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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE DISCUSSION ON THE REPORT ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN SLUMS AND SHANTY TOWNS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The Report on children and adolescents in slums and shanty towns in developing countries (E/ICNF/L.1277) and E/ICNF/L.1277/ADD.1, prepared by the UNICEF Consultant, Dr. Constantina Safilios Rothschild and the UNICEF Secretariat, was considered on 17 April 1971 at a Workshop attended by representatives of more than thirty non-governmental organizations. The non-governmental organizations participating in the workshop emphasized that the problems of slum areas could not be considered in isolation from the concept of overall national, regional and urban development, and that they should receive much greater attention. Care is being taken, however, to avoid any segregation of people living in slums from the community at large. It was agreed that international non-governmental organizations should encourage their national affiliates to study the report and consider how activities carried out by voluntary agencies could be expanded or new activities developed, with the support of UNICEF and other agencies. Non-governmental organizations should encourage their branches to take an active interest in the economic and social conditions of people living in deprived urban areas, without slowing down their efforts to make life in rural areas more attractive. The workshop ~~urged~~ the need for a good clearing house of information about studies and projects related to the problems of urbanization, with special reference to the situation of children and young people in slums and shanty towns. It was also recommended that consultations between non-governmental organizations and UNICEF and other specialized agencies in developing countries should be made a regular feature of United Nations country programming for development. Taking into consideration materials presented to the workshop by a number of non-governmental organizations, including the International Union of Local Authorities, the International Union of Child Welfare, the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, the International Organizations of Consumers' Unions and others, the workshop recommended that in the second development decade a new partnership should be worked out between UNICEF and non-governmental

organizations in order to promote innovation in the solution of development problems in rural as well as in urban areas, including possibilities for ~~supporting~~ the voluntary sector in well-defined projects aimed at the building up of their local infrastructures.

The recommendations of the HSO workshop were presented to the UNESCO Executive Board, which considered the report on children and adolescents in slums and shanty towns at its sessions from 26 - 28 April. In the earlier discussions in the Board, several speakers had drawn attention to the significance of the study and the proposals outlined in it for the populations living in urban slums, specially in the less developed countries. One delegate pointed out that while the process of urbanization led to new and complex problems they should be seen also as an essential link in the modernization and transformation of traditional societies and that, from the point of view of the individuals who left the village for the city, they expressed an aspiration for higher income and opened the door to wider opportunities.

Initiating the discussion in the Board, it was pointed out that the study into the needs of children and adolescents in slums and shanty towns had been taken up in response to the suggestion made by the Executive Board at its 1969 session and that UNESCO had received valuable comments and suggestions from various agencies of the United Nations. The attention of the Board was invited to some of the important conclusions which have emerged from the study. In most developing countries the urban centre was growing faster than the rural centre and the rate of growth was specially high in large cities. Urban slums and shanty towns were growing much more rapidly than the cities to which they belonged, their growth being due as much to natural increase as to the influx from other areas. Already slums and shanty towns accounted for a considerable part of the urban population and usually urban slums had a very high proportion of young persons. The study had shown that slums would continue to exist and to grow at least over the next two or three decades. Slum clearance had not proved to be a practicable or successful solution, ~~possibly~~ because of the high cost involved and partly because of the inability to meet the needs of slum people or significantly to control the spread of slums. Therefore, the limited funds available were likely to produce a greater impact upon a larger

slum population if they were channelled primarily into slum improvement projects on a self-help basis.

Discussion in the Board revealed the general appreciation of the size of the growing problem of slums and shanty towns and its widespread social consequences, specially for children and adolescents. It was felt that the situation in slums and shanty towns, when considered in relation to the economic and social resources which were being devoted to it, had a potential for catastrophe which needed to be recognized and which required that there should be no delay in launching the necessary preventive and improvement strategies. Indeed, slum areas and slum populations were excluded from society to a degree which constituted a threat to efforts to promote harmonious and balanced development. There was need to adopt new concepts of welfare work which were closely identified with the people and laid stress on self-help, local leadership and population participation. However, everywhere slum areas were part of the city itself and a ~~social~~ reality which would continue to assume increasing proportions.

Several persons emphasized that action on behalf of children in slums and shanty towns would not be fully effective or lasting unless, from the beginning, it was envisaged as part of a more comprehensive approach to urban development. This would include a strategy for urban development along with regional planning, a practical approach to the provision of housing and shelter in forms within the means of a country, programmes for expansion of employment and for fiscal planning, well-conceived within policies which would safeguard the public interest and an adequate long-term approach which encompassed slums equally with squatter settlements and shanty towns.

~~The Board~~ recognized that there was a great variety among slums and uncontrolled settlements and that in many of them the inhabitants were working hard to establish themselves in urban employment and to improve their living conditions. As a ~~result~~ of their own efforts there was already an existing base from which to start in helping them remove some of the obstacles which stood in the way of their progressive development. In the poorer slums help had been needed at

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at an early stage to stimulate the process of improvement. The Board shared the view, expressed by the Executive Director in his preface to the Report, that, given steady efforts on the part of the slum dwellers and the necessary determination of the part of society to assist them, much can be done to alleviate the sordidness and misery of existing slums and shanty towns. It was recognized that, keeping in view the costs involved and the wider ramifications, extensive use would have to be made of auxiliary personnel whom should be recruited as far as possible from amongst slum dwellers and suitably trained. Considering the contribution that UNICEF can make, in co-operation with other agencies of the United Nations, the Board agreed that the needs of children in both rural and urban areas should be clearly suited to UNICEF assistance. It proposed that, as a first phase, special help should be given to some selected projects in slums and shanty towns with a view to ~~examining the possibilities of~~ working out economic patterns and methods of community participation and the creation of services benefiting children. If a number of projects could be taken up, it would become possible to test and develop some of the ideas put forward in the report.

The guidelines for UNICEF assistance set out in Part IV of the report were considered by the Board at some length. It was recognized that each country, each region and indeed each slum situation presented unique features and guidelines for action would need to be adopted appropriately according to the nature of the problems to be dealt with and the perspective for development. It was essential, however, that all existing slums should be recognized as urban communities to be treated in all respects like the rest of the population of the city. It was important that consideration of urban and slum development projects was not hampered by bureaucratic obstacles.

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Members of the Board underlined several aspects of the effort required on behalf of children and adolescents in slums and shanty towns. There was a general consensus that an integrated nutrition programme constituted a major starting point for work in the slums. Top priority should be given to the development and implementation of co-ordinated nutritional educational programmes, including special programmes designed to safeguard optimal nutrition during early childhood. As and when requested, extended family planning services should be set up, but always in close relationship to other services in support of the family, thus emphasizing a two-way relationship between the qualitative aspects of family planning and improved levels of living for the family. Considerable stress was placed on pre-school children who constitute a particularly vulnerable group whose numerous needs can not be adequately met by governments on their own. The importance of day care services was recognized, but it was suggested that these should be developed, not in isolation from the social context, but as part of broader programmes for the improvement of the social environment

Summing up the discussion in the Board on behalf of the UNICEF Secretariat, Deputy Executive Director, Planning, said that suggestions made by members of the questions they had indicated would be fully taken into consideration in revising the guidelines proposed in Part IV of the report and in working out further plans for action. While focussing attention preeminently on the needs of children in slums and shanty towns, it would be necessary also to take due account of the wider economic and social setting, including the need for employment, for housing and for appropriate preventative strategies. These broader considerations also provided an opportunity to various members of the United Nations development system to work together in a complementary relationship in the direction of a unified approach to the social and economic development as applied to the situation and needs of each country and each specific slum and urban situation. Several important suggestions which have been made in the earlier discussions in the ESO workshop and in the Board have been carefully noted by the Secretariat,

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including the need to avoid dispersal of resources, to provide for effective project preparation, and to ensure that within UNICEF there is an effective and adequately equipped co-ordinating unit for following up action in relation to children in slums and shanty towns. The emphasis which several delegations have placed on the need for evaluation, exchange of information, objective assessment of expedients, and on action-oriented experimental and innovative projects was viewed as essential.

The Executive Director expressed appreciation for the constructive proposals made by members of the Board and agreed, as the Board had urged, that UNICEF Assistance should be extended to slums and shanty towns in all the fields in which UNICEF normally operated. However, he explained that it would take some time to adapt planning and programming which the Board had generally approved and that, given the magnitude of the issues at stake, UNICEF's contribution would necessarily remain relatively modest. While the agencies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations could and must collaborate in the overall effort, yet it remained for governments themselves to identify their needs and establish priorities. There would be an even greater need for increased action in the future on the part of governments, the United Nations family and of organizations, non-governmental organizations and bilateral sources of assistance. The Executive Director invited delegations to send such further comments and suggestions in writing as they might wish to, with the object of assisting to prepare the report for publication and initiating the necessary action.

The Chairman observed that there had been general agreement on the main guidelines for future policy and on the role of UNICEF in expanding help for children in slums and shanty towns, on government request, in all fields with which it was normally associated. The Board might wish to note, the Chairman said, the forms of aid that would need some degree of adaptation to urban and slum conditions and that the proposed guidelines in Part IV of the report would be further revised in the light of the discussion which had taken place, and such further consultations with governments and experts as the UNICEF Secretariat might undertake. The Chairman drew attention to the fact that expansion into a new field of activity would make it necessary to

for UNCTAD to equip itself adequately, for its role was not only to provide material support but also, to an increasing degree, to assist and advise governments. In conclusion, the Chairman observed, that the discussion had served to emphasize the highly complex nature of the problem and had made it clear that to do its part adequately UNCTAD itself would need additional financial resources and expertise.