



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited  
7 July 2010

Original: English

**For discussion**

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### United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

**Second regular session**

7-9 September 2010

Item 6 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

### Summary of midterm reviews of country programmes

#### East Asia and Pacific region

#### *Summary*

This regional summary of midterm reviews of country programmes conducted in 2009 was prepared in response to Executive Board decision 1995/8. The Executive Board is invited to comment on the report and provide guidance to the secretariat.

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\* E/ICEF/2010/15.

## **Introduction**

1. During 2009, five countries in the East Asia and Pacific region conducted midterm reviews (MTRs), three of which are included in this report: Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia and Thailand. Due to a shortened three-year cycle of the Malaysia country programme, a Strategic Moment of Reflection was conducted instead of an MTR and the draft country programme document (CPD) submitted June 2010 contained a review of the previous programme. The 2008 Myanmar MTR was moved to 2009 to allow for focus on the emergency situation caused by Cyclone Nargis. The Myanmar draft CPD considered at the annual session of the Executive Board in June 2010 contained elements of the MTR.

2. The 2009 MTRs benefited from two important events: (a) a regional review of lessons learned from the 2008 MTRs conducted by the Regional Office in the first quarter of 2009 and (b) programme performance assessments conducted by the Office of Internal Audit. The MTRs were done at the peak of the global financial crisis, with the impact on children closely monitored by the regional office.

## **Midterm reviews**

### **Lao People's Democratic Republic**

#### **Introduction**

3. An MTR reference group, co-chaired by the National Commission for Mothers and Children Secretariat and UNICEF, oversaw the MTR process. An informal UNICEF Strategic Moment of Reflection was undertaken with the support from the regional office. On 23 September 2009, the MTR process culminated in a high-level meeting chaired by the National Commission for Mothers and Children and the Regional Director of the UNICEF Eastern Asia and Pacific Regional Office, with participation from line ministries, provincial and local Government representatives, the United Nations country team, bilateral donors and civil society organizations.

4. Four key components informed the MTR process: (a) an updated Situation Analysis on Children and Women based on a human rights perspective; (b) a review of programme sector components and cross-cutting areas; (c) two thematic studies on the capacity development and programme communications; and (d) a review of the country programme management plan. The views of children and young people were integrated into some of the sectoral reviews. The process also included field monitoring visits to validate the findings.

#### **Update of the situation of children and women**

5. For a country where two thirds of the population is living under \$2 per day (27 per cent live under \$1 a day)<sup>1</sup> unexpected external shocks — including the effects of climate change and the global financial crisis — rollback hard-earned gains and compromise the ability of impoverished families to survive. Although the country is on track to achieve approximately half of the Millennium Development Goals, equity issues remain a serious challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> National Human Development Report, Lao PDR, 2006.

6. Even though the Lao People's Democratic Republic is set to achieve Goal 4, infant and under-five mortality rates remain high (estimated at 70 per 1,000 live births and 98 per 1,000 live births, respectively).<sup>2</sup> Nutrition is a primary concern for children under the age of five — 37 per cent are underweight and 40 per cent are stunted. The routine immunization rate remains low, with 32 per cent of children aged 12-23 months completing the necessary three doses of the combined diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus vaccine (DPT3).<sup>3</sup> Only 14 per cent of children aged 12 months to 23 months are fully immunized.<sup>4</sup> The maternal mortality rate of 660 deaths per 100,000 live births is among the highest in the region. Major contributing factors include very low antenatal care access (35 per cent) and only 20 per cent of births are attended by skilled health personnel. Investment in health remains low at 0.6 per cent of the gross domestic product.

7. In the education sector, despite positive strides made in the net primary school enrolment rate (84 per cent in 2005 to 89 per cent in 2008), the country is off-track in meeting Goal 2, due to high rates of repetition and school drop-out. Gender disparities are gradually being reduced at the primary level, with the lowest enrolment among ethnic girls in rural areas. Completion rates continue to reflect gender inequalities, with girls consistently at a disadvantage. Moreover, the country has one of the lowest education budget allocations in the region — 10.2 per cent of total Government spending (figures may vary depending on the method of calculation applied).

#### **Progress and key results at midterm**

8. The country programme contributed to key results in many areas. Of particular note, the national Expanded Programme of Immunization has been reinforced with the expansion of its cold chain sector (80 per cent coverage compared to 22 per cent at the beginning of the programme cycle). Over 1,100 health staff have been trained on vaccine and cold chain management. At least 80 per cent of children under the age of one year are fully immunized against the seven diseases. In 2008, routine immunization coverage increased between 5 per cent and 10 per cent compared with 2007 as a result of efforts by UNICEF and partners (the World Health Organization, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation and others). Plans are in place for a maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination campaign and the introduction of a new vaccine (DPT3-hepatitis B vaccine, *Haemophilus influenzae* type B). In addition, the universal salt iodization project helped ensure iodization of 85 per cent of salt meant for human consumption, placing the national iodine deficiency disorders elimination target within reach.

9. The Education Sector Working Group, chaired by the Ministry of Education and co-chaired by the Australian Government and UNICEF, has been an effective mechanism to ensure the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan commitments are met. The Ministry of Education has taken strong leadership of the Education Sector Working Group process as the key vehicle for dialogue with development partners and for development of the Education Sector Development Framework, endorsed in 2009. Coordination between partners and the Government noticeably

<sup>2</sup> Lao PDR Census, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> MICS, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> MICS, 2006.

improved. Access to and quality of education in three Northern provinces improved considerably, thanks to an office in Oudomxay shared by the World Food Programme and UNICEF.

10. The adoption of the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children accelerated the establishment of 124 Child Protection Networks (increased from 74 in 2006) and 54 counselling centres in seven provinces. At the village level, Child Protection Networks are providing groundbreaking access to child protection services and the structures are being scaled up to other provinces through partnerships with several international non-governmental organizations. The UNICEF technical support and evidence-based advocacy has contributed to the establishment of stronger child protection systems and structures in the country, specifically in the development of policies and standards on juvenile justice, trafficking, unexploded ordnance and children living and working on the streets.

#### **Resources used**

11. During 2007-2009, the planned regular resources allocations of \$1,787,000 per year were increased to \$1,935,000 in 2007; \$1,980,000 in 2008; and \$1,979,000 in 2009. Actual other resources funds allocated in 2007 and 2008 were 25 per cent higher than planned in the CPD, with some programmes at much higher levels of other resources funding (education) and others experiencing budget shortfalls (HIV/AIDS). However, in 2009, other resources funding was just \$9.9 million, compared to the CPD ceiling of more than \$12 million. As a result of flooding and related emergencies, over \$2.5 million in unplanned emergency funds were also received.

#### **Constraints and opportunities affecting progress**

12. Limited financial and human capacity from project partners continues to remain a constraint to development, especially when engaging with the Government at local levels. There is very low budget allocation to the social sectors by the Government, which underlies many of the challenges in the access and quality of basic social services. There is also limited coordination capacity of the National Commission for Mothers and Children, the key counterpart for the work of UNICEF. The ability of the Commission to lead, coordinate and implement agreed-upon plans for children is limited by the weak capacity of its national secretariat and its corresponding provincial and district counterparts. As a result, programmes have remained highly sectoral, posing challenges to implementing a whole-child approach. Limited data and analysis poses major challenges for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the programme results. Data is often unavailable, unreliable and not separated into precise groupings. Access to essential social services is often hindered by linguistic, cultural and physical barriers, especially in remote areas.

#### **Adjustments made**

13. The MTR confirmed that the overall results, as laid out in the CPD, remain valid for the remaining period of implementation. The MTR has identified several strategic areas of focus for the rest of the country programme, namely: achieving Goals with equity; implementation of the ongoing UNICEF organizational shifts;

change management and improvement initiatives; and further alignment with national planning processes.

14. In particular, the MTR recommended that the following areas need to be prioritized and will impact all programmatic areas: (a) prioritize the poor and hard-to-reach areas, align geographic focus with the prioritized districts, and focus on achieving the Goals with equity; (b) strengthen the programme convergence and maximize programme impact through engagement at provincial and district levels to put children in the centre of local planning, budgeting and service delivery efforts; (c) strengthen monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management, and overall analysis on the impact of emerging issues on children, such as climate change, poverty and disparities, and economic crises; (d) implement a more systematic approach to capacity development and communication for development initiatives, in particular through the identification of impact indicators; (e) expand partnerships in the framework of the Vientiane Aid Declaration (in light of the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action) to leverage more influence and resources on behalf of children; (f) mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment; and (g) bring a stronger focus on youth and adolescent participation.

## **Mongolia**

### **Introduction**

15. The MTR was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 23 June 2009 and was a three-stage process. First, an update of the Situation Analysis of Children and Women was undertaken to assess and analyze the major achievements and key challenges within the framework of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. Second, sectoral reviews were conducted between UNICEF and the line ministries to assess the mid-term progress and key results on resource utilization, constraints and opportunities, and adjustments made. Finally, three evaluations were undertaken prior to the MTR, which provided valuable insight to the review process. These included an evaluation of the juvenile justice committees for the implementation of the 'diversion' strategy for children in conflict with the law, an evaluation of the voluntary counselling and testing for the HIV and AIDS programme, and an impact assessment of the family empowerment strategy for the convergent basic social services programme.

### **Update of the situation of children and women**

16. Despite rapid economic growth in Mongolia, poverty has not decreased and disparities have increased, which may be further aggravated by the current global financial and economic crisis. The most challenging goals are combating poverty, prevention and treatment of tuberculosis, housing, gender equality at the political decision-making level, fighting against the decreasing net enrolment in primary education, and gender parity in secondary and tertiary education. The global economic crisis is reducing the country's revenues, with implications for budget allocations, specifically cutbacks on health and social investment. Against this background of fiscal uncertainty, additional efforts will be required to ensure that Millennium Development Goal progress is not lost as a result of reduced public sector commitment, both in terms of funding and political will.

17. More data and information is being gathered on the issue of child protection, especially around protecting the most vulnerable children. Assessments are being conducted on the underlying causes as well as the status and prevalence of child abuse, domestic and institutional violence, and child trafficking. Progress has come about due to documentation on the levels of imprisonment of children and young people in conflict with the law compared to placement in restorative justice systems.

#### **Progress and key results at midterm**

18. The country programme contributed to results in areas as follows. A country-specific strategic analysis was developed using the marginal budgeting for bottleneck analysis, which identified needs for improvement of hygiene practice, exclusive breastfeeding and community-based public health activities. The Ministry of Health endorsed the continuum of care concept including improved budget allocation and a review of training curriculum. UNICEF provided financial and technical support for the construction of a state-of-the-art central vaccine storage, with effective management of vaccine procurement. The Reach Every District strategy was adopted by the Ministry of Health and the National Centre for Communicable Diseases and an action plan for nationwide implementation was then developed. As part of the strategy, UNICEF secured an agreement on use of the recommended vitamin D dosage and multiple micronutrient supplements.

19. Following the adoption of the child-friendly schools policy, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science developed key performance indicators, child-friendly schools training modules, learning materials emphasizing child-centred teaching, participation of student-led organizations in school planning, standards for dormitories and a national scale-up initiative. Progress made in the early childhood development project includes approval of a preschool education law emphasizing alternate forms of preschool education including disadvantaged children and the approval of the content and age validation for the national Early Learning Development Standards.

20. The multiple indicator cluster survey round 3, completed in early 2007, was an important capacity building process for the National Statistics Office as well as seminal in providing developmental metadata systems (such as ChildInfo.org) in the public domain. Mongolia participated in the Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities (2008-2009) and organized the first ever public-private partnership workshop in achieving Goals, coordinated in close partnership between the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF. The family empowerment strategy, the core approach of the UNICEF community basic social services programme, has been adopted in the draft national programme on child and family development, which will allow the service delivery component to be managed by the Government within its national budget.

#### **Resources used**

21. During 2007-2009, the planned regular resources annual allocations were reduced from \$907,000 in 2007 to \$816,000 in 2008 and \$774,000 in 2009. This reduction in regular resources allocation affected resources for staffing and core areas of programme support. Other resource ceilings have been reached for the office as a whole. However, this is misleading as education programmes' other resource allocations are more than 200 per cent of the planned amounts, while

young child survival and development and HIV are just 60 per cent. This is due, in part, to the expanded role of UNICEF in education and with early learning in collaboration with sector partners and the Education for All Fast Track Initiative. Health and nutrition remain areas of concern.

### **Constraints and opportunities affecting progress**

22. Among social welfare and child protection partners, there is lack of understanding with the systems building approach as well as poor coordination and information sharing among various implementing partners. Limited capacity of social workers constitutes some of the major constraints in the implementation of a systems approach for child protection.

23. Key achievements include improved access to water and sanitation services in targeted rural schools and communities, and the promotion of safe hygiene practices. Major constraints to effective programmes are the vertical approach being taken to programme implementation, poor inter-sectoral coordination and low priority given to sanitation.

### **Adjustments made**

24. The MTR confirmed that the country programme is on track and that no substantive changes were required. Some adjustments to specific programmes were suggested, however, including reducing the child protection programme from four projects to two and focusing and aligning the systems approach to child protection. The child health and nutrition programme will place greater emphasis on the continuum of care as a means of reducing bottlenecks and promoting an integrated approach.

25. From the June Programme Budget Review, staff changes include: establishing four new posts, abolishing one United Nations volunteer post, three vacant posts and downgrading one national post.

## **Thailand**

### **Introduction**

26. The MTR was jointly managed by UNICEF and the Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency on behalf of the Royal Thai Government. It was a consultative and participatory approach with input from partners in the development community, including United Nations and non-governmental organization partner agencies.

27. The MTR took place against the backdrop of many societal shifts: the global economic crisis; the preparation of the Thailand 11th National Development Plan; the review of the United Nations development system in the now classified 'middle-income' country; revision of the UNICEF organizational priorities expressed in its medium-term strategic plan; and an organization-wide shift towards more 'upstream' cooperation.

28. The MTR comprised three interrelated components: (a) an update of the situation of children and women; (b) reviews of each country programme component; and (c) thematic reviews on a number of specific cross-cutting strategic

issues. The MTR was strengthened by a strategic reflection and strategic direction exercise, which looked at key issues relating to UNICEF cooperation in middle-income Thailand and on identifying essential 'strategic shifts'. An Institutional Capacity Assessment was completed too late for inclusion in the MTR, but will contribute to greater understanding on the underlying challenges to overcome in the realization of children's rights.

29. The MTR focused on select strategic issues: (a) key country programme level strategies adopted in the Country Programme Action Plan; (b) lessons learned, including pre-identified strategies that could be strengthened; (c) support to the changing environment and new priorities; (d) identification of 'core strategies' for optimum programme performance (in regards to the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan); and (e) strategies in support of 'upstream' cooperation, consistent with the evolving capacities of Thailand as a middle-income country. Key questions were formulated for each issue to guide the review.

### **Update of the situation of children and women**

30. The impact of the global crisis on children in poor families was mitigated by the availability of free basic education and health care services. However, there may be long-term effects if poor families respond to reductions in income or unemployment by reducing the quantity or quality of food for their children. As in most other countries, there is lack of data to measure changes in the nutritional status of children in Thailand, so the negative effects of the crisis on health and nutrition may not be seen for some time.

31. The Government completed its analysis of household survey results on the situation of children and youth that focused on education issues, but also included modules gauging young people's awareness of HIV/AIDS. UNICEF updated its own analysis of the situation of children, youth and women by bringing together the latest research and data. The analysis includes a specially commissioned section on the threat posed by climate change.

32. The Third Periodic Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child was drafted and the final report will be submitted in 2010. A national consultation on lifting the Thailand reservation to Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — on registering children after birth, in particular children of migrants — will be considered by the Cabinet in 2010. The rights of some children of migrants were recognized when the Ministry of Labour announced that it would, in the future, register these children along with their parents when they receive documentation. This will allow these children access to social services and prevent their arrest or deportation.

### **Progress and key results at midterm**

33. In the area of child protection, the MTR confirmed an increase in systems building approaches and contribution to influencing policy and legislation. However, there is a need to more consistently apply this across all programme components. Particular focus has been given to the rights of the most vulnerable children and notable progress has been made in advocacy and leveraging resources.

34. External evaluation of three of the main programme components — education, child protection and local capacity-building — concluded that proxy indicators

showed progress toward impacts and that there is reasonable evidence to suggest achieved gains will prove sustainable.

35. Good progress was made across all programme components. Notably, the adoption of new policies and legislation through advocacy, including the increase in threshold age of criminal responsibility from 7 years to 10 years and the amendment to the Nationality Law and Civil Registration Law to ensure the universal right to birth registration and acquisition of Thai nationality for children who would otherwise be stateless. Systems for monitoring children's and women's rights were strengthened through the integration of multiple indicator cluster survey modules into national surveys. Targeted programmes for the protection and rights of vulnerable children included piloting an improved birth registration system, which led to reducing the number of non-registered children. Children and young people were provided opportunities to have a voice, including the publication *Everyday Fears*, which documented the perceptions of children living in the conflict-affected far South of Thailand. Experiences and best practices in furthering children's rights were exchanged through technical workshops (such as on child-friendly schools and on HIV/AIDS) with 17 other countries in the region and Africa through South-South Cooperation.

#### **Resources used**

36. During 2007-2009, regular programme expenditure totalled \$18.28 million, comprising \$15.36 million in other resources and \$2.92 million in regular resources. In addition, \$11.18 million in emergency funding was spent for the tsunami response. The breakdown of total regular programme spending was: 40 per cent for the child protection component, 15 per cent for education, 15 per cent for HIV/AIDS, 12 per cent for advocacy and social mobilization, and 9 per cent each for local capacity-building and social policy analysis components. The country programme was fully funded across all components with some 53 per cent of other resources raised locally from country sources. Other resources funding exceeded planned levels as a result of unplanned funding received for: (a) avian and human influenza response and response to other local emergencies; (b) continued tsunami 'building back better' programmes in child protection; and (c) support of the newly implemented cost-recovery scheme for local fundraising and ensuring self-reliance for the cost of local fundraising operations including staff costs. A request for an increase in the approved country programme other resources ceiling by an additional \$15 million (to a total of \$37.5 million) was submitted to the Executive Board.

#### **Constraints and opportunities affecting progress**

37. Major progress constraints include capacity gaps at the subnational level, which hindered effective implementation of policies. Gaps in data, especially disaggregated data, hindered planning and advocacy for the rights of marginalized groups and in measuring progress towards planned results. Limited national understanding and ownership in some programme components, especially relating to child protection issues, will need to be addressed in the remainder of the country programme period.

### **Adjustments made**

38. The MTR confirmed the relevance of current programme strategy as well as the need for further adjustments towards more ‘upstream’ UNICEF contribution across all programme components — including a focus on policy dialogue, evidence-based advocacy, and a provision of specific technical assistance introducing innovations as well as facilitating linkages with regional and global partnerships.

39. The MTR outlined a number of specific cross-cutting adjustments to the country programme:

(a) Maintain the focus on equity and on the most marginalized groups by ensuring reference to the most vulnerable people in programming and advocacy and in monitoring progress toward outcomes. Also, contribute to strengthened social protection for the most vulnerable people and strengthen implementation of programmes in the far South region.

(b) Facilitate the flow of evidence from subnational programming as well as from the work of other partners into policy dialogue by strengthening the strategic use of evaluation, research and piloting. Also, increase the quality of evidence by developing national capacities for the generation and use of data for decision-making.

(c) Strengthen national ownership of the programme and its results by more closely aligning the UNICEF plan with national planning processes, including multi-year workplans, and by setting up stronger mechanisms for intersectoral collaboration.

(d) Focus on achievement of high-level outcomes by modifying planned results in line with agreed MTR adjustments, ensuring clear results and a high degree of focus, and strengthen joint systems for monitoring progress toward results.

(e) Adjust the focused province approach by ensuring that all programme components are active and coordinated in selected locations in the north, north-east and south to demonstrate a synergistic impact.

40. A number of programme component adjustments were agreed upon, most notably that UNICEF contributions to results in the education sector should be significantly strengthened.

### **Conclusion**

41. The outcome of the 2009 regional MTRs underscore the importance of the UNICEF strategic programmatic ‘upstream’ shift, as well as the critical need for balancing that strategy with ‘downstream’ service delivery in low-income countries, such as the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The MTRs also reflect the importance of evidence-based programming and evidence-informed advocacy to influence policies for children. Thailand in particular exemplifies the UNICEF role in a middle-income country — a classification that many countries in the region are rapidly approaching.