

14 June 2005

Original : English

Annual session 2005
13 to 24 June 2005, New York
Item 15 of the provisional agenda
Field visits

**Report on the joint field visit of the Executive Boards of
UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP to Azerbaijan (8 – 15 May 2005)**



**Report on the joint field visit of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA,
UNICEF and WFP to Azerbaijan**

I. INTRODUCTION

Organization

1. Nineteen members¹ of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) made a joint field visit to Azerbaijan from 8 to 15 May 2005.

Programme of work

See Annex II

Objectives

2. The purpose of the joint field visit was to help members of the Executive Boards to:
 - understand the modalities and extent of the United Nations agencies' contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
 - understand how the United Nations agencies support the Government in achieving the MDGs;
 - review the partnerships between the United Nations agencies and bilateral donors;
 - understand how the United Nations agencies can work together synergistically at the country level; and
 - to interact with the national authorities and various stakeholders.

Activities

3. The mission paid attention to the following:
 - How and to what extent do the United Nations agencies contribute to achieving the MDGs?

¹ See list of participants (Annex I).

United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)/Common Country Assessment (CCA) in Azerbaijan

4. The United Nations country team (UNCT) in Azerbaijan completed a CCA in August 2003 that identified challenges to social and economic development such as unemployment and underemployment, policy and institutional weaknesses, deterioration in the health, education and social-protection systems, emigration of skilled labour and the unresolved conflict in and around the Nagorno Karabakh region of the Azerbaijan Republic.
5. The UNDAF builds on the findings of the CCA and consultations with the Government and development partners. It identifies development objectives towards which the United Nations agencies in Azerbaijan will contribute in the period 2005–2009. These fall under two national priorities: (i) creation of a system of governance that ensures an enabling environment for development and (ii) poverty reduction and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
6. In line with these objectives, the United Nations agencies in Azerbaijan will support (i) the Government's efforts to use oil revenues as a means of increasing employment and investment in a diversified economy and (ii) the state's initiatives in a variety of areas to improve its delivery of services and its protection of the rights of the entire population.
7. The second national priority on which the United Nations agencies will concentrate is meeting the basic health and educational needs of the population. The United Nations agencies will help Azerbaijan to (i) increase the efficiency and quality of health services, (ii) strengthen family-based health, nutrition and child rearing practices and (iii) combat health problems of particular concern. The agencies will also support active learning, child-friendly primary schooling and community-based early childhood education.
8. The United Nations agencies will promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, development of civil society and respect for human rights. These crosscutting issues will be central in all United Nations programming during the UNDAF period.
9. The CCA and UNDAF have laid the framework of assistance for the United Nations for 2005–2009. The recent WFP food security and nutrition survey highlighted concerns with regard to food security and nutrition in some rural areas and identified the vulnerable populations and the regions in which they are located, which will facilitate needs-based assistance.
 - How do the United Nations agencies support the Government in achieving the MDGs?

Implementation of agency programmes

10. The **UNDP** Country Programme (2005–2009) for the Republic of Azerbaijan emerged from two national consultation processes: (i) preparation and adoption of the State Programme for Poverty Reduction and Economic Development (SPPRED) and (ii) preparation of the UNDAF. Both processes engaged the government, parliament, United Nations agencies, international financial institutions (IFIs), bilateral donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. During the first joint strategy meeting in Azerbaijan in March 2004, the Government reviewed and validated the country programme and its linkage to the UNDAF.
11. Azerbaijan's development challenges most relevant to the work and mandate of UNDP are interrelated: (i) the need to translate oil-related revenues into investment and employment growth in the non-oil sectors of the economy – “converting black gold into human gold” – and (ii) the need for improved efficiency, transparency and accountability in the public sector.

12. SPPRED defines a path towards poverty reduction and achievement of the MDGs in a context of overall economic development. The state oil fund (SOFAR) provides a mechanism for shielding the country from the difficulties typically faced by oil-dependent economies.
13. The National Information and Communication Technologies Strategies (NICTS) affirm the Government's commitment to improving the delivery of public services, facilitating private commerce and expanding the use and dissemination of information among civil society and the public.
14. SPPRED aims to stimulate geographically balanced development throughout the country. A national employment strategy and a public investment programme are among the policy initiatives expected in the near future.
15. UNDP supported the creation of an ombudsman's office with regional sub-offices to promote human rights in Azerbaijan.
16. UNDP and the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action are working together to develop national capacity for dealing with landmines.
17. UNDP has promoted environmental protection and awareness in the country. As part of the regional Caspian Environment Programme, which addresses the problems of habitat destruction and pollution in the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan and the other four Caspian littoral states have conducted a trans-boundary diagnostic analysis of environmental concerns, signed a framework convention on the Caspian Sea and approved a regional strategic action plan.
18. UNFPA assistance to Azerbaijan began in 1994 on a project basis, focusing on meeting emergency reproductive health and population needs. The first country programme, approved at US\$5.5 million, aimed to strengthen national capacity in the reproductive health and population sectors.
19. Reproductive health indicators are conflicting: according to the 1988 multiple indicators cluster survey, maternal and infant mortality rates are notably higher than those reported by official statistics.
20. There are regional and urban-rural disparities in levels of infant, child and maternal mortality as a consequence of inequalities in access to prenatal care and safe delivery services. Years of under-financing have led to deterioration of the physical infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.
21. The incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS is increasing. Intravenous drug use is the most common mode of HIV transmission, followed by sexual contact and mother-to-child transmission. The early onset of sexual activity, growth in the commercial sex industry, gender-based violence and trafficking in women and young girls are causes for concern.
22. The CCA indicates that despite the recent economic recovery and progress in structural adjustment reforms, there is still a need for external assistance if the MDGs are to be achieved.
23. The UNDAF outlines the roles of the UNCT in supporting national poverty-alleviation strategies and in addressing the needs of the social and health sectors.
24. Programme priorities, based on the needs identified in the CCA, have two areas of focus: (i) reproductive health and (ii) population and development strategies.

25. The UNICEF programme is based on the CCA, the UNDAF and national priorities as outlined by the PRSP. The preparation of the 2005–2009 programme of cooperation began in 2003 with the formulation of the CCA, a process that continued through preparation of the UNDAF, which was finalized in March 2004.
26. The CCA outlined several major issues relating to children, notably high levels of child mortality and malnutrition and growing numbers of children in need of special protection. The underlying causes of increased vulnerability among children were identified with inadequate social systems and capacities.
27. The goal of the programme is to support the Government in progressively realizing the rights of children and women and creating an enabling environment for children. In doing this, it aims to enhance capacities of families, communities and civil society to nurture and protect children, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.
28. Major outcomes of the country programme are improved survival rates and improved nutritional status among children and women, increased participation by children and women and enhanced protection of children from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.
29. To achieve these results, the country programme will operate at the national and local levels. At the national level, policy development will be oriented towards strengthening national capacities for data collection and management of information systems in accordance with international standards. At the local level, an integrated approach will be adopted for multi-sectoral activities and services to benefit women, children and young people. Community-driven models of early childhood education and development will be implemented to inform the policy-making process. Expanding and sustaining partnerships will be vital for creating an environment conducive to the realization of the rights of children and women.
30. UNICEF focuses on (i) evidence-based advocacy for policy reform in the social sectors, (ii) capacity-building for key government and non-governmental institutions with obligations to protect children's rights and (iii) development of models of good practice with potential for scaling up to implementation at the national level. UNICEF has been centrally involved in policy dialogue on health, education and child welfare systems reform. Partnership is pursued with organizations working on similar issues, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for the Demographics and Health Survey, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the field of early-childhood development and the World Bank in the health and education sectors.
31. The country programme addresses several national priorities set out in the PRSP, including improved quality of and equality in access to basic health and education services, reform of the existing system of social protection to give more protection to the vulnerable and improved living conditions and opportunities for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs).
32. The UNDAF and the UNICEF programme take account of the MDGs, the goals of "A World Fit for Children" and the priorities of the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* are the foundation for the country programme.
33. **WFP** has been providing food assistance in Azerbaijan since late 1993. The targeted beneficiaries include IDPs and other vulnerable groups. Following several phases of emergency operation, during which an average of 200,000 beneficiaries were assisted, WFP shifted the nature of its activities from relief to recovery.

34. The current protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) 10168, which commenced in January 2003, aims to promote food security among vulnerable groups through targeted interventions, particularly in rural areas with high concentrations of IDPs.
35. Food for education (FFE) was introduced to increase enrolment and attendance rates and reduce drop-outs, especially among girls. The schoolchildren are receiving dry take-home rations once every two months. The schools involved are in the areas with high concentrations of IDPs; the students are overwhelmingly from IDP families.
36. Involvement of UNICEF in the FFE programme has improved the quality of teaching and enabled students to acquire better learning skills. In partnership with the Ministry of Health, WFP is in the process of carrying out a deworming programme.
37. Support to pre-school caregivers continues through a project linked with WFP/UNICEF initiative, in which WFP provides food-for-work rations to 257 female caregivers, while UNICEF provides technical support and services and supplies for these centers hosting 2,570 IDP-children.
38. The current PRRO will come to an end in December 2005, and even with the intended reductions in numbers of beneficiaries there still will be a caseload of 126,000 beneficiaries by the end of the project cycle. The recently concluded food security and nutrition survey revealed that in the absence of food assistance at least two thirds of IDP households would become food-insecure. It is therefore critical in the short term to continue food aid to IDPs to avoid any negative impact on their nutritional and health status, particularly that of women and children. WFP will design its next programme on the basis of this finding.
39. The exit strategy of the current PRRO was based on the expectations that (i) the economy would have recovered, (ii) sustained investments in new industries would allow the government to cater fully for its social-safety network and (iii) the conflict in and around the Nagorno Karabakh region of the Azerbaijan Republic would be resolved, allowing thousands of IDPs return to their places of origin where they would have more opportunities to become self-reliant. However, these expectations have not yet materialized.
40. WFP is in the process of designing its next PRRO on the basis of the results of the food security and nutrition survey. Besides the IDP population, the report also revealed that 27 percent of rural households are food-insecure, particularly in Lankaran Astar and Ganja Gazakh. About 20 percent of the children covered by the survey were described by their mothers as smaller than normal, a manifestation of poor maternal nutrition; about 33 percent of children aged 6–59 months are chronically malnourished and about half of the women and children tested for anaemia were classified as at least mildly anaemic. In view of the high prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition, WFP is considering an expansion of the current FFE programme and the introduction of mother-and-child health (MCH) programmes and FFW for vulnerable households.

Joint programming

41. Joint programming and joint initiatives by two or more United Nations agencies enhanced programming efficiency and impact in many areas. Collaboration between UNICEF and WFP in raising the quality of education, school attendance and family nutritional status could be highlighted. A low-cost family-based childcare and development programme strengthened 34 child-development centres for 2,570 children in 14 IDP/refugee settlements; 250 of the women caregivers were involved in FFW.

42. UNICEF and WFP enabled 5,300 children from 99 primary schools to benefit from a school feeding programme combined with the introduction of child-centred learning methodologies, teacher training and parental involvement in school governance.
43. Other highlights of joint programming include support for the government's nationwide Labour Force Survey, which was used in preparing a National Employment Strategy supported by ILO and UNDP. The Caspian Ecological Investment Forum in Baku enabled countries of the Caspian Environment Programme to present priority projects for environmental protection, natural resource management, economic development and improved living standards to potential investors and donors, supported by UNDP and the World Bank.
44. The Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action coordinated support from several donors, including UNDP and UNICEF, for clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs) and reducing their effects on economic and social development. UNDP and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) are formulating the second phase of a project to build the capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
45. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNDP are coordinating efforts to enhance United Nations system actions related to human rights. A Regional Academy for Digital Image Technology has been established in Azerbaijan for training in the restoration and preservation of cultural heritage, supported by UNDP and the United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
46. Collaboration in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care took place through the revived HIV/AIDS Theme Group. Collaboration by UNDP, UNOPS and WHO improved availability of safe blood through the blood transfusion system chaired by UNICEF. The theme group has developed an implementation-support plan and advised the Government on HIV/AIDS goals and indicator frameworks for inclusion in the new human-development programme. Most of the resources available to fight HIV/AIDS will shortly be committed by the Global Funds, so UNICEF's role as the major United Nations agency on the Country-Coordination Mechanisms for the Global Funds and Chair of the United Nations theme group will be important in ensuring coherence and harmony. The UNDAF contains a country programme outcome on HIV/AIDS that is common to UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF; development of the joint programme is going ahead in the theme group. UNICEF has focused on youth-friendly health services, prevention of mother-to-child transmission and peer education. Joint programming increased the capacity of the civil society, particularly religious organizations, to sensitize and inform communities on HIV/AIDS issues and prevention (UNAIDS and UNDP), and enabled the HIV/AIDS Resource Center to operate a website with the country's only substantial source of HIV/AIDS information (UNAIDS and UNDP).

The functioning of the UNCT

47. The agencies of the UNCT worked together in 2004 to enhance national efforts to achieve the MDGs. The success of the Azerbaijan UNCT in fostering the linkage between the MDGs and the SPPRED is acknowledged in a 2004 report on joint programming from the UNDP Administrator and UNFPA Executive Director to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board.
48. The joint MDG project, the United Nations Poverty Theme Group and coordinated activities by agencies helped the SPPRED secretariat's poverty monitoring unit (PMU) to produce reliable and timely data and analysis.

United Nations Security Council adopted four resolutions on the matter in 1993; the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has been mediating to resolve the dispute between the parties, with their agreement, and diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict continue.

57. The CCA and UNDAF state that there are 800,000 IDPs and refugees.

b) Economic and Social context

58. Azerbaijan has experienced a prolonged and difficult social and economic transition. A parallel reality of rapid economic growth and persistent poverty affects all aspects of development in Azerbaijan.
59. Sound macro-economic policies have ensured economic stability; energy-related foreign direct investment has generated high real growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in recent years – 9.9 percent in 2001, 10.6 percent in 2002 and 11.2 percent in 2003.
60. The benefits of rapid economic growth have not, however, been felt by the majority of the population. About 44.7 percent live in poverty and their social indicators are deteriorating. To combat poverty and accelerate social reforms, the Government has aligned the MDGs to its situation and is discussing continuation of the present SPPRED for 2003–2005 through a ten-year sustainable development strategy.
61. Establishing and strengthening good governance in the ten-year programme (2006–2015) will be critical in the light of the expected 300 percent increase in GDP as a result of completion of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. It is also vital if public services are to be reformed and made more effective and accountable and thus serve the poorest families.

c) Humanitarian context

62. Azerbaijan is one of the seven lowest-income countries in Europe and Central Asia. At independence in 1991, Azerbaijan faced the challenge of managing the transition to a market economy and pluralist system that respects the rights of individuals, which was compounded by the conflict in and around the Nagorno Karabakh region of the Azerbaijan Republic.
63. A large number of internal displacements has since been a major challenge; many IDPs are still living in sub-standard shelters. Deprived of land and livelihoods, they have little access to employment. The Government links integration and settlement of IDPs to the return of the occupied territories, so IDPs remain highly dependent on government and international assistance.
64. Apart from the Government, United Nations agencies are involved in providing humanitarian assistance to IDPs. The Government is very concerned that the interest of the international community in IDPs is fading away.

PROJECT VISITS

1. Field trip to WFP Project,² Imishli district.
2. Field trip to UNFPA Project,³ Salyan district, and UNICEF/World Bank project, Saylan district.
3. Field trip to WFP, UNDP and UNICEF Project,⁴ Fizuli district.
4. Field trip to UNICEF Project,⁵ Guba district.

III. MAIN FINDINGS AND GENERAL COMMENTS

65. During the visit to Azerbaijan, members of the Executive Boards had the opportunity to met and interact with high-level authorities, representatives of the international community posted in the country and NGOs, journalists and religious leaders. The mission also met with the UNCT, visited and learned about projects in place led by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The mission identified the following main findings.

Strengths

- The mission found that there was a good level of political dialogue between UNCT and the Government. This is a positive sign that could contribute to strengthening the long-term vision of a partnership between Azerbaijan and the United Nations.
- The UNCT shows a good level of coordination and interagency cooperation, reflected in various joint initiatives. The resident coordinator plays an important role in this.
- The successful experience of the UNCT is reflected in its leadership and ability to interact with various actors in adopting and implementing the CCA and UNDAF.
- The mission recognized the important efforts made by the UNCT in supporting the Government in moves towards achievement of the MDGs as reflected in SPPRED.
- In terms of joint efforts by the Government and the United Nations system to achieve the MDGs in Azerbaijan, the mission commends the Government for its decision to include an MDG 9 named “Good Governance”. This approach reflects the political will to strengthen the rule of law, democracy and respect and to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is essential if the Government is to focus on compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly protecting the rights of children, which are not well reflected in the MDGs.
- The mission noted the steps taken by the Government, with technical advice from UNICEF, to implement progressively the the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard, preparation of the second periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and of the NGOs’ report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child were commended.
- The mission welcomes the important contribution of WFP assistance in Azerbaijan, in particular (i) its outstanding efforts to promote food security among vulnerable groups through targeted interventions in rural areas with high concentrations of IDPs, and (ii) its

² See annex III

³ See annex IV

⁴ See annex V

⁵ See annex VI

activities to provide an incentive for school attendance, to prevent primary schools children from dropping out and to address micronutrient deficiencies.

- The mission noted with satisfaction the Government's adoption of the State Programme for the Improvement of Living Conditions of Refugees and IDPs and Employment Generation and its first positive results in terms of building new settlements and offering IDPs decent living conditions and better opportunities for employment and self-sufficiency.
- With increasing oil revenues, the Government is gradually taking over greater responsibility for food assistance to IDPs. Continued involvement by the international community is still needed, however. The food distribution system operated by WFP was useful in providing food assistance with substantial government contributions when WFP operations faced a serious pipeline break in January 2005.
- The mission highlights the important contribution of UNIFEM in promoting respect for women rights in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia through its regional project "Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building in the Southern Caucasus (2001–2006)". The gender considerations need to be further mainstreamed in other UNCT projects and activities of the UNCT, in particular to contribute to meeting the special needs of IDPs.
- The mission acknowledges the range of partnerships between the United Nations and major donors and development organizations, and the successful leveraging of resources. Good examples include the strategic partnership between UNICEF and ADB on early childhood development and with the EU on child protection.
- The Food Security and Nutrition Survey, which covered six economic zones, was the first of its kind carried out in Azerbaijan. The mission recognizes the role of the Office of the Republican Commission for International Humanitarian Assistance in facilitating the independent assessment.

Weaknesses

- Azerbaijan is a country in transition; opportunities and challenges therefore coexist with political, economic and social conditions that will have to be overcome through joint efforts by Azerbaijani society and the Government, with assistance from the international community where needed.
- The mission found that there is room for improvement in terms of coordination and synergies between the UNCT, the Bretton Woods Institutions and bilateral actors by creating a formal framework for policy dialogue in the group and with the Government.
- High rates of poverty are a critical area that needs to be attended to. The state programme for improving the living conditions of refugees and IDPs and increasing employment is a step forward. However, it should be complemented by other initiatives that could work together with the UNCT. On the other hand, poverty affects a wide range of people other than IDPs and includes non-monetary aspects such as health, education, choice, opportunities and human capabilities.
- The mission acknowledges that there is a discrepancy between the Government and the UNCT with regard to standardization of data collection. The mission was informed about the steps that the Government is taking to tackle this issue. The discrepancy is very serious; the magnitude of the infant mortality problem is significantly underestimated, the result of which is inadequate policy choices. The Government has yet to take serious steps to deal with the discrepancies, though recognition of their existence in the PRSP/SPPRED is a step in the right direction.

Opportunities

- Azerbaijan has an economy in transition. The projection for this year is about 18 percent of gross national product (GDP) resulting from oil revenues and predictions of economic growth in the coming years. These special circumstances are expected to contribute to changes in the role of the United Nations, which is gradually moving towards robust policy dialogue, advocacy, support strategies and an overall vision of the development of Azerbaijan.
- In view of an expected surge in oil revenues starting in 2005 and the commitment to spend these revenues on development of the non-oil sector and improved living conditions for IDPs, the Government should consider a significant increase in its contribution to the United Nations country programmes in Azerbaijan.
- The mission was informed by high-level authorities about their commitment to achieving the MDGs, with particular reference to progress in implementing MDG 9: good governance. The UNCT has an important role in assisting the Government and civil society to accomplish this task.
- The Government has expressed its commitment to social policy reform in the areas of child protection, education and health. The UNCT is well positioned to continue advocating for social policy reform as reflected in the UNDAF to address vulnerable groups more effectively and ensure that education and health are available for all. Important ongoing initiatives include the inter-ministerial task force preparing the State Programme on De-Institutionalization and the dialogue on education with UNICEF, the World Bank and the Ministry of Education.
- In the context of the rights of the child, the mission acknowledges the will of the Government and the efforts of UNICEF to conduct an accelerated process of de-institutionalizing children, which should be seen as part of a wider effort to improve the child-protection system for the better protection of all vulnerable children, thus strengthening the Government's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such reform involves (i) development of a system of social services, (ii) social allowances for vulnerable families, (iii) public awareness emphasizing the rights of all children, (iv) alternative community models of care and (v) promotion of school inclusion.
- The mission acknowledges the importance of gender issues and the advancement of women, development of civil society and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as cross-cutting objectives, as reflected in the UNDAF. The role of the UNCT should be to reinforce its current dialogue with the Government and civil society on these matters.
- The UNCT has promoted an effective technical approach in its dialogue with the Government with a view to improving health expenditure and implementing a more flexible allocation of resources based on per capita calculation for a basic healthcare package as opposed to the current system based on the number of hospital beds.
- The conflict in and around the Nagorno Karabakh region of the Azerbaijan Republic created large numbers of refugees and IDPs. After more than ten years of displacement, many IDPs still live in makeshift temporary locations. The mission acknowledges the role of the UNCT in continuing to support government efforts to address the needs of vulnerable groups.
- The mission welcomes the role of the UNCT in promoting innovative approaches to intensifying the public awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS, in particular the initiative to involve religious leaders.

- The mission was informed by high-level authorities about SPPRED, which can contribute to poverty reduction and achievement of the MDGs. The UNCT focuses on encouraging a stronger link between SPPRED and the national budget allocation system.
- The mission recognizes the efforts of the UNCT in promoting a joint programme to ensure that its activities have greater impact at the national level. However, there are areas in which a joint programming approach might be more effective in terms of the role of the United Nations in coming years.

Threats

- The mission was informed by civil actors, members of the international community posted in the country and government authorities about the risks and threats affecting future economic growth and the consolidation of democratic institutions for the management of hydrocarbon revenues.
- High rates of unemployment and inflation are threats to the Government and civil society. The UNCT can help to ease the tensions by assisting in capacity-building, in particular promoting small-scale and medium-scale enterprises and micro-credit projects.
- There is awareness of the need to promote an integral approach to economic and social development based on hydrocarbon revenues. There is a risk that investing in economic growth without promoting social development may increase inequality and the possibility of a crisis.
- There is an urgent need for steps towards implementing reforms of public services in the health, education and child welfare sectors that will ensure access, equity and quality if the Government is to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and meet its commitments to the MDGs.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Azerbaijan has a unique opportunity to eliminate poverty and to achieve the MDGs by 2015, to which the United Nations can contribute. The mission recognizes that the slogan “Let’s convert black gold into human gold” is a powerful message that reflects strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to Azerbaijan.
- The mission considers that the UNCT is playing a strategic role by moving towards robust policy dialogue, advocacy, support strategies and an overall vision of Azerbaijan’s development, an approach that should be encouraged for the future.
- One of the most pressing requirements in protecting vulnerable groups is policy change, involving increasing and rationalizing resources for health, education and child protection. The UNCT should continue to contribute through innovations, good practices and strong advocacy with the Government.
- The mission observed the catalytic effect of the UNCT’s business methods, the positive response to which was evident in willingness to collaborate.
- The mission recognizes the important role of WFP in Azerbaijan and the need to extend its presence. The current PRRO will come to an end in December 2005, but even with the intended reductions in beneficiary numbers, there will be 126,000 beneficiaries by the end of the project cycle whose food-security situation will need to be reassessed.
- The Executive Boards would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to all those involved in preparing the visit, in particular the UNCT, and the Government of Azerbaijan for its hospitality and willingness to collaborate with the mission.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE VISITS

- Members of the Executive Boards should have more time to interact, reflect and discuss experiences after any visit to projects in the field.
- There is a need for more time for discussion between members of the Executive Boards and the UNCT.
- Findings and experiences of joint field visits should be disseminated as widely as possible, perhaps by posting the reports on the websites of the Executive Boards.

Annex I**List of participants in the UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF AND WFP Executive Boards Joint Field Visit to Azerbaijan, 8 – 15 May 2005.****Head of Delegation**

H.E. Harold Forsyth Mejia
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Peru
WFP

Deputy Head of Delegation

Mr Mykola Melenevsky
Deputy Head of the United Nations Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine
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Rapporteur

Mr Carlos Enrique García González
Minister Counsellor
Permanent Mission of El Salvador
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Co-Rapporteurs

Mr Amanuel Giorgio
First Secretary
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Mr Yoshihiro Kuraya
Second Secretary
Embassy of Japan
WFP

Ms Torill Wanvik
Adviser
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UNFPA

Field Visit Participants

H.E. Ernesto Aranibar Quiroga
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Bolivia
UNICEF

Mr Ryszard Wojtal
Minister Counsellor
Permanent Representative of Poland
WFP

Mr Jarl-Hakan Rosengren
Minister Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Finland
UNICEF

Mr Lazare Makayat-Safouesse
First Counsellor
Permanent Mission of Congo
UNDP

Mr Lamin Faati
First Secretary
Permanent Mission of The Gambia
UNFPA

Mr Kiala Kia Mateva
Minister Counsellor
Embassy of Angola
WFP

Mr Almabek M. Demessinov
Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan
UNDP

Mr Arjun Bahadur Thapa
Minister Plenipotentiary
Deputy Permanent Representative of Nepal
UNFPA

Mr Mohammed Abdul Alim
Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of Bangladesh
UNICEF

Mr Irdamis Ahmad
Minister Counsellor
Embassy of Indonesia
WFP

Mr José A. Briz-Gutiérrez
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Deputy Permanent Representative of Guatemala
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Mr Dmitry Maksimychev
Senior Counsellor
Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation
UNDP

Mr Alexandru Cujba
Counsellor
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova
UNICEF

Annex II – Programme of Work

ITINERARY

UNICEF,
UNDP/UNFPA
AND WFP
EXECUTIVE
BOARDS
TO
AZERBAIJAN

VISIT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE

9 MAY 2005 - 15 MAY 2005

Date	Day	Time	Event	Venue/remarks
8 May	Sun		Arrival of EB members and check in Hotel	Hyatt Hotel
9 May	Mon	09:00	Meeting with EB Members and Secretariat	Hyatt Hotel, Nizami Hall
		10:00	Meeting of UN Agency Heads with the Secretariat	Hyatt Hotel, Nizami Hall
		11:00	Informal Meeting with the Resident Coordinator and UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP Representatives	Hyatt Hotel, Nizami Hall
		12:15	City tour	
		18:30	Welcome drinks	Hyatt Hotel, Amirov Hall
10 May	Tue	09:45	Departure from hotel	Pick-up by bus
		10:00	Briefing by the Resident Coordinator and UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP representatives	UN Conference Room
		11:00	Meeting with the President of Azerbaijan	7 EB members
		14:30	Meeting with the Minister of Economic Development SPPRD/MDG presentation	MED
		16:00	Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs	MFA
		17:00	Mission meeting to review progress	Hyatt Hotel, Nizami Hall
11 May	Wed	08:00	Leave for field visit	
			Group A visits Imishli	WFP and UNDP to arrange
			Group B visits Salyan	UNICEF and UNFPA to arrange
		18:00	Return from field visit	
		19:00	Mission meeting to review progress	Hyatt Hotel, Nizami Hall

ITINERARY

UNICEF,
UNDP/UNFPA
AND WFP
EXECUTIVE
BOARDS
TO
AZERBAIJAN

VISIT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE

9 MAY 2005 - 15 MAY 2005

Date	Day	Time	Event	Venue/remarks
12 May	Thu	09:15	Departure from hotel	pick up by bus
		09:30	Meeting with Deputy Prime Minister in charge of humanitarian assistance	Cabinet of Ministers
		11:30	Meeting with Deputy Prime Minister in charge of education and health	Cabinet of Ministers
		14:30	UNDP/UNAIDS Joint Project with Religious Leaders	Europe Hotel - Baku Room
		16:00	Donors' Meeting	Europe Hotel - Baku Room
		17:00	Mission meeting to review progress	Europe Hotel - Baku Room
		19:00	Reception	Philharmonia
13 May	Fri	07:30	Leave for field visit - Group A visits Fizuli	UNDP&WFP will arrange
		08:00	Leave for field visit - Group B visits Guba	UNFPA&UNICEF will arrange
		19:00	Back from field visit to Guba	
		22:00	Back from field visit to Fizuli	
14 May	Sat	09:30	Meetings with civil society/NGOs	Hyatt Hotel, Nizami Hall
		11:00	Wrap up with the Resident Coordinator and UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP representatives	UN Conference Room
		12:30	De-Briefing with the Government	Cabinet of Ministers
		16:00	Press Conference	UN Conference Room
		19:00	Reception hosted by Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Old City
15 May	Sun	03:00	Departure for New York, Geneva, Rome	
		05:00		

Annex III - Field trip to WFP project in Imishli district

Date Wednesday 11 May 2005

Destination Imishli District, 250 km from Baku

Background

WFP is currently providing food assistance for 130,000 IDPs in 23 districts, of whom 70 percent are vulnerable women and children. WFP provides wheat, flour, fortified oil, iodized salt, peas and sugar; the ration provides half of a person's nutritional requirements.

Besides food assistance, WFP has two other initiatives: an early-childhood development centre and food for education (FFE) for the IDPs, carried out in collaboration with UNICEF.

Through the early-childhood development centre, a healthy environment is provided for early childhood care and development and for building capacity through training. WFP provides food for the caregivers in exchange for the services rendered; UNICEF contributes with technical support and services for the centre and in developing community-based models of early-childhood development. UNICEF's assistance has focused on developing the skills of caregivers to provide interactive care appropriate to the age of pre-school children and providing toys and equipment.

The FFE programme aims (i) to improve school attendance and prevent schoolchildren, especially girls, from dropping out and (ii) to address micronutrient deficiencies. WFP provides dry take-home rations for children who achieve 90 percent school attendance in a month. UNICEF is focusing on improving the quality of education and learning outcomes in the assisted schools. This is achieved by introducing educational innovations such as active learning, promoting parent-teacher associations and peer education.

Lessons learned

a) Strengths

- IDPs have a genuine desire to return to their villages.
- Living conditions vary among the IDP camps.
- IDPs are grateful to the United Nations agencies for their support and presence in the field.
- There are no major duplications or overlaps of United Nations activities.
- The IDP issue could be an opportunity for the United Nations agencies to promote government ownership.
- There is a good system in place for monitoring food distributions among IDPs that could contribute to obtaining further accurate data.

b) Weaknesses

- The IDP situation is a perfect example of missing opportunities for the United Nations agencies to act as a system.
- There are limited opportunities for young people.
- There is a high rate of unemployment.
- There is limited participation by NGOs other than Red Cross and Red Crescent International Committee.
- There is limited participation by private-sector entities, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The IDPs situation and capacity-building are areas where the UNCT could consider joint programming.

Annex IV - Field trip to UNFPA project and UNICEF/WFP project in Salyan district

Background

UNFPA established a regional reproductive health centre in Salyan district to address the needs for maternal care, family planning, use of modern contraceptives, men's involvement and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. The programme aimed to build the managerial and institutional capacity of health service providers.

UNFPA supports improvement of the referral system in the district by promoting community-based services, particularly in rural areas. To strengthen the technical capacity of health facilities, UNFPA is providing them with modern contraceptives and training equipment through the National Reproductive Health Office of the Ministry of Health.

UNICEF has been working since 1998 on rationalizing healthcare services, initially in the Primary Health Care (PHC) reform project, and from 2002–2005 as an implementing partner in the World Bank-financed Primary Health Care Reforms. Salyan was one of the five pilot districts in the district-level component of the PHC reform programme, which is an example of substantial collaboration between the United Nations – in this case UNICEF – and the Bretton Woods institutions – in this case the World Bank. The project aimed to improve access to and quality of services and to implement systemic reforms designed to rationalize the use of existing resources.

The mission visited the Salyan Central District Hospital/Reproductive Health Centre and two Salyan district primary healthcare centres, one reformed and one unreformed.

Lessons Learned

Strengths

- The impact of UNFPA and UNICEF assistance was evident in catalytic terms and in terms of providing basic equipment such as ultrasound, benches, contraceptives and laboratory equipment and vaccination programmes.
- The ability of UNFPA and UNICEF to develop partnerships of shared responsibility with the Government is highly commendable.
- Basic infrastructure exists, but there is a need to rehabilitate unreformed primary healthcare centres.
- The involvement of United Nations agencies should continue to be in terms of showing what needs to be done, particularly in sensitive areas; pilot projects should continue to be used to set examples. It is important that their success is not compromised by lack of the required primary healthcare reforms. The Government needs to be encouraged to implement agreed policy reforms to ensure that the improved services are sustainable.

Weaknesses

- Health personnel are paid a salary, albeit a small one, by the Government.
- Policy changes are needed for effective implementation of the PHC reform project; this needs to be stressed. Significant gains have been achieved in terms of building trust and capacity, but there is an urgent need for more flexible resource allocation based on per capita calculations for a basic healthcare package, as opposed to accessibility of hospital beds. The programme shows the vital importance of reform of the entire health system to ensure that the poorest people benefit from government services, which is currently not the case.
- In terms of sustainability, the United Nations system should pursue its efforts to include contraceptives on the WHO list of essential drugs.
- High unemployment in Salyan meant that a substantial part of the workforce has worked abroad and exposed their partners to STIs on their return to Salyan. There seems to be a need for an integrated approach to HIV/AIDS and STIs to ensure proper oversight and an adequate response to the situation.

Annex V - Field trip to WFP, UNDP and UNICEF projects in Fizuli district

IDP camp

WFP and the Government: FFE

UNICEF: early childhood development daycare centre

Accompanied by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations in New York.

Background

- The field visit to Fizuli revealed good collaboration between UNICEF and WFP. The objective of improved school attendance had been achieved.
- Groups of children were cared for of by two different organizations, reflecting the synergies and cooperation between two parts of the system.
- This cooperation is evident in FFE, but in the daycare centre the synergies are more subtle.
- Children develop a sense of contributing to the household.
- The opinion of parents is that WFP should continue to provide assistance; they expressed satisfaction at sending children to school and receiving the food, but it is important to consider the need for gradual transfer of responsibility for the programme to the Government.

Areas of improvement

- There is a need to increase the resources for the project, because it is unlikely that the effectiveness of the programmes can be improved with existing resources.

ANAMA, mine-clearance project

- In this successful project UNDP has had a catalytic role in promoting it and enabling the Government to assume the leadership and ownership. It is an example of good collaboration between the UNCT, bilateral donors and government agencies.

School visit

- UNICEF: education on mine risks
This project is a good example of effective awareness-raising. The inclusion of mine-risk education into the school curriculum began in 2004. Within a year, 303 schools – more than 30 percent of the schools in the 12 affected districts and most vulnerable communities – were covered, despite limited funding. The project is ongoing, so coverage will be further increased by the end of the year.

Annex VI - Field trip to UNICEF project in Guba district

Date Friday, 13 May 2005

Destination Guba district

Background

- **Children in Public Care Institutions**

The visit to Orphanage No. 3 in Khatai district of Baku City serves as an introduction to the issue of institutionalization of children, which is a pervasive problem in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Efforts got under way with the appointment by the Deputy Prime Minister of a task force to prepare a plan for de-institutionalization.

Public institutes are the commonest form of assistance for children with special needs, continuing the system set up under the Soviet Union. About 20,000 children are hosted in 66 institutions, including baby homes and orphanages, sanatoria, boarding schools and institutes for children with disabilities and behavioural problems.

The poor economic situation of many families is frequently quoted as the main reason for institutionalization, but the data suggest that the reasons for institutionalization are wider and more complex. Children in institutions are the final victims of a crisis in which parents cannot find the coping skills to solve family problems.

- **Active Learning**

Guba City school No. 2 was one of five pilot schools supported by UNICEF during the 2000–2004 country programme of cooperation for the active learning and school leadership project, whose objectives were to improve the quality of education, equip children with skills in problem solving and critical thinking, and raise educational achievement.

- **Youth Participation**

Youth resource centres (YRCs) are an important vehicle for promoting opportunities for young people to participate in social processes, to understand the forces that affect their lives and to develop the skills and attitudes that will help them to shape their communities. Young people participating in the YRCs are also engaged in important peer education on healthy lifestyles, including education in HIV/AIDS.

Strengths

- These projects have had a positive impact at the local level.
- The approach is welcome by various actors and should be strengthened as a priority activity in the next programme cycle.
- The projects are contributing to filling the gap resulting from the lack of social workers in the system. However, in the long term there is a need to promote ownership by the Government.
- An external evaluation in 2004 concluded that the use of active learning and school leadership methods in schools was a successful strategy in the improvement of the quality of education. Active learning has been successfully piloted and has been adopted by the Government as a national policy to be implemented over the next five years.

Weaknesses

- There is a need for more collaboration among United Nations agencies.
- There is a need for legislative reform to protect the rights of the child.