

Social Policy for Children in SIDS Paper Series

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Fit for Children Network



Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Fit for Children Network – A Concept Note

UNICEF Pacific and the Eastern Caribbean Offices

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Abstract

Children's rights matter in Small Island Development States (SIDS), where high levels of social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities co-exist. In 2007, a UNICEF organizational review expanded upon the recommendation that UNICEF should further invest in strategic thinking, knowledge management, and continued learning for enhanced programme results. Building on this recommendation, the UNICEF Offices in the Eastern Caribbean and Pacific have initiated dialogue on the establishment of a "Community of Practice" to share experiences and create learning opportunities for UNICEF as well as respective country and sub-regional partners. The paper outlines how both UNICEF offices, with support from their respective regional offices, can jointly focus on the progressive fulfilment of children's rights in SIDS, building on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, but also on the Mauritius Strategy, thematic exchanges and joint short and long term results.¹

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Executive Summary

The UNICEF offices in the Caribbean and Pacific have initiated dialogue on the establishment of a “Community of Practice” to share experiences and create learning opportunities for UNICEF as well as respective country and regional partners. This paper outlines how both UNICEF offices could jointly focus on the progressive fulfilment of children’s rights in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), building on the Mauritius Strategy, thematic exchanges and geared towards short and long term results.

Section One provides a justification for the proposed Community of Practice.

Section Two offers a brief analysis of the major challenges, both common and distinct, affecting both the Caribbean and Pacific SIDS including child poverty and youth exclusion.

Section Three considers the broader governance context of the two sub-regions, including Millennium Development Goals (MDG) progress, child-centred policy and budgeting, and national institutional capacities.

Section Four reflects on the Mauritius strategy noting the many entry points for enhanced UNICEF engagement with SIDS and donors.

Section Five describes an initial work plan for a Community of Practice between the UNICEF offices in the Caribbean and Pacific sub-regions. If productive, the Community of Practice could be usefully expanded to other SIDS such as Indian Ocean countries.

The establishment of a “Community of Practice”

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as the Caribbean and Pacific Islands are island and low-lying coastal countries that share similar sustainable development challenges, including small but predominantly youthful populations, adverse symptoms of violence, lack of resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, excessive dependence on international trade and vulnerability to global economic developments. Though many of the countries may have important differences in income levels, culture and historical background, they are all hampered by small economies of scale, high transportation and communication costs, and costly public administration and infrastructure (Binger, 2002). The countries in both regions are also strongly affected by migration and various forms of “brain drain”, impacting in particular on public institutional capacity.

As an intergovernmental organisation with a UN General Assembly mandate for children’s rights, UNICEF has developed an extensive experience working with SIDS countries (UNICEF, 2004). UNICEF has an Office for the Eastern Caribbean (ECO) based in Barbados which covers 10 SIDS in the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Turks and Caicos Islands. The UNICEF Pacific Office, based in Suva, Fiji with three field offices in Kiribati, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands covers 14 Pacific Island States (PICS). Both country programmes have a similar focus on social policy, child protection and youth development. In coordination with their respective regional offices, the UNICEF ECO and Pacific offices have started exploring how to learn from and build on each other’s experience to improve their mission for children’s rights in their respective SIDS countries.

The recent Update on the organizational review of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2007/CRP.16) expanded upon the review’s recommendation that UNICEF should develop a country segmentation as a tool for strategic thinking, programme design, and continued learning. The rationale underpinning this recommendation is that UNICEF could increasingly capitalize on the global nature and influence of the organization by creating greater strategic coherence and knowledge-sharing among its geographically distributed locations. Given the increasing heterogeneity of countries within regions, the traditional geographic groupings of UNICEF do not fully provide opportunities for knowledge-sharing across a range of countries. There are considerable opportunities for UNICEF to facilitate learning and sharing of best practices among countries facing similar issues.

Aligning countries in different regions but with similar developmental challenges offers more relevant cross-country learning, collaborative strategic thinking and knowledge-sharing. While recognizing country ownership and attention to a country’s unique characteristics remain paramount, it was recommended that an analytical tool be developed to recognize patterns among countries and facilitate dialogue around how successful programming approaches in one

country can be applied in countries with similar contexts and challenges. Such an approach can help facilitate UNICEF thinking around engagement with middle-income countries. The broader exercise would also provide an opportunity for more innovative thinking around the UNICEF role and value-added in these countries.

Building on this recommendation, the UNICEF offices in the Caribbean and Pacific have initiated dialogue on the establishment of a “Community of Practice” to share experiences and create learning opportunities for UNICEF as well as respective country and regional partners. Two videoconferences were held in September and October 2007 between various UNICEF staff in Panama, Barbados, Suva and Bangkok. This joint concept paper is the outcome of these initial discussions. The respective UNICEF offices with support from their respective regional offices could jointly focus on the progressive fulfilment of children’s rights in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), building on the Mauritius Strategy, thematic exchanges and geared towards short and long term results.

Specific challenges to ensure the rights of children in SIDS settings

As confirmed by the Social Policy Mapping in the Eastern Caribbean (UNICEF ECO, 2007), SIDS countries have an urgent need to deal with child poverty, youth exclusion, build political will to tackle child protection issues, develop youth empowerment and education quality and improve sustainable access and quality to Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings. The following section expands upon these major challenges. They are by no means the only challenges facing the two sub-regions, but are presented here as indicative of the potential areas for initial joint focus and learning by the proposed Community of Practice.

Social, economical and natural vulnerability

Countries in both sub-regions are amongst the most vulnerable in the world as a direct result of the prevalence of natural disasters (e.g., floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis), potential sea level rise due to global warming, and unsustainable exploitation of marine and land resources. Most countries –despite their high, middle or low income status- are also economically vulnerable. National economies depend on external factors such as trade agreements, fluctuating oil prices and the unpredictability of income from tourism. These volatile economic conditions contribute to high migration rates, which in turn affect social services with many skilled teachers and nurses leaving, and cohesion of families and communities. The dependency of foreign aid and loans has led to unsustainable high levels of debt burdens, which has led to higher costs of living because of tax reforms impacting child poverty and social exclusion. Both regions suffer from high levels of social inequality, leading to different forms of violence and social exclusion, which can be considered as social vulnerability.

Child and youth poverty and exclusion

Child and youth poverty is extremely high in both sub-regions. In the Eastern Caribbean for example, youth (less than 24 years old) represent more than 50% of the poor (Rossel-Cambier, Pourzand and Olsen, 2007). The State of Pacific Youth Report (UNICEF 2005) highlighted that 18 percent of young men and 19 percent of young women (aged 16-24 years) are unemployed across the Pacific. Countries such as Dominica and Vanuatu are affected by high levels of youth unemployment and low levels of education and skills. In both regions, support for life-skills and vocational training together with the creation of opportunities for young people to engage in alternative livelihoods, civic engagement and entrepreneurship need to be considered. These should enable broader approaches to young people's livelihood opportunities, going beyond conventional youth employment approaches. Also efforts to promote the voice of children and young people in local and national decision-making must be strengthened.

Globalization, economic modernization, new lifestyle aspirations, and in some cases, population growth, have created new problems of cash poverty, poverty of opportunity, social isolation, and inequality across economies in both sub-regions. The impact of poverty on childhood and youth is not well understood in both sub-regions. At the same time, internal male migration and complete dependence on money for livelihoods are contributing to a fragmentation of families. While rural poverty continues, urban poverty has created the most problematic social challenges in both sub-regions linked to urban drift, radical social and economic change, massive unemployment and underemployment among youth, rising levels of violence and violent crime, and the loss of community norms and subsistence resources.

HIV and AIDS

HIV and AIDS has emerged as a major development problem for the Caribbean region, second only to sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS is now the leading cause of death in the 15-44 year old age group. Estimates for adult prevalence rates range from 0.25% in Grenada to 1.5% in Barbados (UNAIDS, 2007). There is a gender dimension involved, with the annual reported incidence of HIV three to six times higher in girls and women between 15 to 24 years old in comparison with males in the same age group (Blank, 2007). Children face stigma in schools and society if they or their family members are infected with HIV/AIDS and, being young and vulnerable, they are poorly equipped to deal with this. Studies indicate that while most young people are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS, this knowledge has not yet been translated into behavioural change and therefore, in many countries rates continue to increase as young people engage in risky behaviour. In the Eastern Caribbean, among young people who are sexually active, almost 80% of boys and 50% of girls reported that sexual initiation occurred before the age of 13 (Blank, 2007). Up to 40% of the girls reported their first sexual initiation was forced. Early initiation and low levels of condom use contribute to high percentages of teen pregnancies and exposure to STIs and HIV, accounting from 10 to 20% of live births in Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, the Turks and the Caicos Islands.

The burden of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the Pacific Islands are difficult to determine due to the lack of accurate data exacerbated by weak surveillance and diagnostic systems. While cumulative numbers of reported HIV cases remain within the range of a concentrated epidemic in most Pacific Island countries – except for Tuvalu and Kiribati which are rapidly moving towards the threshold of a generalized epidemic – adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections reflect the prevalence of unsafe sexuality, a potential driver of an explosive epidemic. As well as high prevalence of STIs, there is limited knowledge of how HIV is transmitted, unsafe sex is extremely common particularly among the young, and a high proportion of people have multiple and casual partners (WHO, 2006).

Child Protection

In the Eastern Caribbean, the number of reported cases of physical abuse of children in their homes, communities, as well as institutions caring for children and the number of crimes committed by children against other children, is increasing. The lack of on-going family support, combine with shortcomings in parenting skills, often leads to authoritarian child rearing practices and use of corporal and other forms of abusive punishment. In all countries, the school environment remains authoritarian with corporal punishment legal and prevalent.

In a survey of Caribbean school children, about 11% girls and 9% of boys reported that they had been sexually abused including through incestⁱ. Juvenile justice systems are still not fully harmonised with international human rights instruments. In most countries, the age of criminal responsibility is less than 18 years. This has led to children who come in conflict with the law being incarcerated, as programmes for alternative means of sentencing are seldom in place. Since there are usually no separate detention facilities for children, they are often placed in the same facility as adults. In almost all countries, children in residential care facilities are not protected by functional legislation or standards and monitoring mechanisms. Other protection issues include disability, child labour and trafficking. Currently only 5% of students with special needs are accommodated at special schools and approximately 15-20% of children in regular primary schools appear to need special education. Trafficking of children within and beyond the Caribbean is another emerging child protection issue, at times hidden under migration.

A similar situation occurs in the Pacific Islands. Legislation and law enforcement to cope with the rising incidence of child abuse and domestic violence requires strengthening throughout the Pacific. Birth registration systems are weak or fragmented. Corporal punishment is accepted within households as well as in schools and villages. Despite evidence that commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is on the rise in the Pacific, most countries do not have legislation to deal with this. Several studies suggest an increase in the number of homeless children and young people living away from their immediate families or on the streets. Alcohol and drug use also render children more vulnerable to various forms of violence and abuse, and increase the likelihood of young people getting into conflict with the law. Social services and

welfare capacities are weak and are not accessible to rural and remote areas (UNICEF, forthcoming).

Education and Early Childhood Development

Both sub-regions suffer from highly competitive, authoritarian and inflexible schooling systems, progressively “pushing-out” many students from the education system leading to high drop-out rates. In the Pacific region, according to several recent situation analyses, numeracy and literacy rates are dropping and questions are arising over the appropriateness of national curricula. In both regions, very few schools in the region are able to cater for disabled children. Most countries dedicate a large portion of their national budget towards education but the quality of services including curricula, teacher competencies and staff-to-student ratios needs to be addressed. The lack of flexible, child/adolescent focused learning schemes remain an issue, while teen mothers and disabled children continue to face stigma and discrimination in access to and participation in formal education services, although there is no legal barrier .

Currently 17 percent of the children in the Pacific do not enrol in primary school (19% did not enrol in 1990). Only Fiji and Tuvalu are above 95 percent primary education enrolment ratios. Primary education is not compulsory in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu although Solomon Islands has instituted a ‘no fee’ policy. Primary school fees or locally applied registration fees exist in RMI, Samoa (some schools), Tonga, and Vanuatu. Of those children who currently enrol in primary education across the region, 12 percent never reach grade 5. There has been no regional change in the ratio of girls to boys in secondary school (0.96 in 1990; 0.96 in 2000) (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2004).

In the Eastern Caribbean, most countries are moving towards universal primary education, but there still remain gaps to guarantee that all countries achieve universal access and completion. Presently, average primary net enrolment rates average around 92%, while completion rates average 85% in the Eastern Caribbean (Blank, 2007). Special attention is given to the need to access quality early childhood services, in particular for vulnerable children. Access to day care services for under two year-olds vary from 5 to 53% and preschool enrolment rates ranging from 55 to 95% (Blank, 2007).

The MDGs, governance and policy environment

While the previous section has highlighted some of the major challenges common and unique to each sub-region, the following section considers the broader governance context of both sub-regions including MDG progress, child-centred policy and budgeting, accountabilities for children's rights, and the challenges of national institutional capacity in SIDS.

The MDGs

The countries of the Eastern Caribbean, are most likely to achieve the MDGs 1, 2, 4 and 5. Nevertheless, they indicate that additional resources and efforts are needed to achieve the objectives 3, 6, 7 and 8. Unless urgent attention is given to prevention of HIV/AIDS, child protection, quality and relevant education, social inclusion and violence, the fulfilment of children's rights will remain in jeopardy. The Pacific Island States have made only moderate progress towards the MDGs. The UNESCAP/UNDP/ADB MDG Report (2006) describes progress in the Asia-Pacific Region as "...still slow and performance on some targets, particularly health-related ones, including water and sanitation, [as]... unsatisfactory". The Sachs MDG Report (2005) described Oceania – PICs and Territories plus Papua New Guinea – as being "...off track for nearly every [MDG] goal, and falling back in some areas... [The report goes on to note that]...Even where there is progress, it is too slow to achieve MDGs... Only Sub-Saharan Africa is off track on more indicators than Oceania."

Child-centred policy and budgeting

In both regions, there is a need to bring the social and child-rights dimension more explicitly, consistently and effectively into the formulation of national and regional poverty reduction and development strategies including those dealing with structural adjustment, macroeconomic policy design or trade agreements, and a stronger involvement of civil society in social policy design. These should be based upon impact analyses of past, present and future social and economic policies and other related thematic studies (e.g., children and poverty, disparities, why invest in children and young people). Moreover, in both regions, there is poor donor coordination and poor targeting of international assistance.

Despite studies and surveys on children and young people being conducted in the both sub-regions, examples of meaningful translation of research findings into policy, budgeting and programming are scarce. Child-related data capture has been weak or uneven within countries and at regional level. Systematic tracking of progress towards child-related MDGs or other development targets needs support. There is a need to strengthen social sector information management systems with a particular emphasis on the regular collation, storage, analysis, dissemination, and use of disaggregated data associated with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, UN 1989), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), World Fit for Children (WFFC) goals, relevant Millennium Declaration Chapters, and child-related MDG targets and indicators.

The vertical analysis of the Eastern Caribbean Social policy mapping (UNICEF ECO, 2007) has revealed that there is little information available on the financial commitment of governments towards the investment in children, that national legislation on children holds little coherence with international standards and that political will is visible for education and HIV and AIDS issues, but should be stronger on child protection issues. This situation is similar for the Pacific Island Countries despite their average lower-income status.

Various countries' governments have made substantial efforts in investing in basic social services, as agreed by the 20/20 initiative. Still, there is evidence that in various countries, expenditure allocated to basic services has been decreased. The high level of debt burden in many countries, ranging from 43 percent in Antigua and Barbuda (CDB, 2006), 55 percent in Samoa in 2002, 71 percent in Vanuatu in 2002 (UNDP 2005a) to 99 percent in Grenada (CDB, 2006), hampers sustainable public funding for social sectors. With relation to rising costs of living, certain physical structures have deteriorated, and there is evidence of a persistent brain drain as the skilled human capital continues to migrate. Analysis of gender and child related investment is a challenge and may lead to a clearer understanding and mainstreaming of child and woman's rights in government budgeting.

In both sub-regions, there is evidence of inadequate government investment in social and protection services. Macroeconomic policies and national budget allocations often fail to take into consideration social/human development concerns and needs. Local level involvement in national budgetary processes is often limited, undermining the linkage between national and community priorities. In the Pacific Region, for example, budget preparation is often constrained by tight timetables, lack of reliable information on outputs, insufficient analysis, and inadequate budget costing at sub-national levels. Where Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks exist, Ministries do not routinely refer to their forward estimates in preparing new budgets.

In both regions, there is a need for national and sub-national budgets to be based on an informed balance between macroeconomic priorities and child, youth and women-centred development goals, are results-oriented, accountable, and established and monitored through participatory processes.

In general, aid received by SIDS as a percentage of their Gross National Income (GNI) fell between 1990 and 2001, from 2.7 per cent to 0.8 per cent, to \$1.7 billion in 2001 (UNDP, 2005b). This is partly because a number of SIDS have a reduced need for aid, having successfully diversified their economies by developing tourism, offshore banking, or clothing or other light industry.

Accountability for children's Rights

In the Eastern Caribbean, while CRC and CEDAW observations are increasingly reflected in certain National Plans of Action, children and women's rights issues are still not adequately integrated in national legislation and policies. In almost all countries, concluding remarks of the CRC stressed the inadequacy of legislative reform such issues of non-discrimination on the grounds of age, obligation for the best interest of the child to be a primary consideration in judiciary and administrative processes, the continuing access problems of children and women to the juridical and legal services and the need for enhancing national policies from a child perspective.

All Pacific and Caribbean Country governments have ratified the CRC, but few have begun aligning policies, plans and laws to Convention Articles, but most of them are late in reporting to the Commission on the Rights of the Child. Less than half of them have acceded to the Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on children affected by armed conflict; or the Optional Protocol to CEDAW (UNICEF, forthcoming).

In both regions, SIDS are concerned about the burden of reporting and dubious about the benefits of ratification. Despite considerable support from UN agencies and other groups, the process of reporting can take time, and requires extensive consultation and information-gathering. Yet, in the Pacific Region, there have been good collaborative efforts to produce such reports and to implement these treaties, especially where NGOs and civil society groups have helped governments.

Challenges for national institutional capacity

The social policy analysis (UNICEF ECO, 2007) put stress on the overall **low institutional capacity** of governmental and non-governmental players in implementing social programmes in the Eastern Caribbean region, which is also the case in the Pacific Islands. SIDS are confronted with a wide array of challenges and may not always have the human or institutional resources to respond to the different needs of its citizens, and in particular its children. Small institutions are in charge of multi-task missions that require a more integrated approach in order to prevent overlapping and overburden. Most SIDS are characterised by **centralised public services** which are still embedded in historical procedures and protocols, incompatible with further modernisation and lack flexible and pro-active working methods. Public services have difficulties in the delivery of **quality social services** because of continuous brain drain and are hampered by the continuous need for innovation. Adverse effects of this are reflected by indicators reflecting education achievements including Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) passing rates and drop-out rates, quality health services, security and justice issues. In particular in the Pacific Islands, the vast distances between communities pose a great challenge to governments to ensure access and deliver quality social services to remote communities and vulnerable populations. Sector-wide reforms are either progressing too slowly or in some cases diminishing government capacity.

The Mauritius Strategy for the further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS – the role of UNICEF

In April 1994, a first Global Conference on Sustainable Development of SIDS was convened in Barbados. The conference adopted the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA) that set forth specific actions and measures to be taken at the national, regional and international levels in support of the sustainable development of SIDS. In September 1999, the 22nd Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly undertook a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and called for concerted efforts to support its implementation.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 reaffirmed the special case of SIDS and highlighted a series of SIDS-specific issues and concerns in the Johannesburg Plan of Action, adopted by the Summit. In a follow-up to WSSD, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution which called for a comprehensive review of the BPoA at a high-level international meeting, which was held in Mauritius in 2005.ⁱⁱ Though the Mauritius strategy is often associated with natural and environmental disasters, the preservation of marine resources and more generally the MDG 7, “ensure environmental sustainability” (United Nations ECOSOC, 2005), the strategy is much larger and deals with various other issues such as climate change adaptation and sea-level rise, energy, intellectual property rights and development, biodiversity, culture and development, agriculture and rural development, HIV/AIDS, transport and security, sustainable production and consumption and information and communication technologies.

The Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States includes various action points and states that: *“All organs and programmes of the United Nations system should coordinate and rationalize their work in implementing the present Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action.”*

While various UN agencies have been actively engaged in supporting SIDS to implement the BPoA and Mauritius Strategy, it might be said that UNICEF, with a clear mission on children’s rights, could play a much more strategic role. The Mauritius Strategy explicitly mentions that “Small island developing States recognize the integral role of youth in sustainable development and express the need to further ensure their participation in programmes and activities related to sustainable development on small island developing States.” (paragraph 14) and reaffirms the importance of gender equality and the “full and equal access of girls and boys, women and men to all levels of education”(paragraph 15). Still, as today, these key areas have not been adequately included in the implementation strategy.

In the Mauritius Declaration, Small island developing States also reaffirmed their commitment to create a world fit for children as called for in the outcome document adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh special session and, in this regard, undertake to give all assistance to protect children and minimize the impacts of natural disasters and environmental degradation on them.

Table 1 provides a rapid synopsis of the key themes of the Mauritius Strategy and illustrates ways in which greater UNICEF engagement could be developed.

Table 1: UNICEF and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States

Mauritius Strategy theme	Relevance to UNICEF (CRC, WFFC, UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) 2006-2011 correspondence)	Potential ways forward for increased UNICEF engagement
Climate change and sea-level rise	+	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, situation analyses, child-centred policy and budgets
Natural and environmental disasters	++++	Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies. Disaster Preparedness Education for Children
Management of wastes	++	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets, education
Coastal and marine resources	+	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets
Freshwater resources	++++	Water and sanitation programmes, education
Land resources	+	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets
Energy resources	+	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets
Tourism resources	+++	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets. Child Protection

Biodiversity resources	+	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets
Transport and communication	++	Education and Child Protection. Child-centred policy and budgets.
Science and technology	+++	Education and Child Protection. Partnerships for children. Child-centred policy and budgets.
Graduation from least developed country status	++	Partnerships for children. Child-centred policy and budgets.
Trade: globalization and trade liberalization	++	Situation analyses. Partnerships for children. Child-centred policy and budgets. Child Protection monitoring of imported products.
Sustainable capacity development and education for sustainable development	++++	Education. Child-centred policy and budgets.
Sustainable production and consumption	+	Children's involvement in social and environmental impact assessments, child-centred policy and budgets
National and regional enabling environments	++	Partnerships for children.
Health	++++	Child Survival, HIV and AIDS
Knowledge management and information for decision-making	++++	Child-related research, evaluations, data systems
Culture	++	Partnerships for children. Child Protection

UNICEF can offer specific contributions to SIDS. Concerning, **climate change and sea level rise**, as well as the **changing trade arrangements**, UNICEF can facilitate vulnerability and situation monitoring on impact on children.

With regards to **natural and environmental disasters**, UNICEF can contribute to contingency planning and early warning, support the preparation of emergency preparedness plans in each UNICEF country office and build national and community capacity to mitigate disasters. The

organization can undertake rapid assessments on the situation of children and women with age, ensuring gender disaggregated data and maintaining capacity to coordinate public health interventions in support of children and women. It can develop more effective provision of infant feeding and nutritional rehabilitation services for children. The agency can maintain capacity for inter-agency coordination in areas of primary concern or can provide essential supplies, for vaccinations and inputs (cold chain, syringes or training). UNICEF can strengthen the management and control of endemic communicable diseases and ensure that messages on health and nutrition issues are provided in a child-friendly manner. UNICEF can establish safe environments for children for learning, recreation and psychosocial support and initiate basic education services in collaboration with communities and local government, including education kits and learning materials for school children. The agency can ensure availability of a minimum safe water supply through technical and material support to partners. UNICEF should prevent and respond to abuses and sexual exploitation of women and children arising from unstable contexts, including orphans and unaccompanied children and ensure that financial and administrative resources are available to fulfil UNICEF's Core Corporate Commitments. These activities should be developed in the light of a larger advocacy strategy and plan of action with a child rights framework for **emergency preparedness**. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction approaches could also be supported by UNICEF's work in the education sector.

The issue of **water sanitation and waste** is in particular relevant for SIDS, and UNICEF can support the monitoring of water supply and water quality, promote community based water quality monitoring, facilitate the provision of safe water and sanitation in schools, support the development of low cost technologies, provide training and offer environmental education for children, youth and communities in formal and informal settings. UNICEF could also play a role in advocating for relevant child-friendly policies.

With reference to **coastal and marine resources**, UNICEF can support the monitoring of the impact on children and advise on child-centred sustainable development policies.

UNICEF should be involved in **land resources** issues, especially when these relate to food security monitoring and assessment of impact of integrated early childhood development and the knowledge needs on the impact on food security on children. UNICEF could also provide high level development policy advice.

UNICEF has developed experience in the promotion of community efforts in the management of biodiversity and has a role to play in **transport and communications**, by supporting community radio stations and the development of appropriate information products for children and youth, the enhancement of the participation of youth in advocacy and decision-making and the provision of logistical support for key health, education and protection services for children.

In terms of **human resource development**, UNICEF has experience in facilitating the survival of all infants and children under five from preventable deaths and disabilities and prevent the spread of childhood diseases and could strengthen capacity of families to ensure children have the best start in life through promotion of care practices, sound environmental health of communities and enhancement of **maternal and child health**. The organisation could increase access of families and communities to good quality basic services and adequate livelihoods. Moreover it could build capacity of health service personnel, seek to improve the quality of basic education through development and enhancement of teachers of formal and non-formal education and support the integration of environmental education and prevention in school curricula. UNICEF can emphasize girls' and boys' **education** and promote the role of women, youth, community-based and nongovernmental organizations in sustainable human development as well as emphasize youth and community participation in programming. Not only on the workplace in the community and within their families, should women's full participation and empowerment be promoted.

UNICEF should support the prevention of **HIV** infections among young people, prevent parent-to-child transmission of HIV, expand care for children and parents living with HIV and AIDS and expand protection, care and support for orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS. The organisation has experience conducting situation assessments on the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security and could facilitate situation assessment on orphans and other vulnerable children.

With relation to **security and governance**, UNICEF should work to end violence against women, especially violence within their families and work to protect all children so that they may grow free from violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination. The organisation, having a clear mission of monitoring children's rights, should promote legislative reform to enlarge the scope of child rights and advocate for allocation of public budgets for children.

UNICEF should invest in knowledge generation, dissemination and enable the development of a wider knowledge function on children in order to influence social policies adapted to the specific context of SIDS. UNICEF, in charge of rolling-out DevInfo for the dissemination of statistical indicators on development issues, can contribute to **knowledge and political will** through research on child poverty, child protection, early childhood development and youth issues, challenged by a small-island context.

UNICEF has a role to play dealing with **culture** in SIDS, in particular relating to the support for peace education and conflict resolution activities for children and youth and the use of existing local cultural and social resources to advocate for and realize child rights.

Through greater UNICEF engagement in the Mauritius strategy as outlined above, such strategic positioning should also provide the organization with important linkages to key donors

such as the European Union's African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) grouping and its the forthcoming EU Strategy and Policy on Children. More active engagement in the Mauritius strategy could be both an entry point for some substantive discussions with the donors operating in the Pacific and Caribbean, as well as leveraging UNICEF's policy credibility into an enhanced relationship with donors.

Towards joint sub-regional initiatives for children's right in SIDS

Many SIDS belong to regional organisations such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Through such regional mechanisms and by leveraging support from donors, UNICEF could play a greater role in mainstreaming children's rights into SIDS national development strategies, the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, as well as other international platforms.

The Mauritius Strategy outlines the types of assistance at global level considered essential in the implementation of actions to achieve progress against these themes, in particular through a knowledge function. In each of these areas of assistance, UNICEF could play a stronger role in following selected areas:

- Generation and dissemination of knowledge on children's and youth issues;
- Institutional capacity development and investment in children;
- National governance for children's rights and participation;
- Social policy through monitoring and evaluation.
- Emergency preparedness taking into account children's vulnerability.

Sharing similar objectives and working in a comparable context, the two UNICEF Offices covering the Eastern Caribbean and the Pacific Islands are considering an initial experimental joint work plan, under the form of a "Community of Practice" called "Caribbean Pacific Small Islands Fit for Children Network" including integrative activities as presented in the work plan below.

Caribbean Pacific Small Islands Fit for Children Network: Draft WorkPlan

Overall Goal and Specific Objectives.

The network aims at contributing to the rights of children in the Small Island Development States.

More in particular the network will:

- Strengthen knowledge, exchange of experiences and lessons learned between the UNICEF offices and their partners about the rights of children in SIDS;
- Advocate and mainstream children's rights in different policy frameworks, including the Mauritius strategy.

Outputs and activities

The joint initiative will ensure following activities, linked to the outputs mentioned above:

Output 1. Strengthen knowledge, exchange of experiences and lessons learned between the UNICEF offices and their partners about the rights of children in SIDS;

Activity 1.1. The generation and dissemination of joint SIDS policy paper series

At least 2 papers (joint or per sub-region) will be produced every year describing innovative experiences and lessons learned, linked to the context of SIDS. These papers will be printed and disseminated to the different partners in the Eastern Caribbean and the Pacific Islands and will be disseminated as well on the joint website.

Activity 1.2. Organisation of exchange visits and staff knowledge exchange programmes

Every year, at least one exchange visit of partners or staff will be supported in order to stimulate exchange and communication between both sub-regional offices. The exchanges will be linked with concrete results and joint projects.

Activity 1.3. Thematic knowledge development community of practice

Thematic focal points (Social policy MandE, youth development, emergency preparedness and child protection) will be encouraged to define specific knowledge development and exchange activities can be defined by their respective focal points, in function of existing opportunities, lessons learned and knowledge needs.

Output 2. Advocate and mainstream children's rights in different policy frameworks, including the Mauritius plan of action.

Activity 2.1. An interregional forum on the rights of the child in the SIDS

An interregional forum, projected to take place in Fiji in 2009, will bring key stakeholders and policy shapers together around common issues and lessons learned. It will build on the exchanges (paper series, exchanges, thematic projects) and will put the rights of the child central in the agenda of the Mauritius Strategy.

Activity 2.2. An interactive formative website on Children's rights in the SIDS

A website will be designed in order to facilitate:

- Smooth communication and exchanges on the different activities mentioned above (internal part)
- Promote joint positions and initiatives to external partners (external part)
- establish a repository of innovations and solutions for SIDS.

The Work Plan for this network is a collaborative approach between two sub-regions where UNICEF has multi-country offices: the Eastern Caribbean and the Pacific Islands. If it proves to be productive, the network could be usefully expanded to other SIDS such as Indian Ocean countries (e.g., Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius).

The respective Representatives of the Suva and Barbados office take full responsibility over the overall implementation of the joint programming where no specific responsibility is assigned (see WorkPlan). Still, to encourage innovation, initiative, accountability and engagement – for joint programming – a rotating chairmanship of 6 months is defined, starting with the UNICEF Pacific Office for the period September 2007 to March 2008.

Six-monthly strategic Video Conferences will enable the chair and staff to report on the implementation of the joint programme for the last 6 months and will function as a steering committee to monitor and review the joint programme.

Particular focus will be put on the thematic approach of the network, encouraging as much as possible exchange processes and collaborations between technical specialists and their partners. For this reason, certain flexibility should be considered in order to stimulate innovative work processes. Funding will be agreed upon on a case-by-case basis. Joint fund-raising will be encouraged.

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Footnotes

ⁱ See : http://www.unicef.org/lac/english_10551.htm accessed on October 2008

ⁱⁱ A Small Islands Development Network is monitored online by UNDESA on the following link:
<http://www.sidsnet.org/index.html>

About the Social Policy (SP) for Children in SIDS Paper Series

UNICEF, mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote children's rights, has developed extensive experience working with Small Island Developing States (SIDS) on social policy issues. UNICEF has two multi-country offices for SIDS - an Office for the Eastern Caribbean based in Barbados which covers 10 SIDS in the Caribbean; and the UNICEF Pacific Office, based in Suva, Fiji with three field offices in Kiribati, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, which covers 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Both multi-country programmes have a similar focus on social policy, early childhood development, child protection, HIV and AIDS and youth development.

The respective UNICEF offices, with support from their respective regional offices, have jointly developed a "**Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Fit for Children Network**" focusing on the progressive fulfillment of children's rights in SIDS. The network is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, World Fit for Children Goals, Millennium Development Goals and the Mauritius Strategy.

*The Paper Series on Social Policy for children in SIDS aims at **strengthening knowledge, exchange of experiences and lessons learned** among different stakeholders to **influence national development priorities, strategies and government machinery at policy level**. These papers are, through the respective UNICEF offices in the Eastern Caribbean and the Pacific regions, available in paper and electronic format.*

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