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Operational activities segment

Provisional summary record of the 17th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 9 July 2002, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Kumalo. (South Africa)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

(a) Progress report on the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review
(*continued*)

Dialogue with the United Nations system country team for India

1. **The President** invited the members of the country team for India to address the Council on the theme of education.

2. **Mr. Bose** (Joint Secretary of Education, Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development) said that the small, innovative experiment in elementary education known as Janshala — meaning “community school” — was a unique partnership between the five United Nations agencies in India, the Federal Government and nine state governments, and under it schools had been set up both in city slums and in rural areas. It was based on micro-planning by the communities themselves at the village level, where local groups formulated strategies, and teachers and parents were involved in making improvements. Teachers working in a multigrade situation created a warm, dynamic atmosphere. The community involvement had had astounding results.

3. The aim of the Indian Government since independence had been free, compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. A series of national and externally assisted programmes, including Janshala, had been launched. The responsibility for education was shared by the Federal Government, the 28 state governments and the local units of self-government. India now had a 65-per-cent literacy rate and an enrolment ratio of 95 per cent up to grade 5 and 59 per cent in grades 6 to 8. Over 3 million teachers taught in over 800,000 elementary schools. Throughout, the effort had been to improve the quality of education by upgrading school equipment and teaching materials and the training of teachers. The Government had invested the significant outlay of over 4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in education, compared with external assistance for education that comprised barely 2 per cent as much. Yet it was estimated that over \$20 billion more would be needed to achieve universal

education within the next 10 years. In the past decade, the greatest strides had been made in basic education, but one half of the female population was still non-literate as opposed to one third of the males and there were great variations between and within regions. Special efforts were needed to reach all disadvantaged population groups.

4. A number of laws had been recently adopted to achieve the goal of universal education by 2010, but it was widely recognized that an empowered community was the key to achieving that goal, and therefore the Government had joined hands with the United Nations system in the Janshala programme, centred on community participation and ownership. Its objectives were to improve the performance of teachers in classrooms and ensure the full participation of girls and deprived children, in the process relying on alternative interventions and encouraging partnerships with non-governmental organizations. The programme covered 3 million children in 18,000 schools spread over 139 district units and 10 cities in 9 states.

5. Among the lessons learned from the Janshala programme was that community empowerment and involvement, even of non-literate communities, put education on a more sustainable footing. Janshala had highlighted the special needs of adolescent girls and children in urban slums. It had emerged as a laboratory for various innovations and shown that the adoption of those innovations in mainstream educational structures served to consolidate them. The partnership with the United Nations agencies, each bringing its own strengths, had created a synergy that had proved very effective.

6. **Ms. McSweeney** (United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative in India) observed that India was among the 18 pilot countries that had begun formulating the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in 1997, with close consultation between the United Nations agencies and the Indian Government, civil society partners, including the private sector and the media, and donors. Since then, the United Nations system had worked in a country team with its partners, giving priority to two strategic, cross-cutting themes: gender equality and decentralization. The heads of the various agencies constituted a decision-making group, and there were 11 thematic and inter-agency working groups on various issues, including education. Even with its modest 3-

per-cent contribution to the limited amount of official development assistance (ODA) allocated to India's social sector, the United Nations system had acted as a catalyst in promoting the universalization of elementary education.

7. The inter-agency working group on education, comprising representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had worked with representatives of the Government and of civil society, to develop new approaches to education. The joint Government/United Nations system programme on elementary education, known as Janshala, reflected the common vision. An integrated approach had been taken by the United Nations agencies and the five Government ministries and departments administering it, each bringing a rich spectrum of mandates, perspectives and special partnerships and a knowledge of global and national best-practices. At a time when the Government was operating larger, multidonor educational programmes, the strength and uniqueness of Janshala had proved to be that it focused exclusively on marginalized communities and was a community-driven programme in which parents, teachers and school administrators were all intimately involved in planning, providing and monitoring their children's education. The village education committees thus set up had been encouraged to empower themselves and take charge, and they had done so enthusiastically.

8. **Mr. Bussi** (International Labour Organization) said that when the Inter-agency Working Group on Education had been established in 1996, it had consulted widely with Government institutions at the national and state levels and with members of civil society, including non-governmental organizations already familiar with community-based primary education initiatives, before formulating the Janshala programme and beginning to implement the preparatory phase in 1997. The Janshala approach and strategies were forward-looking and gave priority to gender equality and decentralization. When UNDAF had been launched in India in 2000, Janshala had, in fact, been cited as UNDAF in action.

9. The management structure of Janshala consisted of four integrated levels, reflecting India's federal

system and the principles of decentralized, participatory planning and community participation. The education provided was based on the needs of the particular community. It had been decided that the most efficient way of channelling funds rapidly and with accountability from the national level to the villages and communities was by using the extensive network of UNICEF offices in the Indian states, while activities carried out at the national level were supported by UNDP.

10. The pioneering Janshala approach had yielded results. The Inter-agency Working Group, practising collective advocacy, had given impetus to original experiments that had extended the coverage and quality of primary education. The programme's focus on the education of deprived children in urban slums, for instance, had been taken up by the Government in its forthcoming five-year plan. The shared vision behind Janshala and the synergy and correlation of the activities of the various partners had ensured maximum impact. Funds had been disbursed efficiently at the state and local level with enough flexibility to accommodate community-led activities. Participatory decision-making had been central throughout. The national standing committee that guided the programme, which was chaired by a government representative and included representatives of all five United Nations agencies, members of civil society and academics, integrated the expertise of the different partners and was a forum for successful best practices. Joint participatory reviews by state-level representatives, members of the United Nations agencies and key actors in civil society had also offered a unique opportunity for inter-state exchange of good practices. Janshala had stimulated policy debate at the national level and inspired to new policies such as the inclusion of community-based education in the national programme for universalizing elementary education, and broader efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

11. The two UNDAF themes — strengthening decentralization and promoting gender equality — had been dominant in all phases of Janshala and, in keeping with UNDAF and other key national programmes, the needs and concerns of the people had been at its core. Increasing the number of girls in school had been a primary focus of Janshala, and to that end various new strategies had been devised, including increasing the awareness of parents, setting up remedial classes for

out-of-school girls, addressing gender relations in educational materials, and encouraging girls to form self-help groups.

12. Links had been established with other ongoing Government programmes, especially at the local level, in fields such as rural development, integrated child development, tribal development and urban development. The programme had also capitalized on successful interventions developed by the different agencies in other contexts, such as school sanitation, access to education for disabled children and the prevention and progressive elimination of child labour.

13. **Ms. Calivis** (United Nations Children's Fund) said that one of the key lessons learned from Janshala joint programming had been a shared understanding of how to achieve goals and a shared sense of direction among all members, as well as the clear delineation of the role to be played by each agency in accordance with its expertise, thus allowing flexibility in implementation.

14. The second lesson had to do with factors responsible for the success of the programme. The Government had been in control of the programme, which was part of an overarching national framework, and had been able to capitalize on the added value of United Nations involvement and its role in innovation and in reaching the hard-to-reach groups. The programme had offered a framework for passing along best practices and successes and had provided a forum for wide participation of non-governmental organizations, resource persons and academic institutions.

15. The third lesson related to the joint programming process, which had been participatory, focusing more on programme management and less on systemic issues, which had meant joint reviews and field trips and a common database. The fourth lesson learned was the importance of guiding principles rather than blueprints for collective action. Janshala had shown that establishing a premise for collaboration was critical in providing a framework for collective action and in allowing flexibility in responding to changes in the programme environment, funding requirements and in addressing emerging needs.

16. Joint programming was a complex process that brought together the knowledge, skills and experience of different agencies interacting at different levels with different partners and with a set of different tools,

within a common framework and for a common goal. The measure of its success was the impact which went beyond what each agency alone could contribute. The team was looking towards its next key milestone, the evaluation of the programme, which would be conducted before the end of the year. In the light of the results, the second phase of Janshala would be programmed, a task that would be facilitated since all United Nations agencies involved had harmonized their programming cycles.

17. **Mr. Zacharia** (Director, Elementary Education, and National Programmed Manager for the Janshala Programme) said that recently, the Ministry of Education had emphasized two themes: decentralization of education and promoting gender equity. India had a long historical tradition of autonomous regional governments, but during the period starting from independence in 1947 until the 1980s, most planning had taken place at the central government level, rather than the state or district level. The district was, however, an important government structure, and a major experiment had begun in 1994, when planning for the primary education programme had been shifted to the district level. The Janshala community education programme had taken that one step further by using the village — about five thousand people — as the basic unit of planning, and subdividing village units even further into blocks of about 100 people.

18. He presented the case study of Jharbhand, a district of 1.2 million people, which had 358 villages but only 158 schools. Sixty-five per cent of girls had not been enrolled in school, and 60 to 70 per cent of children did not have access to a school within 1 km of their homes. Furthermore, the community had shown little interest in education, believing it to be something the State should provide. The Janshala programme had come to the district in 1999-2000 and had conducted an initial survey of the community which had led to the development of a three-step plan. The first step had been a community awareness programme to raise interest in education. Next, microplanning had taken place, including the design of a district map which flagged each home where the children were enrolled in school. Finally, village plans and block plans were devised. Currently, 96 per cent of the boys and 87 per cent of the girls in the district were enrolled in school, and 90 new schools had been opened at locations chosen by the villages. Training for teachers was also

being provided in structures close to the villages. Village education committees, parent-teacher associations and various other committees had been formed to foster community involvement. The level of parental involvement was high, and every school had received some form of material input from the community, which created a definite sense of ownership. The major constraints encountered included resistance from teachers themselves to being trained in new teaching methods and such systemic problems as the shortage of qualified teachers and lack of infrastructure.

19. **Ms. Jain** (Member, Standing Committee, Janshala Programme) said that the problem in India was a situation of deeply ingrained gender discrimination, where a girl was viewed as a mini-adult with a woman's domestic responsibilities, and that view presented the biggest obstacle to girls' education. The Janshala programme represented a conceptual breakthrough by pairing adolescent girls with senior women, who saw the programme as an opportunity to add new purpose to their lives. She used as an illustration an 18-year-old girl and her 40-year-old unmarried aunt, living in an urban slum, who had been trained as teachers in the programme. Not only had their own lives changed as a result, but the community perception of their roles had been altered.

20. **Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana) requested clarification of the division of responsibility between the communities and the Government, how financing arrangements were undertaken, and the degree of involvement of formal Government units.

21. **Mr. Nkingiye** (Burundi) asked what the long-term effects of the Janshala programme would be on the educational system in India.

22. **Mr. Katayama** (Japan) said that Janshala applied only to the primary education sector. He would like to know more about how India planned to address secondary education at the village level, including such problems of infrastructure as roads and sanitation. He also would like to know how the programme planned to measure outcome and evaluate capacity-building.

23. **Mr. Bose** (Joint Secretary for Elementary Education, Indian Ministry of Human Resources Development) said that the central Government was responsible for the funding of the Janshala programme through its commitment to universal elementary education. Most communities, however, had added

value to the Government funding and made it go further by donating their labour and materials for infrastructure development or supporting the village teacher. With regard to follow-up and impact, the successful innovations of Janshala were being passed on to the national universal elementary education programme. In districts where programmes had been established earlier, those innovations allowed plans to be better informed and more successful. The focus of universal elementary education was on the grades up to grade 5. The success of the programme would indeed create pressure on the secondary system, but for the moment, 66 per cent of the national education budget was focused on elementary education because there was still a great deal of catching up to do.

24. **Mr. Zacharia** (Director, Elementary Education, National Programme Manager, Janshala Programme, India) said that, as part of the decentralization process, a significant proportion of the central Government funding had been transferred from the district level to the block level.

25. **Ms. Jain** (Member, Standing Committee, Janshala Programme) said that the programme had experimented with concepts to give teachers fresh techniques to work with and greater motivation.

26. **Ms. McSweeney** (United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative in India) said that evaluation had been ongoing from the outset of the Janshala programme, both at the grass-roots level and through annual reviews in each of the nine states where it operated. The emphasis was placed on successes in using local culture to get the message across, changing mindsets and behaviours and overcoming social constraints. A formal, independent evaluation would be conducted before the end of the year.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.