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FOR INFORMATION

FOLLOW-UP TO THE MULTI-DONOR EVALUATION OF UNICEF
Towards a general programme strategy for UNICEF

SUMMARY

The present report supplements the information provided in document E/ICEF/1995/6, "Follow-up to the multi-donor evaluation of UNICEF: general programme strategy". It briefly describes the main intervention strategies applied in country programmes to achieve the objectives of UNICEF. It also summarizes the criteria used in adapting these general strategies to country situations, indicates how the strategies will be applied in country programmes and lists the operational measures that have been undertaken or are under way to help clarify the implications of the evaluation report and apply its recommendations to programmes.

Introduction

1. As the lead agency for children in the United Nations system, UNICEF derives guidance for its programmes from: (a) its basic mandate; (b) the Convention on the Rights of the Child; (c) overall goals and priorities for children that have been articulated by the World Summit for Children and endorsed by the Executive Board; (d) technical consensus regarding needs and strategies; and (e) analyses of country situations and the complementary role of UNICEF by the major actors in a particular area. All of these factors constitute the framework for defining the scope and objectives of UNICEF programmes.

The key intervention strategies

2. UNICEF has developed and applied to programmes a range of strategic approaches to achieve its overall objectives as they are defined and elaborated in specific country contexts. The medium-term plan for the period 1992-1995 (E/ICEF/1993/3) described 12 strategic approaches, many of which were applicable to individual country programmes. The medium-term plan for the period 1994-1997 (E/ICEF/1994/3 and Corr.1) reiterated these approaches under the headings "policies and priorities" and "instruments" for programming.

3. The multi-donor evaluation found that these "strategy components" were: (a) a mixture of objectives, strategies and planning instruments; and (b) too diverse and numerous and, as a result, could justify almost any intervention at the country level. The report went on to identify three broad "intervention strategies" which covered the bulk of UNICEF programme activities:

- (a) Support to the delivery of specific social services aimed at "going to scale";
- (b) Capacity-building for sustained programme delivery;
- (c) Empowerment of target group members.

4. The Executive Board, recognizing the importance of advocacy and social mobilization in achieving the goals for children as well as the considerable success of UNICEF in this area, decided to add "advocacy" to the list of the main intervention strategies.

5. The evaluation concluded (a) that over the past decade, UNICEF has been placing "increasing emphasis" on support to public service delivery aimed at achievement of global goals; (b) that UNICEF support to capacity-building so far has been limited; and (c) that the use of the strategy of empowerment has been mainly in the form of advocacy and alliance-building rather than in the direct empowerment of children and women to solve their own problems through organization, access to resources and participation in decision-making.

6. The evaluation recognizes that the three intervention strategies are "not mutually exclusive". In illustrating the point, the report says that "support to the delivery of public services should be organized so as to promote capacity-building and empowerment of the beneficiaries". 1/ The report then attempts to relate individual strategies with different programme objectives or outcome in the following way:

(a) Service delivery meets basic needs of children;

(b) Building capacity contributes to meeting basic needs and guaranteeing human rights of children;

(c) Empowerment of children and women enables them to meet their basic needs and protect their rights.

7. The three strategies are then presented as "alternative, but not mutually exclusive, approaches". In line with the "alternative approaches" argument, the report urges that the Executive Board indicate the appropriate balance between fulfilment of basic needs and guaranteeing of the broader human rights of children and women in UNICEF programmes. Because, the report argues, "if UNICEF is to address the structural problems facing the target group, there would be a need for the organization to move from support to service delivery towards the capacity-building and empowerment strategies". 2/

8. As the secretariat noted both in its interaction with the evaluation team and in discussions with the Executive Board, UNICEF experience shows that the strategies are complementary to each other and mutually supportive, rather than alternatives. As the report itself mentions when it attempts to relate the strategies to programme objectives, the objectives of empowerment and capacity-building strategies subsume those of service delivery. In other words, the objectives of empowerment and capacity-building cannot be achieved without adequate provisions for services.

9. The secretariat fully agrees with the following conclusions of the evaluation report that:

(a) Selecting the most appropriate mixture of interventions is a political choice on the part of the country;

(b) The strategy mix at country levels must be decided within the framework of the country programming process;

(c) The final choice of strategy must be made explicit in the design of UNICEF-supported programmes in individual countries.

10. The secretariat also agrees that the mix and balance of intervention strategies in a country should arise from the assessment of needs and opportunities for action based on the country situation analysis, and should be explained clearly in the country programme recommendation. The secretariat further agrees that the objectives, activities and specific strategies related to capacity-building for sustainable and effective social services and empowerment of programme beneficiaries should receive greater attention than in

the past in the design and implementation of UNICEF programmes. The recent empirical trends in this regard and measures undertaken or contemplated to improve strategy formulation are described in paragraphs 14-15 below.

Determinants of strategies at the country level

11. For UNICEF, the country programme is the mechanism for the development and implementation of cooperation activities. Global goals become implementable and the general programming strategies become relevant and applicable when they are adapted to country circumstances. The secretariat agrees fully with the following criteria identified in the evaluation report for determining the mix and balance of programme strategies in a country programme:

(a) Needs in the country at a given time. These needs are identified by the analysis of the situation of children and women, which is the first step in developing a UNICEF country programme;

(b) The capacities of potential partner organizations. The strengths and capacities of other external donors, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other groups willing to contribute to improving the well-being of children need to be assessed and their contribution mobilized. The national Government will have the lead role in this effort and UNICEF will support the national effort;

(c) Activities of other development actors and donors. The role and priorities of UNICEF are determined by the possibility of complementing the work of other actors. This ensures that the limited resources and capacities of UNICEF are put to optimal use;

(d) Sectoral and programme-specific differences. The characteristics of the programme of cooperation are determined by the state of development of a country's social service infrastructure, as well as its social, cultural and ecological specificities and specific problems;

(e) Opportunities and constraints of cross-cultural and integrated approaches. Using these approaches depends on the political and administrative environment, institutional capacities and the national commitment to "people-centred" development.

12. The Executive Board has reaffirmed the lead role of the Government of the recipient country in the formulation of its country programme and in the coordination of external assistance in order to integrate this assistance into the national development process (E/ICEF/1994/13, decision 1994/A/8).

13. The evaluation has helped UNICEF to strengthen the national role in the country programme development process. It also has raised awareness of both headquarters and field staff of the criteria for making programme strategies responsive to national circumstances.

Application of strategies in programmes

14. The evaluations's analysis and the issues it raises have prompted UNICEF to be more critical of and analytical about its programme strategies. For example, country programme recommendations specify how the strategies are articulated. The ways in which a balance is struck among the strategies are summarized below:

(a) An emphasis on the catalytic role of UNICEF in the improvement and expansion of essential social services for children and women. External resources in general and UNICEF resources in particular provide only a fraction of the funds actually needed or devoted to significant expansion of social services. The explicit adoption of social goals set by the World Summit for Children has led UNICEF to examine critically its contribution to achieving the major expansion of services required to reach universal targets or large-scale coverage in services. As a result, UNICEF cooperation increasingly has shifted

to such areas as demonstrations and trials, technical assistance for management and quality improvement, improvement of monitoring and management information system, support for planning, and encouraging approaches for sustainable and effective services. Accordingly, UNICEF will emphasize further in its support for service delivery through the following measures:

- (i) Disparity reduction, with disaggregated analysis of the situation of the deprived populations, giving them priority in the expansion of services and adapting services to their circumstances;
 - (ii) Cost-effective approaches which will make expansion of services and quality improvement financially sustainable;
 - (iii) Mobilizing and making better use of new resources by fostering partnerships between Governments, communities, the private sector, NGOs and households and encouraging them to share responsibilities;
 - (iv) Advocacy for universal provision of services, disparity reduction and new approaches to management and resource mobilization;
 - (v) Experience exchanges, both internationally and within countries, to promote and share lessons learned from successful and innovative experiences in the expansion and improvement of services;
- (b) Greater attention to capacity-building for sustainable and efficient services. Universal, sustainable and efficient access to essential services requires enhanced capacities at different levels, from households and communities to government ministries. The findings of the evaluation report have prompted UNICEF to pay increasing attention to sectoral and cross-sectoral capacity-building in countries through the following activities:

- (i) Short-term training programmes, workshops and seminars at different levels for improvement of skills and technical competencies;
 - (ii) Increasing support to national policy analysis and development, particularly in the context of the goals for the decade and national programmes of action;
 - (iii) Management support for implementation at different levels with technical assistance and sharing of experiences;
 - (iv) Encouraging structures and processes for public participation by communities and at other levels in the areas of operations, maintenance, setting of priorities, planning and monitoring of programmes;
 - (v) Promoting technical, managerial and institutional sustainability of programmes;
 - (vi) Advocacy to promote national commitment to decentralization, subnational capacity-building and greater public participation;
- (c) Empowerment of programme participants and beneficiaries. Empowerment has been seen both as an important dimension of service delivery services and capacity-building and as a general concern in UNICEF programmes. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasizes the rights of children to survival, protection and development as well as their right to participate in the decision-making process affecting their well-being, has lent special significance to empowerment of beneficiaries as a feature of UNICEF programmes. This significance will be reflected in the following activities and approaches:

- (i) Support for enhancing the information, knowledge and skills of beneficiaries;

- (ii) Promoting the organization of targets and increased public participation in the planning, management and monitoring of programmes;
- (iii) Alliances with institutions and organizations which can represent the interests of the beneficiaries;
- (iv) Special attention to the empowerment of women through various measures such as better participation in social services, promoting positive societal values regarding the status of women, discouraging gender stereotyping and encouraging women's self-help organizations;
- (v) Advocacy and social mobilization pertaining to the human rights of children and women, participatory approaches and public accountability of social programmes;

(d) Advocacy in support of the above-mentioned intervention strategies. Advocacy and social mobilization have figured in each of the strategies described above. In addition, consensus-building, mobilization, motivation and orientation of key stakeholders at all levels and in different sectors of society for greater commitment to meeting the needs of children and women have been important feature of UNICEF programmes in the last decade. The World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide a wide scope for advocacy and social mobilization. The possibilities for advocacy in country programmes are broader and more comprehensive than direct financial and technical assistance for programme activities because UNICEF resources for such assistance are very limited compared to the country's needs.

15. Lessons learned from these trends and the experience of articulating strategies in country programmes will be reflected in a series of reports on sectoral programme policies and strategies to be presented to the Executive Board in 1995 and 1996 (see paragraph 18 below).

Operational measures to implement strategies

16. Since the Executive Board's initial consideration of the evaluation report in 1993, UNICEF has continued to examine the implications of the report's conclusions and recommendations and has taken various steps to clarify these implications and apply the recommendations to programming. This process is ongoing, but the measures taken to date are described below.

17. Instructions regarding programming include:

(a) An Executive Directive (CF/EXD/1993-007) issued immediately after the evaluation report was considered by the Executive Board, which provides general guidance on applying the evaluation's recommendations to the preparation and implementation of country programmes and to monitoring and evaluation;

(b) A Programme Directive (CF/PD/PRO/94-005) issued early in 1994, which contains guidelines for preparing country programme submissions to the Executive Board. These guidelines stress the importance of explaining the mix and choice of strategies in country programmes and draws attention to various strategy issues;

(c) In the context of determining and implementing the mid-decade goals, a "10-point test of sustainable programming" was articulated. Local capacity-building, the promotion of self-reliance and participation by community groups were identified as important characteristics of sustainable programmes;

(d) Revision of Book D of the Policy and Procedure Manual (Programme Operations), which is expected to be completed in 1995. This detailed compilation of instructions will include in a more formal way guidelines on strategy development and the mix and balance of strategies in country programmes.

18. Preparation of sectoral policy and strategy papers. In 1995, the secretariat will present to the Executive Board policy reviews on programme policies and strategies in the major areas health, education, water supply and environmental sanitation and emergency operations. A policy and strategy paper on children in especially difficult circumstances will be presented to the Board in 1996. These papers, together with the Executive Board's recommendations thereon, will indicate the policy and strategy for programming in each of the four areas. The choice and combination of strategies discussed in the present report will be addressed in each of the sectoral reports. Each report will stress the importance of a catalytic role for UNICEF in the expansion of essential social services that reach all children, increased attention in programmes to national capacity-building and empowerment, advocacy in support of these strategies and synergy among the strategic interventions.

19. Organizational and staffing measures. The evaluation report mentioned various organizational and staffing implications of a new configuration of programme strategies, especially a greater emphasis on capacity-building and empowerment. The nature of the partnership and interaction of UNICEF with Governments and other actors in a country, coordination with organizations in the United Nations system, the respective roles of headquarters and field offices, governance by the Executive Board and the required profile and skills of staff all would be affected by the shift in the balance of strategies, as the report pointed out. For instance, with an emphasis on the development of national capacities, programmes would have a higher degree of national specificity, requiring expertise in institutional development. A focus on the empowerment of programme beneficiaries puts a premium on the national capacity to analyse structural constraints to social justice and social development and to conduct dialogue on social policies, development priorities and rights of children and women with national authorities.

20. The profile and capacity of staff and their deployment at headquarters and regional or national offices so as to meet the challenges of the decade and beyond are of great concern to UNICEF management. The management study has discussed these issues and has made a number of pertinent recommendations. In the course of reviewing and implementing the management study, organizational and personnel issues will receive systematic attention to ensure that UNICEF is well equipped to implement the strategies discussed in the present report.

21. Monitoring and evaluation activities. Guidelines for incorporating appropriate monitoring and evaluation components into country programmes have been provided to field offices in an Executive Directive issued in 1993 (CF/EXD/1993-006). Other tasks that will require continuing attention are:

(a) Assessment of the experience of strategy development and the application of the choice and balance of strategies in country programmes;

(b) Assessment of the programmatic consequences and outcome of the new strategic emphases;

(c) Assistance to countries to develop national capacities for managing, conducting and using monitoring and evaluation activities to enhance the effectiveness of programmes;

(d) Support for the development of appropriate methods and models for monitoring and evaluation in order to assess capacity-building and empowerment.

22. A vigorous process of clarifying programme strategies, incorporating them into country programmes and into the overall priorities of UNICEF, and searching for ways to implement them effectively has been put in place following the multi-donor evaluation report. The accumulated results of this effort will be reflected in the medium-term plan for the period 1996-1999, which will be presented to the Executive Board in 1996.

Notes

1/ E/ICEF/1993/CRP.7, p.iii.

2/ Strategic Choices for UNICEF: Service Delivery, Capacity Building, Empowerment. Synthesis report of an evaluation of UNICEF commissioned by the Governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark and Switzerland, 1992, p. 157.
