

ABCs for Action and Advocacy

CHILD SURVIVAL

A: THE BIG PICTURE

GLOBAL SUMMARY AND TIMELINE

In the 1960s: According to UNICEF, 20 million children worldwide died per year, every year.

From 1980 to 1995: UNICEF spearheaded a child survival and development movement that saved the lives of an estimated 25 million children, protected the health of millions more, and put child rights high on the political agenda.

In 2008: today, 9 million children under five years old die per year. That is 25,000 deaths every day, or more than 1,000 children dying every hour.

Over 90 percent of the world's child deaths occur in 60 countries – all of which are in low-income or least developed countries, or in the poorest areas of middle-income countries. The same countries also account for the vast majority of maternal deaths, malnutrition and lack of safe drinking water and sanitation.

Child survival and development are a central emphasis in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

B. THE WORK IN PROGRESS

REGIONAL PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Dramatic progress has been made by many regions. In the past 10 years, these areas reduced by 60% the mortality rates of children under five years old. These areas are poised to achieve the MDGs well ahead of the 2015 deadline.

In Asia: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam

In the Middle East and North Africa: Egypt, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia

In Latin America: Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru

In Central/Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States:

Albania, Azerbaijan and Turkey

Hopeful signs of progress are being made in other areas. In the past five years, these sub-Saharan areas reduced their under-five mortality by more than one-third: Angola, Benin, Cape Verde, Comoros, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Niger and Togo.

Challenges remain substantial in other parts of the world. Under-five mortality rates declined 51% in China, and 38% in India.

WORK TO BE DONE

Progress has been slow in sub-Saharan Africa because of civil wars, poverty and the heavy burden of HIV/AIDS. The situation is regressing, with child mortality rates going up rather than down in countries such as Kenya, Congo, Cameroon, Chad, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Similarly, child survival remains precarious in Afghanistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Burundi, Rwanda, and Swaziland.

Children die for many complex reasons. But basically, the survival and well-being of children are intricately linked to the good health and well-being of their mothers. Therefore, there must be a continuum of care for mothers before, during and after pregnancy; for newborns to ensure their survival and health; and for young children to safeguard their well-being.

At the same time, many simple and low-cost interventions can dramatically reduce child deaths. Simple diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria and measles continue to be the major killers, accounting for half of the world's child deaths. Infections, malnutrition, neonatal conditions, accidents, injuries, and in some parts of the world, HIV/AIDS, occur singly or in some combination to cause the remainder of the child deaths.

C. TAKE ACTION IDEAS

The following high priority interventions need to be implemented at a scale that saves more lives. Use this as a framework for advocacy in your own communities:

1. Take care of newborns -- as part of the continuum of care following a life cycle approach
2. Feed infants and young children, including use of breastfeeding, micronutrient supplements and de-worming
3. Immunize mothers and children; introduce new vaccines, especially against pneumonia and rotavirus
4. Pay attention to Prevention of Mother-To-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV
5. Prevent malaria using Insecticide-Treated Bed-Nets (ITN) and Intermittent Preventive Treatment of malaria (IPT)
6. Manage common childhood illnesses by applying the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness strategy (IMCI).

ENDNOTE

Gautam, Kul Chandra, Child Survival as the Cutting Edge of Human Rights and Human Development, 2009 Rabbi Marshall Meyer Great Issues Lecture on Social Justice, Dartmouth College, Hanover NH, 2 February 2009.