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### United Nations Children's Fund

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### **Report of the field visit to Tajikistan by members of the UNICEF Executive Board**

#### **Introduction**

1. Representatives of the members of the UNICEF Executive Board (H.E. Andrei Dapkiunas, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations; Ms. Sarah Bhoroma, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations; and Ms. Nadieska Navarro, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations) and Mr. Nicolas Pron, Secretary of the Executive Board, visited Tajikistan from 18 to 26 April 2010.

2. The objective of the field visit was to gain a first-hand understanding of UNICEF work at the country level. More specifically, the visit aimed at demonstrating concrete examples of UNICEF cooperation with the Government and with other partners, including the United Nations country team. The visit provided an opportunity for the members of the Executive Board to better understand the challenges facing children and women in Tajikistan.

3. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for the opportunities for substantive dialogue with senior members of the Government.

4. The delegation would also like to thank the UNICEF country team in Tajikistan for the well-prepared and well-organized visit, and for staff being readily available throughout the visit.

5. The programme of the visit consisted of two main components:

(a) Meetings in Dushanbe with the UNICEF Tajikistan country office, senior-level government counterparts, members of the United Nations country team, as well as key donors and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners;

(b) Field trips to the Rasht Valley and Khuroson district, where the

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\* E/ICEF/2010/8.

delegation had the opportunity to visit UNICEF-supported projects. The delegation met local government representatives; representatives of civil society organizations; users of health facilities; health workers; teachers; school administrators; students; members of community groups; religious leaders; and UNICEF staff.

6. This report summarizes the briefings received by the delegation and concludes with the delegation's own observations.

### **Key issues facing children and women**

7. Tajikistan is a relatively small, landlocked country in Central Asia. About 93 per cent of its territory is covered by mountains, and only 6.5 per cent of the land is arable. Tajikistan shares a 1,200 km border with Afghanistan to the south, and borders with China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Tajikistan became independent in 1991 following the break-up of the Soviet Union. A low-income country in Central Asia with a population of 7.7 million, Tajikistan has one of the lowest per capita incomes \$697 in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (2008). About 53 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line (\$40 per person per month) and 17 per cent lives below the extreme poverty line regarding the minimum-consumption cost of food (approximately \$26 per person per month). Children aged up to 17 years make up 43.4 per cent of the population, with 1 million of them under five (13 per cent of the population).

8. During the five-year civil war from 1992 to 1997, the fragile economy of Tajikistan lost more than 60 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP). The widespread physical damage amounted to an estimated \$7 billion and heavy human losses of 150,000 to 170,000 thousand lives. Tajikistan, heavily dependent on remittances and on cotton and aluminium export, is experiencing a sharp decrease in cotton and aluminium prices in the global commodity market and a significant decline in the inflow of remittances. In 2008, the level of remittances sent to Tajikistan in relation to GDP was 50 per cent, or \$2.5 billion, the highest in the world. In 2009, remittance inflows declined by 30 per cent compared to the same period of 2008. According to the official statistics, inflation in 2008 reached 13 per cent. In 2009, inflation stood at 7 per cent, due to the global financial crisis and constraints on the demand side due to decline of remittances. The delegation was informed that wheat production meets only 50 per cent of the domestic need and that around 1 million people face food insecurity.

9. Tajikistan is susceptible to natural disasters, including floods, avalanches, mudslides, drought, locust invasions and earthquakes, all of which have the potential to cause serious human suffering, threaten livelihoods, frustrate development efforts and reverse development gains. In July 2007, an earthquake shook the Rasht Valley, damaging or destroying 1,200 homes. In January 2010, UNICEF responded to an earthquake in the Pamir region, and in April 2010 to severe floods in the Vose district of the Khatlon region. The Executive Board delegation also visited Khuroson district, where 3,400 people were displaced by two major mudslides in April and May 2009 that destroyed their homes.

10. The delegation was given the opportunity to visit the Rasht district to gain a first-hand impression of the situation of children and women in rural areas. The Rasht district has been selected as one of the eight priority districts for implementation of a joint UNICEF-Government decentralization programme and local-level development planning for 2010-2015.

### **Maternal and child health**

11. Both infant and child mortality rates in Tajikistan declined during the period 1990-2007, indicating that the country is on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal target by 2015. However, both infant and under-five mortality rates remain very high — more than two times higher than average rates for the region. Child mortality rates differ significantly between boys and girls, with the infant mortality rate among boys being about 20-25 deaths per 1,000 live births higher than that among girls. More than 52 per cent of infant deaths are neonatal (from birth to day 28 of life); more than 85 per cent of these deaths occur within the first week of life. In 2005, 70.6 per cent of children were fully immunized. Official data indicate that 85 per cent of children were fully immunized in 2008. Measles immunization coverage decreased from 91 per cent in 2005 to 57 per cent in 2007. The increase in immunization coverage since 2000 is negligible, and immunization in Tajikistan has not yet reached its potential, leaving almost one third of children unprotected.

12. There has been an increase in the maternal mortality ratio in Tajikistan, from 97 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003 to 170 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2005. The main reason for high maternal mortality relates to the quality of antenatal care (during pregnancy and before birth). The perinatal mortality (from week 37 of pregnancy to delivery) remains very high despite the large percentage of trained personnel.

13. The UNICEF programme aims to achieve the following key results: (a) improved maternal and child health (MCH) services are adequately taken into account in national health policies, strategies and budgetary frameworks; (b) all women who are giving birth as well as newborn infants in eight districts receive quality essential and emergency obstetric and newborn care; (c) parents in eight districts have improved child care practices, while nationwide immunization coverage and vitamin A supplementation are at 90 per cent, and consumption of adequately iodized salt is at 80 per cent; and (d) the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and paediatric AIDS services are integrated into MCH services in 54 maternity hospitals and reproductive health centres in 18 districts, and outreach services and voluntary counselling and testing are provided to most-at-risk adolescents in 25 cities. The MCH project aims to strengthen systems to manage the immunization services, vaccine supplies and cold chain, and to generate the demand for quality services. The project will continue its engagement in health coordination and the health sector reform.

14. In the Rasht district, the delegation visited the central district hospital and heard directly from the chief doctor how UNICEF support in terms of equipment and training had helped to improve the quality of services, including newborn care, neonatal care and PMTCT. A regional training centre has been set up with UNICEF support, and delegates had the opportunity to interact with health staff who had come from remote villages. The delegation also visited the outpatient district health clinic and was briefed by nurses and local doctors about reproductive health activities, as well as breastfeeding counselling. In the community of Shule, delegates interacted with the medical staff of the village health centre, who expressed their gratitude for UNICEF support.

15. While the Executive Board delegation was visiting Tajikistan, there was an outbreak of wild polio virus in several areas of the country, some eight years after

the country was declared polio-free. UNICEF Tajikistan reacted promptly by immediately ordering vaccines from UNICEF Copenhagen, and by setting up a national social mobilization campaign. The vaccines arrived in Dushanbe on 27 April, the day after the delegation departed. National Immunization Days will start on 4 May 2010.

### **Child malnutrition**

16. Stunting is the main nutritional problem of children in Tajikistan; every fourth child under five is stunted. About one in four children (25 per cent) under six months is exclusively breastfed. Water and other liquids are quickly introduced into an infant's diet. As a result, the prevalence of breastfeeding, still high at four months, drops off rapidly in subsequent months. By the end of the first year, roughly three in four children are being breastfed. In 49 per cent of households, salt was found adequately iodized (in 2007). Use of iodized salt is strongly correlated with the level of education of the head of household; the percentage rises from 38 per cent of households whose head has primary education up to 61 per cent of households whose head has secondary or higher education.

17. The UNICEF-supported nutrition project focuses on promotion of infant and young child survival, feeding and care practices and prevention of micronutrient deficiencies. The results of the most recent National Nutrition Survey (2009) will be used to influence policy decisions at the national level and in the development of the required nutritional interventions at the community level.

18. In Rasht, the members of the delegation met with the Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) committee set up by a local NGO, Niso, with support from UNICEF, to conduct IDD advocacy and social mobilization activities. The delegation heard from the members of the committee about how influential they have been in tightening controls on incoming salt to the district and in increasing the use of iodized salt. Committee members also briefed the delegation about activities they have initiated in the areas of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and the daily challenges they are still facing in the delivery of primary health care to remote villages.

### **Water and sanitation**

19. Only 67 per cent of the population of Tajikistan have access to safe drinking water. Outbreaks of water-borne diseases continue to present a risk. This was the case in a community in Rudaki district (some 6 kilometres east of Dushanbe), where in late March 2009 a total of 106 people (out of a population of 1,844) were reportedly diagnosed with typhoid in one week. Only 21 per cent of the country's population have access to improved sanitation facilities, with wide disparities existing between rural and urban areas.

20. The UNICEF-supported Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Education (WASH) and Girls' Participation project focuses on reducing gender disparities and increasing the attendance rate in basic education. The project aims to accomplish this through the implementation of demand-side interventions and through ensuring better access to safe drinking water, basic sanitation and hygiene promotion in eight priority districts.

21. In Khuroson district, members of the delegation had the opportunity to observe WASH emergency relief interventions combined with a sustainable development approach. Following severe floods, which destroyed about 440 homes in 2009, UNICEF, as WASH cluster lead, responded promptly to the request of the Government for assistance and provided water storage containers, purification tablets, tents and hygiene kits, as well as psychosocial support to affected people. The delegation saw how these early interventions have been sustained through ongoing sanitation and hygiene education and the construction of a new drinking water supply system for resettled populations in the Shohruh settlement of Khuroson district.

### **Education**

22. The primary school net attendance ratio had increased to 96 per cent by the school year 2006/2007, from 89 per cent in the school year 2004/2005. Currently, almost all school-age children have parents and grandparents who have completed basic education. In 1990, for example, the girls' enrolment rate for grades 5-9 was 98 per cent; by 2005, it had declined to 73 per cent. A new generation is now being born to young mothers, one fourth of whom have not completed basic education. This lack of primary education among young mothers is a phenomenon that had been addressed in Tajikistan during the Soviet period, and its reappearance bodes poorly for the future. The reasons why children, especially girls, drop out or irregularly attend school include parental reluctance to send their children to school, lack of money for school clothes and shoes, children's work at home or in the fields, a lack of interest in school and a lack of learning materials supposed to be provided by the family. Only 8.7 per cent of children have access to preschool education (2007). Access to preschool education remains extremely low in rural areas, at 3.6 per cent, against 22.6 per cent in urban areas.

23. The UNICEF-supported Education programme strives to ensure that government policies, as well as the plans of partners, explicitly address the issues of gender disparity and other inequities in basic education. UNICEF supports early learning models, which are piloted and evaluated, and the establishment of a conducive policy environment allowing alternative systems. The programme also aims at ensuring that students have access to gender-sensitive water and sanitation facilities as an entry point to increasing girls' attendance and completion rates. Activities are also implemented to ensure that students in grades 7-9 have greater knowledge of, and practice, life skills. UNICEF assists the Ministry of Education in coordinating efforts to improve access, quality and equity in preschool and school readiness programmes. This support is primarily for the piloting and evaluation of alternative early learning programme models, and the strengthening of the policy and legislative framework to support the Ministry of Education management of a mixed-model preschool system.

24. In Rasht, the delegation visited UNICEF-assisted schools that have implemented the Girls' Education Initiative. Members of the delegation were particularly impressed by how School No. 28 had managed to reverse the decline in the school attendance rate of girls, even in secondary education, and to achieve near parity with boys. This was achieved thanks to community outreach interventions, greater involvement of parents in the learning process, improvement of the school environment and innovative approaches such as small thematic grants for extracurricular activities, which help to make school more relevant to girls. In

Shule, delegates heard from young girls about how the UNICEF-supported interventions had allowed them to receive an education and to contemplate a professional career.

### **HIV/AIDS**

25. In Tajikistan 1,542 people are officially registered as HIV/AIDS-positive (2008), although independent studies by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) indicate possibly much higher numbers. Young people aged 20-29 are the most affected and comprise 72.2 per cent of all registered cases. Women comprised 19 per cent of all registered cases in 2008, compared to 14 per cent in 2000.

26. The UNICEF-supported HIV/AIDS project focuses on increasing access of the most vulnerable young people and pregnant women to quality voluntary counselling and testing and treatment, as well as prevention and reduction of sexually transmitted infections and HIV transmission, specifically to newborns. The project uses policy advocacy and capacity-building for paediatric AIDS and helps to ensure that HIV-infected children have access to social assistance. Support is provided to the provision of comprehensive and outreach services for most-at-risk adolescents, HIV-infected pregnant women and children as well as to the prevention of nosocomial infections. In Rasht, the delegation heard how the local district health committee had initiated activities to promote prevention and awareness.

### **Child protection**

27. There were some 10,395 children aged 0-17 years in residential care in 2007. While the rate of children deprived of parental care is low, the number of parents willing to place their children in institutions is very high. Although juvenile offending is relatively low, it is steadily rising. Analysis carried out in 2008 shows a 3.7 per cent increase in arrests of minors. Most mothers use psychological or physical punishment to discipline their children. Of particular concern is the widespread use of violent methods (hit/slap on face, head or ears, or beating with an implement), which was reported by 16 per cent of mothers in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. Corporal punishment of children is banned in schools and within the penal system, but not at home.

28. The UNICEF-supported programme aims to ensure that the child care system is transformed into a comprehensive set of services that rely more on community-based family support services, family substitute care, and the prevention of family separation and involves a juvenile justice system that respects the best interests of the child. The programme also aims to ensure that community-based alternative practices are implemented with UNICEF support, aiming at minimizing deprivation of liberty. The Child Care System Reform project supports the Government in developing a national policy framework and plan, and their implementation, and encourages a stronger coordination among partners, as well as the adoption of common strategies. The Juvenile Justice project continues to support legal reforms based on international standards and to develop the capacity of the personnel involved in the administration of juvenile justice. The project promotes alternatives to custodial sentences, including diversion to community-based services and non-residential rehabilitation services. Specific attention is also given to emerging

issues surrounding child labour, suicide of children, and violence towards children as well as children without parental care and children in contact with the law.

### **The United Nations system and the role of UNICEF in Tajikistan**

29. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with the United Nations country team. The United Nations system in Tajikistan is small relative to the country's needs and to the opportunities for United Nations intervention and expansion. Of the 15 resident United Nations agencies in the country, only 5 have full representation (UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme). The remaining 10 agencies (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Fund for Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNAIDS and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) maintain projects managed by international and national coordinators. The International Organization for Migration is a member of the United Nations country team.

30. There is considerable variance in the nature and scope of the programmes of United Nations agencies and in the resources the United Nations can presently contribute towards initiatives. Annual United Nations disbursements (including mobilized funds) for 2004-2006 averaged \$44.6 million, or approximately 15 per cent of total official development assistance (\$297.1 million). However, the core resources of the United Nations amounted to only \$8.8 million, or 3 per cent. Joint United Nations programming is mostly focused on HIV/AIDS. UNICEF is a member of the working/theme groups on food security, health, HIV/AIDS, gender, and social protection and chairs the education group. The new United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2010-2015 focuses on four thematic areas: (a) poverty reduction and governance; (b) food and nutrition security; (c) clean water, sustainable environment and energy; and (d) quality basic services (health, education and social protection).

31. The delegation saw for itself the catalytic role UNICEF has been playing in engaging other United Nations agencies in the strategic implementation of joint projects. For example, in Rasht, the delegation visited a reproductive health centre set up through a partnership among UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank.

### **Observations**

32. Having had a close look at the activities of UNICEF in Tajikistan, the delegation commended the dedication, hard work and efficiency of the country office staff, especially in the areas of mother and child health, education, and water and sanitation. The delegation noted the high degree of preparedness and initiative of UNICEF Tajikistan in responding to emergency situations, as vividly demonstrated in the prompt reaction of the country office to the wild polio outbreak during the visit.

33. The delegation noted the sense of extreme hardship in the country, especially in remote rural areas. The humanitarian situation in Tajikistan is compounded by multiple natural calamities, including frequent earthquakes, mudslides and floods.

Among the challenges noted by members of the delegation were the issues of early marriage and child labour. The delegation also noted the low levels of awareness of HIV/AIDS and recommended that necessary steps be taken to raise this awareness.

34. The ability of the Government to improve the social and humanitarian situation is restricted by the continuing challenge of achieving national energy self-sufficiency and security and of creating the minimum transport infrastructure required for sustainable social development. While appreciating the hard work done in the country by the international community, the delegation could not escape the impression that Tajikistan was forgotten by donors. Higher indicators of social development during the Soviet times and the fact that Tajikistan belongs to the predominantly middle-income environment of the Commonwealth of Independent States may explain a misleading perception of Tajikistan held by international donors. This misperception downplays the acuteness of humanitarian challenges faced by the population of Tajikistan and, given the country's critical geopolitical positioning, the seriousness of possible implications of any major social and economic backtracking in Tajikistan for the well-being and security of this volatile region.

35. The delegation believed that the continuing development emergency in Tajikistan invited a much larger-scale humanitarian and development assistance to the country, to be carried out on a sustainable and long-term basis. The delegation suggested that UNICEF be engaged in a more systematic fundraising effort and informational advocacy to raise the visibility of Tajikistan among the international donors and highlight the gravity of the continuing risks and threats to Tajik children and their families. The delegation also requested the Executive Director of UNICEF to consider the possibility of enhancing the level of staffing and financing of the country office so that it is on a par with UNICEF presence in countries with similarly dire challenges.

36. The delegation was satisfied with the excellent cooperation and partnerships that UNICEF has forged with governmental institutions at all levels, from central government to district authorities, to achieve results for children through evidence-based advocacy and action. UNICEF engagement with the Government, United Nations agencies, civil society and key international development partners provided good examples of the added value and multiplier effect UNICEF can bring by acting as a catalyst and a unifier. In the projects the delegation visited, UNICEF was often working as a single agency. Increased participation of other relevant United Nations agencies, including international financial institutions, could allow the leveraging of important resources and provide more comprehensive services in a cost-effective manner.

37. The delegation welcomed, as an important strategy for achieving results for children, UNICEF efforts to influence policies, legislation and public spending while programmatically supporting the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

38. The delegation noted with appreciation the cooperation among the Government, local authorities and UNICEF on child-friendly schools and the efforts to influence girls, especially those from remote areas, to attend school. The delegation underlined the importance of ensuring that all children, especially girls, and children from remote areas, have access to quality education, not only as a fundamental human right but also as a key investment in the future of the country.



39. The delegation appreciated the critical role UNICEF played in support of the Government to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and in support of the protection and fulfilment of the rights of children and women in Tajikistan.

## **Annex**

### **Summary of the programme of the field visit to Tajikistan**

#### **Monday 19 April (Dushanbe)**

1. Briefings by the UNICEF Representative, United Nations Field Security Advisor and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
2. Meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3. Meeting with the UNICEF country management team

#### **Tuesday 20 April (Dushanbe)**

1. Briefing by the United Nations country team on the Tajikistan Development Context
2. Briefing by the Representative and Deputy Representative on the UNICEF-Tajikistan country programme of cooperation
3. Meeting with UNICEF staff
4. Meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister

#### **Wednesday 21 April (Rasht district)**

1. Meeting with District authorities.
2. Meeting with the District Health Committee members (NGO and local authorities)
3. Visit to the Rasht Central District Hospital

#### **Thursday 22 April (Rasht district)**

1. Visit to School No. 28
2. Visit to the local community Shule (meeting with community leaders, visit to the community school, and visit to primary health care point)

#### **Friday 23 April (Dushanbe)**

1. Meeting with international development partners
2. Meeting with the Ministry of Health
3. Meeting with the Ministry of Education
4. Meeting with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
5. Meeting with NGOs and civil society organizations

#### **Saturday 24 April (Dushanbe, Khuroson district)**

1. Visit to Khuroson district to observe emergency interventions in WASH
2. Debriefing with UNICEF senior management