

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1994

The cause of meeting the most basic needs of all children must now be taken up with a new determination, both for its own sake and as an essential step towards resolving the problems of poverty, population growth, and environmental deterioration.



United Nations Children's Fund
(UNICEF)

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1994



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Contents

Introduction

Introduction to the State of the World's Children report for 1994, and summary of main themes

page 1

1 *A progress report*

Recent years have seen very significant progress against some of the major specific threats to the health and well-being of the world's children. Present knowledge and outreach capacity suggest that child malnutrition, disease, disability, and illiteracy could be drastically reduced by the year 2000. Social goals reflecting this potential have been established and agreed upon by a majority of the world's political leaders. Taken together, such goals amount to an attempt to overcome the very worst aspects of poverty and to bring some of the most basic benefits of progress to almost all communities. Past experience indicates that national progress in health, nutrition, and education depends not on economic development alone but on a sustained commitment to improvements in the well-being of the poor. At present only a very small proportion of government expenditures and of foreign aid is devoted to adequate nutrition, primary health care, basic education, safe water supply, and family planning. Given greater priority, these needs could largely be met by the end of this century.

page 7

2 *The PPE spiral*

Both past progress and future potential are threatened by 'PPE problems' - the mutually-reinforcing effects of poverty, population growth, and environmental deterioration. Resolving these problems is part of the even larger challenge of managing the worldwide transition to a sustainable human future - a transition which should become the central organizing principle of the post-cold war era. If PPE problems in the developing world continue to be neglected, then the result will be increasing economic disruption, political unrest, set-backs for democracy, and instability within and between nations.

page 23

3 *The synergism of solutions*

Achieving the basic human goals discussed in part 1 would represent a major breakthrough against the PPE problems analysed in part 2. The worst aspects of poverty provide the impetus to rapid population growth and environmental deterioration, which in turn exacerbate poverty. Conversely, mutually-reinforcing investments in health and nutrition, basic education, and family planning can create an upward spiral of improvements in human well-being which would help to reduce population growth and alleviate environmental stress. Investment in meeting basic human needs must therefore be taken up with a new determination both for its own sake and as a means of pre-empting PPE problems which will increasingly affect not only the world's poorest communities but all nations in the years ahead.

page 39

Statistical tables

All-country statistical tables for basic indicators, nutrition, health, education, population, economic progress, and the situation of women, plus regional summaries, and basic indicators for less populous countries.

page 61

Text figures

Fig. 1	Under-five deaths from major diseases in the developing world	page 1
Fig. 2	Percentage of the developing world's one-year-olds protected against the major vaccine-preventable diseases	page 3
Fig. 3	Estimated annual number of children contracting polio	page 7
Fig. 4	Total fertility rate since 1960	page 8
Fig. 5	Percentage of married women using some form of contraception	page 9
Fig. 6	Percentage of school-age children with goitre	page 11
Fig. 7	Percentage of people with access to safe water in the rural areas of the developing world	page 15
Fig. 8	Percentage of diarrhoea episodes treated with ORT	page 17
Fig. 9	Present population of the major regions of the world and projected population in the year 2100	page 23
Fig. 10	Share of total population and total chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions of the industrialized and developing worlds	page 24
Fig. 11	Percentage of rural poorest environmentally threatened - developing world	page 31
Fig. 12	Percentage of rural poorest environmentally threatened - Asia	page 33
Fig. 13	Percentage of rural poorest environmentally threatened - Africa	page 34
Fig. 14	Percentage of rural poorest environmentally threatened - Latin America	page 35
Fig. 15	Changes in the average number of births per woman compared with changes in under-five mortality rates	page 41
Fig. 16	Under-five mortality rates related to levels of contraception	page 43
Fig. 17	Percentage of the developing world's children starting primary school and reaching grade 5	page 45
Fig. 18	Relative risk of dying before the age of five by interval since the birth of a previous child	page 47
Fig. 19	Relative risk of dying before the age of five by age of mother	page 48
Fig. 20	Married women who do not want to become pregnant - percentages using and not using contraception	page 50
Fig. 21	Actual and projected populations for seven countries that had approximately the same population in 1950	page 51
Fig. 22	Total debt as percentage of GNP, 1991	page 52

Panels

1	Children in war: a new ethic needed	page 4
2	Diarrhoeal disease: back to basics	page 6
3	Neonatal tetanus: protecting mothers and children	page 10
4	Eradicating polio: the last mile	page 12
5	Malnutrition: the invisible compromise	page 16
6	Safe water: lesson from the barrio	page 20
7	Year 2000 goals: national programmes of action	page 22
8	Progress: ending iodine deficiency	page 26
9	Bangladesh: from disaster to development	page 30
10	Investing in health: World development report 1993	page 32
11	Facts for Life: spreading the message	page 36
12	Sub-Saharan Africa: fertility decline?	page 40
13	AIDS: the child victims	page 44
14	The USA: a new deal for children?	page 46

"The necessary task of drawing attention to human needs has unfortunately given rise to the popular impression

rural families with access to safe water has increased from less than 10% to almost 60%.

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