

PROGRESS FOR CHILDREN

Achieving the MDGs with Equity

Number 9, September 2010



THE CONVENTION ON
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



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Against all odds

This is the story of a child, a girl born in one of the world's poorest places – probably in sub-Saharan Africa. She could also have been born in South Asia, or in a poverty-stricken community of a less poor region.

Against all odds, she has survived. Just think of the challenges she has already faced throughout her young life.

Compared to a child growing up in one of the wealthiest countries, she was 10 times more likely to die during the first month of life.

Compared to a child growing up in the richest quintile of her *own* country:

She was two times less likely to have been born to a mother who received antenatal care and three times less likely to have come into the world with a skilled attendant present.

She was nearly two times less likely to be treated for pneumonia and about one-and-a-half times less likely to be treated for diarrhoea – two of the biggest reasons she was also more than twice as likely to die within the first five years of life.

She was nearly three times more likely to be underweight and twice as likely to be stunted.

She was more than one-and-a-half times less likely to be vaccinated for measles and about half as likely to be treated for malaria or to sleep under an insecticide-treated net.

She was around two thirds as likely to attend primary school, and far less likely to attend secondary school than if she lived in a nation with greater resources.

Even now, having survived so much, compared to a child in the richest quintile, she is still three times as likely to marry as an adolescent ... more than two times less likely to know how to protect herself from HIV and AIDS ... and, compared to a girl in an industrialized nation, over the course of her life she is more than 300 times as likely to die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth.

So, while she has beaten the odds of surviving her childhood, serious challenges remain – challenges that have the potential to deepen the spiral of despair and perpetuate the cycle of poverty that stacked those odds against her in the first place.

And this is just one child's life. While we may celebrate her survival, every day about 24,000 children under the age of 5 do *not* survive. Every day, millions more are subjected to the same deprivations, and worse – especially if they are girls, disabled, or from a minority or indigenous group.

These are the world's most vulnerable children. Ten years ago, the United Nations Millennium Declaration reaffirmed our collective responsibility to improve their lives by challenging nations, rich and poor alike, to come together around a set of ambitious goals to build a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.

Today, it is clear that we have made significant strides towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), thanks in large part to the collective effort of families, governments, donors, international agencies, civil society and the heroes out in the field, who risk so much to protect so many children.

But it is increasingly evident that our progress is uneven in many key areas. In fact, compelling data suggest that in the global push to achieve the MDGs, we are leaving behind millions of the world's most disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalized children: the children who are facing the longest odds.

Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity presents evidence of our achievements to date, but it also reveals the glaring disparities – and in some cases, the deepening disparities – that we must address if we are to achieve a more sustainable, more equitable progress towards the MDGs and beyond.

We hope that as you read this report and the progress it tracks, you will remember that behind every statistic is the life of a child – each one precious, unique and endowed with rights we are pledged to protect.

So, please take a few minutes to read through the report's tables and summaries. Your reaction may be, "*Of course*. Hasn't poverty always existed? Hasn't the world always been unfair?" True, but it need not be as inequitable as it is. We have the knowledge and the means to better the odds for *every* child, and we must use them. This must be our common mission.



Anthony Lake
Executive Director, UNICEF

Achieving the MDGs with equity

When world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000, they produced an unprecedented international compact, a historic pledge to create a more peaceful, tolerant and equitable world in which the special needs of children, women and the vulnerable can be met. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a practical manifestation of the Declaration's aspiration to reduce inequity in human development among nations and peoples by 2015.

The past decade has witnessed considerable progress towards the goals of reducing poverty and hunger, combating disease and mortality, promoting gender equality, expanding education, ensuring safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and building a global partnership for development. But with the MDG deadline only five years away, it is becoming ever clearer that reaching the poorest and most marginalized communities within countries is pivotal to the realization of the goals.

In his foreword to the *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010*, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon argues that "the world possesses the resources and knowledge to ensure that even the poorest countries, and others held back by disease, geographic isolation or civil strife, can be

While gaps remain in the data, this report provides compelling evidence to support a stronger focus on equity for children in the push to achieve the MDGs and beyond.

Why equity, and why now?

Reaching the marginalized and excluded has always been integral to UNICEF's work. It is part of our mission, and its roots lie in the principles of universality, non-discrimination, indivisibility and participation that underpin the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other major human rights instruments. In policy and in practice, UNICEF's work emphasizes the necessity of addressing disparities in the effort to protect children and more fully realize their rights.

Strengthening the focus on achieving greater equity for children is both imperative and appropriate for at least three practical and compelling reasons:

First, robust global economic growth and higher flows of investment and trade during most of the 1990s and 2000s failed to narrow disparities between nations in children's

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