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Implementation of recommendations on the six mandated areas and on MDGs

Information received from the UN system and other

intergovernmental organizations

UNICEF (United Nations Fund for Children)

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Summary

The present document contains information on UNICEF's work to respond to the recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. UNICEF has been making efforts to implement specific programmes towards indigenous children at country and local levels in particular, while some other initiatives are being conducted at sub-regional level. The work of UNICEF has been focusing on indigenous children while implementing holistic and comprehensive perspectives of indigenous peoples' worldviews. Culturally sensitive approaches have therefore been an important methodology for UNICEF. The document also contains information in relation to indigenous children including birth registration and malnutrition. UNICEF is also very active in inter-agency coordination work to integrate and mainstream indigenous issues at operational level of the UN system.

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A. Response to recommendations addressed to UNICEF

Country specific analyses of the situation of indigenous children

1. UNICEF has made specific efforts over the past year to conduct participatory studies in several countries on the situation of indigenous children. These studies have aimed at gathering quantitative and qualitative data, shedding light on the disparities and widespread discrimination endured by indigenous children. They have been used by UNICEF as advocacy tools to make indigenous children visible with a view to influencing public policies to address these discriminations. In Ecuador for example, UNICEF supports a national publication on the State of Children and Adolescents (EDNA). Indigenous children are able to use the publication to express and raise awareness on their situation through a separate plea filed with the Ombudsman for the rights of indigenous peoples. In El Salvador, UNICEF used a rights based approach to conduct a study on the situation of indigenous peoples, which highlighted that this group lacks representation on the country's agenda.

2. UNICEF also conducts studies at the community level. In Chile for example, UNICEF supported an opinion study with Mapuche children and adolescents from Santiago and localities of the Ninth Region. The results were communicated to the media during a seminar on the Protection of the Rights of Mapuche Children and Adolescents. In the Philippines, over the past year, UNICEF completed a participatory community appraisal of eight indigenous "Kabihug" communities in the Camarines Norte with extensive participation of indigenous youth as part of the research team. With a view to securing a second round of free, prior and informed consent of the communities prior to printing, in

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accordance with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, publication of the study was postponed. The study has prompted a national rapid assessment of the situation of indigenous children and women throughout the country. Among other findings, the study found that Kabihug children are almost completely uneducated with only 12% of them enrolled in primary school, births almost universally unregistered, and Kahibug families routinely forced to abandon their homes and move off of plantations where they work. The study has played a critical role in helping UNICEF to raise awareness of the extreme disadvantage experienced by indigenous children, who for the most part, remain invisible in public policies.

3. UNICEF also supports visits of government officials to indigenous areas with a view to sensitizing them to the situation of indigenous children. In Malaysia for instance, in 2006, UNICEF supported a number of study tours with senior delegations from designated Ministries to remote communities in Sabah and Sarawak. This has fostered greater collaboration and ownership of projects with these communities.

Bilingual and intercultural education projects

4. Over the past year, UNICEF has continued to support bilingual and intercultural education. In several countries, new projects have been initiated, while in countries where bilingual and intercultural education has been underway, efforts have been made to review methodologies and strengthen its effectiveness.

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5. In Belize for instance, UNICEF supported the first ever intercultural education symposium, which helped raise awareness and trigger debate regarding the challenges and disparities faced by indigenous children and adolescents. The meeting involved policy makers, government officials, educators, young people, and community representatives and focused on the promotion of cultural diversity as an essential component to building social cohesion, inclusion, and promoting the principle of non-discrimination in schools and in the wider society. As a result and thanks to the commitment of indigenous leaders, a plan of action was drafted that will lead to curriculum reform, teacher training, and implementation of intercultural education in all schools. An inter-disciplinary committee composed of a wide range of partners was created to provide technical direction to this initiative.

6. In some countries where intercultural and bilingual education has been supported for many years, UNICEF continues to refine tools and approaches to ensure indigenous children's quality education. In Malaysia, UNICEF supported training for teachers and school administrators on special approaches towards Orang Asli children, which focuses on inclusive learning environment, tailored grading systems, and strengthened parenting skills. Remote education initiatives have been highly recognized and will be further expanded. In Guatemala, UNICEF had provided technical assistance for the improvement of the bilingual and intercultural education system (NEUBI). The NEUBI model was pedagogically improved by the inclusion of new components that promote active learning, the development of skills in all areas, greater cultural relevance and gender equality and equity. In Peru, UNICEF has contributed to strengthening the production of

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culturally pertinent educational material in indigenous languages, as well as the reprints and writing of new texts, such as leisure reading and song books in indigenous languages, developed with the participation of teachers and children.

7. In several countries, UNICEF has concentrated on promoting indigenous cultures through education. In Venezuela, efforts have focused on reviving the Wayuu language with teachers trained to teach in their mother tongue and use educational software, while 600 Añu children participated in the reviving of their language with the support of community promoters. In the same country, UNICEF has supported a fluvial network of libraries with the participation of teachers, children and families. In Brazil, UNICEF mobilized children and adolescents in the Amazon region to reflect on their ethnic and cultural identity through the “Mapping our Culture” initiative. Yet, intercultural education does not only benefit indigenous children. In Mexico, UNICEF has continued to support a project to raise awareness and combat discrimination towards indigenous children through the development and integration into the school curriculum of materials that describe the situation, culture and traditions of indigenous children in Mexico.

8. At regional level, it has also supported the Latin American Congress on intercultural and bilingual education held in Bolivia and facilitated the participation of indigenous representatives from several countries.

Culturally sensitive health care

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9. UNICEF continues to promote culturally sensitive health care. In Ecuador, UNICEF entered into an agreement with other partners to ensure that indigenous mothers and children be protected systematically in their right to safe delivery and childbirth in line with their cultural traditions. Under the agreement, and within the framework of the Minimum Agenda for Indigenous Children and Adolescents, pregnant women are free to choose the type of childbirth they wish. In Peru, UNICEF supported the reinforcement of access to maternity services for mothers in rural communities by adapting the practices used at health centres to the culture patterns of the country's indigenous peoples.

10. In the area of reproductive health, increased attention has been given to addressing the spread of HIV/AIDS in indigenous communities. In Venezuela, UNICEF supported the training of health staff as well as municipal committees to promote HIV prevention in indigenous communities.

Indigenous women and girls

11. In line with its Mission statement, UNICEF works to promote the rights of indigenous women and girls. As evidenced in its 2007 State of the World's Children, UNICEF believes that gender equality benefits women and children, and has a tremendous positive impact on the development of the society as a whole. In Guatemala, UNICEF has supported the strengthening of a municipal system of scholarship for indigenous girls from some of the poorest municipalities of the country. In Venezuela, UNICEF strengthened and promoted a strategy for the care for women victims of violence in Zulia, through the publication of awareness raising material. In Bolivia, a gender-sensitive

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sensitive literacy programme for rural women's councils is being supported to help indigenous women leaders not merely know how to read and write, but also to have more influence on Municipal Councils regarding legal and administrative procedures. In Colombia, in 2006, UNICEF provided technical assistance to local indigenous women's organizations in the department of Narino to include a gender focus into the strengthening of youth organizations. 650 men and women were thereby engaged in a collective reflection on gender equity, with positive impact in reducing violence and increasing indigenous women's participation in managing local organizations.

B. Response to recommendations addressed to the UN system in general

12. UNICEF is working jointly with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights towards the elaboration of a study with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru.

13. A joint initiative is underway with the Pan-American Health Organization for the organization of a traditional healers workshop on HIV/AIDS in 2007.

C. Obstacles to implementation of recommendations of the Permanent Forum

14. UNICEF welcomes the recommendations issued by the Permanent Forum and is committed to working towards their implementation in line with its Mission statement. Since recommendations are often numerous, it is UNICEF's understanding that they will be realized in a progressive manner, building on opportunities.

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15. With its 2006-2009 Medium Term Strategic Plan, UNICEF is using the human rights based approach to go beyond support to specific project and adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach that focus on tackling the root causes of discrimination and exclusion against indigenous children through public policies. For this reason, UNICEF encourages indigenous organizations with which it operates to work together through alliances. This allows for a better use of resources in larger scale projects that benefit more people than a number of small projects – unless there is a specific reason to act at a small scale level, such as fighting an epidemic threatening a small group or the disappearance of an indigenous language for example.

16. Another challenge in UNICEF's work with indigenous peoples lies in ongoing political sensitivities around the issue, which affects advocacy efforts. In some countries, the publication of data on the situation of indigenous peoples continues to be highly sensitive.

D. Other significant information regarding recent policies, programmes, budgetary allocations or activities regarding indigenous issues

General developments

17. Like it has in the past, UNICEF has been actively participating in inter-agency efforts aimed at promoting indigenous issues. Specifically, in 2007, it is acting as the co-chair of the Task Team established for the implementation the decision by the UN Development Group to mainstream and integrate indigenous issues in the operational work of the UN system.

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18. In line with the Permanent Forum's statements, UNICEF believes that the focus efforts aimed at reaching the Millennium Development Goals should be redefined taking in consideration the perspectives, experience and cosmovision of indigenous people. In this regard, UNICEF's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean discussed its Medium Term Strategic Plan (2006-2009) as UNICEF's contribution to the MDGs with indigenous leaders. They shared their views and orientation regarding the specific key result areas for indigenous children. A decision adopted at UNICEF's Consultative Group of indigenous leaders is to publish these views in a document in 2007.

19. In 2007, the same regional office is planning to develop a regional communication campaign that celebrates the cultural diversity of the Americas.

E. Other Areas of UNICEF's programmes relevant to indigenous peoples

Malnutrition

20. Indigenous children suffer from malnutrition and low birth weight in several countries. UNICEF is very active throughout the Latin American region to address malnutrition among indigenous children, especially young children. In Paraguay, a nutritional survey in two indigenous communities showed very high underweight and stunting prevalence among children under five years of age. The delivery of nutritional supplements led to a reduction in the underweight prevalence of 70%. In parallel, a number of actions were carried out, such as the training of the personnel of local health care centers for detection and care of cases of malnutrition; the elaboration of a system

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for nutritional surveillance of children, provision of supplements as well as nutritional education to the families. The experience conducted with these two indigenous communities led to the expansion to the whole country of a nutritional programme for children under five and under-weight pregnant women. In Panama, a nutrition study in indigenous communities has been undertaken and will be used to promote inclusive social policies.

Birth registration

21. Birth registration is a child right whose realization is essential to the fulfillment of other rights. However, registrars are often not easily accessible to indigenous peoples because they are located far from the community, imply a complex procedure, are not culturally sensitive and involve user fees. UNICEF has made significant efforts to promote birth registration in indigenous areas. In Venezuela, UNICEF promoted the establishment of civil registry hospital units, leading to birth registration rates of 92% in the Amazonas, and 86% in Zulia, two regions with a high indigenous population. In Ecuador, the campaign Together for Identity is a registration project that enabled more than 6000 children in the province of Morona to be given their identity documents. Part of the registration strategy for remote areas of the borders involves the establishment of a registration brigade on the river health unit, which was provided with computer equipment. The brigade will be instrumental in enabling inhabitants of the riverbanks to gain access to registration services in the future. In Nicaragua, UNICEF promote birth registration through the commitment of the mayors, civil registrars and indigenous community leaders in alliance with tradition authorities, teachers, local media and

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parents. An important innovation was the pre-registration carried out by community registrars, with the subsequent entry of the details at official birth registration centres.

F. Information and suggestions regarding the special theme of the sixth session, “Territories, lands and natural resources”

22. UNICEF believes that children’s rights can be best realized in an environment where children can grow and develop happily, and where their families and communities have the capacity to protect their rights and provide for their needs. Land is an essential spiritual and economic element to indigenous communities, and deprivation thereof affects the integrity of the community, which in turn has an impact on children’s ability to develop harmoniously within their communities. In this context, UNICEF calls on all actors to prevent disruptions in indigenous peoples’ ways of living and ensure in all circumstances a protective environment for their children.

G. Information regarding the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People

23. UNICEF is committed to reaching the objectives of the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People and welcomes the Permanent Forum’s useful guidance on priorities in this regard.

H. Inputs towards a questionnaire on programmes

24. Two countries in South East Asia have programmes directly related to indigenous peoples while eighteen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have implemented and included in their annual reports activities directly related to indigenous peoples.

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25. At regional and subregional levels, UNICEF has conducted the following programmes:

- Programme for the rights of indigenous children and adolescents (17 countries)
- Subregional programme Proandes with a focus on education, health and protection (Andean countries)
- Subregional programme Amazonico (Amazon countries and Paraguay)
- Subregional programme for intercultural and bilingual education (Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru)
- Bilateral programme with a focus on health in Ecuador and Peru with indigenous groups in the border area.