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### United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

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*For information*

### Country note\*\*

**Islamic Republic of Iran**

#### *Summary*

The Executive Director presents the country note for the Islamic Republic of Iran for a programme of cooperation for the period 2000 to 2004.

### The situation of children and women

1. With strong political commitment, well-trained staff and a wide-reaching infrastructure, the Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved all the goals of the World Summit for Children for the year 2000, except that of reducing malnutrition by half. The rates for immunization coverage, primary school enrolment, use of iodized salt at the household level, coverage of safe drinking water and sanitary latrines are over 90 per cent. As assessed by the 1996 population census, the infant mortality rate is 26 per 1,000 live births, the under-five mortality rate is 35 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality rate is less than 40 per 100,000 live births. Access to health services and education facilities is almost universal. Over 85 per cent of births are attended by trained birth attendants and take place in a health facility.

2. The 1998 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), done by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and UNICEF, has shown that disparities exist between provinces, rural and urban areas and males and females, and need to be addressed to ensure transition from goals (coverage of most children) to rights (coverage of all children).

3. The Government is committed to strengthening the social sector, but the impact of the country's economic situation on social sector investments needs to be carefully monitored. Investments are declining, but part of the decline is covered through cost-recovery strategies. The inputs provided by UNICEF are too meager to be used for expansion of services; instead, they can best be used in strengthening capacities and advocating for the introduction and testing of new ideas and methodologies to improve programme effectiveness.

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\* E/ICEF/1999/2.

\*\* 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 1999.

4. There are limited data available on the problems of street children, children in conflict with the law and child abuse. The country does not have separate laws to deal with juveniles but it has begun a review of laws affecting the family, women and children. There is a need to inform households about children's rights and strengthen their capacity to ensure those rights. Children's participation and protection need to be strengthened. While there are support mechanisms for the care of the disabled, efforts to integrate them into mainstream society need further strengthening.

5. The Islamic Republic of Iran is host to approximately 1.5 million refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, half of whom are children. Many do not live in camps and therefore are not registered. This limits their ability to utilize fully the government social services available to them and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.

### **Lessons learned from past cooperation**

6. During the last four National Immunization Days, the health system, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has succeeded in reaching over 95 per cent of the children with oral polio vaccine in a single day of operation. This experience proved to be very relevant and useful to the Government. With increasing stress on its budgets and resources, the Government should seek out and involve NGOs to work in the remaining deprived areas that represent small pockets of disparity.

7. The evaluation of the successful salt iodization programme showed that urinary iodine levels in the community have risen. The success of the iodine deficiency disorder programme has demonstrated the benefits of intersectoral cooperation and of the Government's ability to work with the private sector for the best interests of the population. These experiences can now be used for the design and implementation of other programmes.

8. Traditionally, development workers often do not raise issues deemed to be sensitive or controversial. However, work undertaken lately in collaboration with UNICEF on child abuse, street children and other child protection issues reflects the Government's willingness to listen and act on such issues, if they are raised in a constructive manner.

9. In a feedback session organized by UNICEF, development partners (60 representatives from Govern-

ments, 50 from NGOs, 28 from international agencies and 35 women and children) mentioned that the effectiveness of UNICEF in the country stems from its ability to bring new ideas and innovations into the programmes (i.e., urban health volunteers, National Immunization Days) and back them up with its limited resources, in addition to its ability to involve many other partners.

### **Proposed country programme strategy**

10. The proposed country programme aims to support government efforts for the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified in 1994. It will support programmes to (a) reduce the prevalence of malnutrition in children under two years of age from 16 to 8 per cent; (b) reduce by one third disparities of gender and location for health and education, in areas for which the World Summit for Children goals have been achieved; (c) increase basic competencies in education at age 11 years by at least 10 per cent; (d) improve the efficiency and quality of health services, especially in the most deprived provinces; (e) protect the rights of children in need of special protection; (f) promote the participation rights of children with disabilities; and (g) facilitate the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

11. The proposed strategies and programmes take into consideration the strengths of other development partners in the country. They reflect the consensus of over 600 staff from the government, NGOs, the private sector, the international development community and prospective beneficiaries on the most effective use of UNICEF strengths and resources to realize the rights of Iranian children. The country programme will have five programmes, as described below.

12. **Prevention of malnutrition in children under two years of age.** Studies in the Islamic Republic of Iran have shown that growth faltering starts at four months of age and continues until about 18 months of age. Lack of care and infection are the leading causes of malnutrition in the country. The proposed programme will shift from management to prevention of malnutrition and from targeting children under five years of age to children under two years of age. This targeting will allow health-care workers and child-care providers to intervene at the most effective time. Activities will include the promotion and protection of exclusive breastfeeding, monitoring the use of iodized salt at household level and pilot projects

(for future replication) on reduction of anaemia in women and children and zinc and vitamin A supplementation.

13. **Disparity reduction.** The MICS has helped to identify Sestan and Balouchistan, Lorestan, West Azarbaijan, Ardabil and Hormozgan as the country's five weakest provinces in terms of social indicators, comprising 14 per cent of the population. Working closely with the Government and NGOs, UNICEF will help to identify pockets of disparity within these provinces. UNICEF support will include the introduction of new participatory methodologies for involvement of communities in programme development; strengthening of monitoring and supervision; testing of alternative approaches to service delivery; increasing community awareness; and strengthening the capacities of the government staff.

14. **Improving quality of services.** Having achieved universal access and coverage, the emphasis should now turn to quality. On a nationwide basis, starting in the five provinces cited above, UNICEF will support the Government in improving the quality of its services. In health, this will include support for the introduction of participatory methodologies in programme assessment and strengthening of information systems and management capacities. In education, the emphasis will be on increased learning achievement, strengthening methodologies of learning assessment and increased participation by children and parents in enhancing the learning environment in schools.

15. **Children in need of special protection.** Following consultations with more than 80 stakeholders (from the Government, NGOs, municipalities, the justice department, parents and children) on child abuse and street children, UNICEF has developed preliminary plans of action for addressing these issues through two pilot plans. The stakeholders also identified the need to undertake a comprehensive review of existing laws in relation to the expectations of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the needs of the country. UNICEF

will support a pilot project with the justice department on dealing with children in conflict with the law and children of convicts.

16. Discussions with children with disabilities have shown that while most have access to good rehabilitation care and services, what they want most is to highlight their abilities and have equal opportunities in life, the understanding and respect of their peers and counseling for themselves and their parents. UNICEF will support activities to respond to these needs.

17. **Promotion and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.** Most violations of children's rights take place at home. Because over 80 per cent of households have access to television and radio, there is a unique opportunity to reach them directly with child rights messages. UNICEF will support the national broadcasting company in developing a communication campaign on "responsible parenthood". UNICEF will facilitate the exchange of experiences between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries. UNICEF will also seek partnerships and support alliances with and between the private sector, academicians, parliamentarians, NGOs, policy makers, the media, and communities. UNICEF will support special studies and surveys to help the Government monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF will use the information collected to advocate measures ensuring that the best interests of the child prevail in all decision-making processes.

18. A detailed monitoring and evaluation plan will be developed. In annual joint reviews, UNICEF and the Government will draw on the monitoring and evaluation results to guide programme implementation. As a member of the United Nations country team, UNICEF will work with other United Nations agencies to achieve the child-related goals of the various international conferences.

**Estimated programme budget***Estimated programme cooperation, 2000–2004 a/**(In thousands of United States dollars)*

	<i>General resources</i>	<i>Supplementary funds</i>	<i>Total</i>
Prevention of malnutrition in children under two years of age	1 900	500	2 400
Disparity reduction	1 600	500	2 100
Improving quality of services	1 500	500	2 000
Children in need of special protection	1 700	500	2 200
Promotion and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of the Child	1 800	500	2 300
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 500</b>	<b>2 500</b>	<b>11 000</b>

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