twenty-five years ago, the world made a commitment to all its children, that we would do everything in our power to promote and protect their rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a vision of the world where all children survive and develop to their full potential without discrimination, and are protected, respected and encouraged to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history: 193 States have ratified its celebrated agreement as of 08 September 2014. All children have the right, among other things, to health care, nutritious food, education that cultivates their minds, freedom from violence and exploitation, and the time and space to play.

Accountability for these rights lies with governments, but we all have a common responsibility to uphold and protect these rights – as families and guardians, civil society, community organizations, media, educators, and the private sector. In fact, to make the vision of the Convention a reality for every child, it must become a guiding document for every human being in every nation.

The Convention demands a revolution that places children at the heart of human development – not only because this offers a strong return on our investment nor because the vulnerability of childhood calls upon our compassion. But rather for a more fundamental reason: Because It is Their Right!

Celebrating 25 years of Progress for Namibia’s Children

Today, the 28th November 2014, marks the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a landmark treaty which not only delineated the inalienable human rights of children but also mandated action on behalf of children everywhere.

Today, a whole generation of Namibia’s children and young people has grown up under the provisions of the CRC.

As one of the First African Countries to ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the 28th September 1990, today Namibia celebrated the achievements made and together with the Government of Namibia and the UN, reaffirms its commitment to continue working towards a Namibia Fit for Children as prescribed by the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The near universal ratification of the Convention lends significant force to the new status of the child. But 25 years after the adoption of the Convention, many questions remain unanswered as many children are left behind due to the inequities that still prevails in Namibia.

To commemorate this landmark anniversary of the CRC, UNICEF together with the government of Namibia, SANTAM Namibia and the School of the Hearing Impaired, have undertaken a number of initiatives to advocate, educate, empower and showcase the difference CRC has made as the country is working towards the inclusion of all Namibian children – irrespective of their background.

As the world and Namibia is Commemorating key landmarks in child rights, for the first time in the 21st century, let us also (at the same time) celebrate the tremendous progress achieved by Namibia in child rights in the past two decades and a half.

25 years of Achievements for Namibia's Children

Just after independence on the 28th September 1990, Namibia became one of the first African Countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of a Child. In 2000, Namibia subscribed to the Millennium Declaration and adopted key Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and in May 2002, the country adopted the World Fit for Children (WFFC) declaration and subsequently the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (ACRWC).

These international treaties set the tone for addressing key development issues and serves to translate them into specific objectives for children’s health, education, protection and for combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. With all these in place, Namibia has managed to achieve and Local.

1. The National Development Plan 4 and Vision 2030 place the Namibian child high on the government’s agenda. And many non-governmental organizations work together with the government for better implementation of the Convention.
2. Namibia’s efforts in immunisation and nutrition of children has resulted in the reduction of under 5 deaths from 4,200 per year in 1990 to less than 3,000 in 2013.
3. In Namibia Birth registration of children increased from 67% in 2000 to 89% in 2011
4. In Namibia eradicated Polio since 2009 and the country is Polio Free - thanks to vaccination campaigns and strengthened routine immunisation programmes which have protected children from a disease that once paralyzed many.
5. Access to safe water is a basic human right being enjoyed by 84% of the population in Namibia.
6. To address child poverty, the government of Namibia decided to expand its social grant system to universalize its child welfare grants by 2017, which expects to reduce child poverty to 9%.
7. The government of Namibia has ratified all core ILO conventions concerning child labour, and incorporated that in national laws in order to address Child Labour.
8. UNICEF and NFA had successfully implemented the Galz and Goals programme reaching over 5,000 girls with life skills through soccer
9. Namibia has achieved a net enrollment rate of 99.7% for Primary Education. Enabling the country to meet the MDG and EFA goals for Education.
10. The country is also implemented access to universal primary education since through the abolishment of School Fees (School Development Fund) since January 2013.
11. To ensure the best start in life for their children, more than 88% of Namibian mothers deliver at health facilities.
12. In bridging the gap to ensure equal access to health, the government of Namibia has introduced the Health Extension workers’ programme Nation wide.
13. Through the PMTCT programme Namibia has managed to reduce transmission of HIV to children of HIV positive mothers to only 4%.
14. Corporal punishment has been abolished by law in Namibia since 1991, recognises that correcting or punishing children should not be about beating, but teaching them acceptable and proper behaviour.
15. The Government of Namibia is addressing child marriage through laws such as the new Child Protection Bill prohibiting marriage of children under the age of 18 years.

CRC: A LEGALLY BINDING INSTRUMENT

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights (civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights). It is the world’s most widely ratified human rights treaty, signed by all countries in the world but two. By end of 2007 nearly 30 countries established specific national plans of action for making children’s rights a reality. Some, like Namibia, have included children’s rights in their constitutions.

Namibia is among the first African Countries to ratify the CRC, 6 months after independence on the 28th September 1990.

The Convention sets out these rights in 54 articles and two Optional Protocols. It spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. Every right spelled out in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The Convention protects children’s rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services.

CRC - THE FOUNDATION OF UNICEF’S WORK

The Convention on Rights of the Child is UNICEF’s guiding mandate. The principle it enshrines underscores every word and action we make. UNICEF’s mission is to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is guided in doing this by the provisions and principles of the CRC.

The prevalent inequality in Namibia hampers progress to the realization of all children in Namibia. In all situations, it is the most marginalized children - children born into poor families, children of ethnic minorities, children who live in remote areas and children with disabilities who most often cannot access the services and protection needed to safeguard their rights.

In particular, the CRC laid the groundwork for the rights-based approach that UNICEF applies in all of its programming, which has led to many achievements for children.

Over the past 25 years, UNICEF has worked in Namibia to help harmonize national legislation and legal systems with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires ratifying states to take all the measures necessary to implement the social, civil, cultural, economic and political rights that it recognizes.

The 20th anniversary of the CRC reminds us of what we have left to do. Following through with the commitments we have made to children depends on every level - National, Regional and Local. Together we need to...