Technical Guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce and eliminate preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age

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Save the Children is the world’s leading independent organisation for children, working in 120 countries through our members, programmes and partners. Our mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. In 2012, Save the Children’s work worldwide touched the lives of over 125 million children and directly reached through its programmes 45 million children.

Save the Children has a dual mandate as a development and humanitarian agency, covering issues such as health and nutrition, education, child protection and child rights governance. Save the Children’s work on child mortality falls within the scope of our health and nutrition programmes and our global child survival campaign, the EVERY ONE Campaign. Our vision and breakthrough is that no child under five should die from preventable causes, and public attitudes will not tolerate high levels of child deaths.

**Introduction**

Deaths of children under the age of five are a major human rights concern. Globally, 6.6 million children still die annually before their fifth birthday. This includes major disparities across and within countries and regions. The goal of Save the Children’s EVERY ONE Campaign is the achievement of MDG4, a key milestone towards a broader vision of all children realizing their right to health. The campaign focuses on those countries with the highest burden of under-5 mortality.

Key areas of focus of the campaign, which we consider to be basic premises for children's right to health include:

1. *Working towards universal health coverage* - UHC is about ensuring all people, with a particular priority on children and women, have access to a package of essential health services without suffering financial hardship.
2. *Investment in strong health systems* - This is essential for securing the gains made to date on child health and ensuring that the poorest and marginalized groups of children are reached.
3. *National and international investment in primary healthcare* - Increased domestic resources must be mobilized for health in an equitable and sustainable way.
4. *Participation and empowerment of children and communities* – It is essential to involve them in decision-making processes and support them to hold duty bearers to account
5. *Access to information* - So that children (or their parents) can make informed decisions about their health through understanding their entitlements and what their governments have already committed to

*Please provide information on how your organization works to reduce mortality and morbidity of children under five years of age. In particular, please describe any action that your organization has taken to ensure that human rights standards and principles such as non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability, are systematically integrated in efforts to address and reduce under-five mortality and morbidity.*

The following are just a few illustrative examples of how Save the Children has systematically integrated human rights principles to address child mortality, particularly at community level.

**Tracking the health budget in Sierra Leone**

Budget tracking work is a tool that can build the capacity of civil society to advocate for their right to health. It is therefore a good example of applying and integrating *participation, transparency and accountability principles* into efforts to reduce under-five mortality. Save the Children developed a Health Budget Tracking Tool to support civil society organizations to effectively track the flow of resources within the health sector, through the various layers of government structures, to determine how much of the originally allocated resources reach each level and how long they take to get there.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The tool aims to bring citizens closer to the decisions that affect their everyday lives by simplifying the health budget and the budgeting process, giving them the knowledge to hold Government to account when necessary. At a national level, the tool enables civil society to play an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability in health expenditure; where CSOs are actively engaged in the planning process they can also influence national priorities. At local level, civil society can oversee and monitor health expenditure by examining district health service spending or even local clinic budgets.

For example, in Sierra Leone, Save the Children together with partners undertook a nation-wide health and sanitation budget tracking exercise to determine what investments are actually being made in health, from the national ministry level down to local councils and hospitals.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Government of Sierra Leone launched its Free Healthcare Initiative (FHCI) in 2010, which provides free healthcare to pregnant and lactating women, and children under the age of five. But the study revealed that expenditure on health was still insufficient and that primary healthcare was not receiving the full allocation as specified in the annual budget. It also revealed that civil society was not actively engaged in the budget planning and review process.

Save the Children worked with partners to improve access to information about the FHCI and what entitlements women and children now have. Activities included organizing community road shows and supporting the government to manage a toll-free number where people could learn about the FHCI or raise complaints about health service delivery. Public hearings were also organized for community members from all 14 districts to discuss challenges around the implementation of the FHCI with district and national decision-makers.

Key findings from the 2013 budget tracking report were developed into a citizens scorecards further highlighting gaps in health budget allocation and disbursement in each 14 district of Sierra Leone. The coalition supported civil society to engage the public at district and community level on the issues and challenges building on their support in influencing 2014 budget allocation and timely disbursement. The scorecards and one page advocacy briefs were disseminated to the public including decision makers at meetings/forums/public events. At national level, the coalition engaged in media and stakeholder advocacy with the Ministry of Finance and Members of Parliament.

Our work on budget tracking and advocacy has created a lots of public and stakeholders awareness on budgetary issues. It has increased attention of CSOs and INGOs implementing in other sector such as education, gender and protection. There has been active civil society space, involving them in national budget discussion and a mandate to monitor the implementation. One of Save the Children's strongest civil society partners has been given the mandate by the Ministry of Finance to actively monitor national budget implementation of Ministries, departments and agencies and report on progress.

**Community action to address child mortality in India and Afghanistan**

Save the Children works with communities to ensure they understand their health entitlements and can hold decision-makers to account on addressing child mortality. Our work with communities systematically integrates *human rights standards and principles to reduce child mortality*.

In India, communities identified undernutrition as a major challenge. Save the Children found, however, that communities had little or no knowledge of a new national scheme on nutrition which entitled them to free nutrition and counselling services. Increasing awareness was therefore the first step towards active participation. Save the Children trained community members and health workers on communication skills and facilitated meetings where communities could raise their views with local decision-makers. The Right to Information Act was found to be a useful tool for holding decision-makers to account. These efforts resulted in non-functioning centres being reopened and providing nutrition supplements. The views and demands of communities are also raised at the national level through media, public action and engagement with Members of Parliament.

In Afghanistan, Save the Children is working with communities to build their capacity to identify and analyze health problems - particularly causes of child mortality - and to empower them to advocate for better health care at district and provincial levels. Community health councils (shuras) are established or supported with training. Save the Children community mobilisers work with the councils to help identify the causes of child mortality within the community, develop possible solutions and implement community-led action plans. Shuras and community health workers have introduced the provision of clean water, improved nutrition and feeding practices to eliminate child malnutrition, and increased good health and hygiene practices to households, particularly for mothers and children.

For example, in one village, a mobile health team from the provincial hospital had stopped visiting, and the winter was coming. The health council decided to apply its acquired advocacy skills to address the problem. Save the Children mobilizers had taught the shura members how to identify health problems and how to try and address them with higher authorities. To have health care coming to their village is crucial to the survival of the children. One of the council members wrote a petition to the Provincial Health Directorate have the mobile clinic start coming again. The petition reached the Provincial Health Director, who was happy to receive the petition, as it helps her push for better health care at higher levels. She passes them on to the Ministry of Public Health in Kabul where decisions about health facilities are made. She promised to establish a Family Health House with a midwife, who takes care of pregnant women and small children and will also give vaccinations. Community action, participation and accountability are crucial to reducing and eliminating preventable child deaths in this particular village and in many others around the world.

1. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/health-sector-budget-advocacy-guide-civil-society-organisations> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/sierra-leone-health-and-sanitation-budget-tracking-2012> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)