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REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE CEPAL SECRETARIAT CLOSELY RELATED TO CHILDREN, THE FAMILY AND WOMEN (EDUCATION, HEALTH AND HOUSING)

79-5-1255

A. MANDATES AND BACKGROUND

1. General Assembly resolution 31/169, called upon "the appropriate organs and organizations of the United Nations system to contribute to the preparation and implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Child". 1/

2. In turn, the Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America states that "the integral education of children should be an essential goal for societies"; 2/ that the family is the mediating institution between the individual and the social group; 3/ and that tradition and customs assign to the woman of the family a greater responsibility in affective and formative roles in relation to children. 4/ On the basis of this approach it not only devotes an entire section to the question of child care but also sets forth a series of action proposals, such as: the adoption of measures prohibiting the employment of children, and providing them with easy access to education and training; the provision of nurseries and day-care centres so that women and youth with responsibilities relating to child care may continue their studies; the development of special health plans for mothers and children to establish proper child-care centres; to establish programmes to provide appropriate care and recreation for children; to establish priority national food and nutrition policies which ensure rational consumption by the population groups most vulnerable from the social and biological standpoints (such as pregnant women, babies, children, adolescents, old people, etc.), etc.

1/ Resolution 31/169, in paragraph 4.

2/ Regional Plan of Action, paragraph 46.

3/ Regional Plan of Action, paragraph 35.

4/ Regional Plan of Action, paragraph 39

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3. It should also be borne in mind that, according to UNICEF, the activities of the International Year of the Child (IYC) should take place primarily at the country level and in accordance with national priorities and possibilities. The intention is not to standardize a single form of activity for all countries, nor to organize world events. This means that the initiative for the implementation of the above mandates lies with the countries of the region.

4. Finally, it is important to recall that in her opening address at the first Meeting of the Presiding Officers of Regional Conference for the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America, held in Kingston, Jamaica, on 14 and 15 February 1978, the Chairman pointed out that in view of the close relationship between the problems affecting children and those affecting the family and women, the subject should be dealt with at a future meeting of the Presiding Officers.5/ Consequently, at subsequent meetings the Presiding Officers recommended that the agenda of the Regional Meeting should include inter alia, an analysis of the situation of children and youth in relation to women and the family.6/

B. CEPAL ACTIVITIES

5. As early as October 1977 CEPAL appointed an official, reporting directly to the Executive Secretary, who would act as a focal point by assuming responsibility for the coordination of the Commission's internal and external activities in the field.

5/ E/CEPAL/MDM/1, para.4

6/ E/CEPAL/MDM/2/Rev.1, para. 16 (4a) and E/CEPAL/MDM/5/Rev.1, para. 28c.

6. In December 1977 CEPAL informed the Secretariat of the International Year of the Child that it could collaborate in the following activities:

(a) The Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE) is carrying out a study on mortality in the first years of life of the population of various Latin American countries, taking into account geographical subdivisions and the educational level of mothers. The aim is thus to identify the population with the highest mortality risk in the first five years of life and to estimate the proportion accounted for by this population in total mortality in the country. The reports on a number of countries (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru) have already been published.

(b) The CEPAL Division of Statistics and Quantitative Analysis, through its normal technical assistance activities, will see to the inclusion in the permanent household surveys of a statistical module specifically designed to study the situation of children. Data on the employment of children may also be obtained from the information accumulated and analyzed in collaboration with the Regional Programme for Employment in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC).

(c) Depending on inter-organizational agreements and additional resources, other activities could be undertaken, such as: a diagnosis of the education and health situation of children under 15; more specific studies on the situation of the family, women and children in relation to situations of critical poverty; and the production of more highly processed and analytical statistics on children between 6 and 15 years of age, using the CELADE data bank.

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7. Subsequently, on the occasion of the visit of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for IYC, Mrs. Estefanía Aldaba-Lima, an inter-agency meeting was held at CEPAL, at which the following agreements were reached:

(a) Creation at the regional level of multiagency machinery for holding periodic co-ordination and information meetings, to be based in CEPAL and staffed by UNICEF.

(b) Each United Nations organ based in Santiago will appoint an official to be responsibile for the above duties (CEPAL has already appointed its official).

(c) Co-ordination among the public information services of all United Nations organs, under the responsibility of the office of Public Information of CEPAL.

(d) To make fuller use of statistical data and research, particularly the technical data available in the CEPAL and CELADE data banks.

8. At a special meeting held in Mexico City in May 1979, the UNICEF Executive Board studied the general question of the situation of children in Latin America and Caribbean. For this purpose the UNICEF Regional Office prepared a background document with the collaboration of various units of the CEPAL system, namely: (a) CELADE: "Demographic trends"; (b) Project on Critical Poverty: "Conditions of critical poverty in the Population"; (c) Unit on the Integration of Women: "The family and the role of women as immediate frames of reference for child"; and (d) Project on Education and Development: "Primary education".

9. In addition, CEPAL has carried out the following activities:

(a) Publication of a book entitled "Social Indicators on the situation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean", prepared jointly by CEPAL and the UNICEF Regional Office for the Americas in a bilingual Spanish and English version;

/(b) Nos.

(b) Nos. 288 and 289 of "Notas sobre la economía y el desarrollo de América Latina" were devoted to a summary of the above book;

(c) The issue of the CEPAL Information Unit's "Micronoticias" dated 5 January 1979 was devoted mainly to the International Year of the Child.

C. SPECIFIC AGREEMENTS ON ASPECTS OF CHILDHOOD CONNECTED WITH THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

10. When working out specific agreements and recommendations, it should be recalled that the activities of IYC are to take place primarily at the country level and in accordance with the priorities and possibilities of each country, with the inter-organizational co-ordination of UNICEF. In this connexion, nearly all the countries of the region have already set up their corresponding national committees.

11. This approach is wholly in keeping with the agreement adopted by the First Meeting of the Presiding Officers, which stated: "To stress the need, in view of the fact that the basic responsibility lies in the action taken by each country at the national level, for Governments to ensure the implementation of those recommendations of the Regional Plan of Action which are of most importance within the framework of the relations and strategies established by each country, and to formulate specific priority projects for which they hope to obtain external technical and financial support."7/ It is within this framework, which emphasizes national action, that "the close relationship between the problems affecting childrens and those affecting the family and women" is to be found, to which the Chairman of the Presiding Officers drew attention in the above-mentioned address.

7/ Document E/CEPAL/MDI/1, paragraph 9.2.

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12. The living conditions of the rural and urban poor families of the region are well known, as is the outstanding role played in them by women in tending to daily needs of the members of the family and in bearing children. It must therefore be emphasized that when adopting effective long-term measures to improve the living conditions and status of women and children, the family units to which they belong must be kept in mind. An effort should be made to improve the living conditions of families in such a way that women, relieved of the burden of domestic chores, may achieve greater self-fulfilment and make the individual and social contribution to society and to their children, who will be the new generation of citizens.

13. Hence, particular importance is assumed by all action aimed at alleviating the burden of domestic chores: obtention of an adequate family income; housing; drinking water; sewer; fuels; electrification; nurseries and other forms of community organization designed to provide adequate care for children; etc. On the basis of these, further effective action might be taken to provide families with the necessary means and knowledge to improve their situation as regards hygiene, health, education, nutrition, etc.

14. This opens up a sphere of recommendations on policies and action aimed at the countries and international organizations with a view to promoting social development and improving living conditions by including in development plans and in various activities (training, research, pilot programmes, dissemination, etc.) these three objectives which are inseparable in Latin American life: the family, women and children. The CEPAL secretariat fully shares this concern and attaches due priority

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to it, and is therefore in close contact with other organs of the United Nations system, primarily UNICEF as the focal point of the International Year of the Child, and with the Governments of the region, so as to implement as fully as possible the mandates received in order to achieve these important objectives at the national and international levels.