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Notes

[Archives: CF/NYH/SP/SUM; Folder: S0355.] Contents: Section 1: Members of the Planning Committee - Schedule of (remaining) meetings and activities; Section 2: Schedule and Programme of the World Summit for Children; Section 3: Draft Declaration of the World Summit for Children - Draft Plan of Action; Section 4: Report of Meetings: - 1st, 2nd, 3rd Meetings of the Planning Committee - Meetings of the Working Group on Format - ~~Meetings of the Working Group on the Declaration - Statement of Agreement of the six Initiating Governments -~~

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A Global Agenda for Children Beyond Year 2000

The EXD on A Global Agenda for Children Beyond Year 2000 was issued by the Executive Director too late for consideration by the first EAP/RMT of 1998, so there has been no opportunity for a full review involving participation from all country offices, such as those carried out in other regions. However, the Regional Director did brief the February 1998 RMT on the work in progress on the Global Agenda by the Tarrytown group, and an early draft of the report was circulated. In addition to the Regional Director, several other regional staff have participated either in the deliberations of the Tarrytown group itself or in working teams on specific topics, the output of which will be considered in the final formulation of the agenda. Discussion of the Global Agenda has already been identified as a major item for the next RMT in June, 1998.

Other opportunities to discuss the proposed agenda and to receive feedback from the field have occurred during the Regional Director's recent participation in programme preview meetings in the Philippines, Thailand and DPR Korea. The response from the region has been generally favourable, and UNICEF Representatives and other partners find the emerging agenda broadly responsive to the situation in the region. In some cases, as in the new Philippines country programme's activities to address the issue of violence against women, the agenda has clearly inspired a new, forward-looking perspective on UNICEF's work.

The highlights of the Global Agenda were presented to and discussed with a cross-section of UNICEF staff attending the regional Training of Trainers Workshop on the rights-based approach to programming in April 1998. Participants found the Agenda well suited to the emerging realities of countries in the region. The following observations are derived primarily from discussion within the region focusing on the priorities and strategies for maximum achievement of the World Summit goals—the unfinished agenda, which the Executive Director has characterized as the most pressing business now at hand—while at the same time responding to newly emerging issues and seeking to position UNICEF so as to anticipate problems likely to arise over the longer term. The February 1998 RMT meeting included formal presentations and extensive discussion on proposed strategies for the remaining years of the decade that had been developed over a period of many months. Thus, what follows primarily relates to the part of the Agenda that involves the year 2000 goals, completing the tasks to which we committed ourselves at the World Summit for Children. In many parts of this discussion the linkages and implications for the longer term are obvious.

The Regional Context

In many ways the countries of East Asia and the Pacific typify the changes taking place globally, and patterns emerging or already clearly apparent in this region are likely to characterize much of the developing world in the relatively near future. In this sense, a careful analysis of trends and experiences in this region may be particularly useful in formulating UNICEF's global priorities and strategies.

Several countries in the region have, until very recently, led the world in rapid and sustained economic growth, accompanied by rising living standards and declining rates of poverty. Indicators of health and education, of access to information and modern technology and, increasingly, of public influence and participation in the processes of governance and policy formulation, have shown marked improvement in recent decades. Likewise, however, many of the less positive symptoms of rapid globalization, and largely unplanned social, economic and political change have come to prominence in a more striking fashion than in most other regions. Growing disparities between the haves and have-nots, the mainstream majority and ethnically or geographically isolated minorities, for example, have been noted in many countries. Child abuse, neglect and exploitation are on the rise everywhere, along with crime, environmental destruction and a breakdown in traditional mechanisms of social support and control.

In several large and populous countries the ongoing transformation from centrally planned and regulated economic systems to systems exposed to the vagaries and dictates of market forces has brought profound change to many millions of people, in all aspects of life. Even more strikingly, the sudden collapse of local currencies and the onset of economic crisis in many of the countries previously in the forefront of general development and social progress, has set in motion a series of closely interrelated events whose ultimate outcome is still far from clear. Already apparent, in less than a year, are rising levels of malnutrition, declining school enrolments, an increasing incidence of child labour and growing strains on the ability of families, communities and institutions to give adequate attention to the proper care and protection of children. Sincere efforts have been made in several countries to minimize the impact of budget cuts on the most critical social sectors. The extent to which affected governments can continue to support basic services at levels that made the achievements of the Asian 'economic miracle' possible, however, is still a matter of serious concern. The recent example of Indonesia shows how even the most apparently fixed and solid structures are vulnerable to abrupt and unpredictable disintegration. In this context, the emphasis of the Global Agenda on dealing with the structural causes of the violations of children's rights, good governance, the need to develop a dynamic partnership among state, civil society institutions and the private sector in the best interest of the child are seen as highly relevant for UNICEF's mission in the EAP region in the next decade.

Regional Progress in Goals and Child Rights Achievement

Progress toward achieving the mid-decade goals was very substantial in most countries of the region. On a region-wide basis the best performance at mid-decade was in primary school enrolment and immunization (96 per cent and 91 per cent, respectively, in 1995). The least satisfactory performance was in sanitation coverage, in which the regional average at mid-decade was only 34 per cent. Interestingly, these same two goals showed the most (for sanitation) and least (primary enrolment) variability among countries.

In child health, high levels of immunization coverage and successful promotion of ORT for diarrhoea, coupled with the development of sound service delivery infrastructures, have contributed to good progress in reducing infant and under-five mortality. Though maternal mortality remains unacceptably high in many countries of the region, significant reductions have been achieved in Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia. Yet even as sickness and death from these traditionally important causes have been reduced, new health problems have emerged in the form of HIV/AIDS, and resurgence of malaria. In addition, access to existing health systems, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, is increasingly threatened by budgetary constraints brought about by the current economic crisis and by the more general trends toward decentralized management and funding, privatization and cost recovery schemes. Sustaining EPI coverage and basic service delivery at levels achieved at mid-decade will remain a challenge.

Reducing malnutrition, providing adequate sanitation to all and promoting good hygiene practices have been elusive goals in the region. In all countries except China, Malaysia and Thailand moderate and severe malnutrition still affects more than 30 per cent of the young child population, and progress over the last decade has been slow. On the other hand, reduction of micronutrient deficiencies through such interventions as salt iodization and vitamin A supplementation has been generally successful.

In the light of the unfinished agenda in the areas of health, nutrition and WES which have commanded major UNICEF priority in the past two decades, UNICEF's counterparts in government are likely to expect a continuing activist role for UNICEF in these areas in the coming decade. In elaborating the "Adequate living standards" part of the seven-point priority themes for UNICEF advocacy and action, the Global Agenda should explicitly state UNICEF's continuing commitment to this unfinished business.

Although primary school access and enrolment levels are relatively high in almost all countries, quality and relevance have become the predominant issues throughout the region.

However, the impact of the current economic situation on both quantitative and qualitative issues has yet to be assessed, and it could be substantial. As in other sectors, there is growing concern for the disparities among groups and regions within and among countries, that will require increasing attention by UNICEF and its partners. The identification in the Global Agenda of the need to ensure an enabling learning environment for children and adolescents, responds well to the EAP region policy priorities.

As noted above, neglect, abuse and exploitation of children can be explained to a considerable extent as the negative consequences of rapid growth and development in the region over the past two or three decades. These same factors are also among the major causes underlying poor health, undernutrition and inadequate education. Recognition of these common causal elements suggests that strategies for addressing child protection issues and those for improving children's health and education should be closely interlinked to achieve maximum synergy and mutual reinforcement. This is one of the major conclusions that has emerged from a review of the situation of children and women from a regional perspective. Operationally, the following major approaches have been proposed, concentrating primarily on prevention rather than remedial action:

- Promote greater involvement of families and communities in identifying risks to children's rights and well-being, and strengthen their capacity to act appropriately. This includes expansion of ECCD programmes and advocacy for national policies and programmes for child and family development, and development of mechanisms to help respond with care and compassion to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.
- Strengthen linkages between communities and governmental or non-governmental institutions and facilities to help ensure that available services and other resources are utilized optimally. This is particularly critical in areas such as referral and safe delivery in cases of obstetric complications, in the proper handling of child abuse situations, and in ensuring protection of the rights of children affected by AIDS..
- Utilize existing institutions, such as schools and clinics, as focal points for community mobilization and participation, as vehicles for the delivery of life skills messages, and as concrete examples of good practice in areas such as hygiene and sanitation.
- Develop and promote programmes aimed specifically at adolescents, both as targets for special interventions and as partners in UNICEF programmes. This is an area in which the exercise of children's right to participate can yield particularly valuable information and insights for addressing a wide array of issues (e.g., HIV/AIDS prevention and other

life skills, involvement of boys in good child care practices, enhancing the status of women and girls, etc.).

- In all aspects of UNICEF programming, improve the quality and utilization of data, indicators and analysis for problem identification and assessment, monitoring and evaluation. In areas such as HIV/AIDS and CNSP, even basic indicators and baseline information are often weak or lacking; in better-established areas such as education data are often overwhelming in quantity and not always relevant to issues of concern. In all areas, available data are seldom properly analyzed, nor are findings widely disseminated to potential users.
- Strengthen partnerships with the region's media organizations in order to better promote and advocate for children's rights and child and family policies and programmes. The various media channels, especially the rapidly expanding television medium, can be utilized to influence attitudes and behaviour as well as policy and legislation, public opinion and the mobilization of resources for children.

The Global Agenda's action points on early child care and development, gender equity, elimination of violence and exploitation against children and women, respond well to these concerns. Promotion of children's participation, especially the empowerment of adolescents as a subject and holder of rights, is also highly relevant for the above actions.

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