UNICEF has been operational in Myanmar for over fifty years providing technical support in key areas of child survival and development. The current five year programme of cooperation with focus on child protection, quality basic education, primary health care, controlling malnutrition, water, sanitation and environmental hygiene is expected to contribute to reducing infant and child mortality, promote quality education and provide a protective environment for children to grow up as responsible adults. UNICEF appreciates its close collaboration with various government departments and NGOs partners. Through this bulletin, UNICEF would like to keep the general public and our patrons informed of all our activities. This bulletin covers January to March 2008.

UNICEF-Myanmar

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HEALTH AND NUTRITION

UNIVERSAL CHILD IMMUNIZATION

In 2007 and early 2008, Universal Child Immunization Program conducted immunization campaigns against Measles, targeting children aged 9 months to 5 years. Ministry of Health with the support of UNICEF and in collaboration with other UN agencies and NGOs, targeted 6 million children in all 14 States and Divisions of Myanmar.


However, immunizing 6 million children is not easy, especially among hard to reach populations which include children of marginalised groups, mobile populations, city slum dwellers and remote villages. They are often missed out by routine immunisation as well as by campaigns. Therefore to cover these hard to reach children, UNICEF has supported measles vaccination campaigns together with the crash immunization programmes (mobile operations) to cover hard to reach areas which are usually not possible to cover in one day and requires at least an overnight stay.

Using this strategic approach and with the support of partners, about 6 million children including hard to reach populations have been immunized last year and early this year.

NUTRITION

Vitamin B1 supplementation for pregnant women and nursing mothers

Deficiency of Vitamin B1 may cause infant deaths. In Myanmar, UNICEF in collaboration with the National Nutrition Centre of the Department of Health, has launched the Infantile Beriberi Project since June 2006. Vitamin B1 (thiamine) tablets are distributed to all pregnant and lactating mothers throughout the country. Each pregnant woman is provided with the tablets for the last month of pregnancy and the first three months of lactation thus protecting both the mothers and the suckling babies from deficiency of the vitamin.

Support to IDD elimination

With the aim to assess the results of efforts towards elimination of iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) in Myanmar, UNICEF has supported the collection and analysis of salt samples from 39,000 households through 975 randomly selected schools throughout the country. Based on the analysis of these samples and its mapping by townships, it is expected to identify townships with low usage of iodized salt and the sources of their salt supply. These areas will be extensively emphasized and supported this year in order to achieve the Iodine Deficiency Disorders Elimination goal.
MALARIA

UNICEF’s malaria control project always focuses on the most vulnerable communities of the highly endemic malaria regions of Myanmar where services are not easily available or accessible. Tanintharyi division, the southern “leg” of Myanmar consists of many islands and villages some of which are extremely difficult to reach. UNICEF with the cooperation of the National Malaria Control programme of the Ministry of Health has provided long lasting insecticide-treated bednets (LLINs) to the most vulnerable families of these hard to reach areas. Distribution of the LLINs was time consuming due to the distance of the islands, and at times, just one island could be reached in a day. Similarly UNICEF has distributed the LLINs to 24 other townships across the country. LLIN was proven to be highly effective in protecting families from malaria infection for as long as up to three years. More than 140,000 LLINs were distributed by UNICEF in 2007. Similar number will follow in 2008.

HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Four new youth centers were opened in Muse, Taunggyi, Kengtung, and Tachileik, the townships with high drug use. Establishing these centers in such strategic places will provide supportive and safe environments to young people. It will also help them to access knowledge and skills on HIV and drug abuse prevention as well as to essential services especially voluntary counselling and testing. These centers were opened in January 2008 as a result of a new partnership with the Myanmar Anti Narcotics Association (MANA).

Upgrading prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV

UNICEF has increased its support of more effective medicines to the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV project in all of its 76 project sites. This new combination of medicines is highly effective as it substantially reduces HIV transmission from mothers to infants during pregnancy and during delivery. In February, training was conducted to HIV/AIDS Team leaders throughout the country to inform and educate them of this change. Currently there are approximately 6,000 children living with HIV and 5,000 infants are at risk of contracting the virus every year.

UNICEF IN THE FIELD

As of February, UNICEF completed the rotation of its field officers across nine different duty stations. Long years of programme experience and partnership building had given each of them a formidable edge in representing UNICEF on the ground. Now by exchanging duty stations, the field officers will bring freshness to how UNICEF understands and interprets the local situation of children. At the same time, UNICEF will get a valuable opportunity to cross-fertilize varied programme experiences across different regions of Myanmar that will help strengthen the Programme. Although stressful, UNICEF field officers are nonetheless excited at this move and will soon be knocking on the door of our partners to renew the good cooperation in the field.
EDUCATION

Starting from this year, UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, has planned to pilot the Language Enrichment Programme (LEP) to improve Myanmar language skills of primary school children. Before initiating the implementation of LEP, it is crucial to establish a baseline of language competencies of the children in order to be able to measure impact of the LEP. Therefore, a training workshop on testing of Myanmar language competencies of primary children was conducted with 16 staff from the Department of Educational Planning and Training (DEPT), Departments of Basic Education (DBEs), and State and Township Education Offices, and 18 teachers from Waingmaw, Tachiliek and Mudon townships. These participants, in turn, will train teachers on how to administer the test in the first week of March 2008, and immediately after the training, language competency tests will be conducted for the Grade 3 and Grade 5 students from selected schools of those townships.

The Orientation Workshop on implementation of primary life skills curriculum was held for education personnel from Shan, Kayah and Kayin States as well as from 39 other townships in January at Mandalay. After attending the three day workshop, 80 education officials were trained to coordinate and manage subsequent trainings for primary teachers, and supervise implementation of the National Life skills and HIV/AIDS prevention education curriculum in all schools in the 39 townships. They actively participated in detailed discussions on planning training programmes, organizing material distribution and managing logistics, and financial support for trainings at different levels. This is the third year of scaling up the programme for nationwide implementation of Life skills education. Wa and Kokant special regions situated in Eastern, Northern and Southern Shan townships are included this year.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)

UNICEF focuses on strengthening the capacity of its ECD partners particularly of the Ministry of Education for expanding the school-based preschools and to help more children have access to early childhood development opportunities.

Early Childhood Teachers training is one of the many capacity building activities. With the support of UNICEF, the Department of Educational Planning and Training and the Departments of Basic Education jointly organized ECD teachers training (advance course) as a follow up to the basic training course which took place in December 2007. These advance training courses were conducted in January 2008 in the five regions of Yangon, Mandalay, Tachileik, Sittwe, and Dawei. In addition to government appointed teachers, community recruited teachers were also trained in the implementation and management of school-based Early Childhood Education programme in 30 townships. Altogether 644 teachers were trained on detailed concepts of early childhood development, programme implementation and also management of preschools. The full fledged programme is expected to be operational in the next academic year, i.e., June 2008 to March 2009 in over 320 communities of Myanmar.
Participation of the communities is essential to the success of UNICEF interventions. From the assessment and planning to implementation, and eventually leading to a sense of ownership, responsibility, authority and control of the improved system will make the system sustainable in the long term.

To achieve this, the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Programme has developed a communication tool for having dialogue with the communities in order to make an accurate identification and assessment of the water and sanitation-related social problems facing the communities. Known as the Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Tools (PHAST), this community dialogue tool consists of a Manual and Approaches which will help communities to identify problems by themselves, and be informed on the available options of acquiring safe water systems and sanitary latrines. It will also help them to make decisions to take culturally appropriate solutions without having to rely on providers.

PHAST was field tested last year and further modified in accordance with the Myanmar context. Application and use of PHAST was introduced to nine local and international NGOs involved in WASH activities in the country, as well as to the Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) Theme Group at a capacity building workshop in Yangon during the first week of February.

The training workshop with WATSAN Theme Group members also provided an opportunity of application of these tools by the participants in the field and collecting feedback for further development and scaling up in rural Myanmar.

Application and use of PHAST will be further introduced in April to field level technical officers of government who are responsible for rural development related to water supply systems and sanitation.

In accordance with the UN Declaration of the year 2008 as the International Year of Sanitation (IYS), the 11th National Sanitation Week will be launched throughout the country with the aim of enhancing access to basic sanitation for the rural populace of Myanmar thus improving sanitation coverage in the country.

Supported by UNICEF, the Environmental Sanitation Division of the Department of Health is taking the lead in organizing activities related to IYS such as revival and strengthening of commitments to sanitation. These will be complemented by other partners, the Central Health Education Bureau of the Ministry of Health and the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation in organizing activities to mobilise the communities to adopt hygiene practices.

The National Sanitation Week activities will contribute towards efforts to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of reducing the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by one half between 2006 and 2015.
CHILD PROTECTION

Protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation is one of UNICEF’s key priorities.

LEGAL AID FOR CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

UNICEF in partnership with the Myanmar Council of Churches has initiated a legal representation (Legal Aid) project for children in conflict with the law. The project is the first of its kind in Myanmar. Being piloted with 26 lawyers in 31 Yangon townships, the project aims to provide children, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, gender, social or religious persuasion, with the much needed legal representation, both at the time of their arrest and during their exposure to the juvenile justice system.

UNICEF is supporting the Myanmar Police Force (MPF) to develop child-friendly police investigation procedures for dealing with child victims, witnesses and offenders. In March, UNICEF is organizing a technical meeting with an International Police expert and the MPF as well as working with trainers at the Police Training Academy to develop child-friendly police procedures.

CHILD PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES

A series of workshops are being organized in emergency prone localities to protect children during emergencies. The aim of the workshops is to bring together all key stakeholders from divisional and township levels to build an understanding on key priority actions for protecting children during emergencies, to outline key stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities, strengthen coordination mechanisms and develop a contingency plan to prepare for and respond to emergencies. As a result of the two workshops jointly organized by UNICEF and the Myanmar Red Cross Society and undertaken in January and February with 80 local participants, emergency preparedness and response contingency plans are now available in Laputta, Ngaputaw, Myeik and Dawei townships of the Ayeyarwaddy and Tanintharyi divisions.

UNICEF has also initiated discussions with the Department of Relief and Resettlement (DRR) to train government staff and institutionalize training within the DRR training course that is provided according to a schedule every year. The first training is to be held in Bago division on 7-8 March.

A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN

A new drop-in centre to provide basic services to about 30 street and working children has been opened in Pazundaung township in the downtown area of Yangon.

Basic services such as nutritious meals, non-formal education, hygiene and health services as well as life-skills and recreational facilities are provided to support the growth and development of children there. The project is jointly run by UNICEF and Rattana Metta, a local NGO.

In January, UNICEF supported a day of fun and enjoyment for street and working children in Yangon through a performance provided by Clowns Without Borders.

UNICEF has entered into an agreement with Association Francois Xavier Bagnoud (AFXB) to implement a project on “Vocational Education and Psychosocial Skills Development Programme for youth in institutions and out-of-school youth in Myanmar”. The project aims to provide vulnerable children with basic life skills and vocational training that will build their self confidence, provide them with options for healthy living and the ability to earn an income. It is hoped that for children living in institutions in particular, this opportunity will pave the way for their reintegration into their families and communities.

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