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Interesting analysis of the relationship between media and culture, and their influence on social conditions and development. The paper discusses the role of public information as an important aspect of UNICEF's work, outlines limiting factors -- such as the necessity to maintain good relations with the government; the necessity for credibility. Communication needs and methods vary greatly between countries in the region. Should messages promote UNICE programmes, or focus on the region itself -- rather than focussing on improving UNICEF's image, they should perhaps direct attention to the situation of children.

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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND  
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PUBLIC INFORMATION: A MEANS OF SUPPORT  
TO UNICEF'S STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS OF ACTION  
IN THE 1980s

Francisco J. Pelucio Silva  
Regional Information Officer  
SANTIAGO

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, and as far as can be judged up to now, in the present one as well, Latin America has achieved substantial economic growth. Nevertheless, it has not managed to cope successfully with some of its most serious social problems, which have been made worse by the behaviour of the central economies and the changes in world market prices for certain goods, in particular petroleum, to mention only one or two of the aggravating factors.

During the forthcoming years the region's prospects of resolving its current problems will be subordinate to external circumstances, including the behaviour of the central economies, the recovery of their rate of growth and the attainment of acceptable levels of price stability. The degree of intensity of external adjustments and the growth patterns of the central countries thus become basic determinants of the rate of internal development of many countries in the region.

Within this scenario, Latin America is faced in the present decade with a serious challenge: namely, how to give more attention to the social dimension of economic growth within the global process of development. There is a consensus among important groups of government officials, intellectuals, professionals, and representatives of political parties and of such institutions as the churches, regarding the need for a more equitable distribution of the fruits of development. The specific objectives in which this general aspiration takes concrete shape give priority, in some instances, to dealing with the problem of critical poverty, to greater concern for the satisfaction of basic needs; and, in others, to a global strategy of social change.

The attainment of these objectives would seem to imply a reorientation that must signify not only quantitative but also qualitative changes.

The principal challenge facing the Latin American countries - the overcoming of poverty - is the same that the organizations striving for the economic development and social welfare of the family, of children and of youth must commit themselves to meet.

From the institutional standpoint, the specialized and development financing agencies of the United Nations system have an important role to play.

Fortunately, UNICEF is facing the possibility of the aforesaid changes in a spirit of revision and renovation which coincides with the appearance of a new Executive Director for the Organization. This circumstance is traditionally favourable to self-criticism and propitious for the adoption and implementation of new guiding principles.

In this connexion, the International Year of the Child, promoted by UNICEF, has aroused greater interest on the part of the decision-making bodies and of public opinion in problems besetting children. Many of these problems, of course, are not proper to childhood alone, but affect the entire family and the community as a whole. Estimates made in the last few years indicate that about 40% of the population of Latin America is living in circumstances of extreme poverty. Of this proportion, almost half can be considered indigent.

Because situations of poverty spring from so many causes, their adequate cure must stem from an integrated diagnosis and an approach of a similar kind. This diagnosis and approach should take into account the role of communication as an instrument of action in the social sector.

In the Americas Region, the most salient features of underdevelopment - the persistence of situations of injustice and inequality between human groups - impart special characteristics to social communication. Thus, for example, rapid urbanization and increasing industrialization bring about changes in personal customs, habits and needs, in the generation and orientation of culture, and in man's relations with his work and with society, all of which has repercussions on the direction and content of social communication. The latter, in its turn, helps to maintain the basic patterns of our social order, or, again, induces changes, intensifies trends and influences people's individual and social behaviour.

The communication media are a dynamizing factor in economic development and in the never-ending process of formation of culture. They promote recognition of human rights and awaken interest in the problems besetting the population. They facilitate national integration and fuller knowledge of the component aspects of a country's real situation. But they also help to perpetuate inequalities between social sectors, in so far as they dispense with the active participation of the population and bypass the values and culture of the peoples of which nations are made.

Thus, in the context of the urban and industrial trend of Latin America and the Caribbean area, social communication relates the individual, with a broader social universe, but also weakens the links between him and his more immediate community. It transmits knowledge and information that are useful in the population's everyday business, but it may also contribute to the distortion of facts and to persuasive propaganda and produce a cultural warp in the recipients as the effect of foreign behaviour patterns, whether social, economic, political or moral.

The use of information is unquestionably a powerful element in the society of today. Few are the media that escape the control of governments, of private groups or of sectors that hold, or aspire to hold power. The operational costs of media with advanced technology not originating in our own countries, especially the electronic media, enforce a sort of bondage to transnational interests. Efforts to produce information more appropriate to national characteristics come into conflict with the commercial structure, and the shortage of resources forces the use of foreign material which kindles expectations alien to the possibilities and traditions of the countries of the region.

These positive and negative effects are particularly important for the children of Latin America and the Caribbean. The influence of the mass media on the upbringing of the new generations is exercised from a very early age, both directly and through the members of the family and the community responsible for the care of children.

It is a hopeful sign, however, that professionals in the field of social communication are increasingly concerned with discovering patterns whereby this activity can be fully incorporated in the tasks of social development, and particularly in the resolution of the problems affecting children.

In this sense communication, understood as a two-way flow of information, of transmission and absorption of knowledge, has been gradually acquiring a role of paramount importance in many social programmes.

In the case of community participation, for example, the desirability of which is expressed in virtually all social development plans, communication has become a tool which, on the one hand, permits the mobilization of the community, contributes to its organization, and helps to disseminate knowledge

of the objectives of the programmes devised and information on the existing services; on the other hand, it also affords a grasp of the problems of the community, its aspirations, its special behaviour patterns and the resources it has to offer.

In health, education, food and nutrition, housing and environmental sanitation programmes, inter alia, communication is an instrument which is constantly being perfected for the purpose of establishing more flexible relations between the various levels of responsibility taking part in the programmes (national, regional and local) and the possible beneficiaries.

In the planning process, which implies the planning, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of programmes, communication constitutes a system that facilitates the solution of innumerable problems by which programmes are frequently affected.

This means that social communication professionals must make a contribution which goes farther than the fabrication of posters promoting a programme or the production of slides or films.

If the use of communication is to make a scientific, technical and aesthetic contribution to development projects, an essential requisite is interdisciplinary work in which the communication professional takes part throughout all the stages of project formulation, execution and evaluation.

In this context, information and communication have an important role to play. Accordingly, they must not constitute an independent variable, but must form part of a global approach.

One of the traditional objectives of UNICEF's information policy has been to create an attitude on the part of the public favourable to contributions to the Fund. The results obtained in areas such as Europe and the United States and Canada have been very positive. Similar opportunities should be sought

in Latin America, first on account of the middle-income countries' possibilities of helping those that are relatively less developed, and, secondly, because of the economic potential of nations like México, Brazil and Venezuela.

The systematic incorporation of the component "information", as one of the basic elements in co-operation and the exchange of experience, entails the task of satisfactorily organizing this activity, which should motivate the creation of systems and structures capable of producing information and transmitting it efficiently.

With regard to field work, an increasingly indispensable requisite is to produce information that would make it possible to support the formulation, follow-up and control of programmes and projects directed towards resolving the problems of the family, childhood and youth.

## II. PRIORITIES FOR A PUBLIC INFORMATION STRATEGY

In accordance with the foregoing considerations, the following priorities for public information activities in the region may be indicated:

In terms of the classic public information efforts (promotion of the objectives of the organization, within the concept of "advocacy"), it is recommended that more attention be devoted to the audiences that may be found in financial institutions committed to development, and in governmental and non-governmental organizations, with due regard to the market for ideas promoted especially by the private sector and official establishments.



As regards specific fund-raising efforts, priority should be given to activities in the region aimed at increasing the countries' contributions, either directly to the general funds or for specific projects, without neglecting to support the fund-raising activities of Geneva and New York.

The promotion of project support communications should be stepped up both inside and outside UNICEF, and should even include training of personnel; at the same time, it is recommended that support be given not so much to specific projects as to the objectives of UNICEF's major strategies, such as health for all by the year 2000, primary health care, incorporation of women into development, community participation, transfer of appropriate technology, technical co-operation among developing countries, drinking-water and environmental sanitation.

In development education too efforts should be expanded within the region with a view to helping children and young people in the different countries to know one another better. Support should also be given to the work of New York and Geneva in this field.

The priorities indicated serve as a basis for the formulation of specific objectives at both the regional and the individual country level; these objectives, however, should be established by common accord between the Regional Office and the area offices, partly because of the diversity of situations in Latin America and the Caribbean, and partly because of the present structure of public information activities. At all events, UNICEF's current policy seems to be preparing the ground for the implementation of these priorities.

The foregoing approaches point to the fact that public information activities have spread out beyond the traditional limit of the production of specific messages on UNICEF activities, an expansion which implied adaptation of the materials produced for fund-raising purposes in the principal donor countries. Today it is necessary to consider other fields of activity, such as project support communication, development education and the promotion of special events.

#### UNICEF policies regarding public information

Actions in favor of the child demand a continuous flow of information and communications aimed at improving their effectiveness. The importance of such flow lies in the need to create and maintain a collective awareness towards one's own problems and those of others, and the need to motivate collective participation in those efforts to overcome one's own problems or to help find adequate solutions to those of others.

Overcoming these conditions demands two processes of consciousness-raising: one internally and individually oriented aimed at self-diagnosis and self-reliance; and the other a collective and externally oriented process aimed at stimulating interest and external co-operation towards the needs and hardships of the more destitute segments of the world's population. Both processes impose conditions to the production of information materials and to the distribution schemes.

In the case of internal audiences in Latin America and the Caribbean the levels of reaction towards a specific message vary widely. This is in part due to the different levels of literacy and schooling existing in the region, to the intrinsic peculiarities of the audience, and other aspects inherent to the socio-economic situation of the audiences.

The need exists therefore to define more clearly the audience to be reached, taking into consideration that, in the case of the general public, the restricted coverage of the media, the lack of suitability of some of the existing information materials, the limited resources available, would render the efforts to reach the general public almost null.

It would therefore be realistic, in the case of internal audiences, to concentrate UNICEF's public information efforts on specific groups or publics, such as decision-makers in government sectors, opinion leaders within the community, and specialized professional and/or academic sectors.

As to external audiences, the guidelines for the production of materials seem suitable, and the distribution mechanisms, effective. Information materials are addressed to the general public, which in the case of more developed countries is quite homogeneous, forming what is generally called "public opinion". The distribution of the material is made mainly by well organized voluntary groups which generate a substantial and regular demand for the material.

Nevertheless, a subjective approach prevails in the production of materials for external audiences, that is to say, an approach that induces more of an emotional reaction to the situation in the developing countries on the part of the audiences, rather than objective and comprehensive views of the situation of internal groups who may benefit from the Organization's programme efforts.

Thus, the different materials available - print or audio-visual - almost always contain messages that focus on individualized aspects of a situation, reflecting limited features of the total reality. Such messages lose their ability to generate empathy on internal audiences, causing problems for their distribution within the region.

This subjective content of the messages could be the result of an excessive emphasis on convincing, in detriment of a concern for the reaction of the audiences. This problem in the long run may weaken the efficacy of the efforts to create a lasting and positive image for the Organization, with the benefits this entails in terms of moral and material support for its activities. One solution to the problem could be the creation of mechanisms to evaluate quantitatively and qualitatively the production and distribution efforts.

It is nevertheless encouraging to observe that such problems have been sensed by UNICEF's Information Division, and that this perception has motivated new concepts for the production of materials. Such concepts are oriented towards strategically fostering international understanding (Development Education) and promoting the need to support UNICEF programmes with communication approaches directed at stimulating their acceptance by the public in general and by the audiences benefited or to be benefited by such programmes.

"Development Education" aims at promoting social and economic justice, human rights, and dignity and self-reliance both in developing and developed countries 1/. It also emphasizes the need to develop a critical awareness of the causes of hunger and deprivation as well as of the enormous human cost of poverty.

As part of its public information programme, UNICEF has assumed an important role in this area, trying to convey to the children of the developed world a less stereotyped view of the situation of children in the developing world, through their teachers and parents, children's books and school texts, and through mass communication.

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1/ See UNICEF, Policy Paper, NY-November 1978

Within this context, it also would be important to promote an awareness on the part of children in the upper socio-economic strata in the developing countries towards their counterparts who are less privileged.

In summary, UNICEF's public information policy seems to point towards two clearly defined lines of action: one internally oriented, that is to say, that aims at promoting an awareness of the fact that social progress in the developing countries is a matter of their own responsibility and determination; the second is directed towards the developed countries and aims at stimulating their empathy towards the peoples of the Third World.

It seems clear then that the objectives of UNICEF through its public information activities are two-fold: first to divulge, objectively and realistically, the plight of underprivileged families and children in the developing world, and, at the same time to report on its own programmes. Secondly, to ensure, through making donors increasingly aware of the need for greater cooperation, the supply of necessary funds to increase and broaden its action in favour of children, youth and families.

From such a perspective, the function of Public Information should be that of preparing, distributing, and when possible evaluating, materials for the use of different groups and/or individuals involved in activities benefiting children and youth.

### III. FACTORS LIMITING THE ACTION

#### Relationships with governments

In spite of obvious analogies within the region, there is nonetheless a diversity of socio-economic situations and political regimes, each of which has a particular view of its society, its problems and of what is needed to solve them. Thus, it would be impossible for UNICEF's Public Information activities in the region to adopt standardized procedures in face of the different situations. It will not always be possible to collect and/or publish information on the countries, either because this does not correspond to the expectations of the respective government -- although the information may be objective and scientifically valid -- or because certain types of information are considered to be of the exclusive domain of the State.

Further, one cannot lose sight of the fact that UNICEF's Public Information activity develops in a context of relationships with governments which differ from those of a news agency, not necessarily concerned with the internal reaction that its messages may provoke. From this perspective, it is indispensable to assign maximum importance to the type and depth of the relationships to be maintained with the governments as audiences for UNICEF's messages and as eventual sources of financial support.

It is thus recommendable that efforts be undertaken to widen and strengthen relationships with governments in the region, basing such efforts on mutual interests, so as to avoid eventual frictions. It is necessary then to produce and distribute information that is objective, but not offensive to the governments. Further, it would be useful to make a systematic and methodic survey of potential audiences within

government sectors, based on an accurate study of who is who in those sectors and the decision-making capacity they have.

The demographic context of Public Information activities

If positive results are to be achieved in the social domain, one must become acquainted with the magnitude of the population one intends to act upon, and apprehend, at least partially, the social characteristics and main interests of the human groups which make it up.

Public Information activities are not exempted from this concern. For this reason, it is important to consider, however briefly, the social situation of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, based on socio-economic indicators which determine, together with the relevance of the message released, the possibilities of success in the use of the mass media.

In view of the concern referred to, there is an urgent necessity for greater interchange of information between the regional public information officer and the area offices of UNICEF in the interest of better knowledge of the needs of populations - one of the objectives of UNICEF action in the Americas.

To the extent that the problems of children are known in a given country and the alternative ways of resolving their problems are equally well known, the likelihood increases of significant action being undertaken on their behalf.

If public information is called upon to play an important role in this connection, it is indispensable that it should be credible, and this implies that the information available and distributed must be valid with regard to the real circumstances of the social groups which it is hoped will benefit in each case.

### Regional structure for activities

To make possible the approaches and priorities indicate above, the following structure at the regional level is suggested:

- a regional officer responsible for the direction and co-ordination of production, distribution and evaluation activities, and for their direct execution in the areas corresponding to the Bogota and Lima Offices and TARO;
- an information officer in Mexico City, responsible for the implementation of the same activities in Mexico, Central America and Panama;
- an information officer in the Caribbean Area, with the same functions as above for this subregion;
- an information officer in Brazil, with exactly the same functions for that country.

Each of these regional and subregional officers should have a minimum staff, in addition to his secretary.

Administratively, the subregional officers would be answerable to the Representative of the Office where they work, and for the programming and technical aspects of public information, to the Regional Information Officer. As far as possible, the regional and subregional officers should be <sup>national</sup>~~nations~~ of the Americas Region.

### Justification

At the present time, public information activities in the region are geared to supporting the fund-raising objectives of the New York and Geneva Offices, by virtue of which the contents of the messages often almost exclusively promote activities in which UNICEF is involved.



Both the Representative of the Area Offices and the Regional Information Officer have felt the need to focus advocacy on the region or area itself, with messages whose content centres not necessarily on the promotion of the UNICEF image, but primarily on the fostering of keener awareness of the situation of children.

Accordingly, suggestions are being put forward for changing the approaches and priorities of information activities in the region.

Although in his job description the Regional Officer is assigned comprehensive regional functions, in practice he is responsible for information almost exclusively in the area covered by TARO in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay. Consequently, he could only intervene in the programming and budgeting of public information activities in the Area Offices at the express request of their representatives.

The present functional structure of public information activities, combined with the shortage of human and financial resources, does not afford adequate operational conditions for implementing the proposed change of approach and new order of priorities.

A regional public information function within UNICEF is justified, on the one hand, because Latin America and the Caribbean are unlike the rest of the world, and also because, over and above the obvious differences existing in the region, there are analogies which enable it to be considered as a whole.

The regional public information structure envisages subsidiary offices or subregions in Mexico and Brazil for the following reasons:

- a) because of their potential as regards advocacy for children;
- b) because of the leadership they exercise on other countries of the region;
- c) because of their fund-raising potentialities;
- d) because of their possibilities of contributing to technical co-operation among developing countries,
- e) because of their geographical location, which facilitates the distribution of specific production, assignment and evaluation activities throughout all the areas of action;
- f) the Caribbean Office is justified because this is a clearly-defined subregion, with special characteristics, such as the co-existence of three languages, which would call for the establishment of a special set-up for public information activities.

The functional structure proposed would not be efficient without regional co-ordination in the fields of programming and budgeting. This co-ordination, on the other hand, would on no account invalidate the administrative and political competence of the Regional Director and of the Area Representatives.

Lastly, the proposed approach and structure would bring about changes in the existing model and would also involve new demands. It would be necessary to investigate and determine the target populations, target audiences of the messages, to carry out studies designed to create new information products, to work out alternative and more effective distribution schemes and to establish evaluation systems with a view to the possible redinition of the entire operation.

It is thought that the proposed new approach and new structure would not necessitate a very much greater volume of resources than is at present used inorganically in public information activities in the region.

#### IV. PROPOSAL FOR A PLAN OF ACTION

##### Field of action

The elements analyzed in the preceding section as factors which limit the actions may serve as a frame of reference for the presentation of a plan of action in the region of the Americas.

Three main fields of action are involved in Public Information activities.

- production
- distribution
- evaluation

These three fields derive from the objectives of UNICEF's Public Information activities which are:

- to help developing countries in their efforts to generate public support for the aims proclaimed in the Rights of the Child and to create a sharper awareness of the need to invest in children so that they can develop their full potential as members of their society;
- to increase international understanding of the situation and the needs of children in the developing countries, and the possibilities for action;
- to provide information about UNICEF policies of co-operation and activities in order to increase government contributions, and to encourage public participation as the basis for greater financial support from both government and private sources,
- to give information and communication support to help implement programmes in which UNICEF is co-operating.

In brief, these objectives result in three broad, often interacting, types of activity: advocacy for children, support for UNICEF fund-raising and for co-operation through other channels for the benefit of children, and communication support for project implementation. 1/

### Production

In general, production activities are oriented towards two types of public: one located inside the countries receiving UNICEF assistance, and the other external to the reality that is being reported on. Both publics are divided in turn into two categories: the general public and the specific audiences, each requiring different channels and mechanisms of communication and approach.

The social reality of the countries of the region and the factors that mediate their access to mass media seem to point to the fact that country-oriented production efforts have a limited impact, as long as they try to reach the general public indiscriminately. Facts seem to suggest that country-oriented production efforts would more advisably be directed at specific audiences, such as officialdom at different government levels, community leaders, neighbourhood associations, and non-governmental bodies capable of influencing official decisions and/or public opinion. This would make the efforts less comprehensive, but more effective in terms of the results expected from country-oriented messages. Two major lines of action thus become evident for country-oriented efforts.

The first should concern itself with the clientele of UNICEF programmes and should aim at stimulating the participation of the local and national community in order to maximize the results of those programmes with which UNICEF is involved. This

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1/ An overview of UNICEF policies, organization and working methods, E/ICEF/CRP/79-2, March 16, 1979

imposes two demands on public information:

- to provide technical support to the communication aspects of the projects with which UNICEF is involved, and
- to suggest the need for an early start of information efforts aimed at the community benefiting from programming efforts, from the very start of the programme or project.

The financial and human resources available and the present distribution of the roles of public information in the region do not seem to offer adequate operational conditions.

The second line of action in the area of country-oriented information should aim at consolidating the relationships with the governments, in such a way that efforts directed at governmental cooperation be maximized.

In this connection, contacts with the diplomatic communities should be as close and flexible as possible. They should be provided with information not only on what UNICEF is doing, but also on what their respective governments can do for children through bilateral sources and commitments.

Each of these lines of production and approach require different mechanisms of distribution. In the first case organized groups and the mass media should be used as conveyors, but taking into consideration the need to pinpoint, a priori, the target audiences involved, and the necessity to focus the messages on those audiences. From such a perspective, PSC efforts are bound to play a decisive role in the process of consciousness-raising and motivation.

As to audiences in government sectors, the most effective approach seems to be direct contacts, without losing sight of the important impact that a message released through the mass media, such as an editorial in an important newspaper, may have on those audiences.

### Distribution

No production activity would be successful if it failed to consider opportunely the problems of distribution. However, it is not just a problem of distributing, but of distributing efficiently.

Distributing information materials through the media to internal audiences is not just a question of sending the material to the medium selected. It is essential to establish and nurture personal contacts with a view to setting up a gatekeepers' network that will ensure the good reception and the adequate circulation of the message. Such contacts are also important in the case of organized groups and non-governmental organizations. Also it is necessary to see to it that materials are not indiscriminately sent to such contacts, especially trying to avoid distributing to internal audiences materials specifically produced for external audiences.

Some specific suggestions could be made:

- a) Due to the lack of an operational structure, distribution efforts may be facilitated by hiring the services of news agencies with a national and/or international coverage. Eventually these agencies could cooperate with production and evaluation efforts by including specific clauses in the agreements.
- b) Adding diplomatic missions to the distribution list for information materials. This would result in an additional effort to strengthen relationships with donor countries.

### Evaluation

The persistence of certain shortcomings involving Public Information efforts may be due, in part, to the lack of evaluation of the impact of messages. For the communication process to be complete it is essential to assess the feedback from the audience,

that is, its positive or negative reaction to the message. Evaluation efforts should have two objectives:

- a) To appraise the direct repercussion of the message, that is, to evaluate quantitatively and qualitatively the usage of materials distributed. This enables the distributors of the message to quantify its usage, and to measure the degree of its acceptance, both in terms of its technical quality and of its content.
- b) To measure the message's indirect repercussion, that is, to probe the interest of the media for issues and problems that concern the organization. In this way, media professionals who reveal a favourable disposition towards matters that are of interest to UNICEF, could be given encouragement, support and guidance.

Only the methodical evaluation of distribution/placement efforts will produce the elements necessary to judge the adequacy of production efforts and the effectiveness of distribution schemes. An efficient evaluation may even lead to the reorientation of production -- both in terms of content and presentation of the message -- and to the reformulation of distribution schemes.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been pointed out in the foregoing pages, public information has an essential role to play in connection with the development process of the countries of the region. First, it affords a definite frame of reference for action. Secondly, it offers the possibility of directing efforts towards the most crucial problems and towards groups in need of priority action.

It is therefore indispensable that this activity should have at its disposal clearly-defined measures, policies and strategic orientations, supported by an operational structure and financial and human resources adequate for effective work.

At a time when we are confronted with a new arena for the work of public information, full of new factors to be considered, a specific recommendation is that information should be viewed on an equal footing with other divisions of the Organization; that its contribution should not be regarded as mere backing for the end-activity of the Organization, but that information in itself should be a quasi-end activity because it can do so much in the field of advocacy.

We are an Organization whose special characteristics enable it <sup>to</sup> ~~for~~ establishing relations with the persons composing the various social strata of the population. And in this our aim is not only to secure financial backing, but also to gain moral support. This is why the work of social communication in UNICEF needs stronger backing in terms of human and financial resources, and more opportunities to participate in the planning of UNICEF activities in the 1980s.