Why ensuring child survival and healthy development is a critical component of the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Ending preventable newborn and child deaths is achievable within a generation
The era of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has resulted in dramatic and unprecedented progress in reducing child deaths. Compared to 1990, 6.4 million fewer children under-five years old died globally in 20131 as a result of more effective and affordable treatments, innovative ways of delivering critical interventions to the poor and excluded, and sustained political commitment – as well as improvements in nutrition and education. Overall, vital child survival interventions have saved more than 99 million lives in the past two decades.1 Maternal deaths have also decreased by 45 per cent during this time period.2 These gains represent tremendous reductions in human suffering, but also substantial economic gains. For example between 2000 and 2011, about 24 per cent of full income growth in low-income and middle-income countries resulted from health improvement.3

Despite these gains, however, most recent data show that over 17,000 children still die each day before their fifth birthday1 from often preventable causes such as pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria and complications and infections during the newborn period. Forty-four per cent of under-five deaths now occur in the first month of life. Additionally, approximately 800 women still die each day from complications in pregnancy or during childbirth.2 The necessary knowledge and technology exists to ensure that no child should die of preventable causes and no mother should die giving life through childbirth. Modelling work commissioned by UNICEF and partners,4 and corroborated by two other independent groups,3,5 confirms that reducing child mortality in every country to levels associated with high-income countries is feasible by 2030.

How to include child survival and healthy development in the Post-2015 goals and targets

Explicitly include ending preventable newborn and child deaths in the Post-2015 Agenda
There is a historic opportunity to see a convergence in child mortality rates so that children reach their fifth birthday regardless of their country of birth. The Post-2015 Development Agenda should make an explicit commitment towards ending preventable newborn and child deaths, and reducing maternal mortality, with clear and explicit numerical targets.

Prioritize the poorest children across all goals to meet the new goals with equity
It is widely recognized that equity was not adequately incorporated in the MDGs. To address this, it is crucial to have a specific focus on the poorest children across all goal areas. To do this requires consistent monitoring of disaggregated data to assess progress of the poorest children and other marginalized groups across all goals and targets.
Suggested Health Targets
- By 2030, end preventable newborn deaths by reducing, in all countries, the newborn mortality rate to 12 or less deaths per 1000 live births
- By 2030, end preventable child deaths by reducing, in all countries, the under-five mortality rate to 25 or less deaths per 1000 live births
- By 2030, end preventable maternal deaths by reducing the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to less than 70 per 100,000 live births
- By 2030 end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases*
- Achieve universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all*
- By 2030 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes*

* To maximise the effectiveness and contribution of the targets in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, UNICEF supports the OWG targets related to health for children, but recommends the inclusion of timelines and measurable numerical targets where these are lacking.

Suggested Nutrition, WASH and ECD Targets
The health of children is inextricably linked to having access to nutritious food, appropriate maternal and childcare practices, early childhood development, clean water, proper sanitation and hygiene. In addition to the health-related targets, the following must also be included as they are equally essential to ensuring child survival and healthy development. The nutrition targets for the new SDGs should be derived from the World Health Assembly (2012) targets for maternal, infant and child nutrition.
- By 2025, 40% reduction in the number of children under-five who are stunted
- By 2025, 50% reduction of anemia in women of reproductive age
- By 2025, 30% reduction in low birth weight
- By 2025, no increase in children overweight
- By 2025, increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months up to at least 50%
- By 2025, reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5%
- By 2030, eliminate open defecation
- By 2030, achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys are ready for primary school through participation in quality early childhood development, care and education, including at least one year of pre-primary education

CHILD HEALTH DATA
SNAPSHOT

Figure 1: Number of lives saved and to be saved among children under age 5

Progress in improving child survival has saved 99 million children’s lives since 1990; additional 2.3 million children will be saved if all countries were to meet MDG 4 on time

For more information on Post-2015
Please see UNICEF’s webpage on Children and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: http://www.unicef.org/post2015/
