The Children Here

Current Trends in the Decentralization of National Programmes of Action

Carlos Castillo

with the collaboration of Richard Dunbar

UNICEF INTERNATIONAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, FLORENCE, ITALY

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Preface

The Children Here is part of the second phase of a research—carried out by the UNICEF International Child Development Centre (ICDC) in Florence, Italy—on the decentralization of National Programmes of Action (NPAs) for Children. It attempts a thorough, although initial, analysis and assessment of how and why countries are creating programmes of action at the national, regional and community levels. In doing so, the report analyses the principal dimensions of NPA decentralization, drawing on the experiences of developing countries that are currently engaged in the process.

The National Programmes of Action are a result of the worldwide Plan of Action adopted at the conclusion of the World Summit for Children, attended by 71 Heads of State and Government and 86 senior officials in September, 1990, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The World Summit Plan of Action, with its 29 goals for the protection and development of children, recognizes the potential importance of planning and implementing programmes for children at the local level and urges national governments to assist their regions and localities in undertaking their own programmes of action for the specific needs and problems of their children. Article 34.1 of the Plan of Action states:

...National Governments should encourage and assist provincial and local governments as well as NGOs, the private sector and civic groups to prepare their own programmes of action to help to implement the goals and objectives included in the Declaration and this Plan of Action (UNICEF 1990).

The NPAs occur in a period during which numerous internal and external forces, in part due to the changing balance of global power and the dominance of economic neo-liberalism, are pushing countries to seek political and administrative reforms that favour decentralized governance. The move away from highly centralized planning and implementation, whether perceived as a way to empower localities or merely to lighten the load of the central bureaucracy, has contributed to the phenomenon of NPA decentralization. In this conception of state decentralization, which implies improved local governance and increased community participation, the NPA at the local level has a great deal of meaning and potential. Taking into account the general processes occurring in the world, it has been important to try to understand what local perspectives are being included in the NPA process. Despite the recommendations in the Plan of Action for formulating regional or local programmes, no guidelines were issued from any agency or international authority directing offices to advocate for NPA decentralization and assist countries in decentralizing their NPA.

This research, begun in 1993, aims to collect and analyse data on NPA decentralization in order to better understand how this process can more effectively achieve the World Summit goals for the 1990s. The final objective of the project is to provide recommendations and alternatives on how to proceed as well as to offer training to those involved in the process of NPA decentralization. More specifically to UNICEF, which is however only one of the actors involved in NPA decentralization, the results of the research will serve to encourage regional, area and country UNICEF offices to cooperate with national and local governments in the design of local or sectoral programmes of action as part of the decentralization of the NPA.
The Phases of the Research

The research is articulated into four phases: 1) a general overview of the status of NPA decentralization in developing countries; 2) a narrower focus on the main dimensions of NPA decentralization in 16 selected countries; 3) in-depth case studies in eight countries; 4) the diffusion of the results.

In the first phase of the research, an Overview of the general status of NPA decentralization has been produced on the basis of a survey, carried out between late 1993 and early 1994, of UNICEF offices working in 103 countries. The aim of the survey was to provide a global picture of the characteristics, initial steps and pace of NPA decentralization. All of the offices responded to the survey: it was revealed that 50 countries were at varying stages of decentralizing their NPA s, and 36 more were committed to beginning the process. The NPA decentralization Overview has been published in an Innocenti Occasional Paper (Castillo and Akenhurst 1994).

In the second phase, on which this publication is based, a closer look has been taken at the NPA decentralization process. A Technical Meeting held in Florence in June, 1994, was attended by UNICEF members from Headquarters, five Regional Offices, 16 Country Offices and ICDC researchers, as well as functionaries from UNDP and the World Bank. Papers reflecting the process of NPA decentralization in 16 developing countries were presented at the Meeting. Work groups and plenary discussions were held to analyse the NPA s and the process of state decentralization, in relation to the principal dimensions of NPA decentralization.

In the third phase, an analysis is being made on the basis of in-depth case studies of the specific situations in Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Uganda and Viet Nam. Based on these studies, the research will attempt to analyse and define the most important issues surrounding NPA decentralization and the extent to which it better enables countries to achieve the World Summit goals. The findings of this phase of the project will be published in a forthcoming book.

The fourth phase will be devoted to the diffusion of reports, debate and meetings between UNICEF, governments, and other interested agencies. An objective of this final phase will also be to provide training support and technical advice to selected UNICEF offices in countries seeking to undertake NPA decentralization.

A central aim of this research is thus to help guide this kind of local programming, both in those countries where it is already taking place and in other countries where it might start. The data presented in the Overview, the country reports presented at the ICDC Technical Meeting, and in particular the in-depth case studies, describe a rich variety of experiences that should be shared with other countries.

A basic assumption of the research is that local programming makes activities more relevant to the specific needs of localities, better engages the local populations and local leaders, and enhances programme sustainability. These increase the chances of achieving decade and mid-decade goals at the local level and, as a result of the sum of new and unforeseen local achievements, at the national level as well.

While basic service projects or area-based projects have often succeeded in improving service delivery and empowering communities, they are more limited in scope than the local-programme-of-action (LPA) approach, with its more holistic view of the community. In confronting the needs and problems of the community and children, the LPA approach should be able to affect the overall planning and programming process, as it encompasses a broader set of relations and dimensions that interact within the whole administrative unit. At the same time, in the NPA decentralization perspective, the sum of all local or regional programmes of action, properly regulated by the central level, could help ensure equity across regions and social groups, while representing an opportunity to go to scale.

It is also worth noting that while a wide variety of administrative divisions of the State exists throughout the world, the term “local programme of action” is used in a generic sense, meaning programmes for any one of several subnational units of a State. When referring to specific programmes, mention of the specific unit (region, district, municipal, etc.) has been made in this report. Other times, programmes are referred to generically as local or regional. However, this attempt at descriptive simplification should not mask the fact that an important distinction needs to be maintained between two, albeit somewhat hypothetical, administrative levels below the central government. Broadly speaking,
these could be called the “community” or “local” levels (the first level) and the regional (second) level. In Uganda, for example, these are represented by the sub-county and district levels, in India the district and state level, while in Mongolia, one must refer to sumans and aimags. Whatever the names, the second or regional level should be more active in the areas of coordination and control, while diagnosis and programme execution, for example, should be emphasized at the first level. The Overview of NPA decentralization found that 56 per cent of the countries are decentralizing to both levels, while 30 per cent are decentralizing to only the second level and the remaining 14 per cent to only the first, or local level.

The Dimensions of the Decentralization Study

The principal issues addressed in this report are grouped and discussed under the main dimensions of decentralization as they pertain to this research: technical, organization and management, political will, social mobilization, communication and advocacy, community participation and finance. The major actors who participate in the process are also analysed, as are the roles played by cooperation agencies, including UNICEF.

These interrelated dimensions of NPA decentralization need to be addressed to gain a fuller understanding of the process and to make it more effective towards reaching the goals for children. Each of the dimensions is examined and discussed in light of its role, potentials and limitations, as seen in the experiences up to this point. The relationships between some of these dimensions are also briefly discussed.

It is generally agreed that the inexperience in local programming of most States means that these dimensions will seldom be at an optimal level when undertaking local programmes of action. The LPAs, however, must be seen as a process, part of which infers that the dimensions should improve during the evolution of the programmes. In fact, some experiences have already indicated that working to optimize these dimensions should be a part of the process itself, and not a precondition to formulating the local programme. Therefore, low technical capacity, lacking political will, inaccurate costing, etc., should not constitute reasons for delaying the formulation and implementation of LPAs.

Technical dimension. Technical aspects implied in local programming include the need to diagnose the situation of local children and women, set goals and goal levels according to the local context, and design strategies and activities to achieve those goals.

Parallel to these steps, methods must be defined and likely improved to estimate the cost of the local programme and to define the source of the resources, to establish methods of monitoring and evaluation, and to create or strengthen a system of information.

Organization and management. The dimension of organization includes the relation of local structures to central structures, and the relations between the NPA and the LPA. In many countries, a local point, which is often a ministry or inter-ministerial commission, has been created by the central government for the purpose of directing LPA formulation. Coordinating the interventions of implementing agencies and non-governmental organization at the local level as a result of the LPAs has been an unprecedented exercise for many countries.

In the areas of management, the capacities of the local staff and local institutions are factors that play an important part in the success of local programmes of action. In most cases, it is necessary to improve the managerial skills at the local level. In many countries, capacity building measures are integrated into NPA decentralization guidelines.

Political will. The support and commitment of key political figures and government officials is essential to legitimize and sustain the programmes of action, and to involve a broad range of public and private actors. LPAs that are created without central government support or the legal instruments to carry out local programming and implementation run the risk of being marginalized from the normal programming procedures of the State.

Social mobilization. Social mobilization, intended as a structured, systematic and permanent process that incorporates the actions of the population and the key actors from both the public and private sectors, is another key to sustaining the process. In promoting broader participation, social mobilization also helps overcome lacking human and financial resources.
Communication and advocacy. From the use of the mass media to person-to-person methods, communication helps to promote public awareness of child-related problems and knowledge about possible solutions. Social communication and generating awareness should induce people to articulate their needs and demands. Advocacy refers to attempts at engaging the key players through efforts and activities that aim to encourage all concerned parties — from government officials to the actors in civil society and the beneficiaries — to support the local programmes of action.

Community participation. The development of community-government partnerships is becoming increasingly important, as governments have come to recognize that they alone cannot achieve the goals for children. Community participation presupposes community organization, knowledge and democratic principles whereby elected officials at all levels of the State can be held accountable by the people they serve.

Finances. Accurately estimating the cost of local programmes of action and identifying the funding sources are essential to ensure the programme’s viability. Properly carrying out these exercises also faces several large constraints, namely the lack of effective costing skill for this kind of programming and the severe economic hardship faced by most developing countries. Experiences show that the mobilization induced by local programming leads to unexpected inputs of both local resources and local labour. At the same time, the kind of integrated programming envisioned in the LPAAs can lead to reduced costs compared to sectoral programmes.

The experiences in NPA decentralization have revealed that numerous strategies can be adopted to work locally; in fact, the particular social, economic and political contexts of individual countries discourage attempts to draw up a universal, static, step-by-step guide for creating local programmes of action in favour of children. Major trends and classifications, however, are discernible, and in such cases attempts are being made to take examples and situations into account which will be helpful to other countries and localities in similar contexts.

The project also faces the limitation of trying to evaluate unfinished sets of ongoing experiences. The validity and accuracy of the information, along with the degrees of political commitment, social mobilization, resource allocation and administrative and human capacities will change over time. It is hoped that this dynamic and changing situation will be reflected in the various publications of the research, and that likely future trends and outcomes can be anticipated and offered.

In concluding the second phase of the ICDC research and in preparing the ground for the third phase, this report on the present status of NPA decentralization uses as its main sources of information the general bibliographical analysis, some previously known experiences, the Overview, the 16 country reports presented at the Technical Meeting in June, and the discussions from the plenary meetings and workshops, which addressed the main dimensions of NPA decentralization in view of country experiences. Following the Technical Meeting an editorial team drafted syntheses of the results from the working-group encounters, which have been instrumental in the compilation of this report.

This report reflects a point in time in which some early experiences have accumulated and can begin to provide valuable information to those involved or interested in local efforts to improve the lives of children. Many of the experiences, tendencies, problems and issues identified and discussed in the following pages will help lay the foundation for the next phase of the project, when they will be examined more thoroughly in particular contexts.

While a premise of the research is to investigate how decentralizing the NPA, in relation to state decentralization, can improve the chances of countries' achieving the World Summit goals, the underlying aim is to examine and report on the phenomenon, judged significant on the basis of the responses to our initial survey. In particular, special emphasis is being placed on analysing the interaction of the differing dimensions that are part of the process. In a given country, NPA decentralization, like state decentralization, can of course produce negative or positive outcomes, or both. The purpose of this research is therefore not to promote NPA decentralization per se, but to explore the positive and negative aspects of NPA decentralization in relation to particular situations and contexts. Thus, our aim is to report on and suggest actions and knowledge, on the basis of lessons learned, that can help countries optimize the process they have chosen to undertake.
1. DECENTRALIZING NATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF ACTION

The consolidated central power of the State has been a characteristic and worldwide tendency since the industrial revolution. In particular, over the past several decades, the phenomenon of centralized power has seen small towns and provinces have come to languish far from the main centres of political, social and economic activity. The loss of importance of small towns and communities, as well as their diminished impact in contributing to societal trends and the setting of appropriate standards for an individual's life, was a process sometimes called "the eclipse of community" (see Stein 1960).

This situation, however, is now beginning to show some signs of reversal. A new economic and political order has emerged, necessitating changes in the concept, structure and function of the State, and justified by the inequities and inefficiencies created by the excessive concentration of state power. With the emergence of these new political and economic realities, the subnational units within countries — regions, provinces, counties, cantons, municipalities, parishes, etc. — are being seen in a new light. In a sense we are witnessing the refutation of the undisputed and absolute power of the centralized State.

Towards the Decentralization of the State

The development of the 19th century State based upon the unification of the nation-state implied the reinforcement of central power. Industrialization further accelerated the importance of central power, while leading to a rapid growth of urbanization and the concentration of populations. During the 19th century in some Latin American countries, for instance, longstanding disputes between partisans of the federal State and supporters of the centralized State ended in a debilitating series of civil wars. In many countries centralism dominated. In some of the Latin American countries that instead chose to federalize, the resulting federal units did not always achieve high levels of autonomy.

In the middle of this century, decentralization became an important issue in the decolonization process of some African and Asian countries. Many colonial territories had been administered with firm rule, and the concentration of power was deemed necessary to maintain a hold over land in which tribal autonomy, or conflict in some cases, had previously existed. Following decolonization, however, the newly formed States inheriting these diverse territorial entities were encouraged to decentralize.

A concentration of power nevertheless transpired in most of these countries, and not always solely for political or administrative considerations over ways to govern. A rapid shift occurred from traditional to capitalist modes of production, dramatically changing labour conditions and the labour market. Restrictions in land tenure, the scarcity of jobs in the countryside, and inadequate social services spurred migration to urban centres of commerce and industry. As a consequence, the explosive growth of cities in developing countries must also be seen in light of these changes in the mode of production, resulting in the concentration of finances, employment, services and power. This over-concentration, besides weakening the periphery, has produced macro-cities burdened with inefficient administrations and large segments of marginalized population.

The accumulation of the central State's excessive functions and concentration of authority are today regarded by many to be excessive and a major cause of the inefficiencies that negatively influence
economic development and people’s welfare in the modern State. The function of the State in a new economic and political order has changed. The dominant powers are seeing the State as an instrument which is different from the one it was in the past.

Decentralization of the State

Whether or not the above affirmations are true, the reasoning has been used to justify sweeping reforms of the State. The need for a nation to reduce its social, economic and administrative costs has resulted in strategies for transferring certain functions, responsibilities and resources to localities and provinces. As a consequence of this process of decentralization, the periphery in some countries has begun to recover a relative share of importance. At the same time, decentralization strategies in urban agglomerations aim to create more responsible suburban administrations that relate better to the complex populations of these large sprawling cities, some of which have the population of a mid-sized country (see Hardoy 1992).

There are several approaches to decreasing the concentration of power and functions of the central level (see, for example, Cheema and Rondinelli 1983; Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema, 1984). The first form of decentralization, deconcentration, is defined as the transfer of some amount of authority or responsibility to subnational levels of central government ministries and agencies. In this way, the workload is shifted from centrally located officials to staff or offices that are located outside the national capital and are responsible for an assigned area.

The second form, delegation, is defined as the transfer of managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to organizations that are not a part of the regular bureaucratic structure and are only indirectly controlled by the central government. It implies that a sovereign authority creates or transfers specified functions and duties to an agent, usually private or non-governmental, which has broad discretion to perform such activities, although the ultimate responsibility remains with the sovereign authority.

The third form, devolution, is understood as the creation of subnational units of governments, or the strengthening of pre-existing ones by assigning them financial and legal authority and responsibility. In this case, the activities of these units are substantially outside the direct administrative control of the central government. Under devolution, local units of government are autonomous and independent, and their legal status makes them separate or distinct from the central government, which must, however, exercise indirect supervisory and regulatory functions.

Usually a combination of forms rather than a single form of decentralization is applied in a country. Also it is commonly said that decentralization is a process rather than a static condition, meaning that countries coming from centralized forms of power might naturally work through several forms of decentralization before actually devolving administrative and political responsibilities. In any case, with all processes of decentralization it is necessary to maintain relations between the centre and the decentralized periphery to guarantee the unity of the country, ensure equity and regulate disparities across and within regions.

Pros and Cons of Decentralization

As previously mentioned, decentralization in modern times started in the period of decolonization. During these more than 40 years, decentralization has had different functions and characteristics, with great variations in its intensity, impact, reach and positive and negative effects (see among others Coueyrs 1985; Wunsch and Oloue 1990, Rowat 1980). In present times, with the new global political balance and the predominance of neo-liberal economic models, state decentralization is increasingly seen by many as essential.

However, there is still insufficient evidence to support purely positive or negative views of decentralization. Many have highlighted decentralization’s positive effects in improving the functions of state administration, reducing central government and personnel, democratization, increasing transparency and accountability of public administration, and broadening the population’s control over public functions (see, for example, Smith 1985). By potentially increasing the community’s role in the control and monitoring of public programmes and investments, decentralization can have a positive democratic effect, leading to increased chances of programme sustainability and ultimately encouraging behavioural changes in people. To many of its
proponents decentralization is seen as a panacea for guaranteeing all peoples, no matter how remote or disadvantaged, the possibility of an improved life and self-determination.

To truly achieve greater equity and autonomy, state decentralization must be accompanied by certain basic conditions, such as adequately appropriated resources, firm democratic procedures and institutional competence. The absence or inadequacy of these conditions provides the basis for some important arguments against decentralization (see Smith 1985).

One argument suggests that decentralization allows the central government to pass responsibilities down to local governments without ensuring them the adequate resources and authority to carry out their new functions. The financial impact of decentralization on local levels can be particularly onerous if no compensatory instruments are successfully established. Local governments usually have to increase personnel when taking on new responsibilities, which can increase not only local budget needs but also produce a higher aggregate cost at the national level. The consequences are particularly damaging to those who need state protection to survive. Inherent to this argument are claims that local capacity to deal with new responsibilities are also lacking (Rondinelli, Nellis and Chema 1984), and training programmes for local authorities and community workers have been largely unsuccessful, with the result that decentralization increases, or at best maintains, the inefficacy of public administration.

Another point often raised is that decentralization without modifications in local social structures will reinforce the power of local elites, who can replicate the vertical and authoritarian system of power of national elites. All of these risks need to be cautiously avoided by ensuring that all mechanisms work towards empowering people, reducing costs, increasing the quality of services and promoting equity.

Many argue that some functions and responsibilities of the State should not be decentralized. Some areas remaining under central control would typically be those pertaining to national defence, foreign policy and monetary policy. The centre must also continue to play the lead role in policy making, defining norms and standards, coordination and macro-projects. The State can begin to relax its control over certain regulatory functions when appropriate and effective mechanisms of consensus exist across all levels of the country, effectively guarding against conflict and disparity. The idea that everything can be decentralized and that communities can take responsibility for all functions is nevertheless utopian or unrealistic. Decentralization is still a question of balance between centre and periphery.

The arguments in favour or against decentralization should not be seen independently of their context. What has been highlighted as positive for some countries and in a specific situation will have negative consequences in other contexts. The relative benefits or disadvantages that decentralization offers to a given country depend, upon other things, on that country’s history, its administrative structure, its social, political and economic circumstances, and the will of its politicians to decentralize. It should also be noted that a large number of the negative views on decentralization are based on social, political and economic circumstances that were prevalent several years ago. At present, and in spite of the possible merits of the arguments against decentralization, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the many forces that are pushing for state decentralization and the new political reality that it implies.

**Conditions for Effective Decentralization**

Democracy and the participation of civil society and the community, authority, functions and responsibilities, privatization, territory and reconciliation denote the basic conditions that interrelate with the process of decentralization in a given context.

**Democracy and the participation of the community and civil society** are directly related to the population where authority is exercised and they presuppose adherence to democratic principles. When decentralization is in the form of deconcentration or delegation, the function of the population in overseeing the performance of the government and the public administration is not as crucial, or easily accomplished, as it is in devolution. The participation of the community and civil society in an organized way becomes critical, instead, when putting a devolved form of decentralization into practice.

The quality and inclusiveness of community
and civil-society participation and organization will reflect the local power structure. At the same time, a community will seldom be homogeneous, conflict-free and in agreement over common goals, even though some probably overly idealistic concepts of “community” have been applied in development planning.

Transfers of responsibility imply transfers of authority. In some cases decentralization has been attempted with only a narrow delegation of authority, leaving localities insufficient decisional and implementation powers to carry out their new functions. The interrelation and balance of central and local authority is therefore a critical point in decentralization for maintaining both national unity and the functionality of localities (Conyers 1990). In this respect it has been said that decentralization without devolution is not real decentralization (see, for example, Wunsch and Oloum 1990).

The decentralization of financial responsibility means that decentralized functions and responsibilities should presuppose arrangements for decentralizing financial allocations and revenue collection, including the increased capacity of localities to augment their resources. At the same time, it will be necessary to improve and perhaps increase local human resources and their capacities. If local governments do not have new resources and adequate capacities, decentralization is no more than an exercise in demagoguery and a vehicle for central governments to rid themselves of their responsibilities. Since most of the decentralized functions are of a social character, poor populations end up without the state protection they need to survive when local capacities to carry out those functions are inadequate.

The privatization of public and social services has occurred in some countries as a result of decentralizing or delegating state functions and responsibilities. This has in many cases meant that public services are run as private businesses and consequently provided only when economically feasible. In the same way that localities without sufficient means cannot afford to satisfy the needs of the poor, privatized services cannot provide them to people who cannot afford to pay.

Decentralization infers an appropriate and balanced division of responsibilities across different territorial levels and the mapping out of authority through the political and administrative structure. Decentralization from the centre to an intermediate level (e.g. region, province, state) without extending decentralized authority to a lower level (e.g. district, community, municipality) gives excessive power to intermediate elites. It also appears inappropriate to decentralize from the centre directly to small localities without recognizing intermediate territorial and power realities. Both forms of exclusivity promote conflict, discontent and inefficiency. Moreover, the functions of the intermediate levels should be different from those of localities. The functions of the former are more related to maintaining coordination and consistency with the centre, while localities are better suited to interpret immediate realities and execute programmes.

In these basic conditions of decentralization a general concept appears to be essential: the reconciliation of conflict and disparities. This regulatory principle implies the need, in a process of decentralization, to maintain or improve equity across territorial and social lines, and to prevent or neutralize possible exceptional ambitions of some of the decentralized parties. In working to satisfy social needs, decentralization requires this harmony-inducing mechanism in order to preserve the unity of the nation and prevent disparities from growing wider. This reconciliation can be effected through the rule of a higher authority or through shared decisions taken among peers.

NPAs and their Decentralization

On September 29-30, 1990, 71 Heads of State and Government and 88 other senior officials, mostly at the ministerial level, assembled at the Headquarters of the United Nations to participate in the World Summit for Children. At the conclusion of the Summit, the participants adopted the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children as well as a Plan of Action for achieving 29 goals during the 1990s. Government representatives committed their countries to developing National Programmes of Action (NPAs) to meet those goals. Almost all of the participant countries, along with the other developing countries that subsequently subscribed to the Declaration and the Plan of Action, have prepared or are preparing their NPAs, and at last report, 106 developing countries have final or draft versions of their NPAs (Thet 1994b).

At the World Summit, reference was made to the need to develop subnational programmes of ac-
tion. Article 34.1 of the Plan of Action states:

National Governments should encourage and assist provincial and local governments as well as NGOs, the private sector and civic groups to prepare their own Programmes of action to help to implement the goals and objectives included in the Declaration and this Plan of Action (UNICEF 1990).

In view of the present trend of nations to undertake political and administrative decentralization, the decentralization of NPAAs should be considered in the context of this ongoing state decentralization; that is, the increase in responsibility of subnational units of government for certain public responsibilities. According to the NPA decentralization Overview and the database covering 103 countries (Castillo and Akehurst 1994), NPAAs are being decentralized in 50 countries, with another 36 committed to or considering decentralizing their NPAAs (see table 1, page 18). Two factors could explain this tendency: 1) the process of state decentralization has important implications for the restructuring or structuring of all planning activities in these countries, and 2) NPAAs have particular pertinence for the local level.

Several interesting trends emerge from the database. NPA decentralization tends to occur in more developed and populous countries, which also appear to have a greater probability of reaching the goals for the 1990s. Not all of the countries are moving at the same pace, and the degree NPA of decentralization — whether at the local, district, provincial, or state level — varies from country to country (tables 3, 4, 5).

Some countries have included all of the Summit goals in their local programmes of action, and others are focusing on selected goals, mainly in the area of health (table 6). There are also differing combinations of the major outputs achieved so far in different regions. Institutional commitment to and involvement in the NPA decentralization process appears to be quite extensive at both the national and local levels (table 8, 9). UNICEF’s role is in advocacy, mobilization and financial and technical support (table 10).

Differing combinations of inputs by the central and provincial governments have been recorded in the 50 countries where some initial action toward NPA decentralization has taken place. Where the process was strongly centre directed, such as in Uganda and Viet Nam (see boxes 1 and 2), it might most accurately be called NPA decentralization; in other countries, often in federalized systems (e.g., India, Nigeria, but also in Chile), the centre has permitted greater flexibility in the local formulation process in the areas of goal definition, organization, strategies, resources, etc. In yet other countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, the subnational levels and/or civil society have taken a leading role in defining programmes as a result of lacking input from the central government.

The Dimensions of NPA Decentralization

NPA decentralization is affected by several dimensions or groups of variables. These dimensions have emerged as important components in past experiences of social programming and are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

To understand NPA decentralization as a multiple-purpose or multiple-function concept helps to understand much of the current programming reality. Plans and programmes originated as responses to the need of adjusting means to goals. A nationalistic principle was involved in this concept. But recent experiences have demonstrated that planning and programming involve something more than merely setting goals and defining the activities to achieve them. Reality does not necessarily work in such a simplistic way. Planning and planning involve, require and/or promote political will, social mobilization, people’s education and so on. For example, countries, as well as international agencies such as WHO and UNICEF, have found in the experience of universal child immunization that interrelations and cross-fertilization exist in other dimensions, such as social mobilization, political will, popular and community awareness, etc. In the case of a local programme of action (LPA), this implies integrity, and when many community and institutional groups become involved it is necessary to analyse all of the relevant dimensions. These dimensions could be defined as follows: technical, organization and management, political will, social mobilization, communication and advocacy, community participation and finance.

The technical dimension. The technical dimension entails all of the instruments and methods needed to produce a plan or programme. Defining indi-
Decentralizing National Programmes of Action

cators, gathering information, analysing and evaluating existing programmes, adjusting goals according to local characteristics, defining new projects, and defining instruments for determining costs and sources of financing are all components of the technical dimension that require careful attention in the formulation process of local programmes of action.

The difficulties of implementing centrally designed programmes at the local level are well-known, as such programmes usually end up needing considerable adjustment to reflect local contexts. First of all, local programmes of action present new realities where no appropriate instruments have been developed. At the same time, local development is often constrained by local-level programming deficiencies requiring technical solutions: lacking coordination, limited financial resources, a shortage of human resources and inadequate organizational and administrative systems. Outside support is generally required to address this situation, including a coherent set of technical guidelines for programming, training and implementation. These programming techniques are only now being fully developed, but limited progress has been made on adapting broader public-sector decentralization techniques to NPA decentralization needs.

NPA DECENTRALIZATION: SELECTED INDICATORS
(March 1994)

Tables 1 & 2 refer to the 103 countries surveyed

1 - Status of NPA decentralization

| In process of NPA decentralization | 50 |
| Intend to decentralize the NPA     | 26 |
| With future possibility            | 10 |
| Will never decentralize the NPA   | 17 |

2 - Formulation of NPA

| Decentralized                      | 14 |
| Centrally with local consultation  | 15 |
| Centrally                          | 63 |
| Still under preparation            | 11 |

Tables 3 through 13 refer to the 50 countries with NPA decentralization

3 - Year NPA decentralization began

| Started in 1991 | 5 |
| Started in 1992 | 14 |
| Started in 1993 | 24 |
| Started in 1994 | 7 |

4 - Levels of NPA decentralization

| First level (local) | 7 |
| Second level (intermediate) | 15 |
| First/second level   | 28 |

5 - Geographical coverage of NPA decentralization

| Selected areas | 26 |
| Whole country  | 24 |

6 - Goals included in NPA decentralization

| All Summit goals | 32 |
| Selected goals   | 18 |
| Health           | 17 |
| Education        | 10 |
| Child Development| 4  |
| CEDC             | 7  |
The dimension of organization and management. Organization and management refer to the institutional capacities necessary for the implementation of a plan or programme. Effective decentralization, being a new reality, necessitates the strengthening of the community’s human and organizational resources and management systems. Some new institutional instruments could be needed. Experience has shown how severe limitations in local administrative capacity, in the quality of human resources and in organizational structures can impede the decentralization process of a country. During the formulation stage of local programmes of action, issues of feasibility and viability must be considered and plans developed for increasing local capacities. Correcting mistakes due to inadequate local capacity-building can be very costly and produce major delays in the implementation of programmes.

The political dimension. The political dimension refers to the involvement of political leaders, parties and groups in the decentralization process, and their willingness to take responsibility for, make decisions about and grant importance to the local programmes of action. Political engagement is fundamental to the formulation and implementation of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 - Areas where outputs have been achieved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/organization/administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>8 - Institutions participating at the national level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of State</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Public Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other National Institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Cooperation Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<th>9 - Institutions participating at the local level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads 1st/2nd level government</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st/2nd level institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other local institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local offices of national institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>International cooperation agencies</td>
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<tr>
<th>10 - Role of participant agencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multilateral Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilateral Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
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<td>Mobilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
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<tr>
<th>11 - National-level leadership of NPA decentralization process</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry/secretary of planning, development or finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of social sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s welfare offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special committees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other institutions</td>
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<tr>
<th>12 - Local-level leadership of NPA decentralization process</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local head of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local or regional planning offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central national institution/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local offices of national institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special committees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local public institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other institutions</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>13 - Children’s participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countries where children participate</td>
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</table>
NPA. Nationally, it promotes the participation of many institutions and state resources, while locally, even in centralized States, many leaders have developed a large degree of autonomy, responsibility and implementation capacity. If, on the other hand, local authorities are not involved in the process they can generate considerable resistance to central policies and programmes. Programmes bearing local characteristics strengthen the standing of local politicians, helping them obtain greater legitimacy and recognition.

Political commitment should involve not only the Heads of State and local politicians, but their whole team of collaborators. Effective political mobilization requires a system that motivates physical, human and financial resources towards a common purpose. This kind of mobilization is the result of a combination of know-how, charisma, efficient organization and action.

The dimension of social mobilization. Social mobilization implies the process whereby local groups

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**Box 1. UGANDA**

**Planning social services during decentralization**

The National Resistance Movement came to power in Uganda in 1986, ending more than a decade and a half of civil conflict. The political organization of the State, set across a five-tier system of Resistance Councils and Committees (RC) from the village through the district level, are meant to play a key role in providing the focal point for decentralization, with special emphasis placed in the areas of finance, planning and personnel management. In particular, decentralization will be carried to the district (RC5) and the sub-county (RC3) levels. While the central government is to retain control over functions and services of national interest (e.g. defense, banking, natural resources, justice, higher education), the districts will be responsible for designing their own development plans and social services.

Placing resources under local control will require the development of managerial and technical capacity at that level; to facilitate that, the central ministries are providing financial and human resources, training, policy documents, guidelines, supervision and technical advice.

In order to improve the information base about the situation of women and children at all levels, the National Council for Children, in collaboration with UNICEF, commissioned the university-based Child Health Development Centre to carry out a situation analysis. The nationwide survey came up with district-specific reports ("Districts Speak Out"), which are being used in developing district plans of action for children.

In the course of the planning phase at the district level, a six-day workshop is held to determine planning capacities and to evaluate and direct the overall planning process. During the week a progress report is presented on the district plan of action and sectoral position papers are written by working groups. At the district consensus meeting, the main issues and problems faced by children and women in the district are identified, and the key sectoral objectives and strategies that must be included in the plan are agreed upon. A national and district core planning team also visits two sub-counties in order to gain insights about their planning capacities, with an aim to eventually bringing implementation responsibilities to that level. After prioritizing the problems identified in the sub-counties and formulating broad strategies for confronting them, the sub-county group is facilitated in devising a work plan to continue the planning process and develop its own plan of action for children.

Budgeting exercises help districts better pinpoint allocations to primary services, and budgetary reviews with restructuring plans are meant to increase funding to those activities that address the identified goals. Districts are also encouraged to look beyond their own locally generated revenue and central government allocations by seeking supplementary funding from donors and NGOs.

Source: UNICEF Kampala 1994
and individuals participate in the LPA in a meaningful and systematic way. Broad participation in the formulation and implementation of both national and local programmes of action helps ensure that the process is balanced and is essential for both attaining NPA goals and sustaining the results. Experiences in successful immunization initiatives, for instance, have demonstrated the importance of mobilizing all types of social groups. Decentralization facilitates this mobilization process by allowing programmes to better reflect local realities and encourage the use of local resources.

Since the NPAs seek to accomplish broad, long-term goals, social mobilization must be part of a sustained process that maintains public interest, awareness and participation. Local mobilization and community participation imply that all persons and in-

### Box 2.

**Decentralized planning in a rapidly changing environment**

VIET NAM

The process of decentralizing the NPA in Viet Nam presents a mixed bag of outcomes, some of them seemingly contradictory. This may also reflect to some extent the difficulties, or the dynamics, that exist in a country undergoing radical and rapid changes.

Viet Nam is in the midst of a transition from a centrally planned to a market-based economy, and legal, administrative and financial reforms are gradually being introduced. At the same time, budget cuts in social services are placing a greater burden on families, and income disparities are becoming more apparent between and within provinces.

In such a situation, much of the pre-existing state machinery and structures naturally lag behind the rapid pace of change. Although there is very little experience in decentralized planning — provinces and districts in Vietnam normally only implement, and do not plan, services — it was decided that each province should draw up its own programme of action. By the end of 1993, all 53 provinces had formulated their programmes of action and some were planning to take the exercise to the district level. The political commitment to the process is very high, as demonstrated by the country’s rapid adhesion to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and the creation of a ministry in 1991 — the Committee for the Protection and Care of Children — which guides the entire NPA process.

The provincial programmes of action vary in quality and will need continued technical and financial support for improvement. Coordination and monitoring mechanisms need to be developed, as do modern work methods and concepts such as cost-effectiveness. The process also reflects the lack of information and analysis at levels below the province. District and commune levels of government also appear to be underfunded for meeting their needs, and communes which are not able to raise additional local resources on any significant scale cannot achieve adequate levels of services for the poor and children.

The timely submission of programmes of action from all provinces, however, has allowed for a more rapid detection of planning and technical weaknesses and pointed out the need to introduce capacity-building mechanisms at subnational levels. The process and outcome have also helped to better define large disparities, both in economic and human development terms, between provinces and are thus making a valuable contribution to the overall development process.

The cost analysis undertaken by provinces for the programmes of action were unprecedented exercises. Provinces have used the programmes to express their urgent capital expenditure needs in social services, although often this has pointed out a lack of linkage between the preparation of the provincial programmes and the budgetary process, once again reflecting to some extent inexperience in decentralized planning.

Source: UNICEF Hanoi 1994
Institutions assume the overall objectives as their own. As a consequence, they have an educational effect whereby people interpret the goals as values, and the actions in favour of children as normal, desirable behaviour.

The dimension of communication and advocacy. In numerous local programming experiences, social communication, from local-level person-to-person communication to the use of the mass media, has played a key role in spreading information about programme activities and in involving community members and other key actors in the process. An important communication tool is advocacy, in which the commitment of key actors is sought for the local programmes of action for children.

The dimension of community participation. Community participation implies the process whereby community leaders, community groups and community organizations representing the will of the people are involved in a continuous and structured way in the execution and follow-up of the local programme of action. The participation of the community will help increase government transparency and ensure that the programme is relevant to community needs. To guarantee meaningful community participation, democratic mechanisms must be firmly established and respected; at the same time, community participation requires that communities be organized, educated, aware of their rights and knowledgeable of their objectives, and involved in permanent or systematic actions rather than in only specific events.

The financial dimension. The financial dimension refers to the origin and expenditure of financial resources, including the budgeting process and control of expenses, and the allocation, mobilization and increase of resources as a consequence or need of local programmes of action.

To achieve the goals for the 1990s, a concerted effort is required for increasing and reallocating resources. Local interest and commitment can lead to a substantial increase in the resources needed to meet decade goals. Decentralization can enhance the ability of local areas to increase their financial base and decrease dependence on central allocations through, for example, the generation of local resources (taxes, user fees, etc.), donated local labour inputs, direct loans and grants, and the involvement of the private sector.

Relationships between the Dimensions

Since decentralization is a process rather than a static condition, these dimensions cannot be viewed exclusively of one another. The function and importance of each of these dimensions differ throughout the various stages of the NPA decentralization process. During programme formulation, for example, the political and technical dimensions are likely to be very important. Social mobilization can be fundamental at the time the NPA is launched. The organizational dimension will carry more weight in the implementation stages.

Each dimension will often evolve over time. In the case of the technical dimension, for instance, much emphasis has been placed on the need to begin the NPA process with the available knowledge and rough indicators, as the data will only improve in successive stages. To cite another example, mobilization can spark enthusiasm bordering on euphoria at the outset. But it will need to be systematized and rationalized over time to institutionalize and sustain the process. Political will must capture different and new forces as governments and politicians change, but it is likely that the progress achieved in the past will pressure incoming politicians to give their support.

Resources should increase with time, provided that political will and social pressure is maintained, and the ability to make more rational investments will often increase as a result of the technical improvements in NPA implementation. This process implies that progress in some of the dimensions will spur the development of others. The relationships between the dimensions and their relative importance at different times can be observed and analysed, and it will be necessary to systematize this process and to develop the appropriate tools to promote this kind of synergy.

As previously discussed, NPA decentralization must be understood in relation to the decentralization of the State. Nevertheless, local programmes of action for children have been formulated in several highly centralized countries, although the extent and impact of such programmes are limited by obvious technical and administrative constraints. Despite that, LPA's in centralized States have important functions in the areas of advocacy, coordination and increasing public awareness, underlining the need to con-
sider all of the dimensions of NPA decentralization and their overall impact when analysing individual cases.

General Considerations on NPA Decentralization

As noted previously, efforts at decentralization in developing countries have yielded mixed results. It has been observed, however, that very few systematic attempts have been made to evaluate the impact of decentralization in relation to particular objectives (Conyers 1990). Decentralizing NPA goals would appear to be an appropriate tool for such an evaluation. The decentralization of NPAs, or the formulation of LPAs, is a specific, initially goal-driven form of decentralization, which can be applied either in specific regions or throughout the country, and which can aim at achieving only selected goals or all goals.

NPAs are essentially the responsibility of the State, community members and civil society, despite potentially significant roles played by NGOs and several international agencies, among them UNICEF. The decade and mid-decade goals included in the World Summit Plan of Action have helped to sensitize countries about the need to develop new programmes or strengthen existing ones, making the NPA an especially suitable tool for shaping relevant social policy and directing national planners and ministries that must devise the methods and strategies for achieving the goals.

The NPA is therefore strictly related to national planning, a fact amply reflected in the country reports presented at the Technical Meeting on NPA Decentralization in Florence. In Viet Nam and Sudan, newly created ministries have been in charge of directing the NPA process, and in Pakistan, similar to Uganda, Mongolia, Namibia, Indonesia and oth-

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Box 3. SUDAN

NPA decentralization in the war-torn south

The largest nation in Africa, Sudan is home to nearly 600 different tribes and ethnic groups, although the country’s population has two broad, distinct cultural and religious entities — the predominantly Arab/Muslim north and centre and the Christian or animist Negroid populations of the south. This ethnic division has been a major contributor to the recurring civil conflict in the country since its independence, the most recent phase of which is now over a decade old.

The last ten years of the conflict have had devastating effects on the country and its citizens. Some 500,000 civilian deaths are estimated, along with the virtual destruction of the basic infrastructure for social services in many parts of the south.

In this context, the Sudan case reflects an attempt at decentralizing its NPA in a complex emergency situation. The main focus has been to advocate and support certain decade and mid-decade goals in the ongoing relief activities and, in some relatively stable and secure areas of the south, in the shift from relief to rehabilitation activities. Recent initiatives around the selected goals involve the Government, NGOs and UN Agencies, and have focused on guinea worm eradication, measles immunization, vitamin A administration and increasing access to basic education. These will receive special emphasis in the relief and rehabilitation activities currently being undertaken, although they need to be pursued beyond 1995-96 and include key decade goals of the NPA.

The prospect of the resolution of the civil conflict and of instilling peace in the war-torn south will also have far reaching consequences for overall NPA decentralization. Peace can bring about a valuable reallocation of scarce national resources for child survival and development, regenerate external development assistance and, most importantly, enable the south to recover from the devastating effects of the war and make the transition from relief to rehabilitation and, ultimately, to development.

Source: Farooqui and Singh 1994
er countries, the NPA goals have been incorporated into the country’s overall development plan, where they are an essential part of the overall planning strategy and policy framework.

Some ground work has already been laid regarding social mobilization and local focus: basic-service projects or area-based projects have often been effective at delivering services and empowering communities, but they are limited in scope and can create privileged and well-served areas while other more deprived areas receive little or no benefit. The well-known and rich experience of these past and current projects, with their broad community participation, should nonetheless prove to be useful in the formulation and implementation of LPAs. Some of these experiences have employed strategies now advocated in numerous LPAs, such as an integrated approach to children’s problems, inter-institutional coordination, and community participation in the phases of diagnosis, programming and follow-up.

Compared with basic-service projects, the LPA approach takes a more holistic view of the community. It links the needs and problems of the community and children to a more encompassing set of relations and dimensions within the whole administrative unit, affecting the basic planning and programming process. Basic service programmes, on the other hand, usually operate within small rural communities or neighborhoods that are only a part of the overall locality. At the same time, in the NPA decentralization perspective, the sum of all local or regional programmes of action, properly regulated by the central level, could ensure equity across regions and social groups. Also, NPA decentralization provides the opportunity to go to scale.

The size of a country’s territory and population, along with population density and heterogeneity, influence planning for NPA decentralization. Sparsely populated areas and isolated populations make service delivery and communications more problematic. Although the populations of the 50 countries decentralizing their LPAs appeared to be more heterogeneous than the remaining 53 countries included in the survey, it can be hypothesized that the minority populations in these countries require special treatment. In such cases, decentralization should make service delivery more efficient and pertinent for minorities, while giving a larger share of autonomy to regions for confronting their own particular needs.

In some countries, ethnic and religious groups living in specific regions have been marginalized from the mainstream of national political and social life. In extreme circumstances, this and other factors have led to ongoing civil conflict, as the case of Sudan illustrates (box 3). Nevertheless, state decentralization and NPA decentralization are continuing apace in Sudan, and the NPA efforts undertaken in the war-torn southern part of the country reflect a possible role of NPA decentralization in an emergency situation.

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1. The database uses secondary data in order to compare the overall indicators of countries decentralizing their LPAs with countries not decentralizing their LPAs. Indicators used for ascertaining population homogeneity were the percentage of the population speaking the same language, practicing the same religion and belonging to the same ethnic group. Countries decentralizing their LPAs recorded higher percentages in all three cases: 67 vs 59 per cent for language, 73 vs 70 per cent for religion, and 64 vs 56 per cent for ethnic group (Castillo and Akehurst 1994).

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**Box 4.**

**ECUADOR**

**Why giving local government power over social policy favours participation**

1. There is more pressure on local authorities to meet the local population’s expectations.
2. The narrower scope of problems helps to keep down the size of bureaucracy.
3. It is easier to pinpoint political apathy and the reasons for it.
4. Local groups have easier access to administrative structures.
5. It is easier to make local authorities accountable for their actions.
6. Pockets of poverty and powerlessness can be more easily identified.

Adapted from a paper by Dr. Simon Pachano, IVLA-CELCADe consultant, delivered at ILDIS Seminar on Social Policies and Society, Quito, Ecuador, Sept. 1993.
II. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Creating local, goal-oriented programmes in favour of children requires planning techniques that are not always present in a systematic form. It is necessary to develop local planning and programming methods that are capable of coordinating and systematizing different actions and different levels of execution and responsibility. The decentralization process is often hindered by the absence of programming instruments at the local level. At the same time, adequate local capacities to develop these instruments and to address the new reality presented by local programmes of action for children are usually in short supply. In this perspective, the programming activities should also be seen as a means to both improve local skills and ensure that the necessary instruments are put into place.

Diagnosing the local situation, setting goals, evaluating current programmes and activities, defining new programmes to meet the mid-decade and decade goals at the local level, defining necessary human resources, timing the activities and programmes, and calculating their cost are the main programming activities that should be initially undertaken. Plans to monitor and evaluate the activities once they are underway, and the problems related to the location and adequacy of information and data on the local situation also need to be confronted at different stages of the programming process.

Based on the experiences reported up till now, an attempt is made in this chapter to describe the process of designing a formal local programme of action. Circumstances of course can differ widely from country to country — and even within countries — and the general pattern presented in the following sections of this chapter has not been followed in all of the countries decentralizing their NPAs. Some countries have adopted a strategy of incorporating the mid-decade and decade goals into their regular local development programmes in order to avoid putting communities through the process of reviewing all of their local programmes and producing a formal document for children which is separate from institutionalized local planning and programming. This is the case of the Philippines, for example. Of course this strategy might not create an integral vision of children's problems and needs in the localities, although this problem can be overcome with an intensive national follow-up that highlights subnational levels. This vision could facilitate a mobilization process to incorporate the goals and resources for children into the regular local development programme.

In most countries, however, local development programmes — where the mid-decade and decade goals for children could be included — either do not exist or are far from adequate. As a consequence, formal local-level programmes of action for children are being pursued in most countries.

As noted, local programmes of action (LPAs) provide an opportunity to develop and improve certain programming techniques at the local level. In many countries, planning experience and knowledge are very limited away from the centre, and when such planning exists it is often the result of making local adjustments to national programmes or plans. This should not constitute a deterrent for initiating the process of programming local activities for children, which itself has usually served as a training exercise to develop local planning capacity, as the examples of many countries point out (e.g. Ecuador, Uganda, Nigeria, Viet Nam, Mongolia, Namibia). In
some countries, such as Brazil and Viet Nam, LPA formulation has required that local officials be trained in goal-oriented programming, implying a change in local planning routines whereby many activities included in annual plans were justified by virtue of their pre-existence or merely by the need to expend some allocated resources. It is reasonable to expect that local planning and programming capacities will improve over time as a result of practical experience.

If an appropriate follow-up is made, and if other dimensions such as political engagement and social mobilization are strong, programme capacity and sustainability will be progressively reinforced and will increase. Many of the 16 countries participating in the Technical Meeting mentioned that LPA formulation was seen by many government officials and NGOs as their first ever opportunity to programme together with representatives of other institutions. It is also significant that most of these countries noted that the LPAs for children represented the first time that programming by goals was undertaken.

Formulation of a Local Programme for Children

Diagnosis

The first step in formulating the LPA is a situation analysis of children and women living in the area to be covered. Four differing main approaches are being used. The first approach centres the analysis on an examination of all the NPA goals, one by one frequently available or selected indicators on the local conditions are grouped and ordered in relation to each decade goal. This kind of situation analysis focuses on programming by goals, leading to the identification of realistic goals for a given region or locality. It also establishes the need to evaluate or design projects and activities in relation to their effectiveness in achieving the goals.

In a second approach of examining the situations of localities, a social-sector by social-sector analysis is employed, and then the sectoral situation is related to the mid-term and Summit goals. In Bangladesh, information on 16 essential indicators, grouped by social sectors, are utilized to make district level analyses, which are then used to draft sectoral strategy papers for the district.

The third approach applies a type of Triple A (assessment-analysis-action) methodology (WHO - UNICEF 1989). The National Council for Children in Uganda has adopted this open approach in its situation analysis. The Council organizes week-long district-level workshops in order to make sectoral analyses on the situation of children for both the district and sub-county level (see also box 1). Some of the provincial programmes of action in Ecuador also apply this methodology.

A fourth approach works through problems and sectors. In the state of Tamil Nadu, India, state goals were defined during a five-day workshop in which participants were divided into 11 groups, one for each sector. Each group outlined major problems and issues for their respective sectors and set major and specific mid-decade goals for 1995, 1998 (the end of the 8th Five Year Plan) and for the year 2000.

All four types of analyses can create a comprehensive picture of the status of local children and women and lead to a better understanding of their conditions. But, of course, the approach centred on analysing the situation in relation to each goal helps to focus activities on reaching the goals, while optimizing resources for that purpose. It also focuses attention on the problems of reaching the goals, thus facilitating the identification of necessary and appropriate actions.

The local analysis for LPAs has helped to more accurately identify objectives as well as to structure actions in better defined spaces. The situation analysis for the municipal programme of action of Alexandria, Egypt, while showing that the city as a whole will reach the mid-decade goals, also reveals five sections or geographical areas of the city most in need of special interventions, and indicates the sectors in which activities should be targeted. In Sudan, the analyses have pointed to the need to adopt priorities in different states in keeping with the diversity of the country. Likewise, the situation analyses in some cases led to programmes of action that incorporate targets not explicitly listed in the World Summit recommendations, such as in Brazil's state programmes of action.

Setting goals

The reviews of the local situation of children described above lead to the definition of local goals, but in the context of the national mid-decade and decade goals. Sudan, noted above, provides a good
example of how goals should differ from region to region. Effective strategies for reaching out to nomadic populations through low-cost interventions in health care and basic education are a primary concern in former Darfur State, while in the former Central State, despite its relative prosperity, high levels of protein energy malnutrition in five-year-olds testifies to the need for an intersectoral, community-based nutrition strategy. In the war-torn South and in transitional areas, reassessment of the conditions has led to adjustments in the priorities among the key goals for the mid-decade.

Local goal setting depends on a combination of many factors and entails analysis and judgment. Some of the important aspects to consider include political will, social mobilization, capacity, and the potential or immediate availability of resources.

Selected goals and sectoral programmes. The achievement of the decade goals depends on an important extent on the capacities of the State and the development of the various social sectors. Institutions, projects and programmes — in health, nutrition, education, culture, environment, work and even justice — do not always have the same degree of development and national coverage. Nor do they always have the same degree of decentralization. A decentralization process that includes all sectors will therefore not always be possible, and sectoral decentralization of programmes of action could be foreseen.

The need to have decentralized programmes for some of the sectors, or a group of sectors, is evident. For example, health, nutrition and education may have a greater impact on attaining the goals than the other sectors. Sectoral decentralization is often more feasible due to the high degree of independence and autonomy of these sectors in most developing countries.

Eighteen of the 50 countries in the Overview on NPA decentralization are including only selected national goals in their LPAs, based on the priorities of national and local needs and feasibility: 17 of them are doing so for health, ten for education, four for child development and seven for children in especially difficult circumstances.

Some countries refer to placing special emphasis on mid-decade goals. In addition, other countries are decentralizing towards achieving their own goals as well as all of the Summit Goals. The Philippines, for instance, has included all goals incorporated in the Philippine Plan of Action for Children, and Bangladesh has included its 4th Five-Year Plan goals. Other countries have specified certain areas that need the most attention; Chile, for example, has highlighted the particular aspects of the Summit goals that are most relevant to its current situation. Three countries do not fall into the above categories: Panama is elaborating its own selected goals, although priority areas have been identified; Paraguay is decentralizing only for the mid-decade goals; and Tanzania decided during the process of programming that its goals will be determined at the local levels.

LPAs have helped give special emphasis to goals according to local realities. In Brazil, importance has been placed on tackling problems for improving the protection of children living in especially difficult circumstances. These include actions related to combating drug abuse, crime and violence against children and adolescents, and improving the working conditions of adolescents. In Tamil Nadu, a special effort is being made to abolish child labour as part of the state programme of action.

Great importance is usually given to working with the mid-decade goals that have been set as priorities by several institutions and the government. Argentina and Benin (see box 5), for example, are focusing primarily on health goals; Chile and Brazil on children in especially difficult circumstances, and Mongolia on education and nutrition.

It appears that few countries have set standards to define local goals in relation to national goals. Usually, the adoption of goals and programmes has been left to internal programming processes at the local level. If standards for local goal levels are not defined by central authorities, inconsistent goal levels could be established within the country. Even in such a situation, however, the weighted sum of the goals of all localities across the country will matter most. In India, for instance, it will be interesting to compare the cumulative goals of all states with the overall goals set at the national level, since states are accorded considerable autonomy in formulating their programmes. Likewise, the Nigerian states adopting their own programmes of action should aim beyond the goals set in the country's NPA.
**Planning health services at the community level**

Public health services in Benin are being progressively decentralized in the areas of planning and lower-level management decision-making. These tasks are being handed over to some 400 Management Committees at the *sous-préfecture* and communal levels, which manage peripheral public health centres as part of Benin’s implementation of the Bamako Initiative. About one third of the committees have an annual programme and budget.

Another ongoing initiative for decentralizing health services are Community Information Systems, which have been set up in 19 villages within the Zou *département*, where growth monitoring is being carried out by village women’s groups. In the area of Guinea Worm eradication, community centres are being established for local planning, health education and disease surveillance, with activities carried out by trained village volunteers.

Local programmes of action (primarily focusing on health planning and Guinea Worm eradication) are in place in all six of Benin’s *départements* and should eventually be drawn up in all 67 *sous-préfectures*. As a result of the NPA, health committees have been set up in all *départements* and *sous-préfectures*, with the task of sensitizing the population on the mid-decade goals and of supporting the implementation of activities and follow-up on progress towards the achievement of the goals. In addition, these health committees should complement other structures, while acting as a catalyst for appropriate actions and as a coordinator for gathering information, analysing results, and providing feedback to other organizations and committees.

Although decision-making in *département* and *sous-préfecture* health-planning committees still follows a strict hierarchy, and the Ministry of Health must ultimately approve all plans, this is expected to change through further deconcentration, particularly spurred by the Programme for Developing Public Health Services. Moreover, in two *départements*, the competency and foresight of the divisional Chief Medical Officer has been important in stimulating local initiatives, especially for the preparation of *sous-préfecture* programmes of action.

Source: UNICEF Cotonou 1994

Local analyses of children’s situations and local goal setting should generate more sensitivity and motivation on behalf of children, leading to the emergence of a more realistic vision of the problems and their solutions. All together these elements could produce more engagement and efficacy when defining local goals, and as a consequence it can be assumed that local plans will aim beyond centrally defined programmes of action.

Free local goal setting, in which local goals are established as a result of local diagnosis and are not strictly bound to nationally defined goals, could produce one of two outcomes: a) local goals are more ambitious than national goals. When adding up the local programmes of action the result will be that the aggregate goal levels will end up going beyond those established in the centrally defined NPA. In this case, decentralization has resulted in an added positive effect in the interest of children; b) localities could place themselves below the national NPA goals. The result will be a added negative effect.

Several cases can be cited in which localities have set goals beyond the national ones. Tamil Nadu’s own goals include the elimination of female infanticide, improving the status of the girl child and raising the age of marriage. In Argentina, although provinces are adapting centrally defined goals to their situations in order to gain access to special funding, autonomous provincial and municipal initiatives are more specific and, in most cases, go beyond the national goals. Alexandria’s programme is unique in the Egyptian NPA process, and it should yield better results than those of other cities or towns.
Of course, it would be reasonable to create some sort of mechanism or guidance coming from the central authorities, or by agreement among subnational units, to establish appropriate standards on setting the level of local goals. This is desirable in order to avoid disparities and inequities arising from goal levels that are ambitious in some regions and not ambitious enough in others. This is the case of Brazil, where states have agreed on goals and levels among themselves, even without an officially approved NPA. In Uganda, where emphasis is being put on making accurate district-level analyses, districts must nonetheless take national plans and priorities into account since the district programmes will be integrated into the Uganda National Programme of Action for Children. District programmes of action will also be related or linked to sub-county and regional levels. Also, Uganda’s districts plans will be related to lower levels of planning. This is facilitated by the National Council for Children, which coordinates NPA decentralization and ensures that the methodology followed by the districts will allow their programmes to be integrated into the NPA.

Analysis of ongoing projects for children

Once the goals at the local level have been defined, a review and evaluation of current local programmes must be carried out before formulating the strategies and activities of the LPA. It is necessary to determine the reach and efficacy that can be attained under current local programmes and locally executed programmes of regional and national institutions. This evaluation is necessary to determine if the envisioned local programme is able to achieve the locally defined goals. An important element of the situation analysis is therefore the visualization of the administrative divisions of the state and the aid programmes of international agencies and NGOs that are being carried out locally.

Not only objective information on existing programmes should be incorporated into the analysis. A number of programmers have highlighted the need to examine the attitudes and values of child-care providers as part of the potential facilitators for action. Such examination should also include their views on children’s needs and rights, and the contribution that they can make financially and otherwise to satisfy those needs. It is also useful to understand how the providers receive information relative to a child’s health and development, which sources are credible, and how they express their needs and views (e.g. by voting, through the media, access to formal or informal leaders).

Having this information for all segments and key individuals can provide the foundation for building up a strategy to mobilize demand and generate supply or service. A strategy in this sense can signify “marketing” the NPA by finding the “selling point” for key individuals and institutions. A politician might see the NPA as a ready-made political platform and image builder, a tool for fund-raising if properly costed, and, where possible, as a means to coordinate the activities of external agencies. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu presented the state goals as a special 15-point programme (see box 6), while in some municipalities in Argentina, the involvement of many groups from both the public and private spheres has generated a broader vision of needs and solutions.

For most of the countries and localities analysed in this report the exercise of developing a complete and integrated vision of children’s living conditions, as a part of LPA formulation, has been unprecedented. In many cases a clear understanding of the situation has produced higher political involvement and more popular participation.

Children’s views of their own conditions and expectations should be included in the analysis, although few experiences of this have been reported in LPA formulation. In related areas, such as the Rights of the Child, children have had the opportunity to express their views with surprisingly interesting results. In Ecuador, for instance, when children were asked to vote for their rights in descending order of importance, they added the right to recreation, which had not been included in either the Convention of the Rights of the Child nor in the Summit goals. A better understanding of how children perceive their needs could help to make action more effective since it would add to the population’s overall acceptance of the local programme. This has been a basic principle in social change and social programming.

Defining projects and activities

When the ongoing local projects have been assessed in terms of the newly set goals, a strategy has to be defined for making adjustments in existing programmes or creating new ones. An analysis of ways to increase local capacity should also be included in
Subnational NPAs can be good politics

The present head of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalitha, is a former movie actress who has followed the footsteps of her predecessor and mentor, Mr. M.G. Ramachandran, also a former actor. Mr. Ramachandran had built mass support based on film fan clubs and was known for his populist schemes, such as the Chief Minister’s Nutritious Meal programme.

The State Planning Board formed a committee to draft the state programme of action in 1992, although that draft was never finalized. But in August of 1993, Dr. J. Jayalalitha issued an order that the State Plan of Action for the Child (SPAC) be drawn up in time for her to launch it on November 14, Children’s Day in India. The programme was actually completed in only eight weeks, as the drafting process was begun with a hurriedly organized five-day seminar with the participation of more than 70 representatives from 18 state- and central-government agencies and selected NGOs.

During the formulation process, the Chief Minister asked that a 14-point programme be extracted from the SPAC for announcement on November 14. She added a fifteenth point and the plan became known as Dr. J. Jayalalitha’s 15-Point Programme for Child Welfare. All the mid-decade goals and the major goals of the state programme of action were included in the 15-point programme, together with some additional issues which were particularly pertinent to the state: the elimination of female infanticide, improving the status of the girl child and raising the age of marriage, and the Chief Minister’s own fifteenth point, providing free heart surgery for children suffering from congenital heart disease.

To elicit a public response to the SPAC and the 15-point Programme goals, booklets have been published in Tamil and English, entitled “The Future is Now for the Children of Tamil Nadu”, highlighting the role of the community and individuals. A 15-minute audio-visual “A Chance to Live, A Chance to Blossom” (in Tamil and English) has also been produced for widespread distribution.

The Chief Minister’s political acumen saw the opportunity that the SPAC offered for her “government for the populace”; at the same time, political support for the SPAC and the 15-point Programme gave existing programmes a much needed push. The two documents were regarded as separate entities so that the SPAC would not necessarily be associated with the policies and fortunes of a single political party. Though the same favourable conditions may not be found in other states of India, or in all countries, the lessons of the actual process, strategies and methodology followed in Tamil Nadu are nevertheless applicable:

- re-state global goals to match the national context
- focus on “do-ables”
- highlight the achievable
- build on what there is
- seek political commitment from the highest level
- capitalize on the competitive nature of regions and countries
- build partnerships and strategic alliances
- do the ground work of situation analysis, data collection, etc.
- use state-level presence and networks
- use an intensive workshop approach, both to bring together different departments and NGOs and to create a sense of “mission” and camaraderie.
- concentrate on realistic planning
- keep a balance between central and state levels

Source: Lwin 1994
this phase. In general, local programmes, or locally executed national or regional programmes, are unable to fully achieve the goals. This implies the need to define several options, or a combination of options, which can be synthesized as: a) reinforcing existing programmes; b) expanding existing programmes; c) designing and creating new programmes.

Some difficulties can arise in this process of defining or redefining programmes. Aside from the need for additional financial resources, some of which should come from transfers of central resources as a consequence of the adoption of the NPA, the ability of local or regional authorities to modify or create social programmes depends to some extent on their degree of autonomy, as linked to the legal structure of the country. Where a devolved form of decentralization is in place, these subnational levels of government should possess such authority. Contrarily, trying to decentralize the NPA in a highly centralized state can lead to problems of local implementation. As the case of Ecuador illustrates (box 5), although the exercises of local analysis and goal setting provide a valuable picture of the situation of children in the provinces and cities where they are carried out, the feasibility of implementing the programmes is highly compromised by the difficulty of trying to direct and coordinate central ministries from the periphery. Nevertheless, once the provincial programme was established in Riobamba, Ecuador, it was useful for coordination at the local level and for encouraging local ministry representatives to execute their programmes. It also helped the mayor and the local community gain a better understanding of the situation and facilitated the creation of follow-up of activities.

In some countries that are building up or restructuring their social services, the NPAs are helping to define new programmes for children. Uganda is, in a sense, using its NPA to develop social programming during the process of state decentralization in a post-conflict situation. Namibia, which gained its independence in 1990, is in the process of assembling its social policy and programmes. The NPA is being recognized by local development planners as particularly attractive because it is a goal-oriented method of programming that helps to localize actions and resources. It is also politically consistent with plans for expanding access to services and providing support to the entire population. Finally, it is assisting in the strengthening, regeneration and promotion of basic-service strategies with a high degree of community participation and support.

In a situation of enormous and difficult political and economic transformation, Mongolia is using its NPA not only to define local programming needs for children, but also as an instrument to increase local awareness and technical capacity and as a package for seeking the foreign aid that will be necessary to meet the goals.

**Defining resources and cost analysis**

The financial component, dealt with more thoroughly in Chapter VII, presents a very complex situation and is difficult to analyse. In the formulation phase of LPAs, it will be necessary to identify the financing sources and define the instruments that allow for realistic estimates of programme costs. In decentralized planning, such costing methods must reflect a number of factors, some of which should try to foresee the added extra resources that can result from locally formulated and implemented programmes.

This emergence of unexpected resources has some logic since the financial resources for localities as estimated under the NPAs are calculated on the basis of central resource allocations, or of budgeted, centrally controlled decentralized resources. During the budgeting process, however, it is not always possible to anticipate many of unexpected local resources that are commonly mobilized for local programmes in favour of children. It has been seen that an LPA creates new awareness and concern in local authorities and the population, leading to the mobilization of new resources, including the involvement of the private sector, to finance local programmes.

At the same time, the process of state decentralization implies the creation of adequate financing mechanisms so that the subnational units can carry out their responsibilities. Such mechanisms can include transfers from the central to subnational units or increased revenue collecting authority and spending discretion by the subnational levels. Whatever the reality of a particular country, the costing instruments established for assessing the economic feasibility of the LPAs must take into account both these formal mechanisms and the potential economic impact of running local programmes.
Formulating local programmes in a centralized State: some lessons

In Ecuador, external resources in the form of both loans and grants are a major source of financing for social projects, accounting for just more than half of the amount budgeted between 1989 and 1992. In all, US$750 million was received in foreign loans and another $137 million in grants over that period. The money was used in such areas as education, housing, health, credit programmes, rural development, small businesses and community support programmes.

But money destined to municipalities and provinces is channeled through the central government and, in most areas of social services, through provincial offices of central ministries. This inability of the provinces and municipalities to independently generate their own revenues has in large part delayed decentralization of the NPA.

Despite these difficulties, UNICEF decided to support local programmes of action in five provinces, which comprise more than half of Ecuador’s population: Esmeraldas, Chimborazo, Pichincha, Guayas and Napo. The mayors of the cities in these provinces, along with the governor in Guayas, took the lead in advocating for these programmes, providing coordination between their respective municipalities and the institutions.

However, the Social Policies Unit, the central-government body guiding the preparation and implementation of provincial programmes of action, did not participate in the formulation of these programmes. At the same time, the local authorities wrongly assumed that UNICEF would be the main source of financing for the programmes, since UNICEF was playing such an active role.

In the end, the provincial programmes of action were of little practical use due to several factors. Projects, for example, are nearly always negotiated at the central level and the provincial authorities lacked the experience to draw up plans capable of achieving the goals. In fact, provincial council duties are generally quite limited (e.g. school construction, roads, environmental-sanitation services) as are those of municipalities, which generally manage a large share of the water and sewage utilities in the cities. At neither of these levels are the councils involved in designing or administering other services or social programmes. Thus education, health, care for vulnerable social groups and poverty abatement are not part of local government activities.

Moreover, the highly centralized institutional layout in Ecuador often excludes other actors in planning, and potential non-governmental entities, including the Church and the private sector, did not participate in the planning process in three of the provinces. There were also difficulties in compiling information on the provinces, since statistical data are usually concentrated in the capital, Quito.

This experience points out several valuable lessons when trying to decentralize in a highly centralized state:

- where the central government holds the purse strings, the most that can be hoped for at the local level is efficient deconcentration of activities, not true decentralization
- provincial offices of national ministries (e.g. health, education, social services) have to be brought into the process
- an external agent trying to work against the system is likely to find only limited space for action and to create expectations that it cannot satisfy

Source: UNICEF Quito 1994
Monitoring and Evaluation

Many technical aspects are related to monitoring and evaluation, which present problems in social planning and programming that are difficult to resolve. At the local level, problems of information quality, institutional building and human-resource capacities, and the technical instruments for monitoring and evaluation form a very difficult situation. As with the other dimensions, the evaluation and follow-up of local programmes of action should be initiated with pre-existing data and procedures. Simple approaches appear to be more effective for the present levels of NPA decentralization. Some countries are working in this direction, while others have attempted new forms of follow-up in even simpler and more manageable ways. In Brazil, for instance, a monitoring system to fit the governors' follow-up needs has been developed.

In the Brazilian methodology, monitoring is carried out every 100 days. A set of 116 indicators, used to monitor the 29 goals, is divided into three categories: sectoral (health, education, special protection); demographic, as related to the target groups; and financial, providing information on funds allocated to each state through sectoral policies for children and adolescents. The frequency of the evaluations should also make it possible to identify problems and difficulties early into the process and thus carry out the necessary adjustments, while helping to keep the technical staff mobilized to focus on the institutional objectives. The process of devising this methodology and choosing the indicators was extremely rich and democratic: the system encompasses various regional situations and the decisions over its elaboration were invariably achieved by consensus among all the states. Efforts were made to choose simple and objective indicators, so that they can be easily understood and serve as transparent instruments of social monitoring. The product of this monitoring will constitute an important instrument for the review of the NPA and SPAs, and for the drafting of municipal programmes of action. Of course very frequent follow-up is not always possible for all of the indicators and goals.

In Uganda monitoring approaches have aimed at exposing the critical elements in the decision-making processes which influence the achievement of the goals. The strategy involves establishing data bases and using appropriate and compatible software packages to facilitate networking. Other sector and cross-sector monitoring systems will be used to capture trends, while community-based monitoring systems will be promoted to up-date or seek new or additional information when needed.

The Information Problems

In the initial steps of formulating local programmes of action, many countries have reported that the information needed to construct an accurate picture of local conditions is frequently of low quality and limited. This, as we have mentioned, should not be used as a reason to delay initiating the formulation of the LPA. The paucity of up-to-date, reliable data in Vietnam, as well as in other countries, was a major obstacle during the formulation of the provincial programmes of action, and, together with low programming capacities in the provinces, determined problems in the quality and accuracy of the programmes. But all 53 provinces in Vietnam have submitted their programmes of action, and despite the shortcomings — or perhaps thanks to them — the programmes have provided an important starting point for local programming while indicating the technical areas that require strengthening.

Selecting indicators

One of the first problems to be faced is the definition of indicators for goal setting and programme execution. As is well known, social indicators represent an intensive field of work for social sciences and social planning. Non-standardized systems exist, and each specific situation likely requires a particular approach. In spite of this, a general standard is needed when comparing different local programmes and the relations of their results with the National Programme. UNICEF, for instance, has developed a standardized approach for evaluating progress on mid-decade goals. These definitions take into account global follow-up needs, while reflecting national situations. Any local approach of monitoring should at least be consistent with these standards and objectives. The appropriate monitoring activities can be more effectively planned when the areas in which the information needs improving have been identified. This represents an important first step towards the creation of a system of information.

The quality and scope of information should also improve with programme execution, and eventu-
ally the information will be necessary to create a system of programme follow-up. In order to ensure that the quality and scope of information will improve during the process, however, some steps should be planned from the outset. This usually entails plans for the establishment or reinforcement of an information system.

Strategies for improving information on local conditions represent for some countries an important effort in which a variety of actors are involved. The National Council for Children in Uganda, in collaboration with UNICEF, commissioned the University-based Child Development Centre to carry out a situation analysis to supplement the information gathered by the technical staff of the line-sector ministries and update the sector information on the situation of women and children. At a lower level, district technical staff, NGOs and Resistance Council Government representatives are carrying out a similar exercise. As a strategy for strengthening the information base of districts, sub-counties and NGOs, the Child Health Development Centre issued district specific reports, called “Districts Speak Out”, which are being disseminated back to the districts as part of developing district programmes of action for children.

The source of information on local children and women in a given country might in fact be found at any level — national, regional or local — and there is no general norm that reveals where relevant local information is located. In Ecuador, for instance, the concentration of information at the central level hindered the successive steps of local diagnosis and goal setting.

In defining local goals, however, the quality of information may be less important than its pertinence. Although the degree to which information is decentralized in a country is an important variable, the most pertinent information needed to define local goals is generally easier to locate at the local level. In some countries information is gathered and elaborated first at subnational levels. Likewise, information regarding the activities and services of local institutions might be more easily obtained at the local level. The size of the country and the complexity of the area being analysed (e.g., large cities, areas with highly heterogeneous populations, sparsely populated regions) are also important factors influencing the collection, elaboration, location and quality of information.

Where information is highly centralized, as in Ecuador, efforts might eventually be made to combine and complement information at the central level with other, more specific local-level information. Part of this approach must also ensure that centralized information goes back to the local area where it was collected. Such an effort is necessary because the quality, accuracy, and pertinence of locally obtained information for certain segments of the population (e.g., indigenous groups) can be lost or diluted when it is aggregated at the central level.

Not all information is handled in the same manner. Census data, for instance, are gathered at the local level, but census questionnaires are processed at the national or regional level. Once the data have been aggregated, analysed and published, the information may not necessarily even be found at the local level. Conversely, several kinds of information gathered routinely at the local level, such as that for health and education provision, are more detailed and recent than related information processed at the central level.

Towards an information system

The aggregate information of the subnational levels could constitute a complete picture of children in respect to LPA and NPA goals and programme execution. It could be used to produce a more accurate and localized “map” of the country and facilitate overall management for balancing regional disparities, reconciling special interests and subnational entities, channeling funds, and optimizing resources toward meeting NPA goals. According to known experiences, this system could be an important programming and monitoring tool and very useful for feeding back to the programme, as in the case of Bangladesh with the District Integrated Database (DIDS) programme.

There are highly differing approaches to the problem of local information in different countries. Some, like Bangladesh and Colombia, have adopted quite complex and sophisticated systems of information for both the programming and follow-up phases. Bangladesh is using the Rapid Assessment Methodology, and a system has been designed to collect information at annual intervals on 16 key indicators to measure progress on the decade goals incorporated into the NPA. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has also made provisions in the questionnaires
used for Household Income and Expenditure Surveys to generate data on social indicators.

Other countries have tried to use pre-existing information systems for their LPAs. In Argentina, existing information systems are reviewed in order to incorporate the indicators corresponding to each programme; local processing centres are also created or strengthened, and skills are developed in the municipalities to manage them. A special module within the National Employment Survey will enable the establishment of a baseline to monitor the progress of goal achievement. Using existing information systems could also ensure that LPA procedures will be incorporated in the normal activities of the State while eliminating the burdensome need to establish a new information system.

In deciding what kind of information system could be used, it clearly appears that there is a need to analyse the extent that existing systems can cover LPA needs. Useful information provided from existing systems will most often be related to programme goals and execution. In any case the system should be simple, and easy to manage and use. These prerequisites also imply that indicators not used in the NPA process do not need to be collected, a practice which should curtail the widespread tendency to gather information outside the needs of the process.

It is possible to incorporate data reflecting inequalities at the local level in an information system covering the nation. If the diagnosis identifies inequalities in social-benefit distribution and service quality, it is possible to prioritize interventions and resources according to the needs of the poorest at the national, regional, provincial or local levels. This is permitted by the specificity obtained from the analysis at the local level.

Problems related to standards and quality of services

A frequent assumption of central planners is that quality standards for services are consistent nationwide. In-depth analyses, however, squarely refute this assumption, showing instead that the distance between the centre and the peripheral levels is an intervening factor affecting the quality of the services. In decentralizing the NPA, and with an appropriate information system, it would be possible to optimize efforts and resources and improve services.

With an adequate information system, local programmes of action could assist efforts to increase equity. At least three categories need to be considered:
1) Areas with adequate coverage where goals can be achieved through adjustments in the kinds or focus of services and increased productivity; 2) low-coverage areas, where services are insufficient to fulfill demand, as in the case of rural areas or marginal urban areas, where extension models of targeted coverage can be tested, and; 3) areas where regular public services are rarely present and where it is necessary to work with non-conventional forms like midwives, volunteer health workers, child-care workers, healers, or through social mobilization processes for specific interventions (e.g. immunization). Such cases can include tribal and indigenous areas, areas afflicted by conflict, nomadic groups, as well as city slums or new urban settlements.

Vulnerable groups often live within areas where coverage is considered to be generally good. At the same time general and vertical programmes are sometimes unable to adequately identify the needs of very specific or deprived small-sized populations. Therefore, the analysis must also focus on disparities not only across but within regions in order to help pinpoint the particular conditions of specific population groups that suffer more deprivation or are more vulnerable to economic crisis and inappropriate social policies. Such specific populations, or segments of populations, can include indigenous people, ethnic or religious minorities, the poor and women. Local level planning provides an interesting opportunity for focusing specific actions on the behalf of these populations. Disaggregated information is more appropriate for such needs, because it allows a more detailed look at population variations. It is also usually easier to find at the local level. Such an appropriately scaled analysis of social disparities could lead to more rational and optimal programme decisions on investments and resources.

The situation is obviously not identical for all social sectors. Consequently, it must be evaluated for each one of them in each region where LPAs are being formulated. It is very useful to make a goal-by-goal analysis for this, which must be repeated in each region.
III. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Experience has shown that administrative capacity and the quality of human resources and organizational structures are often severely limited at local levels, constituting formidable obstacles for the efficient general decentralization of the State. The adequacy of existing organizational structures must be taken into consideration during the formulation of local programmes of action for children. Plans must be developed to start out with the existing local capability, with measures taken to ensure that it will progressively increase to levels that will be adequate for running the programme. Designing ambitious programmes while improperly assessing the level of local management capacity will in all likelihood result in the programme’s failure. Also, correcting mistakes due to insufficient planning for local capacity building can be very costly and produce major delays in the implementation of programmes. Of course it should be expected that a reasonable increase in local capacity building will take place merely through “in-job” practice.

Decentralizing the NPA across the entire country, or only in selected regions, is a complex operation, and it is necessary to establish the proper instruments for ensuring an adequate coordination of the institutions working at the local level. On the other hand, the creation of new administrative and organizational instruments for the purpose of carrying out the NPA, rather than adjusting and adapting the existing structures, might be seen as an extreme move. As already noted, the creation of new organizations for the delivery of NPA related services risks seeing the programme become marginalized in the overall scheme of social development programming, although in cases where services are absent this scenario may have to be considered with the risk of running up the costs of programmes. For NPAs and LPAs to become integrated into national planning, however, the responsibility of running the programmes should ideally be taken up by the institutions already operating at the various levels of the State.

LPA formulation has usually given rise to major activities of local mobilization and participation, and in some cases these activities have signified a change in the practice of institutional coordination at the local level. In many countries such a level of local coordination did not previously, or does not yet exist, and in some countries the initial steps to produce NPAs and LPAs has led to the coordination of social sector institutions for the first time. In India, Ecuador, Uganda, Nigeria, and many other countries, officers from public and private institutions have expressed that it was the first time they have had the opportunity to meet with all the social sectors to develop a local diagnosis of children and to formulate an integral programme. This process of integrating various ministries and offices points to the possibility of devising new ways to organize programmes in favour of children without having to create new institutions. No new or special institutions have been created to formulate and run the LPAs in the 16 countries represented at the Technical Meeting on NPA decentralization. Therefore, the experiences have demonstrated that institutional adaptation, rather than the establishment of new institutions, has been undertaken to face the new needs related to LPAs.

Three possible options for management and organizational structures of LPAs can be envisaged, according to the level of coverage present in an area for a given sector: pre-existing intersectoral institutions, (e.g. regional development corporations, na-
tional planning) in which the NPA is decentralized through pre-existing social service delivery systems; parallel institutions, specially created for the planning and programming of LPAs, which entail the establishment of new organizations and mechanisms independent of existing structures, and; complementary institutions, created as addendums to pre-existing institutions, which are autonomous of, but include linkages with, existing mechanisms for planning and support of social services at the local level.

Running LPAs through pre-existing intersectoral structures can reduce additional costs and facilitate faster implementation in situations where decentralization includes the devolution of resources and where local capacity exists. However, few countries and localities have reached this mature stage.

Parallel structures, though requiring additional resources, will be necessary in situations where management structures at subnational levels are negligible or non-existent, or where existing systems are ineffective or have little credibility with the people and society. However, this should be considered a transitory phase towards building up appropriate institutions that will be incorporated in the structure of the State.

Complementary institutions have the advantages of parallel structures and are integrated with the pre-existing institutions to develop specialized functions to deal with LPAs. Such structures also enable linkages with existing service delivery mechanisms, ensuring the appropriate action in relation to goals and helping to reduce costs.

Extension of the Process

The type of decentralization envisaged will suggest the kinds of organizational arrangements that are most suitable for implementing local programmes. Below are three principal frameworks within which most NPA decentralization will take place.

Decentralization by jurisdiction. This kind of decentralization is based on political and administrative jurisdictions. It is concerned with decentralization which is applied over the entire territory, or which is limited to particular regions or zones.

Full-scale decentralization. In full-scale decentralization, local programmes of action are developed in all those jurisdictions that have a sufficient degree of autonomy to implement their LPAs independently or in coordination with central institutions. In this case the decentralization of the NPA covers the entire country with programmes for municipalities, provinces and regions. This type of decentralization starts once the NPA is formulated. The combination of LPAs across the national territory serves to adjust the NPA, which, however, is the common reference that represents the integrated framework among local level programmes.

This sort of decentralization is ambitious and complex. Colombia, for example, has developed a method that permits programmes of action to be designed for all the municipalities in the country and, by aggregation, for its districts or provinces and regions (see Presidencia de la República 1992). In spite of the fact that this sort of process is technically feasible, conditions for its application are not always present. Such conditions are: decentralization practices of the State are already in existence; the administrative and technical infrastructure has reached a certain degree of development; local autonomy to execute programmes exists; and, strong political will supports the process.

Partial decentralization. Partial programmes of action prepared through a partially decentralized process can be understood as those formulated only for certain territories or jurisdictions having special priority. It is probable that full-scale decentralization will not always be feasible or necessary. One strategy of reaching the goals can be to assign high priority to jurisdictions that have greater concentrations of needs and population. The programmes for priority areas should intensify, accelerate and concentrate action in order to achieve greater impact and improve resource utilization. These partial programmes should be seen as complements to the NPA and not as substitutes.

This strategy could be applied to large cities and metropolitan areas. The Mayors meetings in Dakar and Mexico City, for example, suggest the urgency of implementing low-cost, rapid-action programmes in urban areas.

But the partial decentralization strategy needs not be aimed only at urban areas. Most developing countries have severe regional inequalities that make it necessary to guide the action towards areas where
poverty is concentrated. Many of these are large regions with a high concentration of rural poor.

Full-scale decentralization of the NPA enables the structuring of a system whereby subnational plans of larger coverage can be developed through the aggregation of local or municipal programmes of action: provincial, state or district programmes depending on the country. The sum of all these provincial programmes or the aggregation of municipal programmes can lead to regional programmes.

The possibility that LPAs will be adopted in many or all parts of the country makes it necessary to have decentralization standards. Local programmes and the NPA should have a mechanism of adjustment and flexibility in order to maintain consistency.

In some countries, especially those that have preferred to develop methodology through pilot projects, a “free” approach to LPA formulation has been employed. In such cases, countries have often made a selection or order of priorities of the provinces, localities or urban areas in which to start NPA decentralization. On the basis of these experiences, general norms of procedure are subsequently assembled for formulating programmes in the rest of the country.

Yet other countries have not established a systematic process of NPA decentralization, and the varying experiences of some provinces and localities reveal different programming methods. Diverse models of NPA decentralization within the country have been produced as a result of this, although such methodology has been envisioned as a means to guarantee an adequate adaptation to regional variations in order to produce better focused strategies and programmes. Ecuador and India are cases of this, one a centralist country and the other a federal State. These countries are sacrificing uniformity in favour of diversity and accurate targeting of local needs. Diverse types of organization will probably arise when applying a variety of methods to formulate LPAs. Some drawbacks in this process include the inability to build up a nation-wide system composed of compatible parts, which renders a standardized process of follow-up and institutional feedback difficult. It is interesting to note that two extreme positions — the autonomy resulting from state decentralization as opposed to a lack of interest in decentralization — produce similar pluralistic approaches of LPA formulation.

Functions of National and Local Programmes

In some countries, efforts to prepare regional and local programmes of action have been a way to arrive at the NPA, or at least at its consolidation. Brazil provides a good example of this, and it is likely that the processes at the state level in India and Nigeria will have a similar effect.

The organization utilized to run the LPA depends to a great degree on the role that the government envisages for the LPAs. Some countries are using LPAs in a marginal way, while others as a way to programme and coordinate social sector activities at the local level during the process of state decentralization. This is the case of Uganda, where the National Programme of Action for Children at the local level has been fully integrated into social sector planning. Also the three-year implementation plan of the NPA has been set up to correspond to the rolling three-year Rehabilitation and Development Plan. All technical departments, as well as head and extension workers, are charged with LPA planning and implementation. As a result, NPA decentralization in Uganda has made state decentralization a reality for the district and sub-county service-delivery workers. NPA decentralization in Mongolia and Sudan plays a similar role in differing contexts.

In other cases LPAs have become the main instrument for coordinating institutions at different levels of the State for local programming, with an aim to expand and improve social services without necessarily changing the structure of the institutions or reorienting them. In Viet Nam the NPA is included in the National Development Plan, and the process of formulating provincial programmes of action was entrusted to the Committee for the Protection and Care of Children (CPCC). With its pre-existing structures across subnational units, the CPCC has facilitated communication and the overall coordination of the programmes.

Coordinating NPA Decentralization

Some NPA and LPA interventions are being carried out in the context of nationally mandated programmes, managed by the relevant service-delivery agencies. Coordination and organization for subnational programmes in most of these cases is done with large amounts of input from the centre, which often sets guidelines for goal definitions and strategies. In
Mongolia, the National Development Board is responsible for incorporating the NPA into national socio-economic development policy and guidelines. Sectoral programmes are to play a key role in the country’s long-term development, and the NPA is an integral part of the socio-economic development. Several ministries and committees will be responsible for implementing the activities defined in the NPA.

One implication of the centre-directed process is that the technical-assistance programming process is usually synchronized with national-development programming and national political cycles where they exist. This is the case of Indonesia, for instance, where no separate NPA has been developed, but where the Summit goals have been incorporated into its Five Year Development Plans. In this case the usual organizations and institutional structures work in favour of children’s goals.

In general terms, some new groups of actors, together with the institutions, will be involved in the social sector as a consequence of LPA implementation, and a clear definition of their roles and responsibilities will be required, as well as mechanisms for coordination.

The practice of decentralizing programmes in favour of children has helped bring about the need for greater coordination at the local level. Coordination will need to include the establishment of effective horizontal and vertical reconciliation mechanisms to prevent domination by local elite groups, avoid marginalization of the deprived and minorities, work toward reducing disparities among different parts of the country and harmonize the national and subnational goals. Other coordination tools can include the creation of governmental/NGO councils at local levels with the involvement of communities, and a periodic review of the decentralized NPA as synchronized with regular planning, implementation and review cycles. This has been to some extent the experience of Brazil.

When the inter-sectoral coordination needed to run both national and local programmes is given insufficient attention, activities will have difficulty getting off the ground and adjustments will be necessary. The case of Chile is one such example, although a number of others exist. Although the Chilean Ministry of Planning and Cooperation (MIDEPLAN) established an Interministerial Committee in 1993 to ensure intersectoral coordination and monitoring, because of the excessive number of goals (35 core goals and about 70 supporting goals or sub-goals spread out in 10 sectors) and the indicators and institutions needed to carry out monitoring, the demand on MIDEPLAN as coordinating agency may be too great. Moreover, due to the impetus in launching the NPA and internalizing it within the government structures, less emphasis was placed on creating a management system for the plan that could allow coordination among sectors, provide regular reporting and assist the regions more systematically.

In determining the types of organization that might best be used to run the programmes, it is necessary to first examine what organizations already exist at which levels, and how they operate and may be utilized. Part of this entails an implicit evaluation of the regional and local administrative capacities, the human and financial resources, and the level of technical skill.

When analysing the concrete situation of countries it clearly appears that central functions and decentralized functions are not mutually exclusive, and hence local programmes of action are not independent of the NPA. Consistencies and compatibilities among the different jurisdictions and programme sectors have to be built into the system and monitored, tasks which require establishing an information system, organizations and mechanisms.

Decentralizing the NPA implies a new set of activities and tasks related to the management and follow-up of activities for child-related programmes. Although some countries have previous experience in decentralizing social services, coordinating a combination of activities aiming to improve the conditions of children is a new experience and requires capacities and abilities not always present at regional and local levels. Even at the national level, public officials need to learn how to deal with these kinds of programmes in a coordinated and collaborative way, accepting local participation and decision making. In some sense this represents a new culture of social development that has to be developed, taught and learned.

Training

In nearly all countries, the successful implementation of LPAs will require extensive training of local
personnel and institutional strengthening. Once the commitment to devise LPAs is made, it is better to enhance the existing human resources through training rather than "bringing in" experts, as this will increase the chances of sustainability and decrease the probability that the programme remains a separate, and probably short-lived, entity. This implies both the willingness of governments and ministries to review existing power structures and relationships at all levels of administration, and will probably require frequent technical assistance from external agencies.

Questions of improving capacity through training and methodology for the effective management of local programmes need to be foreseen in the phase of defining the organizational structures that will implement the local programmes.

Training needs for LPAs will be similar to those at the national level. Within this broad range, training and capacity-building should be based on an assessment of local needs. Areas where training will be needed include the use of innovative techniques of participatory rapid needs assessment, team-building, costing and financing, study visits, forums for the exchange of experiences, and the comparison of results are ways of enhancing the confidence and capacity of community representatives in promoting the aims of the decentralized NPA.

In both independent LPAs and NPA decentralization it has been considered essential to assess the national and local capacity to formulate and implement programmes at the local level. The constraints most commonly revealed — usually deriving from the lack of experience in planning and execution at the local level — underpin problems affecting state decentralization in many least developed countries in general: the process is new and local officers have not always received the appropriate resources and training to effectively carry it out. In some countries, local levels have received instructions from the centre to proceed with the development of local programmes without the financial resources and the technical capacity to prepare and implement them.

However, experiences in a number of countries show that the training component is sometimes built into the process. In Argentina, provinces or municipalities that submit technically unsound programme proposals receive technical training. In this way, the formulation process, with nationally established guidelines, serves as a filter to reveal technical deficiencies in the subnational units. In fact, the NPA in Argentina is seen as way to strengthen the management processes and administration of the public sector in the provinces as well as in the NGOs working in areas that deal with maternal-infant issues. Similarly, the technical support and the design of training activities will result in an increase in the quality and technical capacity of human resources in the different levels of management, administration and service delivery at the municipal and provincial levels, in the areas of health as well as social action, education and nutrition.

The formulation process in Viet Nam served a similar purpose in capacity building (box 2), while in Uganda, capacity-building methodologies from the district level down are assumed to be necessary and built into the process. Box 1 relates Uganda’s ongoing experience in running participatory capacity-building workshops. In the Philippines, the Integrated Capacity Building Program (ICBP) is a multi-disciplinary approach which provides training, technical assistance and other interventions in the fields of management, development planning, local legislation, financial management and community mobilization. A Philippine Government-UNICEF project has been included in ICBP to advocate valuable concepts, messages, and lessons on planning and executing programmes for child survival, development and protection. Other ongoing experiences in managing devolved services in the Philippines are discussed in box 8. These lessons emphasize, among other things, the advantages of focused targeting, convergence of services and social mobilization. In Brazil, India and Egypt some training is also provided for local planning and follow-up.

Community Participation in Follow-up and Monitoring

The creation of local management structures also implies the need to build community-government partnerships in which the various actors carry out functions and activities most suited to their roles. The Municipal Councils in Favour of Women and Children in Argentina (box 9) demonstrate a local management structure. Community participation in the areas of monitoring and evaluation should also strengthen follow-up activities, inasmuch as implementors will have a clearer idea of programme results and needs, and the public will be more aware
Box 8.

Reconciliation mechanisms: agreements between the Department of Health and local government

A challenge to decentralizing programmes of action for children in the Philippines lies in the management of devolved services, which requires close partnership between the national government and other local government units. This is most crucial in the case of public health programmes, particularly in the area of communicable and preventive disease control, where a common approach beyond political and territorial jurisdictions would generate the most impact.

Towards this end, the Department of Health is promoting comprehensive health-care agreements with local governments. These agreements seek to augment the resources of collaborating local governments so they can fully implement their devolved services and provide priority health services such as immunization, diarrhoeal-disease control, acute respiratory infection, maternal and child health care, as well as hospital management and information, education and communication.

The Department of Health provides assistance in programme management and monitoring, using resources from nationally appropriated augmentation funds and the proceeds of official development assistance. The agreements strengthen similar sub-agreements between UNICEF, the Philippine Government and local governments to implement locally assisted projects under the Country Programme for Children IV.

So far, eight provinces, seven cities, and two urban municipalities have entered into child health-care agreements with the Department of Health. In the cost-sharing arrangements, the local government units will provide for 74 per cent of the cost and the Department of Health the remaining 26 per cent. The larger share shouldered by the local government units is a positive indication of their commitment to the agreements and their potential for sustainability.

The child health-care agreements also call for regular dialogue between local and national functionaries, who are to make regular field visits to local areas. This should strengthen the flow of information from local to higher levels and improve overall monitoring.

Innovative ideas for the local management of devolved responsibilities need to be encouraged and supported. In terms of structures, delivery mechanisms and monitoring, the child health-care agreement is a good example towards developing appropriate models of cooperation between national and local governments and inter-local government levels. Similar agreements could be pursued in the areas of education, social welfare and legal services.

Source: Nasqui 1994
formation that gives a complete picture of each locality’s status in reaching the goals, and of the disparities, inequality of resources, and efficiency in programme execution. This framework could be a rational instrument to allocate and reassign resources and support.

This coordinated monitoring might also allow an appropriate national follow-up and demonstrate differences, ranks and qualities of localities as opposed to a national aggregate vision of the country. In this framework a mechanism of healthy competition among localities could be instituted that would highly stimulate them to reach the goals.

Reviews of local-level programmes can allow them to be related with the NPA and assist in devising estimates for the time needed to achieve the local goals. Such reviews can also help evaluate if national goals can be achieved locally given the level of local capacity and resources.

In the same way that a system of information is needed at the national level, the local level needs to set up a permanent system of information for programming, follow-up and evaluation. This system should be used not only to execute programmes but to help refine them and meet mobilization and advocacy objectives. Information on programme evolution and goal attainment should play an active role in educating parents and society on children’s problems and the solutions to these problems.

Bangladesh is working on an information system based on central level data, local data and special reports that are to be used to facilitate the diagnosis, the programming and of course follow-up at district, provincial and national level. This programme is developed through computerized processes, but the principle, although more tedious and time consuming, could be applied with mechanical procedures.

It has been pointed out that in this kind of local programming and implementation, the performance incentives of the implementors are directed towards the beneficiaries rather than the central bureaucracies. Instruments to ensure proper accountability include linking NPA phases with the local po-

**Box 9.**

**ARGENTINA**

**Mobilizing all sectors of society: the ideal and the reality.**

In Argentina, the mayors of two cities with high concentrations of urban poor have spearheaded the creation of Municipal Councils for Women and Children, and brought together representatives of various sectors of society to participate on the councils. In Florencio Valera, a satellite city of Buenos Aires, the Council consists of representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Workers’ Confederations and the Dioceses, as well as from the municipal government. A fund has been generated by local contributions to extend day-care services and build up the network of child development centres even beyond the three-year goals established by the municipal programme of action.

In the city of Rosario the Council includes participants from numerous areas: Caritas, the mass media, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the locally powerful Agricultural Federation, NGOs, the University, the Argentine Pediatrics Society, the provincial government, the Workers’ Confederation, and four departments from the mayor’s office.

As a way of planning integrated interventions in poor neighbourhoods, the Council proposed the formation of neighbourhood councils, which are organized around established structures such as schools, health centres and churches. The mayor, however, was reluctant to allow the other political parties sitting on the municipal legislative council to participate in the Council, even though the municipal legislature had previously approved the initiatives. While perhaps difficult to avoid, attempts at political control of this kind work against the effectiveness of bringing together people from different sectors, running counter to the performance and goal achievement which such inter-sectoral cooperation enhances.

Source: Minujin and Vinocur 1994
Box 10. SUDAN

Child-Friendly Villages

Recognizing the importance of empowering local communities for sustaining development efforts, UNICEF initiated the Child Friendly Village strategy in selected areas of Kordofan State in 1992. The Child Friendly Village strategy aims at helping local committees understand the key decade goals contained in the NPA, analyze their present situation in relation to the goals, and identify and adopt actions that they can take to achieve them. Criteria developed for designating a village as Child Friendly include the following:

- the existence of a village committee, with the representation of women, for overseeing activities
- the presence of a trained midwife in the village
- the universal enrollment and retention of school-age children in the local primary school or in non-formal education programmes
- the enumeration and immunization of all infants under one year of age
- the immunization of all pregnant women with two doses or a booster dose of TT vaccine
- awareness and practice of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) by all families, along with the establishment of an ORT depot in each village
- access to safe drinking water and availability of a community-based system for preventive maintenance and repair of existing sources of water supply
- an acceptance of hygienic sanitation and the promotion of low-cost options for safe disposal of human excreta

The main focus is on enabling community members and leaders to undertake a village survey of the existing situation and develop village-based plans for intervention. Village committees meet regularly to determine priorities, review progress and identify future action.

The Child Friendly Village strategy has been initiated in selected villages that have populations of at least 2,000 and have been covered by ongoing UNICEF-assisted sectoral programmes. In addition it is being used as a rallying point for the convergent delivery of relief and rehabilitation services for the displaced in some selected areas.

Because of its success in the experimental villages, the strategy is being expanded and now serves as the basis for UNICEF cooperation with the ongoing Area Development Service Scheme, which is supported by UNDP as well as with other international donors and NGOs.

Source: Farooqui and Singh 1994
IV. POLITICAL WILL

Although responding to technical questions for solving the problems of children, the National Programmes of Action are the consequence of a political act. The World Summit for Children was called to seek the involvement of Heads of State in the efforts to meet the goals for the year 2000, and the importance of maintaining the commitment of political leaders as permanent action has been recognized. In fact, a number of countries have found ways to encourage or obtain the involvement, guidance and follow-up of their Heads of State in the capacity of his or her leadership role.

Political commitment in favour of the NPA process is seen as an appropriate strategy to help ensure that the State assumes ownership of the programme and integrates it into its social planning schemes. It is also usually a precursor to action, as setting up an organization to formulate the NPA and initiating the technical aspects described in Chapter II depend upon decisions taken at the political level. There are several cases of this, with Mexico providing a good example. The President of Mexico meets with his cabinet every six months to assess the progress or setbacks in meeting the decade goals. Of course, having the Head of State’s involvement in the NPA is not always a guarantee of success. Such participation represents a political act, and its effectiveness will depend on the complete set of variables affecting the political legitimacy and impact.

The Head of State’s visible and active political support could be fundamental for ensuring administrative and financial inputs for local levels. In most countries this has led to efforts to seek or maintain the support of the Head of State or Government. At the same time, it appears that at the local level the support of local leaders and local political heads has been more important than the support of central-level figures.

Of course, the political variable has been an important factor. The Overview on NPA decentralization reveals that 27 of the 50 countries in the process of NPA decentralization cited political will as a major output in the process, and in 22 countries the heads of regional or local governments were identified as key political actors in various stages of the local programmes. This would seem to indicate that LPAs are also part of the political reality, or, in other words, that in a modern and practical conception, the political factor not only serves to facilitate and give legitimacy to programmes, but it is also an integral part of planning and programming.

Political Will and State Structure

The importance and consequence of political engagement for LPAs can vary at different levels, and must be considered in the framework of the country’s political and administrative structure and in the formal and informal relations between the central power and the local/regional authorities or other sources of power. For example, the NPA decentralization process in single-party States, as well as countries recently changed from single-party systems, is generally strongly centre directed. This was witnessed in Viet Nam, where political will at the central level was particularly high, and where all 53 provinces complied with requests to formulate their own programmes of action and submit them in a given time frame. Mongolia has used a similar approach, while Uganda and Sudan are proceeding in selected
areas. These examples do not infer that the support of local officials in the countries was indifferent or insignificant; indeed, experiences have shown that part of the centrally directed process is meant to increase awareness at the local level, as well as improve programming capacities and gain a better picture of the conditions of children in all areas of the country. What might be supposed, however, is that in countries where some forms of decentralized planning are gradually being introduced, the process will be centre-directed and that the political figures at the centre, including ministers, will at least initially be important in moving the process.

States in which decentralized authority has been institutionalized, such as in most federal countries, instead presuppose that a large amount of authority will reside at the subnational level, making vertical central decisions less viable. Attempts to engage the heads of local, provincial or state governments will therefore often make sense in these countries. The political figures in Argentina who have thus far come to the forefront are several mayors, who have assembled municipal programmes of action. In Brazil and India, the Governors and Chief Ministers have taken the lead political role, as the states have been defined as the principle units where the programmes of action will be formulated and implemented. In India, where states have powers in both the planning and execution of some social programmes and share powers with the central government in other areas, the Department of Women and Child Development had asked the states to prepare programmes of action and submit them back to the Department for review. The response from the states was sporadic, and a change in strategy was eventually decided to increase UNICEF advocacy and more directly engage the Chief Ministers of each state. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the involvement of the Chief Minister was the decisive factor in producing the state programme of action, which is being decentralized to the district level.

This should not imply that politicians with little or no authority to direct social policy, such as mayors in some countries, should be overlooked. Not only can such authorities play a key role in encouraging community participation and mobilizing the public and key actors, they can also generate considerable resistance to the implementation of central programmes. The current Mayor of Quito, Ecuador, who is also the President of the Mayors, Defenders of Children in Latin America, is a well-respected figure, even though a member of one of the current opposition parties. His jurisdiction, however, is confined to the city, and his actual authority in the social sectors is limited by the central and extensive authority of the national ministries. Despite those constraints, he has spearheaded the provincial programme of action for the entire province of Pichincha. Likewise, the Mayor of Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, despite having very little effective authority, has been a driving force behind successful negotiations with central ministries for the adoption of the municipal programme of action. In general, however, engagement is particularly sought from political figures who are directly elected by their constituency and who have some responsibility and authority over social policies.

**Variables Affecting Political Will**

The interest of the central government to support the NPA and its decentralization depends on a number of variables. The level of awareness of the Head of State has proven to be extremely important, along with the advocacy efforts that aim to engage his or her support. As mentioned above, in nearly half of the countries decentralizing their NPA, the Head of State was involved to varying degrees, in a number of cases attending official launch ceremonies of the NPA or taking personal interest in assigning appropriate committees and ministries with the formulation. It can also be demonstrated to national political figures that supporting the decentralization of the NPA makes good sense, as it should increase the chances that the country will reach its overall national goals and bring more people into the process. This might be particularly pertinent in countries like Ecuador, Bangladesh and Benin, where intentions to decentralize state functions are still unfulfilled. The NPA could provide an opportunity to begin decentralizing some functions, and if the declared goals are reached, provide further political impetus to continue with the process.

The willingness of political leaders to give local authorities power to design and implement programmes, as well as the presence of legal instruments for such power to be effective, also greatly increases chances to carry out effective local programmes of action. Political will of this sort is highly evident in Uganda, for example, where it has been acknowledged that the success of the NPA will depend on the quality of district programmes of action. Viet
Nam and Mongolia also show a strong willingness to provide officials at lower levels with increased authority and technical capacity to design and implement programmes.

A final variable is the degree to which the planning process includes and encourages the involvement of civil society. The governments of seven South Asia countries have issued a joint statement calling for the development of government-community partnerships, signalling a recognition by the political class of those countries of the need for broad and sustained involvement in social development programmes (see SAARC 1992). Civil society in Argentina (the Argentine Pediatrias Society) and Brazil (the Pact for Children) played major roles in defining goals and spurring social mobilization for their countries’ NPAs, leading to the more concrete involvement of mayors and governors.

The Involvement of other Offices and Figures

Whether the actual involvement of an important political figure is prominent or limited, his or her commitment will often stimulate and activate the instruments and persons that function in relation to the office, such as key staff and influential ministers. These figures can play important roles in the areas of support, mobilization, engagement and legitimization. The personal assistant to the Mayor of Windhoek, Namibia, along with the Mayor himself, did much of the detailed work in pushing through the city’s Municipal Programme of Action (see box 18), while Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Dr. J. Jayalalitha mobilized her Chief Secretary and the Social Welfare Secretary to prepare the state programme in time for an opportunity launch date. A related programme extracted from the state programme of action was named Dr. J. Jayalalitha’s 15-point Programme for Child Welfare (see also box 4).

One indication of the importance given to the NPA by the Head of State or other high-ranking authorities is the method devised to formulate and decentralize the programme. In some cases, ministries or councils were either created or reinforced to oversee both the NPA formulation and its decentralization. The Committee for the Protection and Care of Children (CPCC) in Viet Nam, which has been the moving force behind the formulation of both the NPA and provincial programmes of action, provides a good example of political will translating into concrete actions. Because of its increasingly important role in social policy formulation, the CPCC was also accorded ministerial status in 1991. The National Centre for Children in Mongolia, which is composed of ministers, was established by the government to direct all phases of the NPA, while in Uganda, the National Council for Children, which is also directly involved in all aspects of the NPA and its decentralization, was established by an act of Parliament. The Ministry of Economic Planning and Investment in Sudan also gained ministerial status as a result of its role in the NPA, while in Chile the NPA forms an integral part of the National Programme to Eradicate Poverty, whose interministerial committee is chaired by the President of the Republic.

Little or Lacking Political Will

Lacking political commitment at the national level to decentralize and in some cases formulate the NPA does not necessarily preclude the involvement of politicians at lower levels. The effectiveness of local politicians in pushing for their own programmes of action depends on several factors.

As mentioned previously, the structure of the State will dictate to a large extent the impact that local political support can have in creating operational local programmes of action. In strongly centralized States like Ecuador and Bangladesh, the necessary instruments for devolved planning and implementation still need to be developed. In these situations, local authority as well as the capacity to plan, implement and finance programmes is usually very limited, and will lead to difficulties in developing and maintaining local social mobilization and community participation. Nevertheless, products such as Ecuador’s provincial programmes of action should not be underestimated nor viewed as a wasted effort. They are valuable tools for advocacy, give a more accurate picture of local conditions than was previously available, provide experiences in coordinated planning at the local level, and can ultimately play an important role in pushing central authorities to undertake administrative reforms in favour of decentralized authority.

In other cases it is necessary to understand why political will is weak at the central level, implying perhaps that the problems were transitory. Brazil was in the midst of an institutional crisis that ended with the impeachment of the President when its NPA was being formulated. Argentina’s government was
focusing nearly all of its efforts on economic reform in that period. India’s government was also very unstable when attempts were being made to define the NPA.

When local or regional programmes arise despite low amounts of central-level input or direction, it often means that dynamic local/regional political figures, private and professional organizations and NGOs, or international organizations can exert considerable pressure in the area of social policy and are able to mobilize social forces. When such events happen, it can also imply that the country’s political system or situation allows for such activities to occur outside the realm of strict central control or planning, although the causes of this can range from planning flexibility to planning vacuums. As pointed out above, civil society helped fill the vacuums in Brazil and Argentina, at least initially. In Nigeria, which is also a federal country, political uncertainty plagued and continues to plague nearly all efforts to design central policies and implement them with any degree of continuity. UNICEF has been instrumental in its technical and advocacy roles in selected states where programmes of action are being formulated. These efforts have helped secure the involvement of state and local authorities and officials, as well as other centres of power, such as traditional leaders and selected NGOs, in efforts to maintain the continuity of the programmes of action for children that the central state is not able to provide.

In India, like in other countries, UNICEF advocacy and technical support has helped to engage the support of key political figures in some states, ensuring a high level of political will and commitment.

The Engagement of Local Politicians

The examples cited above demonstrate the importance of seeking the political support of regional and local politicians. The success of securing the commitment of local political figures often depends on the extent to which they perceive the local programme of action as benefiting both the local population and their own political interests. The benefits of consolidating political support are becoming increasingly evident from the politicians’ point of view and, more importantly, from the perspective of enhancing programme sustainability. The awareness, acknowledgment and ownership of key politicians on the need to promote the protection and development of children can be fundamental for rallying support and getting a broad range of actors involved in the process. Therefore, the NPA will be most effective when it serves as a consensus building tool, spanning democratic changes in political figures and parties.

Political involvement, it has been observed, is a key ingredient for programme sustainability and durability. Open and decisive political support for child-related programmes at the local level is important to gain broader coverage of the population and to create awareness and knowledge among the different actors, as well as to have stronger engagement from the public sector with all the consequent financial and human resources. Even in Brazil, where movements in civil society preceded strong government support, the role subsequently taken up by the Governors was necessary to politically legitimize the process and ensure the involvement of the public sector.

Limitations and Risks

As the cases of Brazil and many other countries suggest, political will is generated as a consequence of advocacy and social mobilization. But these dimensions alone are not sufficient for sustained results, a fact noted in the country reports and workshops during the ICDC Technical Meeting. Political will and social mobilization must result in the institutionalization of the programmes, which necessitates technical capacity and an appropriate organization. Therefore, political will, while an essential element, is not enough. In Bangladesh the NPA was launched by the Prime Minister, but political factors and bureaucratic problems in that country have made effective NPA decentralization efforts, and the funding and implementation of social programmes in general, very difficult. Likewise, problems at the ministerial and bureaucratic level have been hard to overcome in Ecuador, whose NPA nevertheless enjoyed the active participation of one President and the backing of the current President. Benin’s President and relevant ministers were involved in the formulation process of the NPA, but pledged intentions to effectively decentralize certain state functions have been slow in coming, contributing to difficulties in implementing the NPA. In this sense, the interrelations between the dimensions of the NPA decentralization process, in this case between political will, organization and social mobilization, are again evident.
In the context of these examples, it is important to point out the negative effects, such as public disillusionment, that can occur when a highly visible launch with the participation of public figures is not followed by substance. Nevertheless, visible political will increases the likelihood that such institutionalization will take place, and together with advocacy and social mobilization, it will play a fundamental role in the larger framework of educative campaigns in favour of children’s needs and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Political involvement, however, is not without its risks, and strategies for corrective or preventive actions must be considered where political support proves to be a liability. In some countries political regimes are very unstable or lack popular support. It has been pointed out that the political discontinuity and preoccupation for political survival in Nigeria is somewhat counterbalanced at the subnational levels by the authority of local traditional leaders.

At the same time, it must be taken care that a programme actively promoted by a single politician or party does not suffer the fate of political fortune or misfortune. For example, while the 15-point Programme for Child Welfare in Tamil Nadu is “owned” by the Chief Minister, the State Programme of Action for the Child belongs to the state.

Although it has been said that “the child has no political colour”, social movements and programmes often do. National and local programmes of action are political instruments: they are inexorably linked to the political structure of a state, and the politicians and political parties in office exert considerable influence over the design and execution of social programmes. Politicizing or engaging in partisan politics, however, runs counter to the objectives of the process, as they risk marginalizing the constituencies of the opposition parties and make efforts at broad social mobilization difficult to attain. Consequently, movements in favour of children must usually count on the broad support of all political groups. The country report for Bangladesh, where competition among the eight main political parties can often be intense, emphasizes the necessity to include all political parties in the local process, while warning that the process itself must not be politicized. In a few cases, such as the municipal plan of action for Rosario, Argentina (see box 6), political groups were tempted to manipulate LPAs in their own interest, not accepting opposition parties in the LPA organization and execution and thus damaging the legitimacy of the programme.

The active involvement of civil society, as well as the commitment of the bureaucracy, is thus crucial in this context. It has been demonstrated that when the programme is popularly mandated, and a broad range of participants is involved in the various phases of the process, incoming politicians will in all likelihood embrace or give a vote of confidence to the programme because, among other things, it makes good political sense. The new government in Chile (March 1994) appears to be following up on its predecessor’s commitments. In Ecuador, noted above, and similar to what occurs in many other countries, President Sixto Duran-Ballén, after his election in 1992, issued a presidential decree to keep the programme in force and strengthen the follow-up committee. Civil society’s role is therefore paramount in ensuring this happens by exerting the necessary pressure.
In previous chapters some references have been made on the need to incorporate political engagement into the process of NPA decentralization. Despite the importance of political involvement, however, other actors and forces have to be mobilized. The strategy of the broad mobilization of society is an integral part of the modern practices of planning and programming. This social mobilization serves to motivate and produce the effective participation of other actors who are not a part of the institutions executing the programme. This is a double-edged strategy. First of all, it can help obtain additional financial and human resources from civil society, basically composed of NGOs, the private sector, churches, the military, the mass media and community organizations that represent or are related to the beneficiaries. Secondly, by helping the population to better understand the LPA, it promotes the educational value of the process, leading to increased possibilities that the community will adopt more appropriate practices and actively participate in improving their own situation.

Advocacy

Although it is a term which has been overused and abused to the point of nearly losing its meaning, advocacy must refer to attempts to engage the key players. Advocacy is not only oriented towards political leaders. In the area of our interest, advocacy comprises all efforts and activities oriented to convince political leaders, NGOs, bureaucrats, members of civil society and community leaders of the importance of undertaking a process of NPA decentralization. In this sense advocacy is also understood as occurring prior to action, although some demonstrative activities might be used as tools for advocacy, and programme achievements will increase the effectiveness of advocacy.

The background for local level advocacy

In the past decade advocacy has been widely to mobilize actions in the areas of universal immunization, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and even the NPAs, with the result that leaders, NGOs, civil society and communities have become more sensitized to the needs of children. Institutional action and social mobilization have followed these advocacy processes, increasing social awareness and interest in children’s problems. These past experiences represent an appropriate base for local-level advocacy.

Advocacy in favour of local programmes of action should also be reinforced by the fact that LPAs
identify problems and solutions that can be more immediately felt and acknowledged locally, where they are most visible. Successful advocacy efforts at the subnational level can in turn act as a collective force to put pressure on the central government to acknowledge the need for action and to perform its role. Advocacy strategies that have been applied at the national level for immunization, child rights and NPAs should be adapted at the local level, and new forms appropriate for local action should be developed. The principle of social mobilization should remain the same and only specific practices for local levels should be devised. For the community, local programmes of action for children have at least the same importance as the NPA at the national level, and, in certain small communities, districts or municipalities, they can have a relatively greater importance. One strategy suggested in the Philippines, where provincial and municipal officers have received increased authority since 1991, is to convince those officers of the long-term advantages of child development. To do this, it is necessary to develop and nurture a new paradigm and consciousness among many local chief executives that investments in human capital, particularly children, make economic sense and generate as many votes as highly visible public investment projects such as roads and sports facilities (Nuqui 1994).

The local basis for advocacy is not only derived from activities planned at the national level. Several kinds of global events are serving to advocate for children at the local level, such as the Mayors Meetings held in Dakar, Mexico City and the recent one in Paris. Following these meetings some regional groups of mayors were created with an aim to undertaking child protection programmes at the municipal level. As a result of the Mexico City Mayors Meeting, a group of mayors from Latin America (Alcaldes defensores de los niños) was organized and has met in Quito and Ibagué, Colombia. The members of these groups encourage other mayors in their respective countries to undertake similar activities, usually through the relevant local programmes of action.

LPAs as instruments for advocacy.

There are, of course, cross influences between activities designed at the national and local levels, and not in all cases are they exerted from the top downwards. On the contrary, LPAs and their mobilization activities are creating a healthy influence at the national level in the framework of advocacy. In some cases, the formulation of local programmes has influenced national authorities in formulating their NPA, as the case of Brazil illustrates (box 11). According to the Overview on NPA decentralization, 14 of the 50 countries formulated their NPA through a decentralized process of some sort.

The decentralization of the State implies in some places that localities have the responsibility, although not the means, to operate in the social sector. LPAs are becoming an instrument to structure a coherent proposal to advocate for new funds and other resources on behalf of children, as experiences in Ecuador and Chile indicate.

How advocacy for LPAs is working

Of course the general objective of advocacy is to demonstrate and convince all sectors of society of the importance and effectiveness of working in favour of children’s goals, and therefore of developing the NPAs and LPAs. Sometimes advocacy is seen as an action to be directed only at political leaders. Although advocating for political engagement is crucial, it is equally crucial to advocate for the commitment and participation of other social groups. The private sector, NGOs, social and professional organizations, religious groups, community leaders and other key social, economic and political groups have to be stimulated to participate. This advocacy process is not random; it should follow a structured strategy that produces increased levels of participation in which multiplying effects can be expected.

For instance, initial experiences in certain parts of a country can assist in the advocacy process by spurring competition and demonstrating what can be done. The Federation of Mayors in Argentina (box 12), the “500 Days of Action for Children” supported by Brazil’s governors, the experiences of the provincial plans of action in Ecuador, the 10 state programmes of action underway in northeastern Nigeria, and the sectoral NPA for women in Alexandria, Egypt, have included advocacy efforts towards local governments. In each case, and to varying degrees, these have inculcated a sense of ownership in different groups of society and served as examples to others both inside and outside the national boundaries.

Programming in some municipalities has motivated mayors to get more involved. In some instances mayors initially accepted the LPAs without
The NPA is a decentralized process from the start

In Brazil, the process of NPA decentralization has differed from the usual practices of public-policy formulation and evaluation. In fact, by the time the Brazilian NPA was finalized in January 1994, it was in effect already decentralized.

The process of formulating the NPA stalled during the institutional crisis that shook the country between 1991 and 1992 and ended with the resignation of the President. In the same period, Brazilian society was becoming increasingly mobilized around the grave problems faced by numerous children in the country. Starting in 1991, the Pact for Children (PACTO) began uniting more than 100 government and non-governmental organizations, rallying them around the basic issues of education, violence against children and health. As the movement grew in scope, it was eventually decided to involve the governors of Brazil’s 27 states, and in May 1992 the first Summit Meeting of Governors took place in Brasília. At the second Summit Meeting of Governors, held in July 1993, the governors presented state programmes of action. Twenty-three of Brazil’s 27 governors adhered to 29 commitments for children and set a time frame of “500 Days of Action for Children” to accomplish the goals.

In sum:
- NPA decentralization has come about as a result of social movements instigated by leaders of civil society; only later was it embraced by the state and Federal governments. Normally, public policy is formulated by the Federal Government and then passes to state governments and eventually to municipalities, where society as a whole becomes involved;
- states have autonomy in defining the objectives and goals of their respective plans, and governors took the initiative of specifying common goals and the strategies for pursuing them;
- the creation of common strategies across states could help to strengthen the regulatory role of some social-sector ministries at the central level (e.g. Ministry of Health);
- states elaborate their own programmes to best meet their objectives and receive no additional funding from the Federal Government;
- there is emphasis on monitoring, with strong participation of the states in defining appropriate monitoring instruments;
- the monitoring process has a democratic approach, with growing segments of civil society increasingly involved in its formulation and evaluation;
- the monitoring mechanisms are being adopted by the Federal Government, by state governments, by the State Councils of Rights and by NGOs;
- there has been good continuity in the NPA decentralization process, as it has been extended to the municipal level in many cases;
- the data resulting from the monitoring are valuable for making adjustments in goals and implementation strategies, thus providing an important instrument for follow-up.

Source: Mangalhães and Marques 1994

having a complete understanding of its ramifications or committing their engagement. Once the situation analysis of their community was completed, however, they started to grow more aware of the problems faced by local children, which in turn motivated them to increase their participation and involvement. In this sense, the LPA formulation process itself is in an instrument for advocacy and motivation. In the Colombian municipality of Girardota, for example, the mayor began to mobilize the whole community, the local government and national institutions to improve child nutrition after seeing the diagnosis that had been carried out for the local programme of action.
**Box 12. ARGENTINA**

**Horizontal coordination: Towns and cities working together**

In Argentina, political will in tackling social issues greatly decreased in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, as nearly all of the government’s efforts were focused on fighting the hyperinflation and the more than 15 years of shrinking GNP that had crippled the county’s economy and seen larger segments of the population slide into poverty. Although much of Argentine society backed the government’s economic measures, many sectors of civil society (the Catholic Church, NGOs, universities, scientific societies, professional organizations) began to mobilize to advocate for renewed attention for the poor and fill the vacuum that had been created by the dismantling of the social sectors.

Due to this fragmented state of the country’s social services, a professional organization — the influential Argentine Pediatrics Society — proposed the goals for Argentina’s NPA in April 1991. The goals were later presented to and adopted by the National Minister of Social Action. The Society has also been promoting local programmes in several provinces.

Federal restructuring and unclear institutional roles across subnational levels also led to some political mobilization at the municipal level. In 1990, mayors from the major cities of Argentina formed The Argentinian Federation of Municipalities with an aim to strengthening municipal autonomy and sharing problem-solving strategies. To ensure plurality, the country’s two main political parties are represented on the three-member council directing the Federation’s activities, and the third seat is reserved for a mayor representing local parties and minorities.

At the urging of the mayor of Rosario, Argentina’s second largest city, the First National Forum of Mayors for the Defense of Children took place in the city of Posadas in November 1993. The officials of the 70 municipalities in attendance debated NPA goals and reported on the child-related policies in their municipalities. Following the Forum, eight municipalities developed programmes of action and another five were also planning to do so. In some of those municipalities, the programmes were unanimously approved, enjoying the endorsement of all the political parties sitting in the local legislative council.

Source: Minujin and Vinocur 1994

Shared experiences between countries can be a helpful advocacy tool. Groups from Sudan have visited Pakistan to benefit from the latter’s experiences in NPA decentralization. Similarly, the Philippines has given support to other countries, and India and Bangladesh have set up a series of exchanges.

International agencies also play an important role in advocating for LPAs. The Overview on NPA decentralization shows that multilateral and bilateral agencies, and especially UNICEF, have been active in many of the 50 countries reporting NPA decentralization. In 88 per cent of the countries UNICEF was cited for its role of advocacy; in 28 per cent of the countries multilateral agencies were cited; and in 8 per cent of the countries bilateral agencies were participating in advocacy in favour of NPA decentralization.

**Limitations of advocacy**

Advocacy should not only focus on the need to act; it should also point out the constraints that can potentially hinder local programmes. In advocating the decentralization of LPAs to national authorities, it is important to illustrate the difficulties that the country will likely face or the types of reforms it has to undertake. It is perhaps a good opportunity to relate the LPA process to the need to improve or facilitate the distribution of resources, institutional change and strengthening, and collaboration with NGOs, while promoting a greater openness towards community participation and social mobilization. Politicians should also realize that the LPA process could raise expectations and that responsiveness and results will be necessary to avoid the risk of creating disappointment and losing support.
Advocacy, Social Mobilization and Communication

It must also be taken care that advocacy from an external agency does not lead to false expectations on the issue of financing, a problem encountered by UNICEF in Ecuador (box 5). Similarly, in India, it was extremely important and no less difficult to strike a delicate balance in convincing senior State officials “of the need and benefits of preparing the State Programme of Action without creating expectations of massive additional funding from UNICEF…” (Lwin 1994).

Social Mobilization

Social mobilization is only one of the strategies used to advocate for the NPA and its decentralization. In fact, social mobilization can be considered an instrument of advocacy, although there are many other consequences and benefits of social mobilization that should be analysed per se. Social mobilization does not follow a universal pattern — it depends on the existing social, economic and technical conditions and is limited by the political structure and the political circumstances of the moment.

Social mobilization in this context does not refer to an action for moving people in an indiscriminate way nor to a given project requiring a one-time effort. Rather, it implies a structured, systematic and permanent process that incorporates the actions of populations and the key actors from the public and private sectors. Social mobilization is a fundamental element in the effort to bring about changes in people’s behaviour and to make the overall process educative and sustainable. The technical aspects of social mobilization are important to ensure the process is well-targeted and comprehensive. Before understanding the political, administrative and service structures in a given context, a “mobilization” analysis needs to look inside the child-care-giver’s mind. This leads to the issue of knowledge, strategies and whom to include: we need to define means, audience, objectives, messages and their interrelations. Therefore, the social mobilization strategy and programming should be in relation to the programming and timing of the NPA.

The need for social mobilization comes about for three reasons: to overcome lacking human and financial resources; to promote awareness of children’s problems and provide education on ways to tackle them; and to generate knowledge in the endeavour to create an enduring pro-child culture that will safeguard the needs and rights of children.

Three key elements help create and maintain an appropriate level of social mobilization: knowledge, continuous action and organization. The interactions between these elements increase their strength: more knowledge about children’s problems and the ways to solve them will increase motivation for action and give rise to activities, necessitating expanded levels of more complex organization. This in turn produces more knowledge, leading to more action, and so on.

In light of these three elements a process of social demand should be induced. In a strict, if oversimplified metaphor of supply and demand, the NPAs themselves can be seen as the supply mechanism, although the process implies the articulation of demand through broad participatory processes of, for example, diagnosis and monitoring/evaluation. A key to inducing and sustaining social demand is the creation of a much deeper, more dynamic and more qualitative situation analysis than is normally carried out. Moreover, in the process of mobilization some objectives and end results could be targeted at specific audiences (Haile 1994).

For instance, in mobilizing children from 6 to 18 years of age around the LPAs, objectives could be to allow them to directly express their own interests and needs, increase their awareness of societal responsibilities and the rights of others, while encouraging lateral and vertical mobilization and the transfer of ideas. For the children of this age group several means and messages could be developed. For instance, suggestions include children’s debating societies on CRC/NPA; children’s elections; the development of curriculum and materials along the lines of Facts for Life; child-to-child, child-to-parents programmes; community mapping by local children.

For parents, objectives could include an assessment of their attitudes on childhood, children and children’s needs. In carrying out such an assessment, it is necessary to find out who is influential to them; whom they influence upwards, laterally and downwards; the capacity, financial and otherwise, they currently have to meet their needs. The means and messages could be from groups; interactive media use (e.g., local radio); surveys of the key informants who reach these groups; household expenditure surveys.

If community leaders are considered as the audience, the objectives could include involving them
in the NPA decentralization process; having them mobilize others in their community; appealing to their sense of competition with similar groups; placing pressure on politicians and service structures to respond to community demands for child development. Means and messages could be devised such as community meetings; local media to which they have access; parents and children putting pressure on community leaders; interpersonal communicators.

For NGO audiences the objectives could include their involvement in the formulation and implementation of the NPA as opinion leaders and service deliverers; as lobbyists with politicians and administrators. The means and messages could be through meetings and the media, both as a source of information and as a means to provide coverage to their activities in order to increase their visibility.

For the media, as an audience themselves, the objectives could be to enable the media to provide correct information; to raise the level of public debate on child-rights issues; to enable the media to lobby politicians/parliamentarians on the basis of monitoring the situation at the grass roots level; to give positive coverage to good examples of involvement/achievement by the community, leaders, NGOs, etc; to point out negative examples of non-cooperation in the NPA decentralization process. The means and messages could be briefings and training workshops on the objectives and procedures of the LPAs.

For the government bureaucracy, the objective would be to obtain its informed and quality involvement in the formulation and implementation of the decentralized NPA. The means and messages could be some participatory development and costing workshops with the community, local leaders, and representatives of other sectoral agencies (government, non-government, external) working at the grass-roots level.

For politicians at the national level or local-level representatives, the objective should be to have their support of the NPA decentralization process, and their promotion of the NPA as a funding tool and an instrument to coordinate efforts of external aid agencies. The means and messages could be high-level advocacy aimed at directors and representatives of multilateral and bilateral agencies and international NGOs.

For the business community, including the private sector, the objective should be to engage their involvement as lobbyists and service providers. The means and messages could be concentrated in briefings to provide economic and humanitarian arguments in support of the NPA process.

In some cases, multilateral and bilateral agencies should be mobilized as full participants in the LPA formulation and implementation process. Means and messages could be community-level agreements between agencies. Meetings and briefings could help facilitate this.

Outputs in the area of social mobilization were recorded by 27 of the 30 countries decentralizing their NPAs. Most of the 16 country reports presented at the NPA decentralization Technical Meeting in Florence referred to the recognized need to undertake mobilization, providing some insights for their specific contexts. Namibia (box 13) faces a situation of hard to reach sparsely populated rural areas which are in contrast to the capital city, where the poorest residents still have relatively high access to media messages and other forms of communication. The recent history of non-governmental initiatives was highly evident in the state programme of action process. In Sudan, the Child Friendly Village strategy initiated by UNICEF in 1992 aims, among other things, to educate communities about relevant decade goals (see box 10).

The involvement of children in Ecuador — 180,000 children voted in 1990 on their rights that most need safeguarding — was a valuable experience, although by 1993 the lack of progress weakened the initial impulse of the NPA, causing doubts in public opinion and in civil society regarding the political will of the government to make the programme work (UNICEF Quito 1994).

This last example highlights an area of caution: it could be very dangerous to initiate the mobilization process of LPAs if substantial and real answers are not given to the problems revealed in the situation analysis and if the goals are not viable. This will increase frustration, leading to social discontent and unrest.

Despite these examples, there are not many cases of systematic and programmed efforts of social mobilization found in LPA development. Perhaps
Box 13.

NAMIBIA

Urban and rural social mobilization

The potential for social mobilization around the local programmes of action in Namibia differs greatly between the municipal programme in the capital, Windhoek, and the efforts in the sparsely populated rural regions.

In Windhoek, the force behind the municipal programme is the Personal Assistant to the Mayor, who is very frank about the political benefits that both the people of Windhoek and his own boss can reap from the municipal programme of action. As such, popular awareness of the MPA is very much at the forefront of the discussions, and a sub-committee for public relations was established as one of five groups to create the MPA.

Opportunities for this level of social mobilization are numerous, with the mass media well-represented, and public access to print, television and radio very high. Even the reach into the poorest areas is reasonably good. The municipality has a number of publications which can be utilized to promote mobilization around the MPA.

Personnel for the promotion of the MPA will soon include a cadre of six Community Liaison Officers. Assigned to the poorer areas of the municipality, the Liaison Officers will talk with community members and serve as the conduit for channelling concerns and information between the municipality and residents.

Since actual service delivery within the municipality is largely the domain of the national ministries, it is in the area of social mobilization that the municipality has the greatest scope to effect change. With the resolve of the municipality and the active involvement of the Public Relations Sub-Committee, it is expected that the social mobilization efforts in the implementation of the municipal programme of action will be considerable.

A completely different perspective is found in the development of the regional programmes of action in the country’s vast rural areas. Radio contacts can be made in some regions through the local language services of Namibia Broadcasting Corporation, but print and television are not available. The potential for interpersonal contact is also limited in many regions, limiting social mobilization strategies as well as the delivery of services. With vast distances between small population clusters, particularly in the south of the country, interpersonal contacts between community members and elected officials, extension officers, and even teachers and religious leaders is limited, although traditional leadership structures in some areas of the country provide a potential base for mobilization around the regional programmes of action.

The potential and need for social communication in promoting regional activities is recognized by public officials in some regions, and at the first workshop for the development of the Omusati Region programme of action it was strongly recommended that religious leadership become involved in the development and implementation of the programme since they hold an authoritative position and have regular access to assembled and individual community members.

Source: Adkisson and Hogan 1994
the cases of Brazil and Argentina are exceptions, in that these countries were able to link past experiences of massive mobilization for children to the more recent LPA process to the point that social mobilization in favour of the LPAs was the main strategy in the process. In these cases mobilization was replacing much narrower forms of social programming and planning.

Some conditions of social mobilization

Mobilization for improving the conditions of local children has proved to be more effective where local planning and resources are involved. Attempts to guide or summon mobilization from the centre, where “the child” is too abstract, are inevitably weaker. Going down to localities is also increasing the resources originally planned: experience shows that unexpected resources — financial, manpower, spaces and buildings — are mobilized when an LPA is produced.

A key element to mobilization and local-level programming is that the people come to feel ownership of the activities and take responsibility for achieving the goals and improving the lives of children, even if this implies a participatory process of social mobilization where the people can decide on the goals and the strategies for action. In cases of vertically and centrally structured states, on the other hand, populations see the problems raised and solutions designed at the central level as distant, and the concept of “nation” could appear intangible for populations living in isolated areas. But people know the problems that their own families face, and they feel the urgency to do something about them. Their involvement in being part of the answer, in entering into the cycle of knowledge, action and organization, must be promoted locally on the basis of local realities. This is a condition for social mobilization and also one of the major arguments in favour of programming and implementing locally, as foreseen in the World Summit and Plan of Action.

Communication and Mass Media

The dimensions of advocacy and social mobilization discussed above are often related to social communication. It must be made clear that advocacy and social mobilization are not identical, as often appears, to social communication. The latter is an instrument in itself that can intervene in a positive way, or sometimes in a determinant and essential way, for appropriate advocacy and social mobilization. But social communication in our case must be viewed from a broader perspective, so that some of its other positive effects can be revealed and analysed.

In social communication it is necessary to analyse the flow of information that occurs among different actors involved in the process. This, simply put, can be a message sent from one actor to another. This one-way flow, however, hides the actual communication process. Here we are interested in a situation where there are multiple message-senders and multiple message-receivers interacting simultaneously, and continuously changing the roles of senders and receivers, so that the message itself is enriched or at least changed. This is possible if we consider the different levels of senders, receivers and media that are used.

It is necessary to include formal, informal, media and face-to-face communications to understand this process. In the case of LPAs we could theoretically consider that there are several senders, as defined in the previous section on social mobilization. Children 6 to 18 years of age, parents, community leaders, NGOs, media, government bureaucracy, politicians, business community and international agencies are examples of the actors involved in the social communication process who interact through sending, receiving, processing and sending back messages. In this way a multiplication effect is obtained in the communication process, which ends up with the enrichment, adaptation and instrumentalization of the messages.

For instance, the message sent by the central power through the mass media will be re-elaborated by community recipients and sent out again through face-to-face means — or by local media in a more structured way — to other community members. Of course the message could become modified, but in general this could be a way to spread the message to larger audiences, while reinforcing and adapting the essence of the message. The views of the community could be received, as usually happens, by institutions of the State and fed back to the mass media.

If social communication is seen in this way, it infers that a structured planning of the communication process has to be undertaken. It is crucial to make programme timing and communication timing co-
Tamil Nadu: taking the state programme of action down to the district level

In India sectoral programmes are usually implemented at the district level by the District Collector (the head administrator of each district) and his or her team. In the state of Tamil Nadu, with its 15-point plan championed by the state’s Chief Minister, it was decided that decentralizing the state programme of action to the district level would promote ownership by allowing district teams to define their own goals (within the framework of the state goals), as well as the strategies and actions to be taken.

The district programmes are prepared by sectoral department officials at the district level, with support from state officials and UNICEF, Madras. This State Core Team is divided into 18 teams of two persons each, one of whom is a health professional, who facilitate district planning workshops in one or two districts. Key officials in each district have received special orientation on steps for preparing micro-plans.

The decentralization process is envisaged to eventually arrive at the village level. With the new constitutional amendment requiring that elected bodies in the village oversee all social programmes, the panchayat (village council) leaders are expected to play a critical role.

Panchayat leaders will participate in a two-day orientation workshop on the 15-Point Programme, focusing on what each village can do to define specific actions. While the actual management and control of village level “services”, such as health centres and schools, are not likely to shift in the immediate future, there is nevertheless the need to define local actions and elicit “pledges” for representing the interests of the villagers.

All villages in the state have at least one salaried government worker. The most common are the Anganwadi Worker of the Integrated Child Development Service, which consists of centrally sponsored programmes administered and implemented by the states, or the organizer of the Chief Minister’s Noon Meal programme, Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Programme, or the Village Health Nurse of the health department. These front-line village workers already have several functions, and they will be relied upon to act as catalysts and communicators for the set of local-level actions. Ongoing training programmes are helping these workers incorporate these new elements into their roles and functions.

One example of the inter-sectoral support being initiated can be found in the case of nutrition and Anganwadi workers who assist primary school teachers in their annual enrolment drives by enumerating school-age children. The workers will also continue to follow up on attendance and retention records during their normal household visits throughout the year.

District plans will be drawn up in cooperation and collaboration with panchayats, and NGOs will be involved in the preparation and implementation of the plans, as well as playing a critical role in monitoring the progress.

Source: Lwin 1994
examined. Many countries are using various means of communication for their LPAs (sports, posters, meetings, etc.), but few of them have planned their communication activities in relation to the development of the LPA.

Nevertheless, some interesting experiences can be cited. Some countries have taken advantage of the mass media to disseminate information and knowledge about the NPA, using it to raise the interest and spur the development of local programmes. Direct, face-to-face communication, has been very effective, and feasible, at the local level. The Anganwadi Workers in Indian villages are one such example of this kind of communication (see box 14).

In Chile, where large segments of neglected populations live within a context of economic growth and overall good health and social indicators, a publicity agency has been engaged to stimulate the involvement of all the relevant social actors. This strategy targets opinion leaders, decision makers in all levels of government and the private sector (NGOs, church institutions, universities, private enterprises, communications media, etc.). The means to accomplish this include a publicity campaign on several radio stations, direct mailing of publicity material, and a complete programme of public relations and events. The objective of the campaign has been to inform all sectors of society of the existence of the NPA, and to encourage participation in the fulfillment of the targeted goals. This is expected to help LPA development. Besides Chile, many other countries are working in this same direction.

Past experiences must be used to develop local communication strategies for LPAs. That is the case of basic-service programmes which have demonstrated a wide use of local means of communication. Traditional forms of cultural expression like puppets or theatre have been used in those programmes to promote the spread of information, knowledge and education on the appropriate behaviour in favour of children. Similarly, other common forms of communication are used at the local level, such as comics, local radio stations, posters, loud speakers, wall journals, etc.

When the media reports success stories at the local level, or cases of political involvement and social mobilization around a new programme in one part of the country, it can serve as an effective tool for advocacy in other parts of the country by giving rise to demands for a similar programme, forcing politicians to take notice, and, in general, creating a dynamic climate of productive competition.

**Interrelations between Advocacy, Social Mobilization and Communication**

Many of the efforts made in advocacy and political will should and must induce a process of social mobilization. At the same time, while the dimension of social mobilization is a key to sustainability, it is important to consider its interrelations with the political and organizational components.

The holistic nature and myriad interrelations of the varying elements implied in this kind of local programming give rise to limitations when an element-by-element analysis of the process is attempted. The boundaries between advocacy, social communication, political will, social mobilization and community participation, in all their various juxtapositions, are far from exclusive: energy exerted in one area will have an impact on one or more other areas, leading, in turn, to further reactions. There are obviously risks involved. When an expected action does not come, when there are reversals of policy, when conflict begins to dominate the process, the negative effects will reverberate along every branch of the process. Social mobilization is particularly susceptible to this sort of backlash: the high it is capable of producing (by rallying people outside the normal power and decisional structure) will be in relation to the sense of disappointment, powerlessness and anger felt if the process stalls and fades away.

It could be said that advocacy, social mobilization, and social communication work in the direction of increasing educational and information levels, reinforcing democratic and conscious participation and, as a consequence, ensuring endurance and self-sustainability.
VI. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation in the LPA process — that is, the organized participation of the people, usually poor, who are the recipients of the services — should be considered a strategy to ensure that the programme is relevant to community needs through increasing government transparency and democracy. In this sense, community participation is essential, and not coincidental, to NPA decentralization. In fact, the LPA process should aim to increase local power by making programme formulation, development and follow-up more democratic, while the people’s participation in these phases should lead to improved knowledge, education and awareness within-the community. One of the major aims of this participation is that people’s behaviours will change as they begin to integrate the new practices in favour of children into their daily lives. Consequently, community participation, in which the people are not envisaged as a mere “labour force”, but as full actors in the process, implies that the community participates in an organized and technical fashion in all phases of the process: the analysis of the situation, the definition of the goals and activities, and the execution, follow-up and evaluation of those activities.

Difficulties in Community Participation

Some groups in the community face notable obstacles in becoming full participants. It is frequently argued, for example, that people living at the periphery have limited opportunities to interact with government systems and can only negotiate political favours. Communities do not yet perceive the relationship between the resources they generate for the State and the returns they receive back: a major part of public investments in goal-related areas like health care and basic education is absorbed by system losses and transaction costs (e.g. corruption, absenteeism, overpricing, favoritism).

There are, in fact, many difficulties in integrating this crucial dimension into the LPA process. First of all, despite the now commonly acknowledged need to include community participation in the programming process, there are few standard methods and experiences for formulating general rules that apply to all countries and situations. It is even difficult to classify with any reliability the different situations and ways in which community participation can be successfully adapted.

Many times the concept of real community participation is unclear or dubious. For example, the fact that the people are often not formally represented by their official representatives is usually overlooked. There is widespread manipulation in local communities, sometimes reflecting local social differences, which prevents true and extended democratic participation. In some cases, extreme poverty does not allow the community to have adequate levels of awareness about its own interests. Also, so-called “community leaders” and “community participation” are in many cases the result of the manipulation by central or dominant powers. Commonly, for example, community groups or community leaders are utilized by external political parties as a way to ensure a substantial amount of votes in general elections.

The political structure and situation of many countries provides little or no possibility for people’s participation, which is perceived as negative and politically dangerous. In such countries, community participation in the processes of analysing the local sit-
ution, setting goals and following-up programme execution is accepted with great difficulty.

All of these elements make it difficult to win the openness and support of technicians and politicians for community participation, creating a major obstacle in instituting intensive and effective community participation in the process of NPA decentralization.

Reasons for Community Participation

In spite of all the doubts that can be raised about community participation, its importance is supported by several arguments that go beyond simple ethical or ideological considerations.

The first is related to the functionality of community participation in the framework of the current transformations of the State at the global level. In the post-modern era, community participation is consistent with and essential to the new State that is based on diversity, local governance and participation, and people’s control over and execution of services.

Secondly, many governments in developing countries have openly recognized that they are unable to achieve the goals without the effective participation and contribution of organized communities. Apart from accepting, in their respective NPAs, the need for the government to interact with community formations at the local level, some governments have also jointly endorsed the concept of “community-government partnership” as the main means of achieving goals for children (see, for example, SAARC 1992). The challenge today is to build such partnerships and make them work for the goals for children.

Thirdly, real community participation can increase the transparency of government action. When the community is aware of the goals and projects, it can play a very important role in controlling and monitoring programme execution. Complementary to this, the closer the community is related to the process, the greater its involvement, awareness, and expectations are going to be.

The nature of government institutions and the reality of communities in poverty often make working together difficult, creating the need to build a horizontal platform where an organized community and a decentralized government can join forces. The prospect that representative local government will progressively become the community organization is directly related to the extent that democratic forces prevail in a country. This process is the ultimate guarantee that the reach of the goals is universal, that they are sustained by democratic will, and that the NPA goals attain the status of rights, as intended by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

However, as a rule, and across countries, traditional constraints and related current causes are not making basic human goals easier to achieve.

Conditions of Community Participation

It is not easy for a community in poverty to achieve the goals for their children or social goals in general, if some support is not provided and if some basic elements of community participation are not maintained.

The same principles of sustained social mobilization should be taken into account for community participation. That is, community participation is tied to a systematic process which always comprises the following elements: autonomous community organization, permanent increases in knowledge and awareness, and continuous or programmed action. Community organization without awareness could lead to actions with a negative impact for community interests. The same could happen when action is undertaken without awareness. In fact, many projects have failed when they have emphasized only one of these three dimensions. For instance, reinforcing organization without action and awareness results in ritualism. Action without organization and awareness ends up with limited activism and one-time results without generating sustainability. Raising educational levels, training and awareness without organization and continuous action produces frustration since there exists no outlet to apply what has been learned.

At the same time, community organization has to allow the free and systematic participation of people in the decision-making process. Knowledge and awareness have to be specific to the immediate needs, but the community also has to be aware of its own limitations, as well as those of others, in solving problems.

The LPAs should have intensive community participation in all phases of the process: diagnosis,
selecting and setting the priorities for goals, defining activities and follow-up. These different phases could also help communities to increase their awareness and knowledge, to involve them in continuous and systematic action and to facilitate the creation or reinforcement of their organizations to accomplish the tasks of the LPA.

Specifically in relation to the NPAs, and drawing on the experiences, some elements of external support for community participation can be identified. The institutional structures and organizations related to LPA formulation and implementation should aim to assist communities in organizing themselves into groups to assess and analyse their own situation, to take collective action to the extent it is possible to meet their needs, and to articulate their unmet needs as legitimate demands on the resources of the State and society.

In bringing together the fragmented functions of the State at the community level, inter-sectoral linkages can be strengthened and made to function in a team mode, progressing under the active participation of the local community and its representatives. In a community-government partnership, goals can be promoted through annual inter-sectoral action plans in each compact political-administrative unit.

Of course it may be possible to decentralize the planning process and to implement the NPA without the actual devolution of political power. But, with the authority so far from the action, the role of the community would remain passive and community processes insignificant. If, on the contrary, decentralization of the political-administrative structure is promoted step by step, community processes become correspondingly feasible.

With a democratic orientation, socio-political systems can progressively negotiate an optimal distribution of functions at various levels (local, provincial, national and international) so that power carries responsibility. Ultimately, if a major goal is the reconciliation of regional imbalances and disparities, these democratic principles need to be in place and functioning. Without the corrective influence of participatory democracy, decentralization gives undue and uncontrollable influence to local elites or predominant groups, and might ultimately be less conducive to the design and implementation of local programmes of action than a centralized system. The corrective process must begin by creating and supporting participatory structures and processes that allow, as a matter of right, communities to articulate local demand.

Nevertheless, traditional concepts of democracy have not been a precondition for some forms of community involvement in the NPA decentralization process in some countries. In several of the countries in which government authorities are not elected by direct vote, as well as in states with single party systems, popular councils have participated in LPA formulation (e.g. Viet Nam), and communities are being organized to articulate their needs (e.g. Nigeria, Sudan) and undertake monitoring (e.g. Benin), therefore representing a valuable source of community-based information, while promoting greater community awareness about the LPA goals and activities.

Community participation is often urged by donors and technicians; but nearly as often, the grounds for real community participation are not prepared. In many cases “community participation” signifies the involvement of elite community leaders. In many cases this participation is only a reflection of traditional political behaviour in which local leaders monopolize the benefits of social and economic redistribution without improving the social condition of the poor. This does not mean that community participation should be rejected. But it must be guaranteed that the mechanisms of participation are present in each stage of the process to ensure the participation of the poor.

The NPA decentralization Overview shows that community participation was not very widespread in the terms discussed here. Despite the immense efforts made in mobilization it appears that community participation — with the exception of some particular cases — is still limited to one-time activities and that it is more formal than real. This can be explained by several factors, some of which have been mentioned in this chapter. Many countries are coming from vertically driven experiences in which little emphasis has been placed on community participation. The decline of the community’s importance brings with it the decline of social organization and participation. The participation of community leaders and the population in the programming process has been valuable, but usually limited to experimental and pilot projects. This makes it difficult to incor-
porate these experiences into larger and more integrated processes like the LPAs.

The participation of local communities should be guaranteed in the LPA process. Poor women, children, ethnic groups and the very poor should be the objects and the subjects of the LPAs. Some initial experiences are taking place. Among them are the developments in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, where a special programme of action for women is being developed. Also, some attempts were made to develop a specific methodology to incorporate indigenous population in the LPAs of Colombia.

Even though the concrete examples are few, most of the countries have emphasized the need for community participation. This participation appears to be essential for the new state structures and the specific needs of LPAs. It could be expected that the LPA process, in the medium or long term, can help make community participation and organization realities.

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**Box 15.**

**EGYPT**

**Eleven recommendations for improving local administration**

1. Increase public awareness of local reform laws and of the local government's role in the delivery of vital services.
2. Find ways to provide local governments with increased budgetary flexibility, including the levying of local taxes, in order to improve local planning, performance and accountability.
3. Tie funding to maintenance projects and launch a public education campaign to focus attention on the importance of maintaining public property.
4. Avoid the proliferation of small projects, as they fragment resources and make coordination, accountability and evaluation difficult.
5. Improve organizational procedures. Productivity in local government is often stifled by certain practices which could be altered through informal negotiations.
6. Stimulate individual performance and leadership development.
7. Promote informal communication among local government officials both between and within local units.
8. Make a realistic assessment of the technical support services available to local governments.
9. Strengthen links between local governments and local universities.
10. Encourage the private sector to play a more vigorous role in the provision and maintenance of local services.
11. Improve the quality and accessibility of information from the regions to the central level, and strengthen the information management capability of regions.

VII. FINANCES

Financing new programme activities represents an important area in the NPA and LPA formulation process that has not always received adequate attention. At least the following elements should be considered under the financial aspects of LPAs: an adequate cost analysis of the current and new activities designed to meet the goals, budgeting the LPA, defining the sources of financing, increasing resources, and rechanneling some currently existing resources to the LPAs.

Cost Analysis and Budgets

The main exercises of cost analysis and budgeting for the NPAs have been carried out. It has been estimated that the cost of implementing NPAs is achievable, although the poorest countries will require sizable sums of external aid in order to bridge the gap between resource requirements and availability (Thet 1994a).

However, few examples of costing and budgeting at the local level exist. Techniques for accurately estimating costs and financial mechanisms for ensuring adequate funding of local programmes of action were often given insufficient attention in the initial phases of planning. The NPA decentralization Overview shows that only 15 of the 50 countries decentralizing their NPAs listed financing as an output. This should be considered a limitation in the LPA process. It has been asserted that "economic analysis needs to be built into the NPA process from the start, rather than being introduced after strategies and programme mechanisms are laid out" (Mehrotra et al. 1992). The same holds true for LPAs.

A number of factors contributing to this shortcoming can be identified: the decentralization of finances is a recent development which does not always run parallel to the ongoing tendency of state decentralization; budgeting and costing capacities are generally quite low away from the centre; state structure is often not fully amenable to local financing; disbursement methods are often cumbersome and unresponsive. At the same time, the decentralization of finances in States that are not administratively prepared to handle and exert controls over such a task could run the risk of seeing large portions of resources targeted for local programmes end up in the hands of local elites.

Other common problems of cost methodologies include the elaboration of indicative estimates and the lack of analysis on the synergistic effects of intersectoral programmes, such as an estimate of water and sanitation costs on the costing of diarrheal interventions, or the impact of education and nutrition programmes for women and mothers on the cost of primary health care. Most cost estimates are restricted to sectoral programmes.

Sources for Financing LPAs

The lack of precise and practical guidelines in the area of financing alludes to possible pitfalls in decentralization strategies in general. It has already been noted that the central government must not relinquish or diminish its role of reconciling disparities throughout its territory. But when proper and viable financing instruments are not in place, decentralization risks becoming an exercise of passing respon-
ilities to subnational units without ensuring that the resources to carry them out will be present.

The strategies decided by countries for financing their NPAAs and LPAs depend on a number of factors, and in general a combination of income sources must contribute to meeting the costs of local programmes. However, the central budget still remains the main source for financing local programmes of action. Moreover, many countries have declared that LPAs are helping localities to advocate for and negotiate new resources from central sources of financing.

The degrees of local authority over financing and budget formulation differ widely from country to country. At the same time, relationships between the centre and regions in this area have changed in many countries in recent years, reflecting increased efforts to couple administrative decentralization with financial decentralization. In some countries, these changes are implying that the newly allocated resources have to be programmed, expended and controlled locally.

In Uganda, Sudan and the Philippines, as well as in other countries embarking on political decentralization, changes in the tax collection system give the subnational units more responsibilities in the collection and management of locally generated taxes. In Uganda, financial decentralization implies that 50 per cent of locally raised taxes is retained by districts and sub-counties, in addition to central transfers and outsourcing of personnel; in the future, block and equalization grants will be afforded. This process takes place, however, in a situation characterized by an extremely poor tax and revenue collection system and by the presence of various ethnic political traditions. As decentralization is gradually effected in Argentina, the central government’s share of funding the provincial and municipal programmes of action will shift over three years from 100 per cent to only 10 per cent. The provincial programmes of action in Viet Nam have also served as a means for soliciting increased allocations from the central government.

Not less important is the potential financial capacity that localities have. Some limited experiences are showing that once the LPA has been formulated, local resources that were not previously used for children’s programmes are being made available. In Riobamba, Ecuador, for example, the mayor has allocated new municipal resources to finance an educational and communications project in favour of children. Local resource mobilization, including in-kind contributions of labour and materials, cost recovery, direct relations with other sources of funding, etc., will have financial implications that cannot be measured at the central level. In the Vietnam’s yen Bai Provincial Programme of Action (estimated cost per child: $6.35) it was observed that in-kind contributions, such as the transportation of desks by foot to schools in isolated mountain districts, are crucial to the PPA’s implementation (Evans and Rorris 1994). In cases where agreements are made to match locally generated revenues, such contributions have to be reflected in the programme cost.

When advocating for LPAs, as for NPAs, special care has to be taken not to create false or unrealistic expectations of countries and localities on the funding capacity and allocation practices of international-agency cooperation.

The private sector and NGOs are being encouraged to finance part of the NPA costs in many countries. Initial attempts show a great potential for incorporating these actors in LPA financing. This is especially true when the private sector and NGOs at the local level are not only aware of children’s needs, but also feel some responsibilities about the social environment.

Some countries present a mixed picture of allowing budgeting autonomy to subnational units, while remaining the main source of funding. The formulation of state programmes of action Brazil helped illustrate the deep financial dependency that many states still have on the Federal Government. In Nigeria, oil revenues disbursed from the central government account for almost all social expenditures for funding state designed programmes.

Constraints and Commonalities in Financing LPAs

The resource gaps of the poorer countries present formidable obstacles to be overcome. Lacking resources stand as a basic impediment to financing programmes of action, even when proper allocation mechanisms seem to be in place at local and regional levels. In some cases this can be partly remedied by improvements in the tax and revenue collection systems, although grants from external sources will usually be necessary. In most of Mongolia, for exam-
Economic zones help to overcome scarce resources

Mongolia's transition to a market economy has put increased pressure on spending for social services. The system of social protection that had evolved prior to 1990 provided extensive benefits, including maternity leave and various child-related allowances. Since then, however, the government's budgetary constraints have deepened and inflation has eroded the value of entitlements, leading to drastic declines in the real incomes of families and in household food security. Education has been hurt by rising costs for books and other learning material, and social services, particularly in health and education, have worsened.

Mongolia's NPA, which also provides the guidelines for the formulation of local programmes, was completed in May 1993, and a Government Working Committee was established to organize its implementation, coordinate sub-committees, and carry out monitoring and evaluation.

Administratively, Mongolia is divided into aimags and the capital city. Aimags are divided into sumans, which in turn divided into baghs. The capital, Ulaanbaatar, is divided into districts and sub-districts. In all, there are 18 aimags and more than 300 sumans in the country. Aimags have a population ranging from 50,000 to 112,000, and each aimag comprises about 20 sumans.

As a first step towards decentralizing the NPA, a seminar was organized for the governors of all aimags, cities, and the capital, who agreed to implement the NPA at the local level. The central government issued a set of directives which advised aimags to include the programme in their annual development plans and allocate at least 20 per cent of the local budget to fund the programmes. The directives also stressed the need to focus on reliable information.

Decentralization of the NPA will be carried out through economic zones in which several geographically linked aimags and cities join together to implement policies. Given the country's distribution of resources and sparsely populated areas, this approach has been designed to allow aimags to unite their financial and human resources to tackle common problems. For example, in the three eastern aimags comprising one of the economic zones, Dornot aimag is the most industrially developed of the three. Therefore, in this grouping, Dornot aimag can provide the necessary industrial goods for implementing the programme in the zone, while the other two aimags, relying on their potential in animal husbandry, can supply raw materials and food-diary products for children.

In the prevailing situation in which the economic performance of the country is weak and there are insufficient financial resources to fund the implementation of the NPA, the strategy of selecting certain regions for development could be introduced in order to set an example for others. Such experiences could also bolster the needed training and methodology capacities that are currently in short supply in many areas, particularly rural, of the country.

Source: Bergen and Badamhand 1994

Where local governments are given increased responsibilities for running social programmes, instruments for generating resources locally, along with transfers from the central level (often coming sectorally through ministries) must be defined.

Attempts at decentralizing the NPA in countries where financing is tightly controlled by the centre are difficult to carry out, as the case of Ecuador demonstrates. When, as in the case of Ecuador, goals
and strategies are defined locally, but the instruments for carrying them out are lacking, they may have a greater value as tools for advocacy.

The exercise of formulating both national and local programmes of action has demonstrated varying capacities in the areas of costing and budgeting, although generally these are quite low away from the centre. This has been identified as a major obstacle to effective planning since a key element of the NPA and LPA's lies in the financial impact of coordinated inputs by different institutions and agencies, as well as mobilizing local resources. Progressively shifting the responsibilities of programming and social-service provision to subnational levels demonstrates the need to have a more rationalized, and at times innovative, system of allocating and collecting resources. In Mongolia (box 16) and the Philippines (see box 8), two different approaches are attempting to move dependency on resources away from the central government, and in Chile (see box 17) and Ecuador localities have gained access to special funds.

Funding local programmes of action can also be adversely affected by methods of disbursement, which are sometimes counterproductive and wasteful, or burdensome and unresponsive to programming needs and realities. The example of Bangladesh, where civil servants are reluctant to allocate available funds due to fears of political retribution, is exemplary: in the last three years only 23.5 per cent of the foreign aid earmarked for social development was actually disbursed (UNICEF Dhaka 1994). In Argentina, the World Bank has agreed to finance part of the first phase of the NPA with $160 million. The guidelines set by the Federal Government and the Bank, however, are often not compatible with the local norms and administrative procedures, thus enormously delaying the operation (Minujin and Vinocur 1994).

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**Box 17.**

**CHILE**

**Financing regional plans for children**

Public spending on children in Chile for 1992 represented 22 per cent of the overall budget for social expenditures, or around 14 per cent of overall government spending. It is estimated that between 1992 and 1999 the NPA will cost US$736 million, a figure which does not include any additional funding from the private sector or other sources. On the basis of current patterns of social spending (ca. $6 billion in 1993), the NPA funding target would seem viable.

Moreover, under the Government and Regional Administration Law of 1992, funds earmarked for child-related programmes are to be provided to regional governments by the National Government, which should give extra impetus to the development of regional plans of action. Regional authorities will decide where to channel the funds they receive through the two main sources, the National Fund for Regional Development (FNDR) and the Agreement on Programming and Sectoral Investment for Regions (ISAR). In the case of FNDR, available funds should increase by 25 per cent above the average growth of the annual public investment budget (excluding ISAR) over the first two years of this law. With ISAR, regions may finance sectoral projects that are in compliance with the criteria set by the central ministries.

Regions will also be able to allocate additional funds to the projects they consider to be of special interest, or propose the transfer of resources from one ISAR programme to another or between ISAR and FNDR programmes. Agreements on programming may also be stipulated between one or more ministries and one or more regional government.

Regional autonomy in drawing up programmes, however, does not guarantee that the actions planned will be implemented. It is in this sphere of budgeting that the regional governments, established only in 1992, are a new public institution that will have to compete for resources among themselves and with other public institutions.

Source: Goncalves and Colonna 1994
It should be emphasized, as Patrice Korjenev does, that the variety of components and underlying assumptions about the determinants of costs does not permit the direct comparison of different cost estimates (Korjenev 1993). Thus, each estimate must stand on its own. Despite that, based on the experiences recorded up until now, several commonalities have emerged that suggest areas requiring closer attention.

It is necessary to take into consideration different variables when costing at the local level. The chain of costing, budgeting, identifying the sources of financing, and engaging those sources must reflect local realities. When cost analysis and budgeting is performed at the local level, it should be done with local service costs rather than “average” costs.

Costing methodologies and capacities have to be improved to ascertain the feasibility of the LPA, and if, for example, its estimated cost represents a resource gap. Realistically costed programmes should give impetus to raising local resources through local taxation, increase pressure from localities for central funds when presenting integrated local plans, encourage the participation of the private sector, and help promote in-kind contributions from the community.

Realistically costed LPAs can be combined to form a more accurate picture of the country, highlighting the special needs and available resources on a subnational basis. In a national system where the localities are seen as a whole, a system can be developed in which central taxation and allocations are more equitable. This also helps put into clearer focus demands on the centre to support social programmes, and provides external agencies a clearer basis for targeting interventions.

The result of the national vision of the different subunits of the country produces a kind of map that can facilitate the establishment and operation of compensatory funds for underdeveloped regions, and policies for the relocation of economic activities. Such a map could also help to improve the understanding of the general structure of centralized and decentralized public budget resources, along with the decision-making processes related to budgetary allocation at both central and subnational levels. Although formal descriptions of public structures at the national and local levels are evidenced in country reports, the “political economy” of resource distribution is not illustrated as thoroughly.

In Viet Nam, the formulation process of the provincial programmes of action helped highlight regional per-capita income disparities and the need to introduce modern methods of cost-effectiveness to the country’s planning procedures. Provinces in Viet Nam have also used the process to express urgent capital expenditure needs. Viet Nam’s central government has used the LPAs as an instrument to guarantee social equity and to monitor the social-services coverage of the entire population.

Similar outputs can be expected from the Philippines, where local planning should be extensive, and Uganda, whose district programmes of action should help to highlight the diverse conditions, resources and traditions existing there.

There must be a realistic approach to what can be managed at the local level when the financial source is not local. This will vary according to the placement of programming and implementation authority.

Questions regarding the source and destination of finances are no doubt foremost in the minds of many involved in the process. It is nevertheless apparent that defining the financial dimensions has not been a starting point in the process of LPA formulation, and this lack of clarity over programme costs and how they will be met has led to questions over the feasibility of local programmes. In this context, other crucial elements (political will, social demand, organization and the relation of programmes to national development plans) must help to secure the commitment to decentralize the NPA while the issue of defining appropriate financial instruments and increasing costing efficiency in decentralizing states is more earnestly tackled.

It can be expected that the financial resources and the related technical matters will be optimized as the process of NPA decentralization advances, and many of the questions regarding programme costs, the source of funds, and the instruments for receiving them will be solved. To ensure that this happens, special attention has to be paid to this issue in the early stages of the LPA process.
VIII. THE ACTORS IN NPA DECENTRALIZATION

The NPAs are conceived as a general process that incorporates many groups and institutions from the public sector and civil society. By extension, the same is true of the LPAs. In the words of the World Summit for Children Plan of Action, art. 1:

this Plan of Action is intended as a guide for national Governments, international organizations, bilateral aid agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and all sectors of society in formulating their own programmes of action for ensuring the implementation of the Declaration of the World Summit for Children (UNICEF 1990).

Therefore, participation in the differing programme phases should ideally come from all areas: local institutions, the private sector, NGOs, private voluntary organizations and the population at large. Whether these private or public institutions are local organizations or represent central institutions, they must work in a coordinated and organized way from the planning stage onwards, both among themselves and with the other key actors in the process. International organizations, usually through cooperation agreements at the national or local level, should also be part of this coordination.

The Different Actors

The actors discussed here can be classified according to their national or local level, their private or public status, their position in the social structure or their multi-status condition, their international or national origin and the functions they perform.

The 50 countries with ongoing processes of NPA decentralization cited the participation of more than 400 national institutions. The number might well be larger, since terms such as "universities", "NGOs", and "other institutions" were frequently mentioned, implying several of them in each category. A wide variety of institutions falls under this category, including national, international and civil-society organizations such as professional associations, religious groups, boy and girl scout organizations and women's groups.

At the local level as well, a vast number of organizations are involved. The Overview lists 373 institutions that are participating at the local level in the NPA decentralization process. Here too, reference is made to organizations like "municipalities" or "people's committees", which, when considered in the plural, could account for several hundred additional groups. Many different kinds of groups involved at the local level were also mentioned, including local representatives of national institutions, civil and religious associations and movements, and bilateral and multilateral organizations.

A variety of situations exists in the countries under study. In Brazil (see box 11), a coalition of governmental and non-governmental actors, called PACT, spearheaded the state programme of action process. In the federalized state of India, the delicate balance of centre-state relationships and changing balances of power at the federal level during the early 1990s led to the centre playing a very weak role in the NPA decentralization process. Guidelines for states to undertake their own programmes of action were eventual-
ly issued in 1993 by the Department of Woman and Child Development, within the Ministry of Human Resources Development. In those guidelines, a role for UNICEF field offices both as technical collaborators and as facilitators was clearly envisaged in the process of preparing state programmes of action.

National public institutions

The participation of the main authority in each country has been sought for the formulation and development of the NPAs, since the World Summit Plan of Action specifically aims to engage Heads of State. Consequently, a concerted effort by the Head of the State should also be expected in ensuring that the NPA is decentralized. It could be surmised that the degree of support received, the authority of decisions, and the allocation of funds, as well as the autonomy accorded to different levels of the State, will be influenced by the authority or institution that leads the process of decentralization. It could also therefore be supposed that the higher the level of leadership directing the process, the stronger that process will be.

This, however, has not always been the case. In the Overview it is revealed that the leader of NPA decentralization at the national level is the Head of the State in only very few cases. In 21 of the 50 countries in the process of formulating local programmes of action, the leader was the minister of planning, development or finance, or an important figure within one of those ministries. In eight countries the leadership came from a social sector ministry. In seven cases it was led by an office of child welfare. In 10 countries it was led by special committees, some of them inter-sectoral, and in other countries a combination of both the public and the private sector.

These data suggest that NPA decentralization is seen by most as a technical issue, and that selecting the ministry of planning to direct the process is meant to ensure solid technical input and coordination. When the leader of the process is the ministry of finance, it indicates that guarantees are being sought for financial support. In countries where the social sector is leading the process, the effectiveness of that choice will depend on the degree of acceptance and status that this sector has in the governmental structure.

In some cases it has been noted that special institutions are being created for the follow-up of the NPA and LPA. Sometimes, other institutions have added to their normal functions new functions of NPA and LPA follow-up. In some countries a special committee has been formed to carry out these functions.
The number of public national institutions involved in the process differs from country to country. In some countries more than seven national institutions are involved in NPA decentralization, whereas in only a very few countries are fewer than three institutions involved. Nevertheless it clearly appears that in very few cases is NPA decentralization mobilizing only specialized institutions relating to children’s issues; usually a combination of most of the public institutions in the social sector are involved. In many cases the social sector is coordinated with planning and finance offices, and frequently special coordination activities and mechanisms are established to follow-up and reinforce the process.

There is, therefore, a multiple combination and richness of forms included in the process of NPA decentralization. This demonstrates the amount of interest and engagement that countries are dedicating to the process, along with the efforts they are undertaking for making appropriate use and adaptation of their institutional resources.

Local public institutions

At the local level, local heads of government were cited as spearheading the LPA process in 22 of the 50 countries decentralizing their NPAs. In nine cases the process was led by the local or regional planning offices, in four cases by special committees, and in three cases by another local public institution. Surprisingly, the process was led by local representatives of a national institution in five countries, which runs against the principle of decentralization. These figures show that local governments are taking the LPAs into their own hands, although, as seen above, they have the support of national governments. This could imply that local leaders recognize LPAs as an instrument that reflects local children’s needs, and that some priority is assigned to the programmes. To some extent it also reflects the need to approach the problems from a local perspective, where a combination of knowledge, definition of goals and appropriate action can be put into relation and structured.

In addition to the head of local and regional governments directing the process, a large number of local public institutions are involved as well. The participation of the heads of subnational governmental units — at the local or intermediate administrative level — was mentioned in 17 of the 50 countries that reported NPA decentralization. In 43 of the countries, subnational public institutions were mentioned as participants at both the local and regional levels.

In many countries the participation of local and regional planning institutions is noted, a fact that ensures a certain degree of planning and coordination. Other institutions that have been mentioned at the local level are the local offices of health, education and in some cases social affairs. Other groups and institutions mentioned include police stations, hospitals, regional councils, local development committees, nutrition networks, village welfare centres, special programmes for daughters, institutes for municipal administration, literacy committees and so on. These organizations are often combined with local and national NGOs of differing types and with some bilateral and multilateral international organizations. The participation of so many actors gives the impression of a broad social movement in favour of LPAs.

Civil society

As previously mentioned, a large number of NGOs are participating at the national and local levels. In the Overview, 26 of the 50 countries cited the participation of NGOs at the national level and 32 of 50 at the local level.

The spectrum of participating NGOs is extremely varied. Among the international NGOs, those mentioned most often include CARITAS, CARE, Lions Club, Red Cross, Rotary International and World Vision. There are also national NGOs working from the national level that should present some degree of organization and institutionalization. An example of these are professional associations, among which pediatricians and physicians in particular are taking an active role. In other cases NGO associations are frequently cited.

Other NGOs represent specific social groups and associations, such as youth and women, and groups with some specific interests, like Boy Scouts, child-rights volunteers, or associations of preschool teachers and other labour unions. Among religious groups several churches are represented, including Buddhists, Christians, Catholics, Muslims, and the Council and Conference of Churches.

Some groups from the private and economic sector are mentioned. Among them are some national and international banks, economic associations,
pharmaceutical laboratories, soap manufacturers and one international oil company.

Community organizations

Community organizations are mentioned several times for their role in the process. In some cases, the citation refers to the basic community itself, while in others, specific groups representing sections or groups within the community are indicated.

As previously noted, specific forms of community organization and participation for LPAs are not mentioned. Community organizations are only participating as such, and there are no reports reflecting a process of adaptation by the community due to the establishment of LPAs. Of course it would be reasonable to expect this to occur as the LPAs develop.

International participation

The World Declaration (art. 23) states:

We also seek the support of the United Nations system, as well as other international and regional organizations, in the universal effort to promote the well-being of children.

We ask for greater involvement on the part of non-governmental organizations, in complementing national efforts and joint international action in the field (UNICEF 1990).

The participation of international agencies in the NPA decentralization process is quite extensive. In the 50 countries included in the Overview, international organizations were mentioned as active at the national level by 27 countries and at the local level by 16.

The participation of multilateral and bilateral organizations is frequently mentioned in the Overview. From the bilateral side, mentions are given to the specialized cooperation agencies of Belgium, Canada, Italy, Germany and the United States of America. From the multilateral side a number of UN agencies are mentioned several times: ILO (International Labour Organization), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UNESCO, UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UNICEF, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), WHO (World Health Organization), PAHO (Pan American Health Organization), and WFP (World Food Pro-

gramme). The involvement of the World Bank is also frequently indicated, while the European Union is mentioned as working at national levels to support LPAs.

For the preparation of the Overview, UNICEF country offices were asked to indicate the different agencies that were most involved in the NPA decentralization process. UNICEF appears as the most active international cooperation agency, with major contributions in the areas of advocacy, finance, mobilization and technical cooperation. Bilateral and multilateral agencies provided important but less intensive support in these areas. This kind of multiple participation is very important in the sense that the LPAs should be shared as common responsibility by everybody. Sometimes the overly active role of UNICEF has been pointed out, which could jeopardize the full participation of all actors.

The role of UNICEF

Since UNICEF is working intensively to incorporate its support of LPAs within the programme cycle and within the whole NPA process, and because it is the privileged reference institution of this study, it is important to devote some space to an analysis of the role of UNICEF. According to the Overview and the country reports, UNICEF has in most countries played an important role in advocacy and mobilization, and provided technical and financial support. This implies emphasizing the cooperation of UNICEF in the LPA process through four main areas: advocacy, capacity building, empowerment, and service delivery.

To make programmes as politically relevant as possible, UNICEF management needs to be aware of the issue of synchronizing its own programming and priority-setting process with the national programming and priority-setting process. If other agencies, like UNDP for example, did likewise it would help bring about closer synchronization for the respective programmes of UNICEF and UNDP. It is also important that NPAs, in targeting five different areas (health care, education, water and sanitation, nutrition, CEDC-children in difficult circum stance) become state owned and not a UNICEF programme, so that other donors will support it.

In some countries, UNICEF offices have placed emphasis on including the mid-decade goals as part
of the NPA decentralization process, as should be normal. Others have started to consider the importance of making NPA decentralization consistent with the different phases of the programming cycle: mid-term review, situation analysis, strategy paper, country programme recommendations and master plan of operations, as well as progress evaluations in the annual revisions of UNICEF cooperation. This will ensure that UNICEF cooperation for LPAs provides appropriate efforts, resources and follow-up. It must however be recognized that NPAs and LPAs do not necessarily represent the full programme of UNICEF-Government cooperation and, since UNICEF has limited resources, the kind of cooperation it can provide will be mostly technical. UNICEF will have to work at the central level on mechanisms for implementing the NPA.

The strategy of supporting NPA decentralization should be consistent with the main objectives of UNICEF. This support can be expressed through promoting the mid-decade goals, the Mayors’ Initiative, CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child), women’s programmes (e.g. CEDAW-Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and specific issues (e.g. baby-friendly hospitals).

Efforts made by the Planning and Coordination Office of Headquarters and the process of setting up the ICDC database on NPA decentralization demonstrate the possibility of having a consistent and systematic method of follow-up in which UNICEF regional offices can play an active role.

Difficulties in this Multi-Participatory Process

A general consensus seems to have been reached by those involved with the NPA process, echoed frequently during the Technical Meeting in Florence, that all relevant public and private institutions, community groups and organizations should participate throughout the mobilization, programming, execution, evaluation and follow-up stages of the LPA process. Although this is desirable in principle, in practice it must be qualified and organized. The indiscriminate participation of all actors could create a very complex situation, easily leading to confusion and inefficiency.

Participants must fill specific roles as per their specialties and particular function. In this sense it has been said that some degree of specialization exists that should be respected in each one of the steps of LPA formulation and execution. It is important, for example, that technical functions be done by technicians. In many countries, national planning offices are coordinating the general process of LPA formulation at the national level. At the local level many technical offices are responsible for local organization and implementation. It is feasible that civil society and special community groups participate in aspects like local goal-setting and initiate discussions around the programme.

It is reasonable to expect that programming be a specialized task performed by technical personnel. NGOs, for example, are not appropriate policy-making bodies, but they can be very active in implementation or mobilization. NGOs could also have a role in new service delivery programmes resulting from the LPA. NGOs in association with community members and other important figures or groups from civil society could play a very important role in following up the programme from the point of view of the population, creating pressure on governments for appropriate programme implementation and management.

The combined participation of government, NGOs and community ensures a balance of relationships that could be crucial in ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the LPAs. When this type of massive participation is obtained, a shared sense of ownership is created, and periodic political changes due to elections will not seriously affect the development of the programme. Such participation ensures broader social mobilization, which will positively affect the programme’s educational impact on the population.

The participating local-level actors leading this coordination can vary, as can the level of coordination and participation. The combinations of actors arising in each country reflect the autonomy of local institutions and governments as permitted by the structure of the State, along with the different levels of non-governmental participation. Organized civil society as a whole appears to be especially active at both the national and local levels, and in some cases civil-society participation has been decisive in promoting NPAs and even LPAs, as in the cases of Brazil and Argentina, where the influential Argentine Pediatrics Society actually proposed the goals for the NPA (see box 9).
Box 18.

Windhoek: the birth of a municipal programme of action

The creation of the programme of action within the Windhoek Municipality was initiated by the Mayor and reflects his desire to hasten the pace of change within a municipality which still has considerable, largely race-defined divisions.

The development of a programme of action for children was seen as an opportunity to create a vision of development for Windhoek. To support and strengthen the Mayor’s efforts, UNICEF provided financing for his visit to the Second International Colloquium of Mayors in Mexico City, from which he returned with the new moniker of “Defender of Children”. This in turn strengthened his own resolve, as well as that of his Personal Assistant, as he pressed forward with the creation of a municipal programme.

However, the structure of the Municipal Council accords little executive power to the Mayor, whose capacity is limited to stimulating discussion about the issue within the Council.

On initial consideration, the Administration and Management Committee recommended against the creation of a programme of action because of the limited service-delivery role of the municipality. At length, however, the Council came around to agreeing that the municipality could assume an active role in mobilizing the demand for services and in encouraging dialogue between service providers and constituents. The commitment of the Council was secured on the condition that the programme was to imply no financial obligation from the Municipality.

A steering committee comprising municipal officer was formed to oversee the sub-committees, which are composed of members from national ministries, local NGOs and the private sector. The sub-committees have the task of analysing sectoral problems and drafting appropriate programmes.

Based on the lessons of the National Programme of action, it was evident that post-launch programme management, public visibility and continued coordination must be an integral part of the development process.

Source: Adkisson and Hogan 1994

In some countries the local promotion for LPAs was in direct relation to the central authorities organizing the decentralization of the NPA, while in other countries it was more independent of central management, especially where such central forces were weak or lacking. In the case of India, for example, the most important actors (apart from UNICEF’s role in advocacy and technical advice) were generally in the state administrations, as the example of Tamil Nadu (box 11) demonstrates. Namibia (box 14) and Ecuador (box 5) also provide differing examples of the roles of subnational officials (mayors in these cases). The NPA, and therefore the LPAs, should relate and seek to coordinate with the relevant development programmes of other international organizations and NGOs working at local level, or at least have the potential to do so. A constraint is that these agencies have programming and budget cycles that do not always coincide with the national cycles of planning, budgeting and political elections. This implies that a good deal of coordination, negotiations and adjustments have to be plotted out in order to ensure that there is the necessary consonance among the components.

Since national and local programmes of action should be a part of government programming, LPAs might not give rise to new programmes in cases where other similar government programmes, whether national, regional, or both, may already exist. At the same time, the elements or systems of decentralization in the State, the administrative division, and pre-existing sectoral programmes will condition the programmes of action. This implies that
LPAs in such circumstances should find a place in current programmes and at times play a role of articulating their particular elements at the community level.

Another area requiring coordination is the relation with UNICEF and other agencies. Some effort should be made to harmonize cooperation within established cycles, define common geographical areas where the agencies can work together, or divide their work in different sectors in a coordinated way.

It appears that the programmes of action are providing a good basis for the United Nations system to coordinate programmes and strategies, and to prioritize sectors of cooperation among agencies. Special cases are the UNDP Human Development Programme, the growing interest of the World Bank in the social sector, and the fact that the World Summit and mid-decade goals represent a collective engagement of these agencies. The strategy notes of UNDP should include the LPA elements and their distribution of responsibilities.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW are universal agreements that everyone has to enter, since they represent the rights, or "demand", that the LPAs seek to fulfill.

Box 19.

**Hopes and expectations for the state programmes of action**

Excerpts from discussions between UNICEF staff and State Task Force members involved in the development of state programmes of action.

**Q. What advantages do you see in your state having its own programme of action?**

**A.** We will be able to lobby more for budget allocations in support of Child Survival Development and Protection programmes, and will be in a stronger position to compete for available resources. Our bosses will also have a comprehensive planning document to refer to, which will help when they change office (they change too often, and new ones always need to be re-briefed before they will commit themselves to anything).

**Q. What two or three major things have you learned during the preparation of the state programme of action which you feel will benefit you as planners?**

**A.** Cost analysis, cost/financing issues and intersectoral/agency coordination. We can promote more cost-effective approaches and do more with available resources.

**Q. Do you honestly feel that your state will achieve your decade goals?**

**A.** Yes, provided we can mobilize and attract sufficient resources in the first couple of years. I hope that if we do not achieve mid-decade goals by 1995, we will not be in a worse position to motivate key actors and attract such resources.

**Q. What role do you see UNICEF playing in helping you to achieve your goals?**

**A.** We'd like as much of your resources as you can afford, although we know you cannot meet all our needs. Please keep pushing our bosses to try to get them to meet our own commitments.

*Source: Wright 1994*
IX. SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although universal causes and prescriptions for NPA decentralization cannot be drawn from such a diverse panorama of conditions and situations, some general comments can be made on the basis of the existing information and experiences.

In the preceding pages several assertions have been made that might appear to reflect the author's bias towards the decentralization of the National Programmes of Action. It should therefore be clarified that enthusiasm for the research must not be mistaken for unconditional praise of decentralizing either the State or the NFPAs. The decentralization of the State has two contrasting faces. A dark one views decentralization as a mechanism of freeing central powers from their social responsibilities, or as an international conspiracy to debilitate third world States. On the lighter side, decentralization is thought to be an all-purpose remedy for the ills afflicting the modern State. A similarly contrasting concept could be applied to NPA decentralization. We have tried make it clear from the beginning that neither generalization is appropriate in attempts to intervene in and improve specific situations.

The Interalrelation of LPAs and Initial Conditions

Decentralization could have positive and/or negative effects, according to certain specific conditions in a given country. A conscious analysis of these conditions must always precede any efforts in advocacy, social mobilization and programming to avoid unnecessary frustrations or the misuse of resources. International organizations can play an important role by not blindly encouraging — or discouraging — countries to decentralize.

Decentralization is a central element in the debate over the current political reality and the crisis of the State. According to our experiences, where NPA decentralization is taking place it appears to be consistent with the institutional frameworks of the countries, and the process is inevitably linked to the specific constraints and difficulties of these given States and their societies. In this sense LPAs have different functions and characteristics in a given country, depending also on whether or not that country is decentralized.

In States that are not decentralized, the LPAs tend to be more isolated and specific. Local programmes in such States have become instruments for advocacy, mobilization and the education of the population rather than real programming and planning tools. In some of these cases, the LPA has been used to request additional funds for locally executed programmes, or to allocate local funds that have been set aside for child-related programmes. In centralized States, the LPAs have also served to create a thorough vision of the situation of children in communities for the first time. This new information has increased the awareness of local leaders and the population on the problems affecting children, improving the odds that new human efforts and financial resources will be channelled to tackle those problems.

In decentralized or decentralizing States, LPAs are being utilized as instruments for the coordination of the local-level social sector or for programming local social services. In some cases, they are an instrument for reinforcing or even guiding the decentralization process of the State, or for ensuring that social service coverage is equitable and comprehensive.
It should be evident that the development and application of local programmes for children are conditioned by the social, political, economic and administrative context of a given country. Despite that, local programmes of action, as any other programme or action may be, have the capacity to start new processes and generate new social and institutional demands. These demands initiate a process of change that should modify the initial, prevailing conditions. In this sense it is reasonable to think that advocating for children, seeking political support, and programming and carrying out actions for children represent an effective and appropriate strategy for social development.

Starting NPA Decentralization

Country experiences have demonstrated that many variables will be acting on the basic dimensions of NPA decentralization at the time the process is initiated. Although it is impossible to generalize, these varying conditions have provided specific opportunities in each country to start the process of NPA decentralization or the formulation of specific LPAs. Moreover, certain dimensions may appear to be more important or relevant in a given country due to the particular conditions and circumstances found there. Similarly, certain dimensions will usually be more evident or decisive at a given point in the process, such as political will and advocacy in the initial stages.

Each country has succeeded in finding its own way to start the process. In some cases, NPA decentralization has come as the result of a vertical decision from the top. At the opposite extreme, NPA decentralization in other cases has been initiated as the result of the massive mobilization of civil society. Neither of the extreme forms, nor the intermediate variations, would appear to be better than the others. All of them can lead to a rounded and successful process.

In several countries — 14 of 50 according to the ICDC database — the NPA was either conceived and designed to be decentralized, or the NPA formulation process was decentralized from the start, meaning that some subnational levels were active in its formulation. Along these lines, the feasibility of decentralizing the NPA was considered by some countries in their case study presentations of existing programs made for the preparation of the NPAs.

The Initial Level of the Dimensions

The dimensions we have examined in these pages appear to be developing at different rates. In most cases, however, their levels are still quite low. Local information gathering and local planning are often carried out in a tentative way and frequently do not conform to standardized guidelines. Despite some very stimulating and specific experiences, local-level mobilization still requires a more thoroughly studied approach in the phases of both planning and implementation. Advocacy for the decentralization of NPAs appears to be occurring somewhat spontaneously, and not as a consequence of analyses on the potential positive impact of local programming in specific contexts. A similar observation can be made on the financial aspects, an area in which much ground remains to be covered. Globally, the process of NPA decentralization seems to be very intuitive and very much linked to the realities of the different countries. In some sense, the initial stages of NPA decentralization have responded to the particular needs of the countries, and the actual programmes for children reflect the administrative and organizational mechanisms of society. What appears important is that each country start the process with a realistic evaluation, and acceptance, of the levels of development for each of the dimensions interacting with the LPAs.

While many of these dimensions are not at their highest functional levels, with time they can evolve and adjust so that they better fit the conditions needed for effective decentralization. In order for this potential to be realized, however, it will be necessary to make particular efforts to maintain commitment to the process and to analyse and take corrective action on those elements that are performing poorly.

A process can begin by focusing on the development of one of the dimensions, and then move on to other dimensions. Universal Child Immunization (UCI) provides an example. At the beginning, the UCI programme was initiated in some countries as a result of advocacy. Social mobilization followed the political decision to carry forward with the programme, and in the initial stages the vaccinations were frequently administered despite scarce information, poor planning and a low technical level. Once the process started, new demands arose, including the need for improvements in registration, information on children who had been vaccinated, the cold
Some General Considerations

Despite these advantages, it is not very clear which methods are being used to set up and implement local programmes, although it does appear that countries are trying to define their own ways to confront their local programming needs.

In formulating an LPA, it must be understood how the local level relates to the national, regional, or other levels of planning or programming. Interrelations between these levels generally exist in decentralized States, and the different administrative levels should be considered during planning to ensure that there are appropriate flows of resources and to avoid unnecessary duplications and parallel activities. In these cases a comprehensive system is established so that all significant administrative units of the country are fully included in the process. These systems could allow for the development and implementation of mechanisms that ensure equity in resource distribution and facilitate a national follow-up of the process that is disaggregated to the local level.

Few countries are developing their own methodology. Moreover, community participation is seldom included in the planning process. In some cases, regularly used programming methods are applied without making any special adaptations for the local context. Other countries are trying to apply methods like the “triple A”. But this methodology must be adapted to goal-oriented planning for the purposes of the NPA. Where this adaptation is not made, it implies that a post-programming analysis has to be made to assess how the results of triple-A programming match the mid-decade and decade goals. Although strict guidelines are not suitable for such country-specific programming, some instructions or a set of alternatives for local programming should nevertheless be offered to countries so that they can develop more systematic and higher quality local programmes.

There appear to be great variations in the quality of the local programmes of action. In principle a local programme should be evaluated in function of at least three criteria: 1) the technical and internal quality of the NPA, 2) the consistency with the institutional framework in which it operates, including its financial and operational feasibility, and 3) the degree to which it can be used as an instrument in the decision-making process. Some work is being done in the third phase of this research to measure these criteria, while the preliminary informa-
tion reported here gives only a vague idea of where efforts are being channelled in the initial stages of the LPA process.

It is important to begin a local programme of action with available information. Many countries have found that information found at the local level is generally more reliable and useful than information coming from the national level. While locally collected information is normally sent to specialized central institutions for elaboration and aggregation, more detailed information sometimes remains at the local level and can be found only there. In a few cases, however, no such data remain at the local level, and the localities have to rely on central institutions to retrieve their own relevant information.

Countries and localities are recognizing the importance of having disaggregated statistics at different administrative levels. This is clearing the way to set up national systems of information that could assist in local programming and local follow-up. Also, if the political will exists, the system of information could serve as an instrument for ensuring that policies promoting equitable service availability and fair resource allocation are properly managed. Some countries, such as Bangladesh, are working in this direction with a sophisticated computerized system. It is also possible to envisage a system based on the same principle of disaggregated information for local programming and follow-up, but with simpler technology. It would also appear important to identify an appropriate set of simple and effective indicators to programme and follow-up local programmes of action, although there is no evidence that any countries have yet established standards for this.

**Political will**

It is evident that local authorities must take part in the formulation and development of local programmes of action, and in most cases local politicians have shown an interest in the LPAs. The engagement of politicians is also important in efforts to involve local technical offices in the process of LPA formulation and follow-up. Despite this commitment, it is not yet clear if real political participation exists at the local level beyond that of the institutionalized authorities. A number of local organizations and NGOs are involved in the process, but no clear references have been made to strategies that ensure the full participation of the community. The beneficiaries of the process still appear to be passive recipients in the majority of the cases, since no special provisions for organization and participation have been put into place.

No particular conflicts between central and local powers have been noted. In most cases a spirit of cooperation has marked the relations between the local and central levels, even in cases where they are dominated by differing political parties. In those few cases where political differences have contributed to an atmosphere of disinterest and restraint, no open confrontation has nonetheless arisen. These sporadic cases are more frequent in centralized States. It could be hypothesized that cooperation, or at least the absence of open conflict when political divergencies exist, is due to the central role that children have in the LPAs. This same spirit of cooperation was also present in UCI, even in countries with open and violent social conflicts.

**Advocacy, social mobilization and communication**

Advocacy has played a substantial role in the development of LPAs. Of course, this advocacy reflects an evolving context in which increasing international and national interest for the well-being of children combines with earlier programmes in favour of children and international agreements like the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children. Another important factor is that decentralization is currently seen as a positive international tendency, particularly by States with vast territories and/or a complex population composition.

In some of the countries under study, mobilization and communication efforts are being carried out at the local level. The significant number of NGOs participating in the process is a good indicator of this. There is, however, little evidence that a systematic strategy and well-defined programming have been devised for these actions. Mobilization instead tends to be quite spontaneous, and it is difficult to ascertain if many of the valuable past experiences of informal communication are being used in the LPAs. More systematic forms of mobilization and communication might be expected as the process moves forward.

**Organization and management**

Given the present situation as described, it might appear that efforts to face the management
and organizational needs presented by LPAs will require the creation of new institutions. In general, however, only some small institutional adjustments have been made through adding or redefining some specific responsibilities. Very few countries have seen the need to create specific institutions for NPA decentralization, thus greatly reducing the probability of duplications and administrative cost increases. If this tendency is maintained, it should provide an overall boost to institutional efficiency, making the implementation of the LPAs more feasible.

Substantial efforts need to be made in the area of monitoring, which implies the consistent development and application of the same indicators used in programming. In countries where these key indicators do not exist at the beginning of the LPA process, technical assistance will be necessary. Much of this technical support should come from international agencies, a practice which would also facilitate comparative analyses among different regions of the world.

Finances

No specific studies have been carried out on the financial impact of LPAs. At the national level, it appears that an immediate financial consequence of the NPA will be to increase the amount of resources available to meet the goals due to the new needs and actions that have been identified. LPAs, on the other hand, are uncovering some local resources that were not included in the overall estimates carried out nationally for the implementation of the NPA. As a consequence these newly found resources can help offset the rising costs, and in some cases the locally mobilized funds could outstrip the funds expected from the centre. Another positive effect of the LPA process is that the local analysis of the children’s situation and definition of the goals has in some cases led to a rechanneling of central funds. It is evident that when LPAs are set up and begin to attract attention, a process involving new demands, new advocacy and new resources can arise.

Despite these potential positive effects of local programming, there is little evidence that thorough cost analyses for LPAs have been carried out. It will be important to provide local authorities better technical assistance in this area, as it appears that there is little tradition in this kind of cost analysis and budgeting at the local level. Local budgets are usually prepared on the basis of past expenditures and are very much tied to existing resources. LPAs represent an opportunity to establish fund-raising activities, and public officials in many countries have remarked that the LPA process represented the first time they could relate goals to activities and resources.

Relations between Dimensions

Considering the dimensions of NPA decentralization separately is necessary for their ordered presentation and analysis. However, as our repeated efforts to underline the holistic nature of the NPA process imply, there are numerous interrelations and interactions between these dimensions. It has also been shown how different dimensions will demand greater attention in varying phases of the process, how improvements in one dimension will clear the path to concentrating efforts on the improvement of another dimension, and how, in general, changes in the quality of one dimension will naturally affect the others.

It should be evident, for example, how political will and institutional commitment are related to the decision to undertake local training, how members of the community can participate in the area of information and evaluation, and how social mobilization could lead to demands for political accountability, compelling politicians to give continued backing to programmes that they had previously vowed to support. At the same time, integrating the programmes of action into national planning, so that politicians and institutions take responsibility for their respective roles, should also be seen as a desired objective.

LPAs and Cooperation

An unexpected outcome of the LPAs is the attention they have received from many international and national organizations. While NPA has generally enjoyed positive support from international agencies and NGOs, the local programmes of action for children are providing organizations working at the local level a chance to coordinate their activities. In fact, participation of this sort at the local level encompasses a very broad variety of organizations in terms of their origins, areas of intervention, structure, etc. At the same time, this cooperation, with its
positive impact on coordination, could help prevent duplications and wasted resources and efforts.

It is sometimes argued that United Nations agencies are duplicating their actions and wasting resources without having a visible impact on the population. LPAs can provide an opportunity for several UN agencies to effectively coordinate their interventions among themselves and with the State, with small adjustments in certain programming procedures and cycles. Thus, they can be seen as a vehicle for the UN system to present a coherent illustration of what it can do to improve the situation of the poor.

UNICEF, since it focuses its activities on children, has naturally taken a lead role in advocacy and the promotion of LPAs. In many cases, however, this active participation has been misinterpreted. Because of the scarce resources in many countries, together with other factors, local authorities have frequently asked for UNICEF’s support in the development of their LPAs. In this sense they perceive the LPAs as dependent on UNICEF, even if not as a UNICEF programme. In a few countries, some international agencies and NGOs also view UNICEF’s role in this way. In order to build a successful process of NPA decentralization, it will be necessary to establish highly participatory partnerships with the international community, as well as to secure the extensive engagement of local governments.

Implications for UNICEF

There is a general feeling among UNICEF offices that LPAs are helping them focus their actions and build better coherence in their country programmes of cooperation. In some countries UNICEF offices are recognizing the opportunity to revive some past or marginalized experiences of basic services or area-based programmes. They are interested in using the process to revitalize community participation and ensure that the different sectoral interventions are consistent locally.

Many UNICEF offices regard NPA decentralization as the most appropriate instrument for achieving the mid-decade goals. Even though the mid-decade is upon us, and the decentralization of the NPA requires time, local level efforts usually focus on the mid-decade goals. The LPA process has implied the adaptation of universal goals to local realities, of universally recommended actions to locally feasible actions, and of idealistic processes of advocacy and mobilization to the real engagement and participation of people, while transforming the illusion of available resources into concrete efforts to get them. In this sense local programmes of action are giving UNICEF offices the opportunity to practice development realism by trying to overcome the impediments, limitations and difficulties that often hinder local programming.
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