



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/ICEF/1996/P/L.11
4 December 1995
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
First regular session 1996
22-26 January 1996
Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

FOR ACTION

THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY NOTE

Gabon**

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country programme strategy note for Gabon for a programme of cooperation for the period 1997 to 2001.

On the basis of a study of the situation, cooperation between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Government of Gabon for the period under consideration is designed to reduce the wide disparities between indicators reflecting the living conditions of children and women and the economic level of the country through support for reform of the basic social sectors. The mutually complementary strategies adopted will seek to inform, sensitize and mobilize the key actors (policy-makers, development partners, civil society and the private sector) with respect to the reform priorities, to increase social-planning capacity with a view to translating the efforts thus mobilized into policies and action plans and to apply those reforms in pilot areas. These areas will be developed from the perspective of the feasibility and relevance of the reforms with a view to extending them in the longer term to the national level, subject to the agreement and participation of the development partners.

Given Gabon's economic potential, supplementary funding will be mobilized on a priority basis with the Government and the private sector of Gabon.

* E/ICEF/1996/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendations will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1996.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Gabon's extensive natural resources (petroleum, minerals, timber) provide its population of just over 1 million with a per capita gross national product (GNP) of 4,450 dollars. Despite the various structural adjustment programmes implemented since 1986, the economic crisis has only served to increase the disparities between the living conditions of children and women and the country's economic potential as revealed by the fact that the country's rating on the human development index is 36 points lower than its rating in terms of per capita GNP.

2. Notwithstanding some degree of improvement, the infant mortality rate (IMR) and the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) (estimated respectively at 93 and 154 per 1,000 live births) and the maternal mortality rate (MMR) (190 per 100,000 live births) are still too high. The high incidence of infectious childhood diseases, the steady decline in breastfeeding and the spread of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) reflect the poor quality of curative, preventive and promotional care and the persistence of attitudes and stereotypes that endanger the health of mother and child. Although there is a dense network of health facilities, those in the outlying areas are severely handicapped owing to the poor motivation, skills of their staff, a lack of essential drugs and the almost general absence of operating budgets. Gabon is one of those African countries which has been unable to maintain the goal of universal child immunization (UCI) which it achieved in 1990. Moreover, the use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) remains very low (10 per cent). Access to drinking water is provided for about 68 per cent of the population, but with very high unit costs in rural areas. While 60 per cent of the urban population has a satisfactory human waste disposal system, sewage disposal, drainage and garbage disposal remain of great concern.

3. Despite a gross school enrolment rate of 121 per cent, the poor quality of performance at the primary school level is reflected by the high number of children repeating grades and the low level of completion (only 30 per cent of children enrolled complete the primary school programme), a 21-point disparity in enrolments between girls (74 per cent) and boys (95 per cent) and relatively high illiteracy rates of 39 per cent for men and 52 per cent for women. Preschool education is confined to a small minority of children in urban areas.

4. Rapid urbanization, increasing socio-economic, socio-cultural and geographical disparities, the existence of unsuitable social policies and the inadequacy of budgets for essential social services are the principal structural constraints to the notion of sustainable development and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Gabon in 1994.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

5. The goal of the cooperation programme for the period 1993 to 1995 was to achieve the mid-decade goals for the expanded programme on immunization (EPI), ORT and the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. The results obtained are unsatisfactory and reflect the structural deficiencies of the health care

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system, the lack of political attention given to primary health care (PHC) and the limited capacity and low motivation of the partners. However, an analysis of the situation of children and women, undertaken in close collaboration with the Government and for the first time, alerted policy-makers to the discrepancy between the social and health situation of children and women and the resources and economic potential of the country. The study of the situation has moreover highlighted the fact that additional recognition and further studies are needed with respect to children in especially difficult circumstances (handicapped, maladjusted, adolescent mothers etc.). The same applies to women, for whom statutory equality is not yet being translated into action.

6. At the same time, the process of democratization of political life in Gabon and the current economic crisis have led the Gabonese authorities and the development agencies to review their priorities relating to sustainable human development and appropriate strategies. Thus a consensus is emerging in favour of a fundamental reform of the social sectors, involving a more rational allocation and use of the country's own resources. The increasing inadequacies of the social security and welfare system suggest the need to study alternatives, in particular decentralization of the management of outlying health and educational facilities, rationalization of their operations and the involvement of communities and consumers in the management and funding of basic health care and education.

7. Such reforms are expected to be based on the objectives of the Declaration of the World Summit for Children, to which Gabon subscribed, and to contribute directly to implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the conclusions and recommendations of the recent conferences on social development, population and women. In this connection, it is proposed that cooperation between the Government and UNICEF should be directed towards support for social sector reform, especially in the field of health and basic education.

8. Lastly, a positive element of the current programme is the financial counterpart which the Government has granted for implementation of the activities. Nevertheless, in view of the country's potential, the new programme should attempt to secure from the Government of Gabon a commitment to make regular increases in its counterpart financing until the latter covers most of the recurrent costs of the projects. In addition, the new programme should explore in greater depth the possibilities of local funding through the private sector.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

9. The country programme for the period 1997 to 2001 is designed to raise the survival, protection and development of children and women to a level more representative of the economic standing of Gabon, as required by international conventions which it has ratified, and primarily the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The cooperation programme is designed to promote achievement of the objectives of the Declaration of the World Summit for Children by fostering and supporting the ongoing reform and implementation of social policies.

10. To achieve these objectives, a single programme is proposed, on support for reform of the social sectors. In the particular circumstances of Gabon, the main strategy will be to reduce substantially the imbalance between the availability of essential social services and the fundamental needs of the population by mobilizing efforts in the following complementary and priority areas: (a) a thorough restructuring of the State budget to promote the 20/20 initiative; (b) the elaboration and implementation of relevant and realistic social policies, particularly in the areas of basic health and education; and (c) compliance with commitments entered into at the international level and the active and coordinated participation of development partners for the implementation of the reforms.

11. These priority areas will be supported by this programme through three projects: advocacy and mobilization; social planning; and strengthening of basic services. These projects are expected to work in a synergetic manner in order to bring about the desired changes in the supply of services, their quality, their utilization by the population and their impact. The three complementary projects will aim at (a) providing information to key actors (policy-makers, development partners, civil society and the private sector), raising their awareness and mobilizing their efforts with regard to the necessary changes at the institutional and social levels; (b) building social-planning capacity, with a view to translating the efforts thus mobilized into sectoral policies and action plans and (c) effecting these reforms in the pilot areas. The latter areas will be developed with the aim of demonstrating the feasibility and soundness of the reforms, with a view to their subsequent implementation on a national scale, in agreement with and with the participation of the development partners.

12. The advocacy and mobilization project will encourage the Government and its partners to address the reform priorities and will mobilize the resources necessary for the development of appropriate tools, procedures and systems and for strengthening skills. Working groups will be formed and their terms of reference established. Priority areas will be identified and working methods developed in the light of the recent analysis of the situation. A survey of innovative experiments will also be conducted. The 20/20 initiative will be further promoted, and publicity will be given to the financial gains made possible by the introduction of appropriate technologies or the use of essential drugs in place of generic medicines. The advocacy component will also promote awareness throughout the country of the successful pilot programmes.

13. The social planning project is intended to promote national capacity-building in the collection, analysis and utilization of the data necessary to guide and support the planning, administration and implementation of the reforms. An analysis and charts of gender disparities in the different socio-economic groups will be prepared. Particular attention will be given to behaviour patterns in connection with such phenomena as the rejection of exclusive reliance on breast-feeding or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. The roles and specific tasks of women in Gabonese society, together with the discrimination to which they are subjected, will be studied and taken into consideration in the development of social policies. A comprehensive plan will be elaborated for the follow-up and evaluation of the results of the

programme and for the regular updating of the analysis of the situation of women and children.

14. The project to strengthen basic services will undertake to demonstrate, in three target departments of Gabon, the feasibility of the reform process, using as its central strategies the empowerment of communities and families and capacity-building in planning and administration at the intermediate and local levels. The results are expected to exceed the national level by at least 20 per cent in such areas as PHC (antigen vaccination coverage, ORT use and treatment of acute respiratory infections (ARI) and malaria) and school attendance (net primary school enrolment rate, primary school finishing rate and access to pre-school education). The selection of the target departments will be made in close consultation with the Government and the other development partners, including non-governmental organizations, associations and communities. In addition to UNICEF support, the project will be financed by the Government counterpart contribution and by the beneficiary communities.

15. This new cooperation programme will be prepared in close consultation with other agencies of the United Nations, bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies and non-governmental organizations. A funding strategy will be developed and will take due account of the considerable opportunities for fund-raising in the local private sector.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

Estimated programme of cooperation, 1997 to 2001 a/

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	<u>General resources</u>	<u>Supplementary funds</u>	<u>Total</u>
Support for reform of the social sectors	3 750	5 000	8 750

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