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ETHIOPIA AT THE CENTER OF CHILD SURVIVAL REVOLUTION

UNICEF's flagship report - *The State of the World's Children 2008: Child Survival reports 40 per cent reduction in under-five deaths in Ethiopia between 1990 and 2006*

ADDIS ABABA, 22 JANUARY 2008 – Dramatic achievements in strategies to reduce under-five mortality rates in Ethiopia were highlighted at the Ethiopian launch of UNICEF's flagship report - *The State of the World's Children 2008: Child Survival* – in Addis Ababa.

Under-five mortality rates in Ethiopia have reduced by an impressive 40 per cent between 1990 and 2006.

These reductions have been achieved through national interventions targeting major childhood killers such as national measles immunization campaigns and the Government's malaria reduction programme. Over 20 million insecticide treated bed nets have been distributed in malaria-prone areas of Ethiopia since 2005, enough to protect 10 million families. Together with the roll-out of the effective new anti-malaria drug, Artemether-Lumefantrine (Coartem) to all health facilities in all malaria affected communities throughout Ethiopia the incidence of malaria has been reduced dramatically throughout Ethiopia.

Extreme manifestations of malnutrition, a leading cause of child mortality, have been brought under control through the Enhanced Outreach Strategy and Targeted Supplementary Feeding for Child Survival (EOS), the adoption and institutionalization of a national protocol on the treatment of severe acute malnutrition.

"No Ethiopian child need die of preventable causes. That is the underlying principle guiding our child and maternal health programme," said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Ethiopian Minister of Health.

The child survival strategy of the Government of Ethiopia is centered on the Health Extension Programme (HEP) which is designed as a community-based child and maternal health system. This strategy particularly aims at increasing access to primary health services to the majority of the population living in rural areas. Over 24,000 Health Extension Workers of the planned army of 30,000 have been trained in the provision of 16 basic interventions addressing child and maternal health and have been deployed in rural health posts across the country. Training of additional workers continues and when fully implemented the HEP envisions two health extension workers stationed in 15,000 health posts across the country providing primary health care in every kebele (lowest administrative unit) across the country.

"Ethiopia is at the center of a new wave in the child survival revolution," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia. "The Ethiopian example is a beacon for other African countries in keeping with the African Union endorsed strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goal on Child Survival. The challenge now is to ensure that the systems that are being put in place by the Government continue to achieve sustained results and deliver on all key child survival opportunities."

The progress made with regard to nutrition is particularly encouraging. "Ethiopia is in a position to confidently deal with severe and acute malnutrition, a major underlying cause of child mortality," said Dr. Shiferaw Teklemariam, Ethiopian State Minister of Health. "Ethiopia

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is putting in place a national nutrition strategy that will deal with the issue of malnutrition in a more sustained way.”

The Health Extension Programme with its community-based, interactive approach to providing primary health care to children and mothers also holds great promise for sustaining gains made in child survival. The Health Extension package includes critical preventative interventions including immunization, nutritional screenings, malaria testing and treatment, sanitation and hygiene promotion.

“Health Extension Workers, though stationed at the periphery of the health system, are actually at the center of the child survival revolution in Ethiopia,” said Ghebreyesus. “They are the foot soldiers in the war that has been waged against major childhood killers. If they are to deliver on the immense responsibility put to them then we need to ensure they have the knowledge and resources to succeed.”

In particular, the Health Extension Programme will need to address remaining challenges with regard to child survival including pneumonia, diarrhoea and neonatal diseases.

“A solid foundation has been put in place to sustain and accelerate the decline in child mortality and achievement of the Millennium Development Goal 4 on Child Survival,” said Ljungqvist. UNICEF and WHO commend the Government of Ethiopia and the Ministry of Health for the vision and leadership that has resulted in the child survival revolution that is at hand. We also note the substantial and consistent support from the international community that has made these achievements possible. Together with the health extension workers and communities that they serve we should be able to achieve the vision of Ethiopia where children can grow and develop without succumbing to preventable killers.”

Photographs of the event will be available upon request.

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