UNICEF in South Africa
A message from the Representative

UNICEF in South Africa prides itself for its unfailing support and protection of children and women. Since our engagement with the new democracy in 1994, we have worked with the South African government, civil society, the private sector and communities to reduce violence against girls and women, reverse the tide of HIV and AIDS, ensure that girls are going to school and provide basic social services to orphans and vulnerable children.

Though UNICEF relies entirely on voluntary donations, it is not a charity. Our work is programme-based rather than project-based. We seek to improve the lives of 20 million children by investing in systemic change. This means building partnerships and using our influence to transform legislation, policies, budgets and programmes to benefit large numbers of children and women.

We believe that investing in children is the surest way of creating a more equal, just and prosperous society. It is a huge undertaking and we need your support. We invite you to partner with us to make a real difference to the lives of children and women.

Aida Girma
UNICEF Representative in South Africa
A better life for all

Behind the busy school yards and the smile of a grandmother with her grant money in her wrinkled hands lies the complex, time-consuming and often invisible work of creating the right conditions for a better life for all.

South Africa’s long walk to democracy and development is about improving the daily lives of ordinary South Africans. Legislation, policies and programmes are now in place to enhance the quality of life for all citizens. The government spends more on health, education and social security than ever before. Primary healthcare is free, and children between 7 and 13 benefit from compulsory education. Subsidised housing, electricity, water and sanitation and other essential services are available for those that qualify. South Africa’s comprehensive and aggressive attack on poverty has lifted millions above the poverty line.

The country has made substantial progress towards meeting some of the key Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - a set of targets agreed upon by the majority of the world’s countries to improve the welfare and living conditions of poor people. Children are affected by all of them.

The Millennium Development Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Source: http://www.unicef.org/mdg/
The importance of monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a vital cross-cutting function of the UNICEF’s country programme in South Africa. M&E are management tools that lead to more effective coordination of UNICEF programmes and generate high quality data and research to enhance evidence-based programme design and implementation. Programme communication – used to influence positive behavioural change in society – is an important part of the M&E programme.

South Africa is well on track to meeting the MDGs on universal primary education and gender parity in education and access to water and sanitation. Progress on other Goals such as eradicating poverty and hunger and reducing child mortality is slow, making it unlikely that targets will be met by the 2015 deadline.

South Africa is today one of the most important and dynamic countries in Africa. A regional economic powerhouse, the country is also the most influential player in the SADC sub-region and plays a key role on the global stage. Steady economic growth and a sharp rise in average income have propelled the country to middle-income status.

Challenges

Despite the remarkable progress, crushing poverty still affects many South Africans. Around 68 per cent of children from poor families live well below the international ‘dollar-a-day’ poverty line (General Household Survey 2006).

Living standards and race are closely intertwined, with poverty concentrated among black South Africans. A fifth of the working force is unemployed and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow. The government delivers basic social services against great odds.

HIV-related illnesses are responsible for a significant proportion of deaths among children and women. There are no signs that children’s nutritional status has changed significantly over the past decade – one in ten children are underweight.

The majority of school-aged children are enrolled in primary school and there are now almost as many girls in school as boys. The public education system however struggles to deliver quality education. Many schools in townships and rural areas do not have electricity, running water, toilets, sports fields, materials and quality teaching. Learners and teachers report high levels of school violence and gender-based abuse. Gender-based violence and abuse against children and women are widespread.
UNICEF uses its technical expertise and global reach and influence to support the South African government and civil society in realising the rights of children. The strength of our work lies in:

- Child-focused research and programme design,
- Helping to redirect national resources towards successful programmes for children and women,
- Supporting improvements in the quality and reach of basic social services for vulnerable children and their families,
- Facilitating public/private partnerships,
- Delivering emergency assistance during man-made or natural disasters.

UNICEF's programmes for 2007–2011 are focused in five strategic areas, all which contribute directly towards achieving the MDGs.

1. Young Child Survival and Development

   South Africa’s progress on meeting the MDG targets on child and maternal mortality needs to be stepped up. UNICEF supports the Department of Health and other key partners to reduce child mortality by 30 per cent by 2011. Priority interventions include healthcare services for newborn babies, treatment and care for babies and children living with HIV and AIDS, encouraging women to breastfeed exclusively for six months, and preventing mothers from passing HIV onto their unborn children.

2. Basic Education and Gender Equality

   South Africa is very close to meeting the MDGs on universal access to basic education and gender equality in education. However the quality of education has not kept up with high enrolment rates.

   UNICEF works with the Department of Education to provide quality education to 40 per cent of schools by 2011 through the Safe and Caring Child Friendly Schools programme. Emphasis is put on helping orphans and vulnerable children enrol in school and complete their primary education. Another priority intervention is early childhood development, where the goal is to bring home, centre and community-based early childhood development services to 50 per cent of children under the age of five.

3. HIV and AIDS & Children

   With the world’s largest number of HIV infected people, South Africa needs to seriously step up its efforts to achieve MDG 6 on reversing the spread of HIV and AIDS. Adolescents and young people are key to this. UNICEF’s role lies in helping children and teens stay HIV-free. An adolescent development programme uses sports, youth mobilisation and girl empowerment to provide HIV education and life skills to 50 per cent of children and teenagers by 2011. Paediatric antiretroviral treatment and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV are also key components of this focus area.
4. Child Protection

South Africa’s response to the unacceptably high levels of violence against children and women needs greater attention and stronger partnerships. Orphans and vulnerable children are especially at risk of being abused, exploited and neglected.

UNICEF uses its technical expertise to improve government capacity in delivering services for orphans and vulnerable children. A major goal is to provide community and home-based care, support and protection to 70 per cent of orphans and vulnerable children by 2011. Strengthening the capacity of national partners to prevent and respond to abuse and sexual violence is another critical area of work.

5. Policy, Advocacy, Partnership and Participation

South Africa has progressive and comprehensive policies and legislation for children and women. Ensuring that they are translated into effective service delivery is a challenge. MDG 8 on global partnerships provides an opportunity to advocate for what UNICEF refers to as ‘the first call for children in laws, policies and budgets’.

In South Africa, this is achieved by lobbying government to allocate resources and spend budgets on children and women, and to monitor policy implementation and services for children more effectively. Building partnerships to advance children’s issues as well as partnering with the South African corporate sector and private individuals to raise resources are important strategies of the UNICEF country programme.

Why invest in a middle-income country?

Countries like South Africa have huge resources. Government budgets are large enough to finance major social welfare programmes and there are concentrations of great wealth among many people. UNICEF plays a major role in convincing government, corporate companies and well-off citizens to spend their wealth in a manner than benefits children.

UNICEF’s human rights approach to programming assists middle-income countries to address the needs of marginalised populations. This principle becomes even more important in countries with large populations such as South Africa where the total number of poor often exceeds the population of a poor country like Zambia.
Thank you

Generous donor contributions allow UNICEF to deliver results and invest in the long-term future of South Africa. UNICEF wishes to thank the following donors for their commitment and dedication to ensuring that children and women are never left behind. Please visit the UNICEF Country Office website for a list of our current donors: www.unicef.org/southafrica.

If you are interested in supporting the UNICEF Education and Adolescent programme, please contact:

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