



THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD 2009

Theme: Africa fit for children; Call for accelerated action towards their survival

Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development

Department of Children's Services



‘Enhance the life chances of all children’

Message from Hon. Esther Murugi Mathenge, Minister for Gender, children and social development

The Day of the African Child is commemorated on 16th June each year. This is in memory of black children killed in Soweto, South Africa in 1976 while protesting over the poor quality of education offered by the Apartheid regime. The African Union decides on the theme for each year. This year's theme is, “Africa Fit For Children: Call for Accelerated Action towards their Survival”.

This theme is based on a declaration made by African Heads of State in 2001 on what needs to be done to make the continent fit for her children. They agreed on priority areas as: Enhancing life chances; overcoming HIV/AIDS; realizing the right to education; realizing the right to protection including, legal, and protection against violence, abuse and exploitation; and participation of youth and children. As a follow up to the Declaration the leaders in 2008 met and made a call for accelerated action to make the Africa Fit for Children a reality.

The theme is therefore very apt as it captures the basic of all children's rights, child survival. This is one of the broad categories of child rights together with Child Development, Child Protection and Child Participation. Child survival entails the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of children.

My ministry has developed the National Children Policy to ensure child rights are fulfilled in their totality. One of the policy statements on survival stipulate that “all children have a right to be born, nurtured and to grow in a conducive and secure environment”. We are in the process of coming up with a National Plan of Action for children to operationalize the provisions in the National Children Policy.

To ensure children survive and develop to their full potential efforts/interventions aimed at reducing child mortality and improving child health. These efforts include provision of maternal services to women, new born care, hygiene promotion, Prevention of mother-to- child Transmission and paediatric treatment of HIV/AIDS, provision of



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adequate nutrition to the child and the mother, immunization, prevention and treatment of malaria.

The government is committed to ensuring child survival through the provision of preventive, promotive and curative health care services. All children under five years are given free medical care Government health institutions and insecticide treated nets. However, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has reversed some of the gains made in reducing child mortality.

Global studies have shown that when children are well nourished, cared for and provided with a safe and stimulating environment, they are more likely to survive, fall ill less often and fully develop physically, emotionally, linguistically, socially and to succeed later in life.

The role of parents and other primary care givers in child survival cannot be over emphasized. I therefore appeal to communities to take seriously their role of caring for their children and ensuring their survival. Our nation's strength and future lies with our children. If we do not look after them today, we will have no future.

I would like to urge all stakeholders to rededicate themselves to the task of ensuring our children survive and develop to their full potential God Bless the Children of Kenya; God Bless the Children of Africa

Message from Hon. Beth Mugo, EGH, MP, Minister for Public Health and Sanitation

I salute all the children in Kenya. Week-long activities to mark this year's Day of African Child were launched in Malindi on 9th June, 2009. This year our centre of focus and emphasis is on the survival of the child.

The Day of the African Child is celebrated annually on 16th June in commemoration of about 700 children that were massacred in Soweto, South Africa in 1976.

These innocent children were killed as they demonstrated against the inferior education that they were receiving from the apartheid regime.

The theme for this year's celebration is **Africa fit for Children; CALL for Accelerated Action Towards Their Survival.**

Globally, regionally and nationally there is an increasing focus on child survival and all nations including Kenya are aiming to achieve the millennium development goals. It is clear that a child has to be born, survive and develop in order to claim the other rights.

The child's right to life, survival and development is clearly spelt out in Article 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Kenya Children Act 2001.

It is therefore important to enhance the life chances of all children. The primary duty and responsibility falls on the parents and the government. The community and partners contribute to this responsibility on behalf of either the parent or the government.

The development of a nation is influenced by the health and wellbeing of her children. Poor health and nutrition in children negatively affects the country's development through resources diverted to treatment of illness, working hours lost by the caregiver of the sick children and the loss of life of the children.

Long term effects include the dependency caused by the mental and physical handicap from poor health. The affected children therefore fail to reach their full potential, leading to poor school outcome and high chances of unemployment and perpetuation of poverty.

This not only deprives the children of their inherent rights but also the country loses in terms of highly qualified and innovative human resource essential for national development.

Every year in Kenya, over one million children are born. Though most survive to adulthood, at least one in every fourteen children born die before their first birthday and one out of nine die before their fifth birthday. The main causes of childhood deaths are; conditions specific to babies aged below one month, malaria, diarrhoea, and pneumonia.

These are all exacerbated by high levels of malnutrition. Every year about 13,600 mothers die due to pregnancy related problems. If a mother dies, the risk of death for her child below five increases by 250 per cent.

To increase chances of survival, interventions must start even before conception (pre-conception) to ensure that future mothers are healthy, have good nutrition and have matured in development. This helps prevent and manage teenage pregnancies which are likely to have complications resulting in maternal and child deaths.

It is recommended that pregnant women with support from their partners and families should attend ante-natal care at least 4 times and deliver with skilled attendants. Although 90 per cent of pregnant women attend antenatal care at least once, only 42 per cent deliver under skilled care. Currently less than 70 per cent of children are fully immunized before their first birthday.

Malaria is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in under fives and is responsible for 34,000 deaths per year. Malaria affects 2/3 of the country and remains one of the biggest killers of young children in Kenya.

The Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation has put in place various strategies to enhance child survival and development.



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These include working with communities to prevent common childhood illnesses. Ante-natal care and delivery services are free in public health facilities. Moreover, free or highly subsidized insecticide treated nets are issued to pregnant women and children below one year in malaria-prone areas. Currently, at least 52per cent of children below five in malaria-prone areas sleep under insecticide treated nets compared to six per cent in 2003.

Immunization, vitamin A supplementation, growth monitoring and treatment for children under five years are free in all public facilities. The Ministry targets to reach full immunization coverage of least 90% for children below 1 year by 2010. Diarrhoea, a major contributor of illness and death among children, is caused by poor hygiene practices and poor faecal disposal. Community Health Workers are being trained on measures necessary for prevention of diarrhoea and other illnesses.

Improved feeding practices of young children especially breastfeeding, availability of safe water and proper sanitation are important preventive measures. This must

start right from birth with exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. Thereafter nutritious feeds are given with continued breastfeeding for two years or longer.

Exclusive breastfeeding of children for the first six months reduces the risk of diarrhea by at least 30 per cent and childhood mortality by 13 per cent. My ministry is grateful to all those partners promoting breastfeeding including employers who are establishing mother-friendly work-places.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also contributed to the ill health and deaths of children. It is estimated that 150,000 children are infected and about 20,000 are on anti-retrovirals. It is important for pregnant mothers to attend antenatal care so that measures are taken to prevent transmission of HIV from infected mothers to their children. Delivering in health facilities also facilitates continuation of prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV. Medicines for malaria, TB and HIV/AIDs (anti-retrovirals) are administered at no charge in government facilities.

To further improve access to health care and thus improve child survival and development, the Government provides drugs and vaccines to faith-based facilities. To create demand for health and nutrition services for mothers and children, my Ministry in collaboration with other line Ministries and development partners has been running the 'Malezi Bora' initiative twice a year from 2007.

'Malezi Bora' is implemented nationwide as a strategy to enhance the utilization of child and maternal health and nutrition services that are available in our health facilities. The event also advocates for practice of preventive measures to reduce child and maternal mortality. In fact, the first 'Malezi Bora' event was launched on 16th June 2007, to coincide with 'The Day of the African Child'.

A Child Survival and Development Strategy has been developed and will soon be launched to guide and coordinate child survival and development issues.

Natural and man made disasters such as frequent drought, food insecurity and violence affect children most. All measures should therefore, be taken to prevent them while full attention should be paid to the children's special needs.

From the foregoing it is clear that survival of children involves partnerships between families, communities, government ministries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, private sector, media and development partners. My ministry therefore urges all our partners to redouble their efforts in contributing to child survival and development. Families and communities are urged to take advantage of the health services available in order to increase life chances of their children.

As a ministry, we are committed to achieving the millennium development goals as a way of guaranteeing all children the right to life, survival and development.

I wish all Kenyan children good health during these celebrations and always.

Message from the PS

Message from the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development Dr. James W. Nyikal, CBS



Dr. James W. Nyikal, CBS

This year's theme of the Day of the African Child emphasizes the need for all of us to work towards ensuring the maximum survival of our children to the maximum extent possible. Survival concerns mainly life which is upheld as a universal human rights principle. The right to life principle is articulated in many international, regional and national conventions. Various issues determine survival of children. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights some of the issues that affect child survival. Perinatal care of mothers

main preventable diseases: BCG, OPV3, DPT3 and measles. In public hospitals, children under five years are given free medical attention. In the last five years, there has been an effort to distribute free insecticide treated mosquito nets in order to reduce the chances of expectant mothers and infants contracting malaria. We have also on a number of occasions administered vitamin A supplements as a measure of enhancing the nutrition status of children.

With the advent of HIV/Aids, the child has faced increased dangers. In order to counteract problems posed by HIV/Aids and rising, a number of measures have been put in place. All expectant mothers undergo Prevention of Mother to Child

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