Evaluation of the UNICEF-DIPECHO Programme supporting Disaster Risk Reduction Amongst Vulnerable Communities and Institutions in Central Asia and South Caucasus

Background

In spring 2010, UNICEF received two grants from Directorate General - European Commissions’ Humanitarian Aid Office (DG-ECHO) under its Disaster Preparedness (DIPECHO) programme to implement two disaster risk reduction programmes—one in South Caucasus and the other in Central Asia. The objective of the programme was to increase resilience and reduce vulnerability of local communities and national institutions mainly through disaster mitigation and preparedness activities within the education sector in seven countries of the two sub-regions: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Objective, scope and methodology

As required by the DIPECHO programme, and to inform the next programme, UNICEF conducted an evaluation at the end of the programme to verify the results achieved through their support and identify lessons learnt to inform the following programming period. The evaluation covered the period September to November 2011 and was undertaken by an independent expert. The methodology adopted included a desk review as well as 5 project country visits. Findings, preliminary conclusions and recommendations were discussed with key stakeholders before finalisation of the evaluation.

Equity focus

The programme targeted significantly vulnerable areas in the 7 countries, focusing on the most vulnerable populations. Males and females were represented equally in all the training materials and education services. The only gender differentiation came at a school in Tajikistan where senior girls were given the role of nurses and senior boys were given responsibilities for search and rescue, fire fighting and security. Some countries had different perspectives on gender and assigned specific roles to men and women differently. Deliberate steps were taken to ensure that gender issues were dealt with equitably.

Key findings and conclusions

Relevance. The region of Central Asia and the South Caucasus is highly vulnerable to disasters that are amplified by poverty, ethnic tension, inequitable gender relations and other factors. This programme was found highly relevant as it addressed priority areas under Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which is a global blueprint for reducing disaster risks. With a strong focus on education, the programme reached school children, teachers and other school staff at local level and policy makers within the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Emergency/Emergency Departments Situations at national level.

Effectiveness. All countries in the two regions achieved the specific programme objectives and expected results. Some policy and curriculum change were achieved, teacher training developed and conducted; and school safety assessments and training undertaken. In almost all countries, there were pre and post programme surveys which gauged the knowledge of children before and after the DRR activities in schools. All surveys confirmed positive results. At local levels the pilot schools (teachers and students) have directly benefited through the provision of safety equipment to schools, teacher
training, student education in DRR, emergency drills and personal safety awareness.

**Efficiency.** A hallmark of this programme was the strong partnership approach. The partner agencies offered technical expertise in DRR, risk assessment, training in evacuation and specialist advice to curriculum development; Government agencies provided the mandate, support, teacher training and development of training and educational materials. UNICEF worked well to build partnerships and developed varied and in-depth working relationships from school to national level. However, a major difficulty was the relative brevity of the programme (15 months) which cumulated with delayed staff appointments and constraints on coordination protocol, did not allow for its full embedding in all countries. The short duration of the programme also affected some Governments’ level of commitment. Finally, confusion occurred at times between short-term emergency management and long-term structural disaster risk reduction.

**Impact.** Despite challenges mentioned above the evaluation reports that the programme made substantial contribution to DRR relevant teaching and learning materials, teacher training, student education and school safety and risk management. DRR and how it may be enacted through education is better understood at national levels and increased political commitment was observed.

**Sustainability.** Post-programme benefits in the target school are substantial and will persist for the life of the current teacher cohort; this applies to education and safety awareness. Teaching support and teaching materials will have to be periodically renewed as they wear out. Curriculum change and development will also persist until challenged by other priorities in the frequent reviews of curriculum content. Long term sustainability is doubtful unless additional support is provided regularly. Educational outcomes may not be easily or quickly disseminated across each country. However, the curriculum development, teacher training and educational materials and the good practice guides provide a springboard to launch a wider DRR/Education programme if this is decided by national governments.

**Lessons learned**

Considering all the positive results already achieved it is clear that with a longer adequately resourced programme more could have been achieved especially in terms of scaling up and national level long-term commitment to disaster risk reduction.

**Main recommendations**

**Rec 1:** Disaster Risk Reduction needs to be clearly and definitively conceptualized by UNICEF and confusion with natural hazard control, emergency management and emergency response activities needs to be avoided.

**Rec 2:** That future similar projects allow for greater coordination of resources at both regional coordination level (within the project area) and also at regional office level (Geneva) and these resources to include both personnel and funding for travel, communications and knowledge transfer mechanisms, including inter-country office workshops and knowledge portal websites.

**Rec 3:** The relationship within UNICEF of Disaster Risk Reduction and Education needs to be clarified and agreed and projects clearly assigned to one sector.

**Rec 4:** Mainstreaming elements of DRR into the Education sector should be actively considered in UNICEF at policy, strategy and country office levels strongly linking DRR with development; kick off funding as necessary should be allocated to facilitate this process.

**Rec 5:** Project duration needs to be extended where feasible to between 3 and 5 years for projects that involve policy change and curriculum development.

**Rec 6:** Project management should be clearly assigned to the Regional Office with individual UNICEF country offices responsible for implementation with project design focusing on regional as well as national issues.

For more information and to access the full evaluation report, contact: mecop@unicef.org