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Introduction to item 4(a) of the provisional agenda

Presentation of West and Central Africa Draft Country Programme Document

Guinea-Bissau (E/ICEF/2015/P/L.32)

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Mister President, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my pleasure to present the Country Programme Document for UNICEF’s Programme of Cooperation with the Government of Guinea-Bissau, covering the years 2016 to 2020. Before I do this, allow me to provide a brief update on the regional situation affecting children, and particularly on the evolution of the situation in Ebola affected countries, in the Central African Republic and in Nigeria and its 3 neighboring countries, commonly referred to as the Nigeria plus regional response (Nigeria+).

As far as Ebola is concerned, I am pleased to say that - after almost 28,000 recorded cases and over 11,200 deaths in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea – only a few Ebola cases continue to be recorded in Sierra Leone and Guinea [PB1]. Governments, partners and communities, as well as UNICEF colleagues, have done a tremendous job to contain the transmission of Ebola, support children who have lost their caregivers, and reopen safe schools. In Phase 3 of the response, objectives are to (1) accurately define and rapidly interrupt all remaining chains of transmission and (2) to identify, manage and respond to residual risks - including important investments in EVD preparedness and prevention undertaken in Guinea-Bissau since its inclusion in the L-3 response earlier this year.

Community ownership of the response is fundamental to stop Ebola. Where communities have adopted safe behaviors, and have assumed responsibility for contact–tracing, early referral of cases and safe burials, the number of cases has dropped. UNICEF has shifted from initial mass communication and awareness campaigns to nuanced messaging and targeted community-based activities.

The priority is to reach and maintain zero cases, but we must build on gains made during the response, to improve health services and access to safe water and sanitation, and other basic social services, with special attention to safe schools, child protection and measures to protect affected populations, and children in particular, from stigma and discrimination.

Mister President, distinguished delegates,

Let me also highlight the many positive developments in the Central African Republic. Security has improved, with reduced incidents of humanitarian shocks and displacement. UNICEF is making major progress on supporting the government to re-start the education system, with the support of the European Union (EU) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). UNICEF is also making significant progress in the removal of children from armed groups.

However, there are also significant risks ahead, including underfunded elections and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration/Security Sector Reform (DDR/SSR) process. And as we have seen in the last weeks in Bambari where clashes between rival militias forced several thousand people to flee their homes and displacing 3,000 IDPs to the MINUSCA compound, violence can easily flare up locally, and there is always a risk of violence breaking out at greater scale.

The hybrid Special Criminal Court (SCC) could set new precedents but lack of funds may delay prosecuting perpetrator and foster a very real sense of impunity for war crimes against children and women.
The sexual exploitation and abuse committed against children by international peacekeepers in CAR is a completely unacceptable violation of the rights of children, and doubly unacceptable when perpetrated by those sent to protect. More cases of sexual abuse of children will gravely undermine the credibility of peacekeeping forces, and make the fulfilment of their mandates difficult. While the forces responsible for the conduct of its personnel, UNICEF has always worked closely with DPKO on such issues, and stands ready to provide technical support if needed.

The Nigeria crisis is the other major humanitarian crisis – one that is first and foremost a protection crisis. While much territory captured by Boko Haram in Nigeria has been taken back, the group remains a potent threat against governments and civilian populations in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon; and we are seeing that regained territory does not translate directly into immediate humanitarian improvements. Displacement remains near peak levels, and targeting of civilian populations by Boko Haram continues. We are concerned about the protection of civilians living in designated combat zones and the detention of civilians associated with Boko Haram, including children, under unclear legal terms. UNICEF has in all four countries created strong field presences in order to enhance protection of children and deliver quality humanitarian assistance. For UNICEF, proximity to the population is critical, but maintaining field presences in high security threat areas is also costly. Overall, the key constraint is the lack of donor funding, which is holding back the expansion of programmes.

Mister President, distinguished delegates,

While these and other dire humanitarian crises continue to deepen the vulnerability of children and their families to external shocks, many countries in the West and Central Africa region have made remarkable – yet insufficient – progress to meet the MDGs. As we collectively embark on setting and implementing national SDG targets, we will need to transform our way of working, building on the equity re-focus, to ensure that gender equality, social cohesion and lasting peace are part and parcel of our efforts to reach every child, everywhere.

Mister President, distinguished delegates,

Allow me now to introduce the Programme of Cooperation between UNICEF and the Government of Guinea-Bissau for the period 2016-2020.

The proposed programme was prepared at a critical – albeit fragile – juncture of renewed hope in the recent history of Guinea-Bissau following the April 2012 coup d’état and the withdrawal of foreign assistance. The legislative and presidential elections that took place in June 2014 brought the country back to constitutional rule and allowed for the development of a Strategic Operational Plan (SOP) and of the roadmap “Vision 2025”. In addition the Republica di Minius Hoje (RdMH) movement, involving 350 children and youth groups, promoted a National Child Rights agenda that was signed on by the highest members of government.

While these positive political developments, including the Donor Roundtable meeting held in Brussels in March 2015, opened an important window of opportunity to deliver on the post 2015 agenda, the political crisis that has been unfolding over the past weeks could jeopardize these important gains. We
hope it can be resolved swiftly and peacefully in order to implement the country’s shared vision for unity and prosperity.

Mister President, distinguished delegates,

This programme acknowledges the remarkable progress made by Guinea-Bissau over the past five years, including a 23% reduction in under 5 mortality (from 116 to 89 per 1,000 live births), achievement of the MDG water target, an important reduction of open defecation practices and a 29% increase in early learning and pre-school attendance.

It also seeks to address persistent challenges and deprivations in Guinea-Bissau, particularly the urgency to address gender issues as central feature of our work. Maternal mortality remain unacceptably high (900 per 100,000 live births) and HIV prevalence rates are among the highest in the West Africa region (5.3 per cent ages 15-49 // 3.6 per cent among adolescent girls 15-19). In addition an estimated 44.2 per cent of children aged 6-11 are out school and almost 4 in 10 girls under 18 are married.

To address these challenges, the proposed programme will take a two pronged approach, strengthening equity focused policies and programming at sector level and supporting integrated community approaches to deliver services at decentralized level. The new programme objectives systematically address key dimensions of equity, gender equality, and engagement of communities and youth to deliver upon the Objectives of the Government’s SOP Vision 2025 and to fulfill human rights.

Policy dialogue and programming interventions will address key deprivations across sectors. Health and nutrition interventions will focus on mothers and newborns during pregnancy, delivery and the neonatal period, as well as during the 1,000-day window, and across the first 59 months of life of girls and boys, especially in the most disadvantaged communities. The quality and coverage of PMTCT and pediatric AIDS services will be expanded, along with targeted prevention programmes for adolescents, to ensure scale up of interventions along the continuum of HIV prevention, treatment and care.

At decentralized level, community based approaches will be leveraged to expand integrated service delivery platforms including birth registration, infant and young child feeding practices, use of long lasting insecticidal nets (LLINS), improved immunization coverage, access to and use of WASH facilities, PMTCT as well as community led total sanitation (CLTS) marketing.

Important investments will also be made in education and child protection. The emphasis in education will be on equity and quality in support of the National Strategic Education Plan (2016-2025): ensuring right age entry of children in primary school, improving primary school retention and completion rates, as well as transition to secondary education, especially for girls in areas with high rates of child marriage. In the domain of Child Protection, UNICEF looks to catalyze engagement and support towards the adoption of a National Child Protection Policy and a Child Protection code, while strengthening local – level family services, referral mechanisms and case management. Other key areas include strengthening national systems for civil registration and vital statistics as well as acceleration of positive social transformation for the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), child marriage and other socially condoned forms of violence against children.
These interventions will be anchored in continued efforts to deepen coherence with the work of other UN agencies within the broader mandate of the political mission. A wide set of strategic partnerships will also be strengthened, including with the alliance for child rights, supported by innovative platforms for national advocacy, decentralized monitoring and youth engagement.

Mister President, distinguished delegates,

I would like to conclude by thanking you for your constant support and for your contributions to the Programme of Cooperation between UNICEF and the Government and Guinea-Bissau covering 2015-19.

(Thank you).

[1] UNICEF Update (as of 31 August 2015) on the Humanitarian Appeal for Nigeria plus Regional Response. For Nigeria: 12.9 million received against 26.5 requested; for Chad – 820K received against 8.2 million requested (10% covered); for Niger (Diffa) ~2 million received against 7.9 million (25% covered); and for Cameroon (North) 488K received against 7.7 million requested (6% needs covered)

[PB1] Liberia is due to be declared Ebola free this week. Liberia was declared free of Ebola transmission on 9 May 2015. On 29 June, surveillance detected an EVD-positive community death in Margibi County. The case first became ill on 21 June, died on 28 June, and subsequently tested positive for EVD. The last case was discharged after testing negative for EVD for a second time on 23 July. All contacts have now completed follow-up.