enhancing tax transparency are key to achieving economic justice.

Innovation in Sustainable Financial Solutions: Progress in **Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)** financing and innovative financial instruments offers a pathway to promote sustainable development through climate-resilient infrastructure investment.

Resilience to Economic Shocks: Strengthening **automatic stabilizers**, such as unemployment insurance and cash transfer programs, can enhance economies' resilience to crises, protecting vulnerable populations. Developing **climate-resilient infrastructure** and adopting financial innovations, such as **debt-for-development swaps**, are central to addressing climate challenges without compromising growth.

Although Tailored Policy Approaches are needed to combat inequality, customized to each country's circumstances balancing economic efficiency with social equity is critical, the model proposed below could be an initial landmark to stimulate global debate and local implementation.

Effective **debt management** is crucial for maintaining economic sustainability in vulnerable countries. Debt-for-development mechanisms show promise but must be carefully implemented. Our objective is to promote this debate putting Children and Adolescents mental health in the spotlight of global priorities.

To achieve this objective we need solid, accurate and transparent data for meaningful assessments of inequality dynamics. Cooperative initiatives to improve data collection can help provide a clearer picture of distributional impacts.

5. Conclusion

The application of a **Child Lens** within the **Mental Health Fund of Funds**, combined with a robust strategy of resource allocation for social determinants of health, pandemic preparedness, and the construction of resilient mental health systems, has the potential to transform Brazil and the world post-G20. By focusing on children's and adolescents' mental health as a driver for sustainable development, the fund will significantly contribute to the realisation of the **SDGs**, the building of more prosperous communities, and the reduction of global inequalities. With an ideal governance model and the use of instruments such as **Health for Debt**, the fund will be a powerful lever for building a healthier and more equitable future for future generations.

Implementing the **"Health for Debt"** model in Brazil, applied to both public and private debt, domestic and external, presents a unique opportunity for the country to restructure its finances while simultaneously improving the mental health conditions of its young population. The success of this model depends on efficient governance, coordination between different actors, and the ability to generate measurable outcomes that not only benefit public health but also drive sustainable economic growth. Applying this model will help Brazil address its debt challenges while building a healthier, more equitable, and resilient society.

Key Arguments

1. *Sustainable Development*

Human Rights Protection: Individuals with mental health issues and their families often face stigma, discrimination, and victimisation. Effective human rights-oriented policies and laws are essential for preventing abuse and protecting rights.

Equitable Access and Universal Health Coverage: Access to mental health care remains inadequate for most individuals suffering from mental health issues, with many incurring high costs for treatment. Integrating mental health services into publicly funded primary care and utilising task-sharing with non-specialist providers are recommended strategies to enhance access and affordability.

Promoting Environmental Resilience: Enhancing mental health resilience prepares communities to better cope with the stresses caused by climate change, thus supporting sustainable environmental practices and disaster readiness. It helps to mitigate the adverse effects of economic crises on mental well-being, enhancing societal stability (Wahlbeck & McDaid, 2012). Protect indigenous and vulnerable populations assuring access to mental health care and programs to prevent suicide (Araujo, 2023).

Empower Youth: Build Minds, Build Futures: Investing in mental health for children and youth is a transformative strategy that builds resilience, boosts productivity, and ignites social innovation. Integrating youth into this innovative transformation process is beneficial in multiple domains (McCabe, 2022). By including youth and fostering a sense of engagement, ownership and commitment resulting in more innovative, relevant and effective interventions for increasing mental literacy and building more resilient and informed future generations to lead the charge for a more sustainable planet and productive society.

Guaranteeing access to Justice: By adopting and domesticating the CRPD, nations will combat inequality and exclusion for persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, provision of appropriate accommodations ensure the rule of law is administered effectively within human rights spheres.

2. *Socio Economic Empowerment through Mental Health:*

Life Satisfaction: Comprehensive mental health strategies enhance individual well-being, happiness, and the ability to manage life's challenges effectively.

Equitable Access: Addressing mental health needs helps to empower all individuals, who may face unique mental health challenges due to social and economic inequalities. Prioritising the investment in Mental Health, especially in community-based settings ensures broader access and reduces inequalities in mental health care provision (McDaid & Park, 2019)

Poverty and mental health are intricately connected in a bidirectional relationship where poverty can increase the risk of mental illness and vice versa causing a vicious cycle (Ridley et al., 2020). Those living in poverty are more susceptible to mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and severe psychological stress (Kuruvilla & Jacob, 2007) (Wan, 2008)., with particularly profound impacts on children, adolescents (Dashiff et al., 2009) (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012), and vulnerable groups like women and minorities (Gilroy et al., 2015). Addressing this cycle requires comprehensive interventions that include psychosocial support and accessible mental health services to both alleviate the symptoms and tackle the underlying economic factors (Wahlbeck et al., 2017). Poverty significantly impacts mental health, with a particularly severe effect on vulnerable populations. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing targeted interventions that not only address the symptoms but also the root causes of this interplay.

Leaving no one behind: Emphasising the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that *leave people behind* and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. (UN, 2017)

Quality Education: Mental health support in educational settings increases school attendance and performance, contributing to future generations prosperity (Eisenberg & Raghavan, 2019) Australia, India, Brazil?.

Economic Burden: Mental disorders account for 10% of the global disease burden. They lead to significant economic losses, with an estimated cost rise from 2.5 in 2010 to $6 trillion globally by 2030, reaching up to 8% of global GDP by 2030 .Global Mental Health annual loss of US$ 1 trillion due to productivity loss. (Arias, 2022).

Cost-Effectiveness: Affordable, accessible, scalable and effective strategies exist for preventing and treating mental conditions with high ROI. Investing in mental health has a high Return on Investment (ROI) in multiple settings. (WHO, 2021) It can prevent significant economic losses from disability and disease burden, projected to save billions in lost economic output (Chisholm, 2015). The global cost-benefit analysis found that the impact of failing to address the mental health and psychosocial support needs of 10–17-year-old children and adolescents affected by humanitarian emergencies would result in the equivalent of a global US$203 billion loss of potential lifetime earnings. (Unicef, 2023)

Increased Productivity and Reducing Unemployment: By investing in mental health, individuals gain better emotional and psychological resilience, enhancing their productivity and employability. This reduces unemployment rates and economic dependency, key drivers of poverty and hunger (Chisholm et al., 2016) .

3. Reform of Global Governance

Influencing Policy at Global Levels to the Incorporation into Global Agendas: By advocating for mental health as a core aspect of public health at forums like the G20, this manifesto supports the reform of global health governance to include mental health as a global priority. Mental health becomes a part of global health diplomacy, encouraging nations to commit to mutual goals and shared challenges, thus reforming how global health issues are addressed collaboratively.

Cross-Sector Collaboration: Promotes integration of mental health across different sectors and international bodies, fostering more comprehensive and effective global governance structures.

Strengthening International Cooperation and Collective Impact: Facilitates the exchange of innovative mental health policies and practices among nations, enhancing global health strategies and cooperation.

Entrenching Democracy: True democratic coexistence is sustained by the respect for the equality and dignity of all persons. Absolute respect for human dignity, regardless of personal, family or social circumstances is a fundamental backbone of democratic principles.

The commercial determinants of mental health, particularly from the tobacco, alcohol, and gambling industries, exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities by disproportionately harming vulnerable populations. Policies such as the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), WHO Global Strategy on Alcohol, and gambling regulations focus on restricting advertising, increasing taxes, and implementing harm reduction measures. These controls aim to reduce consumption, limit exposure, and direct revenues toward mental health services. Strong regulation of these industries is essential to mitigate their negative impact on mental health and address health disparities in disadvantaged communities.

Advancing Credible, Robust, and Just Transition Plans. Prioritising Mental Health Investment in Global Transition plans: Transition plans often require significant societal shifts and can lead to stress and uncertainty among affected populations. By investing in mental health governments and organisations can alleviate the psychological burden, increase resilience, productivity and facilitate environmentally sustainable and socially just transitions.