

Health services, especially vaccines, must 'reach the unreached,' stress UN agencies

17 July 2017 – Globally, nearly 13 million infants – almost one in ten – did not receive any vaccinations last year, putting them at serious risk of potentially fatal diseases, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) said today, urging greater efforts to extend the reach of health services.

“Every contact with the health system must be seen as an opportunity to immunize,” stressed WHO's Director of Immunization, Dr. Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, noting that most of those who remained un-immunized were also the same as the ones missed by health systems. “These children most likely have also not received any of the other basic health services. If we are to raise the bar on global immunization coverage, health services must reach the unreached,” he added.

According to WHO and UNICEF estimates, 6.6 million children received their first dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) vaccines but did not complete the full, three dose DTP immunization regimen (DTP3).

Full completion of the vaccination series doses is critical to ensure the highest level of protection against those diseases.

Furthermore, according to the UN agencies, since 2010, the percentage of children who received their full course of routine immunizations has stalled at 86 per cent (116.5 million infants).

If we are to raise the bar on global immunization coverage, health services must reach the unreached
Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, WHO Director of Immunization

Of the estimated 10 million children, in 64 countries out of 194 WHO member States which have not achieved this target, 7.3 million live in fragile situations or in humanitarian emergencies, including countries affected by conflict. Four million of them also live in just three countries – Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan – where access to routine immunization services is critical to achieving and sustaining eradication of diseases such as polio. Similarly, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Ukraine recorded less than 50 per cent coverage for DTP3, last year.

In the battle against measles, 85 per cent of children globally received the first dose by their first birthday but only 64 per cent received the second dose.



A little girl, 1 year old, held by her mother during a medical examination in Ukraine. Ukraine is one of the countries that recorded less than 50 per cent coverage for DTP3 last year. Photo: UNICEF/ Pirozzi

Additionally, concerted effort is required in the progress against rubella (which can cause hearing impairment, congenital heart defects and blindness and other life-long disabilities), which has seen global coverage increase from 35 per cent in 2010 to 47 per cent last year.

Furthermore, global coverage of more recently-recommended vaccines are yet to reach half the world's children. These include vaccines against major killers of children such as rotavirus, a disease that causes severe childhood diarrhoea, and pneumonia. Vaccination against both these diseases has the potential to substantially reduce deaths of children under five years of age, a key target of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Inequities in immunization coverage

According to WHO-UNICEF data, many middle-income countries still lag behind in the introduction of newer and more expensive vaccines and disparities persist within countries, implying the need for more work to reduce inequalities related to household economic status, mother's education as well as those living in rural and urban areas in many countries.

Stressing the importance of immunization as one of the most "pro-equity" interventions currently available, Robin Nandy, Chief of Immunizations at UNICEF, stated: "Bringing life-saving vaccines to the poorest communities, women and children must be considered a top priority in all contexts."

Immunization currently prevents between 2-3 million deaths every year, from diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and measles. It is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions.

[UN report urges accelerated efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals](#)

17 July 2017 – If the world is to eradicate poverty, address climate change and build peaceful, inclusive societies for all by 2030, greater efforts are needed to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), according to a United Nations report presented today by [Secretary-General António Guterres](#).

"Implementation has begun, but the clock is ticking," stated Mr. Guterres. "This report shows that the rate of progress in many areas is

far slower than needed to meet the targets by 2030.”

Using the most recent data available, the annual [SDGs](#) report provides an overview of the world's implementation efforts to date, highlighting areas of progress and areas where more action needs to be taken to ensure no one is left behind.

Despite advances, accelerated efforts needed

While nearly a billion people have escaped extreme poverty since 1999, about 767 million people remained destitute in 2013, most of whom live in fragile situations.

Despite major advances, an alarmingly high number of children under age five are still affected by malnutrition. In 2016, an estimated 155 million children under five years of age were stunted.

Between 2000 and 2015, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 37 per cent and the under-five mortality rate fell by 44 per cent. However, 303,000 women died during pregnancy or childbirth and 5.9 million children under age five died worldwide in 2015.

In the area of sustainable energy, while access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking climbed to 57 per cent in 2014, up from 50 per cent in 2000, more than 3 billion people, lacked access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, which led to an estimated 4.3 million deaths in 2012.

From 2015 to 2016, official development assistance rose by 8.9 per cent in real terms to \$142.6 billion, reaching a new peak. But bilateral aid to the least developing countries fell by 3.9 per cent in real terms.

Progress is uneven

The benefits of development are not equally shared. On average, women spent almost triple the amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work as men, based on data from 2010 to 2016.

Economic losses from natural hazards are now reaching an average of \$250 billion to \$300 billion a year, with a disproportionate impact on small and vulnerable countries.

Despite the global unemployment rate falling from 6.1 per cent in 2010 to 5.7 per cent in 2016, youth were nearly three times more likely than adults to be without a job. In 2015, 85 per cent of the urban population used safely managed drinking water services, compared to only 55 per cent of rural population.

“Empowering vulnerable groups is critical to ending poverty and promoting prosperity for everyone, everywhere,” stated Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

Harnessing the power of data

Effectively tracking progress on the SDGs requires accessible, reliable, timely and disaggregated data at all levels, which poses a major challenge to national and international statistical systems.

Read more on: [FEATURE: Number crunchers in the spotlight ahead of UN World Data Forum](#)

While data availability and quality have steadily improved over the years, statistical capacity still needs strengthening worldwide. The global statistical community is working to modernize and strengthen systems to address all aspects of production and use of data for the SDGs.

The SDGs Report 2017 is based on the latest available data on selected indicators of the global SDG indicator framework, prepared by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) with inputs from a large number of international and regional organizations.

[Civilians continue to bear the brunt of Afghanistan's 'ugly war' – UN report](#)

17 July 2017 – Civilians lives – including those of women and children – continue to be lost at record high levels amid a worsening toll of suicide attacks, the United Nations mission in Afghanistan said today, calling on anti-government forces to stop indiscriminate attacks against civilians as well as on the Government to stop using mortars and rockets in populated areas.

[The human cost of this ugly war](#) in Afghanistan – loss of life, destruction and immense suffering – is too far too high, said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)), Tadamichi Yamamoto, in a news release today.

The continued use of indiscriminate, disproportionate and illegal IEDs [improvised explosive devices] by anti-government elements is particularly appalling and must immediately stop.

According to the UN Mission's 2017 [Mid-year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan](#), 1,662 civilian died (up two per cent on the same period last year) and 3,581 were injured (down one per cent) between 1 January and 30 June 2017.

Many of those casualties occurred in a single attack in Kabul city on 31 May, when a truck bomb killed at least 92 civilians and injured nearly 500. This was the deadliest incident documented by UNAMA since 2001.

Women and children in the country continue to be particularly affected. In the report, the UN Mission noted that so far this year, 174 women were confirmed killed and 462 injured (an overall rise of about 23 per cent), reversing a decline documented in 2016.

The statistics in this report, horrifying though they are, can never fully convey the sheer human suffering of the people of Afghanistan
UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

Child casualties, overall also increased by one per cent, with 436 deaths (a nine per cent increase) and 1,141 injuries, it added, highlighting that the use of pressure-plate IEDs and aerial operations in civilian-populated areas led to substantial increases in both women and child casualties.

Also in the news release, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights underscored that behind each death or injury, there is a broken family, unimaginable trauma and the brutal violation of people's rights.

[Many Afghan civilians are suffering](#) psychological trauma, having lost family and friends, and are living in fear knowing the risks they face as they go about their daily lives. Many more have been forced from their homes and suffered lasting damage to their health, education and livelihoods, he stated.

The continuing national tragedy of Afghanistan must not be overlooked.

Highest number of casualties occurred in Kabul

The UNAMA report also highlighted that 40 per cent of all civilian casualties during the six-month period were due to anti-government forces using IEDs, such as suicide bombs and pressure-plate devices.

In total, anti-government forces caused the deaths of 1,141 people and injured 2,348. These deaths and injuries represent 67 per cent of the total number of civilian casualties, with 43 per cent attributed to the Taliban, five per cent to Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), and the rest to unidentified attackers.

Also in the report, the UN Mission noted continued efforts by the Afghan security forces to reduce civilian casualties resulting from ground engagements, which represent the second leading cause of deaths and injuries.

Pro-government forces were responsible for 327 civilian deaths and 618 injuries, a 21 per cent decrease compared with the same period last year, although UNAMA noted a 43 per cent rise in civilian casualties during aerial operations (95 deaths and 137 injuries).

In terms of locations, 19 per cent of the casualties occurred in the capital, Kabul and deaths and injuries increased in 15 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, mainly due to increased attacks by anti-government forces. After Kabul, the highest numbers of casualties occurred in Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Faryab, Herat, Laghman, Kunduz and Farah provinces.

Recommendations

In its recommendations, the report has called on anti-government forces to stop targeting civilians and to enforce directives from the Taliban leadership calling for an end to such attacks. It has also urged the Government to stop using weapons such as mortars and rockets in civilian populated areas, and to disband pro-government militias and similar groups.

It also recommended ongoing support from international military forces to support and train the Afghan national army.

In the news release, the UN Mission also noted that the report includes only those incidents that have been confirmed after a thorough verification process, meaning that the actual figures could be higher.

Syria talks end with 'incremental progress' but 'no breakthrough' – UN envoy

15 July 2017 – Speaking to reporters in the early hours of Saturday in Geneva, United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura said that the latest round of the [intra-Syrian talks](#) ended with 'incremental progress.'

'We made, as we were expecting and hoping, incremental progress. No breakthrough, no breakdown, no one walking out, incremental progress,' he said at a press conference, following the conclusion of the 10-15 July round of the UN-facilitated talks aimed at ending six years of war in the Middle East country.

Referring to a technical consultative mechanism agreed on in the previous round, he said that 'in addition to this technical agreement... there has been a generous effort among them (the opposition) to build something they didn't have before, trust, mutual trust.'

'I would not have imagined two months ago that they would have been sitting in such an intensive and constructive way together in confidence,' the envoy said.

He said he intends to reconvene the intra-Syrian talks in early September.

I have asked the parties to be ready to offer clear, substantive positions on issues across all four baskets, and we hope that we will be at least pushing them to sit in the same room.

The four baskets are: a credible non-sectarian transitional government; a future constitution; early and free parliamentary elections within 18 months; and a united war against terrorism within Syria.

[UNICEF names YouTube star Lilly Singh as goodwill envoy](#)

15 July 2017 – The United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has appointed Indian-origin Canadian YouTube star and actress Lilly Singh as its newest Goodwill Ambassador.

In this role, Ms. Singh, known by her digital alias Superwoman, will use her unique cyber presence to engage children and young people and empower them to speak out about the challenges they face.

I am honoured to join UNICEF as a Goodwill Ambassador, and to use my voice to support its mission of reaching every child, she said at a special event today in New Delhi. The children I have met here are overcoming so many challenges and they are living proof of what a child can achieve, if given a chance, she added.

According to a [press release](#) on her appointment, the 28-year-old has gained a huge fan base of over 11 million YouTube subscribers. This year, she released her international and New York Times bestselling book *How To Be A Bawse*, and was recently cast in HBO’s film adaptation of Fahrenheit 451. Additionally, she was ranked 1st on the Forbes Magazine Top Influencers List in the entertainment category.

Lilly Singh is already a Superwoman, helping empower girls around the world and we are delighted that she will lend her passion and her powerful voice to speak up on behalf of the most vulnerable children, said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth.

Lilly is a role model to so many young people, especially girls, and we look forward to the role she will play in generating greater discussion and greater action around the value of girls in India and everywhere, said Yasmin Haque, UNICEF’s Representative in India.

More than 50 per cent of India’s population are below the age of 25 and India is already the second largest market for YouTube, Facebook, and many other video platforms.

Ms. Singh joins a list of other UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors that includes David Beckham, Orlando Bloom, Jackie Chan, Muzoon Almellehan, Danny Glover, Liam Neeson, Priyanka Chopra, Ricky Martin and Shakira.