



## Overview

### Open Dialogue - UN Conference Room 5, Tuesday 30 January 2006

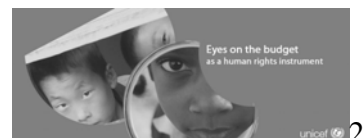
The Open Dialogue took place at the UN Secretariat on 30 January. Over 60 Missions attended both morning and afternoon sessions, including many delegates of Member States of UNICEF's Executive Board and the Peace Building Commission, several of them staying for the full meeting. Many attendees also came from UNICEF and a few from other UN agencies, including the Peace Building Support Office. There was a high level of interaction and interest by participants throughout the meeting.

### Agenda:

- Introduction of the concept of human rights based approach to the budget, why it is important.
- Detailed presentations on Ecuador experience – principles, context, process, outcomes and lessons learned.
- Presentation from the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation on importance of sharing experiences between countries.
- Presentation by NGO International Budget Project of Open Budget Index, which rates countries on the level of transparency and participation in their budgetary process.
- Presentation on experience of UNICEF and the UN Country Team in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in working with government and with other major donors to agree on public policy options for the realization of human rights, including budgetary measures to support elimination of user fees in basic health and primary education and low cost improvements in rural water and sanitation.
- World Bank presentations on their experience in social policy and budget work, especially in Latin America, and their views on the importance of the human rights perspective
- Q&A and discussion

## Key ideas emerging from the dialogue:

- The budget is a political instrument that reflects the vision and priorities of a society, including the value it places on the fulfillment of human rights, beginning with children
- It is essential to work with budgets in order to ensure sufficient resources to guarantee children's rights, including universal access to quality basic social services – key to achieving the MDGs
- The specific role to be played by UNICEF/UN in relation to national budgets will depend on the context and needs of each country.
- UNICEF's work in Ecuador together with sister UN agencies, focused on supporting a process of dialogue and consensus building among diverse sectors of society regarding budgetary priorities (including universal access to basic health and education), and how to generate resources for them, leading to real increases in social spending.
- Several key elements in promoting this process of social participation are: openness and proactive position of the government; transparency and availability of information; technical and communication efforts toward making budgets understandable for everyone, including demonstration of the relationship between social and economic aspects of development as well as with peace and security; public monitoring of budgetary execution and results in terms of realization of child rights; empowerment of society to participate in a meaningful manner in the debate on budget and fiscal policies; development of mechanisms and channels for participation as well as articulation of concrete proposals; UNICEF/UN maintaining a single, consistent discourse centered on the idea of building a better society based on the fulfillment of the rights of all citizens
- The work of the UN Country Team in DRC demonstrates the importance of the UN's role in achieving consensus among donor agencies, including the World Bank, to look beyond current resource limitations to formulate public policies including budgets, aimed at achieving human rights-based aspirations; coherence between donor positions, based on human rights principles, is particularly important in countries like the DRC which are heavily dependent on external resources.
- Added values of the rights approach: It adds 'bite' to the idea of accountability by formalizing the nature of public obligation and helping citizens to make claims for delivery, for voice and service provision and for information; also, when working with very restrictive resources, a focus on core human rights obligations can be helpful to prioritize allocation (World Bank).
- The UN System has an important role to play in promoting social consensus and participation around budgets because of its impartiality and its normative role: i.e. universal values and neutrality with regard to national political interests. Because the wellbeing of children is a goal around which it is relatively easy to achieve consensus, it can be a good entry point in terms of constructing initial agreements about budgetary priorities.
- The UN can be more effective if it speaks with a common voice on these issues, even if one or other agency is taking the lead at country level. Both the Ecuador and DRC experiences are examples of interagency coherence and collaboration.



- The budget is an area for fruitful collaboration between the World Bank and the UN agencies. Each has different skills and perspectives to contribute to the budget debate.

### **Follow up:**

- A CD-ROM containing a more detailed report of the event with possible ways forward and summaries and content of the presentations will be prepared and shared shortly.
- There is a need to document and share good experiences between countries – and in particular in promoting South-South sharing and cooperation. The Special Unit for South-South Cooperation offered to help fund a publication on good examples. UNICEF plans to work together to identify and disseminate good examples.
- World Bank is interested in working together with UNICEF and the broader UN System on this issue, and on rights-based social policies more broadly. It has specifically been agreed to jointly work on a study in Ecuador.
- UNICEF will work together with the other UNDG agencies to share these and other experiences in rights-based programming toward strengthening the capacities of UN Country Teams.
- Follow-up dialogues will be organized in order to further deepen the sharing of experiences and capacities in this field, both within UNICEF and with the broader UN System and interested countries.

