

MONITORING ACHIEVEMENT OF SOCIAL GOALS
IN THE 1990s

Report by the United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

- 1) National Governments, both individually and through the United Nations system, are in the process of adopting goals for the year 2000. WHO and UNICEF have agreed on a broad range of goals for the health development of children and women by the year 2000 as part of their contribution to the work of the proposed fourth United Nations development decade (1991-2000). The Education for All conference, to be held in Bangkok in early 1990, and which is supported jointly by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, can be expected to identify goals for the 1990s for the educational development of children and women.
- 2) In order to determine progress towards these human and social goals, regular and rapid monitoring will be required, so that departures from planned targets can be identified and corrective action taken quickly. Monitoring the various indicators will involve a mix of statistical instruments and methods, with household surveys playing a major but not the only role. Existing national statistics operations and structures need to be utilized, building upon them where appropriate, refining them where necessary and avoiding duplication. A number of support programmes have already been established: some which involve joint collaboration between agencies, such as in the case of the NHSCP and the IFNS programmes; others which are supported primarily by one agency, such as SDA by the World Bank and the monitoring programmes of WHO and FAO. In addition a number of UNICEF country programmes are already providing support to national monitoring activities.

Objective

- 3) However, recognising that further support is required, in April 1989 the UNICEF Executive Board approved additional funding for the period 1989-93. The overall objective of these funds is to ensure that as many countries as possible will be able to undertake regular and rapid monitoring of progress towards child-related human and social goals for the 1990s.

Activities

- 4) Although this monitoring programme has been initiated only recently, UNICEF has already been involved in work which has relevance to a number of activities which are expected to play an important role in this programme.
- 5) Before collecting new data, and because trends are at least as important as absolute values, existing data should be fully exploited. UNICEF has assisted several countries in analysing existing data; for example, Turkey in the derivation of child mortality measures from the last census, and Egypt in the derivation of a wider range of child-related indicators. An example of a current activity is one where UNICEF is assisting WHO in updating their database on country specific anthropometric measures for determining nutritional status.
- 6) Obtaining timely and reliable data for the derivation of indicators requires the use of suitable measurement tools. Although many tools exist, they are not always suitable for rapid assessment and monitoring purposes. The UNICEF Middle East and North Africa regional office has adapted existing demographic measurement techniques in helping a number of countries in the region, such as Syria and Djibouti, to rapidly estimate relatively recent trends in infant and under five mortality. An output from this work is a manual for data collection and processing, as well as for mortality estimates production. This manual is being used as the basis for similar mortality monitoring in additional countries.
- 7) Other instruments need more extensive development. An example is given by literacy in Yemen where UNICEF is supporting development and use of more objective instruments than the generally used verbal questions on whether a person is able to read and write. It is expected that further joint work with UNESCO and NHSCP will be undertaken to extend this technique to more countries.
- 8) As indicated earlier, a mix of statistical systems will be required for monitoring progress. For several years UNICEF has supported NHSCP as a means of building or improving national multi-purpose household survey systems, with the aim of obtaining the necessary data through the resulting systems. However, building this survey capability can take a considerable time and in order to obtain data in the intervening time period other systems have to be used. One approach is to add data modules onto existing systems. UNICEF has supported the addition of a nutritional status module on some Demographic and Health Surveys (which are funded by the USAID), and the addition of a mortality module to immunization coverage surveys.
- 9) A further important activity is the actual use of the monitoring indicators by national government departments, such as those responsible for health and education. Use of data has historically been a weak area. Although UNICEF has some experience with joint producer and user groups and with training in understanding and use of data, a more multifaceted approach will need to be developed. At the same time this approach should be adaptable to each country since indicator use is expected to be more country specific than many other monitoring activities.