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THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:
ANALYSES AND APPROACHES

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In this paper I shall be stressing four or five points of concentration which appear to be needed at the present stage to accelerate progress for children in developing countries, and I shall be citing some UNICEF points of view, concerns and actions to illustrate these points.

I should like to begin with a few statistics which indicate certain dimensions of the problem. Three quarters of all the world's children and youth under nineteen years of age - about 1 1/3 billion - live in developing countries. By 1980 - at the end of the Second United Nations Development Decade - the number will have increased by a fourth - some 320 million. This compares with an increase of only 22 million children in industrialized countries. What this means is that over 95 per cent of the expected increase in the world child population in this decade will take place in developing countries.

Let me cite several other figures to illustrate that the situation of children in developing countries - which results in such a tragic wastage of investment, frustration of hopes and the deprivation of potential talent - is not due to a lack of interest in children. About 35 per cent of the national income of developing countries is spent on the rearing of children and adolescents - fully as much as the relative share invested by the economically advanced countries. But, of course, the absolute amount available is very low. This is because the low level of development limits what can be done by the family, the community, and the State, and also because children constitute such a large proportion of the population of developing countries. About half of the total population in developing countries consist of children and adolescents. This compares with about a third in the industrialized countries. One more revealing figure: over 70 per cent of the total number of children and adolescents in developing countries - 880 million - live in countries where the annual per capita income is in the neighbourhood of \$100 a year or less.

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1/ This speech was made at a general meeting of the XVI International Conference on Social Welfare, The Hague, Netherlands, 15 August 1972. It will be reproduced in the proceedings of the Conference.

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Since it is important from the standpoint of social policy and action to deal with the special problems and influences affecting particular age groups within the child population, the age group composition is of considerable interest. Out of every 100 children and adolescents in the less developed countries, 45 are in the age group of birth through 6, and 30 are in the age group 7 through 12. The remaining 25 are about evenly divided between thirteen through fifteen years of age and sixteen through eighteen.

In the 1960s - during the first United Nations Development Decade - social development lagged behind attention to economic objectives. It is clear from that experience that increases in production do not necessarily by themselves result in an improvement in the conditions of the children of large sections of the population. Despite gains in over-all growth rates in some countries, there has been a continued growth of marginal populations, high unemployment, particularly among youth, and lack or unevenness of services. These are factors which, together with large population increases hamper the efforts of countries to protect their children against hazards and hardships - and to be able to go beyond that, and prepare their children to cope with the demands of a developing society - to grow up to be responsible citizens and creative agents for change.

There is no doubt that tremendous and growing difficulties are encountered by developing countries, in the light of competing claims on slim resources, in providing for the needs of their children and adolescents. Even where initial costs for services benefiting children are met, sometimes in part from external resources, services already established are becoming more costly to maintain, and involve recurring burdens, which, in turn, hamper expansion and improvement. The less developed areas of the country, and the poorer sections of the population - always difficult to reach - continue to be comparatively neglected - and many countries are becoming increasingly concerned about the growing gap between relatively more prosperous areas and backward rural areas.

The picture, however, is by no means entirely gloomy. As a result of developments of the past two decades, in most of the less developed countries significant positive elements have become available for accelerating the rate of social and economic progress. With the growth of the modern sector, and increased economic capacities in agriculture and industry and in trained manpower, many countries have now before them a wider range of options, and the ability of countries to improvise and adapt is much greater than may appear at first sight. In many countries, external aid - even though limited - has helped generate a larger domestic effort and has made possible a range of development that might not have otherwise come about. Even in countries generally regarded as being among the least developed, capabilities have come into existence by way of resources for administration, planning and training which it has taken many years to create. It is a distinct gain that, despite serious handicaps, many national governments and their agencies are now prepared to assume economic and social obligations which were earlier wholly beyond their power. In a number of countries more and more people are coming into positions of responsibility with experience, and who are aware of problems and want to do something about them.

I believe there is little necessity, for this audience, to expand in detail on the needs of children in this context. A round-table conference on planning for the needs of children in developing countries was held in Bellagio in 1964, under the auspices of UNICEF. Since then there have been a number of regional and national

conferences on the basic needs of children in the less developed countries, and also some country surveys. These have called attention to the main problems affecting the young: infant and child mortality, high sickness rates and resulting debility, malnutrition and undernutrition, illiteracy and excess school drop-out rates, neglect of adolescents, and lack of work opportunities for adolescents and youth.

There is a good deal of interest these days on intersectoral and multidisciplinary approaches. I think there is a key to achieving this. Our experience has shown that programmes focused on the child provide a good basis for advancing these approaches. If one takes a comprehensive view of the child's needs, it is apparent that they cannot be compartmentalized according to the concerns of one ministry or another, one agency or another, or this or that project. Moreover, experience has also shown that a focus on children can be socially unifying, and can be a helpful foundation for beginning to meet other needs as well. As a matter of fact, integration of health, nutrition, education and child welfare services may well be the only approach that can be afforded in a number of developing countries, particularly in rural areas, if significant coverage is to be achieved.

Internationally, as well as nationally, children and adolescents can be rightly viewed as an area of unified action, their well-being and development providing large practical opportunities for multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies concerned with development, and non-governmental organizations to work together in support of the efforts of the less developed countries. I might say at this point that UNICEF considers that it has a major responsibility to promote this unified action. It would like see this action taken in ways which combine both humanitarian and developmental objectives, and which - in addition to increasing the amounts of aid available - help improve the quality and coverage of services in ways relevant to the needs of developing countries and at costs which they can afford.

I have already made a reference to the special needs of children in different age-groups. The period from birth to say, up to six years of age is especially crucial. In addition to its high proportion in the child population to which I have already referred, the young child is especially vulnerable. It is still too far little recognized that what happens to the young child can have lasting effects in adult life. Very few countries appear to be taking account of this group in drawing up their national development plans. True, there are a large number of separate health and nutrition programmes and day-care centers which benefit the young child, but only a few projects developed for UNICEF aid give special attention to the young child by co-ordinating and adapting existing services so as to involve local community resources, train staff and educate parents. We must admit that we have yet to see much progress in developing a planned and systematic approach to the weanling and pre-school age child - both through direct and indirect means - which encompasses the whole range of his needs, including not only his physical needs but his emotional development and his preparation for schooling. This is admittedly a most difficult task. UNICEF is currently starting on a study on how better this problem can be tackled in economically practical ways, hoping to profit from what successful experiences at the community level there might be and on the basis of which innovative programmes might be prepared. It appears that much new experimentation under varying conditions will be needed before satisfactory answers become available.

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I shall not take the time to go into the special needs of other age-groups at this point other than underline the need for continuity during the whole period of childhood and adolescent growth. Progress at one point in a child's life can be undone by neglect at another - and, unfortunately, this is most often the case.

In addition to age-groups it is essential to recognize that the priority needs of children in the various social, economic and geographic sectors of a country often differ, and in addition to over-all measures, programmes have to be designed to meet the specific protection and development needs of children in different situations. In most countries, there are specially disadvantaged groups of children who may be totally bypassed as the nation progresses or whose problems are aggravated by rapid social change; these include the children in the more backward rural areas, the more rapidly developing rural zones, regional development areas and in urban slums and shanty towns and poorer neighbourhoods in cities and towns.

Let us now turn to education and to the very large number of children who only get a minimum of formal education. As matters are at present about three-fifths of the future adult population in the developing world will grow up deprived of the basic human rights of literacy and ability to handle numbers, and without an adequate orientation to their environment and occupation.

Earlier this year UNICEF decided, after a joint study with UNESCO of experience in developing countries, that the future concentration of its aid in education should be for projects for educationally deprived children of primary school age, and also young adolescents who had missed school - particularly in rural areas and in urban slums and shanty towns. Instead of a high priority for expanding education along standard lines and for secondary education, there will be more emphasis on the kind of schooling needed for primary school age children relevant to the future life of the vast majority of children who will not go on to secondary education or vocational training. There will be more emphasis on measures to reduce educational wastage, to reform curricula and to retrain teachers. In addition, there will be a greater emphasis on community orientation - on encouragement of the use of schools for health and nutrition education and for instruction of parents in child-rearing. This approach recognizes that education, aside from its own value, is interlocked in its effects on child development with health, nutrition, welfare and preparation for work. Moreover, it must be remembered that in many rural communities the school is the only channel available to deliver any kind of organized service. Other external aid agencies such as UNDP and the World Bank are devoting increasing resources to the educational systems of developing countries. But their emphasis is largely on programmes most likely to have a rapid impact on national socio-economic development. What is illustrated here is a feeling that an orientation to the deprived child and an overall view on child development is necessary to provide an essential complement to this larger assistance.

An important element in this problem is making use of non-formal programmes of education which might be complementary to the regular school system, or might be separately designed to give another chance to children who had dropped out or had never attended primary school. Some examples are functional literacy training, out-of-school pre-vocational training, young farmer training, and providing mothers and out-of-school girls opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills in informal settings - through women's clubs, community centres, and various self-help

activities to raise levels of family and community living. The whole question of non-formal education is a complex one and experience is relatively recent. A major item at the UNICEF Executive Board session next year will be a study in depth being carried out for UNICEF by the International Council for Educational Development on the means that are most likely to be effective in strengthening new non-formal educational opportunities for rural children and adolescents. It is clear that in both formal and non-formal education there needs to be a focus upon innovatory patterns of services designed to offer more equality, more relevance to personal and national development, and greater effectiveness in relation to costs.

I spoke earlier of deprived groups for which special attention is necessary. One of the most important of these is women and young girls. The importance of opportunities for their training and education can hardly be overemphasized. This is important not only because of their rights for individual development and for increasing their occupational opportunities, but also because of their role of mothers: for it is primarily through them that children can be reached - that essential concepts of nutrition and child health and child rearing can be transmitted - and that families will be enabled to adapt to change.

But it is essential to recognize that there are some very real problems which limit the ability of women and girls to take advantage of opportunities for training and education. The many hours which they spend in needless drudgery, grinding or processing of foods by hand, transporting water over long distances, gathering fuel, and making the arduous trek to the market on foot carrying supplies, could be saved if improvements were made in such matters as water supply, roads, transport and food processing. While UNICEF has been helping with the provision of rural water supplies and in the provision of simple labour-saving devices for food preparation, this is an area directly affecting child welfare to which very clearly insufficient attention has been given so far, nationally and internationally.

It is now widely recognized that the health and welfare of children and the family is profoundly influenced by family size and the spacing of births. Children suffer the most from the inability of parents to provide sufficient care and attention to their large families - as well as from the difficulty of governments - as I have indicated earlier - to meet demands for health, education, social welfare and other services for a burgeoning child population. The health of mothers is too often impaired by frequent child-bearing. In an increasing number of countries family planning is being provided through maternal and child health services. It is clear that a close relationship with basic maternal and child services is necessary for successful family planning programmes. Maternal and child health services are essential to enable children already born to grow to healthy adulthood. This should strengthen parents' aspiration for their individual children and negate the widely held fatalistic view that only a few of the numerous children born will survive. In turn, this new confidence should encourage parents to have smaller families.

But even with a much greater coverage by health services than we can foresee in the near future, this cannot be counted on to be enough. Other social measures - including a variety of agencies and approaches - closely related to over-all development are required. These include various forms of women's education,

including literacy campaigns, as a means of raising the status of women and increasing their motivation towards responsible parenthood. Services such as social welfare, schools, agricultural and home economics extension, community development, industrial health services and the communication media have an important role to play.

This broadened concept towards family planning is now recognized by UNICEF, whose aid originally restricted to family planning through health services, is now available for these other essential co-promoters of educational and motivational aspects of family planning. I think it is reasonable to expect that the increasing acceptance of the view that family planning is most effective when combined with the delivery of health and other social services will attract greater resources for the promotion of these services themselves. Where family planning is a programme by itself - a one-shot deal - there is danger of competition between services and personnel, duplication and increased costs as well as less effectiveness in the long run.

I referred a moment ago to health services. This is a field benefiting children in which a number of developing countries have made considerable progress. It is one in which UNICEF has made its largest investment. Yet in most countries the coverage is quite inadequate; probably no more than 5 to 10 per cent of the children are within reach of any organized maternal and child health services.

The problem remains of how to provide such services to the great mass of people who are not being reached. A study on the education and training of health personnel prepared by WHO last year, and reviewed by the UNICEF Executive Board in connexion with a review of its policy on aid for basic health services, suggests the approach. Far greater use needs to be made of auxiliaries, including village health aides engaged in simple health tasks. Greater collaboration is required with non-medical personnel, such as school teachers, social workers, home economists and agricultural extension workers. Active participation is needed of the community, of volunteers, and of the persons whom the health services seek to serve. There is a great need for a radical reorientation of health training, which particularly for doctors and nurses, is now based largely on Western models and is largely inappropriate to local needs and conditions. Much more attention needs to be placed on training for rural areas, with greater attention to public health, the social and preventive aspects of medicine and practical work outside hospitals.

Basic to all these approaches to find methods of delivering simple preventive health care is that much more needs to be done to give each community the capacity to create and maintain a healthy environment for all its members. One approach to this, and one which could be a catalyst for a widening circle of health-oriented and other co-operative, self-help community efforts is the provision of safe, accessible village water supplies. This can have great potential for community action leading on to other sanitation activities, family food production, reforestation for domestic fuel supply, local support of health and education services, etc.

We have not yet had an assessment of social welfare services and training similar to the one I have referred to in the health field. I personally believe that such an assessment is very much needed. It would be interesting to see to what extent the conclusions would, as in the study of health services, suggest a radical reorientation of approaches toward training and delivery of social welfare services.

While I am on the subject of training I would like to make one additional point. UNICEF now devotes about one third of its aid to strengthen within-country training institutions and schemes for all levels of work: planning, directing, teaching, supervisory, auxiliary and volunteer. The greatest emphasis is on training of middle-level and auxiliary staff and volunteers and village leaders. From what I have already said, I think it is apparent that we believe that considerably more attention needs to be given in the future to the relevance of the training to local conditions and to who is trained in the light of who, in reality, can be expected to deliver the services. Related to this, more attention needs to be given to the preparation of trainers, and to the local production of suitable teaching aids and training materials.

UNICEF, with a current budget of under \$65 million - hopefully to reach \$100 million by 1975 - and providing aid to some 110 countries and territories recognizes that its modest aid must necessarily be quite selective, concentrating on where it can do the most good in relation to national priorities, and what the rest of the United Nations and other external aid are doing - or can be persuaded to do. As I have indicated it has now decided to concentrate on helping countries do a better job of reaching children and adolescents in disadvantaged and vulnerable socio-economic groups, and in the more backward regions of the countries.

At the same time you will have noted in my earlier discussion of education, and of health services, a pre-occupation with the same theme - how to reach many more children, more effectively and more quickly. Developing countries cannot afford to wait several generations to achieve significant coverage in their programmes. But this is what will happen if countries, stick to the more traditional approaches, often based on models from countries with a high per capita income and lower percentages of children in the population. It is clear that for a large number of specific problems, conventional approaches have not provided adequate solutions. New programmes and project designs involving concepts of innovation and change, and new ways of bringing together the contributions of different sectors, have to be sought; they have to be tried out on operational scales in varying conditions to find economical organizational patterns which really reach the target population; and where there are successful field trials, they then have to be widely diffused. Hopefully this will serve to lay a sound basis for extension of coverage to areas and groups at present insufficiently served. It would not only make for more effective use of available resources but would have a preparatory and catalytic effect, serving to bring larger resources, both domestic and from external aid, into the total effort made within each developing country on behalf of children.

This emphasis of searching for new answers to meet fundamental needs is not the total story. It is going to take time, and while this is going on we also need to devote greater attention to strengthening our present on-going basic services for children, not only to meet such current needs as we can, but to have an infrastructure and viable programmes on which to build reforms.

These services should be integrated into planning and financial machinery of national development efforts. From the standpoint of the programmes benefiting children this gives greater assurance of resources - internal and external - and of the continuity of effort necessary to achieve lasting effects. It also serves to strengthen the mutual reinforcement of services operated by different ministries

for the benefit of children, and encourages combining a variety of inputs so that, in addition to greater attention in individual sectors, to children, there are integrated strategies, cross-sectoral approaches, and co-ordinated action simultaneously on several fronts. So far as UNICEF is concerned, nearly all the projects it now approves for aid are related to national development plans. Not all, however, I am sorry to say, are as yet firmly anchored in them as we would like. It is increasingly the job of UNICEF field representatives to work with sectoral and planning ministries to formulate national policies and priorities for children as an integral part of national development plans and to prepare specific projects in that context.

At the same time, UNICEF is increasingly coming to recognize that government efforts can never be enough, and there are limits on what can be achieved through formal institutions like schools or health centres. In working out projects we are on the one hand, becoming increasingly concerned with the organization, resources, management and capacities of the formal institutions at all levels of national life - states, provinces, local governments. At the same time we need to develop networks of community-based, non-formal activities to complement the more formal approaches. We are especially concerned with what can be done to encourage local initiatives, to help release local community energy and resources, to motivate and educate parents, women's groups, school children and stimulate local community leadership and other voluntary efforts. Where priorities for what the government and public authorities undertake to do - and priorities for what communities and voluntary groups undertake to do - are in line, substantial results can often be achieved at small cost. In any case the enthusiasm and concern of volunteers and non-governmental agencies can be an important factor not only in extending the reach of government efforts but in focusing attention on neglected problems and in launching innovative activities.

I think it goes without saying to this audience that non-governmental organizations and voluntary agencies, particularly those in the social welfare field, can play a key role in preparing families and communities to utilize the available services, and to develop their own intrinsic resources and capacities. This is particularly true if the voluntary agencies are willing to be innovative, and assume risks, less likely to be assumed by government agencies, of experimentation and pilot projects.

In concluding, I think it is fair to say that we are now at the stage of realizing that we must actively search for ways in which the well-being and development of children and adolescents can be pursued with greater success than we have been able to achieve so far. We are not at all sure what ways we will find, but I think we are becoming clearer about what we are looking for - ways which are more economical and simple, which combine a variety of inputs, and which draw out the maximum of resources and common purpose from within each community.

But we are also at another stage. We must be continuously aware of such problems as unemployment, income distribution, housing, urbanization and rural development, and the ways in which they affect children. We need to be very much concerned with the adoption of development policies and priorities which place more stress on human resources and social development, which give high priority to needed structural and institutional changes, and which enhance the welfare of the great majority of the population - not merely of small groups.

At the same time, we must combat the assumption commonly made that the vital needs of children and adolescents will somehow be met solely as an indirect consequence of the economic development and of sectoral development. Very specific measures of planning and implementation benefiting children are necessary. Unfortunately this is all too often kept waiting on the fringes of national development policy - as well as also the policies of multilateral and bilateral external aid agencies. This is one of the central issues to be resolved if the International Development Strategy of the Second Development Decade is to have any real meaning in the every day life and prospects of the vast majority of the children of the world.