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For information

Report on the field visit of members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board to Morocco, 18 to 25 June 2005

1. Members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board (see Annex) made a field visit to Morocco from 18 to 25 June, the first ever such visit made by members of the Executive Board to the Middle East and North Africa region. The main purpose of the visit was to give the Bureau members first-hand experience of the work of UNICEF at the country level. More specifically, the visit aimed at showing the Bureau examples of how the country programme of cooperation implements the medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) priorities in support of government programmes for children, women, families and communities, in partnership with other United Nations agencies, bilateral donors, and civil society organizations.

2. This visit came at a particularly opportune time, considering on the one hand that the Kingdom of Morocco and UNICEF had recently finalized a mid-term review (MTR) process, including a country programme evaluation, and on the other hand that the United Nations country team was in the process of formulating the first draft of the second Common Country Assessment (CCA). The moment was all the more opportune because on 18 May, His Majesty King Mohammed VI had launched the National Initiative for Human Development (*Initiative nationale pour le développement humain*), targeting the poorest regions and population groups in the country.

3. The programme of the visit comprised project site visits, including interactions with project stakeholders, as well as meetings with national officials (the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, the Minister of National Education, Higher Education, Staff Training and Scientific Research, the Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity, and the Secretary General and senior officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice).

4. Overall, this visit was successful in that it reached its main goal of informing Bureau members about challenges and opportunities in realizing the rights of children in Morocco and in implementing MTSP priorities. Given the high level of the delegation, the visit also offered an opportunity for effective advocacy with national decision makers as well as for motivating communities, key agents and UNICEF staff.

* E/ICEF/2005/10.

The situation of children and women

5. Morocco ranked 127 out of 175 countries in the 2004 Human Development Index. The country remains one of the poorest in the Maghreb sub-region, with a gross national income per capita of around \$1,320. According to a World Bank report on poverty in Morocco (September 2004), the poverty rate (people living on less than one dollar a day), is around 17 per cent, as is the unemployment rate of Moroccans of working age. Within the country, there are large regional and urban-rural disparities in income and social service provision.

6. The Moroccan population is close to 30 million people, of whom 30 per cent are under 15 years old and 70 per cent live in cities. The average life expectancy is 70 years. Migration is an increasing phenomenon, especially from rural areas to cities and to outside the country.

7. The infant mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio, at 40 per 1,000 live births and 227 per 100,000 live births, respectively, continue to be high and have remained unchanged over the last seven years, and the situation has possibly even deteriorated. Discrepancies and gaps between rural and urban areas are significant, and differences also exist among regions and provinces.

8. As for nutrition, only 31 per cent of children less than six months old are exclusively breastfed. The consumption of iodized salt remains low, at 41 per cent (39 per cent for rural areas and 51 per cent for urban areas).

9. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS remains relatively low. By December 2004, the number of reported cases had reached 1,587. Some 3 per cent of HIV/AIDS cases occur among those under 15 years old. HIV incidence among pregnant women is 0.13 per cent.

10. Undeniable progress has been made in elementary schooling: the net primary school enrolment rate has reached 92 per cent at the national level, with enrolment higher in urban areas. The same progress is observed in girls' education: for every 100 girls aged 6-11, 88 are enrolled into school (83 in rural areas). The dropout rate is 6 per cent.

11. Child protection is an important issue. A survey conducted on child sexual exploitation in 2003 showed that many children become ensnared in prostitution, often following violence at home or at school. Another serious concern is the number of non-accompanied, migrating children. The migration issue involves not only Moroccans but also youths and adults from sub-Saharan African countries who come to Morocco with the hope of crossing to Europe, often at great risk. The first results of another survey, on violence at schools, indicated that most children of primary school age suffer corporal punishment. Research on child labour conducted jointly with the World Bank and the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)/International Labour Organization (ILO), with support from relevant Ministries and government offices, suggest that there has been a substantial reduction of the numbers of working children under age 15, but the percentage of children 7-14 who work remains high, at 11 per cent. The number of children living or working on the street is reported to have grown in most cities because of poverty, family breakup, loss of social reference points and school dropout.

12. The Family Code was adopted unanimously by Parliament in January 2004. Signifying a substantial break with the past, the Code consecrates the principle of equality and co-responsibility of both partners (husband and wife) in all household-related decisions, such as the education of

children and management of properties. This Code also upholds child rights. For example, article 54 summarizes children's rights to survival, development and protection, and child rights are specified in 71 out of 400 articles. It should be noted, however, that one year after the Code's promulgation, implementation is being hampered by legal gaps, a lack of adequate resources and interpretations that are sometimes contrary to the spirit of reform.

13. Morocco has initiated the follow-up process to the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on Children. The Government is committed to developing and implementing the National Plan of Action (NPA), "A Morocco Fit for Children". This plan, under the stewardship of His Majesty, will address the strategic priorities of the country and give special attention to the most vulnerable.

14. United Nations agencies, programmes and funds have achieved substantial progress in harmonization, and a number of interesting and innovative initiatives are under way.

Programme of cooperation and programme achievements

15. The country programme consists of four different programmes:

- (a) Support to national policies in education and health;
- (b) Support to children in rural environments; experimentation with a local development model in favour of children and of approaches pertaining to survival and development;
- (c) Child protection, including the development of policies, strategies and pilot experiences in several areas such as children in institutions, children at work and children who live or work on the street;
- (d) Promotion and monitoring implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including advocacy and social mobilization for children and support of the implementation of an integrated information system on children.

16. The main implementation strategy of the country programme is to conduct pilot activities in fulfilling children's rights, aiming for national replication.

17. Programme achievements relate to policy and strategy development, capacity-building and training, community-based approaches, support to legal reform, advocacy, information and communication. One significant example of policy and strategy development is the creation of a national strategy promoting pre-school education. The approach developed for fighting school dropout is now part of national policy and is endorsed by the World Bank for other regions. A new national strategy was also developed to promote breastfeeding practices.

18. Regarding legal reform, the country programme has supported the harmonization of national legislation with international norms. The drafting of a Child Code for protection against violence is well advanced.

19. The programme has developed and used various tools, among which are a module for parental education, guides for early childhood development and nutrition education and a results grid for quality education.

20. Community-based approaches have also proven very effective. To tackle the high rate of maternal mortality, a new community-based approach widening access to essential obstetrical care was put in place in some communes. To improve access to essential drugs, the community mutual fund approach is being expanded. To ameliorate the conditions of children living in rural areas, five participatory communal development plans for children were created and currently benefit 83,000 people, including 42,000 children. The targeted geographic areas also benefited from integrated activities in education, health, protection and participation.

21. Many training activities have taken place as part of capacity-building efforts. Various studies have also been conducted to serve as the basis for evidence-based advocacy and information, education and communication activities.

22. In the area of child protection, the programme contributed to eliminating taboos on the discussion of sensitive issues, such as sexual abuse and exploitation, violence towards children and children deprived of a family. Near the end of 2004, the second Arab-African Conference on Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Violence against Children was held in Rabat.

23. Progress is also noted in the area of child participation. For example, the elaboration of the NPA for children involved their participation; girl parliamentarians have advocated for girls' education; and the harmonization of Scouts curricula was initiated with the active involvement of children and young people.

Official meetings

24. The Bureau members met with Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Amina, the Prime Minister, Ministers and senior officials of the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Justice, Social Development, Family and Solidarity, National Education, Higher Education, Staff Training and Scientific Research, and Health, as well as the Secretary of State in charge of family and childhood. The Bureau also visited the *Observatoire national des droits de l'enfant* (national child rights observatory) and the *Ligue marocaine pour la protection de l'enfance* (Moroccan league for the protection of childhood). The meetings revealed the high esteem in which UNICEF is held and the good relationships that UNICEF in general, and UNICEF Morocco in particular, enjoys with national authorities. The number and quality of these meetings also revealed that the UNICEF-supported programme in Morocco is involved in high-level advocacy and policy debate. As one senior official commented, the appreciation shown towards UNICEF is not mere diplomatic courtesy but rather the outcome of a truly effective partnership. The official added that the UNICEF name is recognized throughout Morocco. The Bureau visit itself was useful as an opportunity for advocacy with senior officials. In fact, through this visit, the country office was able to communicate key messages and obtain a reaffirmation of commitments from the highest officials.

25. There is also a well-deserved appreciation of the fact that experiences piloted in UNICEF-supported programmes have played a catalytic role in policy development or in replication efforts. This is the case, for example, with the education approach for fighting school dropout, mentioned above, which developed into a national policy and was endorsed by the World Bank for other

regions. Similarly, the experience of communal development planning has expanded to reach many other regions, and some of its principles have found their way into the National Initiative for Human Development.

26. The authorities clearly value the approaches, methods, strategies and tools developed through the UNICEF-supported programmes, as well as the ideas, studies and intellectual leadership provided by UNICEF. In fact, as noted by one senior official, although the financial assistance provided by UNICEF is much appreciated, the organization's most important contribution is its ideas.

The National Initiative for Human Development

27. The National Initiative for Human Development focuses mainly on social development and poverty reduction, aiming for the following goals: (a) to ensure access to basic social services to the most deprived communities in rural and peri-urban areas; (b) to promote income-generating activities and employment; and (c) to assist the most vulnerable populations.

28. The initiative is based in part on lessons learned from community-based development experiences in the country and elsewhere and pays particular attention to integrated and multisectoral approaches in well-targeted communities in Morocco (350 rural communes and 250 poor peri-urban neighborhoods). The Government has been tasked with producing a plan for the initiative in three months.

29. This initiative has raised high hopes and expectations. And clearly, the United Nations system in general, and UNICEF in particular, have a strong role to play in supporting the Government in this effort. The Prime Minister indicated what this role might be when he stated that "most of the funding will be assured through the national budget or the just-adopted World Bank Country Assistance Strategy, but the United Nations will be needed for the 'social engineering' component, the grassroots activities, and the monitoring". It is important to ensure that the National Plan of Action for Children being finalized is well reflected in the implementation plan of the National Initiative for Human Development.

United Nations reform

30. The UNICEF country office is involved in the processes of United Nations reform and even leads aspects of it, including the human rights-based approach to programming adopted in the CCA. Similarly, the approach to sustainability and replication being explored in the CCA was developed originally in the UNICEF country programme evaluation.

31. Coordination among United Nations agencies works best in the area of technical issues rather than general processes. It was noted, however, that the reform process is perceived as being a top-down effort and very time consuming. An example in point is the lengthy preparation process for the CCA/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and programme design. As one senior United Nations official in Morocco put it, "To spend two years to prepare a five-year programme is ridiculous and not good for the credibility of the United Nations system".

32. Progress was noted in the conceptualization of the CCA. While the previous CCA was still a compilation of the distinct concerns of various agencies, the current CCA takes a more collaborative

approach, taking as its starting point the needs and rights of vulnerable groups. Without a good CCA/UNDAF, a lot is left to the goodwill of the heads of agencies. This was the case with the UNDAF currently being implemented, a fact noted by one senior United Nations official.

33. A recent inter-agency CCA/UNDAF quality-assurance mission to Morocco gave a good report, concluding that “both the process and what has been discussed in terms of substance are up to par with expectations”.

34. The United Nations system in Morocco contributes 4.3 per cent of the external aid; UNICEF contributes 0.57 per cent of such aid. It is clear that the United Nations system will make an impact not just through its financial contribution but also through its coordinated action within a framework that positions the system to support national priorities.

Field visits

35. Bureau members visited the education programme in the city of Tangier, the protection and child labour programme in the city of Fez, and the programme providing support to children in rural areas in Al Haouz (the city of Marrakech).

Tangier

36. The education activities in Tangier focused mainly on lowering the high dropout rate and more generally on improving the quality of education. Delegates were able to appreciate the significant results obtained in both areas. The child-friendly approach used is truly impressive. It focuses on capacity-building and institutional ownership, thus ensuring sustainability. Under the approach, schools interact openly with their social environment, inviting the very active involvement of teachers, civil society and pupils themselves at all stages, from identifying and analysing problems to designing and implementing plans of action. Teaching methods utilize integrated and comprehensive holistic approaches covering concrete issues in areas such as health, water and sanitation, environment and gardening, and rely on a combination of techniques, including the use of puppets, cartoons and other media.

37. The greatest pedagogical innovation is undoubtedly the use of “formative evaluations”, which involve monitoring and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each pupil and taking appropriate action.

38. Delegates were also able to appreciate the innovative partnership this programme developed with the municipalities, the Ministries covering education and health, the teachers’ colleges, the private sector (Eolia end Amendis, two water and sanitation companies) and UNICEF. In an innovative arrangement, the private sector makes its financial and technical contribution directly to the beneficiaries rather than to UNICEF. The private sector’s contribution to water and sanitation activities complements the technical expertise, health and hygiene education, pedagogic tools and other support provided by UNICEF.

39. Equally significant in this programme is the passion, commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of the teachers, heads of school, and officials. Their success is demonstrated in the eagerness to learn and participate, the assertiveness and the communication skills shown by the students.

40. It should be noted that the very positive results of this initiative are even more impressive when seen against the background of the poverty of the neighborhoods. As one observer noted, “If these schools can succeed this way against all odds, just imagine what they would be able to achieve if they were better endowed!”

41. Possible areas of collaboration are being explored with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in particular for including life skills in the programme.

Fez

42. In Fez, delegates visited the *Centre de protection des enfants au travail* (the Centre for the protection of child workers), the Cooperative Zelij, the Association of Dinandiers, the Red Crescent centre and the Slimane Al Farissi School.

43. Bureau members met with a group of girls aged 6 to 13 who had formerly worked in the carpet industry and had now been integrated into the school system. Of particular interest was the centre for older girls employed in the carpet industry, run by the Moroccan Red Crescent, with support from the IPEC/ILO. There, delegates met with girls who showed self-confidence, basic literacy skills, creativity and inquisitiveness. The girls put on a role-play for the visitors that clearly demonstrated the societal abuse, exploitation and gender bias suffered by these young women.

44. The group also saw three centres for the non-formal education of young boys who are still working. During a visit to the workplaces run by the iron workers association, delegates observed that there were hardly any children working. As a result of awareness-raising activities, the new penal code outlawing the employment of children under 15 and a number of widely publicized accidents involving working children, the association had decided to replace child workers with adult women. This decision was ground-breaking. Delegates were accompanied on this visit by a colleague from IPEC/ILO, the partner of UNICEF in this project. Though there is no joint funding mechanism, the two agencies share expenditures as well as planning, monitoring and follow-up activities.

45. The group had the opportunity to observe the effectiveness of IPEC educational materials, particularly a package entitled “SCREAM”. The Board members were briefed about the interest of UNFPA in joining the project by supporting a peer-to-peer life-skills component. This would involve children from regular schools interacting with working youth and helping them improve their life skills.

46. The Bureau members also observed, and were thoroughly briefed on, the challenges of maintaining coordination among the partners in the project, including between the various government departments, with and among the various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and with employers. Coordination is a key element in ensuring national appropriation and sustainability of the project. The reluctance of the *wilaya* (governorates) to take on this role actively and their dependence on UNICEF to act as a motor for the project was observed and discussed. Other challenges noted were those posed by inter-agency cooperation. For example, budgetary delays suffered by IPEC impacted the project and other partners, including UNICEF. One very positive prospect is the initiative taken by the Ministry of Tourism, Handicraft and Social Economy to replicate the project in the cities of Marrakech and Safi.

47. The delegates were able to observe how sensitive the issues of child protection are, especially in the general context of poverty. Delegates also learned about the perceived economic benefit of several child labour activities and the cultural background of protection issues. The critical role of social workers in child protection was also observed. On the positive side, the very fact that these sensitive issues were being discussed as problems was noted as a first step towards awareness-building and behavioural change. Breaking the silence is in itself a victory.

48. The Bureau members' lasting impression was of the positive impact the project had made on the children and the liveliness of the exchange that had taken place, especially with the young girls.

49. The National Initiative for Human Development places protection and services for the most vulnerable groups of the population at the heart of the political and development agenda of the country. This includes children suffering from abuse, violence and neglect.

Al Haouz (Marrakech)

50. Delegates visited the Dar Al Oumouma project (a "waiting" home for expectant women), the Ourika health centre, the Tamezaghate School, the Toug's pre-school kindergarten and a water supply site under construction. In the Iguerfrouane commune, a presentation on the Communal Development Plan for Children was made.

51. The most interesting aspect of the Al Haouz programme of support to children in rural areas is that it aims to be integrated, community-based and results-oriented. Indeed, using water points as an entry point, the programme deals with other community-articulated needs related to education and health. The community itself is involved in the assessment of the situation as well as in designing solutions and implementing them. The role of women in this process is particularly noteworthy. For example, as a result of a survey taken among women, latrines were selected that were more appropriate for women than were previous latrines chosen. In the same vein, the roles played by parents in general and the association of mothers in particular have helped to improve quality in many areas of the Tamezaghate school.

52. The aim of the Dar Al Oumouma project is to increase the rate of births attended by trained personnel from the current 27 per cent to 40 per cent in one year. The project is a very good example of partnership, involving contributions from the seven communes (building, recurrent costs, and staffing), the provincial council (building and recurrent costs), the province (coordination and technical support and building and equipment), the Ministry of Health (land and technical assistance), local associations (management), UNFPA (equipment, training, support to referral services) and UNICEF (logistical support, community surveys, construction and equipment, information, education and communication activities), with the support of the Spanish and French National Committees for UNICEF.

53. A discussion that took place on the process of developing and implementing the Communal Plan was very informative. It clearly showed how a focus on children can lead to broader issues of community development, initiating a dynamic process of community empowerment and partnership-building. Developing the plan took more than two years, as it involved such activities as community diagnosis, training and development of tools. The process was led by a representative local steering committee, with the support of local elected officials. Bureau members were informed

that during development of the plan, key problems were identified for urgent attention and solutions implemented, without the need to wait for the plan's finalization. This was the case, for example, with an initiative created for birth registration. Such "quick wins" implemented before the finalization of the plan were also a motivating factor for the communities and all parties involved, showing that the end result of the process was not the Communal Plan itself but rather its implementation. The quick wins also partly explain why halfway through its three-year timeframe, the programme has already reached an implementation rate of 70 per cent of plan.

54. The Communal Plan is also a tool for resource mobilization. The commune was able to receive funds from the Governor's Office after presenting the office with the detailed plan, accompanied by a technical note on feasibility and costs.

55. An important success factor noted by many participants is the existence of trust between the communities and the officials.

Replication and sustainability

56. The country programme evaluation conducted a few months before the Bureau visit raised questions about sustainability. The report notes the following: "Up to now, the programme has not formally analysed pilot projects in the perspective of their sustainability and their generalization. The analysis of success factors and constraints identifies several factors which are not guaranteed to be maintained in pilot experiences and which determine their sustainability, notably: outside funding, leadership, stakeholder motivation and volunteer work, the participation of populations, institutional support to the pilot experiment, institutionalization of results".

57. Indeed, Bureau members were also concerned about the replication and sustainability of some of the projects or activities, such as those in child protection. However, many projects in education and maternal health were noted as having several ingredients necessary for success, replication and sustainability. These include an emphasis on capacity-building, institutional development, community empowerment and partnerships. The involvement of officials at all levels also makes a significant difference, as it did with the pilot approach for lowering school dropout through quality education, which was adopted by the Government as national policy. Similarly, one Governor was so impressed by the approach and results obtained in the commune visited, using the approach developed and supported by UNICEF, that he decided to extend the approach regionally. The Governor allocated funds to initiate training and expected all communes to finalize the development of their plans within one month.

General comments

58. From what the Bureau members were able to see, hear and read, key challenges for the country programme include the following: the mainstreaming of gender and women's empowerment and equality in programmes; the identification of a niche for UNICEF in HIV/AIDS; consolidating the chances for sustainability of some of the projects, notably in child protection; developing programme communication for behavioural change; strengthening the collaboration with civil society organizations beyond those of an institutional nature; positioning UNICEF in the changing environment of Morocco with the most appropriate staff profile and budget size; and ensuring that relevant information reaches all staff on the United Nations reform process and what is at stake for children and for UNICEF.

59. In conclusion, the visit by Bureau members provided a good basis for observing the work of UNICEF on the ground. On the strength of what they were able to see and hear, the Bureau members concluded that most of the projects visited have the ingredients for success and sustainability: commitment at all levels, leadership, motivation, enthusiasm of the participants, partnerships, capacity-building and empowerment. The CCA/UNDAF process should help frame opportunities for closer cooperation with United Nations agencies, including joint programmes where they are feasible, relevant and cost effective.

60. UNICEF adds value in Morocco, not only because of the organization's financial contribution but more importantly from its strategic and policy contribution, technical cooperation, advocacy efforts, including on sensitive issues, work in child rights in general, research activities and the development of intervention models and innovative tools. The use of the protective environment framework, even beyond protection issues, offers a useful tool and checklist for assessing the situation of child rights in general and of key intervention points.

61. The Bureau members wish to thank the national authorities at all levels, the civil society organizations, and the children and women of Morocco for being so generous with their time and their hospitality. A special note of appreciation goes to the UNICEF team in Morocco, under the leadership of Maie Ayoub von Kohl, for their preparation of the visit at such short notice as well as for their professionalism, dedication and friendliness.

Lessons learned for future Bureau visits

62. The Morocco visit reconfirms the relevance and usefulness of Bureau visits, with their important benefits outweighing the costs to the organization. First, these visits provide an opportunity for Bureau members themselves to have a first-hand experience of UNICEF activities at the field level, and in a few cases this is the Bureau members' first such experience. The information and learning process as well as the resulting improved understanding of issues, opportunities and constraints are undoubtedly an asset for the Bureau officers in carrying out their duties. Second, these visits have a strong advocacy potential for the UNICEF offices visited, as the Bureau members can convey and reinforce important messages between the Board, the country office and national authorities. Last, but not least, these visits contribute to a strengthening of the team spirit of the Bureau by giving its members the opportunity to increase and improve their interactions.

63. In order to make these visits even more effective, a few principles should be followed in planning and organization:

(a) These visits should preferably be organized earlier in the year, as early as March/April, and definitely before the annual session of the Executive Board;

(b) The selection of countries and programmes/projects to be visited should aim at showing not only what works, or success stories, but also what does not work, and challenges;

(c) Courtesy calls to officials should be kept to the minimum required by local protocol; the bulk of the time has to be devoted to actual programme discussions, project site visits and interactions with project managers, community members and children themselves;

(d) Midway through the visit, an afternoon should be freed up to allow time for Bureau members to review the progress of the visit, digest the information received and assess what is still required, and suggest amendments to the programme, if needed;

(e) Basic country programme documents such as the CCA/UNDAF and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper should be made available to delegates well in advance of the trip.

ANNEX

List of participants in the field visit by members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board to Morocco, 18 to 25 June 2005

President of the Executive Board

H.E. Mr. Mehdi Danesh-Yazdi
Ambassador
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Vice-Presidents of the Executive Board

Mr. Uladzimir Gerus
Counsellor
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus

Ms. Unni Rambøll
Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Norway

Ms. Romy Tincopa
Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Peru

Ms. Leysa Faye
First Secretary
on behalf of
H.E. Mr. Paul Badji
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Senegal

UNICEF secretariat

Mr. Ndolamb Ngokwey
Secretary, Executive Board
