

**Address of Dr. Sanjiv Kumar, Chief of Health, UNICEF, Kenya
on CHILD SURVIVAL at
Rotary International District 9200, 84th District Conference &
Assembly**

16 May , 2009

Rotarian Kaushik Manek, District Governor 9200, Past District Governors, President Ashok Shah, Country Chairs, Chair of the session PDG Sam Owor, Assistant Governors, Distinguished Rotarians, Invited Guests, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for UNICEF to be invited to this very special occasion and for me to address you on child mortality, a key area of concern for all of us.

At the outset let me compliment all of you for being part of Rotary International, one of the leaders in Polio Eradication through your Polio Plus programme.

Rotary has contributed more than US\$610 million to polio eradication. In addition, 1.2 million Rotarians have partnered with health professionals all over the world to eradicate polio. Hopefully we will see the end of this disabling disease in the near future. In the words of Mr Kofi Annan, "Rotary's PolioPlus Programme is a shining example of what cooperation between Governments, the United Nations and NGOs can achieve".

On behalf of UNICEF and **xxxx million** children from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tanzania, I also compliment you for launching ***Make Dreams Real*** for our children and our communities to improve the lives of children.

The statistics on child mortality, as given in the UNICEF publication 'The State Of The World's Children 2009', in the five countries of Rotary District 9200 are horrifying:

- Average Under Five Morortality Rate (U5MR) is 118/1000 live births and ranges from 70 in Eritrea to 130 in Uganda, against

global average of 68.

- Out of the eight million children born every year in the five countries (Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tanzania) of your District, 947,000 die. This means 2,600 per day, 110 per hour or two every minute.
- During the course of this meeting, we will lose another 8,000 innocent children in the District.
- A large proportion of those who survive become malnourished, with about one third suffering from stunting, a form of chronic malnutrition which prevents them from achieving their full mental and physical development.
- The sad thing is that 90% of all child deaths are preventable.

What is killing so many children?

The major causes of this tragedy are infections, asphyxia or breathing difficulty and preterm among new borns, pneumonia, diarrhea, HIV and AIDS and malaria. In two thirds of these deaths, malnutrition is the underlying cause.

Why are children dying?

They are dying because the families do not have access to simple low-cost and highly effective interventions which fall in two groups:

1. Interventions that can be provided at home without even going to health institutions. These include initiating breastfeeding within half an hour of baby's birth, exclusive breastfeeding for six months of life, appropriate complementary feeding, continued feeding and increased fluid intake in diarrhea and other common illnesses.
2. Taking children to health institution for immunization, prompt treatment of malaria and early detection of danger signs and treatment of pneumonia and diarrhea, administration of vitamin A every six months, de-worming, Transmission of HIV infection from mother to the baby can also be easily prevented.

In other words most of these deaths can be easily prevented with inexpensive and easily administered interventions.

What is UNICEF doing about this situation?

Child survival and development is the highest priority area for UNICEF in the countries in your District. UNICEF has been working with the government and other partners to scale up the package of interventions to prevent child mortality. UNICEF is also empowering communities and families with the knowledge to practice appropriate care at home and to access, utilize and claim the appropriate services in a timely manner.

UNICEF works closely with governments and partners to develop innovative approaches of reaching every child. These approaches include

- The child health and nutrition weeks, called Malezi Bora in Kenya, conducted twice a year to reach mothers, children and families.
- UNICEF is actively engaged in developing models for reaching out to the poor and vulnerable populations. One example is in the north eastern province in Kenya. In this model, called the Voucher Scheme, vouchers are given to pregnant mothers to encourage them to visit health facilities for safe and healthy deliveries. In the three districts where the pilot was implemented, institutional deliveries increased from 8% to 45%. The Government has made a commitment to scale it up.

In UNICEF, we give a high priority to emergency preparedness and response. For example, last year after the post election violence, through the request from the Rotary Country Chairman Sudesh Walia, we partnered together to assist the affected populations.

We need to redouble our efforts to stamp out Polio virus is from the last few pockets in the world. The recent outbreak in Kenya is a reminder that no place is safe till the virus is eradicated from the whole world. Tragically, as we discuss these issues the wild polio virus introduced in Kenya from a neighbouring country is circulating among children and has disabled 11 Kenyan children who are

paralyzed due to the polio virus. The Government of Kenya with support from UNICEF, WHO, Rotary and other partners is currently conducting a polio campaign to stop the circulation of the virus.

UNICEF is advocating for more partners to join in the polio eradication effort to stamp out this disease which has been reduced to circulating only in a few pockets. In Kenya, polio resurfaced in the Turkana districts which had a low immunization coverage. Strengthening the routine immunization will go a long way in sustaining the gains made of polio eradication activities.

What can Rotarians do to improve child survival?

As one of the largest and leading social service organization in the world, it is natural that Rotarians are concerned about preventing child mortality and make dreams real for parents, families and communities. You have already done an exemplary work in your work in Polio eradication efforts. I offer some suggestions to clubs under your District to consider for improving child survival:

1. **Mobilizing the corporate sector for support:** Many of you are part of the private sector, which is a very important partner in issues related to children. Some of the areas in which the private sector can be engaged are:
 - Supporting resources in the last leg of polio eradication activities.
 - Promoting universal iodization of salt to prevent iodine deficiency disorders, the single most common cause of preventable mental retardation and other conditions.
 - Promotion and protection of breastfeeding through ethical practices for marketing and promoting breastfeeding and creating family friendly work places so that mothers are encouraged to breastfeed.
 - Scaling up food fortification initiatives: Vitamin A deficiency and anemia prevalence is very high among women and children and this contributes to maternal and

child mortality. Food fortification of sugar, flour and oils is one important intervention to prevent it. I am pleased to note that many of you are engaged in this activity.

2. **Social Mobilization:** You have done exemplary work in advocacy for polio campaigns in containing the outbreaks. You may consider mobilizing the communities in which you operate to improve attendance at activities such as, child health and nutrition weeks as well as immunization campaigns for polio, measles and maternal and neonatal tetanus. Please support by spreading the word about these campaigns encourage to all your staff, friends and families!
3. **Advocacy at the highest political level to put child survival on the agenda;** You have contacts at the highest political level and your word carries weight. Through these contacts you can help in placing issues related to child survival and development at the forefront of national consciousness.
4. **Support in Emergencies:** You can consider mobilizing your volunteers and supplies to address the needs of the population affected by emergencies related to drought and global increase in food prices.

In the spirit of the theme 'Make Dreams Real", let us work together on improving child survival and development. We from UNICEF will be happy to collaborate with you to implement the ideas that I have shared with you.

Once again, I thank you for spotlighting child mortality in Rotary District 9200 and I encourage you to make the dream of every child to survive, real!