

UNICEF follow-up to the Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children: oral report

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, as the first global review of this multifaceted issue, attracted wide and positive attention. The study was particularly noteworthy for its consultative process, in particular the nine regional meetings, the level of inter-agency engagement, and the active involvement of children and young people. The recommendations in the study are a sobering reminder of the work that is needed to make the world fit – and safe – for children. This oral report sets out UNICEF follow-up actions and charts issues and proposed actions ahead.

2. The study exposed the appalling scale and impact of all forms of violence against children, highlighting its universality and magnitude. Emphasis was placed on the need for multifaceted and coordinated solutions, for bringing together different perspectives and professional expertise and for engaging actively with children themselves. The recommendations are addressed primarily to States, referring to their legislative, administrative, judicial, policy-making, service delivery and institutional functions. The study's emphasis on the need for national child protection systems and on the preventable nature of violence against children provides strong reinforcement and encouragement to UNICEF and to other child protection advocates.

3. Child protection, including preventing and responding to violence against children, remains one of UNICEF's global programmatic priorities as set out in the medium-term strategic plan (MTSP). For this reason, the study recommendations are central to UNICEF work. In addition to the full engagement of child protection staff and partners, including civil society and the faith-based community, many essential actions in child protection require the engagement of other sectors, notably education and health.

II. Actions

4. The study recommendations dovetail with existing approaches and are also stimulating new areas of partnership to improve the protection of children. UNICEF is working with national authorities, children, civil society and others to strengthen the protective environment around children. The main examples of follow-up action, as well as indications of future actions, are set out below.

* E/ICEF/2007/13.

A. Dissemination of the findings and open discussion

5. In the relatively short time since the Secretary-General's study was presented to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, in October 2006, the study and the publications and materials it engendered – the World Report on Violence against Children and child-friendly materials – have been translated into more than 20 languages and have been featured in more than 80 international, regional and national launches. UNICEF has been instrumental in these efforts. Related publications developed by UNICEF with partners include a “Handbook on Violence against Children for Parliamentarians”, a publication on actions for religious leaders, and the *Coordinated Strategy for Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in One Generation*.

B. Legislation and implementation

6. UNICEF has been devoting particular attention to promoting, advocating and providing technical assistance for the implementation of laws, policies and programmes relating to violence. Several countries have passed new legislation as a result. An increasing number of Governments implement the United Nations Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime and are integrating into national systems the recommended indicators on children in conflict with the law. UNICEF has also carried out initiatives to improve judicial procedures for child victims and witnesses of sexual abuse and exploitation, and new child-sensitive procedures for investigating cases of violence are being adopted by several countries.

C. Capacity development of those who work with children, and support for basic and targeted services

7. In partnership with health, education, social welfare authorities and community-based organizations, various types of programmes are being implemented to ensure the access of child victims to treatment, counselling, protection and social reintegration. In more than 40 countries, UNICEF is working with countries to address the scarcity of social workers and to improve the capacity of those who work with children. In several countries, UNICEF continues to help to map existing social welfare capacity for protection. In south-eastern Europe, UNICEF promoted a consultation in July 2007 involving inputs from 10 countries (assessments, documented practices and fact sheets), which focused on quality-assurance of services for children, including a thorough discussion on the importance of standards, supervisory mechanisms and inspections. Through the Child-Friendly Schools initiative, and as part of the broader United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, UNICEF works with school and education systems to improve the effectiveness of violence prevention and the addressing of gender issues in schools. The study emphasizes that it is important to address gender stereotypes and other risk factors that form part of the cultural context.

8. One systemic aspect of capacity development and support for services that should help to protect children is improved civil registration systems. UNICEF continues to advocate, promote and support children's access to birth registration, including measures specifically focusing on marginalized groups. In this regard, regional partnerships were maintained with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States in the Partnership on Citizen Registration.

9. Protection in situations of conflict and emergencies is crucial. Programmes continue to be implemented to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children, including by peace-keeping forces and as part of emergency response. Support for capacity development in

multi-sector approaches to preventing and responding to sexual violence is ongoing. UNICEF has partnered with other United Nations agencies to support the capacity of governments and civil society partners to raise public awareness on reducing the impact of landmines, through mine-risk education, and on reducing the impact of small arms and armed violence on children.

D. Attitudes and practices

10. Support to the abandonment of female genital cutting has yielded important insights into the dynamics of social change, and UNICEF is seeking to increase both knowledge and programming through academic and civil society partnerships. An evaluation of a programme based in Senegal indicated that a significant reduction in cutting had been sustained over many years. UNICEF is examining the possible application of this approach to other social conventions, in particular those that relate to early marriage.

E. Knowledge and monitoring and oversight

11. The study highlights the dearth of systematic information-gathering on violence against children. Seven modules on child protection issues have been designed for the multiple indicator cluster surveys (household surveys). The third round of these surveys has provided data for 50 countries on child marriage and birth registration, and for more than 30 countries on child discipline, attitudes towards domestic violence and child disability. The module on female genital mutilation/cutting has been used in 10 countries. UNICEF has developed a participatory assessment tool on violence against children and, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a “Manual for the Measurement of Juvenile Justice Indicators”, which introduces 15 global juvenile justice indicators.

III. Partnerships

12. Partnerships were important throughout the study process and are instrumental to successful implementation of the study’s recommendations. UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director continued in 2007 to chair the Inter-Agency Group on Violence against Children, comprising United Nations agencies and members of the NGO Advisory Council on Violence against Children; to promote sharing and coordination of efforts, joint advocacy and collaboration; and to support the Independent Expert in gathering information and developing reports.

13. UNICEF has partnered with other agencies in various initiatives to prevent and respond to violence, including by serving as the secretariat of the Donor Working Group on female genital mutilation/cutting, as a member of the Inter-agency Coordinating Panel on Juvenile Justice, and by participating in the Understanding Children’s Work programme, the Global Initiative to Fight Trafficking, and the UNDP/WHO-led Armed Violence Prevention Programme. UNICEF has also been prominent in the establishment of a high-level panel for the Commission on the Status of Women, which led to adoption by the Commission of two resolutions. Plans are under way to work more closely with WHO for implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, including in data collection.

14. The study process has opened up debate and expanded networks that are now poised to accelerate action to prevent and respond to violence against children. Several Governments, as well as NGOs, have sought assurances of strong leadership from UNICEF in the follow-up to the study,

and the organization is committed to strengthening its leadership in this regard. UNICEF will work towards accelerated implementation at country level.

IV. The way forward

15. The study process spurred significant national commitment and gave an impetus to the development of national and regional networks and to the participation of children and young people on issues of vital concern to them. Following up on these commitments, and maintaining high visibility to these issues, will need action at all levels.

16. UNICEF is committed to providing technical support to countries and other partners for the implementation of the study recommendations, including through mapping national protection systems; legislative reform, improving data collection, and strengthening the capacity of those who work with children; and supporting the continued participation of young people. At the regional level, the support of UNICEF offices is proving important to scaling up and catalysing implementation. This is evident in the thorough and sustained process in the Middle East and North Africa region, which has resulted in the development of integrated strategies in many countries of this region.

17. The UNICEF strategy for child protection will review this in greater detail, including organizational resource and capacity issues related to study follow-up as an integral part of UNICEF work. The inter-agency cooperation and broader coalitions that have grown up around the study are immensely valuable, and UNICEF will continue to work closely with partners in preventing and responding to violence against children, including through chairing the Inter-Agency Group on Violence against Children.

18. Examples of inter-agency action include UNICEF and WHO joint plans to support country- and regional-level activities around four of the study's recommendations, namely: strengthen national and local commitment and action; prioritize primary prevention; provide recovery and social reintegration services; and develop and implement systematic national data collection and research. Major conferences planned with partners for 2008 include a World Congress on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (following conferences on this subject in Stockholm in 1996 and in Yokohama in 2001), and a Global Child Labour Conference, with ILO/IPEC and the World Bank.
