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for

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# INTRODUCTION

The "African Decade for Child Survival, Protection and Development" opens amidst dreadful conditions for children in Africa. But at the same time, there are extraordinary opportunities to overcome difficulties.

Africa has the highest average under-five mortality rate in the world and is the only continent where child deaths are projected to increase during the 1990s. The reality reflected in these sad figures explains the priority UNICEF accords to Africa and the expansion of the Agency's presence on the continent.

Even in the hostile environment of the last decade there were signs of hope in demonstration of what *can* be done when an effective strategy and the political will to work together for its achievement exist. A fine example is Africa's remarkable progress toward Universal Child Immunization. In sub-Saharan Africa, no fewer than 25 countries are expected to achieve their 1990 goals of protecting 75 per cent of children against the six main child-killer diseases.

The accomplishment of remarkable advances for child health has not occurred automatically, nor by conducting business as usual. African countries have had to radically restructure their health systems, placing greater emphasis on primary health care than in the past. Throughout this process, and especially during the last half of the 1980s, UNICEF has substantially increased its volume of assistance to Africa and has opened and upgraded offices of Representatives to administer an increasing number of programmes. Its work is very much a *partnership* with governments, implementing country programmes that are designed by and for countries themselves. Popular participation has been indispensable to all of these joint programmes. The strengthening of national capacities is a key to sustaining individual programmes, and to development progress itself.

Just as UNICEF has been consistently increasing its involvement in Africa, so too the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has been devoting more and more attention to child-related issues. The OAU commitment to children reached a new height this year when African Heads of State and Government adopted a record number of landmark resolutions on child survival, protection and development. Six years of collaboration stand behind the seven resolutions—a testament to African concern, at the highest levels, for meaningful development progress through attention to children.

In these resolutions, and in other multilateral fora, African governments, often through their Heads of State and Government, have committed themselves to the "goals for children and development in the 1990s", which are described in this booklet, and include such targets as reducing child mortality by one-third. Are the goals feasible in Africa? UNICEF is convinced that they are. The World Summit for Children has nurtured a solidarity among nations for a new mode of operation.

Implementing the goals for children, like all other broad development efforts in Africa, will take not only strong popular and political *will* at all levels, from families and communities to Heads of State and the international community; it will also take courage to mount the kind of extraordinary efforts that will be necessary. It will require reallocating resources to basic education, with an emphasis on universal primary education, and to primary health care approaches such as the Bamako Initiative. It will involve a major effort to soften the blow of AIDS through health care and support for orphans, as well as expanded initiatives to slow its spread, through education. It will take bringing life to the principles codified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, through active implementation.



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