

## Breakthroughs for children

### Changing the global agenda on paying for healthcare

Since the 1990s, Save the Children has stood out against majority opinion on the issue of healthcare fees. In developing countries fees for basic healthcare are common, yet the reality is much of the population in those countries can't afford to pay healthcare fees, or else are pushed further into poverty by fees. Following our research, lobbying and public campaigning on this issue, we have started to see a shift in international policy.

In the 1970s and 80s, there was a massive decline in health sector funding across much of the developing world, and health services struggled to meet the needs of the people. As a result, in the late 1980s, the international community encouraged user fees as a necessary evil to help pay for health services. By the mid-1990s most developing countries had introduced some form of fees for healthcare. Despite growing evidence that user fees were causing more problems than they solved, large donors like the World Bank continued to promote them.

Save the Children UK believes that healthcare fees, which cause the poorest and most vulnerable children to suffer, are an outrage. We are keeping our promise to stand up for children's right to healthcare by consistently opposing healthcare fees and investing in research to back up our arguments. In 2001 we funded a review of user fees in African countries, which demonstrated that fees have not been an effective way of funding national health systems. Within a year many other organisations joined us.

In 2005 the *British Medical Journal* published research by Save the Children that showed that 250,000 lives could be saved each year in Africa if user fees were abolished. That research, along with a high level campaign, was referred to in speeches by both Tony Blair and Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, and it helped change UK and G8 policies on healthcare fees. In 2006 the UK government gave £14.5 million to support the abolition of user fees for healthcare in rural Zambia.

Following intense lobbying from Save the Children, in 2005 the G8 countries agreed to support any country choosing to abolish user fees. Now, even the World Bank acknowledges that user fees discriminate against the poor and no longer promotes user fees for basic health services for poor people.

Uganda, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia have all now stopped charging for some or all of their basic healthcare services. Take-up of healthcare by children in these countries has risen dramatically and at relatively low cost to governments. In Uganda, use of health services has more than doubled, largely a result of increased take-up by children.

Save the Children is now encouraging more countries to follow this lead and change their approach to paying for healthcare. We are ambitious to see user fees for healthcare become a thing of the past.