

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1993



United Nations Children's Fund
(UNICEF)

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1993

*Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford
OX2 6DP, Oxfordshire, U.K.
Oxford, New York, Toronto, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta,
Madras, Karachi, Peealing Jaya, Singapore, Hong Kong,
Tokyo, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Cape Town, Melbourne,
Auckland and associated companies in Beirut, Berlin,
Ibadan, Nicosia.*

*Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press
Published in the United States by Oxford University
Press, New York.*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
The state of the world's children 1993
1. Children - Care and hygiene
613' 0432 Rfj101
ISBN 0-19-2623869*

ISSN 0265-718X

*The Library of Congress has catalogued this serial
publication as follows:-
The state of the world's children - Oxford
New York: Oxford University Press for UNICEF
v.; ill.; 20cm. Annual. Began publication in 1980.
1. Children - Developing countries - Periodicals.
2. Children - Care and hygiene - Developing countries -
Periodicals. I. UNICEF.
HQ 792.2.S73 83-647550 362.7' 1'091724*

*UNICEF, UNICEF House, 3 U.N. Plaza, New York,
N.Y. 10017 U.S.A.
UNICEF, Palais des Nations, CH. 1211
Geneva 10, Switzerland.*

*Cover and design: Miller, Craig and Cocking, Woodstock, U.K.
Charts: Stephen Hawkins, Oxford, U.K.
Typesetting: Duncan Carr Desktop Publishing, Wallingford, U.K.
Printing: Burgess & Son (Abingdon) Ltd., U.K.*

*Edited and produced for UNICEF and Oxford University
Press by P & L Adamson, 18 Observatory Close, Benson,
Wallingford, Oxon OX10 6NU, U.K.
tel 0491-38431, fax 0491-25426*

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PUBLISHED FOR UNICEF

Oxford University Press

STATISTICAL NOTE

In this report, the total annual number of child deaths in the developing world is given as 12.9 million. In previous years, the figure of 14 million has been used. This note gives the background to this change.

The under-five mortality rate (U5MR) is the number of children who die before the age of five for every 1,000 live births. It is affected by many factors, including income, nutrition, health care, water supply, and parental education. It is therefore one of the principal indicators used by UNICEF to measure levels of, and changes in, the well-being of children.

Unfortunately, most developing countries have no comprehensive system of registering births and deaths. Estimates of under-five deaths are therefore made by the United Nations Population Division (UNPD) using an indirect approach based on demographic models. The 12.9 million figure is arrived at by this method and is the latest UNPD estimate for 1990.

In parallel with this indirect approach, UNPD and UNICEF² are also developing a more direct method of assessing levels and trends in under-five deaths for each country. Drawing on a variety of sources, including population censuses, household surveys, and surveillance studies, the new study brings together available data from 82 countries and is published under the title *Child mortality since the 1960s - a database for developing countries*. For the most populous countries, U5MR trend lines have also been plotted, using standard statistical techniques. The resulting new estimates for U5MR in 1990 have been incorporated into the statistical annex of this report.

The results so far indicate that these improved methods of assessment will yield a new total of approximately 12.7 million under-five deaths each year in the developing world. This is less than, but broadly in line with, the figure of 12.9 million used in the text of this report. This figure may change as new data becomes available and as more countries are assessed by the new method.

The overall trend in the number of under-five deaths in the developing world each year can be summarized as follows:

Year	1960	1970	1980	1990
Per year (millions)	18.9	17.4	14.7	12.7
Per day (thousands)	52	48	40	35

The question remains - is this change a function of better statistics and new methods of analysis, or does it reflect actual improvements in child health and survival?

Unfortunately, there can be no clear-cut answer. For more than half the developing countries, the raw data used to arrive at these new estimates, even if based on direct measurements and even if interpreted by improved statistical analysis, is still data which refers to 1987 or earlier. Although an increasing proportion of countries have data for more recent years, most national estimates for 1990 are still projections of trends from the early and mid-1980s.

Where very recent individual country figures are available, the results are mixed; U5MR appears to have decreased significantly in Egypt, for example, but to have increased in Zambia. For some countries, there is evidence of a deterioration caused by factors ranging from war and drought to debt-induced recession, falling commodity prices, and the impact of AIDS. But it is also known that the immunization achievements of the 1980s are now preventing approximately 3 million deaths a year (and probably many more as immunization also helps protect against malnutrition). Similarly, the spread of ORT is preventing an estimated 1 million dehydration deaths each year.

It is UNICEF's expectation that these positive factors will have outweighed the negative and that the progress made in the last five years, as yet only partially reflected in the statistics, will have reduced the annual number of child deaths to considerably below the figure of 12.9 million a year used in this report.

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I The age of neglect and the age of concern

Despite all the problems of the post cold war world, it is clear that the means are now at hand to end mass malnutrition, preventable disease, and widespread illiteracy among the world's children. Following the 1990 World Summit for Children, many countries have now drawn up specific plans for achieving this goal. An accumulation of reasons suggest that the time is now right to make this attempt. The additional cost would be in the region of \$25 billion a year. At the moment, only about 10% of the resources available for development are devoted to such purposes.

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II A common cause

To give this cause priority, a worldwide movement is required to bring to bear the same kind of pressure as is today being exerted by the environmental and women's movements. Protecting today's children from the worst aspects of poverty would strengthen efforts to promote environmental protection, sustainable economic growth, equality for women, population slow-down, and political stability. It is therefore a cause that merits the support of all.

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III A movement for basic needs

Many hundreds of organizations, especially in the developing world, are already beginning to respond to this challenge. In particular, support is needed from the media, from health and education professionals, and from the non-governmental organizations.

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IV The wider context

Political and economic change in the world at large is creating the conditions which, however difficult, offer new hope for overcoming the worst aspects of world poverty. But those who support a movement to meet basic human needs must also be aware that action on debt, trade, aid and loans, and on trading relationships, is a necessary part of that struggle.

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Basic indicators, nutrition, health, education, demographic indicators, economic indicators, women, less populous countries, newly independent countries, the rate of progress.

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