



Business leaders engaged to support children's rights

20 November, Windhoek: On the 29th celebration of the World Children's Day – the anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – UNICEF engaged high-profile business leaders in Namibia to “go blue for children” by creating a Business Council, whose aim is to promote the delivery of results for children and advance the rights of every Namibian child.

At an event in Windhoek to celebrate the landmarks of UNCRC in Namibia, business leaders from the banking, agricultural, commerce, mining and fishery sectors were invited to be part of a pool of partner companies who will adhere to a set of principles to respect and support children in their business decisions and operations.

“Because children and young people make up a huge part of our population, the actions and decisions of business will inevitably affect them directly or indirectly as consumers, children of employees and as illicit workers of some employers,” said UNICEF Representative, Rachel Odede.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) signed the UNCRC in 1990 as a pledge to improve children's lives through reducing infant mortality, increasing school enrolment and ensuring that services are in place for the protection of children.

Twenty 28 years on, commendable milestones have been achieved. Most Namibian children are protected from common childhood diseases such as measles and polio through accessible immunisation services which are fully funded by the Government. The total number of deaths of children under 5 has reduced from 4,200 per year in 1990 to less than 3,000 in 2013. At the same time, 96% of babies born to HIV-positive mothers test negative for HIV because of there is a well-functioning Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) programme across the country.

In education, the country has also celebrated universal access to primary and secondary education, while water is accessible to children for more than 84% of the population.

However, while celebrating these achievements, the business leaders also had an opportunity to reflect on unmet targets which have resulted in thousands of children living in poverty and who lack access to basic sanitation services. Many remain unprotected and vulnerable to violence and abuse, and some also fail to access available health services because of geographic distances.

The establishment of a business council is therefore a welcome step to open up channels for the business communities to support Government efforts towards the full realisation of children's rights.

"If we do not urgently invest in education and skills training, the rapidly growing global population of adolescents and young people – which will reach 2 billion by 2030 – will continue to be unprepared and unskilled for the future workforce," said UNICEF Representative, Rachel Odede. "We therefore need you to join us - to strength and deepen partnerships between the public and private sectors, so as to better position Namibia to leverage the rich potential of its young people."

This year's celebration of the World Children's Day comes barely two months after the UN General Assembly launched a global partnership called "Generation Unlimited", which calls stakeholders, including the private sector, to bring together resources and expertise to ensure that every young person is learning, in training or in employment by 2030.