

SPEECH

BY THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE,

MS. CARRIE AUER AT THE MID-YEAR REVIEW OF THE

UNICEF/GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI COUNTRY PROGRAMME OF

COOPERATION

31ST AUGUST 2010

Mr. Joseph Mwanamveka, Secretary to the Treasury;

Mr. Eric Ning'an'ga, Permanent Secretary in the Minister of Gender, Children
and Community Development;

Distinguished senior government officials present;

Representatives from civil society organizations;

UN and UNICEF colleagues;

Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of UNICEF, I would like to welcome you to this mid-year review of the 2010 workplan agreed upon between UNICEF and the Government of Malawi at the beginning of the year. The workplan, as you may

already know, is the third of four annual workplans in the current cycle of the country programme that started in 2008 and will end in 2011. A mid-year review of the workplan affords us an opportunity to review progress and to critically analyze areas of the workplan that need improvement.

This mid-year review, in our opinion, assumes an important urgency because it comes just a few weeks before world leaders, including His Excellency the President Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, gather in New York in September to review progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. The questions the leaders will be asking themselves are exactly the kind of questions we will also be asking ourselves in the course of today. Where has progress been made and where is it lagging? What should we do to accelerate progress? What do need to do to ensure that the progress being made is even and that it leaves no child behind?

We in UNICEF globally 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. Right from our Executive Director

Tony Lake to every regional and field office, we are asking ourselves what exactly it means for UNICEF to focus on reaching children in the bottom quintile.

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. I will never forget the expressions on the faces of children I have met who are living alone, left to fend for themselves by a community too poor or too preoccupied with their own survival to actually care for those who are worse off.

The children I am talking about lack the most basic necessities of life – 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 on end without eating a healthy meal . These children are the human face of poverty and they bear its greatest weight.

So then, we ask ourselves: why would focusing on children like these make the greatest sense? Allow me to propose several 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 these killers find their best hiding places.

As we review our workplan, I would like to challenge us all to think about strategies that can reduce disparities and lift children out of the bottom quintile of poverty and vulnerability. We need to focus especially on how best to integrate 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 in UNICEF will spare no effort to ensure that poor and vulnerable children are not left behind. No child has less of a right than another. Our role as duty bearers is to do all we can to ensure that the rights of all children in Malawi are realized. Nothing is impossible. Working together, we can deliver on our promises for children.

Zikomo kwambiri.