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## United Nations Children's Fund

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### **Report of the field visit of members of the UNICEF Executive Board to Sudan, 26 April to 2 May 2014**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. A delegation from UNICEF's Executive Board, comprising representatives from Albania, Denmark, Djibouti and the Netherlands, carried out a field visit to Sudan from 26 April to 2 May 2014 under the able and inclusive leadership of Albania.
2. The objective of the field visit was to gain a first-hand understanding of UNICEF work at the country level and the UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation with the Government of Sudan covering the period 2013-2016. More specifically, the visit aimed to discuss the impact and results of UNICEF work with government and non-government counterparts at national, local and community levels within the broad context of national development priorities, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and other relevant development and humanitarian assistance frameworks. The visit provided an opportunity for the Executive Board to better understand the challenges facing children and women in Sudan.
3. The delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Government of Sudan for its cooperation in preparing the visit and for the welcome, as well as the opportunities for substantive dialogue with ministers and other senior representatives at the federal and state level. The good relations between the Government and UNICEF teams on the ground are instrumental in allowing them to carry out their work and fulfil their mandate in support of the children in Sudan.
4. The delegation would also like to thank the UNICEF country team in Sudan for the well-prepared and well-organized visit, and the country representative and staff for being readily available throughout the visit to provide support to the delegation to better understand UNICEF work and engagement. The delegation was

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\* E/ICEF/2013/14.



particularly impressed by the level of commitment and dedication of UNICEF staff in Sudan.

5. The delegation would also like to thank the Office of the Secretariat of the Executive Board for its support and assistance in planning the field visit.

6. The programme of the visit comprised meetings and other activities in the capital, Khartoum, Northern State and North Darfur.

(a) In Khartoum, the delegation met with ministers or high-level representatives of education, foreign affairs, health, finance and national economy, welfare and social security, the National Council for Child Welfare and the Humanitarian Aid Commission to exchange views on the situation of children and women in Sudan and opportunities for increased and targeted investment in commodities and social services to benefit children across the country — especially the poorest and most vulnerable ones. The delegation also met with the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), the United Nations country team and representatives of international and local civil society — primarily those dealing with issues related to children and youth — including youth organizations and movements.

(b) In Dongola, Northern State, the delegation met with the Deputy Wali (Governor), ministers and other Government representatives, and visited a state hospital that counsels new mothers on the necessity of abandoning female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) through the national Saleema campaign. To get a sense of the expanding child protection system in Sudan, delegates also visited a Family and Child Protection Unit (FCPU) of the police, an organizational setup recognized as international best practice in child protection. Finally, the delegation saw the Extended Programme of Immunization Centre and met with representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), with whom UNICEF cooperates.

(c) In El Fasher, North Darfur, the delegation met with the Wali and other senior state officials to hear about prospects for peace and development in the Darfur region. The delegation also met with senior officials of the United Nations system, African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and select international cooperation partners in Sudan. The delegation also visited one of the established camps for internally displaced people (IDPs), Zam Zam, to witness the protection and services provided to children and families sheltered there as well as to inquire about the situation of recently arrived people displaced by resumed conflicts in the Darfur area.

(d) Throughout the visit, the delegation met with users of health facilities, health workers, children and parents, beneficiaries of various programmes, members of local communities and development partners.

7. The present report summarizes the briefings the delegation received and its activities, concluding with the delegation's own observations on various issues related to the visit and the work of UNICEF.

## II. Key issues facing children and women in Sudan

### Political and security context

8. The current population of Sudan is estimated at 37.3 million people, of whom half are children under 18. Poverty in Sudan is deeply entrenched and is largely rural. It is more widespread and deeper in areas affected by conflict, drought and famine. High poverty rates are closely correlated with volatility in Sudan, as illustrated by the fact that the Darfur and Kordofan regions have the highest concentration of poverty, with 63 and 59 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, respectively.

9. Since separating from South Sudan, Sudan has lost about three-quarters of its oil revenue: real gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have contracted by 0.6 per cent (and the World Economic Forum predicts a 2.7 per cent drop in GDP for 2014). Inflation rates rose from 20.0 per cent in 2011 to 36.0 per cent in 2013. Current accumulated loans are estimated at \$43 billion, while the budget deficit in 2013 was \$2.23 billion. Loss of revenues has been compounded by other serious economic challenges, including instability in South Sudan and bilateral economic sanctions.

10. Most of government spending goes to the military, police and security. The 2013 budget allocated Sudanese Pound (SDG) 555 million for health and education sectors, while SDG 8.6 billion was allocated for security and SDG 1.5 billion for what is known as “sovereign sectors,” which includes the presidency, council of ministers, and ministries of defence, justice, foreign and federal affairs. In addition, disruptions to revenue collection in conflict-affected areas have further undermined economic growth and stability. During meetings with the delegation, various federal and state representatives responsible for social issues mentioned their ability to provide services is hindered by a lack of sufficient funding.

11. In January 2014, President Omar al-Bashir announced that his government planned to initiate an all-inclusive national dialogue focusing on peace and security, political reform and democratization, economic reform and national identity. The Government gave assurance to armed groups that they would not be arrested by participating in the dialogue. The delegation was informed that some meetings had already taken place, and that the process is ongoing. During its meeting with the delegation, civil society groups complained, claiming that while they represent large portions of society, especially youth, they feel excluded from the process and expressed scepticism about its prospects.

12. An upsurge in violence is currently destabilizing Darfur and impacting three other states (South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei). This new wave of instability is putting at risk achievements made in Darfur since the signing of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur in 2005 and is undermining security in large parts of the country. The deteriorating economic situation has led to increasing conflict among tribes over land and resources and unresolved political rivalries among prominent political figures. The deployment to the region of government aligned militia, known as Rapid Support Forces, has undermined the security of civilians, their property and livelihoods, particularly in South Darfur and increasingly in North Darfur. The security situation continues to be aggravated by the attacks of rebel groups against government forces and indiscriminate bombardments by the Sudanese Armed Forces in areas of rebel control.

13. Protection assessments conducted in conflict-affected areas during 2013 noted serious concerns related to civilian casualties, sexual and gender-based violence, the separation of families, the recruitment of children into armed groups, violence against children and the targeting of civilians in transit camps or temporary settlements. Moreover, assaults, sexual and gender-based violence and looting take place within an overall climate of impunity.

#### **Observations**

14. The delegation welcomed measures taken by Sudanese actors at both federal and state level, government as well as non-government, with support from the international community, to further work to protect and preserve the well-being of children in Sudan. While some progress has been made in recent years, it is clear that way too many children in Sudan do not benefit from basic social and protection services due to insufficient investment in services or inadequate knowledge about positive child-rearing practices. Chronic and acute conflict severely compounds the panorama for children, robbing them of their childhood, jeopardizing their chances of building a future for themselves, and depriving the country of the much needed energy of its growing generations.

15. Despite efforts and some progress, Sudan lags behind in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. A firm and stronger commitment by the Government of Sudan to put children first and to keep children at the heart of the national development agenda is therefore crucial. A strong foundation for its future should begin with adequate, targeted investments in children and appropriate budget allocations, especially for the most vulnerable. It should further build on achievements and aim for sustainability.

16. The delegation firmly believes that an all-inclusive, committed and vigorously pursued national dialogue is required, representing an opportunity for the economic and political development of Sudan. The Doha Document for Peace remains key to addressing the root causes of the regional conflict that are specific to Darfur. It presents an opportunity for the peaceful political settlement of ongoing conflicts that are affecting the lives of children and have resulted in mass displacement. All parties must embrace the initiative with sincerity; they must put an immediate end to all conflicts in the country and come together to build a future for all and by all.

#### **Humanitarian issues**

17. The humanitarian operation of UNICEF in Sudan is one of the largest in the world. The need for assistance is due to protracted and sudden onset of conflict situations in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, internal displacement, malnutrition, disease outbreaks and floods. Since the end of 2013 there has been a large influx of refugees from South Sudan, mainly into White Nile State, as a result of ongoing fighting across the border. The protracted malnutrition situation in Sudan in itself is an emergency.

18. There are over 100 locations throughout the country where people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Around 40,000 IDPs live in Zam Zam camp, most of whom have been there for more than a decade. Between January and May 2014 approximately 370,000 people were displaced in Darfur as a result of renewed fighting and attacks. This number is higher than the number of people displaced in 2011 and 2012 combined, and represents about half of the number of persons

displaced in 2013. In total, Darfur is now estimated to host over 2 million internally displaced persons.

19. In Sudan, UNICEF is the sector lead in: nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and education; it co-leads in health and child protection. In implementation, UNICEF works closely with international and national partners. In the camp the delegation visited, child-friendly spaces and a health clinic targeting both children and mothers have been established.

### **Observations**

20. The delegation noted the extremely difficult circumstances IDP children and mothers face, especially the newly arrived IDPs. Many girls and young women arrive at the camps with small children and infants on their backs, all suffering from undernourishment. The IDPs live in deplorable conditions without proper housing, access to sufficient sanitation facilities, health care, education, food and livelihood opportunities. Efforts to relocate the camp to more suitable lands have not yielded results. More efforts should be undertaken by the Government, with the assistance of the United Nations where needed, to come up with better and quicker solutions.

21. The delegation was impressed by the activities UNICEF and partners have implemented in Zam Zam camp under difficult circumstances, but it also observed that much remains to be done to address the needs of children and mothers. The delegation noted that UNICEF faces considerable challenges in implementing humanitarian programmes in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. In order to implement programmes and have sustainable impact, access to the people in need is essential, as is the ability of other United Nations actors to contribute to the overall alleviation of needs. For three years, UNICEF has been without access to significant population segments in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and obtaining travel and access permits for IDP camps in other locations is accompanied by delays and difficulties.

22. The delegation urged the Government and UNICEF to work jointly to overcome coordination constraints, and to allow for quick, unhindered access to all populations in need of humanitarian assistance.

23. In general, the delegation observed that UNICEF has the capability to address the synergies between humanitarian, early recovery and development activities. For example, UNICEF is supporting government initiatives in Darfur to address malnutrition and WASH issues in order to make families more resilient. However, the limited availability of funds and ongoing insecurity is hampering progress and sustained impact. This makes prevention of malnutrition and addressing its underlying causes difficult.

24. As cluster lead and on cluster coordination, UNICEF is doing a good job under difficult circumstances, but the constant lack of funds puts the cluster coordination system under pressure, as all the clusters are underfunded and competing for the same pools. The recent development in South Sudan has diverted attention from conflict areas of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, resulting in even more limited resources. The fact that two United Nations operations are taking place in Sudan — the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and UNAMID — complicates the coordination of humanitarian action. Limited resources remain an issue for the Regional Coordinator.

**Health**

25. Health and nutrition issues are closely linked in Sudan, where the under-five mortality rate and the maternal mortality ratio are high and even worse in areas affected by conflict and natural disasters. Access to maternal and child health care and its infrastructure is often inadequate and not equitable. The huge burden of acute malnutrition and stunting in Sudan warrants attention at the highest level.

26. Health indicators in Darfur are among the poorest in Sudan, due in part to the destruction of health facilities as a result of conflict. In order to ensure adequate health care and immunization for children affected by conflict and IDP children and mothers, it is important that UNICEF has access to all areas and regions.

27. UNICEF health programming in Sudan consists of: expanded immunization; child and maternal health; AIDS control and paediatric HIV prevention and treatment activities; emergency preparedness and response; and policy support. The goal is to achieve equitable and sustainable impact and build resilient communities, while implementing flexible programmes for the divergent goals and challenges of UNICEF in Sudan.

28. There is a strong focus on upstream policy work, training, technical support and capacity building with the Government of Sudan. Sustainability of results and resilience building are important targets. With UNICEF assistance, the Government has achieved impressive results in vaccine coverage through routine immunization.

**Observations**

29. The delegation had a constructive meeting with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health, underlining the importance of data collection and a multi-stakeholder approach to address health and nutrition issues. The decision to create a high-level nutrition council following the adoption of a multi-sectoral action plan are important steps forward, also with a view to becoming a Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) country. Equitable implementation of the plan is key, not only for the health and welfare of Sudanese children, but also for the (economic) development perspective of the country as a whole.

30. In Northern State, the delegation was warmly welcomed by the State Government, met with the Minister of Social Welfare and the national and local Council for Child Welfare, and visited a UNICEF-supported hospital that participates in the nation-wide Saleema campaign to eliminate FGM/C.

31. The delegation was impressed with the innovative and multifaceted approach and involvement of stakeholders in the Saleema campaign, including religious leaders, health workers and communities. It is clear that a shift in social and cultural traditions altering the practice of FGM/C will take a long time, but the decline in girls being cut is a promising signal of progress. The delegation highlighted the need for more involvement and support for the campaign at the federal level.

32. UNICEF, along with WHO, is the main partner of the Ministry of Health (MoH) in supporting routine immunization. In order to sustain progress, it is important for the Government to increase its expenditure to expand coverage of essential health services for children and mothers.

## **WASH**

33. Limited access to clean water and sanitation services is a huge problem in Sudan and a large contributor to poor health conditions. Only 27 per cent of the population use improved sanitation, and 60.5 per cent have access to drinking water facilities. Furthermore, only 52 per cent of the population wash their hands after using a latrine. Around 50 per cent of the existing basic schools don't have access to improved drinking water and sanitation facilities. The increasing number of internally displaced people adds to this challenge. There are around 2 million IDPs who are in need of lifesaving WASH services.

34. The delegation learned that a WASH policy is being finalized, while national and state level WASH strategic plans for 2012-2016 are being implemented. UNICEF is WASH cluster co-lead with the Government and pays special attention to ensuring that related humanitarian responses are timely and appropriate.

35. By supporting emergency preparedness and response activities, UNICEF ensures that clean drinking water and sanitation facilities are available for uprooted populations, the aim of which is to reduce mortality due to waterborne diseases.

## **Observations**

36. People affected by violence most often seek safety in overcrowded areas and camps, where access to clean water and sanitation is very limited. Clean drinking water is an immediate and critical need to keep people alive and prevent illness and the spread of diseases.

37. At meetings with various officials as well as during the visit at the Zam Zam camp, the delegation heard about declining levels of government and donor funding to the WASH sector, which affects service provision at scale. Further, limited capacity for effective WASH cluster coordination at national and state levels results in serious inefficiency in the leadership and management of the overall WASH sector.

38. Frequent and widespread emergencies affect the predictability and pace of WASH early recovery and development programming; they also hinder efforts to shift from a dominant short-term humanitarian response to long-term sustainable development planning, as well as the exploration of sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions. The slow pace regarding the approval of sector policy and activating national and state level WASH strategic plans hampers the implementation of nationwide, government-led WASH programming.

39. Efforts to integrate WASH within other sectors — mainly education, nutrition and health — should continue. Schools, health and nutrition centres are useful entry points for WASH interventions.

## **Nutrition**

40. Malnutrition in Sudan is an issue of great concern. As the cluster lead in nutrition and education and WASH programmes, UNICEF is addressing this silent emergency.

41. The high rates of malnutrition in many areas of the country are not a direct consequence of conflict, but a consequence of underdevelopment; for example the most recent data across the country (Sudan simple spatial sample method (S3M)

Survey 2013) demonstrated that some of the highest levels of acute malnutrition are in the Eastern region of Sudan, which has been conflict-free since 2005. There are 301,124 children under 5 with Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) in the East, compared to 2,010,939 nationwide. However, the effects are amplified in conflict-ridden regions such as Darfur. During its visit to Zam Zam, the delegation observed UNICEF-supported treatment of children and mothers suffering from malnutrition, as well as the consequences of the conflict on the health of mothers and children in general.

42. A national nutrition strategy was endorsed in 2009, with the adoption of the Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition as a national protocol. The number of children treated for severe acute malnutrition increased from 11,335 in 2007 to 75,588 in 2011. However, the proportion of children needing treatment who receive it is still only 15 per cent. Preventive activities and a nutrition information system are functional in 15 of the 17 states. Six states now have laws banning the sale of non-iodized salt.

43. More needs to be done to identify disadvantaged children and ensure they benefit from interventions to reduce stunting from 35 to 30 per cent within five years. The focus should be on the adoption of food fortification laws, maternal nutrition packages, and the promotion of appropriate young child feeding through systematic behaviour change interventions. UNICEF plans to work with the Government to ensure that by 2016, all 17 states enforce salt iodization laws and enact the International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes. In the area of micronutrients, the aim is to sustain the high coverage of vitamin A supplementation through biannual campaigns.

44. The delegation visited the SAMIL Factory, which was established in 2012 and produces Plumpy'nut, a Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF). UNICEF purchased from SAMIL 67,000 cartons of the RUTF in 2013, about 40 per cent of UNICEF overall needs in Sudan. In 2014, UNICEF will procure about 90,000 cartons, which is anticipated to be 60 per cent of the total need. In addition, UNICEF has an agreement with SAMIL to deliver the supplies directly to the field in Darfur. This is advantageous because it reduces freight costs and transportation time by three weeks, avoiding delays associated with contracting commercial transporters.

45. Malnutrition is a serious problem affecting the health of children in Sudan. More than 2 million children are stunted and unlikely to reach their full growth and full development potential. Conflict as well as recurrent drought and recent poor harvests have raised food security to crisis levels in various parts of the country. Acute malnutrition will reach life-threatening levels for over half a million children in 2014.

46. Maternal malnutrition is directly linked to child undernutrition, which is particularly high in certain states, including in Eastern State and Red Sea State.

47. Breastfeeding has increased across the country and the use of iodized salt has progressed, but needs remain very high.

48. UNICEF is involved in supporting government structures responsible for nutrition, state level legislation for salt iodization, distribution of related medicines for pregnant women, counselling through mother support groups and health worker training.

## Observations

49. The delegation was encouraged by the work of UNICEF in the sector of nutrition in emergencies; this was particularly evident during the visit to Zam Zam camp, where the delegation observed three components of the nutrition response, including the Stabilization Centre (SC), Out Patient Therapeutic Programme (OTP) combined with other health response components, and a Supplementary Feeding Centre (SFP).

50. Evidence gathered through studies, evaluations and reviews indicates that further reductions in child mortality require a focus on maternal and newborn health, as well as on treatment of children with severe acute malnutrition. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to support the Government and strengthen the role of communities in managing malnutrition. Community management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) requires strong partnership between government, civil society and communities. While the Government has increased its financial contributions for treatment, the increased numbers of malnourished children and the high cost of supplies will require enhanced efforts by the Government and its development partners, including UNICEF, to shift gradually towards more cost-effective interventions.

51. In this regard, the delegation was impressed with the cooperation between UNICEF and the SAMIL Factory, the local producer of RUTF in Khartoum.

52. The delegation was further impressed by the positive impact the UNICEF-SAMIL Factory partnership has had on the local economy, as well as by other advantages of this partnership. These include greater cost-effectiveness (compared to importing RUTF), more efficiency in terms of delivery lead time, and greater sustainability, as the Government can buy directly from SAMIL and realize the economic dividends of addressing malnutrition.

53. The major challenge faced by UNICEF is the flexibility of funds to allow local purchases in country. SAMIL has made huge efforts to exempt itself from the economic sanctions to which Sudan is subjected, but so far it has achieved minimal success.

54. The delegation took note of other challenges and gaps in addressing malnutrition in Sudan. UNICEF needs to cope with an absence of long-term funding and its subsequent impact on programming, as well as the problem of access to conflict areas.

55. In meetings at the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Welfare, the delegation learned about the convergence of views between UNICEF and the Government on the critical state of malnutrition in Sudan and the need to address its root causes holistically and in an integrated manner; the latter, it was noted, includes the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with six United Nations agencies. The delegation was encouraged by measures taken by the Government to establish a high-level council on nutrition involving different ministries and non-governmental organizations. The high-level council was instrumental in establishing Sudan as a member of the SUN movement to scale up nutrition.

56. The delegation observed that capacity building and resilience is an important issue jointly pursued by the Government and UNICEF when addressing humanitarian emergencies — including nutrition in emergencies programmes.

57. In January 2014, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocated funding for nutrition to UNICEF and other United Nations agencies operating in Sudan, including the World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Noting a lack of multi-sectoral coordination on nutrition among these agencies, the delegation expressed concern over the missed opportunity to collaborate and leverage these resources. This, the delegation noted, demonstrated the United Nations system's lack of a long-term development perspective for nutrition in Sudan and the persistence of sectors built on humanitarian response.

### **Education**

58. Sudan has made remarkable progress towards achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE), Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for basic education in Sudan has increased from 65.8 per cent in 2005 to 74 per cent in 2011 (Federal Ministry of Education data). The gender parity index in basic education has increased from 0.8 in 2005 to 0.9 in 2011.

59. The result of the peace dividend in promoting education is visible in states affected by conflict (Darfur states, states bordering southern Sudan and the Eastern states). In Darfur states alone, the annual GER rate has increased by an average of 10 per cent in the last 10 years.

60. Despite these recent positive enrolment trends, multiple challenges in education remain. These include: inequitable access to basic education, as Sudan is among the countries with the highest number of out of school children (1.8 million children aged 6-13); poor learning environments, especially for girls and other vulnerable groups; poor quality of teaching; and inefficiencies in the education system. Furthermore, dropout rates are extremely high. Inadequacy of education policies, insufficient investment in basic education, and ongoing conflicts in Darfur, Abyei, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile states also hamper progress in education. Girls from rural areas are still at a disadvantage, hindered by such factors as sociocultural beliefs, negative attitudes about educating girls, opportunity costs related to domestic work, safety concerns, and child marriage.

61. These challenges are further magnified by education costs for parents, cultural attitudes against girls' rights to basic education, and limited access for vulnerable populations — including nomadic communities, IDPs, and children with disabilities.

62. In terms of education, UNICEF has made many achievements in Sudan. On a policy level, UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education to develop the interim Basic Education Strategy (iBES), state education strategic plans, and to build capacity for planning officials. UNICEF continues to support the Ministry of Education on strategy and policy development for girls' education, education for children with disabilities, nomadic education, teacher training, and child-friendly school construction.

63. UNICEF has also supported Sudan in its efforts to achieve the second Millennium Development Goal through the Out of School initiative, which combines data collection with campaigns to increase enrolment. Furthermore, UNICEF has advocated for increased allocations and investment in child-friendly school infrastructure and services. UNICEF is now piloting innovative projects

aimed at improving access and quality. In conflict situations UNICEF has: supported the development of emergency preparedness plans at national and state level and pre-positioned relevant emergency education supplies; constructed/rehabilitated classroom units; distributed education in emergency supplies; and facilitated International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) training for government and civil society counterparts to ensure sector-wide adherence to the minimum standards for education in emergencies for children affected by conflict and natural disasters.

64. The delegation did not visit any schools, as the visit coincided with summer vacation. However, education was discussed with the Minister of Education as well as other senior officials during the visit. As a cross-cutting issue, education was raised in relation to health, nutrition and child protection. When visiting the Zam Zam camp in North Darfur, the delegation noted the huge challenges to education for internally displaced children due to a lack of schools, teaching materials and teachers. Although it is defined as a life-saving activity, education is often underfunded compared to other humanitarian activities.

### **Observations**

65. The delegation was impressed by the meeting with the Minister of Education and her team, as well as the achievements they had made in the last few years. It was clear that a lot of progress has been made, particularly regarding the development of strategic plans on both national and state levels. However, huge challenges remain, especially for marginalized children — especially girls and children of nomad groups — and dropout rates are extremely high. These challenges will have to be addressed before efforts to improve education will have an effect.

66. The delegation was encouraged to see that education has been integrated as a cross-cutting issue within many other areas, but it would have liked to see a stronger emphasis on education to promote family planning in health related activities.

67. In humanitarian settings it is clear that education can play an important role in creating safe spaces for children; it can also provide a sense of normalcy for children under very difficult circumstances. With this in mind, the delegation would like to have seen a greater focus on education in humanitarian situations, recognizing that funding is a huge constraint. A more coordinated effort among United Nations agencies in Sudan, however, would result in a better division of labour, thus increasing efficiency and effectiveness; this, in turn, could increase the focus on and funding for education. The delegation also noted that the UNAMID Joint Special Representative singled out education as the most important effort to ensure that another generation of children would not be lost.

68. The delegation, therefore, also urges the Government to permit humanitarian organizations to increase their education activities for IDPs, allowing for more than just temporary shelters. Some of the children have lived in the camp for more than 10 years, and the lack of schools are one of the main obstacles to breaking the cycle of war and conflict, since the older children often do not see any alternative.

### **Child protection**

69. The enactment of the Federal Child Act (2010) was a milestone, aligning domestic legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The National

Council for Child Welfare is currently establishing a regulatory and policy framework to implement its provisions. A new Civil Registry Act (2011) reflects international standards and will support the modernization of the birth registration system. However, national legislation and judicial practice regarding the definition of a child are inconsistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as concepts of adulthood as per Sharia law are often applied. In addition, the act does not criminalize FGM/C, although it has been banned through state legislation in 5 of 18 Sudanese states. The act's implementation suffers from a lack of clarity regarding which critical components of a protection system need to be in place, which entity is accountable for delivering these services, how much they cost, and how they should be funded.

70. There is a chasm between the concept of child rights and prevailing attitudes towards children, particularly girls. This is evident in the virtually universal practice of FGM/C, the persistence of child marriage, and the common practice of abandoning children born out of wedlock. Efforts to address these harmful practices are challenging. Child protection concerns that touch upon issues of sexuality are considered taboo subjects, and advocacy may provoke a backlash among religious conservatives in Sudan; furthermore, despite the proliferation of theories on the dynamics of social norms and change, the evidence base to inform behavioural change communication interventions is weak.

71. The resumption of armed conflict in Darfur and in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei undermines family and community capacities to provide adequate care for their children and protect them from violence, exploitation and abuse. There are currently nine parties to conflict that are listed in the Secretary General's Annexes for recruitment and use of children. Denying humanitarian access and the use of indiscriminate weapons (landmines, aerial bombardment, and shelling population centres) are also major concerns. Psychosocial trauma and family separation affect many of the more than one million children caught up in population displacement. There are specific concerns related to family unity and citizenship of children among the hundreds of thousands of southerners left behind with the secession of South Sudan.

72. Efforts to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict face various limitations, including: (a) access restrictions imposed on United Nations agencies both by the Government of Sudan and armed groups preclude monitoring and programming in those areas most affected by armed conflict; (b) the issue of gender-based violence is highly sensitive in the Sudanese context, and efforts to improve reporting, judicial response and support to victims face enormous challenges; and (c) the release of children associated with armed groups through the United Nations Action Plans have thus far applied only to armed groups that have signed peace agreements. There is no admission of the use of children in armed forces/groups by the Government of Sudan or allied forces, and little or no access to armed groups.

73. UNICEF child protection efforts in Sudan fall into three different categories: (a) child protection systems and legislation; (b) social norms; and (c) children and armed conflict. During the visit to Sudan, the delegation had the opportunity to observe all three components.

74. The delegation met with the Minister of Welfare and Social Security and the National Council of Child Welfare. The ministry and the national council were very involved in the visit and participated in many of the delegation's site visits to

projects. In Northern State, the delegation met with the Family and Child Police Unit as well as with representatives working on the Saleema campaign (see section on health). In the Zam Zam camp in North Darfur the delegation met briefly with the child protection unit working within the camp.

75. The delegation also noted the importance for UNICEF to have access to flexible funding to address issues such as child protection, malnutrition and education in a holistic and sustainable manner. There is room for more mainstreaming of child protection issues in other sectors.

### **Observations**

76. The delegation was encouraged and impressed to see the many efforts UNICEF is undertaking in the area of child protection, both on a policy level and through outreach to communities and families. The delegation was also very impressed by the commitment and engagement shown by the National Council on Child Welfare; however, it became clear during discussions that the council and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security are under pressure from other ministries — both in terms of funding and regarding their decision-making powers. The delegation recommends that UNICEF continue to support these two agencies in their efforts.

77. UNICEF sometimes has limited space to manoeuvre in Sudan when it comes to discussions on the rights of the child. The delegation recommends that UNICEF continues to pursue this agenda when dealing with the Government. The delegation also recommends that UNICEF engages on the more difficult subjects — including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights — which are extremely relevant and important, especially for older girls in Sudan.

78. The delegation was particularly impressed by the results achieved by the Saleema campaign, but recognizes that this campaign also has its limitations. The delegation therefore recommends combining the campaign on FGM/C with other relevant activities, and duplicating these efforts in other states, where possible. Recognizing that changing social norms regarding FGM/C is a long-term process in Sudan, the delegation encourages UNICEF to continue its hard work on this issue.

79. In the Zam Zam camp the delegation saw first-hand the need for child protection, noting the excellent work UNICEF staff are doing there under extremely challenging circumstances. The delegation encourages UNICEF to continue this work, but also to — where possible — rebuild social protection systems to provide protection for children (including separated and unaccompanied children) in a family-based environment. UNICEF work in the camp with adults on reunification of children with families or relatives is one example of such efforts, which could be duplicated in other areas of child protection.

### **Youth**

80. Sudan has a predominantly young population; over 62 per cent are under 25. This represents a challenge in the current context and contributes to the political and social complexity. Sudanese youth have taken to the streets in recent months to claim political participation, equitable social services and jobs.

81. Adolescents constitute 23 per cent of the population in Sudan, 66 per cent of whom are girls aged 14-16 years who require special attention. Adolescent girls face

challenges such as child and early marriage (which affects 42 per cent of girls, and even more in rural areas), lack of knowledge and skills in family planning methods, and harmful practices such as FGM/C. Female adolescents and youth are more involved in domestic work, which has a negative impact on their education. Moreover, lack of access to education (both primary and secondary) and high dropout rates among adolescents and youth, coupled with the high unemployment rate (20 per cent) among youth, further exacerbates the precarious situation.

82. In various meetings — including at the Ministry of Welfare, Northern State and with civil society, youth organizations and international and local non-governmental organizations — the delegation discussed the issue of social protection and social welfare as a matter of concern for children and youth, particularly adolescents.

83. The delegation learned about the link between poverty and school dropout rates, particularly for young boys who abandon school to find jobs in gold mining activities throughout the region. Regional authorities indicated this phenomenon was a concern and a challenge for their region, and requested UNICEF support to handle the problem effectively.

84. UNICEF supports the Ministry of Youth and Sports and youth organizations at national, state and local levels to develop capacity to deliver services for youth and enable them to exercise their leadership. This support is mainly focused on institutional capacity development, as well as revising and developing national policies, strategies and guidelines for youth integration.

### **Observations**

85. The delegation observed that the landscape of youth organizations is fragmented and there is no clear platform for youth participation on issues pertaining to their lives.

86. The delegation was encouraged by the equity approach applied by UNICEF to address the needs of out-of-school adolescents by providing life skills based on alternative learning programmes as well as efforts to boost their employability; conducted through civil society organizations, these efforts provide demand driven vocational training and entrepreneurial skill development.

87. The delegation was encouraged by UNICEF efforts and commitment to reach out more to the Government to assist in efforts to integrate youth in national policies that respect their rights and create spaces for them to contribute to sustainable development.

88. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to find ways to advocate more and assist the Government to respond to youth needs and the enjoyment of their rights.

89. The delegation was satisfied with UNICEF achievements in the creation of youth friendly spaces and services through the construction of youth development centres.

90. The delegation expressed concern about the limited resources available for this crucial sector; only \$2.37 million are available over the next two years to fund current UNICEF activities as well as planned activities — such as supporting youth participation in the media to educate communities about various social issues, or the

development of a strategy devoted to mainstreaming issues impacting adolescents across programmes.

**Other observations**

91. The complex architecture of the United Nations presence in Sudan requires stronger coordination and integrated assessment and planning among the various agencies on the ground to achieve synergy and magnify its impact. Speaking to different actors on the ground, the delegation was left with the impression that, despite coordination efforts between different actors, joint decision-making on operational planning, shared delivery of results, and evaluating activities of common interest is limited.

92. A new vision based on an integrated analysis of the volatile situation in Sudan is needed. It should consist of better and clearer prioritization, a strategic and operational planning system that mobilizes resources around defined priorities, and a strong, integrated and timely reporting and evaluation system. It should allow all key actors and decision-makers to have a shared picture of short- and long-term developments and maximize the work of the United Nations.

93. Throughout the visit, government representatives highlighted the need for the United Nations presence in Sudan to move from humanitarian activities to development support. The delegation supports this idea and encourages all the actors, UNICEF included, to explore all possibilities and make every effort to support mid-term and long-term development goals.

94. However, the delegation remains convinced that the current conflict-prone situation is not conducive for such a transition to successfully occur. A stable, peaceful situation — with real progress towards national reconciliation based on inclusiveness as well as the continued firm commitment of the Government — are necessary prerequisites to resolutely anchor the country to a sustainable development agenda.

95. Throughout the delegation's visit, government representatives and others stakeholders, including representatives of international organizations, repeatedly highlighted the detrimental effect sanctions have on the children and women in Sudan. While the delegation was not mandated to assess the overall impact of sanctions on women and children, it is nonetheless of the opinion that UNICEF, and possibly other United Nations entities on the ground, should gather information on this subject and, on that basis, make recommendations as appropriate.