

SPEECH

**BY THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NGO COALITION ON CHILD RIGHTS
TRAINING OF TRAINERS WORKSHOP**

27TH SEPTEMBER 2010

MANGOCHI

The Director of Child Affairs Ms. Hyacinth Kulemeka,

Mr. Undule Mwakasungula, Chairperson of the Human Rights

Consultative Committee,

Members of the Coordinating Committee of the NGO Coalition on Child
Rights,

Workshop participants,

Invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me from the outset to congratulate you for forming the Malawi NGO Coalition on Child Rights. The very fact that Malawi today has a coalition to advance child rights is a major milestone in child rights advocacy in this country. In forming the Coalition, you have joined the league of nations in Africa and the world that have national coalitions on

child rights. To date, there are 100 known child rights coalitions globally, out of which 25 are found in Africa.

Let me at this juncture also thank Mr. Bamusi and the Coordinating Committee for the work they have put in since the formation of the Coalition in May. They have worked tirelessly to not only organize this workshop but also to develop an elaborate plan of activities for between now and July 2011.

Why we have strongly supported the formation of the NGO coalition? We believe that as civil society, you have an important role in monitoring child rights violations and holding duty bearers accountable. You are such an important and critical stakeholder that the Committee on the Rights of the Child encourages national coalitions to submit reports, documentation and other written information to enable it form a better picture of how child rights are being fulfilled in a particular country.

It is our expectation that the Malawi NGO Coalition will be an effective monitor of child rights in Malawi and will play its role in providing alternative reports to the CRC Committee.

The NGO coalition also provides an important platform for leadership, networking, representation, and capacity-building. We believe that your strength in numbers can have the potential to influence local and national policy decisions. But in order for you to effectively

influence decision-making, you need to have the tools and skills needed to engage effectively in decision-making processes.

This week, you will have a chance to discuss how you can meaningfully participate in the process to develop the next Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS), and how you can take the recently-enacted Child Care, Protection and Justice Act to the communities. The MGDS process happens to coincide with a drive to decentralize planning and implementation mechanisms in the country. Herein lies the window of opportunity for you to engage both at national and district levels on behalf of children.

In UNICEF, we are making a strong case for putting children at the center of the next MGDS. In our opinion, this is the only way that Malawi will make a bold statement about its resolve to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Last week at the MDG Summit in New York, world leaders asked themselves what more they needed to do to achieve the MDGs. Those questions lie at the heart of what you will also be doing this week. Where has Malawi made progress and where is it lagging? What more needs to be done to accelerate progress? What do we need

to do to ensure that the progress being made is even and that it leaves no child behind?

We are convinced that if progress is to be speeded up, we need to focus more on reaching the communities and children that are being left behind. This means refining our programmes to reach the poorest communities and most marginalized children.

Here in Malawi, the National Statistical Office estimates that 1.1 million children are living in the bottom quintile. This means they live in households that survive on less than 22 Kwacha per day. These children live in extreme poverty; many of them are either stunted or severely malnourished and are less likely to finish school, if they are lucky to even attend one. They are also extremely vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse, forced labor, and trafficking, all of which stem from the absence of familial care and support. Some but not all of these children are living alone, having lost one or both parents most probably to AIDS.

These are the children we should bear in mind throughout this week. But why does focusing on them make the greatest sense?

Firstly, evidence shows that it is possible for children to be left behind as countries make social-economic progress. It is not enough to focus on progress alone without analyzing how that progress is spread.

For example, a key characteristic of poverty in Malawi is that it affects more disproportionately children living in female-headed households in both urban and rural areas. According to the Malawi Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment of December 2007, poor households tend to be larger than non-poor households. They also have a higher dependency ratio and are more likely to be headed by persons with little or no education. I would like to see disaggregated data such as these become a central feature of our planning processes.

Secondly, reaching the poorest and most marginalized children is more cost-effective than focusing on the more accessible. Because the needs are greatest among the most vulnerable children, the returns in children's lives saved and enriched can be greater still. In other words, reaching the most children, as we are presently doing, does not necessarily guarantee saving the most children.

Thirdly, we cannot succeed in our efforts to tackle major child killers like measles, malaria and neonatal complications if we do not focus our services on reaching the poorest. For, it is in the poorest and most marginalized communities that these killers find their best hiding places.

As you formulate your position papers for the MGDS sector working groups, I would like to challenge you to think seriously about

strategies that can reduce disparities and lift children out of the bottom quintile of poverty and vulnerability. You need to focus especially on how best to integrate all our efforts, those interventions in the communities that include not only more coordinated efforts in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and HIV but also education, protection and other cross-cutting areas that can address the underlying causes of deprivation and exclusion. This will require, of course, an emphasis on coordination and harmonization of efforts between the government, development partners, the United Nations and civil society.

We would also like to see Coalition members play an active role in monitoring and supporting districts as they align their development plans with the MGDS. This training of trainers workshop therefore represents a huge opportunity, not just to enable you to become technically proficient in child rights, but also so that you can become champions for children wherever you work.

I look forward to receiving the report and, more importantly, to working with you in the next few months in advocating for a child-centered Malawi Growth and Development Strategy.

Zikomo!