

# Unicef in the Pacific: its priorities and concerns

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The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) has programmes of cooperation with 14 Pacific Island countries. The Suva sub-area office serves 13 of those countries (Cook Is., Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Is., Niue, Palau, Solomon Is., Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Western Samoa) and a separate office in Port Moresby has specific responsibility for Papua New Guinea.

The breadth of Unicef-assisted programmes in the Pacific has expanded considerably in the past five years and new areas of involvement are currently being assessed in light of the changing socio-economic environment. Unicef's mandate is to protect the lives of children and promote their healthy development. Recognizing that children health is integrally related to the health and well-being of their families and particularly their mothers, Unicef's programmes are also targeted to women. Unicef, in fact, has a multi-sectoral approach to addressing the health and well-being of children which takes into account the physical, social and cultural environment which surrounds children and impacts on their well-being.

In addition to the more traditional Unicef interventions such as supporting maternal and child health and basic education, safe water and sanitation is, for instance, an integral component of many country programmes.

The programmes of cooperation are determined by thorough analyses of the situation of women and children in any country where Unicef cooperates. The situation analysis is the basis upon which Unicef and the collaborating partners—governmental or non-governmental—prioritize needed areas of assistance for children.

Two other significant programming tools influence the direction of Unicef assistance. They are the Goals for Children and Development in the 1990s which were endorsed at the September 1990 World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the United Nations on 20 November 1989 and came into effect as international law in September of 1990.

While the Goals are time-bound, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is timeless. The CRC is increasingly being used as a framework for country-level situation analyses and for developing National Programmes of Action for Children. Based on the situation analysis, progress towards the goals established at the World Summit for Children and the priorities of national and sub-national partners, a five-year programme of cooperation is established. The Programme of Cooperation specifies the strategies and activities through which Unicef and the collaborating country work jointly to meet the needs of children.

Unicef's assistance to Pacific Island countries has been in the areas of nutrition—particularly support for household food production; support for maternal and child health programmes; material and training support for safe water and sanitation programmes—particularly targeted to rural communities and schools; assistance to develop early childhood education programmes and teacher training programmes; and, support for the regional BELS (Basic Education and Life Skills) project. Increasingly, social mobilisation support is provided at the policy, community and family level to ensure that children needs are understood and addressed.

A growing area of concern and programme development is directed towards youth. This concern is in response to high levels of sexually transmitted diseases among youth, increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies, teen suicides in some areas, and growing numbers of youth moving away from their traditional extended families in rural areas to urban areas, often resulting in social problems. Unicef assists countries in a variety of ways including the provision of technical assistance for surveys, evaluations, training and systems development; supply assistance for programme implementation (from vaccines to vehicles); reimburseable procurement on behalf of governments; and support for training and conferences that have a direct bearing on improving the situation of children and women.

The exact nature of the support is determined in the five-year Programme of Cooperation as a function of the needs of the country and Unicef's comparative strengths. Through regular updating of country-situation analyses, the impact and relevance of programmes is monitored and new responses designed in collaboration with government and non-government partners.

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