

**“Plus 5” review of the 2002 Special Session on Children and
World Fit for Children Plan of Action**

Update of Activities from Sri Lanka

Major National Actions taken for Children and towards the WFFC targets since 2002:

Sri Lanka developed and launched its National Plan of Action for the Children of Sri Lanka (NPA) 2004-2008 in September 2004 as a follow-up to the WFFC agenda agreed upon at the UN Special Session on Children in 2002 and the State's commitment towards its Children. The NPA was part of and falls within the broad policy framework, articulated in the policy document “Creating Our Future, Building Our Nation” of the then Government, which encompasses country's social sector programmes aimed at poverty reduction. The present Government's development strategy “Mahinda Chintana” and the ten year Development Policy Framework 2007-2016 too reflect strategies and commitments made in the NPA ensuring broadly the protection of children's rights especially in the areas of education, health, water and sanitation and abuse.

Since official launch, which marked the operationalisation of the NPA, the State's commitment in terms of funds towards the implementation of the NPA activities increased. The total budgetary allocation for the year 2007 for the sectors of health, education, water and sanitation, justice, labour, and child protection is USD 6 million for the implementation of the NPA activities and it shows a substantial increase over the last three years allocation in 2006 being around USD 2 million. The reasons for the increased trend in the funding levels for NPA is invariably the commitment of the State towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which are the overarching development milestones and the basis for Mahinda Chintana Goals and other development targets. WFFC goals are fully consistent with the MDGs, and therefore achieving MDGs mean fulfilling the commitments made at UN Special Session on Children in 2002. Sri Lanka is on track to achieving many of MDGs except for poverty reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate and a few other mortality rates.

Initially, the NPA implementation monitoring mechanism was to establish a national steering committee under the Department of National Planning (DNP) of the Ministry of Finance and Planning as DNP was the focal agency in the formulation of the NPA. The operationalisation of the NPA took place in September 2004 and as such, much could not be achieved in terms of implementation and monitoring of progress in the same year. However, sectoral allocations made were utilized to implement the activities at provincial levels. In 2005, activities under the NPA were implemented at various administrative levels, progress monitoring did not take place as the focus in the development and social sectors was on tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction and sectoral ministries and departments were preoccupied with tsunami related activities. This does not mean that the development activities in the non-affected areas were neglected, development work including NPA did take place. Following the Presidential Elections in 2005, a reshuffle of ministries took place, under which established was the Ministry of Child Development

and Women's Empowerment (MCD&WE). The responsibility of monitoring the NPA implementation was then cast on the MCD&WE and the establishment of the National Steering Committee under the Chairmanship of the Secretary resulted. The Steering Committee consists of all sectoral stakeholders including UNICEF and Save the Children in Sri Lanka at national level represent provincial interests. At times when specific province related issues are discussed, the relevant province is represented at the Steering Committee. It needs to be mentioned that it took some time before it was clear to the Committee as to what its Terms of Reference and commitments are. However, the Committee held four progress review meetings in 2006 and managed to advocate for and work towards increased budgetary allocations in the 2007 national budget. Progress of the NPA implementation, discussions that take place at the meetings and the decisions are available for reference in the form of minutes of the meetings which are circulated to all the stakeholders. One of the important issues under discussion at the Committee was the responsibility of close monitoring of progress of activities and reporting to national level by provincial structures. This aspect needs improvement and Steering Committee is working towards this end.

In the NPA development stage, participation of children was high. The process was facilitated by Save the Children in Sri Lanka and Sarvodaya, an NGO, in collaboration with UNICEF. Participation of child representatives from all districts, in spite of the ongoing conflict was a remarkable achievement in the initial stages of the NPA development.

Gaps exist between the estimated budgets as given in the NPA and yearly allocations. One of the issues to be resolved by the Steering Committee is to determine the ways of bridging the funding gaps, which will be taken up at the Committee on priority basis in 2007.

Creation of a new Cabinet Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment by the current President indicates the high priority given by the government for child development and protection. This Ministry is now the focal point for monitoring the Plan of Action for Children.