

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1980-81



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From here to 2000

Of the 122 million children born last year – the International Year of the Child – one in every ten is now dead.

Almost all of those 12 million infants died on the knife of poverty: a poverty so absolute that the bare necessities of life are beyond its reach; a poverty so stubborn that a trebling of world output has failed to loosen its grip on one-fifth of the world's people; a poverty so unnecessary that it mocks any pretensions to planetary civilisation.

At the heart of what follows in these pages is the belief – and the evidence – that the worst aspects of this poverty can be banished within the remaining years of this century. It is UNICEF's view that, perhaps for the first time, the world stands poised, possessed of the resources and of the knowledge, to mount a decisive push against mass-hunger, ill-health and illiteracy. It is not over our capacity to achieve this goal that the question mark now hovers. It is over our wisdom and our will to do so.

Our tempered optimism is rooted in recent history and example. In the short span since the end of the Second World War, the economically poor nations of the world have doubled their average incomes and halved their rates of infant mortality. In the same period, they have increased average life expectancy from 42 to 54 years and average literacy rates from under 30 per cent to over 50 per cent. Over the last two decades alone, by dint of colossal effort and in the face of rapidly rising numbers, they have pushed the school enrolment rates for their six to 11 year olds from 47 per cent to 64 per cent and substantially increased their per capita food production.

By any historical standards, these are impressive achievements. And in the industrialised nations, where one sometimes detects a tendency to regard the Third World as a vacuum waiting to be filled with development from the outside, they deserve fuller recognition. In the 20 years between 1955 and 1975, for example, the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America brought 150 million hectares of new land into production – more than the entire present crop land of the United States, Canada, Japan and Western Europe combined. As a result of such efforts, and of a doubling of land under irrigation, only one tenth as many people have died from famine in the third quarter of this century as in the last quarter of the last century.

Exaggeration of the Third World's problems and

minimisation of its achievements is unjust to the past and unhelpful to the future. It encourages only hopelessness to say that 'half the world's children are starving'. Unacceptable as it is for even one child to starve, the facts suggest that the number of children now in the grip of severe protein malnutrition is approximately ten million – less than two per cent of the world's under fives. If that definition is widened to 'moderate malnutrition', then the number rises to 100 million or approximately 20 per cent of the world's young children. It is an appallingly high proportion. But it is almost certainly smaller than at any other time in history.

The poorest people

The message of these two decades is not that the problem of world poverty has been or is being solved, but that it *can be* solved. For within these great achievements reside great disparities in the benefits they have conferred.

In the poorest nations, and for the poorest people within nations, average incomes over the last two decades have risen by approximately one dollar a year in real terms. And their share of attendant benefits has been similarly small. Four fifths of their income is spent on food. Water supply is neither dependable nor safe. Average life expectancy remains below 50 years and infant mortality remains above 150 deaths for every thousand live births.

In numbers, such problems are concentrated in South Asia, where half of the world's hungry now live, where eight million children under the age of five have died in the last 12 months, and where 77 million 6-11 year olds are not in school. In percentages, the problems are most acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where one child in two is inadequately fed and one child in five dies before his or her fifth birthday.

Also masked by these aggregated statistics is the fact that the actual number of people afflicted by hunger, ill-health and illiteracy has risen even as the percentage has fallen. The total of the malnourished in 1970, for example, stood at an estimated 400 million. Today that figure is probably 450 million. Similarly, the actual number of illiterate people was estimated at 700 million in 1960, 760 million in 1970, and has almost certainly passed the 800 million mark this year. Future illiterates

– the six to 11 year old boys and girls who today are not in school – total 128 million. By 1985, that figure is expected to increase to 137 million.

Percentages are not people. Therefore it is not by percentages that the scale of any problem must be gauged, but by the question 'how severely does it affect how many?'

Overall, the number of men, women and children now living out their lives in absolute poverty is estimated at 780 million out of a total world population of 4,400 million.

More than 300 million of these 'absolute poor' are children: children whose mothers received no pre-natal care, children whose birth was not attended by any trained person, children who are not eating enough for the growth of their minds and bodies, children who are not immunised against the preventable diseases of childhood, children who will never see a health worker, children who have less than a 50-50 chance of ever going to school, children whose enjoyment of childhood today and whose capacity as adults tomorrow is withered by the poverty into which they were born.

In taking stock of the present position and future prospects of the world's children, recent history is therefore both inspiring and humbling, demonstrating both the possibility of a decisive push against absolute poverty and the elusiveness of the goal itself.

In sum, the picture which emerges from the achievements and the failures of recent decades is of a world population divided into quarters. Roughly one quarter of the world's people have seen their lives change from material well-being to unprecedented affluence; roughly one quarter have made the transition from hardship to relative comfort; roughly one quarter have seen the promising beginnings of an improvement in their lives; and roughly one quarter have been left behind.

The plainest lesson which the past brings to the future is that progress does not automatically benefit the poor and that if absolute poverty is to be shed then it is the by-passed people of the earth who must now be placed first.

The future

The 20 years to the end of this century are not beyond the reach of forecast. Yet history has a habit of humbling the extrapolators of trends. For trends, like rivers, follow the contours of the political and economic landscape through which they flow.

In 1945, for example, when the United Nations was founded with 51 member states, few imagined that it would today embrace 154 independent nations and that hardly a tint of empire would remain on the map of the world. Nor would many at that time have predicted that the economies of Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany would now be among the world's strongest, or that India would be the world's sixth largest industrial power, or that the per capita GNP of Libya would be greater than that of the United Kingdom. Nor is there any convincing evidence that scientific analysis of trends is any more reliable than creative leaps of the imagination. Harold Nicholson, who wrote novels, predicted the atomic bomb. Ernest Rutherford, who split the atom, did not.

Having bowed to caution, we turn to the future. An important part of UNICEF's task is to monitor the trends which affect the world's children, to extrapolate those trends into a picture of the future, to re-examine them in order to determine what kinds of changes in the present might improve that future, and to allocate its resources to the points of maximum leverage in bringing those changes about.

Taking into account recent birth-rate declines of at least ten per cent in many of the world's nations, including the two most populous, the United Nations Population Division now estimates that the year 2000 will see a world population total of approximately six billion people.

The profile of that total, by region, by age, by income and by level of well-being, is perhaps more easily drawn if the world of the year 2000 is reduced to a global village of 100 people. Approximately 58 of that 100 will be living in Asia, 13 in Africa, ten in Latin America, nine in Europe, five in the Soviet Union, and five in North America. (Less than one will be living in Australasia.) And on present trends, half will be living in cities.

By age, six out of those 100 people will be 65 or older and 33 will be 15 or younger. And of those 33 children, 29 will be living in the developing world.

When it comes to that population's level of well-being – its income, its nutrition, its health, its education – the crystal ball begins to cloud. For human well-being is affected by ideas and events which are vulnerable to unforeseen change. One year before the Russian Revolution, Lenin predicted that it would not come about in his lifetime.

The task is made the more difficult by the interlocking complexities of a world shrunk by the centralisation of decisions and the extension of their outreach. In the corridors of capital cities, in the boardrooms of large corporations, in international rounds of tariff negotiations, today's decisions stretch out to touch the lives of individual families in almost every part of the globe.

The economic order

Of direct importance to families in the developing world, and to the prospects for their children, are the discussions on the New International Economic Order which have been the subject of three Special Sessions of the United Nations General Assembly and of many other international conferences and commissions of which the Brandt Report is a recent example.

The issues at stake include the prices to be paid for the Third World's raw materials, the lowering of customs barriers against the Third World's manufactured products, and changes in the international monetary system within which the Third World must earn its living. Also under discussion are levels of aid from industrialised countries, new codes of conduct for multinational corporations, guidelines for the transfer of technology, and increases in economic and technical co-operation between the developing countries themselves.

If such issues seem remote from the lives of the world's poorest children, then consider this discussion of the same issues 2,500 km south of the U.N. General Assembly – in the village of Coolshare, Jamaica:

'The price for bananas at present is very bad. They are paying us about six cents a pound. Usually we get a ton, sometimes maybe even two tons. The farmers are asking the Banana Board for a processing plant. Until then we will not be able to pay our debts. If we could use the bananas to make vinegar, or rum or chips, there would be lots more things to make and for people to eat. At present all that happens is that just all the best bananas go for export.'

The greatest problem we have is the price. If we can get the price, we can make the grade. Today for example, we have to sell a pound of bananas at six cents and then go to the shops and buy a pound of rice for 41 cents. A medium size box of

soap powder is 59 cents. But still only six cents for the bananas. Well, I am going to tell you, sometimes I think it is a miracle each year. It is only through the mercy of God that we survive each passing year. We are having a bad time right now because our dollar has been devalued and the price of everything is going up. We are in the Blue Mountain area, so we get a good price for our coffee.

If you get a good price you can make a much better livelihood for your kids. They all help to carry the bananas down to the valley and the little children help us with the peas. Coffee time they help to pick the coffee. There's not much for the children. If you have a good farming programme with roads, if we have a truck and the products to sell, if we get a good price, then there is something here for the kids.

It is very expensive to send children to school. Marlene is going to the secondary school in September and she told me she needed eight exercise books. She needed to lodge five dollars for books as soon as she was in school. She needs pen and pencil and her uniform is six dollars per yard. She has to wear black socks, so you can see what it is just for one child.

Thomas and Icilda Japp

(Statement to a UNICEF representative, October 1979)

The year 2000

Negotiations on the New International Economic Order will affect the livelihoods of millions who, like the Japp family, are struggling to earn a better living for themselves and their children. Yet progress is painfully slow. And the broad economic brush strokes in our picture of the year 2000 do not point to a significant improvement in the well-being of the poor.

Specifically, 1980 World Bank estimates suggest that the middle-income developing countries can expect to see their GNP per head (in 1977 dollars) go past the \$2,000 mark by the end of the century. For the low-income countries, on the other hand, the increase in wealth, although significant in itself, will be very much less – taking their GNP to between \$215 and \$260 per person (which in real terms is less than the per capita GNP of Europe or North America two centuries ago).

The message of these estimates is clear. The poorest nations, and the poorest people, stand to be by-passed by the next 20 years of development just as surely as they have been by the last. And in our global village of the year 2000, approximately 30 out of 100 people will be living in those poorest countries.

For the richer developing nations – mainly in North Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean – a per capita GNP of over \$2,000 should put the elimination of absolute poverty within their grasp. Latin America in the year 2000, for example, should be at the same level of GNP per head as Western Europe was in 1960.

South Asia is likely to remain the home of over half the world's poorest people. Yet India, with its large reserves of trained men and women, and with the inflow of more than a billion dollars a year in remittances from its migrant workers in the Middle East, may be poised for a far more rapid advance in the well-being of its people than is hinted at by present trends.

The bleakest growth prospects are faced by the nations south of the Sahara, where GNP per head grew by 1.6 per cent a year in the 1960s, fell to 0.2 per cent a year in the 1970s, and is unlikely to rise above one per

cent a year until the second half of the 1980s. Sub-Saharan Africa is also the only major region of the world where the rate of population growth has shown no signs of decline and where food production per head is falling.

In sum, present economic trends suggest that the proportion of the absolute poor will decline from 18 per cent of world population in 1980 to around 11 per cent in the year 2000. The actual number, which according to World Bank conclusions now stands at 780 million, will fall to 720 million if things go well and rise to 800 million if they do not.

For our global village of 100 people in AD 2000, these trends suggest that 13 will still be left behind in absolute poverty, their lives dominated by frequent malnutrition and ill-health, by the lack of opportunities to escape, and by the early deaths of three out of every ten of their children.

For a much larger number – approximately two billion people – GNP per head is likely to be somewhere between \$200 and \$300 a year.

Translated into the indicators of human well-being which would normally be expected at that degree of wealth, these figures mean that for approximately one third of the world's people, literacy will not surpass 50 per cent, life expectancy will only just exceed 50 years, and infant mortality rates will not fall below 100 deaths per thousand live births.

Changing trends

The response of UNICEF to this brief statistical portrait of the next 20 years is that such figures are unacceptable. And they are unacceptable because the suffering they foretell is unjust and unnecessary.

The first and most important point to be made about the trends which yield this picture of the year 2000 is that trends are functions of present policy and not expressions of inevitable destiny. And the task before us now is to go back along those trends to find out where and how the points might be switched in order to arrive at a new and better future.

In recent years, UNICEF and other members of the United Nations family have been deeply involved in just such a re-examination. It has ranged from set-piece world conferences on Environment, Population, Food, Water, Employment, Agrarian Reform, Technical Co-operation, and Primary Health Care, to smaller working groups such as the Tinbergen Report on Reshaping the International Order, or the U.N.'s own Committee for Development Planning. This re-examination has had at its disposal the experience of two decades of development effort and an avalanche of recently published research. And to all of this, UNICEF has brought more than 30 years experience of working with communities in more than 100 developing countries.

Out of this re-examination, a new consensus is being born. And its cutting edge is that the needs of the great majority for food, shelter, health care and education can be met by the year 2000.

This image of a new future is not vague. Life expectancy of 60 or more, infant mortality rates of 50 or less, literacy rates of at least 75% and school enrolment for every child, are the specific indicators of the progress which we believe can be made by the poorest nations and peoples over the next two decades. Such achievements would also imply that almost every family has reasonably productive and remunerative work to do, that nutritional levels in all nations reach at least the recommended minimum calorie intake, that communities have adequate health care and water supply, that virtually all young children are immunised

against the most common preventable diseases of childhood, and that 6-11 year olds are enrolled in school for at least four years.

Cheating destiny

The question arises of whether these goals are a mere whistling into the wind of economic reality. Are they launched with no more than a wing and a prayer or are they validated by hard evidence that they can be achieved?

The evidence that these targets can be reached, and that the 'destiny' of economic extrapolations can be cheated, exists in the example of nations and regions which have already achieved such targets and have done so at a level of economic development close to that projected for the world's low-income nations in the year 2000.

Pre-eminent among those examples is the Peoples' Republic of China. And, as an example of how 'inevitable' trends can be changed, it was written only 20 years ago, that 'China quite literally cannot feed more people. Millions are going to die. There can be no way out.' Since that time, the number of people in China has approached 1,000 million, virtually all of whom appear to be adequately fed.

In 1950, average life expectancy in China was less than 45 years. Today, it may surpass 70 years. In that same period, primary school enrolment rates have risen from 25 per cent to 94 per cent and the infant mortality rate, which was one of the highest in the developing world, is now one of the lowest. And yet the GNP of China today, estimated at under \$300 per head, is close to the level which most low-income countries can reasonably expect to achieve by or before the year 2000.

Were China the only example of a different gearing between GNP per head and the level of human well-being, the case for the viability of the 'new future' would not perhaps be convincing. For the circumstances under which it was achieved were certainly unique. Yet also from Asia comes the quite different example of Sri Lanka.

With a per capita GNP today of under \$200 – again less than the low-income countries can expect to reach over the next twenty years – Sri Lanka has also surpassed the 'new future' targets for the year 2000. And with a literacy rate of 80 per cent, an infant mortality rate of less than 50 per thousand and a life expectancy of 68 years (as opposed to 46 years only 35 years ago), Sri Lanka too has shown how much human progress can be achieved on how little economic wealth.

A third powerful example is the South Indian State of Kerala. Similar in population size to the nations of Argentina, Colombia or Zaire, Kerala is one of the poorest states in India. Its per capita GNP of \$135, for example, is below the \$180 average for India as a whole. At this economic level, and with a growth rate of only just over one per cent per person per year, Kerala would not normally be expected to reach the proposed social targets by the year 2000. Yet Kerala has already reached those targets. Almost all of its children attend primary school and threequarters of its adults are literate. Infant mortality rates are approximately 50 per thousand and life expectancy averages 61 years.

Clearly Kerala has also altered the seemingly rigid gearing between the level of economic performance and the level of human well-being.

Similar, if less clear-cut examples, are Costa Rica, Cuba, Barbados and Jamaica, all of which have rates of literacy, life expectancy and infant mortality which are among the best in Latin America and the Caribbean but

none of which has a GNP per head higher than the regional average.

By contrast, there are several middle-income developing countries whose GNP per head exceeds \$600 or \$700 a year but whose literacy rates are below the average for the low-income countries in which the average GNP per head is only \$200 a year.

Each of these examples is set in its own unique circumstances of history, culture and political relationships, and the separate strands of their successes can not be pulled out and woven into one portable formula for development. Yet the sum of their evidence would suggest that the relatively low levels of economic growth which the poorest developing nations can expect to achieve over the next 20 years need not leave them locked into malnutrition, ill-health and illiteracy. In short, a new future is achievable.

Growth from below

Underlying this consensus on what can be achieved in the next two decades are certain general principles which have been learnt from the last two.

The first is that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the eradication of poverty. The second is that policies aimed at directly meeting the needs of the poor are a more promising way forward than reliance on the trickle-down of growth. The third, and perhaps most controversial, is that the redistribution of resources and incomes implied by such policies need not detract from, and may even enhance, the prospects for economic growth itself.

The conventional approach has long been that inequality is necessary in order that some might have the capacity to save and invest, so creating the economic growth which would increase the employment opportunities and the incomes of the poor. In practice, according to studies undertaken by the International Labour Organisation:

'Too small a fraction of the savings of the rich are channelled into investments designed to produce goods and services for the poor. One important reason for this is that, as a consequence of the unequal distribution of income, the poor have little purchasing power and hence there is little incentive to produce for them. Finally, the savings potential of the poor has probably been underestimated, and such saving and investments as they do undertake have the virtue of being directed towards the production of commodities which satisfy their basic needs.'

In other words, the kind of economic demand which results from the concentration of incomes, investment and credit, creates too little employment for, and confers too few benefits on, the poorest sections of the population. Putting a smaller amount of extra purchasing power into the hands of a much larger number of people, on the other hand, could create a different kind of economic demand – a demand for improved food, health care and schooling; for better farm tools, seeds and fertilizers; for improved transport, clothes and homes. Such a demand would be more capable of being met by local skills and local resources, so creating more employment and incomes for the poor in the very process of meeting their needs and investing in their productivity.

Succinctly summing up this turnabout, the economist Mahbub ul Haq has said: 'We were taught to take care of our GNP and that this would take care of our poverty.

Let us reverse this and take care of the poverty – and let the GNP take care of itself.

This is the kind of approach which the late Senator Hubert Humphrey had in mind when he spoke of the 'veritable intellectual revolt amongst scholars of development who are turning against the long held view that growth alone is the answer that will trickle benefits to the poor majority. . . the poorest majority must share in the work of building a nation and must share more equitably in the fruits of development at the outset. Greater equity and greater participation, instead of taking a toll on growth, support and reinforce it'.

International inequality

The practical significance of these examples and principles is that progress towards meeting the human needs of all people can be greatly accelerated even though the engine of economic growth is only slowly increasing the wealth of nations.

But whilst it may be true that low growth does not a prison make nor GNP a cage, it is also true that the eradication of poverty is unlikely to be achieved without an acceleration in the rate of economic growth itself. Without increased growth, the redistribution of resources and opportunities within the developing world would not be enough to bring a new future within reach. To steeply increase taxation on the upper 20 per cent of income earners in the developing world, for example, would affect almost every employee in the car factories of Sao Paulo or the textile mills of Calcutta.

It is equally clear that the necessary acceleration of growth in the developing world is unlikely to be achieved without a restructuring of international economic relationships which presently retard that growth. Progress in present negotiations for structural changes in the world economy is therefore also essential if the needs of the poorest peoples and nations are to be met within the next two decades.

Under the banner of the New International Economic Order, over a hundred nations of the developing world are now campaigning for such a change. Their claim is that the existing economic order discriminates against the developing countries. And their evidence is that almost 80 per cent of the annual increase in the world's wealth accrues to the already rich industrialised nations containing only 15 per cent of the world's people, and that less than two per cent accrues to the world's poorest nations containing more than 30 per cent of the world's people.

Such a polarisation does not happen by accident. It happens principally because the concentration of economic power has enabled a minority of nations to lay down the rules of the world's trade, regulate the world's monetary system, decide what investments will be made where and for what purpose, steer the course of science and technology, and organise the international division of labour in their own interests.

In other words, many developing countries feel almost as dominated today as they were in the days of direct colonial rule. The price of the raw materials they sell, the value of the foreign currency they must use, the cost of the industrial goods they import, the terms of the aid and investments they seek, and the kind of technology available to them, are all determined by forces which they can do little to affect.

The concept of a New International Economic Order is therefore not merely an assemblage of economic nuts and bolts. It is an assertion of will and self-esteem which amounts to an economic counterpart of the drive for political independence which so many developing countries sought and gained in the 1950s and 1960s.

Nationally and internationally, therefore, greater equality of opportunity and more equitable distribution of growth are among the most sensitive levers in determining whether or not the needs of the poor are to be met. And social development must now assume its rightful place alongside economic development if a new future is to be brought within reach.

Investing in people

THE task of moving from today's world to a world in which the suffering of mass poverty is a thing of the past, requires more than encouraging example and thoughtful reappraisal. It requires particular strategies, worked out nation by nation and community by community.

Such strategies cannot be mechanically transplanted or magnified merely by money. Nor can they be centrally imposed on the passive periphery of the poor. But the lessons of their successes and failures can be assimilated and recreated.

In the main, these lessons lie in the field of social development – in the devising of new structures which more effectively gear resources generated by economic growth to improvements in the lives of the majority. In particular, new strategies are needed for health, nutrition and education. And it is to what has been learnt about this great trilogy of human development that this report now turns.

HEALTH

It is 2,500 years since Heraclitus wrote that 'when health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself; culture cannot become manifest; strength cannot fight; wealth

becomes useless and intelligence cannot be applied'. For precisely those reasons, the improvement of health is both a means and an end of development. And any strategy for the eradication of poverty must eventually be measured against it.

It is sometimes said that standards of health in the world today are higher than at any other time in history. Whilst that may be true, it is also complacent. For health must surely be measured not against the horrors of the past but against the possibilities of the present.

The lottery of birth shows the width of that gap between what is and what could be. For a child born in Sweden, the chances of dying before the age of one are less than one in a hundred. For a child born in the developing world, the chances are approximately one in ten. In the poorest countries, the odds fall to one in six.

If the 12 million babies who died during the International Year of the Child had been born in Japan or Finland, then 11.88 million of them would still be alive today.

For those who survive their first year, the struggle for life and health is far from over. In the poorest countries, only one child in ten will ever see a trained health worker or be immunised in its first year against diphtheria, tetanus, measles, tuberculosis, pertussis or poliomyelitis

– the six most common preventable diseases of childhood.

As these children grow, crawl, walk, run, play and work, they enter into an environment which is a minefield for their health. In the rural areas of the developing world, almost threequarters of all children have no dependable supplies of water and even less have safe sanitation. As a result, environmental diseases flourish. Schistosomiasis, the debilitating illness which goes under the alias of bilharzia in Africa and snail-fever in China, affects between 180 and 250 million people. Ascariasis (round-worm) weakens an estimated 650 million. River-blindness darkens the lives of 20 million more. Malaria kills an estimated one million children a year in Africa alone. And inadequate diets sap the strength of people and of nations.

World-wide, one in every five children suffers from malnutrition, the beckoner of disease. And two out of every hundred are so badly undernourished that their bodies have to draw on the protein reserves in their muscles – including their heart muscles – in the fight to stay alive.

The net effect is that almost 15 million children under the age of five die every year – accounting for more than one third of all the world's deaths.

Primary health care

To Alma Ata was brought the experience of many pioneering efforts to improve public health for the poor. And from Alma Ata came a consensus endorsed in principle by more than 130 governments of the world.

First, it was recognised that to invest in improved nutrition, water supply and sanitation for all is to lay the foundations of mass health. Secondly, it was agreed that those who work under the names of bare-foot doctor, health promoter, para-medic, rural medical aid, or primary or community health worker, embody part of a strategy which can help to change the picture of world health over the next 20 years.

It requires neither seven years of training nor costly pieces of technology to prevent or cure most cases of ill-health. It is estimated, for example, that four fifths of all ailments in children can be treated by primary health care workers at very low cost.

In different countries of the developing world, the tasks of such primary health care workers include: nutrition and water supply advice; sanitation and hygiene education; maternal and child health care; immunisation campaigns; family planning services; water quality monitoring; essential drugs distribution;

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