

TALKING POINTS

**By UNICEF Representative Carrie Auer at the Budget Analysis
Meeting of the Budget and Finance Committee of Parliament**

Crossroads Hotel, Lilongwe,

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PROTOCOLS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- UNICEF considers this an important step in our continuing efforts to engage the Parliament of Malawi on key issues affecting children;
- We recognize that as Members of Parliament, your constituents include children, whose rights and interests we work daily to fulfil. But, as Members of Parliament, you also have the power to create and shape the kind of Malawi that these children are growing up in. As members of the Budget and Finance Committee, you even have a greater responsibility to scrutinize the budget to ensure that it is child-friendly. You can ask tough questions, demand answers and hold the executive accountable for how it allocates and spends taxpayer money;
- We also know that by virtue of being political leaders, when you speak, your voice will be heard. The media loves to report on politics

and politicians. Our desire is to persuade you to use that same voice to speak for the children of Malawi. You are uniquely positioned to send the message that, for Malawi to make good progress and safeguard its place among progressive nations, it needs to invest the bulk of its resources in health, education, water and sanitation, child protection, and social protection;

- Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Malawi is a signatory, urges member States to allocate the maximum available resources for children. And we also know that Malawi is a party to various international agreements that commit governments to allocating a certain percentage of their annual budgets to the social sector. These include the Abuja Target of Allocating 15% of the Annual Budget to the Health Sector and the Dakar Target of Allocating 20% of the Annual Budget to the Education Sector. These are important benchmarks that as the peoples' representatives, you can use to monitor budget allocations and expenditure;
- We are aware of the economic challenges the country is facing, which are placing enormous pressures on the national budget. Under these tough circumstances, it is even more critical that we safeguard the allocations that have already been made to the social sector. Since children and women are the most vulnerable and would be hardest hit by this crisis, budget allocations for areas like child and maternal

health, basic education, child development, social protection, et cetera, need to be protected. And I am confident that we can count on your support to ensure this happen, particularly as the budget review is just around the corner;

- Let me now come to the purpose of this meeting. As you may already know, it is jointly organized by the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) and UNICEF. MEJN will present their analysis of the 2011/2012 national budget, focusing especially on allocations to sectors that impact on children. The analysis compares Malawi with other neighbouring countries to help us see where we stand;
- After that, we will have a session on the National Social Support Policy. You may be aware that although key social support programmes like the Social Cash Transfer Scheme have been running for some time, there is as yet no government policy to guide this important area. Mr. Harry Mwamlima from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning will give us an update on the policy. We are also delighted that Mrs. Hyacinth Kulemeka from the Ministry of Gender, Child and Community Development will join us in that session so that we can have a meaningful dialogue on what is clearly an important policy for Malawi.
- I thank you.