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Summary of mid-term reviews and major evaluations of country programmes

Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States region

Summary

The present report was prepared in response to Executive Board decision 1995/8 (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1), which requested the secretariat to submit to the Board a summary of the outcome of mid-term reviews and major country programme evaluations, specifying, inter alia, the results achieved, lessons learned and the need for any adjustments in the country programme. The Board is to comment on the reports and provide guidance to the secretariat, if necessary. The evaluations described in the present report were conducted during 2001.

* E/ICEF/2002/9.

Introduction

1. There were no mid-term reviews (MTRs) conducted in the 27 countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic States region in 2001. However, eight countries will conduct MTRs in 2002, and a concerted effort is being made by the country, area and regional offices to ensure that the lessons learned from previous MTRs are taken into account in preparing for these upcoming reviews.

2. In 2001, the eighth Regional Monitoring (MONEE) Report, entitled "A Decade of Transition", was published. It reviews the momentous changes in the 27 countries of the region and the effects of transition on children, women and families. Building on the research carried out by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, the report analyses the changes in household incomes, health status, education and children in public care, and reviews policy implications. Once again, the report reconfirms that although there has been considerable positive change during the decade, the transition leaves many families and children worse off than before.

3. The evaluations highlighted in the present report are only a sampling of the more than 100 surveys, studies, assessments and evaluations carried out in the region in 2001. They were selected based on either the significance of the lessons learned from the evaluation or the potential impact on policy or programme direction.

4. The evaluation of the primary health care (PHC) reform project in the Republic of Moldova demonstrated the possibility of improving the provision of PHC at relatively low cost, thus ensuring access to basic services to the most vulnerable. The evaluation of the life skills project in Armenia identified aspects that required further development over the next few years of the project and areas to review before the MTR in 2002. The evaluation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia demonstrated the contribution of the BFHI project to the establishment of the high standards of care covering 90 per cent of the births in the country. The evaluation of psychosocial interventions in schools affected by the earthquake in Turkey has added to the region's cumulative knowledge of lessons learned in this increasingly relevant area. The evaluation of the mine awareness education programme in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo) not only highlighted the effectiveness of using child-to-child methodologies, but examined the unexpected effect of influencing other projects to use this successful methodology. The evaluation of psychosocial projects in primary and secondary schools from 1992-1998 in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a follow-up study to the recommendations of an earlier evaluation that examined the impact of psychosocial training on classroom practices.

Major country programme evaluations

Evaluation of the primary health care reform project (Republic of Moldova)

5. The PHC project has been implemented for the last three years as a pilot project in the Hincesti region of the Republic of Moldova. The evaluation (by an

outside consultant) was conducted through a comprehensive desk review of project documentation and records, in-depth interviews and field visits. The evaluation reviewed progress towards meeting the project's objectives of increasing the accessibility, effectiveness and quality of PHC services by implementing the basic benefit package of services, the essential drugs policy, and the standard health care and treatment protocols. It also examined the aim of the project to strengthen PHC management and streamline the funding system of health services. A key underlying strategy of the project was to involve communities in the process of health service planning and evaluation, which was also reviewed.

6. The basic package of services in the project focused on maternal and child health and used the standard World Health Organization/UNICEF protocols and guidelines. In addition to the specific interventions, the package also covered general morbidity consultations and a package of 109 drugs (mainly generics) directly linked to the covered interventions. The results of the final evaluation indicated that this "package" provided excellent coverage against the main causes of illness in the country and appeared to lead to improvements in utilization and health status in the beneficiary population. For example, a greater number of visits to PHC centres and better prenatal coverage led to a decline in the levels of anaemia.

7. The project demonstrated that with roughly \$3 per capita per annum, it was possible to provide access to basic PHC services, including pharmaceuticals and ancillary services. The average out-of-pocket payment per case in the pilot area was just one quarter of the payments in other areas of the country. Thus, the average cost of case treatment at the PHC level in the pilot area was about \$5 (54 Moldovan lei) compared to the national average of \$19. In some areas of the country, treatment costs per case could actually be as high as \$28.

8. The resource mobilization aspect of the community financing scheme has been less successful. One of the reasons for its failure was that the pre-payment scheme was not actively supported at the local level due partly to the lack of public awareness and information. However, the fact that the Republic of Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, with an estimated 80 per cent of the population living on less than \$1 a day, must certainly also affect the ability of the public to pay.

9. The Government of the Republic of Moldova is now considering the model for replication in other provinces, and the evaluation contains many lessons learned that will inform the process of health reform.

Evaluation of the life skills education project (Armenia)

10. The life skills education project had been actively supported by UNICEF through the Ministry of Education for three years and had grown to cover 11,566 students in 106 schools. The evaluation was conducted by an external consultant over a one-month period through desk reviews of project documents, in-depth interviews and classroom observations. It aimed to evaluate the impact on the classroom environment and the acceptance of the project by students, teachers, principals and parents through a sampling in 14 schools and surrounding communities.

11. The evaluation found that teachers and principals noticed more participation, active group work and peer support among those students taking the life skills course when they were in other subject classes. Teachers pointed out that students with behaviour problems in other classes seemed to enjoy the student-centred, highly participatory approach of the life skills classes. If parents knew about the project, they were quite positive and welcomed the approach. Students responded quite favourably to the classes, and many remarked on their enhanced self-esteem and improved interpersonal skills.

12. The evaluation pointed out that project staff now have the challenge of influencing other curricular changes that are quickly evolving so that the life skills methodology and content become more integrated in the whole curriculum and do not remain a stand-alone subject. The evaluation recommended that the project continue with revised objectives that are more measurable and indicators of behaviour change to monitor the impact on students' knowledge, attitudes and practices. The detailed recommendations are now being integrated into the plans of action for 2002.

Evaluation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative project (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

13. The evaluation, conducted by an external consultant, examined the coverage of BFHI through a review of the initial involvement of UNICEF in 1995 to promote breastfeeding, through concerted efforts from 1999 onwards in the implementation of BFHI. It was found that by the end of 2001, the BFHI project had contributed to the establishment of high standards of care in 28 maternity hospitals certified as "baby-friendly", which covered 90 per cent of the births in the country.

14. In 1994, the percentage of children breastfed exclusively for six months was only 36.6 per cent; by 2001, it had increased to 65.7 per cent. The finding that 87.5 per cent of infants were breastfed exclusively immediately after discharge from the maternity hospital indicates that mothers internalized the importance and practice of breastfeeding. The analysis of trends in the introduction of complementary foods for infants showed that the introduction of fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, eggs and cereals in the diet was still low.

15. In future, the programme will develop sustainable mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of high standards of care in certified baby-friendly hospitals, as well as more targeted activities aimed at incorporating the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in the national legislative framework.

16. The lessons learned from this project will benefit other countries in the region that are currently working on BFHI and have been shared with them.

Less fearful, more active: evaluation of psychosocial interventions in schools (Turkey)

17. As a result of the two massive earthquakes in the Marmara region of Turkey in 1999, the Ministry of National Education initiated the psychosocial school project, in collaboration with UNICEF. The aim of the project was to reintroduce a sense of normalcy in the children's lives as quickly as possible and to alleviate the fear and

stress resulting from the catastrophes, working primarily within the classroom setting through the medium of teachers.

18. The evaluation was based on a compilation of studies, questionnaires, field trips and interviews undertaken by external consultants, the University of Ankara and the Ministry of National Education after the earthquakes, and subsequently consolidated into this report by an outside consultant. This first attempt to evaluate the impact of the psychosocial project has raised many questions that need to be addressed through more rigorous analysis, but it does provide important lessons through the successful implementation of the project.

19. The evaluation found that classroom-based psychosocial interventions accelerated the recovery process among children. The children who participated in the project appeared to become less fearful, more active and more motivated to return to school than the children who did not benefit from these interventions. The evaluation also led to more open communication between parents and school authorities, as well as between students and their teachers.

20. The quick training and deployment of school counsellors in their new role as helpers and facilitators of psychosocial activities in the school system were key to the success of the project. The creation of the National Expert Group led to a wide-ranging collaboration among professionals, counsellors, psychiatrists and psychologists, among others, who learned more about the interdependence of their professions and improved their cooperation. Experiences from the expert group led to the formal inclusion of trauma courses and counselling in the educational system of the earthquake-prone country.

21. The evaluation highlighted the improved capacity and preparedness of the Government to respond to disasters as a result of the project intervention. This was proven during a later earthquake in February 2002. Ultimately, however, the main impact of the evaluation was to convince the Government to expand the project nation-wide through the schools. In this way, the country will be better able to cope with childhood trauma arising from any future emergencies wherever they may occur. Moreover, a "child abuse" module has also been added to the project to help counsellors identify and respond to this threat to children.

Child-to-child methodologies in the mine awareness education programme (United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)

22. Through a combination of successful mine clearance and mine awareness education, fatalities and injuries from landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Kosovo have declined to nearly zero by the end of 2001. One approach to disseminate mine awareness information built upon children's natural interactions with other children. The approach was first introduced in Kosovo in 1999, and many landmine experts considered its use controversial, questioning whether children could be "trusted" to convey accurately such vital and potentially life-saving information that was often technical in nature.

23. The evaluation, conducted by an outside consultant, showed that the children who had received child-to-child training scored better than other children in the same school on basic tests to assess children's knowledge of the landmine and UXO

problem. Not only were they better informed about what to do should they discover a mine, but they also showed a greater tendency to inform others of the dangers. The children who had received child-to-child training were reported (and report themselves) to be more aware and careful, to avoid risky behaviour, to have more confidence, to show greater respect for others, and to know better how to behave and treat others. They reportedly enjoyed their responsibility of passing on information to younger children. In some cases, the child trainers were able to identify inconsistencies in the types of information that mine awareness experts were planning to convey. Many of the teachers in the schools were child trainers who reported that their students became more active in class and learned better in school. The introduction of the approach, in short, generated unexpected benefits for the schools and communities in which child trainers were active.

24. One of the key findings was that children were not involved in the early (design) stages, which limited project performance. For example, children were not asked to analyse the problems and dangers facing them, but were simply presented with an already identified problem. This aspect of getting children to analyse and identify the problems is the cornerstone of child-to-child methodology, and it was recommended that this initial stage not be neglected when using the approach. This project, as well as others that are attempting to develop the child-to-child approach, have been redesigned to incorporate more of a process of child-based analysis and problem identification.

25. UNICEF Kosovo is now using the results of the evaluation to develop peer education strategies in its new programme of cooperation (2002-2004). The experience gained from the project and the lessons learned based on the evaluations will be incorporated in future programmes so as to involve young people in the identification of problems and in the communication of key messages to their peers.

Evaluation of psychosocial projects in primary and secondary schools from 1992 to 1998 (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

26. An external UNICEF evaluation study entitled "A critical review of UNICEF support to psychosocial and peace education projects in the countries of the former Yugoslavia" was carried out in 1998 to review psychosocial projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and was reported in document E/ICEF/1999/P/L.7. One of the findings of the report was that although the initial objectives were to help children themselves, the most tangible benefits were to teachers and psychologists. However, the report suggested that among the thousands that received training, only a small minority applied what they had learned to the classrooms on a consistent basis. Based on the recommendations of the previous evaluation, this current evaluation was launched to assess how well the teachers had applied what they had learned in the training sessions and to learn more about the impact of the project on the students who had participated in it.

27. The evaluation was carried out by an external team of evaluators, in collaboration with the Universities of Sarajevo and Banja Luka and with UNICEF support. It showed that participants felt that the project had given them valuable knowledge and skills in the area of behaviour change. About 90 per cent of the teachers reported that they had utilized the skills they received from the project in their daily work with children, parents or other teachers. About one third of all

participants had consistently carried out many of the activities learned through the training, both within the regular curriculum as well as in work with children outside the classroom. The seminars had helped them not only understand their students better, but gave them a deeper understanding of their own reactions to traumatic events and losses.

28. The evaluation pointed out that there was a need for in-service training and professional supervision if the knowledge and practices were to be sustained. Another point that the evaluation brought up was a need for other alternative models to be evaluated and some way to assess the cost-benefit from various intervention strategies.

29. The report also suggested that the evaluations that have been undertaken in the region to date have covered a relatively short time-frame as far as impact. There is a need to establish longitudinal studies that can monitor the change over time to the various beneficiaries of psychosocial intervention projects.

Conclusion

30. Four country programmes and one multi-country programme were approved in 2001,¹ and as part of the master plan of operations, each country programme had an integrated monitoring and evaluation plan. Many country offices are continuing to build the capacity within the country programme structure, while others are struggling with small office structures, limited budgets and a lack of interest among significant counterparts. The use of evaluations for the revision of programme directions, as well as capacity-building of staff in basic monitoring and evaluation skills, are essential in the current cycle of programmes.

31. As there will be eight MTRs in the coming year,² efforts are being made to conduct strategic evaluations in each country that would feed into the MTR. It is also becoming increasingly apparent that country programme objectives have to be more clearly written to ensure that proper programme evaluations can take place in the future.

Notes

¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova, as well as the multi-country programme for Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Russian Federation, Slovakia and Ukraine.

² Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.