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UNICEF follow-up to General Assembly resolution 59/250 of 22 December 2004 on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system: oral report
Background note

1. UNICEF is implementing the 2005 triennial comprehensive policy review (TCPR) resolution in close collaboration with other member agencies of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the High Level Committee on Programmes as well as with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In addition, this implementation is being integrated with several ongoing reform processes, including the follow-up to the Paris High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and the Greentree retreats, as well as with internal processes. UNICEF is also following the preparations for the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the review of progress made on the Millennium Declaration, including the internationally agreed development goals, 14-16 September 2005, and discussions on the report of the Secretary-General, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All", which is expected to have a bearing on TCPR implementation when adopted by the General Assembly.
2. The overall context for implementation of the TCPR is capacity development and meaningful national ownership of the development process to implement the Millennium Declaration. Follow-up is being carried out within the framework of the overall management process for the implementation of resolution 59/250, the UNDG work plan for TCPR follow-up, and the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan (MTSP).
3. UNICEF is accelerating its work to implement measures in line with United Nations reform through a senior-level task force set up to promote a clearer vision for reform within the organization.
4. These activities continue the momentum achieved with implementation of the previous triennial comprehensive policy review, during which the programme planning process was harmonized by the member agencies of the UNDG Executive Committee; common services were instituted and became mandatory; UNICEF participated in some 60 United Nations houses; and UNICEF worked closely with the other agencies to ensure that the Resident Coordinator system was strengthened and the country teams became more effective. The contribution of UNICEF to the functioning of the United Nations system at the country level became one of the key responsibilities of UNICEF Representatives.

* E/ICEF/2005/7 and Corr.1

Capacity development

5. UNICEF continues to build national capacities through its country-based programmes - owned, led and coordinated by national authorities, to the extent possible. This capacity-building is particularly evident in support for child survival activities. Polio eradication programmes involve intensive support for micro-planning at the district level; in education, strategic planning support is a critical element of programmes in many countries; in child protection, support is given to many partner governments to develop policies, strategies and legal frameworks; and in HIV/AIDS, support is given to programmes which, in many cases, require multi-disciplinary, multisectoral institution- building. The mid-term review of the current MTSP highlighted the need to place greater emphasis on promoting and supporting national capacity development for pro-child public policies, including through knowledge-generation, data collection and analysis and advocacy.

6. UNICEF, in collaboration with the other UNDG Executive Committee members, is increasing targeted efforts to build government and civil society capacity not only through technical assistance but also through increased support and advocacy for children's issues as Governments prepare and adopt poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and other mid- and long-term development plans, both at the national and sectoral levels. In addition, UNICEF programmes are designed to work through government systems, aiming to enhance national capacity including through strengthened joint monitoring and evaluation. This increase in capacity-building, through planning and through changes in processes, may require redefinition of the core skills and capacities of staff, an issue to be considered by the UNICEF Reform Task Force.

Transaction costs and efficiency

7. The adoption by the members of the UNDG Executive Committee in 2005 of a common operational framework for transferring cash to government and non-government partners is a major step in reducing transaction costs for partners. The new modalities will be implemented by 2006, significantly reducing the transaction costs and administrative burdens that a multiplicity of United Nations procedures had created for partners.

8. Implementing partners will use common forms and procedures for requesting cash and for reporting on its utilization. Agencies will adopt a single risk-management approach and will select procedures for transferring cash on the basis of a joint assessment of the financial management capacity of partners. They will also agree on and coordinate activities to maintain assurance over the utilization of the provided cash. Jointly conducted assessments and assurance activities will further contribute to the reduction of costs.

9. The adoption of the new harmonized approach on cash transfers is a step further in implementing the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which calls for a closer alignment of aid with national priorities and needs. By using national systems wherever possible, the approach will also build capacity for better aid management where existing systems are weak. The new approach will rely on assurance activities, which will be done jointly by all United Nations agencies in close cooperation with national partners.

10. The new procedures for transferring cash and for reporting are fully integrated with the new procedures for programme planning and monitoring that have been adopted by the member agencies of the UNDG Executive Committee. There is now a common set of procedures for the United Nations to use as the agencies plan and implement programmes with partners. The emphasis going

forward will be on simplification for the benefit of national partners to complement an earlier emphasis on harmonization among United Nations agencies.

11. For the remainder of 2005, work will proceed for the launch of the first joint office by January 2006. This work involves decisions on the shape of its programme, leadership, and administration of the joint office. In the meanwhile, the number of United Nations houses continues to increase. Common services are now mandatory and a support system is in place to help operations management teams at the country level to combine services whenever feasible. A tracking system is in place to measure savings as well as to guide country offices as they institute common services.

Coherence, effectiveness and relevance of operational activities for development

12. Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) are now the basis of all regular programming at UNICEF. Twenty-one countries began new programmes using this system of joint programming in 2004 and 2005, and another 77 countries are planning their new programmes based on CCAs and UNDAFs. UNICEF is working closely with the other agencies to increase the number of joint programmes where this will contribute to programme effectiveness. This has been particularly important in areas that require joint work for effectiveness, such as school feeding programmes, combating HIV/AIDS, and polio eradication. UNICEF will present a detailed report on progress in joint programming to the Executive Board in at its annual session in June 2006.

13. UNICEF is working closely with the other member agencies of the undg Executive Committee to strengthen the resident coordinator system by clarifying accountabilities and making it more participatory, collegial and accountable. This work includes establishing ways to ensure that the Resident Coordinator has the capacity to function impartially for the entire system. The work also includes instituting participatory evaluations of the Resident Coordinator and the country team members. UNICEF has reaffirmed its encouragement for staff to seek appointments as Resident Coordinators.

Evaluation

14. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) recently approved the United Nations Norms and Standards for Evaluation. This is a significant step forward for the evaluation function within the United Nations in improving the overall quality of evaluation with the United Nations and allowing for comparable assessments of the evaluation function within the United Nations entities. Future evaluations will stress programme effectiveness and the impact of United Nations country team efforts.

Additional progress in reform

15. There is substantial progress in inter-agency work at the regional level. This includes strong collaboration among the Regional Directors of the member agencies of the undg Executive Committee, in close collaboration with the specialized agencies, to assure that the UNDAFs fully reflect government priorities and strategies and that the United Nations programmes can effectively contribute, within the constraints of available resources, to the desired outcomes.

16. There is newly concentrated effort to respond to the triple threat in the Southern Africa region: a high prevalence of AIDS, a lack of food security and poor governance. Here, UNICEF is working closely with the other member agencies of the UNDG Executive Committee, with the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS and the specialized agencies to ensure that the agencies in each affected country work much more effectively and efficiently together. In the Americas and the Caribbean, the UNDG Executive Committee agencies covering common geographic areas are considering how to bring about greater integration and cohesion of regional efforts.

17. Measures are also being taken to ensure that national ownership is strengthened in post-crisis situations, where countries make the transition from relief to recovery and rehabilitation following conflict or a natural disaster. UNICEF is also building its capacity to respond to humanitarian crises, whether large and of long duration or short in scale or scope. The response of UNICEF to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami has involved working very closely with the other member agencies of the United Nations, as well as with civil society, to ensure that the Governments and people affected would have both the needed immediate relief and support for the recovery phase.
