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Country note**

Dominican Republic

Summary

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

The situation of children and women

1. Dominican Republic has an estimated population of 8.3 million, 40 per cent of whom are children under the age of 18. Poverty affects 26 per cent of the population, mostly in rural areas, and affects 12.2 per cent more women than men. Despite sustained economic growth of over 7 per cent in 1999, the poorest 20 per cent of the population receive only 4 per cent of the national income, while the richest 20 per cent benefit from over 50 per cent. During the 1980-1997 period, social sector spending averaged 36 per cent of total government expenditures. Distribution of expenditure in basic social services for the 1990-1997 period averaged 65.6 per cent in education, 33.8 per cent in health, and only 0.6 per cent in water and sanitation.

2. The newly elected Government has established children's rights as a priority. Considerable gains have been made in this area, including creation of a National Protection System for Children and Adolescents to oversee action related to child and adolescent rights; enactment of laws related to child and youth protection,

* 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.

family violence and education; initiation of judicial reform; and creation of venues for child and youth participation.

3. Likewise, the new Government has committed to continuing the process of decentralizing public administration, with the creation of regional, provincial and municipal councils and the definition of mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between these levels. Serious difficulties persist, however, in the application of laws, service delivery, inter-institutional coordination, sustainability of interventions, and local-level involvement in national-level decisions. Because of a shortage of valid statistics, there is a lack of reliable data on achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children.

4. Progress has been made, although several goals remain unfulfilled. The infant mortality rate (IMR) and under-five mortality rate (U5MR) are 47 and 57 per 1,000 live births, respectively, although estimates for the year 2000 place the IMR and U5MR between 21 (World Health Organization) and 36 (Demographic and Health Survey). Immunization coverage has increased, and there is a lower incidence of severe diarrhoeal disease, but acute respiratory infection rates remain high. Moderate and severe malnutrition rates are 5.8 per cent and 0.9 per cent, respectively, showing improvement over past figures. In 1996, 25.2 per cent of infants were exclusively breastfed. Vitamin A deficiency affected 22.7 per cent of children under five, iodine deficiency 74 per cent of children age 6 to 14, and iron deficiency 30.7 per cent of children under 14. Consumption of iodized salt, at 13 per cent in 1996, is still low due to weak technical capacity of salt producers and cultural barriers to using processed salt.

5. Pre-school education, obligatory for five-year-olds, covered 57 per cent of children in that age group in 1999, an improvement over figures from 1997, when it was not part of the formal system. In 1999, the net primary enrolment rate was 84 per cent, with a 14.9 per cent desertion rate; 45 per cent of eighth grade students are over 15 years of age. In 1994, only 58 per cent of children enrolled in primary school reached fifth grade. Primary schools in rural areas, 72 per cent of which are multi-grade, lack supplies, equipment and qualified teachers. UNICEF supports a government initiative to improve this situation.

6. Eclampsia, haemorrhage and infection are the main causes of maternal mortality, with a rate of 229 per 100,000 live births, despite 99 per cent coverage of institutional deliveries and 98.3 per cent of prenatal care. It is estimated that adolescents represent 27.9 per cent of institutional deliveries. Sexual education programmes for adolescents are weak, and there is a lack of youth-focused services and recreational alternatives.

7. Growing concern exists regarding HIV/AIDS, with a total of 9,930 cases reported by March 2000. Transmission is mostly heterosexual, with 79 per cent of cases in the 15-44-year age range and 20 per cent between the ages of 15 and 24. HIV prevalence in pregnant women is estimated at 2 per cent, increasing the risk of mother-to-child transmission. In 2000, the Sexually Transmitted Infections and AIDS Control Department of the Ministry of Health initiated a Vertical Transmission Reduction Strategy, supported by UNICEF, within the context of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

8. Other issues affecting children and adolescents include child labour and sexual exploitation, poverty, weak family structure, lack of parental education and

substance abuse. It is estimated that 19 per cent of children age 7 to 17 work, mostly in agriculture. Around 25,000 children age 6 to 18 are sexually exploited, 63 per cent of them girls. Regarding child and adolescent perceptions, “The Country We Want” survey, supported by UNICEF, identified family violence as a major problem, as well as a lack of trust in politicians, few opportunities for participation, a weak education system and environmental degradation. There are also problems related to birth registration, particularly for children of Haitian descent born in the Dominican Republic, which results in difficulty in access to education and health services. Lack of birth registration also affects Dominicans, for reasons of access and cost.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

9. The 1999 mid-term review (MTR) identified several areas that need to be strengthened in future programming. These include inter- and intra-sectoral coordination; support to institutional development; promotion of child rights as the core of programming; improvement of monitoring and evaluation; use of information as a social mobilization tool; gender equality as a crosscutting concern; and focus on preventive and causality-directed interventions, particularly in the area of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

10. The increasing government emphasis on decentralization presents an opportunity to further support local-level capacity-building. Although experiences in sectoral interventions provided some successes, it has become increasingly clear that future country programming must be more focused in integral interventions, taking advantage of the decentralization process.

11. Early childhood development strategies, multi-grade innovative schools, Women and Child-Friendly Police Stations, and sexual exploitation, violence and child abuse prevention programmes have provided opportunities for the definition of national policies and the participation of children, adolescents and families. Through these efforts, the country programme has effectively contributed to institutional strengthening and the development of citizen-based demand and rights vigilance. These efforts have also demonstrated that there is a need to involve non-traditional counterparts such as the Ministries of Interior, Police and Finance to ensure expansion and sustainability. Locally, the implementation of Provincial Action Plans for Children, and the Child Friendly Municipalities Initiative, have highlighted the need for continued support to improve quality of participatory planning, management, monitoring and evaluation. The assignment of municipal budgets to projects and initiatives benefiting children and families has proven effective in involving local-level authorities, as well as civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in the planning, programming and management of development interventions, while ensuring sustainability.

Proposed country programme strategy

12. The strategy of the new country programme is to ensure compliance with children’s and women’s rights through the strengthening of national capacity to formulate and apply sustainable and equitable policies within a rights-based perspective, clearly identifying the responsibilities of all actors. The programme will also support efforts to create an enabling environment for the empowerment and

participation of children, youth, families, NGOs, communities and organized groups at the local level in the exercise and demand of children's and women's rights.

13. The proposed country programme strategy is based on new government policies, strategies and priorities, lessons learned, and the New Global Agenda for Children. Proven strategies and successful experiences of the current programme of cooperation will be reflected in the new country programme, with the addition of a more rights-oriented approach. The process of formulation of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the draft United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) identified areas of intervention for United Nations system agencies, based on a rights, gender and life cycle approach.

14. A combination of programme strategies — advocacy, capacity-building and institutional development — will be used in the design of programme interventions to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. Policy design will be actively supported within the context of newly identified national institutional reforms. Vertical and horizontal integration will be encouraged by fostering a continuous exchange of information and experiences between national and local levels and the implementation of best practices. The programme will strengthen alliances and partnerships within the newly created development councils at the municipal and provincial levels, which include representatives from civil society, local authorities and NGOs. Inter-agency support will place special emphasis on the development of an information system to monitor rights compliance and achievement of goals.

15. The proposed country programme identifies two interlinked and complementary areas of intervention. They will ensure cohesion among all activities and will work to promote the rights of children and adolescents in an integrated manner through all levels of society, linking national policy and legislation for child and adolescent rights to local-level activities, and ensuring sustainability of rights innovations.

16. The first cluster of interventions, *support to integrated national policies for child rights*, will focus on: strengthening the National System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents through definition of social and economic policies and legislative reform; promoting the 20/20 Initiative at national and local levels; and supporting the process of state reform and modernization in accordance with new government policies, and the design of municipal-level policies. Other actions will include establishment of an information and monitoring system, research and studies; and social mobilization at national and local levels.

17. The second cluster of interventions, *operationalization of integrated national policies at the local level*, will contribute to institutional strengthening and the quality and accessibility of services that guarantee the survival and development of children and youth. It will continue support to the decentralization process in order to empower local authorities and civil society, in particular children and adolescents, to demand rights and access to justice. It will include actions related to social communication, information and education, while building alliances for rights compliance. Interventions will address reduction of maternal and child mortality, preventive health care, early childhood development, improvement of quality and access to basic education, and eradication of child labour. Eliminating sexual and commercial exploitation of children and youth will require special efforts.

18. Within the context of UNDAF, particular emphasis will be made to coordinate efforts among United Nations agencies, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and bilateral development agencies.

19. Cross-sectoral costs include salaries for cross-programme assistance, as well as logistical support costs.

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>
Integrated national policies for child rights, and operationalization of integrated national policies at local level	2 225	4 250	6 475
Cross-sectoral costs	1 400	750	2 150
Total	3 625	5 000	8 625

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