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Programme Committee

Recommendation of the Executive Director for an Apportionment
SYRIA
Maternal and Child Welfare - School Health and Nutrition

1. The Administration recommends an apportionment of \$49,000 to Syria to assist in a two-year project for the development and expansion of school feeding and school health services in which training of school personnel, community participation and health and nutritional education of the public would be important elements. UNICEF would provide:
 - a) dried skim milk, fish liver oil and stoves for school feeding in 240 primary schools to benefit 10,000 children in 1956 and 30,000 in 1957;
 - b) basic health equipment for school clinics to extend school health services to fifty additional schools;
 - c) seeds and hand pumps for school garden projects in fifty rural agricultural schools; and
 - d) transport for coordinated supervision of the various services.
2. The matching commitments of the Government for the two-year period are estimated at the equivalent of \$185,000 for the provision of personnel, equipment and utensils for the school feeding programme, vehicles for supervisory and inspection work and miscellaneous facilities and services.
3. This programme is based in part on studies by experts of the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs, FAO and WHO. FAO and WHO will assist with technical advice during the implementation of the programme.
4. The Board has previously apportioned a total of \$70,000 to Syria for maternal and child welfare out of which provision has been made for equipment for health centres and dispensaries, drugs and diet supplements, laboratory / equipment...

equipment, transport and equipment for the pediatric and maternity wards of two large hospitals. (E/ICEF/178/Rev. 1, para. 71 and E/ICEF/212, para. 402). A description of the public health organization and health services in Syria was presented to the Board in connexion with earlier recommendations. (E/ICEF/R.156 and E/ICEF/R.382).

5. Some notes on educational facilities, school health services and a scheme for primary rural agricultural schools, which the Government has been developing since 1948, are presented in Annex I to this document.

The Problem of Child Nutrition

6. A study made by the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs in 1953^{a/} found a large wastage of life among young children due in considerable measure to poor nutrition and recommended further study of the value of local foods, nutrition education and a school feeding programme. The state of health and nutrition among primary school children in Syria was more recently examined by an FAO/WHO team which visited Syria in March 1955. This team in its report stressed the sound agricultural potentialities of the country and concluded that the greatest need was for nutritional education and improvement of the food habits of the people. Deficiencies of nutrition are particularly evident in rural areas where cereals predominate in the diet, with minor amounts of pulses and milk products. Pre-school groups are particularly vulnerable and show a high mortality rate caused by poor nutrition. The FAO/WHO team suggested that a sound nutrition scheme be linked with school gardening in order to teach children the "hows and whys" of producing and consuming protective foods which they would grow on their own farms later on.

7. Financial limitations have in the past prevented the Government from carrying out recommendations and plans for school feeding programmes and nutritional education, and have curtailed school health services. The proposal now presented would make it possible for the Government to proceed with three parts of its overall plan for expanding and improving school services: school feeding, school health and school gardens.

^{a/} "Study of Services for Children in Syria" by G. Chesters, ST/TAA.J.Syria, 13 July 1954

Plan of Operations

8. Responsibility for school health and nutritional services will be carried by the Directorate of School Health. As the work develops eighteen full-time supervisors (two for each Mohafazat or province) will be appointed to work with the school medical officers and to supervise the implementation of the programme. One vehicle will be allotted to each of the nine Mohafazats to be used by the senior medical officer and two school health supervisors responsible for regular routine duties and supervision of the programme in each province. For the first two-year phase, UNICEF would provide three vehicles and the Government would provide the remainder.

Community Participation and Public Education

9. An effort will be made to enlist all possible municipal, communal and private and voluntary participation and interest in order to extend the services as broadly as possible throughout the country and eventually to consolidate these services on a permanent basis. An educational campaign will be undertaken to acquaint the public with the programme and with its long-range objectives.

School Services Committees

10. With the assistance of the programme supervisors, school services committees will be constituted in each of the towns and villages where the services are to be carried out. Each committee will comprise the head of the municipality or the "Mukhtar", one or more representatives of the parents and a representative of the Ministry of Education who may be the school headmaster in villages where no other representative of the Ministry is permanently available. These committees will take an active part in the development of school services and will work to secure at the town and village level an increased public interest and participation for the constant promotion and improvement of school services.

Training of Staff

11. Medical officers appointed for school health services and the school health supervisors will be required to undertake special training courses organized by the School Health Directorate on all the various aspects of school services including health and nutrition, the scope, mechanics and long-range objectives of the programme. The School Health Directorate will expand its curriculum for summer courses for school health assistants so that instruction is sufficiently comprehensive to cover all the services involved. Conferences will also be held before the start of each school year where school personnel connected with the work of the services will receive specific guidance on the objectives and obligations of the programme.

Three Part Proposal

12. The project which UNICEF is asked to assist falls into the three parts described below. The supplies and equipment which UNICEF would provide (See para. 13 below) would be for the two-year period 1956-1957.

- a) School Feeding and Nutrition Education: UNICEF would provide 288 tons of skim milk powder and forty tons of fish liver oil to provide daily supplementary rations for 180 days per year to 10,000 primary school children in eighty schools during the school year 1955-56 and to 30,000 children in 160 schools during the school year 1956-57. Two hundred and forty kerosene stoves would also be provided by UNICEF for the preparation of school meals. A regular mid-session meal will be provided to school children each school day consisting of locally produced protein and vitamin foods, including fruits and vegetables and sugar, in addition to the UNICEF ration of milk. The meals will vary according to the types of food which are available locally and will be planned in accordance with a basic nutrition programme established by the Director of the School Health Services with the assistance of FAO. Utensils and other kitchen equipment will be provided by the Government.

During the 1955-56 school year the feeding programme will be carried out in the Mohafazats of Sweida, Dera'a and Damascus; in 1956-57 it will be extended to Homs, Hama and Lattakia. The possibility of developing

/the programme...

the programme in one or more of the three remaining provinces will be considered later, dependent in part upon the success of operations in the other provinces.

Courses in nutritional education which are now given in the teachers' training schools and in primary and secondary schools will be re-oriented with the help of FAO and with special emphasis on the practical considerations derived from implementation of the school feeding programme.

- b) School Health Services: The Government proposes to add new technical services to the existing school health programme and to expand and improve these services so that more primary schools may benefit. To assist in this project, UNICEF would provide fifty sets of basic health equipment, comprising first aid kits, weighing scales with measuring rods, charts for testing eyesight and simple diagnostic equipment.

The initial aim of the school health service is to detect and remedy abnormalities and provide treatment for minor ailments which would interfere with schooling or be detrimental to health. Emphasis in the expanded service will be placed upon: school entry examination, periodic re-examination, maintenance of basic health records, including progressive height and weight records for each school child, and adequate provision of treatment services.

The School Health Directorate plans in 1956 to increase to seventy the number of part-time medical officers from the 38 employed at present. The number of trained school health assistants is expected to be doubled in 1956 and the number of clinics available for school children will be increased accordingly. Until health services are more extensively developed in the country so that children could be referred to local health units for treatment and follow-up, the School Health Directorate plans to open school dispensaries in all large localities on the basis of one dispensary per ten schools. Ten such dispensaries have already been established in Damascus and four in Homs.

In rural, less populous areas, the school health assistant and/or medical officer will be personally responsible for ensuring adequate

/follow-up action

follow-up action on all cases requiring medical assistance. Where appropriate such assistance will be provided free at the nearest government dispensary; alternatively, suitable arrangements will be made, which the School Health Directorate will subsidize as necessary, to ensure that required treatment is given.

As in the case of the school feeding programme, the school health service will be developed progressively, concentrating upon three selected Mohafazats in the first year. On the basis of further experience, the programme will be expanded in relation to the availability of trained personnel and supervisors. Particular attention will be given to the coordination of the service with the development of other rural health work. Such coordination will also be developed in connexion with current mass health activities in appropriate fields, for example the mycosis control campaign in which UNICEF is assisting (see document E/ICEF/L.489) and the BCG vaccination and mass-radiography schemes being developed by the Ministry of Health.

As a further adjunct to its programme of school services, the Government plans to install safe drinking water supplies, sanitary privies, septic tanks and wash basins in schools. In the larger schools, where possible, shower facilities will be provided. Community participation will be enlisted for this phase of the programme which will also be supervised by the School Health Directorate with the cooperation of the Ministry of Engineering and Construction. The Government will encourage and extend all possible assistance so that such environmental sanitation schemes will be duplicated in the areas surrounding the schools.

- c) Primary School Gardens. The purpose of this part of the project will be to promote the development of school gardens in fifty primary agricultural schools (see Annex I, paras. 4 and 5) in order to give practical training to children in the production of protective foods. Foods grown in the school gardens will be utilized to the maximum extent in developing the school feeding programme, and the feeding programme outlined above will gradually be extended to the primary agricultural schools.

Government Commitments and Matching

15. The Government's matching commitments for the first two-year period of this programme are estimated as SE 692,000 (US\$185,000) and would include the following:

Syrian Pounds

a) Personnel

Salaries of additional part-time medical officers; full-time supervisors, drivers and school servants as may be required.

200,000

b) Equipment and Supplies

i) For the School Feeding Programme

240 heating pots with a corresponding number of pitchers, ladles, etc.

12,000

30,000 cups

6,000

Internal transport of milk; cost of local foods including sugar, fresh fruits and vegetables, etc.

250,000

ii) For Rural Agricultural Schools

Building materials, water ducts, etc. 50,000

c) Transport

3 station wagons for supervisory and medical inspection work. (The Government would later provide an additional three vehicles)

24,000

d) Storage space, Fuel, Spare Parts for Vehicles, Maintenance, etc.

50,000

Total estimated cost

SE 692,000

Equivalent to US\$ 185,000

/Target Time Schedule

Target Time Schedule

16. By October 1955 Recruitment of six supervisors, training of school teachers and other personnel and implementation of first phase of the programme.
- By December 1955 Government to complete financial and administrative provisions and procurement of equipment for feeding programme. UNICEF to make first delivery of milk, fish liver oil and stoves.
- January 1955 School feeding programme to begin.
- January-March 1956 UNICEF delivery of equipment for school clinics, pumps, seeds and one vehicle. Government recruitment of additional medical staff.
- June-July 1956 UNICEF delivery of additional milk, fish liver oil, pumps, seeds and two vehicles.
- August 1956 Government recruitment and initiation course for six additional supervisors, conference for school principals and teachers. Recruitment of additional medical supplies, procurement of additional vehicles, financial and other arrangement for local food contributions and provision of additional equipment for feeding programme.
- September 1956 Implementation of second phase of school feeding programme and school garden programme.

ANNEX I

Syria - Some Background Information on Education,
School Health Services and Primary
Agricultural Schools

Primary Education and School Services in Syria

1. The Syrian Government is making considerable progress towards eliminating illiteracy and generally promoting the standard of education throughout the country. Efforts are being made to develop at the same time a school health services programme and to train increased numbers of children in the production and use of protective foods and the elements of environmental sanitation.

2. Primary education is, by law, compulsory and free in Syria. There are 2,500 government primary schools and 304 run by private and voluntary organizations. The Government thus shoulders almost the entire burden of the country's primary education. This extensive network provides facilities for 75 to 80 per cent of the country's children of school age, which is a relatively high standard for the Eastern Mediterranean area. The public interest in education is great and the demand is such that in some localities morning and afternoon sessions for different shifts of students and teaching staff had to be organized in the same buildings. Special facilities are provided for the education of Bedouin children as part of the Government's overall scheme for the settlement of this section of the population. To meet these obligations, the Ministry of Education was granted some 18 per cent of the national budget in 1954 which was increased to 20 per cent in 1955.

School Health Services

3. School children were serviced irregularly by medical officers of the Ministry of Health until 1954 when the increased budget of the Ministry of Education permitted the creation of a separate School Health Department under that Ministry, consisting of one School Health Director assisted (for the 1954-55 academic year) by 38 medical officers working on a part-time basis in the nine Mohafazats (provinces) of the country. In addition, a special summer course in school health services was organized for a number of School Health Assistants recruited from among primary school teachers. Forty-eight such School Health Assistants are now available in various parts of the country. Consultation clinics for school children have been established and these Assistants work under the general guidance of the responsible medical officers in providing a simple Health Service for local school children. The School Health Directorate is much concerned to develop this service qualitatively as well as in extent. A Manual on School Health is now under printing by the Government press and increasing attention is being given to improved hygiene and sanitation in all schools.

Primary Rural Agricultural Schools

4. The scheme for primary rural agricultural schools was started in 1948 as a fundamental step in the Government's policy for the development of rural areas. The premises for such schools and the land for their gardens (usually varying in size between 5,000 and 30,000 square metres) are provided by the rural community which often also contributes labour for the digging of water wells, the setting of fences, etc. The Government provides the teaching staff, furniture, tools, insecticides and fertilizers as well as any needed demonstration equipment. Theoretical and practical agricultural education is given to the fourth and fifth grades, i.e. to children 10-15 years old, who learn to handle such simple tools as they would find in their home farms and with which they are taught to plant and care for new and/or improved types of vegetables, pulses, fruits and cereals chosen with particular attention to the needs of the area in which the school is situated. Keeping of bees and small stock is frequently also included in the programme, and the possibility of developing fish ponds with the help of the FAO Expert on Fisheries assisting the Ministry of Agriculture is being considered. Produce of the school garden is used for consumption by the students and part of it is sold locally, the proceeds being used for the benefit of the school.

5. The number of primary rural agricultural schools in Syria totalled 147 during the academic year 1954/55. The Government's policy is to introduce progressively such agricultural instruction into all primary schools in rural areas, the only limiting factor in this process being the availability of qualified agricultural teachers. The present graduation is at the rate of forty to fifty each year after a three-year course given in two training schools specially established for primary rural agricultural school teachers. Three additional training schools of this sort will be established in the next two years. The value of this scheme to make the children aware of the importance of the land and teach them at an early age methods of good farming and the best crops, is increasingly appreciated among rural communities, who support it whole-heartedly. The popularity of the scheme thus makes the primary rural agricultural school a particularly valuable channel for conveying to the rural communities modern ideas in the health, sanitation, nutrition and social fields.