

**The 2010 edition of UNICEF's *Progress for Children* shows that despite advancement towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), many of the poorest and most disadvantaged children are still missing out. UNICEF invited several experts to offer their insights on what can be done to realize the MDGs for all.**

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**Richard Morgan is Director of Policy and Planning at UNICEF. He helped to explain some of the findings in *Progress for Children: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals with Equity*, and highlighted approaches that have worked to bring essential services to the most disadvantaged children and families.**

First of all, we've seen tremendous aggregate progress across the world in reducing the number of child deaths. It's come down below 9 million child deaths a year – which is of course still huge, but it's the lowest on record. Unfortunately, more and more of those children who die before the age of five are in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia, particularly South Asia. So we've seen a widening of inequalities among regions at the same time as we've seen progress globally.

*Within some of the countries that you spoke about, who is missing out in terms of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals?*

Very often, it is children and families in rural areas, including remote areas, and sometimes children in the inner cities, in the slums. It's also often girls, and children in the poorest families and communities.

*What are some specific approaches that have worked to bring essential services to children and their families – and also to ensure their use?*

Some countries have been very successful at delivering what we call 'integrated packages of basic services' – making sure that the medicines are there [and that] the advice is there, reaching out from the clinics and health posts to families, and bringing families into the net of basic services. One of these ways is the use of child health days or village health days, in which different kinds of interventions – including immunizations, supplementation of vitamin A, deworming and advice to mothers and fathers – can be all done at once. And this packaging together of services and their delivery in specific days in villages and in urban areas is one widespread way which has proven successful.

One of the major risks to children comes from diarrhoeal diseases, which in turn are linked to poor sanitation. The community-led total sanitation [approach], which is in Bangladesh but also in many other countries, brings communities together to talk about how they can improve their hygiene and sanitation habits. It looks for alternatives to defecation around the village – and changing those habits in a way that is safer and less likely to spread infection.

*Is there an argument for always focusing on a universal approach to health and survival, as opposed to a more concentrated approach where certain populations are targeted?*

We could think of a double track approach. One that tries to ensure that all the basic services, which are essential for children to survive and to grow and to thrive, are available to all families. And a second track, which tries to reach out to those families and help them to access the services. Many families face barriers in accessing services. Maybe the distances are great that they have to travel, maybe they're short on time, and maybe they're short on the cash that they need to pay for local fees. We have to understand those barriers that families face.

*What do we know about how children and families will be affected by the global economic downturn?*

We don't have systematic information from every community, but all the indications are that millions of families have come under stress – through losing their jobs, through losing their main livelihoods and income – and one of the effects of this has been seen in many communities in rising levels of malnutrition among children.

*In your opinion, does the global economic downturn present a challenge to achieving the Millennium Development Goals? Or does it present an opportunity?*

It certainly presents a challenge – on the other hand the opportunity comes in designing new policy measures and interventions that can help families in an affordable way. And one of these different programs [is] to provide cash supplements to families, including families with children. And the cash transfers have proven an effective and – even in the poorest countries – quite affordable way of helping families to get through the economic crisis and beyond.

*What does UNICEF want the international community to know about 'achieving the MDGs with equity'?*

The key message is, not only is it the right thing to do – to make sure that the poorest and most deprived families and children are not left out of global progress – but it is also an effective thing to do. Those children who are out of school, those children who are not vaccinated, those mothers who don't have access to antenatal care, are the very ones that we should be focusing on if we want to make the most rapid progress.

*If you were addressing a head of state, how would explain the notion of making decisions based on equity?*

I would suggest that every leader [and] every politician [should] know who are the poorest families – where they are, and how to reach them. The report gives some indication of how countries which have made progress have been able to reach the poorest families, but it starts from the idea that we have to know who they are first, before we can design and tailor services that will reach them.

*Is it realistic to believe that we can have more inclusive development for all children and families within, say, the next two decades?*

There are many countries that have achieved much greater equity in terms of children surviving, children going to school. So we should be inspired by those successes, we should learn from them. Some of those successes have taken place within countries in certain regions and could be adapted and spread to other parts of those countries.

*Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't asked about?*

We think there's an ingredient that could be added to the mix of programs and efforts, which has tended to be neglected. It is what we call 'communication for development'. It is providing those who take care of children – the mothers, the fathers, but also the other caregivers – with the basic information they need to protect their children and help them to grow. How often babies should be fed, how they can be weaned, how they can be protected from unsafe water, how mosquito nets can be used to prevent children getting malaria, rehydration when children get dehydrated from diarrhoea. Providing that basic information to families, we think, is a missing ingredient.

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*Progress for Children: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals with Equity*, underscores growing evidence that progress toward achieving many of the goals has been accompanied by persistent and in some cases widening disparities. The report examines the latest available data through an equity lens, focusing on three factors – poverty, gender and geographic location of residence – that greatly affect a child's chances of survival.