

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2008

Child Survival



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children

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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2008

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Editorial, Design and Publications Section
Division of Communication, UNICEF

3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

Tel: (+1-212) 326-7434

Fax: (+1-212) 303-7985

Email: nyhqdoc.permit@unicef.org

United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza

New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: pubdoc@unicef.org

Website: www.unicef.org

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Foreword

In 2006, for the first time in recent history, the total number of annual deaths among children under the age of five fell below 10 million, to 9.7 million. This represents a 60 per cent drop in the rate of child mortality since 1960.

However, there is no room for complacency. The loss of 9.7 million young lives each year is unacceptable, especially when many of these deaths are preventable. And despite progress, the world is not yet on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal target of a two-thirds reduction in the rate of child mortality by 2015.

Data compiled by the Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation reveals that progress has been made in countries in every region of the world. Since 1990, China's under-five mortality rate has declined from 45 deaths for every 1,000 live births to 24 per 1,000, a reduction of 47 per cent. India's under-five mortality rate has declined by 34 per cent. The rates in six countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bolivia, Eritrea, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal – were reduced by 50 per cent or more since 1990, although under-five mortality rates in these countries remain high. And Ethiopia achieved a nearly 40 per cent reduction since 1990.

Of the 62 countries making no progress or insufficient progress towards the Millennium Development Goal on child survival, nearly 75 per cent are in Africa. In some countries in southern Africa, the prevalence of HIV and AIDS has reversed previously recorded declines in child mortality. Achieving the goal in these countries will require a concerted effort.

Widespread adoption of basic health interventions, including early and exclusive breastfeeding, immunization, vitamin A supplementation and the use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets to prevent malaria, are essential to scaling up progress, in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

More needs to be done to increase access to treatment and means of prevention, to address the devastating

impact of pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, severe acute malnutrition and HIV.

We know that lives can be saved when children have access to community-based health services, backed by a strong referral system.

The focus must be on delivering key interventions at the community level, as part of integrated efforts to support the establishment of stronger national health systems.

And particular attention must be paid to the special needs of women, of mothers and of newborn children.

The World Health Organization, the World Bank and UNICEF, at the invitation of the African Union, have jointly developed a framework, examined in detail in this year's *The State of the World's Children* report, to help African countries achieve the MDG for child survival.

One source of hope is the new momentum on global health. Public and private interest is high, and innovative partnerships are being established and strengthened, as we collectively seek to capitalize on this momentum.

Partnerships hold great promise for accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. UNICEF is working closely with UN system partners and with governments, regional and non-governmental organizations, foundations and the private sector to coordinate activities and to pool expertise and knowledge.

Our challenge now is to act with a collective sense of urgency to scale up that which has proven successful.



Ann M. Veneman
Executive Director
United Nations Children's Fund

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SUMMARY

Child mortality is a sensitive indicator of a country's development and telling evidence of its priorities and values. Investing in the health of children and their mothers is not only a human rights imperative, it is a sound economic decision and one of the surest

will require additional effort. Attaining the goal is still possible, but the challenge is formidable.

Reaching the target means reducing the number of child deaths from 9.7 million in 2006 to around 4 million by 2015. Accomplishing this will require accelerated action

Every child has the right to live a healthy life. *A group of children at a community child centre, Malawi.*

The remarkable advances in reducing child deaths achieved by many developing countries in recent decades provide reason for optimism. The causes of and

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