The situation of children in the DRC: successes and challenges

Childhood mortality among children under 5 has decreased by almost 50% since 1990. The percentage of children dying from serious illnesses such as measles and malaria fell by almost 70% between 2000 and 2015. Poliomyelitis virus, once a major cause of disabilities in children and adults, has ended in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Vaccination coverage against measles increased from 63% to 72% during the same period, while exclusive breastfeeding of children during their first six months of life rose from 36% to 48%.

As to early education, the number of children enrolled in primary schools more than doubled between 2001-2002 and 2012-2013, from 5.47 million to 12.6 million. There is very little difference between the number of girls and boys entering school, however, only 6 out of 10 girls complete primary school, compared to 8 out of 10 boys.

Despite remarkable achievements, many challenges remain. Chronic malnutrition affects more than 6 million young children in the DRC, compromising their development. Nearly 40% of girls marry before the age of 18, the legal age of marriage. Once married, girls often quit school, have risky pregnancies and suffer abuse.

The right to an identity is recognized as every child’s right, yet only 25% of child births have been recorded. Registering children at birth is the first step in securing their recognition before the law, safeguarding their social, economic, civil, cultural and political rights, and ensuring that any violation of these rights does not go unnoticed.

The DRC has experienced a humanitarian crisis for so many years now that the acute nature of the situation is often overlooked. In 2016, there were more than 1.7 million displaced people in the country. Ongoing insecurity in some regions, including destruction and looting of schools and health centers, has had a major impact on the access of basic goods and services for children.
UNICEF in the DRC

UNICEF has worked in the DRC since 1963. Today, UNICEF engages in development programs, as well as humanitarian and transition assistance throughout the entire country. UNICEF, along with its partners and the Congolese Government are implementing programs in the following areas:

**Survival**: Ensuring child survival through medical services, health promotion and disease prevention programs, with a special focus on vaccination, fighting malaria, improving child nutrition, preventing HIV transmission, and maternal health.

**Water and sanitation**: Ensuring increased access throughout to safe drinking water and sanitation measures, through the Healthy School and Villages program, among others.

**Education**: Guaranteeing universal access to education for school-aged children; significantly and equitably increasing the number of children completing quality primary education, as part of a life course approach.

**Protection**: Enhancing child protection and prevention of all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, as well as ensuring that each child has access to birth registration services and legal protection.

**Child-friendly environment**: Creating an enabling environment for child rights, engaging everyone in their protection, by improving the laws, standards, social policies and budgets protecting children and their rights and promoting the rights of the Child in the public arena.

**Emergencies**: Ensuring special protection, quick and effective assistance to children affected by war, displacement, or natural disasters.

For further information:

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