



CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2006-00012

Expanded Number **CF-RAI-USAA-DB01-HS-2006-00012**

External ID

Title

The Objectives of a Development Policy for Children by Dr. Georges Sicault

Date Created

Date Registered

Date Closed

Primary Contact

Home Location **CF/RAF/ZW/B055_-1987-000006725 (In Container)**

FI2: Status Certain? **No**

3/3/2006 at 2:57 PM

3/3/2006 at 2:58 PM

Contained Records

Owner Location **FIG: E J Heyward Dep Exec Dir =56819177**

Current Location/Assignee **Record & Archive Manage Related Functions=80669443 since 3/3/2006 at 2:57 PM**

Record Type **A02 HIST CORR ITEM**

FI3: Record Copy? **No**

d01: In, Out, Internal Rec or Rec Copy

Container **CF/RA/BX/HS/1B5/1987/T005: HEYWARD'S FILES (3) EJRH UNDP BALS PRE-POST I**

Date Published

Fd3: Doc Type - Format

Da1:Date First Published

Priority

Document Details **Record has no document attached.**

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Number of images without cover

THE OBJECTIVES OF A DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR CHILDREN

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I THE REASONS OF A POLICY FOR CHILDREN

The experience of the last fifty years shows that there can be outstanding achievements on the economic side in developing countries without necessarily bringing solutions to "human" problems. We have witnessed the springing up of flourishing industries, the creation of new cities, the development of natural resources, and the establishment of solid infrastructures, without similar progress in human living conditions; for if a minority of the population has benefited from increased well-being, the great majority is still living in conditions akin to misery.

At a time when the richer countries are intensifying their help to the developing countries, this lesson should inspire reflection on the problems of development as a whole.

The objective of a development policy should not only be, as it has too often been thought of, the development of the economy of the country and of its natural resources, but the advancement of man. If it is true that no real social progress can be achieved or maintained unless a country is building up its own wealth, we must not confuse the means with the end and draw the conclusion that economic considerations have absolute priority. Progress should be placed under the sign of humanism; the objectives must be, above all, to enable the inhabitants of the less-favoured countries to develop their aptitudes and thus achieve physical, mental and social well-being. This orientation is part of a trend which began in the eighteenth century and has never ceased to affirm the rights of man in society; after the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the working classes, it opened all frontiers to broad ideological currents which have placed the advancement of man foremost among the needs of humanity. Moreover, there no longer exists a conflict between the conception of the "humanists," who consider that the progress of man is the essential aim to be achieved, and that of the economists, who consider economic development as a necessary if not sufficient condition of such

* Prepared for the Round Table Conference on Planning for the Needs of Children in Developing Countries, April 1 to 7, 1964. Bellagio, Italy.

progress. The aptitudes of men to create wealth and put it to good use are more important, perhaps, than help in the form of capital investments.

The development of these aptitudes represents a most difficult task, since one has to work on a living being, and not on inanimate matter, to change his habits and attitudes; in a word, to mobilise man in the service of his own destiny. For that we have to put the population to work to improve the fruits of their labour and, in order to forge the "cadres" and the élite of the nation, to train people in relation to the tasks they will have to assume.

11 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHILD →

Such considerations being obvious, we have to accept their corollary: the development of man, that is to say the development of "human resources," must begin in the earliest stages of life. It seems, however, that this aspect of the problem has often not received the attention it deserves. The development of man has been conceived as an abstract process, without taking into account either the physical and psychic repercussions which sickness of the mother during pregnancy, illnesses of early infancy and malnutrition may have on him, or the importance of his social environment, education, and many other factors. The building up of the personality is a continuous, lifelong process; but who could deny the profound impression on the individual of his years of infancy? Without resorting to Freudian theories, is it not universally admitted that the physical and mental health of the individual, his physiological and psychic development, even his cultural pre-conditioning, are greatly influenced by the first period of his life? On the basis of a given heredity, the personality begins to be formed from infancy onwards, and years often add only "super-structures" to the foundation. Even the conflicts, latent or open, born of the confrontation of the present with this accumulated but living past, will not succeed in destroying it. The child builds his own universe from earliest childhood, and it would be idle to deny this or not to take it into account when considering the development of human resources at the national level. The strength of a building lies in its foundations. As Prime Minister Nehru has declared: "In a sense, the care of the child is of the greatest importance; for out of this child will grow the man and woman of tomorrow and the New India that we seek to build."

This fact needs no more demonstration in the countries which have still only a small percentage of children in school and which are encountering the greatest difficulties in implementing their development plans. We all know isolated cases of ignorant adolescents who, in a few years, were able to become scientists, but these are exceptions. The training of "cadres" cannot begin after adolescence.

Thus, we are not being audacious but simply realistic in asserting that any development plan must, to the extent that it envisions the development of man's capacities, whether as a basic objective or as a necessary means for the economic development of the country or for both these reasons, take into consideration measures for the protection of the child and his preparation for a useful role in life.

CU STUDY OF THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN →

Such measures have to be based on a serious study of the problems which arise all through childhood; problems which are, moreover, very different according to the degree of economic development of the countries. This came to light in the survey made a few years ago by UNICEF, with the participation of the United Nations Specialised Agencies and the Bureau of Social Affairs. In the rich countries the child no longer suffers from hunger, forced labour at an early age, ignorance, or the sicknesses which are killing the young generations elsewhere. Certainly there are cases of unhappy, maladapted or handicapped children; but these countries have the necessary financial resources and skills to integrate them into the life of the country. Quite different is the situation in the developing countries, where so many ills afflict children all at once. The static state of under-development is a canvas woven of poverty, sickness, malnutrition, ignorance and all their consequences. On this backdrop, the dynamics of development often adds still darker touches, as when population expansion adds to the number of mouths to feed, while agricultural production is insufficient; as when families leave their traditional surroundings to swell the miserable shanty-towns, while no longer benefiting from the protection of the group. The picture varies from one country to another, for the needs are not the same; or, more precisely,

the respective importance of different needs varies with geographical latitude, social environment and the degree of a population's progress. In one place, it is principally sickness which hinders all economic and social development (for instance in those countries where malaria still represents a real scourge); in another it is hunger, with all its consequences and the vicious circles created by malnutrition and other childhood ailments such as parasitic diseases; elsewhere, it is the lack of social protection which means that the child is often born without identity, with no protection but that of its mother abandoned during pregnancy and before any family home has been created; in still other places, it is ignorance that must be fought before any progress can be achieved.

Thus, there is no situation which exactly resembles any other, nor any magic formula for detecting basic needs and determining priorities to remedy them. As made clear in the studies carried out in the past few years, it is for each government to study its own child problems and establish priorities for action within the framework of its economic and social development plans.

POPULATION EXPANSION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES →

The first problem is obviously that of population expansion, often very rapid, which, while bringing to a country its "human resources," can represent for the community an increasingly heavy burden to the extent that the country is underdeveloped. When the annual gross national product of a country increases at a slower rate than the population, "demographic" investments needed to maintain the standard of living are no longer possible, and we have to abandon any social and economic investment which would permit an improvement in living conditions. This raises the question of birth control, with all its attendant difficulties due to different religious and moral values in various parts of the world. In practical terms, no satisfactory solution seems to be immediately in sight. However, a slowing-down of the population expansion does not seem in many developing countries to be a necessary condition of progress.

CONDITIONS OF BIRTH AND SURVIVAL →

The second problem relates to conditions of birth and survival. Neo-natal mortality is usually very high in the developing countries, and the same goes for

infant mortality. There is an enormous difference between the mortality rates for children from one to four years old in developing countries and the rates in others. Many explanations may be evoked: under-nourishment; malnutrition - which is even more serious among shanty-town populations who, without adequate wages, have switched suddenly from a subsistence to a market economy, unhygienic conditions in the environment; and a high incidence of communicable diseases (malaria, tuberculosis, etc.).

The first question to answer is which among these ills threaten the children's future; the respective importance of such ills; and what are the immediate, medium-term and long-term measures which should be taken to deal with them. Priority in the fight against the major diseases? Creation of a public health infrastructure? Health and nutrition education? Acceleration of the production of protective foods at the village, provincial and country level? Even if infant mortality were considered a natural brake on population increase, nobody could maintain that the morbidity and mortality of the older child, although he may more or less "weigh" on the national economy before having any productive role, must not be combatted on humanitarian and economic grounds.

11 SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT →

In the developing countries, the shrinking of the world by modern transport facilities and commercial exchanges of all kinds has brought ancient civilisations into contact with the West, and frequently imposes new ways of life on the less-advanced populations. This cannot happen without an often difficult period of adaptation, and may even result, from time to time, in failure, with all the inevitable consequences for the individual and society.

The examination of children's needs should first consider the protection of the child in his social environment: registration of his birth and protection against everything which tends to dislocate the natural family group. Certain countries of Latin America have an extremely high rate of illegitimacy (70 to 80 per cent). The child finds himself linked to the fate of his mother: when she has numerous liaisons followed each time by new births and abandonment by the father, when her income is meagre or non-existent, it is not at all surprising

that the child is defenceless and oppressed in his social environment. He may fend for himself more or less satisfactorily, depending on whether he takes a job shining shoes or delivering newspapers or whether he turns to begging or pre-delinquent activities. These problems are often met with in the shanty-towns where poverty reigns alongside modern buildings reflecting the luxury of an inhuman civilisation. In rural areas the child is protected by the clan or the group in which he is living; but there his future is endangered, since illiteracy is often his lot.

Lit EDUCATION AND TRAINING →

Education is an area of major importance for the development of human resources, but it is also one where the needs of the child conflict with those of his society or of the whole nation.

On an individual level, the problem is obviously to give all children a minimum education to prepare them for useful work and a better life.

On a national level, universal education appears to be impossible in many countries because of their meagre financial resources. Nothing can be done for a certain percentage of the children who will have to remain ignorant. The rest can have the benefit of a basic primary education. A small minority will be able to obtain secondary or technical education which will prepare them more directly for work. Finally, a tiny percentage (0.5 per cent) will be able to enter a university and become the élite of the country.

Everywhere, however, even in countries where school enrolment is high, it is not only a quantitative but a qualitative problem; and we have to know what type of teaching should be given to these children. If no prospects of future employment are open to them, is it wise to continue giving an academic education to children living in the rural areas when such an education will uproot them from their surroundings, when they will not want to lead the sort of life led by their forefathers, and when they will swarm around the towns and swell the ranks of unemployed who have no training to follow a practical trade? It is therefore a whole orientation which has to be envisaged, both in terms of quality and in terms of outlets offered, in order that the child may be prepared for an active life within the national structure.

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THE MINIMUM TO BE GUARANTEED TO THE CHILD →

If in each of these sectors - health, nutrition, teaching, preparation for a trade - it is necessary to establish a policy, it is equally evident that all the problems of childhood are intimately linked. The child is a complex being, who has to be considered as an entity; and his ailments, hunger and ignorance cannot be overlooked if it is intended to prepare him for a social role tomorrow.

A plan for the development of human resources - setting aside all humanitarian and social aspects - has to foresee measures which will ensure a minimum of health to the child, insofar as one can speak of a "minimum" in this area; his health must be safeguarded, and he must be sheltered from the main infectious diseases and from nutritional ailments. A minimum of social protection must also be ensured through appropriate legislation and through the creation of social services within the limits of the country's resources.

In preparing a child for active life, the country's activity in the areas of agriculture, industry and mining, its employment prospects, and the professional qualifications needed for employment will determine the minimum education necessary for him to obtain employment, either directly or by successive stages.

In the last analysis, this complex of health and social protection, education and professional training calls for qualified personnel; priority in all cases should be given to training those in charge of training. Action in this field requires the creation of training centres, whose smooth operation must be assured by teachers and monitors. The order of priority thus becomes clear: one must begin at the top of the pyramid before getting down to the operational level. Perhaps this is where external aid can play its most important role; first, by sending experts to advise governments and begin training at a higher level, and then by helping governments create this valuable national resource composed of professors and technicians.

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CONCLUSIONS →

In this perspective of development, the place of the child appears in the forefront. His health, his physical and moral strength, his education and his personality will determine the future of the whole nation; and it would be just

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as dangerous to forget this as to try to build a policy for children outside the general framework of the plan.

Finally, the planner should seek a long-term compromise between what it would be desirable to do for all, on the one hand (in the name of the rights of the child), in order to ensure complete protection against hunger, sickness and social injustice, and adequate preparation for life, and, on the other hand, what is necessary for the development of a sound economy, without which the social structure would crumble like a house of cards.