

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1993-0035

Address by James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
Fifth Meeting to Review and Evaluate Follow-up to
Mexico's National Programme of Action

Los Pinos Presidential Residence
Mexico City, Mexico
6 July 1993



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01129**

ExRI Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1993-0035**

Fifth [5th] Meeting to Review and Evaluate Follow-up to Me
Date Label Printed 21-Aug-2002

cover + 5 pp + 0b



United Nations Children's Fund Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia
Детский Фонд Организации Объединенных Наций 联合国儿童基金会 منظمة الأمم المتحدة للطفولة

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Mr. President, I am both delighted and honoured to be here with you and your distinguished colleagues for the fifth in the series of remarkable meetings to evaluate follow-up to Mexico's national programme of action (NPA). These meetings are vitally important to all Mexicans; they also set a worldwide standard for political leadership.

Our meeting today takes on additional significance due to the presence of mayors from important cities throughout the world, on the occasion of the Second International Colloquium of "Mayors, Defenders of Children". We trust that the example of Mexico's leadership will inspire them to draft and implement programmes of action in their own cities.

As a result of the changes brought about by the end of the Cold War and the upsurge of democracy in recent years, political leaders everywhere are increasingly confronted with the need to articulate and integrate social and economic policies in a new style of development that is more human-centered -- and more effective -- than traditional approaches. This challenge is at the heart of the worldwide movement to translate the goals of the World Summit for Children into realities at the national, state and municipal levels.

We are now in the second phase of the National Programmes of Action, which calls for programmes at State and municipal level, to fulfill the commitments of the World Summit for Children. Reaching the goals for children survival, protection and development by the year 2000 will require all of us to redouble efforts and to take new steps that are innovative and strategically designed to obtain the greatest results.

In this light we very much appreciate the impressive progress you have already made in implementing your National Programme of Action. I have learned about the extraordinary efforts which the States are making to formulate and implement their own programmes, and about the excellent progress being made at the municipal level.

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This translation of national priorities and targets into action plans that are relevant and doable at the State and municipal level, is, undoubtedly, one of the most complex and difficult tasks facing us. But it is the only way we can ensure success.

Over the past year, several high-level gatherings at the regional level set specific targets to be reached by mid-decade to spearhead the advance toward the year 2000 goals. These mid-decade targets naturally vary from region to region, but there is a core group of targets common to them all which was endorsed by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy and subsequently by the governing bodies of both organizations. These actions do not require huge budgets or elaborate infrastructures to carry them out; they are low-cost and, in some cases, cost-free, and they rely heavily on community action for implementation.

As you know, each time I come to Mexico to attend one of these meetings and visit different projects for children, I get so inspired by the progress you are making that I am moved to suggest ways to further accelerate the pace or specific areas that could benefit from additional top-level attention. And I must say that you, Mr. President, have consistently welcomed and publicly embraced UNICEF's friendly challenges. Today I want to discuss some of the new mid-decade goals being taken up around the world and draw out their implications for the work you are doing here in Mexico -- work that includes a series of bold intermediate goals of your own, and which requires, once again, your active leadership.

The mid-decade goals call for:

1. **Maintaining high levels of immunization:** globally, the 1995 goal is to reach and sustain at least 80 per cent coverage, but since you have already reached a remarkable 95 per cent, the goal for Mexico would be to maintain it in the coming years. Sustaining such high levels of coverage over the long haul is a tremendous challenge, for it implies making immunization a part of the country's social culture, so that every parent comes to feel a need to get the full schedule of shots for the new baby before its first birthday. It also implies reaching the hardest-to-reach, those living in remote areas or in marginal settlements. But, again, Mexico has made formidable progress to date.

On the **polio** front, Mexico has not had any cases of polio since October 1990. By maintaining high levels of coverage, you will greatly increase your chances of reaching the end of 1995 without a single case -- as the Americas strive to become the first entire region in the world to eradicate this ancient scourge.

As for **neonatal tetanus**, we believe you can virtually eliminate this disease by 1994 -- the date you've set for this goal.

On the basis of the excellent work you have done around **measles**, Mexico should be able to reach by 1994, the mid-decade goal to reduce measles deaths by 95 per cent, and surpass by at least 5 per cent the goal of a 90 per cent reduction in cases. Of course, measles epidemics are cyclical and it will take broad and sustained coverage to insure that outbreaks do not recur as they have, periodically, in the past.

2. The global 1995 goal calls for use of **oral rehydration therapy** in 80 per cent of all cases of diarrhoea to prevent lethal dehydration. Thanks to the commitment which you yourself made at last year's NPA review meeting, Mr. President, Mexico expects to reach this goal in 1994, a whole year before the world target date. We understand that a 50% reduction of child mortality due to diarrhoeal diseases has already been achieved in five States and in the Federal District. What is still needed here is a sustained effort and also a special focus on reaching isolated communities in rural areas. Your present initiative to train 4,500,000 mothers before the end of 1994 is an example of the kind of effort needed.

3. The goal for **acute respiratory infections** is to reduce by at least 20% the deaths caused by these infections among children under five. I know that Mexico is strengthening its programme to control pneumonia in particular, by empowering mothers with knowledge of how to prevent conditions leading to infection, how to recognize symptoms and when to seek professional help. By following this approach and the kind inter-sectoral cooperation you have achieved in the diarrhoeal disease control programme, you certainly should be able to achieve the mid-decade goal of a 20% reduction in mortality.

4. By the end of 1995, Mexico can **virtually eliminate deficiencies of iodine and vitamin A**. To reach these goals it will be necessary to achieve universal iodization of salt; identify high risk areas for both iodine and vitamin A deficiencies; and to distribute supplements of micronutrients to children in need.

5. Mexico's nutrition success story to date has been its **Baby and Mother Friendly Hospital Initiative**, for which the goal is: transform 100 per cent of hospitals with more than 1,000 births annually into Baby and Mother Friendly Hospitals which encourage breastfeeding. To date, more than 330 hospitals are in the process of being

transformed into Baby and Mother Friendly Hospitals. Before the end of year, 555 hospitals are expected to be included in this initiative, which will put Mexico well on its way to reach the goal. This should give a tremendous boost to breastfeeding and reverse the harmful trend toward bottle- and formula-feeding observed in recent years.

6. On the **basic education** front, Mexico is way ahead of the game. Globally, the 1995 goals are as follows:

a) reduce by a third the gender gap that existed in basic education in 1990. This appears not to be a problem in Mexico any longer.

b) reduce by one-third the gap between current primary school enrollment and the year 2000 goal of universal access -- Mexican primary school enrollment stands at 98 per cent already and I understand that plans are underway to achieve universal enrollment by the end of 1994: fully six years ahead of the global goal. In order to reach this historic milestone, I know that you will be making special efforts in the more remote rural areas of the country, and particularly among indigenous populations, where disparities currently exist in spite of the overall progress on the national level.

c) reduce by one third the gap between current levels of retention and the year 2000 goal of getting 80 per cent of all pupils to complete their primary school education -- in Mexico, the rate of retention was already 94.7 per cent in 1990; an extra effort could achieve virtually 100 per cent completion of primary school.

One additional word on education. With such high levels of enrollment and retention, Mexico is now reaching the point in the general development of primary education systems when the policy focus shifts from issues of quantity to issues of quality -- this means looking at how much learning actually takes place in schools and how relevant that learning is to the lives of the pupils, their communities and the nation as a whole. How to accurately measure learning achievement remains an open issue worldwide, but there is widespread agreement that more emphasis needs to be placed on the quality and relevance of the learning experience.

Most countries today are grappling with the need to reduce disparities and improve educational quality. Mexico can make a global contribution in this area through its active participation in the new initiative of the nine most populous developing countries to promote

education for all. I look forward to your customary leadership, President Salinas, in this important initiative and, of course, to your participation in the 9-country summit in India next December.

7. In the area of **safe drinking water supply and access to adequate sanitary facilities**, it is expected that Mexico will surpass the proposed goals in 1994, when drinking water coverage should reach 93.5% and basic sanitation coverage 60%. Special efforts would be required to provide these services to hard-to-reach areas and widely dispersed population groups.

All in all, Mexico is either well ahead of the 1995 goals already or well-positioned to reach them on, or before, schedule. You are of course faced with the real challenge of making services available in isolated rural areas which are typical of Mexico's geography. And this brings us back to the importance of community involvement for the second phase of implementing National Programmes of Action at the State and municipal level.

Mr. President, your continuing personal attention to each and every one of the mid-decade goals which represent critical areas for child health, nutrition and development, and to more and more community involvement in their implementation, will pave the way for achieving the more complex year 2000 goals.

As you know, the international community has begun preparing for the World Summit on Social Development that will take place in 1995, the year of the UN's 50th anniversary. This promises to be an historic gathering, following on the World Summit for Children, the Earth Summit, and the forthcoming UN conferences on population and women. The World Social Summit will be an excellent opportunity to take stock of efforts made for the world's children through mid-decade. Based on our review today of Mexico's outstanding progress towards the year 2000 goals, it is certain that Mexico's report at the World Social Summit will be to your credit.

As you yourself indicated during our first evaluation and monitoring meeting, "Children are the center of modern Mexico's political agenda". Indeed they are, as I personally witness every time I return. Your example -- which UNICEF loudly proclaims worldwide -- will help make children the center of the political agenda for leaders throughout the world. I thank you for this, on behalf of UNICEF, and personally, and in the name of the children of the 21st century.