

The purpose of the Child Protection Programme is to build a protective environment for children, free from violence, abuse and exploitation. In 2008, the work of the programme was focused on Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

## **Looking Back**

The Programme builds on the notion of broad partnerships to effectively address child protection issues. Therefore new partnerships were formed throughout the year through networking and dialogue by the child protection teams in the five countries. Key partners in the justice sector, such as the new Ministry of Justice and Social Welfare in Vanuatu, were brought on board when UNICEF participated in the South Pacific Council for Youth and Children's Court conference held in Samoa.

## **Laws and regulatory frameworks**

As part of a comprehensive baseline research conducted in 2008, a legal review was undertaken in Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It assisted in identifying the areas needing reform so that children who are victims, offenders and witnesses can be better protected and served by the justice system in their country.

Efforts were also made to ensure that existing laws and regulations are properly applied. In Kiribati, for example, a manual for child-friendly court proceedings and police procedures was developed. Magistrates and police officers in some areas of the country are now more ready to consider children's rights when making decisions.

With support from UNICEF, the Fiji government assessed the extent to which child protection issues are included in the pre-service curriculum at the Police Academy and the University of the South Pacific.

## **Social welfare systems**

A good start was made in 2008 to strengthen the social welfare systems in Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu so that children can be better served and protected from abuse. In Solomon Islands, for example, UNICEF funded a technical advisor who worked with social welfare staff to set up a case management system and establish links with other stakeholders through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). This has resulted in more children being referred to social welfare for professional care and more staff being assigned to the Children's Protection section.

A case management manual has also been developed in Kiribati and this, too, has shown results: a greatly improved coordination between police and social welfare personnel in Tarawa. Here, there has been an increase in the number of children who voluntarily come to the Social Welfare Unit; this is possibly a result of the school visit programme undertaken by the Unit.

In Vanuatu, UNICEF is working with the new Ministry of Justice and Social Welfare to define its role in relation to the protection of children and, in Fiji, the Social Welfare Department began revising the guidelines for greater collaboration among the various agencies involved in resolving cases of child abuse. Also in Fiji, a study on kinship/foster care began and could be a first step towards reducing the number of children being raised in child care centers rather than in families.

Work has been done in Kiribati, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands to improve the birth registration system, allowing birth registration to be officially undertaken by health professionals.

### **Child protection in the home and community**

To provide a solid foundation against which to measure future progress, a child protection baseline research was undertaken in Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Children, communities and government ministries were involved in the research, and already some indirect benefits have been noted, such as a greater understanding among stakeholders of critical elements in a good social welfare system for children. The research was the major achievement in 2008 and took a great deal of time. Already the research has proven to be a powerful tool for advocacy and has helped to identify critical areas for intervention.

Field Offices in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu being fully staffed with Child Protection Officers, were able to provide constant monitoring of activities throughout the year, as well as mid-year and end-of-year reviews with national partners and other UN agencies.

In Fiji and Samoa, Child Protection Programmes continued to support community-based activities for promoting child protection. Discussion with groups of community leaders is one such activity.

### **Moving forward**

From 2009, the monitoring of trends and the assessment of the impact of activities undertaken by the Child Protection Programme will be greatly facilitated by the baseline research findings. It will be possible to measure changes in regulatory and social welfare systems, as well as changes in the behaviour and practices of individuals and communities.

Samoa expects to complete their baseline data research in 2009 and the findings will inform policy and planning for 2010. Their research focuses on assessing behaviour, knowledge and practices at family and community level; social welfare and protection systems; and a legislation review.

The Child Protection team, working with the Education Programme, expects to improve protection of school children from abuse by teachers. A code of conduct will be developed for all who come in contact with children. The aim of this activity is to make it possible to identify danger signals and to provide professionals and parents with the skills they need to prevent abuse.

Birth registration in Samoa, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati will be strengthened by a variety of measures, including training in registration procedures for medical personnel and training of the civil servants working in registry offices.

Legislation dealing with child protection will be further improved by training duty bearers such as police and legal officers in promoting and drafting Child Protection Acts.