

Statement by Dr. Shreeranjana, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, at the Annual Session of UNICEF's Executive Board on June 05, 2012

**Madam President,**

My felicitations to the Executive Director Mr. Anthony Lake for his extremely informative statement and I would also complement UNICEF for an insightful report on the progress and achievements against the Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP), which has been placed for consideration before the Board. The Executive Board Meeting is very timely and important as it provides an opportunity to reaffirm our collective commitment to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of children all over the world.

As we review the progress of the MTSP, it is indeed pertinent to frame the discussion in the context of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), so that we are able to forge synergies within the overall policy framework of the UN System. However, some basic paradigm differences do remain in the contours of the development approach, which in my delegation's view must be premised on the principle of "No one size fits all".

My delegation compliments UNICEF for its initiative "Child Survival - Call for Action" and India remain committed to its success. My delegation also welcomes the call of the Executive Director for putting children at the heart of sustainable development, especially by focussing on initiatives in primary education, early childhood care and child nutrition. It is indeed a timely call and merits positive consideration of the Executive Board.

Another key facet of India's joint initiative with countries of the South, has been along with Brazil and South Africa, our IBSA initiative and some of the projects already implemented under IBSA Trust Fund with a special focus on children, include a construction of a Hospital for Children with special needs in Cambodia and delivery of safe drinking water in Cape Verde. However, the paradigm construct of South-South cooperation requires that developing countries have the policy space for their own development. It is distinct from that of North-South development cooperation, with the clear understanding that South-South cooperation can supplement North-South Cooperation but cannot substitute or dilute the obligation and quantum of North-South cooperation. Given the vast difference in development levels between countries of the North and those from the South, it is important that development projects under South-South Cooperation are not straight-jacketed in terms of rigid rules and regulations or policy prescriptions. Flexibility and adaptability is the key to the success of South-South Cooperation. These, we believe, must not be compromised.

Also, UNICEF country teams, while implementing country programmes must also aim to address the national priorities and attempt to harmonise the goals of UNICEF with the national government's so that it does result in stronger national ownership and increased alignment with the UN system.

**Madam President,** India is home to the largest number of children in the world. The Constitution of India and International Commitments provide affirmative actions relating to child rights of survival, development, protection and participation. We are committed to the cause of ensuring basic rights and needs of children with protective and nurturing policies and programmatic enablement to help them reach their full potential. Our plans and programmes acknowledge and are oriented to these tasks in an 'inclusive growth' and free from any discrimination of class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender.

Several positive developments happened during the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan towards fulfillment of India's commitments to child development, nutrition, early childhood education, child rights and protection etc. To name a few, the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 with greater focus on education of girl children; universalisation of the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) Programme to reach out to each and every habitation of the country, focusing on the areas inhabited by Scheduled Casts/Scheduled Tribes/minorities etc. covering currently about 100 million beneficiaries.

In addition, two new schemes have been launched on pilot basis - one for empowerment of adolescent girls to provide them nutrition and life skill education targeting about 10 million AGs; another one on conditional maternity benefit scheme targeting about 1.25 million pregnant and lactating women every year. These would effectively contribute towards breaking the inter-generational cycle of undernutrition. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has been expanded with several new elements of maternal and neonatal care. The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) which aims to reduce their vulnerability to situations and actions that could lead to abuse, neglect, exploitation, abandonment and separation for children in difficult circumstances has been launched. The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was established to ensure that all legislative and administrative measures are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective. Issues of child rights have also received impetus through decentralization of political and planning processes wherein more and more women are getting represented in local bodies of governance and implementation.

**Madam President,** our progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets remains uneven. The large scale of maternal and child under nutrition remains a challenge for India in reaching the Millennium Development Goals on child nutrition, survival and development. Massive investment in the health sector has led to drop in infant mortality rate from 58 per 1000 live births in 2005 to 47 in 2010. With a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 212 deaths per 100,000 live births, we are making progress on MDG-5. India has not reported a single polio case since January 2011. The number of newly detected HIV positive cases has dropped by over 50% in the last decade. India has reached the target on access to improved drinking water sources, yet improving sanitation and drinking water quality remains a major challenge. Progress is evident in universalizing primary education, and we are

likely to achieve this MDG. Enrolment and completion rates of girls in primary school have improved and are catching up with those of boys, as are primary and elementary completion rates.

However, there are inequities based on rural-urban divide, gender imbalance and child nutrition. Nutrition has received priority attention in India's development agenda. The Prime Minister's National Nutrition Council has recognized the nutrition challenges in the country and has recommended actions. The Government is also galvanizing multi-sectoral action plans in 200 high burden districts for addressing the challenge of child malnutrition as well as a campaign to generate awareness and visibility to Nutrition with technical support from UNICEF.

**Madam President,** to conclude, we expect UNICEF to continue giving support to major flagship programmes in India through its country programme. Given the scale, reach and capacity of such programmes, this support will contribute to the sustained achievement of key national and globally agreed development goals including the MDGs. Government's efforts to improve early childhood care and education (ECCE) outcomes through commensurate investments is an important area for UNICEF also to contribute. **These must be done within the framework of overall National policies and programmes.** We expect a detailed plan of action capturing the diverse needs of various sectors and regions for the next programme cycle. I would like to reiterate our support to UNICEF in fulfilling our common vision and goals for nurturing and fostering child friendly environments.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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