

## **SPEECH**

**BY THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE, MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE  
LAUNCH OF *FACTS FOR LIFE*  
LILONGWE**

**6<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

The Minister of Information and Civic Education, Honourable Symon Vuwa Kaunda, MP,

The Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, Mr. James Kalilangwe,

The Director-General of Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, Mr. Bright Malopa,

Senior government officials present,

Members of the national social mobilization committee,

Members of the press,

Invited guests, ladies and gentlemen

Before I begin my remarks, let me recognize the children gathered here this morning together with their parents and teachers. Their presence is a strong reminder of why we are here this morning. Many of the messages contained in *Facts for Life*, such as health, sanitation,

child protection and emergencies, are intended to help fathers, mothers, other family members, caregivers and communities at large to change behaviours and practices that can save and protect the lives of children and help them to grow to their full potential.

*Facts for Life* is the product of collaborative efforts between eight different agencies – WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNDP, UNAIDS, WFP, the World Bank and UNICEF. Since it was launched in 1989, three editions of *Facts for Life* have been published in 215 languages worldwide and 15 million copies have been distributed.

Today, we are launching the fourth edition and in doing so, we join several other countries around the world that have already had their national launches. In this particular edition, newborn care has been added to safe motherhood, underlining the critical importance of the first few days of a child's life. A new chapter on child protection has also been added, focusing on what we need to do to ensure that our children grow up in a safe and protected environment.

This launch comes only a few weeks after the Millennium Summit in New York where heads of state and government gathered to take stock of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. It is gratifying to note that Malawi is on track to achieve the goals related to child mortality reduction and provision of improved water and sanitation.

Be that as it may, a lot more work still needs to be done to improve the situation of children. We in UNICEF are convinced that if progress is to be made, 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.

According to the National Statistical Office, an estimated 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.

The children I am talking about lack the most basic necessities of life – things like beddings, soap, cooking utensils, and clothes. Many bear the tell-tale signs of under-nourishment, too thin or too short for their age, and many go for days without a meal.

So then, we ask ourselves: why would focusing on children like these make the greatest sense? Allow me to propose three reasons:

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 diseases find their best hiding places.

It is against this background that the upcoming multimedia campaign on *Facts for Life*, by government and partners, will play a key role in addressing some of these challenges. The campaign will engage stakeholders at all levels to deliver key messages through social dialogue, interpersonal communication, institutional and capacity development and in the mass media. The primary groups will comprise claim-holders and duty-bearers, including caregivers, youths, and decision-makers in the home, such as fathers, grandparents and other guardians of children.

The campaign will also include custodians of culture, our traditional leaders, who have the power to galvanize local communities and develop a groundswell of action-oriented groups who can carry these messages to households.

Faith-based organizations will also find the information and supporting materials contained in *Facts for Life* useful in churches and mosques. At the community level, health extension workers, community mobilizers and animators, information officers, and village health committees will find the materials most useful for their work.

Decision-makers at district and national levels will also be provided with easy-to-use packages. Various media products have been developed as part of this multimedia campaign and various channels will be used to deliver these messages. They include printed materials, radio

and television spots, billboards, drama programmes, cell phone messages, school competitions and many other innovative tools. The roll-out of *Facts for Life* will also ensure that communities and households are equipped with the most comprehensive health and development messages on a consistent basis.

Honourable Minister, ladies and gentlemen, I am informed that more than 70 per cent of all households in Malawi will be reached on a daily and weekly basis through radio programs and jingles. More than five million television viewers will be reached on a weekly basis, approximately 200,000 newspaper readers will be reached on a weekly basis, more than three million school-going children will be reached through school-based activities, and more than two million mobile phone subscribers will be reached periodically. In general, various communities in all the 28 districts will be empowered with key information through the *Facts for Life* campaign.

Through such an intense and engaging multimedia campaign, it is envisaged that indicators in the key programmes of safe motherhood, child and newborn health, child development and learning, breastfeeding and nutrition, immunization and child protection will be impacted positively.

We in UNICEF will do our best to ensure that this campaign is a success. Our primary interest is to ensure that all duty-bearers are provided with information that may save lives and guarantee a better and healthier future for children. I am convinced that working together under the able leadership of the Government, we will achieve greater things.

Zikomo!