

**Extracts from Dr. Festo Kavishe's (Deputy Regional Director of UNICEF-EAPRO)**

**closing speech:** “Two decades after its wide ratification, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has shown that when children’s rights are ensured, countries benefit. When children are healthy, enjoy quality education and are protected from harm, their living standards, and that of their families, increase. Investment in children should thus remain a priority of socio-economic development.

“Despite the broader socioeconomic progress made, many of world’s ethno-linguistic minorities lag behind, facing greater risks of illiteracy, impoverishment, and conflict. While the MDGs have been instrumental in articulating the agenda for mobilization of critical resources, we must now accelerate our effort to reach the poorest and the most vulnerable children and families. Without equitable results, we can neither claim nor sustain progress towards human development aspired by the Human Rights Declaration and the Conventional on the Rights of the Child.

“The challenges and tasks we face in this effort are complex and impossible to achieve for any one of us to achieve alone. I am thus inspired to see the tremendous strength of our collective scholarship and collaboration, represented by the wide range of partners and advocates from various capacities in government, international organizations, civil society, and academia from around world.

“The past three days have proved to be an extremely rich and stimulating time of inquiry and dialogue, demonstrating the tireless commitment and efforts you are making to promote the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism and the appreciation of its integral role in development.

“Linguistic diversity: a means and an end for progress towards MDGs

“Languages shape our identity. In an increasingly rootless world, threatened by the globalization of communication and promotion of the use of a single, dominant language, it is our own language that often gives us the sense of belonging and community. Appreciation and understanding of the importance of linguistic diversity are essential to safeguarding and extending the cultural identity and heritage.

“However, it is also the inextricable role of language in the educational, social and economic fabric of our societies that the acquisition of national and languages has become the central concern of education systems, as we seek to break down the barriers that continue to marginalize the millions of ethno-linguistic minorities from the most fundamental rights and services.

“Language differences can determine genuine opportunities and barriers to learning and development, to gender equality, to accessing health and protection, HIV/AIDS services and to rising out of extreme poverty. For children, in particular, barriers to learning in their own language, especially in the early years, can have irreversible impacts on their future potential.

“Furthermore, it is evident that access to and quality of: care and development; health, protection and other basic services must be understood from the broader social, cultural and economic processes that are inextricably linked to affect the lives of ethno-linguistic minorities. Realities of their ways of life and their heritage are invaluable and must be respected, if we are to achieve meaningful progress in development.

## Moving forward

“Over the years, we have built a solid knowledge basis to identify and implement strategies that makes positive difference for children and families of ethno-linguistic minorities. But many questions and tasks remain for us to tackle in our respective capacities as policymakers, researchers and scholars, and development partners.

“We need to continue efforts in: building rigorous evidence in identifying effective mother-tongue based interventions for solid early childhood care and development; in developing strategies to manage competing priorities and demands among local, national and international languages; and in implementing effective activities to improve access to basic information and services in health, nutrition, protection and sustainable environment.

“Translating theory and evidence into strategic, effective advocacy will be key to addressing the deep-rooted biases and ideological, political differences that continue to prevail and hinder formulation and implementation of critical policies.

“As the impact of the economic crisis continues to reverberate throughout regions and nations, we need to prioritize and intensify investments that benefit the most vulnerable and mitigate the widening disparities, long term socioeconomic and human costs which will be too costly for any one nation. Policies and strategies across sectors, from central to local levels, must reflect these intentions.

“In doing so, let us ensure political will and development processes that fosters tolerance and mutual respect for the dignity and human rights for all. When the rights of children, families and communities remain central motivations, it unleashes the doors to understanding why linguistic diversity and multilingualism is sensible and right in practice.

“Ultimately, we need to promote societies where differing languages do not separate peoples, but instead, unites us with equitable development that celebrates the cultures and heritage that enrich our lives.

“UNICEF and the partners remain your closest allies in this effort.

Words of gratitude:

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Speakers who have shared great knowledge, insight and experiences;

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