



4 September 2015

HE Filipe Nyusi
President of the Republic of Mozambique

Dear Comrade Filipe Nyusi,

Subject: Children in Mozambique: Achievements and New Challenges

I would like to congratulate you and your Government for your commitments to protect children's rights and contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of Mozambique. The five year plan of your government gives importance to the development of the country's human capital and its strategic objectives are well-linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs.)

Much progress has been made in improving the situation of children in Mozambique over the past decade. However, more remains to be done if we are to ensure that "no child is left behind". I would like to bring to your attention three key areas that would require more attention and commitment: **HIV**, particularly among adolescent girls, **early marriage** and **chronic malnutrition** (stunting).

First, **HIV**. Mozambique has the 8th highest HIV prevalence in the world, and is home to four percent of all people living with HIV globally. AIDS is the primary cause of death among adults and young people in Mozambique, and the second highest cause of death among children. The burden of treating HIV and AIDS takes up a large share of annual health expenditure and constrains growth, as new groups of children and young people become infected every year.

Thanks to a coherent, coordinated and harmonized approach, there has been an impressive and rapid expansion of services. These efforts have led to a decrease in new infections, from 160,000 per year in 2001 to 120,000 in 2013 (UNAIDS 2014), but Mozambique still ranks fifth in the world in incidence of new infections, with 330 Mozambicans infected daily. The number of people living with HIV is on the rise (from 850,000 in 2001 to 1.6 million in 2013), in part because more people are successfully receiving treatment, which reduces mortality.

While progress has been commendable, it is very concerning that Mozambique's efforts are almost entirely funded by external development partners with internal resources accounting for less than five percent of the cost of all HIV/AIDS interventions. At present, the yearly financing gap is projected to be 100 million USD in 2017. *The government needs to allocate more domestic resources to tackle HIV* and with your personal stewardship in this matter, I trust we will be able to ensure the next generation of Mozambican children will be HIV-free.

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We welcome the leadership of the first lady on the issue of **Early Marriage**, which represents another major threat to the rights of Mozambican children. Indeed, 9% of Mozambican girls between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before 15 years of age and 48.2% before 18, with the northern and rural parts of the country presenting higher rates. This is one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Child marriage often leads to teenage pregnancy, with more than one in three adolescent girls bearing children before 18. This greatly increases the risks of maternal and child mortality, and of malnutrition to the child.

The third issue I would like to highlight is the lack of progress on **chronic malnutrition**, or stunting. We want our children to grow and be happy and healthy productive citizens, yet Mozambique has one of the worst nutritional status of children in the world, with 4 out of 10 children being chronically malnourished, without any change in prevalence over the last decade. Wide disparities exist between provinces, with rates ranging from 23% in Maputo Province to 55% in Nampula. Children in the poorest families are almost four times more likely to suffer from severe chronic malnutrition than children in the richest families. However, no group is exempt from the risk of malnutrition, showing this is not only an issue of food security. Malnutrition is a major factor holding back the development of our country. Each year Mozambique loses up to 3% points of GDP due to chronic malnutrition.

Chronic malnutrition has been a major concern for the Government and development partners. The addition of food security to the Ministry of Agriculture is a welcomed change, and the inclusion of reducing chronic malnutrition as a strategic objective of the Five-Year Plan is an important step. The Multi-sector Action Plan for the Reduction of Chronic Under-nutrition (PAMRDC) that defines the key cost effective actions to address malnutrition is being implemented at national and provincial levels, and is supported by many partners.

Yet, to achieve a reduction of chronic malnutrition, there is a need to *increase domestic financing for nutrition and in particular ensure the PAMRDC is included in the annual budget at national and provincial levels*. There is a proposal to transform the current structure, SETSAN, into a public institute for food security and nutrition (INSAN). Given the strategic importance of nutrition in human development, *I would like to request that this structure be led by the highest government level, if possible at Prime Minister level*. Your continued strong leadership in this matter will also give a very strong message.

While funding and intersectoral coordination are important factors in addressing malnutrition, I would like to also highlight the issue of access to safe water and sanitation, which also has a large bearing on malnutrition. Lack of access to safe water and particularly sanitation is strongly associated with the prevalence of chronic malnutrition.

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The data shows that 79% of the population do not have or use improved sanitation facilities and 10 million Mozambicans are practicing open defecation, 90% of them in rural areas. Investing in sanitation has extensive social benefits beyond reducing malnutrition. Indeed it impacts on health, education, gender equality and sustainable economic growth. The World Bank has estimated that the cost of poor sanitation in Mozambique is equivalent to 1.2% of GDP.

Mozambique has committed to achieving universal access to safe drinking water supply and the total elimination of open defecation by 2025. Achieving these ambitious goals will require considerable efforts for strengthening the capacity of the sector and greater investments. *The government expenditure on WASH, relative to non-extractive GDP, needs to double by 2025.*

Your Excellency, I am confident that giving attention to these critical areas will substantially reduce Mozambique's poverty and improve the welfare of its children. UNICEF Mozambique, which is partnering with my Trust, is a knowledge and technical leader in these areas and is prepared to engage with the respective line ministries of your Government as you implement the 5-year plan.

Our brother in arms and my late husband said that "Children are flowers that don't wilt" (As crianças são flores que nunca murcham), but I would add they need water, fertilizer and care to grow strong and beautiful. I hope that your legacy to Mozambique will be one of positive and significant change for the lives of the children in the country.

Yours sincerely,

Graça Machel

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