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**Report on the field visit of members of the Bureau
of the UNICEF Executive Board to Kyrgyzstan,
22-28 April 2007****Introduction**

1. Members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board (see annex for details) visited Kyrgyzstan from 22 to 28 April 2007. The objective was to gain first-hand understanding of the role of UNICEF at the country level. More specifically, the visit aimed to provide examples of UNICEF cooperation with the Government and other partners, including as a member of the United Nations country team (UNCT). Furthermore, the visit provided an opportunity for the members of the Bureau to better understand the issues and challenges facing children and women in Kyrgyzstan.
2. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Government of Kyrgyzstan for the excellent programme and opportunities for meetings and dialogue with senior members of the Government.
3. The Bureau also would like to thank the members of the UNICEF country team in Kyrgyzstan for the excellent preparation and organization of the visit, and for making themselves available throughout the visit. The members of the Bureau were impressed by the commitment and dedication of all UNICEF staff in Kyrgyzstan.

Key issues impacting the situation of women and children

4. Kyrgyzstan has a population of 5.1 million, 46 per cent of whom are children. Two thirds of the population live in rural mountainous areas. Over 10 per cent (600,000) of the population live abroad, resulting in remittances of \$600 million

* E/ICEF/2007/13.

supporting one third of the families in the country. An estimated 500,000 have migrated internally.

5. The gross national income per capita is \$440. The national budget is \$890 million, 20 per cent of which is external aid. Despite the current external debt of \$2 billion, Kyrgyzstan recently turned down the possibility of being categorized as a highly-indebted poor country. The growth rate of the gross domestic product is estimated at 5 per cent, which corresponds to the average growth rate in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with a potential increase to 7, 8 or even 9 per cent.

6. Some of the major challenges in the country are problems related to governance, corruption and political instability. The Government has committed itself to governmental reform, the fight against corruption and policy change. Some external actors define governance-related concerns as endemic in an environment without a strong and independent judiciary system.

7. Unemployment is estimated at over 10 per cent, with youth unemployment being much higher at over 15 per cent. An estimated two thirds of children live in poverty. The situation is particularly dire in rural areas, where three out of four children are poor.

8. Child and maternal mortality rates remain high: 39 of 1,000 infants do not reach their first year, and the under-five mortality rate is 44 per 1,000 live births according to the UNICEF-supported multiple indicator cluster survey (2005), although official figures are lower. Access to and quality of public health services are unsatisfactory. Health sector reform is underway, but transition from one system to another takes time and money. On the positive side, more than 95 per cent of all children receive basic vaccinations and the country is free from poliomyelitis. The Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses programme has been introduced by UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

9. It is estimated that Kyrgyzstan loses approximately \$20 million every year due to loss of productivity caused by the high prevalence of anaemia. An estimated 50 to 80 per cent of pregnant women and children under age five years are anaemic and one half of all children aged 6-24 months are at risk of disrupted brain development due to anaemia. Each year, approximately 300 child deaths can be linked directly or indirectly to vitamin A deficiency. The rate of stunting is 13 per cent nationally and in three provinces is as high as 20 per cent. Some 20,000 babies are born every year with intellectual impairment caused by iodine deficiency during pregnancy.

10. The real number of people living with HIV/AIDS is estimated at 10 times higher than the officially registered figure of 824 cases. Of 4,000 youth respondents, only 40 per cent were able to give correct answers on how HIV is transmitted and how they can protect themselves. The policy on prevention of mother-to-child transmission is currently being developed.

11. Since the transition from the Soviet Union to an independent State, Kyrgyzstan is facing a number of new-child related concerns. Children are facing new risks and families are in distress as the social welfare and protection systems are not adequately designed to prevent risks and to sufficiently support families. The accountability for child protection is divided between several ministries, which poses a major challenge.

12. Many children are deprived of family environment and parental care. Exploitation, abuse and violence are widespread as a result of the increasing number of dysfunctional families and widespread alcohol and substance abuse. Extensive use of child labour and child trafficking are other areas of serious concern.

13. Institutionalization is a phenomenon which was widely practiced during the Soviet era. This practice has remained strong in today's Kyrgyzstan, with over 6,000 children living in residential care institutions, even though 88 per cent of them have one or both parents. This illustrates clearly how placing children in institutions is seen as the main protective intervention.

14. Most children in Kyrgyzstan enter school without the required life skills and basic knowledge for their age, and therefore are unprepared to cope with the structured school environment. Fewer than 8 per cent of all children in 2005 had access to pre-school activities, compared to 35 per cent in 1990. Almost one half of children do not have any books at home. The problem is further complicated by parents lacking the knowledge and skills for interacting effectively with their children in order to boost their child's intellectual, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

15. Although the net primary-school enrolment rate is 93 per cent, 1 out of 10 students does not go to school regularly. During the harvest, approximately 40 per cent of students drop out of school. The quality of education is of serious concern, as demonstrated by the increasing number of children failing basic tests.

16. According to estimates of two major non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there are about 2,000 children living and working on the streets of the capital Bishkek and 1,000 in Osh, capital of the biggest southern province. Many of the street children were left with no other option than to leave their families or the institution due to excessive alcohol abuse by the parents, violence or abuse.

17. The problem of juvenile delinquency is reportedly escalating rapidly. The number of crimes committed by 14-17 year-olds increased by over 50 per cent in only one year from 2001 to 2002. A disproportionate number of children in conflict with the law enter the juvenile justice system. Due to lack of alternative recourse, many children are deprived of liberty and are placed in correctional facilities for such petty crimes as robbery, theft or drug use. Major efforts are needed to ensure swift reform of juvenile justice to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Kyrgyzstan already in 1994, and other international standards.

18. The members of the Bureau visited the detention centre for juveniles in Voznesenovka, and found the facilities and circumstances unfit for children and youth. Approximately 90 children are held in pre-trial custody for an average of six months without access to school and allowed only two hours of daily exercise in a confined area. Another 70 convicted juveniles are held in detention. The circumstances in pre-trial custody in particular were found to be extremely harsh and not in compliance with any international standards. In addition to important upgrading of the physical conditions, urgent progress is required for improved understanding of child rights and considering detention as the last resort after all other alternative recourses have been explored.

19. Kyrgyzstan took an important step in 2006 through the adoption of the Child Code (Code of the Kyrgyz Republic on Children), a legislative instrument calling

for priority attention on child-related issues. This is of particular importance because in Kyrgyzstan, as in other CIS countries, the child protection system is fragmented with different responsibilities within the various ministries. The Child Code called for establishment of a department coordinating the work of the various ministries.

Priorities and strategies for UNICEF in Kyrgyzstan

20. The key priority for UNICEF in Kyrgyzstan is to place child poverty and related problems on the national agenda, and to mainstream children in policies, in practice and in legal reform. The real impact of poverty and deprivation on children is not adequately known and further evidence-based analysis is needed. The linkages between economic growth, human and social capital and child poverty are still missing to a large degree as key determining factors informing decision-making.

21. UNICEF strategies include: (a) influencing the development and implementation of national and government priorities through evidence-based advocacy; (b) developing and strengthening national capacities; (c) empowering disadvantaged children and families, including the excluded; (d) fostering partnerships and forging alliances; (e) supporting the development of sectoral reform; and (f) triggering enhanced systems through testing and development of pilots. All these strategies aim at creating a protective environment for children.

22. The Child Code was informed to large degree by the experiments by the Family and Children Support Department of Issyk Ata *rayon*. The department was created in 2002 as a pilot to implement a “new generation” national plan of action to support realization of children’s rights. The main objective of the department is to prevent institutionalization by enabling families to overcome their crisis situations and to set up community-based social services to support them. Both the new generation national plan of action and the development of child protection and care services in Issyk Ata were influenced by the reporting requirements to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF played a key role in supporting and advocating for timely reporting and implementation of the Committee’s concluding observations. UNICEF also provided technical assistance to develop the normative framework and modus operandi for the department and support services. The next challenge to replicate the prototype model developed in Issyk Ata across the country.

23. UNICEF has given priority attention to supporting authorities in developing community-based social services to prevent at-risk families from institutionalizing their children. In order to achieve progress in this area, a change of mindset among caregivers is essential, giving priority to reuniting children with their families and developing family care alternatives, such as foster care. At the same time, work continues to ensure that the institutions transform into smaller, family-type residential care alternatives. Major efforts are underway through advocacy and communication to create a culture of child-minded care givers and duty bearers.

24. The members of the Bureau visited a UNICEF-supported rehabilitation centre for street children in Bishkek. The centre provides three types of services for children: (a) a day-care centre; (b) an art therapy centre; and (c) advocacy through drama therapy. The objective of the day-care centre is to provide an appropriate and

safe environment for children from families living in poverty and those living and working on the street, to support their reintegration into normal life. The centre aims to support the children as well as their families at times when they are under extreme pressure and at risk of not being able to cope with social and economic problems.

25. The children at the centre have been subjected to different forms of abuse — psychological, physical and sexual — at home or on the street. UNICEF supported the establishment of an art therapy centre to help the abused and traumatized children to regain their self-esteem and dignity. UNICEF has also supported children's own initiatives to express themselves through games, art and performances. A performance by the children from the centre describing their own experiences of abuse and violence at home and on the street has become widely known throughout the country and popular among their peers in public schools.

26. Critical results for children have been achieved through effective partnerships with the Asian Development Bank, the private sector, authorities and legislators in the area of nutrition. Iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) have been combated through introduction of universal salt iodization by salt manufacturers and related legislative changes. It is hoped that Kyrgyzstan will be certified in 2007 as having achieved the goal of sustainable elimination of IDD, which would make it the second country in the region to achieve this goal.

27. Another important area in which good progress has been made is fortification of flour to combat anaemia and to reduce birth defects. In close partnership with a number of different actors, notably the Asian Development Bank, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, National Fortification Alliance and Kyrgyz Millers Association, UNICEF has played a key role in advocacy and in bringing partners together to develop policy, change legislation and to create alliances for flour fortification. The draft law on obligatory flour fortification has been developed and submitted to Parliament for approval. The members of the Bureau had an opportunity to discuss this important issue with the members of the Parliament, who pledged their strong support for the legislation.

28. UNICEF was requested by the World Bank and other donors to take the lead for the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative (FTI). This provided a strategic opportunity for UNICEF to assume a leadership role in the education sector. As a result of extensive efforts to prepare the National Education Strategy and grant proposals, the Government received recently a grant of \$15 million for two years (2007-2008) from FTI. UNICEF will continue in its leading role of coordination and will have an important function in monitoring and evaluation.

29. The community management of education approach, which has been introduced with the support of UNICEF in the Kelechek settlement area, serves as a good example of a system that promotes meaningful community participation and involvement in the management of the education system in their area. The Kelechek settlement has formed around the Dordoi bazaar, which is one of the biggest bazaars in Kyrgyzstan. Hundreds of thousands of people from the southern provinces have migrated to the capital, resulting in about 500,000 (unofficial figure) migrants settled in the outskirts of the capital city. The migrants are confronted with poor infrastructure, lack of identification and lack of access to social services. Regardless of the high number of children, there were no schools available in the area until recently.

30. As a result of advocacy by UNICEF, over 1,300 children living in the area, many of whom are working in the bazaar, now have access to education. The local community was also supported to establish a community kindergarten and to provide an opportunity for young people to get together and develop life skills to prepare them for future.

United Nations system, donor coordination and aid effectiveness

31. The members of the UNCT are working together closely and most United Nations agencies are physically located together in the United Nations House, where they also share many common services. The physical proximity of most agencies was considered by the UNCT to be a positive factor leading to closer and easier interaction.

32. The UNCT described itself as agile and results-oriented, able to respond rapidly as necessary. The UNCT aims to build on its diversity while ensuring a coherent voice towards external actors. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework was finalized before the 2005 events, which rendered it more or less irrelevant.

33. Kyrgyzstan is a pilot country for aid harmonization and alignment following the Paris Declaration of 2005. Kyrgyzstan has a particularly active and well-coordinated donor community. As a follow-up to the Paris Conference, a donor coordination council was established. The United Nations system is represented in the donor coordination council by the Resident Coordinator. In line with the Paris Declaration, five agencies (Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), United Kingdom Department of International Development (DFID), Asian Development Bank, World Bank and the United Nations) developed a joint country support strategy to assist the Government in developing and implementing the Country Development Strategy 2006-2010.

Observations

34. The members of the Bureau were pleased to learn from the State Secretary that the Government had decided to establish a National Council, placed directly as part of the Presidential Administration, to coordinate the implementation of the Child Code. As a sign of importance given to children's issues, the National Council will be chaired by the State Secretary. The members of the Bureau welcomed this decision as an important and positive move towards ensuring that the best interests of the child are firmly placed at the centre of focus for the Government at the highest level in all policy development and implementation.

35. UNICEF has worked closely with *rayon* and *oblast*-level authorities and NGOs in identifying critical opportunities for development of successful alternatives to institutionalization. Concerted efforts are now needed to influence the authorities and caregivers to enable replication of successful pilot examples across the country. The question of sustainability of replicating prototype efforts and how to mainstream the financial cost into the national budget clearly still pose major challenges. The members of the Bureau encouraged UNICEF to continue to work proactively on the issue.

36. The *Magic Journey* cartoon, the only Kyrgyz language animated TV programme produced and broadcast daily at prime time by the Kyrgyz Television Radio Broadcast Corporation, is an illustrative example of the efforts by UNICEF to reach all children in Kyrgyzstan. The programme serves as an excellent vehicle for helping children to learn life skills and pre-school concepts. Caregivers also receive additional advice during the programme. The popularity of the programme and its main characters, Aktan and Akylai, speaks for itself. The popularity and outreach of the programme are good examples of how small investments can yield maximum results for the well-being and protection of children.

37. The conditions of the youth in the Voznesenovka juvenile detention centre, especially in the pre-trial areas, were of serious concern to the members of the Bureau. The members of the Bureau would like to express their appreciation to the Minister and Deputy Minister of Justice and all staff at the Voznesenovka detention centre for their openness and willingness to allow the members of the Bureau to have access to the pre-trial area, for the first time ever. Urgent action is required to reform the juvenile justice system and to identify alternatives to detention. In the meantime, the members of the Bureau call for swift and radical improvements to the existing physical conditions and circumstances at the detention centre.

38. UNICEF has established excellent partnerships at all levels with ministries, local authorities, civil society, caregivers and the private sector to achieve results for children. The creation of alliances for salt iodization and flour fortification between the private sector, Asian Development Bank and legislators, facilitated by UNICEF, are particularly noteworthy. Despite the limited financial input (UNICEF assistance in 2006 was \$1.43 million, i.e., 0.01 per cent of all official development assistance), the members of the Bureau found UNICEF to have a critical role in influencing the national agenda and in policy formulation through evidence-based advocacy. UNICEF clearly is seen by many actors as the trusted partner of choice and therefore has the legitimacy to facilitate coming together of various partners to reach results for children.

39. The members of the Bureau noted the good cooperation within the UNCT, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, and between the United Nations system and bilateral and multilateral donors. The level of strategic planning and coordination within the donor group was found to be exemplary and hopefully will lead to useful lessons learned in the aid effectiveness and alignment review meeting in Ghana in September 2008.

40. In conclusion, the members of the Bureau appreciated the critical role UNICEF continues to play to support the Government to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and for the protection and fulfilment of the rights of children in Kyrgyzstan.

Annex 1

Participants

H.E. Mr. Javier Loayza Barea (Bolivia), President

H.E. Mr. Robert Hill (Australia), Vice-President

H.E. Mr. Michel Kafando (Burkina Faso), Vice-President

H.E. Mr. Kyaw Tint Swe (Myanmar), Vice-President

Ms. Kirsi Madi, Assistant Secretary, Executive Board

Annex 2

Summary of the programme

Sunday 22 April

- Security briefing by the United Nations Field Security Officer
- Briefing by the UNICEF country team
- Dinner with the United Nations Resident Coordinator a.i., UNICEF Representative and Deputy Representative

Monday 23 April

- Visit to the Issyk-Ata district — Child Protection Services, including meeting with the Family and Child Support Department and visits to day-care centre, crisis centre and family-type home
- Meeting with the State Secretary of the Kyrgyz Republic, H.E. Mr. Adahan Madumarov
- Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Ednan Karabaev
- Visit to the centre for rehabilitation for children living in the Streets and in poverty, art therapy, day-care service
- Welcome reception hosted by UNICEF with the participation of the senior Government officials, parliamentarians, members of the diplomatic and donor community and of the UNCT

Tuesday 24 April

- Visit to the Voznesenovska juvenile detention centre
- Visit to Belavotskiy residential institution
- Briefing on nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies including on food fortification strategy, progress and communication activities. Meeting with key partners including Asian Development Bank, and representatives of the Flour Mill Association and Salt Producers Association
- Visit to flour mill to see flour fortification
- Meeting with the Members of Parliament promoting legislation on food fortification

Wednesday 25 April

- Visit to Orlovka *rayon* focusing on community-level work supporting low-income families with children at risk of institutionalization
- Visit family-type home by the NGO Respite Care for Street and Abused Children
- Meeting with the Minister of Justice, H.E. Mr. Kaiypov
- Meeting with the Minister of Labour and Social Development, H.E. Ms. Abdulaeva
- Meeting with Mrs. Borombaeva, Chair of National Council for Women, Family and Gender

Thursday 26 April

- Visit to the Kalecheck migrant community, including meeting with local officials, visit to the local school, kindergartens and the Youth Leader's Club of the Centre for Protection of Children
- Meeting with the Deputy Minister of Education, Ms. Elmira Imanalieva
- Visit to the residential institution for children with mental retardation in Krasnaya Rechka village
- Meeting with the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the UNCT on United Nations collaboration, joint programmes and emergency preparedness

Friday 27 April

- Visit to the Kyrgyzstan Television and Radio, including meeting with KTR Executive Director, H.E. Mr. Moldokasymov and participation in the audience feedback session on the *Magic Journey* programme
- Round table with the donor community to discuss harmonization and alignment and the joint country support strategy (Government of Germany, SDC, DFID, United States Agency for International Development, Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Bank)
- Debriefing with UNICEF country team

Saturday 28 April

- Departure from Bishkek
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