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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

THE EXPANSION OF BASIC SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN  
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund,  
submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 3408 (XXX)

Introduction

1. In response to General Assembly resolution 3408 (XXX) and on the basis of the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) contained in document E/ICEF/L.1342 and Corr.1, the Executive Board of UNICEF, at its 1976 session, examined in depth the question of the expansion of basic services for children in developing countries (to be referred to henceforth as "Basic Services").
2. Basic Services represent the extension to a number of developmental activities benefiting children of precisely the same principles as those adopted by the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board of UNICEF at their 1975 sessions in connexion with the approach to be followed in meeting basic health needs in developing countries.
3. The present report outlines the concept of Basic Services, indicates the dimension of needs and describes how Basic Services are to be implemented. It also contains the text of a draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council.

The concept

4. Basic Services comprise a group of interrelated, mutually supportive activities in the development of the social infrastructure and services in the fields of maternal and child health, including family planning, safe water supply and waste disposal, production and consumption of more and better quality foods and nutrition education, measures to meet the basic educational needs of the community and the introduction of simple technologies to lighten the daily tasks of women and girls.
5. UNICEF has been providing assistance in support of activities identified as components of Basic Services. However, stress is now needed on the approach to implementation of these services on a more integrated basis, with special emphasis on the community, to ensure that the fundamental needs of children and mothers are more adequately met.
6. In a number of countries, the principles and approach advocated in respect of Basic Services are already being applied in varying degrees. However, it is important to extend considerably the application of the concept of Basic Services in order to meet the basic needs of the large number of children and their mothers who still remain unserved.
7. Basic Services represent, in essence, a broadly based endeavour to stimulate self-help and to organize human resources for investment in social and economic progress. Successfully organized as a first stage developmental operation, Basic Services afford prospects for the progress of rural and urban communities towards an improved quality of life.
8. To ensure the successful development of Basic Services, the following essential features should characterize the strategy or approach to be followed in delivering the services:
- (a) Active participation by the communities themselves;
  - (b) Involvement of communities in the identification of needs, planning and the implementation of activities taking into account local traditions, customs, mores and agrarian cycles of activity;
  - (c) The use, within the community, of suitably trained, locally selected persons, employed on a part-time or full-time basis as primary-level workers with the task of motivating the community and delivering Basic Services in the various sectors of activity;
  - (d) The engagement in the national network of social services of substantially greater numbers of auxiliary staff, with increased responsibilities, thus freeing professionals to serve as trainers and supervisors. The auxiliaries would provide the link between the national network of services and the primary-level workers

The dimension of needs

9. The magnitude of unmet basic human needs of young children in the developing countries is indicated by the following:

(a) Less than 10 per cent (203 million) of the rural population of developing countries (2,032 million) live within walking distance (10 kilometres) of a national health facility of any kind;

(b) A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) of 91 less developed countries 1/ indicates that 85 per cent of the rural population has no access to safe drinking water;

(c) WHO sources estimate that 3 per cent (approximately 10 million) of children under five years of age in developing countries suffer from severe malnutrition and a further 80 million children suffer from moderate-level malnutrition; 2/

(d) Nutrition deficiency diseases afflict large numbers of persons: goitre 400 million; anaemia 300 million; xerophthalmia 100 million; 3/

(e) In 1970 more children of school age were out of school (269 million) than in school (212 million). Projections for 1985 indicate that 375 million will be out of school compared with 350 million in school. 4/

10. Despite the progress that developing countries have made, on their own initiative and also with external support, in the development of services for children, the prospects for millions remain bleak. Despite impressive advances in the medical and other sciences and in technology, their application to meet the needs of the developing countries has been woefully inadequate.

11. Because of limited resources in terms of finances and trained manpower, it would not be possible for low-income countries to provide the services that are now required by using conventional methods. The Basic Services approach provides a feasible way of bridging this gap. It should be clearly understood that Basic Services represent an out-reach of existing services.

1/ World Health Statistics Report (Geneva, World Health Organization, 1973), vol. 26, No. II, 1973.

2/ The State of World Nutrition, WHO-NUTR. 73.1 (Geneva, 1973).

3/ Many of the same persons would be suffering from anaemia and other nutritional deficiencies; the total, therefore, should not be added. (See United Nations World Food Conference, Rome, 5-16 November 1974: The World Food Problem - Proposals for National and International Action (E/CONF.65/4).)

4/ Education, World Bank Sector Working Paper (Washington, 1974).

Costs

12. The World Bank estimates that some 900 million persons in the developing countries live in absolute or relative poverty. Of this total, 350 million represent children under 12 years of age and expectant and nursing mothers. This total will continue to rise.

13. While cost estimates of Basic Services programmes must essentially be developed at the country level it is estimated that external resources of at least 500 million dollars a year will be necessary in the years immediately ahead in support of vigorous efforts to provide coverage for significant numbers of these unserved children and mothers. These total funds would represent the aggregate of contributions from all external sources.

External assistance

14. In addition to expenditures by national and provincial governments and other local authorities, external assistance would be required for the effective launching of programmes in the under-served areas. Investment in human resources would represent a substantial proportion of the assistance required. Contributions to the training and employment of additional auxiliary and other personnel would be needed, as well as imported supplies and equipment.

15. The Basic Services concept and strategy provide guidelines for future action by UNICEF. The concept and strategy commend themselves for consideration and adoption by all agencies and authorities interested in the promotion of programmes of human development in developing countries. The resources that UNICEF might be able to allocate would be entirely inadequate to meet those requirements. Assistance for Basic Services might be made available to requesting countries from such sources as bilateral donors; the World Bank and regional development banks, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and non-governmental agencies and foundations, in accordance with their respective mandates. Technical support might be provided by the specialized agencies, by appropriate national institutions and by non-governmental agencies with the necessary expertise or with developmental experience.

16. Developing countries undertaking the establishment of Basic Services would require external assistance over a number of years for the progressive extension of these services. Potential donors should take this requirement into account in their discussions with Governments.

17. The Basic Services approach affords a new dimension for action which should be vigorously pursued by the international community.

Implementation

18. Locally selected village-level workers form the foundation of Basic Services. Personnel and institutions of the national network would provide the training and technical supervision of the village-level workers and would also provide referral services for the communities in respect of each component of the programme. In this manner relatively simple, low-cost services would be made available to cater to the basic needs of the community. Those who traditionally delivered services within the community would be encouraged to give help and instruction.

19. The nature and extent of children's needs and of the resources required to meet these needs must, of necessity, be determined at the country level by the Governments concerned. Similarly, it is for Governments to determine the goals and priorities for these programmes. However, a time-frame is needed for the provision of Basic Services to all areas where communities are generally regarded as living near or below the poverty line. A target period of 10 to 15 years is considered appropriate, depending on the size of the population to be given service coverage.

20. Communities participating in a Basic Services programme, while providing support to activities by virtue of their local knowledge, experience and skills, would also make contributions in cash or kind. The latter might include the provision of local supplies, materials and labour and the use of existing local buildings and other facilities. The communities would nominate suitable persons and assign them responsibility for delivering the simple services for which they would receive training. The community would assume responsibility for the proper conduct of activities. Basic Services are labour intensive and would therefore provide opportunities for the mobilization and productive use of resources that are abundantly available but substantially neglected, namely, human resources. Special attention would also be given to mobilizing that large proportion of the population which in many developing countries represents a still untapped reservoir of energy, potential skill and leadership for development, namely, women.

21. Experiments in development bear testimony to the ineffectiveness of trying to find piecemeal solutions by isolating multi-faceted problems. The close linkage of rural progress to the availability of public social services and the contribution they make to the whole process of development should be emphasized. Basic Services are an integral part of the development process and should feature in national development strategies.

22. At the country level, suitable machinery should be established by Governments for co-ordination of the development of Basic Services and, in turn, for the co-ordination of these services with the broader plans for national development. At the international level the participation of the international community should be co-ordinated through arrangements for regular mutual consultation and sharing of information.

23. Basic Services should be planned as an integral part of national development strategies, using to the fullest possible extent existing national mechanisms or such additional mechanisms as the Government concerned may deem it appropriate to establish.

24. The international community should take the necessary steps to ensure its effective response to Government requests for assistance in the development of Basic Services. Donor agencies, authorities and institutions would provide assistance in accordance with their respective mandates and terms of reference.

Draft resolution

25. The Executive Board of UNICEF submits to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, the following draft resolution for consideration:

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 3408 (XXX), which, inter alia, invited the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund to consider in depth the matter of Basic Services for children in developing countries,

Recognizing that the provision of Basic Services constitutes an important link in the development process,

Noting that the Basic Services concept represents the extension to a number of developmental activities benefiting children of the same principles as those adopted by the World Health Assembly at its twenty-eighth session, held at Geneva from 13 to 30 May 1975, and by the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund at its 1975 session, held in New York from 14 to 30 May, in connexion with the approach to be followed in meeting basic health needs,

Convinced that the Basic Services concept and strategy, while providing guidelines for future action by the United Nations Children's Fund, are equally appropriate for adoption by agencies and authorities concerned with the promotion of programmes for human development in developing countries,

Stressing the importance of increased international co-operation in support of Basic Services as a vital component of social and economic development,

Believing that the external assistance required to support these services should be within the capacity of the international community,

1. Urges the developing countries to incorporate the Basic Services concept and approach into their national development plans and strategies;

2. Urges the developed countries and others in a position to do so to provide, through bilateral and multilateral channels, including the United Nations Children's Fund, external assistance to supplement the efforts of developing countries in launching or expanding Basic Services benefiting children;

3. Urges the international community to recognize its responsibility for increased co-operative action to promote social and economic development through its support of Basic Services at the international and the country programming level.