

UNICEF Engages in Successful Measles Campaign

By Emily Temple

Imagine not living past your fifth birthday. Although the majority of children in the United States do not need to worry about this, it is a tragic reality for many around the world. In 2008, one in seven children in Sub-Saharan Africa died before their fifth birthday. Many of under-five deaths are preventable with the implementation of routine vaccine programs, health education for mothers, and proper nutrition.

Staggering mortality figures make the issue of children's global health and wellbeing intimidating to tackle. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is up to the challenge. Originally established by the United Nations as "International Children's Emergency Fund," today the agency does more than provide emergency relief. UNICEF's mission is to advocate for children's rights, to assist youth in realizing their full potential, and to develop countries' resources for children's education and health.

As 2015 approaches, UNICEF is most concerned with reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially that of reducing child mortality. Progress is being made to ensure all children reach their fifth birthday and grow up living happy, healthy lives. In fact, between 1990 and 2008, the global under-five mortality rate declined from 12.5 million children to 8.8 million. To accomplish this, UNICEF has been working in more than 150 countries and uses the skills and knowledge of a variety of professionals.

One such professional is Maya van den Ent, who holds dual degrees in pharmacy and public health. Her work with UNICEF has focused on the Measles vaccine campaign, which has been one of the great success stories for reducing the under-five mortality rate. In the US, we often take routine vaccines for granted. In the developing world, immunizing children is a difficult task. According to Ms. van den Ent, there are many challenges in vaccinating children in those areas, such as keeping track of who received the vaccine, transporting live vaccines from capital cities to rural villages, and affording technology such as non-reusable syringes. Despite these challenges, UNICEF's efforts in the Measles vaccine program have been successful in reducing the number of children who die from Measles each year from 800,000 in 2000 to 164,000 in 2008. Ms. van den Ent also emphasizes that 20% of the decrease in under-five mortality between 1990 and 2000 is due to the Measles vaccine.



As UNICEF continues to work toward fulfilling its mission and achieving the MDGs, it will need help. Whether it is as an advocate for these vaccine programs or simply a voice for the staggering statistics, everyone can help to ensure that children around the world live beyond their fifth birthday.