

## Renewing the promise to save the life of children

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The good news about Peru being the country with the greatest reduction in child mortality rates in the Americas between 1990 and 2011 is cause for great satisfaction.

According to a world report released recently by UNICEF and its partners, the number of children under five years of age dying every year worldwide declined from 12 million in 1990 to almost 7 million in 2011. Even though there is a downward trend in child mortality in global terms, Peru is to be congratulated on its effort to reduce by 76% the under-five child mortality rate during the last two decades.

In Peru these indicators are linked to economic growth but above all to the commitment to make social inclusion a reality. Actions towards achieving such progress have been fundamental, such as focusing on maternal morbidity and mortality, promoting exclusive breastfeeding, and encouraging families to recognize acute respiratory infections and diarrheal illnesses, especially those living in rural and peri-urban high Andean and Amazonian areas with limited access to health, water and sanitation.

Peru is among the countries that have managed to control measles and poliomyelitis outbreaks, which were causes of child mortality. In addition, the country has reduced maternal mortality, delivery complications, low birth weight and neonatal death rates. This was accomplished with successful cultural adaptation strategies in health services for pregnant women, such as the maternal waiting houses implemented by the Ministry of Health in high Andean areas and through the increasing number of health facilities established in rural areas.

This is an accomplishment of the health sector and of the different instances that provided their support to this sector. It should also be considered an achievement of the authorities, who made sure that health centers were provided with water and sanitation services and built roads to access them; of teachers, who remind their students every day of the importance of washing their hands with soap; of communication professionals, who include in the media agenda the significance of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life, and of those who promote appropriate nutrition for mothers and their babies, to give a few examples.

Progress is considerable, but according to the National Institute of Statistics and Data Processing (INEI), 11,000 children under five are still dying every year; 5,000 of which die before their first month of life. There are regions, in particular rural regions of indigenous population, where child mortality risk is 2 times higher in relation to the national average. Most of these deaths can be avoided with timely and appropriate care of newborns, opportune identification of warning signs of illnesses in

children and the use of health services, as well as the use of zinc to treat diarrhoea and antibiotics for pneumonia.

In order for children to survive and develop, concerted actions are required between the various State organizations. For example, a child born to a literate woman is more likely to survive past age five than one born to an illiterate woman. Each additional year of the mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 10%.

UNICEF and its partners have launched an invitation to the governments, civil society, religious communities and the private sector worldwide to join the initiative "Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed" with the purpose of giving all children the best possible start in life.

Peru will surely be among the first to join and renew the commitment made to children. It does so from the sandy areas of Ventanilla, with the health promoters who devote themselves to making sure children receive their micronutrients, to the Amazonian forest where itinerant teams cross rivers for hours and hours to bring health services to their communities. There is much to be done, let's do it all together.

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