



OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Building Hopes for children under residential care

OVERVIEW

It is universally agreed that all children have the right to live within a protective family environment. In Tajikistan, however, orphans, abandoned children, children with disabilities, children whose parents are imprisoned, children in conflict with the law and those living in poverty are often denied this fundamental right. The problems caused by widespread poverty, the past civil war and the country's rapid transition to a market economy have led to the collapse of the social safety net with an increase in the number of children at social risk.

The weakening capacities of families have driven many parents to send their children to institutions.

Unavailability of an alternative care to protect children's rights to grow up in a family environment is a great concern. Institutional care is currently the primary means of social protection services for children in need of special protection in Tajikistan. A UNICEF-supported study shows that out of 11,000 of children in institutions, more than 80 per cent of children in social institutions have either one or both biological parents.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child states that every child should grow in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding for full and harmonious development of his or her personality.

Dramatic decline in Government's capacity to provide adequate protection has also contributed to the increasing number of children in institutions.

Poverty is so pervasive throughout the country that provision of adequate social protection and benefit schemes to those children in need of special protection has become the most challenging concern of the government, with an increased demand for a systematic social welfare reform.

Family crisis has also led to increased violence at home. Children and women have become increasingly exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation as a result of increased stress on families, the breakdown of the social system and the persistence of certain social and traditional norms, which perpetrates gender inequalities.

“...the child, for [a] full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow... in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The Tajik government, with technical advice and support from UNICEF, has demonstrated an increased understanding of the benefits of protective family environments and of the reforms needed for improving the welfare of children and their families. This change of attitude is helping to bring the country into compliance with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children living in residential care have become a high priority, which reflects changing national policies.

Through seminars, workshops, study tours and information campaigns supported by UNICEF, there are growing political commitment to find alternative solutions to institutional care for children under residential care. The establishment of National Social Work Courses was an important milestone in this regard. Child Rights Departments, a new function of local government child welfare services, are being established at a few district governments, as an innovative approach to support families at social risk. It is a major challenge of the country's social welfare reform, supported by UNICEF. Instead of sending children to institutions, reform initiatives bring counseling and welfare services closer to families and children at risk in communities. More support is given directly to families, so that children's right to grow up in a family environment is still protected.

ACHIEVEMENTS

UNICEF continued to focus on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children threatened as a result of weakening social safety nets and achieved next results:

- The establishment of five Child Rights Departments for provision of social welfare support to families. This has facilitated the transformation of residential care institutions for children and the establishment of alternative care services.
- The capacities of social welfare and family support organs at local governments in monitoring, reporting and assistance provision enhanced through establishment of the new organ as Child Rights Departments
- The Pedagogical and Academic capacity of 25 core cadres enhanced through the provision of two courses at master's level by Stockholm University, first Social Work Resource Centre established
- 601 institutionalized children returned to their families in three pilot institutions as a result of five months of social work training/practice with institutional staff at the community level and monitoring of institutions.
- Some families at risk have access to training and micro-credit with the support of community-based civil society organization as part of de-institutionalization project.



- Resolution drafted for all Ministries to undertake measures for special protection of the rights of children with disabilities.
- The skills of local experts of Parents Education Centre and local specialists of the Medical Pedagogical Commission strengthened to examine children with disabilities with new methods of screening and deliver training courses to low skilled institutional nurseries and parents.
- Public awareness on rights of children to be protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation increased by 20% in Dushanbe by creating information zone.

MORE RESULTS FOR THE FUTURE

- Scaling up the Child Rights Department initiatives as a systematic social welfare services.
- Extending the social work training at local government services with the established national trainers
- Strengthening monitoring and reporting functions of child welfare and family support services through Child Rights Departments at Local Governments, targeting most vulnerable children and families
- Supporting the government of Tajikistan for a stronger legislative framework, with the provision of technical assistance for a legislation review.
- Wider awareness rising on children's rights concerning families at social risk, prevention of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against children.

APPEAL SUMMARY 2005-2009 (US\$)

Child Welfare Reform Child Protection Against Violence	1,400,000
Programme Support	400,000
Budget Appeal to Donors	200,000
UNICEF Contribution	2,000,000
TOTAL BUDGET	450,000
	2,450,000