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Country note**

Costa Rica

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Costa Rica for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2006.

Situation of children and women

1. Costa Rica is a Central American country with a population of 3.9 million, of whom 39 per cent are under the age of 18. Human development in Costa Rica is impressive, in part as a result of strong social investment in health and education since the 1960s. During the 1990s, Costa Rica reformed its legal framework to conform to principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and established public institutions to enforce child rights. In spite of these successes, however, inequities continue, particularly for the 21 per cent of households that are poor and 33 per cent which are headed by women. It is estimated that one of every three children and adolescents, mostly in rural and coastal areas, is poor, lacking basic necessities of life.

2. In 1998, per capita income was \$3,943 and social expenditure represented 21 per cent of gross national product. More recently, however, while investment in health and social assistance has remained strong, the education sector budget has

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

decreased. Although social investment remains a government priority, there is a lack of mechanisms for allocating resources and monitoring the impact of expenditures at different stages of the life cycle of the child.

3. The country has achieved the main goals of the World Summit for Children, with an infant mortality rate of 11.8 per 1,000 live births and an under-five mortality rate of 13.9 per 1,000. However, there remain challenges in equity, quality and coverage, particularly for children under five. Immunization coverage decreased to 85 per cent in 1998, a change partly attributable to social sector reform which led to dismantling of some of the former coordination of services. Only 8 per cent of children under five have access to formal services for early childhood stimulation.

4. Decreased investment in education has resulted in gaps in educational coverage and quality. The repetition rate in rural schools is 17 per cent, compared with 2 per cent in urban schools. Of children in first grade, 6.5 per cent drop out, and it is estimated that 48 per cent of 12- to 14-year-olds have completed fewer than six grades of school. Pervasive poverty leads to early entrance into the labour market for 6 per cent of children age 5 to 11, and is one factor contributing to drop-out rates. Educational disadvantages are accentuated for adolescents. As many as 47 per cent of boys and 51 per cent of girls age 12 to 17 do not attend school. Sixteen per cent of 12- to 14-year-olds enter the labour market, even though this is legally forbidden, and 39 per cent of adolescents between 15 and 17 work.

5. Sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is another concern. Though formal data are scarce, adolescent prostitution is a visibly growing phenomenon, probably exacerbated by tourism. Teenage pregnancy has increased to 9 per cent of all births, and 9 per cent of AIDS deaths are among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Violence is also a major threat to the rights of children, adolescents and women. In 1999, 64 per cent of the 17,847 cases reported to the Child Welfare Institute involved some form of family violence.

6. According to several studies, the rights of children and adolescents to participation are also not adequately respected. Disciplinary mechanisms in the education system violate constitutional principles (due process, for example) and the fundamental civil and political rights of students. These and the other risk factors mentioned above often have a greater impact on immigrant children from Nicaragua, although there are no official data available to confirm this. Costa Rica also faces such environmental risks as earthquakes and volcanoes, which increase social vulnerability. Although there are emergency alert and intervention mechanisms and systems in place, in the emergency preparedness system, educational activities are not sufficiently emphasized.

7. To address these problems, the Government has made serious efforts to effect institutional changes based on recent legislative reforms. In agreement with civil society representatives, it has put in place the Integral Protection System for Child and Adolescent Rights, encompassing the justice administration sector, which is itself undergoing reform to comply with principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in cases of rights violations involving adolescents in conflict with the law. The Integral Protection System includes the National Council on Children and Adolescents (NCCA), which coordinates state policy related to children and adolescents, and Child Protection Boards. These bodies deal with problems encountered between national and local service delivery institutions. The NCCA has also launched a National Agenda for Children, designed to promote long-term

policies for fulfilment of children's rights, which has attained a broad-scale national consensus.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

8. The 1999 mid-term review (MTR), the study "Supporting the Change of National Frameworks to Meet the Demands of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: The Role of UNICEF", and the technical evaluation report on the current programme of cooperation all highlighted programme successes in mobilizing civil society, coordinating key sectors for enactment of the Child and Adolescent Code, adopting complementary legislation, and promoting policies and institutional networks for the defence of child and adolescent rights. Legal reform has created a comprehensive foundation in public institutions and has demonstrated the need to focus activities on developing strategies to promote and implement the public policies defined by the NCCA.

9. MTR recommendations also suggested a future programme emphasis on knowledge acquisition, particularly in operationalization of a child-rights approach and promotion of permanent monitoring of the evolution of the situation of children. This monitoring would be at the national level to follow up on goals; at the sectoral level focusing on impact of activities; and at the local level.

10. Even though authorities, the media and the general public have become increasingly involved in a discourse on rights protection and respect, there remains a need to support capacity-building for the incorporation of the rights approach in public institutions. Experience has shown that the same strategy utilized for the promotion of legal reform will also be effective in mainstreaming the rights approach as the paradigm for economic and social policy and institutional management. This same approach should also help foster a decentralized national child and adolescent protection system.

11. A recent evaluation demonstrated that the reform of juvenile criminal law has incorporated the rights approach in judicial institutions, promoting fulfilment of the rights of adolescents in conflict with the law. In the future, it may be necessary to expand this approach to other sectors of judicial administration to guarantee the effective implementation of the Child and Adolescent Code and criminal law.

12. There is strategic value in the timely production of statistical information to support formulation of public policies and the development of a child rights culture. Communication and social mobilization strategies also have a greater impact when information on social indicators and social investment are systematically and selectively used. Partnerships with academic institutions, traditionally important actors in Costa Rican society, can be very important in this endeavour.

Proposed country programme strategy

13. The main role of UNICEF in Costa Rica is in the generation and dissemination of information on the situation of children and the realization of their rights; provision of technical assistance; and social mobilization and advocacy for the adoption of the rights approach in public policy. The general objective of the programme is to promote and support the formulation of policies designed in

compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child to reduce inequalities and support gender equity and respect for diversity. Emphasis will be placed on comprehensive protection of the rights of children under five and of adolescents, and on overcoming inequalities stemming from severe rights violations, focusing on elimination of child-adolescent labour, commercial sexual exploitation, and violence manifested in physical, sexual and psychological mistreatment.

14. The proposed programme is in line with government priorities set forth in the National Agenda for Children and Adolescents (2000-2010), which establishes national goals for the implementation of the Convention, for the sustainability of the achievement of goals of the World Summit, and for the New Global Agenda for Children. The strategy will focus on strengthening the capacity of the National System for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents at both national and local levels through support to: (a) the NCCA, to guarantee sustainable, decentralized social investment policy, and the incorporation of a rights approach in identifying risks and preventing emergencies; (b) the National Commission for the Improvement of the Administration of Justice and the Judicial College, helping both to guarantee compliance with child and adolescent rights in judicial proceedings at national and local levels; (c) the institutional and social mechanisms that foster active citizen, and particularly adolescent, participation in monitoring and enforcing rights compliance; and (d) systems for producing and disseminating information incorporating an analysis of social investment and its effects on the social conditions of children and adolescents. This last component includes the promotion of capacities to document lessons learned in the adoption of the rights approach and to share this knowledge nationally and internationally.

15. The new country programme will comprise two programmes, as well as a cross-sectoral programme, which will cover operational costs outside of those encompassed by the other two programme components. The *rights approach in social management and justice administration programme* will include: (a) the development and consolidation of a decentralized social management system that supports the country in achieving increased coverage and quality of services in care, education and stimulation for children under five, and prevention of physical and psychological violence and abuse of this age group; reduced gaps in academic performance and quality of basic education between urban and rural areas; increased coverage of adolescent education; guaranteed availability of information about the reproductive and sexual rights of children and adolescents and the elimination of sexual exploitation of children; prevention of labour in children under 15 and protection of the rights of workers between 15 and 17; and (b) promotion of changes in institutional and cultural attitudes and practices regarding justice for children and adolescents, fostering a guarantee of rights in judicial processes.

16. The *active citizenship for child and adolescent rights programme* will include: (a) the design and implementation of a locally based, nationwide information system to improve decision-making and strengthen accountability mechanisms for public management of child and adolescent issues; and (b) promotion of social responsibility and active citizen participation, with emphasis on the ability of adolescents to exercise their rights and on monitoring effective rights compliance.

17. Achievement of programme objectives will require expanded partnerships with public institutions, civil society organizations and other non-governmental, multilateral and bilateral cooperation agencies. This will include forging a stronger

relationship with the Ministry of Finance and strengthening relationships with traditional counterparts. It also requires stronger advocacy efforts and partnerships with the private sector, mass media, cooperative organizations and guilds, and universities and other institutions that generate statistical information. The programme will focus on partnership with adolescents and young people and the development of new youth-based organizations.

18. The programme will also prioritize coordination among United Nations agencies and completion of the recently initiated United Nations Development Assistance Framework process. Cross-sectoral costs correspond to those components that support the entire country programme, including support staff, travel costs and other operational expenses.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme of cooperation, 2002-2006^a

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	<i>Regular resources</i>	<i>Other resources</i>	<i>Total</i>
Rights approach in social management and justice administration	1 091	1 350	2 441
Active citizenship for child and adolescent rights	1 636	900	2 536
Cross-sectoral costs	303	-	303
Total	3 030	2 250	5 280

^a These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.