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PLANNING FOR THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN THE NATIONAL PLANS
OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

by
Herman D. Stein* *file*

In April of this year an unusual meeting was convened in the Rockefeller Foundation establishment in Bellagio, Italy, under the auspices of the United Nations Children's Fund. The origins of the meeting stemmed from a decision of the UNICEF Board to promote, wherever possible, the interests of children within the national development plans that are being prepared in developing countries - countries which include four-fifth of the more than 1 billion children in the world.

As a major step in this direction a round-table conference was convened in Bellagio, in order to bring together planners, economists and persons concerned more directly in their disciplines with the specific needs of children, in order to discuss together the place of children and youth in the planning of national development. Included in this group were Ministers of Planning and other economists and experts from Tanganyika, Tunisia, India, Brazil, Poland, France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union. In addition there were representatives from WHO, FAO, ILO, UNESCO, the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East.

It was apparent from the outset that the values in bringing representatives of such diverse fields of activity together, who concentrated on these common problems, far outweighed any possible disadvantages in absence of common technical vocabulary or view-points. Apprehensions about difficulties in communication were soon allayed. More important, however, was the fact that there was virtually no disagreement on certain basic premises.

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Among these were the following:

1. Human resources are essential for social and economic development; they are at least as important as material resources in building economic and social standards. Children and youth represent the key to the development of such resources, and one must ask not only what the development plan can do for children, but also what is needed of them for the success of the plan itself.
2. Since it is much harder to undo all that goes wrong in the childhood years than to capitalize on sound preparation during these years, an investment in preventing the major ills that afflict children and youth, resulting from inadequacies in resources, is of high priority in planning.
3. The welfare of the child should be the explicit responsibility of the family, the community and the state on all governmental levels.
4. There need be no separate sector in governments solely concerned with planning for children.
5. While raising the productivity and income level of the population remains an over-all goal of development planning, the needs of children are not automatically met by such economic progress, and require deliberate and systematic planning.

One of the general conclusions that followed on these premises was the importance of developing a national policy for children in each country. The components of this policy should include a statement of the major problems which the nation wishes to address that concern its younger generation, and its expectations for achieving certain results within defined time periods. It should constitute as well a call for support from the nation as a whole and for the participation of its people in realizing these objectives. To highlight the issues and goals involved there should be a national body, composed of leaders in governmental and non-governmental circles, who would serve to develop public consciousness of children's needs.

Included among such objectives would not only be goals related to health and nutrition, education and social welfare services, vocational training and provision of employment for youth, but also the inculcation of fundamental values, such as honesty, democratic attitudes, feelings of loyalty to home and country and the promotion of international understanding and friendship. Indeed, in the larger view of creating a world of peace and plenty the importance of developing a world perspective within nations and particularly among children and youth through educational process was deemed essential. The promotion of such values is not, of course, desirable only for developing countries, but for all countries. The point here was to see such an emphasis as part of total planning for the younger generation.

It was recognized that many countries do not have and cannot afford at the present time complicated planning operations with autonomous planning bodies. In such countries planning may be done by administrative personnel or representatives of Ministries, who do not have special training in economic or social planning. Moreover, basic data may be absent. Yet the need for an over-all policy for children in such countries may be even more urgent than in those with resources for careful planning. Such a policy, based on whatever knowledge is available, can still be developed in order to focus attention on what is known and on what plans can be constructed to improve the situation. In such situations pragmatic rather than highly refined planning procedures may have to be employed.

Wherever possible, of course, the quantification of goals and means to reach them should be developed. This does not imply that the most important human values can be expressed statistically. However, in order to be of maximum service to the planners and to make it more possible for goals to be achieved in the various sectors, the effort to express plans in given fields in cost and other quantitative terms should be attempted. In turn, this means in a number of countries the promotion or expansion of data-gathering operations and the training of people in research methods in the various fields pertaining to children and youth.

The setting of goals for children and youth in the framework of national program development requires an over-all assessment of the existing situation and problems of the younger generation in each country and sometimes in different regions of the country. One of the pragmatic approaches in planning is to reduce the disequilibrium and marked differences in conditions among the regions of a country. Other approaches which can be utilized even under conditions where necessary data are not always available are the following:

1. Reducing flagrant distortions such as a tiny flow into secondary education compared to a relatively large mass in primary education (e.g. - Tanganyika).

2. Enlarging bottle-necks that stifle development; for example, by the training of key personnel for certain services.
3. Undertaking small-scale activities in order to lay the basis for substantial programs and future plans, and doing what is practical and visible rather than attempting the most that can be done when only few possibilities are open.

The round-table conference recognized the necessity, in countries with such limited resources, of hard choices, for example, how many can realistically be educated at what level in a given time period, or in the choice between investing in environmental sanitation and other environmental conditions and the improvement of over-all nutrition. There is also a choice often to be made between quantity and quality of programs. Generally, the conference felt that it is desirable to spread benefits most widely but to have some demonstration or training centres of the highest quality to serve as standard-setting beacons. Moreover, the necessity of having auxiliary personnel, or those trained for very short periods, to man basic services, makes it more rather than less necessary to have highly trained managers, directors and supervisors of programs, who can make the most efficient and selective use of the relatively untrained personnel.

It was, further, felt necessary to plan for the preparation of children for the world of their adulthood; e.g. when a country is preparing to move its manpower significantly from agricultural to industrial activity, or is engaged in the transformation of its agriculture to more efficient mass production, the training of children should be oriented to the economy of 15 years hence, rather than to the state of affairs as it exists at the present time. The needs of children will thus be linked with perspective planning of 15 years' duration which is itself related to the changing structure of society. As one of the participants pointed out: "For the older generation one may concentrate on the improvement of the existing handtools, but for the new generation one should prepare for adaptation to the use of machines."

There are, of course, direct and indirect means of reaching children and youth. Indirect means, both economic and social, include those that affect the family as a whole rather than the children specifically. They are among the best ways to help the child. But one should be sure that children are indeed reached and helped. One example of indirect means is the policy of redistribution of income, since most children in developing countries live in poor urban or rural families. Another is a price policy which can be employed to lower the price of items of particular importance to children, such as milk. Still another is a policy for the rehabilitation of depressed areas, from which the migration of income-earners leaves behind a very high proportion of dependent children.

Direct means include those that have traditionally fallen into the realms of health, education, vocational training and social welfare services.

In the developing countries the leading causes of child mortality and morbidity are malnutrition - particularly the absence of proteins in the diet - poor environmental sanitation and infectious diseases. Poor health in the pre-school years may cause irreversible damage and considerable priority has to be given to this field. The conference felt that emphasis should be placed on preventive public health concerns, to avoid over-emphasis on curative programs that often monopolize the energies and resources of health personnel. This is particularly important for child health, where in some areas there has been a tendency to emphasize obstetrical care in comparison, for example, with preventive pediatrics. By the same token it should not only be more pediatric beds that are planned for, but an expansion of well-baby clinics.

The problem of protein malnutrition in children is one of the most serious. It represents a hidden cause of child mortality since many infectious diseases follow in the wake of the debilitation that it causes. Specific measures to promote improvement in the nutrition of children within a country's total food situation include school feeding programs and special rations of selected foods for pre-school children; measures to change relative prices to favour

increased consumption of selected foods important for improving child nutrition; measures to discourage consumption of less desirable foods among children; and measures to encourage increased production of nutritious foods through, for example, subsidies on live-stock feeds. In planning for meeting the nutritional needs of children it was not recommended that the formation of a cadre of nutrition experts be encouraged, but rather a policy of injecting a consciousness of nutrition needs into all relevant planning sectors and particularly in training programs affecting doctors, agriculturalists and teachers. The control of a nutrition policy of a country should be placed at as high a level as possible, preferably directly with the Planning Commission where there is one. Nutrition represents one of those cross-sectoral problems, not lying squarely in the field of health, education, social services or agriculture. It does, however, affect all four.

Education is naturally regarded as a key element in the preparation of children for the demands of adulthood and for a productive contribution to society. Moreover the cost/benefit relationship in economic terms between the educational investment and the eventual productivity of the individual is much clearer than in most other areas concerning children, and significant research has been undertaken in this area, under UNESCO sponsorship. Many aspects of educational concern, however, are related to sectors other than education. This would include, for example, wastage in public schools which appears to be a problem not entirely within the scope of the educational system alone to manage. Health, vocational training, industry and other sectors would be involved in the development of policy and plans affecting children of school age.

One of the areas of controversy concerning education in the developing countries was the extent to which it should be heavily utilitarian in nature, and whether it could be employed in preventing a rural exodus of youth to urban centres. With some exceptions the general consensus was that it is not desirable either to make education too utilitarian or to focus too much attention on agricultural pursuits in the education of children and youth

in rural areas. There are no simple solutions in preventing the rural exodus, nor does any country foresee sufficient employment opportunities for youth who will be migrating from rural areas to urban centres in search for employment. Stress was placed rather on raising the level of education in both rural and urban areas, and creating basic standards common to all education in the country. In the rural areas there is a special need to awaken young minds, and considerably more stress has to be placed on extra-educational activities, particularly in the provision of cultural resources, and exposure to some of the more important cultural facilities associated with urban life.

Nearly all countries wish to slow down the rural exodus to a rate corresponding more closely to the creation of employment opportunities in industrial sectors. The policy concerning children and youth in rural areas may contribute to this, and at the same time there will be a social advantage to children in avoiding the migration to urban areas in advance of any economic support.

It is important to reduce disharmony between the rural and urban opportunities for youth. Education should help to free those in agricultural areas and not fix them in a status quo.

The stress on the education of girls was also repeatedly made. It is essential not only for their welfare, but for the welfare of the country.

Because of the inadequacy of existing facilities in education all possible measures should be brought to bear on making optimum use of the existing resources. Thought should be given, for example, to reducing the years of primary education to six years instead of seven or eight, which some countries have already begun to do. One could experiment as well with more intensive and effective teaching methods to speed up learning. The use of the school plant by different groups in the morning and in the afternoon was also encouraged.

The importance was noted of expanding vocational training through the use of public and possibly of industrial sectors, and of expanding broadly apprenticeship training utilizing all available resources.

The conference recognized the gravity both in economic and in human terms of unemployment and underemployment of youth who grow up into a jobless world. No specific measures have been defined to cope with this problem.

Social welfare services have on the whole been subject to much less analysis of the relation of costs to benefits than have health, education or vocational training. It is not always possible to show benefits in the social welfare field in the form of economic returns, but there are often hard quantitative facts, or softer quantitative estimates, that can be used - such as costs, manpower requirements, numbers and classification of people to be served, time periods and the like. Where the objectives or returns to be sought cannot be adequately defined in statistical terms, there is no point in reducing them to such terms. The social welfare expert should strive, however, to make these objectives as clear and explicit as possible for the planner. One cannot assume beforehand that the economist-planner will be unsympathetic to these objectives or insensitive to their importance for the nation, but he has to know quite clearly what to be sympathetic and sensitive about.

The conference recognized that there have to be special childcare services to vulnerable groups, but the direction of the development of social welfare services should be to provide them as far as possible, on a mass generalized basis. Such generalized services for children could include community centres, community development activity generally, the education of mothers, recreational provisions and day-care facilities. Services to vulnerable child and youth groups would include economic and other assistance to deprived families with children, to the care of the abandoned, neglected or delinquent children, social provisions for handicapped children in the form of special resources available directly or through schools, courts or hospitals. In general, it was agreed that social welfare services for children are best achieved through strengthening family life, except where no alternatives are possible. On the other hand provision of day-care facilities in one form or another for children of working mothers is essential, but thus far has generally been given insufficient attention in developing countries. The care of children in their pre-school years should not be neglected, both for the children of working mothers and others as well, since the first five years of life represent the most important period for laying the foundation of a healthy and productive future of the individual. Health, nutrition and social welfare sectors are all involved.

In the consideration of planning approaches, stress was given to the principle of complementarity among services in different fields. For example, where education is being given it is necessary to have a minimum of health services. Comprehensive services of a minimum effective level accomplish more than the same expenditure on unrelated services. This usually means, however, that this level of services can only gradually be extended over the whole area requiring them. One of the lines of research in development planning should be to examine the inter-relationship of various efforts in different sectors, discovering the minimum as well as optimum investments that are required in a number of fields simultaneously in order to make the investment in any one field "pay off". In the education/health example it is obvious that trying to educate a malnourished, weakened child is economically inefficient, aside from the humane considerations.

In the early stages of planning for any of the developing countries, the conference felt, the time period should not be too long, probably three to five years at the most. This is so because their plans will have to be started on the basis of inadequate information, and there will undoubtedly be unforeseen results of whatever is being done that could significantly alter the planning within a relatively short time. The normal method of setting longer range targets to satisfy needs would generally be applicable when the country has reached a certain minimum level of resources in personnel and income, which gives them the necessary freedom of manoeuvre.

It is important, the experts felt, to distinguish in a plan between instrumental targets and goal targets. Instrumental targets involve those goals which represent means to achieve the ultimate objectives. The ultimate objectives constitute the goal targets. E.g. the provision of nurses and doctors represents instrumental targets; the goal target is the reduction of disease rates, the reduction of child mortality, improvement in physical growth, and the like. One of the cautions to be observed in the provision of plans in developing countries is the tendency to equate instrumental targets

with goal targets, and so possibly to blur ends and maximize means. Evaluation of success or failure should be as much on the basis of goals achieved as on the provisions to meet these goals - as much on what children learn as on the provision of schooling, as much on the lowering of the principal disease rates as on the provision of clinics.

Before any plan is adopted, moreover, there should be a horizontal look across sectors to see how the plan affects children and whether what is needed from children and youth in order to realize the objectives of the plan, is provided. It is this kind of process rather than a special sector dealing with children that appears to be called for. In turn such procedure requires inter-ministerial co-operation.

In addition, popular participation in the planning process itself is highly desirable. It can be done through eliciting the reaction of people in regions of the country as well as the reaction of special interest groups. In such consultation procedures, which already exist in some countries, e.g. Tunisia, both in the stages of formation and revision of national plans, the needs of children and youth can be emphasized for special attention.

The conference recognized important research needs in planning for children and youth, including the factors that make for educational wastage and ways of reducing it; and the study of diverse methods of providing for pre-school children from the point of view of costs and returns as well as from the psychological vantage point and the promotion of ethics and values.

It saw also the importance of incorporating in the training of planners an understanding of physical, emotional and social development of children and youth. Moreover, specialists in the needs of children and youth in the developing countries should have an orientation to planning methodology and objectives.

These were some of the high-lights of the week-long conference. Its conclusions, a few of which have been indicated in this presentation, are now available in all principal languages. The total report of the conference, including digests of the many working papers and country case studies, will be available in a few months.

It should be emphasized that this was essentially an exploratory conference, to determine if indeed there was such a thing as planning for the needs of children and youth in national development plans, whether it was a worthwhile pursuit, to determine what the issues were, whether there are any general guide-lines, whether the subject made sense to the economic planner as well as to the specialist concerned with the problems of the young. These ends were achieved, the answers were positive from all sides, and issues were pinpointed. But these deliberations would not necessarily meet the specific planning problems of any one region, let alone any one country. They could only set the stage for more concrete examination of area and country problems in this planning context.

UNICEF is a most practical organization, and could not be satisfied with a generalized exploration, no matter how successful the effort was deemed to be. It therefore arranged, on the basis of this encouraging first venture, to sponsor in 1965 a regional conference on this theme with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, and with the Economic Commission for Latin America, and hopes later on to have a similar conference held with the Economic Commission for Africa. In these subsequent undertakings the results of the Bellagio conference will be pushed further and moved pointedly to application - or revision - to the conditions of each of the countries in these regions.

Even in highly developed countries the inter-weaving of the needs of children and youth into planning objectives is a complex affair. It involves, for example, an analysis of the effects of measures taken in one social or economic sector on all others. It involves, as well, closer recognition of the importance for investment in children and youth to meet the objectives of the plan itself. The answers to these questions are hardly available and differ among countries; they require continued study on a regional and national basis with an emphasis on measures for practical application.

UNICEF is also going ahead with programs to add content on the major needs of children and youth to the training of planners from developing countries, and to add orientation to development planning to the training of sectoral specialists in fields concerning the young. All of these programs would naturally be undertaken with the co-operation of the relevant organizational members of the United Nations family.

A modest beginning has thus been made in focussing attention on the ramifications of development planning as they do and should affect the welfare of children and youth. It is a direction, however, which should be of interest to all who are concerned with child welfare in the broadest sense, with planning particularly in the poorer countries of the world, and with the relationship of social and economic development. I expect that everyone here fits at least one of these categories and probably all three.

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