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Intervention by Ms. Karin Lokhaug  
Deputy Executive Director (Operations) of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

to the

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)  
panel discussion on  
The Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000

New York  
16 February 1989

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The Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000

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I am very pleased to participate in this panel discussion on the significance of the "Global Strategy for Shelter" to economic and social development efforts.

The Global Shelter Strategy to the Year 2000, as adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements in 1988, provides a major contribution to planning an international development strategy (IDS) for the Fourth Development Decade (DD4). By emphasizing the human dimension of development; by setting realistic targets which encompass all peoples, regardless of income, gender, age and physical capacity; and by outlining practical steps to reach those targets, the Strategy is at the vanguard of international development planning.

The "enabling" approach defined in the Shelter Strategy is particularly to be commended, with the two main challenges singled out in its context: how to deal with problems posed by very large numbers of poor people and how to provide for the effective autonomy of community-based groups.

The Shelter Strategy approach parallels very closely UNICEF's own activities with children, and for good reason. We deal, really, with the same people - the world's poor and most vulnerable. And in order to make an impact at the scale that this implies, we must both foster community participation through social mobilization, and we must emphasize low-cost solutions that apply to conditions of the most disadvantaged. This view is presented in UNICEF's own report to the 1989 Executive Board, "Strategies for Children and Development in the 1990s", which states:

"Increased use of low-cost, high-impact techniques of proven effectiveness, combined with massive social mobilization and an emphasis on reaching the heretofore unreached promises to make it possible for the goals for children in the 1990s to be reached and hopefully surpassed."

In fact, Habitat's work and that of UNICEF not only have points of intersection, such as water and sanitation, but more importantly, are mutually reinforcing. Efforts to develop capacity in primary health care, basic education and adequate shelter, when approached simultaneously, are greater than the sum of the parts, and contribute synergistically to a coherent development strategy.

UNICEF's role in this collaborative effort can best be understood in light of three factors. First, UNICEF's global objectives related to improving the health and welfare of children and women can only be realistically approached in conjunction with parallel efforts to focus institutional, financial and technological resources toward solving the problems of the poor. This is the reality which gave rise to UNICEF's work which has come to be called "adjustment with a human face" - an approach which advocates restructuring of public expenditure such that basic human services are assured during periods of economic constraint, such as during a structural adjustment process. The international community has reached rhetorical consensus that cut-backs and reductions to the social sector which do not ensure provision of basic human services to the poor become counter-productive to the economic development of a country. There is also, of course, a political cost for ignoring the needs of the poor. And these are in addition to the real issue - the tragic toll in human suffering. This rhetorical consensus, however, has yet to be fully translated into an effective response.

In this context the "enabling" approach of the Shelter Strategy and the priority given to the poor and most disadvantaged, which are at the core of UNICEF concern, provide the framework for global and country level complementary efforts.

The second factor which defines UNICEF's role in the international development strategy for the next decade, of which the shelter strategy has a main part, is the consistent support which the organization continues to give to country programmes through a basic services strategy. This implies low-cost interventions that maximize co-ordination of government and private efforts aimed at sustainable service delivery. UNICEF's Executive Board adopted a basic services approach in 1976, and since then experience has shown that mutually supportive intersectorial strategies are effective.

UNICEF has taken seriously the 1987 recommendation by its Executive Board to:

"Advocate and support the systematic linking of social planning and development, and the incorporation of urban basic services in physical development projects undertaken by governments, such as sites-and-services, slum upgrading, water and sanitation, post-disaster settlements, and infrastructure for small and medium-sized towns and cities."

Countries in which UNICEF has a long tradition of contributing assistance with software in conjunction with other agencies' hardware interventions for the poor include: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Peru and Sri Lanka.

Full integration of an inter-sectoral basic services approach in the city - i.e., in the formal school system, formal water and sanitation services, and the formal health system - remains a goal which is yet-to-be-reached. But it is a very reachable goal, and tantalizing because its potential impact is so great. In this respect, UNICEF recognizes the shelter strategy as a new force in focusing institutional resources toward approaches which surpass the traditional.

The third aspect of UNICEF's contribution to the IDS lies in the organization's experience in the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Because of its similarity to the Shelter Strategy, the Water Decade can perhaps indicate what kind of realistic advances we are looking toward.

A decade ago, people in all parts of the globe somehow dealt with obtaining water, just as today, people everywhere seek some form of shelter. International attention to the water problem created a new international sharing of knowledge and a new scope of awareness of solutions that are effective at providing adequate clean drinking water and sanitation. Gains in the water decade are seen in the fact that the technical, social and economic aspects necessary for proper community-based management and maintenance are now known in many more countries. The challenge is for progress in human resource development, including institutional capacity-building for governmental departments. UNICEF sees the fact that today, low-cost technologies are applied almost exclusively, as a major accomplishment.

UNICEF highly appreciates the fact that water and sanitation linkage to child survival and development activities contributed significantly to saving the lives of one million children from dehydration due to diarrhoeal diseases - during the last 12 months alone.

Improved shelter, which represents the most immediate environment of a young child, promises an extremely significant impact on overall child health, development and safety, and hence, attainment of UNICEF global objectives. Similarly, UNICEF's experience in social mobilization to reach the unreached with primary health care indicates that a tremendous resource of "people power" is ready to be tapped for new social benefits. UNICEF often speaks of a "grand alliance for children" which has formed throughout the world among non-governmental organizations, religious groups, government agencies, the private sector, and more. They reach and/or comprise the same target group which the Shelter Strategy aims to serve. This experience will perhaps offer entry points for shelter interventions which cannot be carried out on a large scale without local level participation and mobilization of both public and private change agents.

Mr. Chairman:

The activities of Habitat, UNICEF, the UNDP and others can be strongly reinforcing, particularly if molded together for an international mobilization. The Shelter for the Year 2000 exercise is a particularly prescient example of the kind of goal-setting approach that can create such an international mobilization. In preparing for the DD4, all of us have before us an important task to unify these goal-setting exercises.

Thank you.