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SUBSTANTIVE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE

Activities of the relevant organs, organizations
and bodies of the United Nations system in the
field of new and renewable sources of energy

Addendum

Report submitted by the United Nations Children's Fund*

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1. A number of the issues being considered by the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy are of interest to UNICEF: they include the use of solar, biomass, fuel-wood, charcoal and wind energy; the transfer of technology and information; and questions of energy provision in rural areas.
2. Appropriate technologies, whether related to energy or not, do not however constitute a UNICEF programme interest per se; rather, they may be taken up in UNICEF programmes of co-operation as a function of the basic services strategy adopted by UNICEF and endorsed by the General Assembly. This strategy calls for active participation by each community in selecting, planning and running the services it considers essential to the well-being of its children and their families. Often the community chooses one or more of its members to be trained in providing these services. According to the community's priorities and the resources available to it, appropriate technologies may be adopted to meet a variety of ends - to improve health and nutrition, for example; to reduce the time and physical energy spent by women on household tasks; to help women and families find other sources of energy for cooking; or to open up new opportunities for income generation, particularly among women.
3. UNICEF's interest in energy technologies is therefore centred on those which benefit children, directly or indirectly, in low-income rural or urban communities; which are within the reach of such communities, hence low-cost; which meet community needs; and which, given UNICEF's limited resources, carry the potential for replication elsewhere. Training for community members or for the service providers sponsored by their community is an important element in introducing such technologies. It is also, of course, desirable for energy-related developments to be tailored to national development planning, lest the needs of one sector of society be met at the expense of another.
4. UNICEF is currently assisting several Governments to undertake practical studies on the use of simple, low-cost, energy-related appropriate technologies. They include the use of solar energy for water and space heating and for the accelerated drying of surplus vegetables, fruit, fish and grain, for storage and for domestic use; the use of biogas; and the adaptation of traditional cooking arrangements to make more efficient use of fuel.
5. For example, UNICEF is assisting the Governments of India, Peru and Turkey in pilot projects to establish community waste disposal facilities to work in conjunction with biogas production. The orderly disposal of kitchen, agricultural and human wastes may have considerable impact in improving the sanitary condition of the home and neighbourhood, and hence in improving the health of children. Moreover, these biogas systems carry the additional benefits of gas to provide power, heating, lighting, and, in rural areas, weed-free fertilizer.

6. UNICEF has assisted several countries to use windmills on an experimental basis for raising water. Although the use of wind energy to replace human energy is an attractive alternative, there are a number of associated problems. Since windmills tend to be either imported or fabricated from mainly imported materials, their cost is extremely high when compared with the very low incomes of rural communities. Moreover, logistical problems have arisen in moving the materials to technically suitable but isolated sites, followed by difficulties with erection and maintenance.

7. The Karen Demonstration Centre of Village Technology, run by the Government of Kenya, was established with UNICEF support, and is very active in Kenya and the neighbouring countries of Eastern Africa in developing appropriate technologies and providing information about them. While it is primarily concerned with water-related technologies and food processing and storage techniques, it also provides for the demonstration of new techniques in the harnessing of renewable energy, particularly in areas benefiting rural low-income families. In addition, it organizes conferences and demonstrations in collaboration with Governments, and works in liaison with other United Nations and non-governmental organizations on the dissemination of appropriate technologies. UNICEF has made arrangements with other Governments, in West and Central Africa and in Asia, to establish similar centres concentrating on technologies relevant to local needs.

8. UNICEF is actively concerned to foster the transfer of information and technical co-operation among developing countries, and has recently established a technical information referral service to collect and disseminate information on innovative programmes and projects. This interest may well extend to efforts to expand the information available, both nationally and internationally, on new and renewable sources of energy.
