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| REPUBLIQUE DU MALI | | Un Peuple – Un But – Une Foi |
| Ministère du Développement Social, de la Solidarité et des Personnes Âgées | Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances | Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille |

NATIONAL FORUM ON CHILD POVERTY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN MALI: *REPORT OF THE RESULTS OF 4 CONSENSUS BUILDING STUDIES AROUND STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS*

May 12 through 14, 2009 at the International Conference Center of Bamako

SCOPE OF WORK

1. Background and rationale

The year 2009 embodies the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) adopted by the world summit on children which Mali co-chaired with the United States in November 1989. This convention, which advocates, among other things, the universal well-being of children, was ratified by nearly all the Countries of the World (including Mali in 1990).

Although social coverage and impact indicators remain weak, significant efforts have been accomplished by Mali in favor of the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the terms of the CRC. Public policies (CSCR, PDES) and sectorial socio-economic development plans (PRODESS, PRODEC, PRODEJ, etc.) developed and implemented by the Government with development partner contribution have helped achieve progress in the area of child survival, basic education, access to clean water and child protection.

The national commitment for the national well-being has recently become stronger with significant progress in the concretization of the national social protection policy and of the 2005-2009 National Action Plan for extension of Social Protection through, among other measures, the adoption by the Government of Mali in January 2009 of measures of institutionalizing Mandatory Health Insurance (MHI) and the Medical Insurance System (MIS) for poor people.

However, financial barriers (half the population are poor) and geographic obstacles to access and effective use of basic social services are one of the major handicaps to a total fulfillment of all the children of Mali.

In addition, the new international context characterized by a financial crisis and the rising prices of food commodities, has become a factor aggravating the precarious life of people and particularly children in Africa. The FAO index of commodity prices increased by 9% in 2006, 23% in 2007, 54% from April 2007 through April 2008. Even noting since May – June 2008 a worldwide decrease of food prices, the latter continue to constitute a humanitarian challenge given their volatile nature and their rising level.

The scope and depth of monetary poverty in West and Central Africa seems to have worsened and to threaten food and nutritional security of many households both in urban and rural areas. The children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding women, are particularly involved. Other dimensions of children's well-being, including school attendance, could also deteriorate further.

In this unfavorable context, and building on achievements, the results of the 4 studies to be presented in the course of this forum will contribute to reinforce the knowledge and commitments of the various stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the social protection policies and programs in general and for the benefit of children in particular.

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The effective operationalization of social protection policies aimed at increasing the universal coverage of poor and vulnerable groups for basic social services, is one of the major expectations of the effective utilization of the results of these studies.

In addition to efforts aimed at achieving economic growth for sustaining development, the establishment of social protection components targeting disadvantaged populations appears henceforth as an ultimate measure conditioning the acceleration of progress in achieving the MDGs and the universal well-being of children in Mali. Social protection is henceforth perceived at the global level as a key component of the poverty reduction strategies. It constitutes an important link in the efforts aimed at reducing economic, social, food/nutritional vulnerability and other shocks and stresses. It is particularly important for children with respect to the scope of their vulnerability, comparatively with adults, and also on account of the role that social protection could play in order to ensure adequate nutrition and better access to basic social services (education, health, water, and sanitation).

The necessity to promote public awareness of the challenges related to child poverty, disparities and the rises of food commodity prices in Mali as well as the urgent need to set up effective security components for disadvantaged communities, constitute the rationale for organizing this national level meeting.

This forum provides an opportunity to hold extensive discussions with national and foreign experts as well as policy makers, partners, and Civil Society on the choices of relevant social protection policy options, based on evidence of the results of studies carried out in 2008/2009 with UNICEF's technical and financial support as well as the lessons drawn from programs experimented in this country and in other countries. The reaching of a consensus on useful realistic measures for the commitment of policy makers and the mobilization of the multi-donor partnership for the benefit of children in Mali is strongly expected.

Thus, the Government of Mali, UNICEF, and their Partners, invite development actors, researchers, officials of the various communities and civil society to make good use of the outcomes of these studies in order to develop policies and programs which are carriers of well-being particularly for children, women, disadvantaged groups, for speeding up progress towards reaching the goals of the CSCR 2007-2011, of the Economic and Social Development Program (PDES) 2007-2012 and the ten year plan of the MDG's 2008-2015 in Mali.

2. Goals of the forum

2.1. Overall goal

The overall goal of this national forum is to better inform decision makers, planners, researchers, technical and financial partners, civil society organizations and decentralized communities on the poverty and vulnerability of children in Mali and to reinforce their commitment for the child social protection measures in order to speed up progress towards achieving the MDGs and achieving children and women's rights in Mali.

2.2. Specific goals

The forum's specific goals are the following :

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- 1) Improve knowledge and awareness by Mali's development actors at all levels on issues related to child poverty and inequalities;
- 2) Sensitize development actors on the issue of the impact on poverty of the rise in food prices;
- 3) Present quantitative data on the existing family solidarity mechanisms as a strategy to combat poverty as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the social protection systems existing in Mali;
- 4) Strengthen the national debate on draft recommendations and policy options of additional short and medium term social protection measures;
- 5) Single out those consensual resolutions which should allow effective operationalization of the new measures adopted by the Government in the area of social policy;
- 6) Set up a partnership between Government and multi-donors for the promotion of social protection policies in Mali;
- 7) Establish a road map for operational action prospects.

3. Expected results

At the conclusion of the proceedings, the following results must be achieved:

- 1) Public opinion, planners, decision makers, civil society, communal organizations and TFPs become aware of the persistent inequalities in the fight against child poverty and progress towards achieving the MDGs in Mali;
- 2) The operational recommendations and appropriate social protection policy options for the benefit of vulnerable children and groups are adopted by consensus;
- 3) The policy makers and development actors commit themselves to work on the development and operationalization of the security components required as well as capacity building;
- 4) Establishment of a partnership for the operationalization of the national social protection policy in Mali and the operationalization of the new measures adopted by the Government for achieving health insurance;
- 5) A final declaration stemming from the seminar will be read in presence of the Highest Authorities and the TFPs at the closing of the seminar, to serve as the baseline for the road map for the operationalization of the measures.

4. Target audience/participants

At least one hundred participants are expected at this National Forum, including the following:

- Representatives of Government Institutions;
- Representatives of ministerial departments and national technical services concerned by the subject;
- Representatives of regional technical services;
- Representatives of international organizations and technical and financial partners;
- Representatives of decentralized communities in Mali;
- Researchers and academics interested in the subject;
- Children and youth representatives (Children's Parliament and Youth Parliament);
- Representatives of civil society, the media, and the public and private press;
- Professionals of the social protection sector of other countries of Africa and the World.

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5. Seminar partnership/sponsorship

The Forum is to be chaired by H.E. **The Prime Minister of Mali, in presence of the Regional UNICEF Director for West and Central Africa.**

The forum will be organized based on a partnership including three key ministries, namely the Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, and the Elderly, the Ministry of the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family, and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The key organizational component is the National Directorate of Social Protection and the Local Economy. A multi-sectorial organizational team composed of 10 members is set up to ensure the adequate preparation of the seminar for its full success.

The forum will receive technical assistance and a combination of support from the following partners: UNICEF, the World Bank, the ILO, the Swedish Cooperation and the European Union heavily involved in the social protection policy. Their experts at national, regional, and headquarter levels will bring a precious contribution to the holding of the proceedings. This is also true for national and international consultants as well as Executives having played an active role in the implementation of the studies.

6. Forum Content

Addresses will be read at the opening of the forum, including the following ones:

- Introductory word by the Resident Representative of UNICEF Mali;
- Address by H.E. the Minister of Social Development, Solidarity and the Elderly;
- Opening speech by H.E. the Prime Minister.

In the course of the forum, there will be some preliminary presentations as well as presentations of the results of and recommendations of the 4 studies. The preliminary presentations will bear on the following themes:

- 1) The directions of the African Union and the national efforts underway in the area of social policy, by the National Director of Social Protection and the Solidarity Based Economy
- 2) UNICEF's vision in the area of social policy, by the Regional Advisor for West and Central Africa
- 3) The respective visions of the World Bank, the ILO, the European Union, and the Swedish Cooperation in the area of social protection.

The four studies which will be the object of the presentation and discussions in plenary sessions are the following:

- 1) Study on revenue transfers and poverty reduction in Mali: carried out by ODHD/MDSSPA (500 copies of the report published in Mali available);
- 2) Study on child poverty and inequalities in Mali : carried out by the DNSI/MEIC and GREAT-Université du Mali (2.000 copies of the report published in the United States are already available) ;

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- 3) Study on the social protection of children in West and Central Africa, the Case of Mali: achieved by the ODI Consultancy and finalized by the DNPSES/MDSSPA: 1.000 copies of the report published in Mali are available;
- 4) Study of the impact of higher prices of food commodities on child poverty in Mali : conducted by UNICEF and the University of Canada : 300 copies of the report published in Mali will be available.

A summary report containing the entire set of summaries and recommendations of the 4 studies will also be accessible to participants.

7. Methodology, agenda and venue

In accordance with the agenda below, the seminar proceedings will be held in the form of plenary session presentations of the general orientations and principal results/lessons learned from the 4 studies, followed by discussions and syntheses.

The syntheses will be read, amended, and adopted every day in plenary session. A general synthesis of the conclusions and recommendations of the forum will be produced and read at the forum closing to serve as strategic orientations for future actions (including, among others, the future National Action Plan 2010-2014 for Social Protection).

The proceedings will be held in 3 days, i.e., on May 12, 13, and 14, 2009, at the International Conference Center of Bamako.