Today, we mark a small but meaningful anniversary — our third “PaperSmart” Executive Board meeting. I mention this because PaperSmart is not only a sign of our commitment to the environment and to saving on editing and printing costs. It’s also one sign of how we all are adapting to changes and creating a “new normal” for our organization.

Our mission — to realize the rights of children everywhere — has not, and will never, change. But how we carry out that mission — how we create and adapt to change, how we measure our progress, how we make the most of the tools and resources at our disposal — will, and must, continue evolving in every aspect of our daily work.

What is “normal” now in our work — the refocus on equity across our programmes…innovation, like being more paper-smart and the important innovations we’re seeing in the field…and greater transparency, like publishing data on the International Aid Transparency Initiative’s website, and putting internal audits on our own site — were new to us not so long ago.

The long-term results of our new paths won’t be known for some time. Promising innovations like using SMS technology to reach more communities need to be brought up to scale. Our work to reach every last child, no matter where she or he lives, is still progressing — too many are still being left behind. And we must continue seeking ways to improve efficiency and transparency.
So at this and coming meetings of the Board, we will continue to work to get better, to create tomorrow’s “new normal.”

As we do so, let’s also pause for a moment, and take heart in what we achieved together in 2012. With our partners — most importantly, of course, in governments — we supported the vaccination of over 100 million children against measles. We supplied 55 million people with insecticide-treated bed nets. We helped almost 19 million people gain access to water. National education plans in 128 programme countries now include specific measures to reduce disparities caused by poverty, ethnicity, disability and gender. And we reunited nearly 20,000 children with their families after they had been separated by conflicts or natural disasters.

More broadly, under-five mortality continues its steady decline, falling 41 per cent from 1990 levels. Out-of-school children? Down dramatically. Underweight children under the age of five? Down by 36 per cent since 1990. And the proportion of the global population without sustainable access to drinking water has decreased by half.

These trends are captured in the Executive Director’s Annual Report, which Jeff O’Malley will be presenting in greater detail this morning. The report includes our progress in all five of our MTSP focus areas, as well as our efforts to improve our internal operations.
The progress should also encourage us, all the more, to re-dedicate ourselves to the work still to be done. To the boy not getting enough nourishment because he lives in a remote community…to the girl denied a place in the classroom because of her gender…to the mother searching for her lost children in the aftermath of a disaster…to those families demanding — as they should — vaccinations for their children.

And of course, to lives uprooted — or even cut short — by the growing emergencies and conflicts that too easily overwhelm the assistance we can provide. Most notably, the Syrian conflict is fast becoming a regional crisis. Our hardworking staff and our resources are stretched to their limits — limits already not equivalent to the growing needs. Two years of conflict…93,000 deaths, including thousands of children…millions of people displaced…more than one-and-a-half million fleeing to neighboring countries as refugees. Families and communities torn apart — infrastructure destroyed.

Together with our partners, since the start of 2013, we’ve helped almost nine million people gain access to water for drinking and household use. One million children have been immunized against measles inside Syria — and 600,000 in neighboring countries. And we’re continuing to implement education and child-protection initiatives to help safeguard the futures of the children trapped by the conflict.

But so much more needs to be done. I look forward to hearing your ideas on how we can not only turn up the volume on this emergency and summon the increased resources so desperately needed, but, beyond that region, how we can continue responding effectively to the needs of children — and upholding their rights — in the midst of crises everywhere.
Preparing for emergencies…reaching every child…establishing — and meeting — measurable goals…learning from the sometimes difficult lessons of the past… these priorities are at the heart of our Strategic Plan for 2014-2017, the draft of which will be discussed tomorrow, with an eye to adopting it in September.

Broadly speaking, the Plan aims both to focus explicitly on the disadvantaged and excluded and also to continue making the case for holistically investing in the “whole child” — a child’s health, education, protection and social inclusion.

The Plan will also reflect the discussions now underway on the post-2015 agenda. The needs of the most disadvantaged and excluded children must remain in focus long after the MDG deadline passes, supported by simple, clear and measurable goals.

The report last month of the High Level Panel was encouraging in its clear emphases not only on eradicating poverty in all its forms, but also on addressing inequalities — to “leave no one behind.” And as the debates on the successors to the MDGs continue, UNICEF will continue making the case that sustainable development must be built around safe, healthy and well-educated children.
These debates must also take into account the world’s growing population. A new UN report released last week projects an increase of one billion people over the next twelve years — and a rise from 7.2 billion today to 9.6 billion by 2050. And the focus of this growth is increasingly concentrated in Africa. Consider the fact that every third child born by the year 2050 will be born there. The future of Africa and these children will depend on the health, education and outlook of their parents. Those parents of tomorrow, of course, are the children of today, whose lives we are now working to improve.

That work will be guided by our new Strategic Plan. As you might expect, drafting it required an enormous amount of review, consultation and self-examination. And rightfully so. Executive Board members, colleagues here at headquarters and in the field, and our partners in the NatComs and elsewhere, were all instrumental in this common effort.

I’d like to thank Board members who have been involved from the very beginning, through the meetings of the advisory group and the peer-reference group, as well as workshops and informal consultations.

The process was challenging. Any plan we develop cannot capture every priority, every point of view. Doing so would only result in a watered-down, unfocused and — ultimately — directionless plan that would do little or nothing to improve the lives of children.

These plans require focus…clarity…and making choices — especially as we continue adapting to a changing world.
After all, the world has changed significantly since the MTSP was initiated almost eight years ago. Rising food and fuel prices…growing violence and conflict…climate change and natural disasters…migrations…and expanding populations…all of these factors will continue to put increased pressure on our programmes, on our resources and on our staff.

Given this changing world…our changing understanding of how best to help every child, everywhere…and the changing expectations of the job we do…I’d like to explore with you this morning some of the challenges and choices we grappled with as we developed the Plan, and how they will affect UNICEF’s work in the years ahead.

The first challenge was to set a limited number of clear priorities…and to distinguish between those which should be stand-alone result areas and those — like equity, gender and humanitarian action, for example — that transcend any one goal’s importance, and can achieve greater results for children when incorporated across all of the outcomes. And then to determine if the result areas — stand-alone or mainstreamed — are aligned with the practical realities of the countries in which we work…and whether UNICEF has a comparative advantage when it comes to making a measurable and achievable contribution.

These criteria shaped the seven stand-alone result areas we’ve listed in our new plan.

Child protection — the rights of children to be free from harm and violence — is an obvious choice, central to everything we do as an organization.
A child’s survival and health in the earliest years — and living free from preventable diseases and disabilities as she or he grows — is also fundamental to all else. Which is why health and HIV/AIDS are also stand-alone result areas.

Nutrition — the key to healthy, educated children — deserves also to be a stand-alone result area. Recent evidence has deepened our understanding of the centrality of nutrition to a child’s well-being, both early on in life and in the later years. Good nutrition in the early years is vital to a healthy life — with a full capacity to learn and earn.

Stunting is increasingly, but still too little, recognized as a critical challenge, especially in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, where 40 per cent of children under five are stunted — at a disadvantage in school, and thus, later in life. The economic cost is great. In Africa and Asia, for example, some 11 per cent of GDP is lost to under-nutrition every year. The lesson is obvious. When we scale up nutrition, we not only nurture bodies and minds — we nourish both household and national economies.

UNICEF has demonstrated a comparative advantage in nutrition — including through our highly successful therapeutic feeding programme, which saved almost 2.2 million children from severe acute malnutrition last year. And we are deepening our practical collaboration with the World Food Programme and other partners, as we pursue our separate but symbiotic roles.

Education and learning deserve the same priority. Investing in a child’s education is not just an investment in his or her future — it’s also an investment in a society’s future…and our own. Education — especially for girls — is the key to a community’s ability to lift itself out of poverty and reduce reliance on external assistance in the future.
Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) — taken together — are another stand-alone result area. The world has made strong progress in increasing access to improved sources of water, but much less in supplying adequate sanitation and improving hygiene practices. But WASH by no means stands alone. Poor sanitation, for example, is closely linked to stunting…and a lack of hygiene can lead to unsterile equipment being used during childbirth, putting a mother and her child at greater risk.

The Plan also includes a new result area — social inclusion — that captures the fact that the community and environment in which children live, learn and grow is critical to their survival and development.

Too often, societal attitudes keep necessary interventions away from those who would most benefit from them. And everyone loses. If social exclusion keeps girls out of school, it is not only those girls who fail, their societies fail, as well. As this year’s State of the World’s Children makes clear, when we deny children with disabilities the right to learn…or the right to access health care or nutritious food…we not only rob them of their right to make the most of their potential…we rob ourselves of their talents and contributions. Or consider the grave injustice of denying a vaccination or nutrition to an indigenous child, simply because of who she is, or where she lives.
So community leadership is critical — as is understanding the cultural norms and attitudes in the communities in which we work. This is the driving force behind our efforts on “C4D,” Communication for Development. We need community leadership to send girls to school…improve sanitation and handwashing practices to prevent disease…and welcome immunizations — including for polio — for all children, including those with disabilities, so they may learn and contribute to their families’ well-being. Over time, these actions become ingrained attitudes across communities, lasting long after assistance is provided. And those attitudes, in turn, reduce reliance on development assistance.

But while all these priorities are linked, some other priorities should not be left to stand alone, because of the degree to which they inherently cut across all the others. Our challenge is to avoid dissipating their importance as we mainstream them across the other priorities.

You will not be surprised that equity — the right of every child to a fair start in life — is placed at the heart of the Strategic Plan and infuses all its sections. It requires us to reach all children, no matter how distant, no matter what barriers or prejudices stand in the way. Equity will continue to be mainstreamed throughout our programmes, not only because it is the right thing to do for these children…not only because it promotes more stable societies…but because we achieve greater results, and greater value for money, when we focus on the most disadvantaged children, families and communities.

In every one of our result areas, the refocus on equity provides not only a rights-based approach to guide us, but the most practical, results-based approach to help us be as effective as possible.
Globally, four out of five children now receive basic immunization, and we are close to eradicating polio forever. But we cannot rest until we reach the remaining 20 per cent of children at the highest risk of disease because they live in the poorest, most disadvantaged or remote communities. What better way to prevent disease in a community than to have everyone vaccinated? To make vaccination a normal part of growing up? We will never reach our goal of vastly reducing the number of children dying from measles, for example, without reaching every last child who needs a vaccination.

There’s a strong economic case, as well. Research shows that scaling up existing vaccines — which are already very inexpensive — in 72 of the world’s poorest countries would save six million lives and save billions of dollars in treatment costs and lost productivity over the next decade.

Both good reasons why our National Committees recently launched their new “100%” Campaign — to raise US$100 million, split evenly between strengthening routine immunization and running the “home stretch” of polio eradication.

We’re also seeing the benefits of an equity-based approach through our real-time monitoring system, MoRES — Monitoring Results for Equity Systems — to identify and monitor barriers and bottlenecks, and use that information to report results and adjust our policies and strategies. MoRES has now been rolled out in targeted areas in over 30 countries, with many more to come.
Our country offices are finding that MoRES is making our programmes more responsive to local needs, and accelerating results for the most disadvantaged communities. Governments, too, are seeing the benefits — realizing that finding practical, cost-effective solutions to addressing barriers and bottlenecks is not only the “right thing to do” — but also sound economics and good politics. And we are working with UNDP, UNFPA and others to adapt and adopt MoRES within the UN Development Group.

Humanitarian action and emergency response will also be integrated across all of our programmes. Conflicts and natural disasters — exacerbated by the effects of climate change and urbanization — are leaving vulnerable a growing number of children in fragile, risk-prone environments.

Even as we find the means to address crises by mainstreaming this priority, we will work to more closely align immediate humanitarian action and longer-term development programmes. Lessons from the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and other regions have taught us that resilience requires not only bringing humanitarian and development agencies closer together — but developing capacities, systems and structures that can improve disaster response, help communities adapt to climate change, and build peace.

We are changing our perspective on specific responses to emergencies, keeping an ever-closer eye on the longer-term benefits of our short-term actions. Emergency immunization campaigns, for example, also create a logistical network for poor, isolated and underserved communities that can be used to deliver other vital services — including nutrition screening, and the delivery of bed nets and vitamin supplements.
Conversely, community-based development programmes make these communities better able to deal with future disasters. In Ethiopia, for example, the development of community-based health and nutrition programmes helped many more children survive the 2012 drought than would otherwise have been the case.

The Strategic Plan also mainstreams innovation across our result areas. From communities’ use of SMS technology to improve learning for children, and monitor and report on the quality of health services being delivered…to the “three-drug in one pill” regimen being offered to pregnant women living with HIV…science and technology can help us deliver results and feedback faster and more effectively than ever before. Innovations like Edutrac and U-Report are using SMS technology to link communities directly with UNICEF and government ministries, giving even those in remote areas more of a say in determining their own futures.

Successes like these inspired the creation of UNICEF’s new Innovation Unit, reporting to me, composed of Christopher Fabian, Erica Kochi and a network of dedicated teams in the field, to help track and shape our innovations across UNICEF in a more systematic and strategic way. The team is sharing a big honour this year, earning a place on Time magazine’s list of the 100 most influential people in the world.
We also recently learned that UNICEF Uganda’s mTrac was one of the 10 winners of the African Development Bank’s eHealth competition. UNICEF has a growing list of innovation awards in recent years, including making the list of the Devex top 40 development innovators in 2011, and last July’s award from the Industrial Designers’ Society of America for Programme Mwana in Zambia and Malawi, which uses SMS technology to speed the delivery of HIV information. I know you take real pride — as I do — in our colleagues’ achievements.

Beyond our first challenge in developing the Strategic Plan — setting clear priorities while distinguishing among stand-alone and mainstreamed goals — our second challenge was to integrate these outcomes and priorities, so as to better invest in the “whole child” — every aspect of her life, from her health and education, to her protection and social inclusion.

All organizations have silos of some sort — and necessarily so. It’s important to maintain focused and specific expertise in key areas.

Our challenge is to build networks among these silos, harnessing the expertise and comparative advantage of each, to work towards specific, multi-sectoral goals, at both the global and country levels.

After all, children’s lives aren’t lived in silos, their challenges isolated from one another. A boy who is well-nourished but abused at home is not a healthy child. A girl who goes to school without adequate sanitation facilities does not have a child-friendly education — and is likely to drop out sooner than her brothers, diminishing not only her own future, but that of her family. An immunized child with adequate feeding practices but poor hygiene and sanitation remains at risk of stunting.
To truly promote equitable development for children — to promote their rights — we need solutions that work across traditional sectors, as well as within them.

Uganda, for example, is investing in scholarships and programs to help pregnant girls re-enter school. When we educate a girl today, we help her earn tomorrow — and increase the odds that her own children will be healthy, well-nourished and educated. Research shows that each additional year of schooling can increase potential lifetime income by as much as 10 per cent. Higher incomes mean more spending, more business and more overall economic growth for a society.

When we invest in children’s futures by immunizing them, as Botswana is doing with such a high degree of success, we invest in their ability to grow and learn…and we invest in their society’s future workforce and economy.

And the African Development Bank’s Congo Basin Forest Fund is providing resources and technical assistance to 10 countries to protect an important environmental heritage, and manage this precious natural resource for generations to come. When we protect a forest, we protect tomorrow’s jobs for today’s children.

We can take inspiration for our own programmes from these broad synergies — health supporting education...education and nutrition supporting the economy...an economy supporting the environment.
Our Strategic Plan’s success also depends on building effective networks with our sister UN agencies — again, tapping into the comparative advantages and expertise each can offer as we work towards common results. We’re working with these agencies to implement a joint Action Plan to operationalize the QCPR — our effort to improve development effectiveness and capacity by simplifying and harmonizing UN programming and business practices across our organizations.

And we’ll continue re-assessing our internal business practices to find more efficient ways of delivering results and to make the best possible use of funds.

Over the last two years, we’ve achieved budget savings of $13.7 million through better use of our resources and a new spirit of cost-consciousness throughout the organization. Supply chain improvements in delivering ready-to-use therapeutic foods in 2011 cut costs by 27 per cent, saving $14.2 million. Our supply division is improving its supply-chain management and warehouse automation. And our country offices have saved nearly $5 million by working more closely with our sister agencies, taking advantage of common banking arrangements, co-ordinated security services, and shared travel planning and premises.

In fact, we’re seeing a renewed spirit of efficiency and effectiveness across the entire organization. The recent assessment of UNICEF by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network — or MOPAN — found significant improvements in our management effectiveness. And our Effectiveness and Efficiency initiative will help us improve our transactions and streamline our business practices, based on our continuing, transparent review of functions at Headquarters.
This is a challenging process — but a necessary one, as we continue seeking out the most effective ways to improve the lives of the millions of children still going to bed hungry...still living in unsafe conditions...still being denied a place in the classroom...still suffering and dying from preventable diseases...still clinging to the lowest rung on the ladder of progress.

We can do so much more to help these children. And because we can do it, we must do it. Their rights demand it.

Our new Strategic Plan is the next chance we’ll have to keep our promise to the MDG generation — those children born since the goals were established in 2001. We keep this promise not only for these children...but for their children...and their grandchildren.

Today’s children are tomorrow’s parents...women and men who will carry this promise forward...and build a legacy of their own — one of hope, health and opportunity for future generations.

To quote Pericles: “What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.”

When we put our Strategic Plan in motion, we’re opening a new chapter in UNICEF’s efforts to weave hope, health and safety into the lives of all children. Can there be any greater adventure — for all of us?

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