

Review of the Achievements of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and Consideration of Future Action

1. Actions undertaken under paragraph 35 of the WSC Plan of Action

1.1. *UNDCP's contribution to the achievement of goals and strategies enunciated in the Declaration and Plan of Action of the WSC.*

The need to focus more attention on children and young people with respect to drug abuse is contained in the article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989 which reads:

"State Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances."

This concern is reiterated in paragraph 24 of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children (WSC):

"Drug abuse has emerged as a global menace to very large numbers of young people and, increasingly, children – including permanent damage incurred in the pre-natal stages of life. Concerted action is needed by Governments and intergovernmental agencies to combat illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to counter this tragedy. Equally important is community action and education, which are vitally needed to curb both the supply of and the demand for illicit drugs. Tobacco and alcohol abuse are also problems requiring action, especially preventive measures and education among young people."

However, the Plan of Action does not contain reference to drug abuse prevention specific goals apart from mentioning "(g) Improved protection of children in especially difficult circumstances" and also "F. Children in difficult circumstances. Provide improved protection of children in especially difficult circumstances and tackle the root causes leading to such situations."

Protecting children and young people from drug abuse has been one of the priorities of UNDCP since its establishment and has also been identified by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs as a priority.

In addition, a series of statements in this respect have been made by Member States. For example, both the Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session and the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction highlight the importance of investing in and working with youth. Drug abuse prevention activities directed at young people are common in many countries, but need strengthening with regard to both the participation of young people and the relevance of various responses to new trends in drug taking.

The Political Declaration adopted at the General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (June 1998) contains a paragraph in which the Member States of the United Nations:

“Welcome the efforts of the wide range of people working in various fields against drug abuse and, encouraged by the behaviour of the vast majority of youth who do not consume illegal drugs, decide to give particular attention to demand reduction, notably by investing in and working with youth through formal and informal education, information activities and other preventive measures;” (para 6)

Also the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction mentions youth as a group in need of special attention:

“Demand reduction programmes should be designed to address the needs of the population in general, as well as those of specific population groups, special attention being paid to youth...”(Para 13) “...States should, in cooperation with the media, seek to raise public consciousness about the hazards of the drug use and to promote prevention messages, countering the promotion of drug use in popular culture.” (Para 15)

The importance of young people's participation was also reiterated at the 53rd Session of the General Assembly.

“The General Assembly, ... recalls the World Programme of Action for Youth for the Year 2000 and Beyond adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 1995, and takes note with satisfaction of the active participation of youth organisations and youth during the special session, and stresses the importance of their continuing to contribute their experiences and to participate in the decision-making processes, in particular in relation to the elaboration of the action plan for the implementation of the Declaration of the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction;” (Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.7)

Finally the Action plan for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction invites countries to establish and support mechanisms, including networks that facilitate the participation of young people in the design and implementation of programmes intended for them. In addition the Action Plan asks UNDCP to facilitate the creation of an international network promoting regular contact among youth involved in demand reduction activities and allowing them to stay informed and learn from each other.

Following-up to old and recent commitments UNDCP has undertaken in the past years a wide range of activities to reduce demand for drugs among children and young people. These activities vary considerably in responses to local needs but they are informed by a common strategy and by a set of programming principles.

- a. Collecting up to date quantitative and qualitative information on drug abuse patterns and trends among young people.

There is the need to know more about the reality of drug abuse among children and young people. Quantitative data on drug abuse among young people are available in many countries, although not easily comparable due to the use of different methodologies, age breakdowns, etc. What is really missing however, is systematic qualitative information on how young people perceive drugs and why they use drugs. Such information is indispensable for the understanding of the root causes of the high prevalence of drug use and for the design of effective prevention programmes. In collecting information UNDCP is making sure that young people themselves participate in the process of collection, analysis and discussion of the information. UNDCP has developed a comprehensive Global Assessment Programme (GAP) to collect reliable and comparable drug abuse information. This include information on drug abuse among children and young people. In addition, rapid situation assessments are carried out in various countries to assess the drug abuse situation and identify needs and priority areas for programming purposes.

- b. Reducing demand for drugs among children and young through preventive education programmes based on life skills education

Education is fundamental for assisting children and young to reject, delay initiation of, and/or cease drug-using behaviour that could detrimentally affect and disrupt their normal development.

Prevention programmes should provide not only information about the effects of drugs and about the harmful consequences of drug abuse, but also provide

resources and opportunities to develop life skills to deal with those situations that may predispose at-risk youth to initiate drug use and/or perpetuate such drug use. Such measures and interventions should at the same time provide individuals with alternatives to drug-using behaviour, such as drug-free sport, leisure time and recreational activities. School, families and communities should also be encouraged to create and sustain environments in which opportunities that promote and enhance young people's psycho-social and physical health, well-being and quality of life and social competency, and reduce the overall risks of drug abuse, are made available and accessible.

c. Reaching high risk groups of children and young people

Meeting the basic needs and protecting the rights of particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people is obviously very different from addressing the abuse of drugs among youth in general. Whereas most young people are exposed to psychoactive substance use and are vulnerable to health damaging behaviours, certain populations of young people are particularly at risk. These include for example street children, working children, refugees, victims of civil unrest and natural disasters, and youths living in marginalized communities. Therefore, primary prevention programmes need to access these often marginalized and vulnerable youths and to understand and respond to their specific needs. In this context it is essential to work with volunteers, youth workers, street workers who are in contact with young people and are able to reach them. It is important to provide street workers and all the others with appropriate tools and training to enable them to convey effective preventive education to children at risk. For example UNAIDS and UNDCP, together with Street Kids International, are training street workers in Asia on how to use a cartoon as a prevention tool for their street work. UNDCP together with the Ecuadorian NGO CECAFEC, trained over 800 street educators on substance abuse prevention and sexual and reproductive health issues.

d. Making treatment and rehabilitation services accessible to and appropriate for young people

Traditional treatment and rehabilitation centres are not designed for young people. The increase in drug abuse among them and the lowering age of first use point to the need to develop services for drug abuse treatment that are open and accessible to young people who do not always go to traditional treatment and counseling centers when they have drug abuse problems.

For example in South Africa UNDCP supports several community-based treatment centres which provide services for young people with drug problem.

- e. Giving young people the possibility to participate in decisions concerning their development and implementation and to make their voice heard

In all the issues raised above there is a crosscutting element that needs to be considered: the role of young people. Young people are in many situations considered a target population and a problem, instead of a resource in the prevention of drug abuse. Raising the awareness of young people with essential, accurate and credible information is the first step to mobilise their interest. Furthermore, it is fundamental that their voices are heard in the attempt to raise awareness among policy makers and the public at large and that the suggestions from young people on actions to be undertaken are seriously considered. One example of this is the participation of young delegates from the Drug Abuse Prevention Forum *Youth Vision Jeunesse* to the 20th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem. The five young delegates took part in two important UN activities: a meeting of the Committee of the Whole, and a panel discussion entitled “Children, Young People and Drugs”. They also presented a document, called “The Vision from Banff”, containing their view on the issue of drug abuse to the Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Another document, a “Youth Charter for a 21st Century Free of Drugs”, was also presented to Mr. Annan. The Charter was developed by young people at a meeting sponsored by UNESCO and the UNDCP in Paris in February, 1998.

Following the Special Session of the General Assembly, Mr. Annan sent the “The Vision from Banff” and the “Youth Charter” to the heads of all member states with a letter supporting the work of the young people and calling on world leaders to “match the seriousness of their commitment and not throw in the towel”. In his letter, the Secretary-General drew particular attention to Section 10 of the Vision: “...all of us felt that the problems we young people face with respect to drugs are very similar the world over. We want our leaders to join together with us in taking action to prevent drug abuse among young people.” Many world leaders have since written back to Mr. Annan assuring their commitment to a future in which young people are free from drugs.

A follow-up to this participation of young people in the policy discussion on drug abuse has been the establishment of the Global Youth Network for the Prevention of Drug Abuse. Many of the network groups take non-traditional approaches to prevention, using theatre, sports, graffiti, music and other creative activities as alternatives to drug taking. UNDCP is facilitating the establishment of the network by providing communication tools and training opportunities, with the ultimate aim of empowering youth to develop

innovative responses to the challenges that they face and to take action in their own communities. The network will also serve to identify best practice and to share the experiences of different countries and regions. Such activities of UNDCP respond to the need, indicated in the Demand Reduction Action Plan “to facilitate the creation of an international network promoting regular contact among youth involved in demand reduction activities and allowing them to stay informed and learn from each other”.

1.2.

1.2.a. Degree of cooperation with other UN agencies and organs, as well as other international institutions.

UNDCP is cooperating with various UN agencies in the development of initiatives to prevent drug abuse among children and young people.

Apart from various degree of co-operation with different agencies at field level, there is an ongoing policy dialogue particularly with UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and UNAIDS. This dialogue, has been carried out through different mechanisms for co-ordination and co-operation such as the ACC subcommittee on drug control which elaborated a plan of action on children and young people, the Inter Agency Working Group on Young People facilitated by UNAIDS and other consultative meetings on adolescent health organized by UNICEF and WHO

This cooperation has also translated into concrete project activities. For example, the UNDCP/WHO Global Initiative focuses on substance abuse prevention, particularly among young people, through the mobilization of communities and local resources in countries undergoing rapid social and economic change.

Another project aiming at the identification of effective methods to prevent drug abuse is the project Young People in Crisis implemented by UNICEF, UNDCP and other United Nations agencies, inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. The projects aims at meeting the health and development rights of children and young people and particularly those who do not have access to social and health services. These children and young people are those who are caught up in wars; refugees; children who are sexually exploited or work under dangerous and exploitative conditions; disabled children and children living with HIV/AIDS; children living on the streets, young domestic servants and young people living in extreme poverty. One focus of the project is the prevention and reduction of the abuse of drugs within the context of a comprehensive approach to the health and development of the young people.

1.2.b. Support for the achievement of the goals including at field level.

1.3. Participation of UNDCP in mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the WSC Plan of Action.

As already mentioned, quantitative data on drug abuse among young people are available in many countries but they are not always comparable due to the use of different methodologies, age breakdowns, etc.

To monitor progress in the implementation of the Political Declaration adopted at the Special Session of the General Assembly in June 1998, UNDCP has chosen three key indicators for drug abuse. One of these is lifetime prevalence of drug abuse among young people (age 15 to 16 is the standard that is being proposed because there is a considerable group of countries collecting this information). In addition, Member States have agreed on an instrument to assess progress in the implementation of the Political Declaration and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction. This information will also make it possible to follow the developments of drug abuse among children and young people.

In addition, UNICEF has consulted with UNDCP for the development of indicators to monitor adolescent health. UNAIDS is in contact with UNDCP for the identification of drug abuse related indicators to monitor the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

1.4.

1.4.a. Participation in the preparation of consolidated analysis of the plans and actions undertaken by countries and the international community.

See 1.4.b.

1.4.b. Periodic reviews and information to GA

A global overview of the drug abuse situation among youth was carried out in 1999 and presented to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The overview covers the period 1990-1997. Some of the findings are summarized in section 3.

The Commission has requested that a new report be presented to its session in 2001. The report will contain information about drug and inhalants abuse among children as well as prevention and treatment programmes.

2. Other actions undertaken in the implementation of the WSC Action Plan

2.1. UNDCP fostered the effective implementation of the CRC

In providing advice and assistance to Member States for the development of demand reduction strategies, the issue of drug abuse among children and young people has been constantly raised by UNDCP. This has been done by making reference to the programming principles outlined in section 1.1.

In Bolivia UNDCP has cooperated with UNICEF in assisting the Government in the establishment and training of the Municipal Ombudsmen for Children and Adolescent.

2.2. UNDCP contribution to the system-wide follow-up to the WSC, through CCA, UNDAF, thematic groups and resident coordinator system

UNDCP has participated in the various mechanisms for coordination and follow-up to the WSC. However, this participation has been limited by the fact that the Plan of Action contains only generic references to drug abuse. Nevertheless, a number of projects for the prevention of drug abuse among children have been developed by UNICEF together with UNDCP and other agencies in different countries.

3. Considerations for future actions

3.1. Views and global assessment of your organization regarding the implementation and results of the WSC Plan of Action during this last decade.

Drug abuse prevention activities directed at young people are common in many countries, but need strengthening with regard to the participation of young people and the implementation of appropriate approaches.

Few programmes reach out to the marginalized and vulnerable youth for whom drug use is a coping strategy. At the same time, it seems equally difficult to reach out to those socially integrated young people, particularly in the industrialised world, who are exposed to a culture that appears to be more tolerant towards the use of drugs.

As a consequence, for example, prevention messages that are disseminated are not always in line with the perception that young people have of drug abuse and are thus probably of limited effectiveness. Many programmes do

not respond to the whole breadth of life issues facing young people. For example, an analysis of the responses received by UNDCP to the Annual Reports Questionnaire (ARQ) on the activities of countries in the field of demand reduction, shows that there seems to be a worldwide preference to use the school environment and the mass media to deliver drug abuse prevention messages. Limited resources are given to leisure-time activities where young people can develop self-confidence and healthy lifestyles. Activities and programmes are mostly implemented on an ad-hoc basis. While one-time media campaigns and prevention events in schools are quite common, the insertion of drug abuse prevention in the school curricula is less common.

Isolation and lack of information are other problems. While innovative and effective activities are certainly being implemented by many programmes around the world, these are mostly isolated efforts and few can benefit from their experience. If examples of effective programmes could be documented, analysed and disseminated (the so-called “good practice”), this would be of enormous benefit to all those involved in reducing the overall demand of drugs among young people, including not only young people themselves and programmes targeting them, but also Member States and international organizations. Beside the development of “good practice”, programmes would generally benefit from being in constant contact with each other in order to exchange information and experiences. UNDCP is trying to achieve this by making it possible for young people to share experiences in a systematic way within the framework of the project Global Youth Network.

It was noted above that prevention messages are not always in line with the perceptions that young people have of drug abuse. This could be caused by a lack in skills in creating an appropriate message, but could also be caused by a lack of knowledge of what drug abuse means in the lives of young people, and of its real extent and patterns. Therefore, there is a need for planners at all levels to be constantly in touch with the reality of drug abuse among young people. This is especially important in view of the fact that drug abuse patterns among young people are extremely dynamic.

- 3.2. The views of your organization on the emerging trends, issues and challenges that affect the needs and rights of children and women.

Vulnerability of children and young people

The use and abuse of psychoactive substances pose difficult challenges to public health internationally. Children and young people are especially at risk for psychoactive substance use and related problems. Adolescence is a time

of experimentation, curiosity and identity searching, and part of such a quest involves some risk taking.

Drug abuse continues to be a strategy to cope with the problems of unemployment, neglect, violence, sexual abuse, etc. Marginalized youth are particularly susceptible to the enticement of drugs. Furthermore, the number of marginalized young people is increasing, particularly in the urban areas of developing countries where street life and all the aspects that are related to it, including drug abuse and drug trafficking, is becoming the norm for a growing number of young people.

At the same time there is considerable abuse of drugs among socially integrated young people, particularly in the industrialized world. This could be attributed partly to the fact that significant proportions of the world's youth population are being exposed to a culture which appears to be more tolerant towards the use of drugs. There are also indications that experimentation with drugs and initiation into drug abuse is taking place at an earlier age than before.

Increased availability of drugs

While the nature and extent of drug abuse vary from region to region and from country to country, the global impression is that very large numbers of young people are being exposed to a variety of drugs. Cheap and easily available substances such as solvents and cannabis are widely used throughout the world. ATS including ecstasy are also widely abused. Easy availability and low prices have contributed to the popularity of coca paste and "crack" in some parts of South America. Abuse of heroin seems to remain the province of only a small minority of young people, but the availability of heroin of high purity, thus the possibility to inhale or smoke it, seems to have contributed to an increase in concern about heroin abuse among teenagers and young adults in the United States of America and in the European Union during the 90s, although in terms of numbers heroin abuse remain relatively rare.

Cultural trends and normalization of drug abuse

High prevalence figures for cannabis among youth in some parts of the world suggest an acceptance of the place of cannabis in the lives and experiences of a significant number of young people. A similar acceptance seems to be one of the reasons for the growing popularity of drugs such as amphetamine, metamphetamine, ecstasy and other Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS) in

Europe, North America and certain countries in East Asia and South-East Asia.

Cannabis

Cannabis is the most widely abused drug across the world. The data available for young people reveals high lifetime prevalence rates of cannabis use in many regions of the world. Some countries with comparable data available for a number of years show an increase in the lifetime prevalence of cannabis.

The proportion of school children and young adults who admit to having used cannabis is as high as close to 40 per cent in some countries. Also the proportion for past-month use can be as high as 10-25 per cent. Such high figures indicate that in certain parts of the world cannabis use is becoming normalized and not confined to small marginal groups.

Ecstasy

Within the large group of ATS the abuse of ecstasy is particularly popular among young people. Though, ecstasy is a substance popular in the industrialized world (especially Europe) there are indications that its abuse is spreading to other regions. Ecstasy became popular for its association with major trends in the European youth culture (techno music, raves and 'house' parties).

One of the characteristics of ecstasy abuse, in comparison to other substances, is that its abuse is concentrated among socially integrated young people who often do not consider themselves as abusers or addicts and do not seek help and assistance. There is therefore a relative "invisibility" of the abuse of ecstasy to traditional assessment methods.

Cocaine

Cocaine abuse among youth has a relatively low lifetime prevalence in all regions, compared to that of other drugs. This could be due to the fact that the abuse of cocaine seems to be more common among younger adults rather than youth. In some countries (especially in the Latin American region) coca paste is more abused by marginalized youth. In addition, the popularity of ATS among youth, probably due also to their lower price compared to cocaine, maybe also one of the reasons for lower rates in the abuse of cocaine.

Heroin

Heroin, as is the case for cocaine, is not the main drug of abuse among young people. The average age of heroin abusers is increasing in most countries in the world and injecting drug use, given the HIV/AIDS infection implication, is not popular among youth. The highest lifetime prevalence rates are registered in Europe. There are some indications of an increase in heroin smoking in some countries of Western Europe.

Inhalants

The abuse of volatile substances, which are not subject to international control, is widespread among youth and it is reported from every region of the world. Given the easy availability and the low price these substances are often the first drug of choice for many young people who start abusing drugs. Apart from the obvious threat to health, volatile solvents abuse could be considered to be instrumental in opening the way for the abuse of other illicit substances for many young people.

3.3. The initiatives and actions that could be considered for the future.

The changing perception of cannabis among young people, the increasing abuse of ATS and the widespread abuse of other drugs indicate a need for innovative approaches and an adjustment of prevention strategies aimed at reducing the demand for drugs. In that connection, the guiding principle of UNDCP in the process of reviewing prevention strategies and rethinking prevention has been “listening to young people”. UNDCP took various initiatives in this area, the main one being the establishment of the Global Youth Network for the Prevention of Drug Abuse.

The lessons learned and the experiences exchanged in the past show that no single approach or strategy has been proved through rigorous scientific study to be consistently effective over the long term in reducing drug abuse. This is also due to the fact that scientific evaluation of prevention programmes is difficult because of the multiple factors influencing drug abuse. However, there is some consensus among experts, practitioners and youth themselves on what kinds of elements need to be taken into consideration when designing prevention programmes for youth:

(a) Youth are not homogeneous and they are not all equally vulnerable. Strategies should be carefully tailored to clearly defined populations and programmes need to target particular youth cultures and youth settings;

(b) Multiple strategies are probably the best way to approach the complexity of the drug abuse problem and the greatest chances of success are likely to come from a combination of different approaches. Ideally, that combination should combine the knowledge/attitude/behaviour approach with health promotion, and the building of self-esteem and resistance skills;

(c) Prevention strategies should try to foster and enhance individual strengths and to develop resilience factors that protect individuals in stressful situations and environments, and should try to give youth a set of specific skills for resisting peer pressure to use drugs, to strengthen personal commitment against drug use and to increase social competency (e.g. in communications or relationships with peers). It is also important to offer young people accessible and low-cost opportunities to meet, cultivate an appreciation for the arts, play sports and take part in other challenging activities that develop self-confidence;

(d) Young people are a key resource for making a difference in drug abuse and they should be given the chance to express their views, which in turn should be taken seriously. Youth should be involved in all stages of the development of prevention programmes. Also, there is strong indication that involving young people as prevention agents in peer-led initiatives can produce good results;

(e) Prevention should not focus on one drug only, but it should address, within the wider concept of health promotion, substance abuse in general, including that of tobacco, alcohol and inhalants;

(f) There is an openness among youth to information, if it is factual and does not contrast too sharply with their personal experience of drugs. Scare tactics used in some information material do not serve the purpose for which they are intended, but rather significantly reduce the trust that youth may have in the advice of adults and in some case even encourage risky behaviours;

(g) Prevention programmes should include the family and the community at large in order to reinforce the information that is communicated to young people in the context of prevention activities;

(h) Substance abuse behaviours usually change very slowly. Thus prevention programmes need to be sustained over a long period of time to be effective.