

## **Opening Remarks by Cecilia Lotse - Social Policy Workshop May 2006 Kathmandu**

Ms. Cecilia Lotse, the Regional Director for UNICEF for South Asia: Bringing Social Policies Discourse to the MDGs and to Child Rights issue

Good Morning. It is a real pleasure to be able to welcome you all to Kathmandu and to Nepal. Kathmandu is the home of the Regional Office for South Asia of UNICEF. We have been working towards this workshop now for many months, or if one is to be more correct and also to give credit to where the credit is due, Gabriele Koehler and her small super dedicated team had been working very hard to realize this. And we are delighted that all of you could come because we know your schedules have also not been easy and we also know that sometimes the logistics to get here can be somewhat daunting. We are very honored that we have such a distinguished group of renowned academics and policy experts here. So what we hope for these next couple of days is really new insights and innovative policy ideas.

First, let me say a few words about the urgent need for transformative social policy in South Asia. As you know, South Asia remains a region that is struggling with poverty and social exclusion and indeed the situation of women and children in particular is often dire. The Millennium Development Goals and other child related development objectives remain, to a very large extent, under-delivered in most countries in this region. Now there is a lot of concern, a lot of consternation, about what one might call the South Asia paradox. We do have quite impressive rates of growth, we do have integration into the global economy and we do have quite considerable technological prowess in this region. Also we have, I think, quite remarkable government commitment to fulfilling child rights and human development and to enhancing child well-being and this is clearly expressed in support of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, in decisions taken in the South Asia Association of Regional Co-operation as well as in each country's constitution and development plans. But these positives are juxtaposed with extremely high rates of child mortality, maternal mortality, women's illiteracy, growing incidents of HIV/AIDS and particularly persistent low levels of sanitation. South Asia as a region has the highest proportion of children under five who are under-weight. Maternal and infant mortality rates in some of the countries remain some of the highest in the world. Enrollment of girls in primary school is only around 70% with much lower levels at secondary and tertiary levels. Female literacy rates are among the lowest in the world. While women from South Asia constitute about 21% of the world's female population they constitute about 44% of the world's illiterate women. In fact, gender inequality is among the worst experienced globally. In some countries or areas it is physically palpable and in almost all countries in South Asia, this is statistically visible.

The academic literature as well as our experience in the countries of ROSA's work suggest that social exclusion in the form of factors such as caste, ethnicity, religious affiliation, language group and geographical remoteness, as well as gender, are the underlying cross-cutting reasons for the Millennium Development Goal commitments not being met. And these factors are augmented, compounded, with income inequality. The

groups around the poverty line are highly vulnerable to any shock such as illness, and those at the bottom of the lowest quintile have virtually no chance of moving up. For this reason, we think that there is an urgent need to revisit social policy. The MDGs really are a rallying point and in a way they now are a guiding star giving a vision, but the MDGs debate so far has really left open how best to achieve them. This workshop therefore will try to fill some of these policy lacunae, so the purpose really for our two days here is to bring social policy and the discourse about social policy to the MDGs specifically and to child rights.

There are basically three objectives:

1. To scale up and broaden social policy. One could say the overarching purpose of this workshop is to contribute new insights into social policy as a means to accelerate and to enhance MDG performance.
2. Instill a rights-based approach into the development thinking and
3. To contribute to processes that ensure more equitable social outcomes.

To put this into perspective, if we look globally, meeting the MDGs would literally transform millions of children's lives in the next ten years. If the MDGs are achieved, one hundred and fifteen million children will gain access to primary education. One hundred million children will gain access to improved water sources. And three hundred million children will gain access to improved sanitation. Now at least a quarter of these millions will be found in South Asia.

So therefore this workshop will serve to discuss the conceptual framework on policy principles for achieving the MDGs, be a child rights based social service delivery, and to build a common understanding and consensus on these approaches we hope will be a key outcome. It is to bring together the discourse on the financing of public services, issues of taxation, user fees, insurance systems and on the modes of service delivery and to see their performance or applicability in the varied country settings in South Asia. For this we need to revisit, and fill with meaning the notion of universalism.

Universal coverage means the rights of every individual to their entitlements, to basic income, food, health services, education, water and sanitation and to enjoy what one body of research calls human security and others refer to as social protection. In light of gender and social inclusion, we also need to look at effective and just forms of targeting.

Targeting is often used as an excuse to not aspire to universal coverage and it is often used both inefficiently and unjustly. In light of poverty and income disparities we also need to see how social policy needs to match with economic policy. We need to deepen the concepts and meld the human development and child rights paradigms. We hope to contribute to moving forward an agenda of transformation of society and we see these transformations in different dimensions:

(i) The transformations needed in South Asia to achieve the agreed outcomes, the MDGs, and social policy must, out of necessity, play a part of and be a catalyst and an agent of that.

(ii) For this to take place, social policy in South Asia itself needs to be changed and transformed.

So we would like to use the term transformative social policy to refer to both of these dimensions.

We would like to discuss policy options and to develop a methodology for MDG oriented, child rights based principles of social service delivery, which could be useful to the UNICEF country offices in South Asia in their programming, strategies and the advocacy work with governments and partners and civil societies. All of these are against the backdrop of finding a means of delivering social services in the developing economies where the resources are limited and the need for catching up and scaling up is immense. In sum, we would like to engage in this course in the sense of re-examining concepts, and principles and knowledge and to revisit the analytical methods and to examine their application in policy and practice.

The second broad objective of the workshop is mainstreaming child rights. Quite intrinsically many policy makers are of the view that they don't work on children's issues. In fact, this was the response that we heard quite frequently when preparing for this workshop. So the children are foreseen as wonderful and sometimes they are seen as in need of protection but they tend to be invisible to policy makers as a key group for their actions, and they are perceived as voiceless because they are perceived to be under the management of adults. So child issues tend to be left to the "soft agencies" analogous to welfare ministries in countries and not considered to be a mainstream topic. Thus the workshop purpose is also to mainstream child issues, much as women's rights and issues needed to be mainstreamed twenty years ago and in parts still need to be so.

Why is this?

First of all, the child situation is a human rights issue.

Secondly, children, meaning people up to the age of 18, actually constitute between 40% to 50% of the population in South Asia. Really half of human development or social policy in this region defacto is addressing children. And thirdly, the MDGs themselves are about child rights. The right to survival is expressed through MDG goals 2-7 in a very direct fashion. The MDG goal number one is expressed as household income and food access and MDG 8 expresses indirectly the other global macro economic situation, aid and debt issues and in terms of the increasingly globally regulated access to drugs and services. So in other words, MDGs are not only about children, but children really are at the heart of MDGs.

The third objective of the workshop is to chart a course for further work. This, I think, is a two fold task:

- (i) We hope to gauge the existing research findings on social services, impact and outcomes as related to policy approaches in the context of MDGs and their under achievement in South Asia.
- (ii) And we also hope to identify research gaps.

Now while I may not really wish to acknowledge this, I have to admit that I have now reached an age where I can see the continuity of things over time. So I would like to take a quick look at our antecedents. And I think almost everyone knows that UNICEF has quite a distinguished history in social policy. I am not going to go into depth on this but I want to mention three things that might be called social policy milestones:

The first one goes back to the 60s, 70s, and 80s which is the basic service strategy that UNICEF pursued and UNICEF was also a major player in establishing social policies for basic services in developing countries around the world, such as primary health care which we work jointly with WHO on for low cost water and sanitation, for basic education and of course the phenomenal push for universal child immunization during the 80s.

The second milestone that I would identify was the period of the growth fetishism of the 1980s when UNICEF published *Adjustment with a Human Face* and I am incredibly pleased to have, if I may call him so, the Father of the Adjustment of the Human Face, Sir Richard Jolly, with us here for these two days. This was one of the first intra UN critiques of the Washington Consensus. Other critiques came from UNCTAD and from UNRISD. But this *Adjustment with a Human Face* is closely associated with the paradigm shift to human development and to the birth of the UNDP Human Development Reports which really also helped to fundamentally change the development politics.

The third milestone that I mentioned is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Not only UNICEF, but UNICEF with others, was instrumental in the movement that led to the finalization and ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1990. And since 1990, UNICEF has seriously taken up this role, which actually is explicitly identified in the CRC to support the implementation and the monitoring of the Convention. Now in terms of policy priorities and principles this was an important step in promoting a rights based approach in programming and advocacy because the CRC has in a sense internalized the discourse on economic, social and political rights, so it also actually brings into the mainstream another contentious and transformative piece of development policy and human rights, mainly the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. So while this may sound somewhat presumptuous we hope that this workshop could actually create the same kind of momentum as the *Adjustment with a Human Face* initiative did. And we do this because we believe that because of the slow and inequitable process on social and human development in South Asia, we have the responsibility to strive for this.

Let me move to a couple of words about partnerships and UN reforms. UNICEF globally and UNICEF ROSA are developing work in upstream policymaking, linking the in-depth expertise of UNICEF programme areas such as child survival and development, education, child protection, water and sanitation, child participation, HIV/AIDS with cross-cutting social policy work. This relates to our global strategic plan, which is to generate and use knowledge and good practices and to focus on policy, advocacy and partnerships for children's rights and it also relates to UNICEF South Asia's regional strategies, where we have committed to providing leadership, an authoritative voice and a forum for knowledge and information on children so as to inform policy development. And some of the participants here actually are part of a social policy network of UNICEF, the so-called the Pratalina group which is led by UNICEF's Division of Policy and Planning. In the context of knowledge management and exchange, however, and UN reforms, we also are strategically developing partnerships across the whole UN system.

And I think that this workshop is really an expression of this. This workshop has been conceptualized together with the Innocenti Research Center of UNICEF in Florence and the UN Research Institute on Social Development. We see IRC as an intellectual leader on child rights, we see UNRISD as an intellectual leader on social development and social policy and both institutions are really known for the rigor of their work, as well as for being outspoken and for being iconoclast when needed. We also have very strong support from and co-operation with the UN Department of Economics and Social Affairs which leads follow up to the World Social Summit 1995 and produces the World Economic and Social Survey with heterodox policy advice and we will hear from DESA about some of the recent developments around MDGs and social policy in the UN system which will help frame our workshop in the wider UN context and we are very happy to have Dr. Jomo here. UNDP is spearheading the MDG movement, ESCAP and ADB are leading the MDG advocacy in this region and of course my colleagues from the country offices of UNICEF in South Asia, where programmes build child rights and child well being at both grassroots and policy level. I am also especially delighted to have so many distinguished academics present from the variety of renowned institutions both in the region and globally. Since incessant are our ambitions to be an authoritative voice on children and child rights, it requires us to work very closely with and to learn from academics.

So among the range of outcomes that we are striving for, we have some that may be a little bit more intangible and they would include a common understanding and visions of the issues and principles that will work towards this transformative social policy for children in South Asia, and also to strengthen the networks. We now have a network of over 150 experts with whom UNICEF ROSA has liaised and we certainly intend to continue this virtual interaction. More tangibly, we will have an initial workshop outcome note which highlights the issues that could inform the social policy discourse in South Asia. We will have an edited analytical proceeding which will be posted on the Internet to address a wide audience - UNICEF and UN overall as well as partners in academia, civil societies and governments. Possibly, we will consider a reader, depending on interest of the participants to prepare papers. We hope that we will have an agenda for research and policy analysis including field based as well as conceptual which would be

useful to the UNICEF country offices and to the UN and others, more generally. We definitely will want to have a plan of action for next steps. These could be working on similar events within a broader UN setting or possibly to have country level events if that should be deemed suitable.

In order to achieve all this in two days, we have cast this workshop as a session really aimed at brainstorming, exchanging ideas and meeting of minds. We have prepared in such a way so that there will be interventions to kick off each session and debate. We really hope for a deep probing of concepts and existing notions and to exchange cutting edge knowledge. Admittedly, it may be a dense and fairly heavy programme but we also felt that keeping it in plenary was actually important so that the expertise that is shared is shared with all. So for that reason we would urge the presenters to stay within their time limits but also to urge our participants to engage very actively in the discussion. We have guiding questions to help structure each session and will rely on the chair of each session and the rapporteurs to lead the discussions toward addressing these questions without clipping the wings of the discussions. Now the rapporteurs and the chairs of each session will be asked to capture the key observations which then will feed into the initial outcome note, and the closing session tomorrow will be the opportunity for all of us to review these notes. I would again like to welcome you, most warmly to these two days and really look forward to very lively and engaging, interesting and contributing discussion from all. Thank you very much.