

SPEECH

LAUNCH OF THE CHILD SURVIVAL FILM SERIES IN MALAWI

REMARKS BY UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE,
MS. CARRIE AUER

23 April 200,
Crossroads Hotel, Lilongwe

The Minister of Women and Child Development, Honorable Anna Kachikho

The Principal Secretary for Women and Child Development, Ms Olive Chikankheni

All government officials present

UN Colleagues

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to be part of the launch of the UNICEF supported film series on child survival in Africa. The films were produced in November 2007 through an agreement between UNICEF Regional Offices in Dakar and Nairobi and TVE, an independent, non-profit organization based in the UK.

In that agreement, TVE was commissioned to produce seven films in support of the continent-wide effort to accelerate child survival. The films illustrate the challenges and opportunities of accelerating progress in both documentary and dramatic fashion. This is intended to reach the widest possible audience.

As we have seen in the film, Malawi is one of a few countries in sub-Saharan Africa that are on course to achieve the Millennium Declaration Goal of reducing under-five mortality. This achievement is a clear testimony of the enormous efforts of Government, civil society, development partners, and communities in investing in children. It demonstrates clearly what can be accomplished when national commitments and partnerships are matched by resources and political will.

Honourable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, the remarkable progress we have seen should encourage us to do even more for children. It is difficult to accept that an estimated 96,000 Malawian children under five years of age still die every year mostly from largely preventable diseases.

These children are dying from pneumonia; neonatal illnesses, diarrhea, malaria, AIDS, and malnutrition. Their ability to thrive is compromised by poverty, food insecurity and poor hygiene and sanitation. Indirect causes of children's and women's poor health include inadequate knowledge and poor caring capacities of caregivers, inadequate access to and poor quality of health services. Yet, there is evidence that implementation of high impact but affordable priority interventions at a high scale can prevent 63% of current mortality in young children, especially when the interventions are implemented at home and in the community.

Malnutrition, sadly, has not improved since the early '90s. One in five Malawian children is underweight and almost half of all young children suffer from chronic malnutrition. Nutrition has been identified as a key component of successful child survival interventions and needs to be a key priority. We know that investing in tackling malnutrition can lead to a 50% reduction in under-five mortality.

For Malawi to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, efforts to promote child survival and development need to be redoubled. I am glad to note that the Government in collaboration with the UN and other partners has launched a policy to Accelerate Child

Survival and Development. A National Strategic Plan for ACSD has been developed to translate the policy into action, and communities are being mobilized to support the accelerated provision of high impact interventions to mothers, newborns and young children. The policy aims to increase coverage of selected high-impact interventions to at least 80% by 2011.

To achieve this goal, we need to find ways to strengthen health systems so that they can better deliver services to the people. Making these improvements is more and more the product of partnerships - and as we move towards reaching every child, we need to ensure that every partnership is working effectively. Let me reiterate that UNICEF is committed to working with the Government of Malawi and its partners in creating a Malawi Fit for Children.

Let me add a word about the role of the media in promoting child survival. In Africa and many parts of the developing world, the media play a powerful role in bringing information to communities, changing old habits, and creating momentum for social change. Their role in promoting child survival has therefore never been greater. We rely on the media to hold leaders accountable for the promises they make; they bring stories of hope and despair from the remotest parts of the country into our living rooms; and they challenge us all to live up to the promises of making a Malawi fit for children.

In UNICEF, we are prepared to work closely with the media to enhance their work in reporting on children. We are already looking into capacity development through training and are exploring frameworks for better collaborations and partnerships.

I thank you for your attention.