NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH OF KAZAKHSTAN
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Executive Summary

UNICEF Kazakhstan initiated national consultations with children and youth between January 2012 and March 2013. The consultations had two closely related purposes. Firstly, to consult with children, adolescents and youth on the current situation of children and women in Kazakhstan and ways of strengthening UNICEF programming as part of the Mid-Term Review of UNICEF's Country Programme of Cooperation for 2010-2015. Secondly, and looking to the international context and the approaching Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) deadline in 2015 to gather the opinions of children and young people on the Post-2015 agenda. Recognising that children and young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the aim was to give a voice to the younger generation about their current situation and living conditions and their vision of improvements for living standards in the Republic of Kazakhstan and globally. The themes for the consultation were based on the Millennium Declaration, global and national objectives, as well as the UN conventions and global conferences. The results of the consultations were presented in a national report on a Post-2015 agenda.

The national consultations process used surveys (online and paper), focus group discussions and social media to gather the views of 492 children and young people. Geographically it was able to cover almost all parts of the

Picture 1. Focus group in Pavlodar school at volunteer club. Photo by Zhanara Omarova
country, including rural areas. A range of actors and resources were drawn upon in collecting the data and organising focus groups, including UN partners, local youth organisations and youth development activists. Particular attention was given to ensuring that those whose voices are usually most marginalised were able to participate, and among the total participants 45% of children and youth identified themselves as vulnerable groups: young people with special needs, from low income families, orphans, HIV positive, living with HIV, migrants and from rural areas.

Although some of the views and responses presented by the young people were in line with what was expected, the process also highlighted less anticipated views and issues that may offer important insights for those working in this area. The rapidly growing economy and marked social differences in Kazakhstan appeared to be a key influence on children and young people’s perceptions about the society and opportunities they see around themselves. Young people from all levels of society seem to have contradictory feelings and values about their current and future circumstances, based on their experience of and exposure to a range of diverse factors including: frustrations of parents and relatives about economic instability; witnessing social injustice; exposure to visual images of wealth; and difficulties in obtaining information about and access to opportunities in education (e.g. scholarships) and employment. The consultations suggested that these factors, amongst others, have changed young people’s priorities over the last two decades. Major priorities set out by youth, including those from vulnerable groups, relate to aspects that would make them feel safe, financially stable and successful in the current economic market: education, job opportunities, family support and social justice. Youth also report being concerned about the environment and pollution as well as their health and quality of medical services available. The consultations suggest that young people would like to be more engaged in the social life of the community and feel that in their current situation their rights are not fulfilled and their voices not heard. Finally, children and youth say that they lack trust in government due to social injustice and corruption, and many therefore seek self-sustainable ways to grow and build their own life. This report will first discuss the background to the consultations and the methodology employed, before turning to the main findings of the consultations to examine what children and youth see as important to them now and in the future.
Background

UNICEF is undertaking a Mid-term Review of its current Country Programme of Cooperation for 2010-2015 signed with the Government of Kazakhstan. National consultations with children, adolescents and young people open up an important space within this process for the voices of those who UNICEF works for and with to be heard and considered within the review process to ensure that programming most effectively meets their needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. This is also framed within an international context characterised by discussion and development of a Post-2015 agenda; this consultation was a valuable contribution to information gathering for that purpose. However, this report is primarily focused on the day to day experiences, hopes and concerns past, present and envisaged for the future of children, adolescents and young people in Kazakhstan and what UNICEF can learn from the consultations to build upon and improve the work currently being done. The results of this consultation, it is hoped, will assist in identifying priority issues, needs and expectations of children and youth.

In Kazakhstan, the UNICEF National Consultations process was initiated in January 2013 and completed by May 2013. The aim was to open a space for the voices of children and adolescents to be heard and listened to. The consultations actively engaged the younger generation from different social groups and geographic locations to ensure inclusivity and as broad a representation as possible within the time and methodological context. The national consultant leading the process was particularly focused on using the consultations to understand what children and young people think about their status, the issues of most concern to them and their expectations of the future. The chosen consultation methods and approaches were designed to ensure that the engagement with children and young people was based on principles of accessibility and fairness.
Methodology

The national consultations with children and young people (CYP) were designed to provide maximum options for them to be engaged. Three approaches were identified in line with this to reach out to children and youth of different age and social groups, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups. These were: an online survey, focus group discussions, and online discussions. The online survey targeted youth that are active online and have access to the internet (students, young professionals, high school students from rural and urban areas). Focus groups mostly targeted children and youth that have limited or no access to the internet (vulnerable groups, children below the age of 15, rural areas) and online discussions were open to children and youth that are active in Internet social groups.

The consultations ran from January 28 to March 1st 2013 and extended to all regions of Kazakhstan via the online survey and online discussions. Focus groups were also conducted in several regions of the country including Kostanay, South Kazakhstan, Pavlodar and Almaty regions.

a. Survey

Participants for this study were recruited through a so-called web-access based approach, which is a type of web-convenience sampling method. The data was collected over a period of six (6) weeks, enabling the consultations to reach a diverse and comparatively representative sample for the country.

Data collection took place online via a popular survey tool called Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). This tool allows implementation of simple descriptive analysis and exporting data to spreadsheets (.xls and .sav formats). Further analysis of data was conducted using statistical analysis package, SPSS.
The study populations for this tracking survey comprised four groups of youth and children:

- Up to 15 years old
- 15 – 19 years
- 20 – 24 years
- 25 and above

The respondents were asked to identify and explore, through dialogue and discussion, the most important and topical issues in Kazakhstani society from the viewpoint of youth and children.

b. Focus groups

Focus groups were designed to meet the aims of the national consultations and engage children and youth with limited access to the internet, and therefore unlikely to be taking part in the online activities, in discussions. Good practice guidance was developed for focus group facilitators and it was recommended that discussions be recorded on audio or video device and photographed for the purpose of documenting the process. Facilitators were selected from youth organizations and volunteers that are active and have access to vulnerable groups of children and youth. Geographically, focus groups were conducted in areas including Almaty, Kostanay, Pavlodar, and South Kazakhstan regions. In total seven focus...
groups were conducted and participants included children with disabilities, and children from orphanages, ethnic minorities and low income families. Focus groups were conducted using interactive methods such as group discussion, brainstorming, and work in small groups. It was possible to record some discussions through video and photography as recommended, however in a number of situations parents asked that no pictures be taken of their children. For school age students it was a requirement of the school administration that an adult (teacher or school psychologist) was present.

c. Online Discussions

Online discussions were initiated on such popular internet social networks as Facebook, Moi Mir and VKontakte. Children and young people were invited to actively participate in national consultations via an invitation uploaded on these internet sites. A number of questions were also posted on the social networking sites aimed to capture the attention of youth and to facilitate the discussion. Results of the ongoing online survey and other events related to the national consultations were posted twice weekly with the intention of sharing progress and raising awareness about the global process facilitated by UN family organizations. The UNICEF national consultant moderated online group discussions and posted questions/statements to draw attention to various issues.
Main findings of the consultations

Overall 492 children and youth participated in the national consultations that ran between January and March 2013. This included 47 young people taking part in Focus Groups, 301 taking part in the online survey, and 144 in online discussion groups. The results of the consultations are divided by methods of information gathering: survey, focus groups, social media discussions and online surveys. A number of general trends can be noted. The survey and focus groups were more informative and effective than online discussions, which appeared to be less popular with young people. One possible explanation for this, articulated by a number of youth activists, is that many adolescents and youth are not ready to speak about their concerns and visions openly using social media. Another suggestion is that young people may not be used to voicing their opinions clearly in such forums, may lack confidence to speak up, and might find it easier to offer responses when there are clear questions stated directly to them.
Wellbeing of the family

The family is where children, adolescents and young people naturally seek protection and stability. Therefore family wellbeing is of high importance to young people and they associate their happiness and confidence with family stability. Feeling safe, stable and secure in life for young people is strongly related to family living conditions and internal relations among family members. Affordable housing was mentioned as an issue that one third of young people would like to resolve for their families. The absence of their own space to live and expensive housing were identified as major obstacles for youth to start their own families, making them feel dependent, and causing stress and insecurity about the future.

Youth said that they place high value on their family living conditions. However, the latter and the general wellbeing of the family depends on the level and quality of social services provided to them in the areas of child care, medical services, housing services, and single parenthood or social orphanhood. Parent’s employment is another subject that has a direct impact on the wellbeing of the family and was highlighted as a significant factor for happiness by young participants.

Children from vulnerable groups especially reported feeling responsible for the happiness of their parents and would like to help them by looking for opportunities to work and earn some money. Social payments that are received by families are not providing a satisfactory level of support and this leads to children seeking other solutions. In focus groups with children and young people with disabilities, participants voiced the need for programs enabling children with disabilities to gain new skills that will help them to obtain a profession or make a greater contribution in their household. At the time of the consultation they reported struggling with finding such opportunities themselves using the internet or through information from small communities based around NGOs.
The majority of representatives from vulnerable groups responded that they are not relying on government social programs due to inconsistency and low quality of the social services provided, and in some cases the absence of such services in the community. However, they also expressed hope that the quality and consistency of existing social programs will improve. One of the respondents, an orphan who graduated from school and enrolled in university, mentioned during the focus group: “I know that government have some programs to support youth like me, but I don’t see it working well. Many of my mates from the orphanage were not able to use them properly because people from state programs ask for a bribe. We don’t have it. I prefer to study well and build my own life on my own.” Participants also said that they do not invest much hope in the NGO services they occasionally receive. A number of the children and young people were not aware that the social services they receive are delivered by local NGOs. The responses in the consultations indicated that children and youth grow up with the idea that they can rely only on their own ability to survive and try to manage their daily challenges with no expectation of external help, except from their families and friends.

“I want to help my mom. She works too much to care for me and pay the bills. I wish I could work too and make it easy for my mom.”

10 year old boy with disability
Education

The online survey and focus group results showed that education was considered to be one of the most important issues directly affecting children and young people’s lives. School age and university students believe that obtaining good quality education will help them to build a career and support them to invest in their futures. They stated several challenges that act as obstacles to obtaining a good education: corruption in the education system; unfairness of a single national test; the high cost of education; small number of grants; and weak career guidance. Orphans and youth from low income families especially noted unaffordable stipends as a serious challenge to their education. Youth are willing to be better educated and emphasized the importance of quality education within a fair system rather than easy study and a fake diploma. The majority of young people appear to be dissatisfied with Kazakhstan’s educational system and have low trust in it due to corruption and unfairness. As a result of this, about 38% of youth, across rural and urban areas, report looking for opportunities to obtain a quality education abroad based on the belief that by doing so they will benefit from an improved educational opportunity and a fair system. High demand for foreign language courses and high interest in international educational programs appear to reflect the preference among youth for foreign rather than local education.

Considering the issues raised about the educational system by youth, there is a need to reform the educational system so that it is more responsive to high standards and will encourage greater quality in obtaining knowledge and skills, not only for selected children but for any young person who wants a quality education. Children and adolescents believe that fair education is possible if corruption in schools is eradicated.

High school graduates report feeling lost in choosing the right profession that will be profitable and will bring them confidence and success in the future. Pressure from parents and limited choices in the range of specializations offered mean youth are less motivated to study well. During focus groups a majority of youth stated that they do not believe that they will continue working on their chosen specialization: “The Job market will make
its own corrections on whom I will end up to be” said one university student. This suggests that in many cases youth feel that they have chosen a specialization that is not in demand or with an insufficient level of knowledge and competence to continue in a chosen path. At the end of their studies, a large proportion of graduates either work in a completely different sector or face unemployment. Focus group discussions also highlighted that young people place importance on studying based on their interests and skills as well as future job market demand. They felt that early professional/career orientation and a fair system of granting study places in a larger number of specializations in higher education institutions would increase the number of motivated and responsible students.

**Employment and Business opportunities for Youth**

From the age of 15 youth appear to be highly interested in obtaining earning power or business skills. They are eager to gain knowledge and skills that will help them to start their own businesses or build successful careers. Some young people feel that there is lack of trust and interest from adults to support business ideas initiated by youth and very few who find such support. They stated that developing an environment more conducive to young entrepreneurs that will enable them to take forward their business ideas and knowledge would build a stronger generation ready to take responsibility for their own lives and country. The consulta-

“I want my grades to be real. There is no motivation to study further if I know that my classmate will get best grades just through bribing”

Young man at focus group

“I have a challenge in believing that our education system is fair”

A student from KazGU

“I do want to build honest business. I really want to make it happen because only that way we can build a fair society.”

Male respondent from online survey
tions showed an impressive eagerness among young people to do something new and positive for their communities and recognition of the importance of self-development. Yet at the same time perceived incompetence and a lack of faith in youth from the older generation stunts initiatives and fosters insecurity. About 38% of young people blame themselves for their problems and for not being successful while, 43% of young respondents stated that they have no problems with ‘success’ and they believe that they will be successful.

Corruption and lack of positive business development examples in the country result in young people experiencing concern and insecurity. During focus groups youth raised issues related to corruption more than during the online survey, where only 29% of respondents see corruption as a cause for challenges to youth. A young man shared: “the thought about my inevitable future in a corrupted country is disturbing me. I have fear and feel uncertainty about my future”. Young people stated that they would like to see fair taxation, a fair government system and a favourable business environment that would help youth to succeed in a free market. Young people who are already active volunteers (e.g. with local NGOs) and active in their communities also stated that they are ready to explore new experiences and gain project management skills by developing and participating in social or volunteer projects. Young people who had such experiences reported feeling much more confident and having a better understanding of their own capacity.

**Public Health System**

A healthy lifestyle and the public health system in the country emerged as one of the top priorities for children and youth in any social group across the country. The growing interest of children and young people in a quality health system appears to be because of the growing health problems they face on a daily basis and their inability to find successful and lasting solutions to them. They identified a number of reasons for increasing health problems, namely bad environment or air pollution, poor living conditions and nutrition, as well as lack of opportunities for sports and other means for a healthy lifestyle in local settings.
Aspects such as sports, a drug and alcohol free environment, reproductive education in schools, HIV/AIDS prevention activities (including lectures on sexual education), rehabilitation centers and ecological issues (e.g. access to clean water, pollution), and medical services were identified by children and youth as important measures that would help them to become healthy and engaged citizens. Despite the fact that such services are available and programs addressing these issues have been initiated by government and NGOs, youth feel that they have not been engaged enough in these programs and/or that the programs are not responding to their level of interests. They also report inconsistency of such programs for youth, especially in rural areas. Children and young people feel that preventative activities delivered and undertaken at school are not satisfactory. They commented that teachers conduct those activities simply to be able to report that they have done so, and as such there is no real intention to engage young people and provide them with relevant information. Some respondents recommended improved provision of higher quality facilities for CYP to achieve a healthy lifestyle based on their own choices and expressed the hope that their teachers will become more comfortable providing such information and knowledge.

Overall, through the national consultations (focus group discussions and online survey) young people demonstrated a lack of trust in the local medical services provided in their communities, although this was less the case for those living in the cities of Almaty and Astana. They feel that

Picture 4. School students presenting their vision on aspects of youth issues. Pavlodar. Photo taken by Zhanar Omarova.
they would prefer to access treatment in bigger cities or abroad. They also highlighted the high cost of quality medical services available to them.

Children and youth from rural areas and low income families spoke about accessibility to entertainment and recreation centres. They would like to see opportunities to maintain a healthy lifestyle through having better sport centres, youth clubs and sex/reproductive education. They believe that avoiding risky behaviour will help them to be healthy and succeed in life.

Civic engagement

Providing children and youth with the opportunity to be engaged in decision making processes and to voice their opinions were also emphasised during consultations as an important aspect for children and young people’s development. Fifty-eight and a half per cent (58.5%) of young people stated that their opinion is not taken into consideration during the decision-making process. The majority of youth believe that this is due to the traditional beliefs that “adults know better” and that youth should “respect older people”. A common opinion expressed by respondents was that the voice of children and young people is not heard due to an established patronymic system which does not support or encourage youth to take responsibilities over their own actions and choices. Young people think that this can be changed if the voices of children and youth are considered and their opinions respected by decision makers. About 30% of young people believe that if their opinions were taken into consideration and they were able to participate in community life, they would be able to make a significant contribution to solving social issues. There are some examples of youth engagement in important community activities and experiential learning projects which teach children and youth to be responsible for their desires and actions. These actively engage them in the social life of the community as volunteers, enabling them to play an active role in school and university, building their confidence and skills, and supporting them to make their day-to-day and bigger life decision.
Gender

The consultations also indicated some interesting differences, as well as a number of similarities, between both girls/young women and boys/young men and between girls and young women in different parts of the country.

When responding to a question about the causes of problems for youth from a gender perspective, about 40% of female respondents reported that they think their gender is a cause of the problems that they face, suggesting that gender inequality may be a challenge for them. The consultations also found that young female respondents were 10-20% more concerned than males about access to good public health, education, and a healthy lifestyle. Young men were 10-15% more interested in business development, earning opportunities and elimination of corruption. An initial interpretation of this may suggest that girls care more about their conditions of living and boys are more self-reliant and seek ways to become independent, however a more in-depth examination of the issues and perspectives would need to be done to acquire a full understanding and that was not within the remit of these consultations. When looking at aspects such as access to information, family support, elimination of inequality and discrimination, crime and the environment, male and female opinions were almost equal.
Kazakhstan is a diverse country comprised of different cultures and values across a range of ethnic groups and subcultures. Because of this diversity, young women across the country appear to experience different conditions in access to education, reproductive health services and self-development. There are parts of the country where young women feel that they are equal to young men. But there are also regions where girls often face challenges to inclusion in social life and opportunities available for development, such as education, health, civic engagement and employment opportunities. These differences were clearly observable in focus groups conducted in various parts of the country that engaged young women from diverse social and ethnic groups. For example girls and young women from Sairam (an Uzbek community) highlighted challenges in access and rights to basic education and had very limited knowledge about the reproductive functions of their bodies. In contrast, girls and young women from Kostanay mainly talked about their future careers and the choices they will have to make. As such, one recommendation may be that Government needs to develop additional programs in regions where such challenges exist in order to support young women in their development and to provide access to available opportunities to be successful.
Annex.

Questionnaire for online survey

*Link for survey in Kazakh: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZT3XPPD*

*Link for survey in Russian: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GPCLGJJ*

**Introduction to the questionnaire**

Hi! We are glad that you decided to take part in this survey which aims at exploring the opinions of children and youth of Kazakhstan. Your voice and your opinion are very important for us because you may influence the development of the country and the world in general.

To fill out the questionnaire, please put a tick in the cell that is located next to the answer selected by you or write your own version in the cell which says “If there is an opinion, write here”. There are no right or wrong answers in the questionnaire. All answers are equally important because they reflect your opinion. Some questions require one or more answers, and some require only one best suited for you answer. It will take no more than 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The survey is anonymous, and all data will be presented in a generalised way!

Please note: It is important to try to answer to all questions. If you miss a question, it could lead to a technical error and your opinion may not be taken into account.

Thank you for your participation!
1. **Gender**
   - Female
   - Male

2. **Age group you belong to?**
   - Up to 15 years
   - 15 - 19 years
   - 19 - 24 years
   - 25 and over

3. **Where do you live?**
   - I live in city
   - I live in the administrative centre of a district
   - I live in aul/village

4. **What is your level of education? Choose the most appropriate definition of you:**
   - I am not studying
   - I am a school student
   - I study in college
   - I am a student at the University
   - Prefer not to say

5. **Do you work? Choose the most appropriate definition of you:**
   - I work
   - I am a volunteer
   - I do not work
6. **Do you consider yourself vulnerable for any reason?**
   - Yes
   - No
   - Prefer not to say

7. **If “Yes”: Why do you consider yourself to be vulnerable? Choose no more than three answers:**
   - I have a disability
   - I am an orphan
   - I am HIV positive /I have AIDS
   - I live with an HIV positive family member
   - I am from a family with a small income
   - I am from a family of refugees
   - I am from a family of repatriates
   - I do not consider myself as belonging to any of the above groups
   - If you have another opinion, please write here

8. **What makes you happy? Choose no more than three answers:**
   - Good relations in the family
   - True friends
   - The friendly team of classmates
   - Well-established relationships with the opposite sex (with a girlfriend/boyfriend)
   - Feeling useful in society
9. **Where do you like to spend your time? Mark the most appropriate for you:**
- At home, with family
- At school (college, university), in the company of classmates or fellow students
- On the street / in the company of friends
- With my girl / my young man
- At cultural and entertainment places
- Do not know
- If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

10. **What makes you unhappy? Choose no more than three answers:**
- Conflicts within the family
- Conflicts with friends, girlfriends
- Health problems
- Conflicts with the opposite sex (the problems in his/her personal life)
- Material disadvantage in the family
- Lack of free time
- I cannot cope with my addiction to alcohol (beer, etc.)
- I cannot quit smoking
- I do not live in a very comfortable environment
- Physical violence towards me (strikes, slaps, beatings, grabbing money and more)
Psychological violence against me (ridicule, derision, assigning nicknames, endless comments, humiliation in front of others, boycott, isolation)
Lack of employment opportunities
Difficulties with choosing a future profession
I do not have any problems
If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

11. What, in your opinion, is the cause of your problems? Choose no more than three answers:
- My age (too young)
- My gender
- My nationality
- My religion
- My place of origin (settlement)
- My family and relatives
- My character
- Lack of education
- Corruption and government inaction
- I do not have any particular problems
- If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

12. Where do you feel safe?
- At home, with parents
- Only at the school/educational institution
- Relatives
• Among friends
• On the street (among other people)
• On the street (alone)
• With boyfriend/girlfriend
• Everywhere
• Nowhere
• If you have another opinion, please write here _______________________________________________________________________

13. **Which of these items can have a significant impact on your life in the coming years? Choose no more than three answers:**
• Affordable and good quality education (including in native language)
• Affordable and good quality health care
• Affordable and good quality housing
• Affordable, high-quality telephone and internet
• Affordable and good quality of food and drinking water
• Affordable and high quality public transport and roads
• Affordable and high quality public services
• Affordable and quality nurseries
• Increased opportunities for leisure time
• Increased opportunities for physical culture and sports
• Increased opportunities for private sector development
• Increased opportunities for travel abroad (study, work, travel, etc.)
• Increased opportunities for building personal life and starting family
• Protection against crime and violence
• Protection against inequality and discrimination (of any form: gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.)
• Environmental protection
• Increased employment and job opportunities
• Transparent and effective government (local and national)
• Access to information and freedom of speech
• Support from family and relatives
• Reduction of corruption in the public system
• If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

14. **What role is given to young people and children in your society?** Choose the most appropriate definition of you:
• The opinion of young people and children is taken into account when making important decisions
• The opinion of young people and children is not taken into account when making important decisions and all decisions are taken by older generation
• Do not know
• If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

15. **What can be done to address the problems of young people and children?** Choose the most appropriate for you:
• These problems will be solved by themselves
• It is necessary to talk about it openly
• Active assistance from the state/government
• Children and youth themselves need to bring their efforts
• It is necessary to unite the whole of society
• Improvements in this area are not realistic
• If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

16. We would be glad to know your opinion, in few words or sentences, to the question: How do you see the current state of children and youth/young people to date in Kazakhstan? You can justify this by your own example or give your overall vision.

17. Which Millennium Development Goals do you think are the most important? Please choose not more than three points:
• Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
• Achieve universal primary education
• Promote gender equality and empower women
• Reduce child mortality
• Improve maternal health
• Combat HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis
• Ensuring environmental sustainability
• Develop a global partnership for development
• All of the above goals are vital
• There is no important one amongst these goals
• If you have another opinion, please write here ______________________________________

18. We would be glad to have your opinion in few words of sentences to the question “Which main (developmental) priorities would improve the world?”
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