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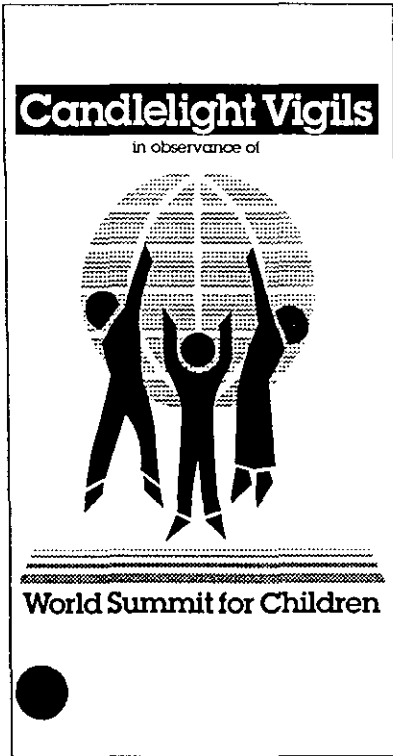
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working to save the world's children



"Children have risen to a higher level of political importance. In country after country, different factions and parties are prepared to work together on children when they are not yet prepared to work together on other issues."

— James P. Grant



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By James P. Grant

Despite all past failures and present frustrations, child death rates have been halved in almost every region of the developing world. Our generation is seeing for the first time in history a fall not only in the rate but also in the absolute numbers of child death. In 1950 more than 25 million children under five years old died. By 1980, that figure had been cut to just under 16 million. Today, it has almost certainly been brought down toward, and possibly below, the 14 million mark. This has been achieved despite a 25 percent increase since 1950 in the absolute

survival and development breakthrough of the late twentieth century has already begun.

The driving force behind this next advance in child well-being will not be medical or scientific. It will be political and social. For it depends upon a political commitment at all levels of national life to mobilize all possible organized resources behind informing and supporting parents in applying today's knowledge.

But now, both past achievement and present potential are threatened by another great force that affects millions in the developing world in the 1980s.



number of births per year.

This progress has been one of the greatest achievements of this century. Yet an estimated 40,000 young children still die every day from the combination of common infections and poor nutritional health.

The next phase of this story is another health revolution which could re-accelerate progress, continue the decline in the population growth rate and again halve the rate of death and malnutrition among the world's young children.

Primary health care is inching along the road from rhetoric to reality. Recent results suggest that the child

Adjustment to Recession

The threat comes from the lingering recession that still rests its crushing weight on much of the developing world and appears unlikely to lift in the immediate future as the United States, Japan and other industrial powers struggle with the necessary restructuring of their own economies.

In 1988, raw material prices are at their lowest levels in 30 years, debt servicing claims about 25 percent of the developing world's revenues, bank lending has dropped 60 percent, overseas aid has stagnated, and both rich and poor countries have failed to solve international economic prob-

Grant: An Interview

Seeds: What have been the best results from the introduction of the child survival campaign?

Grant: It has had a major impact on thinking about children. It has demonstrated that tremendous progress can be made against the most basic problems of children at relatively low cost, if only a society will mobilize itself to use its schoolteachers, television, radio and religious leaders. Most societies are desirous of doing things for their children - it's a question of cost. But as political leaders have looked squarely at the potentials for child breakthroughs made possible by technological advances in oral rehydration therapies and new vaccines and the whole new capacity to communicate, this has meant that in country after country the whole question of children has risen to a new political level. This has become good politics, scores of heads of government have become involved in immunizing children, for example. Frankly, as the public has become aware of what can be done at low cost, it becomes increasingly bad politics for a government not to proceed.

The new South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) became the first summit in the world to take children as a major issue. SAARC committed itself to both universal childhood immunization by 1990 and basic education by the year 2000, and supported the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

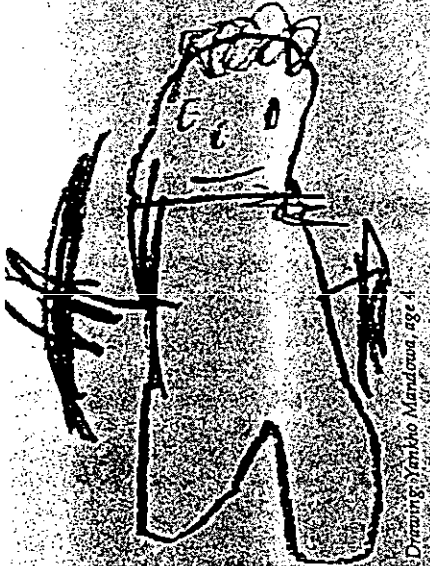
At the Moscow summit, the one development topic discussed by Gorbachev and Reagan was the health breakthrough now in process for children, committing both of their governments to supporting it.

In countries such as El Salvador, Lebanon and even Afghanistan the one thing that all factions have agreed upon is to immunize the children with simultaneous programs.

Children have risen to a higher level of political importance. In country after country, different factions and parties are prepared to work together on children when they are not yet prepared to work together on other issues.

(cont'd on page 46)

Highlights of the Convention on the Rights of the Child



Drawing: Yamiko Mandawa, age 4

Abuse and Neglect. The state's obligation to protect children from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others, and to undertake preventive and treatment programs in this regard.

Armed Conflicts. The State's obligation to respect international humanitarian law to ensure that no child takes a direct part in hostilities, that no child under 15 be recruited into the armed forces, and that all children affected by armed conflict benefit from protection and care.

Child Labor. The right to be protected from economic exploitation and from engaging in work that constitutes a threat to health, education and development.

Definition of a Child. Every person under the age of 18, unless national laws fix an earlier age of majority.

Education. The right to education; the State's obligation to provide free and compulsory primary education; to ensure equal access to secondary and higher education.

Responsibility. Both within the State and from abroad.

Survival and Development. The right to life and the State's obligation to ensure the survival and maximum development of the child.

lems. These forces have caused the rate of per capita economic growth to be negative or negligible for two-thirds of the developing nations in the 1980s.

More than 700 million people, or just under 30 percent of the developing world's population, live in nations with zero or negative economic growth. (Several of the most populous countries, including China and India, managed to insulate themselves from the worst of the recession.)

Average incomes in three-quarters of African and Latin American countries have dropped by 15 percent and 10 percent respectively during this decade. Africa's recent physical and financial droughts combined with regional and internal conflicts, have withered much of the continent.

The ones who have suffered the most from this recession are the young children of poor communities in affected countries. Their families have had to cut back on necessities. They are also the most dependent on government services and subsidies which so many governments have felt obliged to decrease to adjust to the recession.

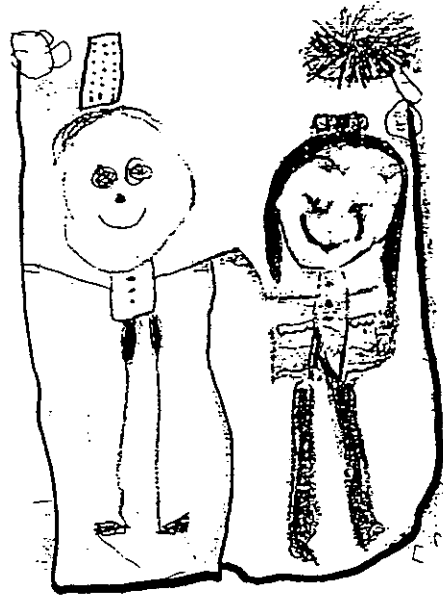
It cannot be stressed too often that the young child just cannot ride out such austere periods. Ninety percent of the growth of the human body occurs in the first five years. A child who has to go without adequate food or health care in those years will not grow to his or her physical or mental potential. There is no second chance.

In the 1980s so far, more than 70 governments have had to adopt economic adjustment policies to reduce balance-of-payments deficits, honor debt repayments, reduce inflation and try to get their stalled economies going again. In most of those nations, such policies have meant cutbacks in government spending on the social services and on subsidies for staple foods.

The well-being of the young has

been measurably deteriorating in at least 30 developing nations. In many African countries, for example, malnutrition is known to have increased. Health care and education have also suffered. In the early 1980s Ghana's education system lost 4,000 teachers and Zaire's lost 7,000.

In 1987 in a sample of 10 countries selected by UNICEF for more detailed study, malnutrition was found to have risen in five of them, child death rates



Drawing: Elizabeth Nevil, age 5

In 20 pages, 54 articles and six languages, the Convention spells out ...

had risen in three and school attendance was falling in eight.

A Better Way

The greatest burden of recession is being passed on to the weakest and most vulnerable. Not even on economic grounds can such a process be justified. Sacrificing the growth of today's children for the growth of tomorrow's economy makes neither economic sense nor human sense.

Yet that is what present adjustment policies, with notable exceptions in some countries, have amounted to. To millions of small children, when all the financial euphemisms of recession and adjustment are stripped away, it means that the once-in-a-lifetime

chance for normal growth must be foregone.

There are practical alternatives. Just as it was necessary to fight for basic needs policies in the 1970s to try to ensure that food, health care, education and housing for the poor were given some priority in a time of economic growth, so it is now necessary to fight for a policy that protects what has been achieved and makes sure the poor do not suffer disproportionately



Drawing: Yuhlio Mamdouh, age 4

... the civil, political, cultural and economic rights of children.

in a period of economic decline.

The effect of adjustment policies on the most vulnerable, particularly children, should be studied in advance. Such policies should seek to improve the productivity and incomes of the poor. Subsidies and services that form part of the fabric of survival should be reinforced rather than discarded.

To those who argue that these services simply cannot be afforded, we must answer that this is a question not of inevitabilities but of priorities. Even if a government has to sharply cut spending, it can choose where to cut. In defense or in the health of its people? In subsidies to national airlines serving the richest two percent or to food programs serving the poorest 20

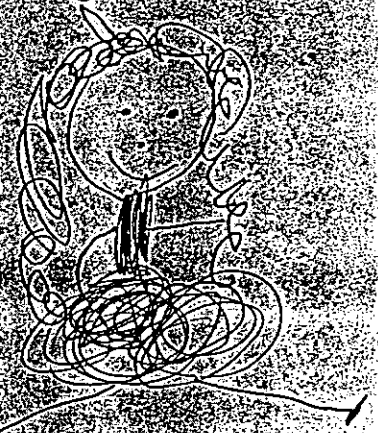
percent? Even if spending on health and education does have to take on its share of the financial strain, governments can still choose whether to cut into the budgets of universities or primary schools, city hospitals or rural primary health care clinics, cardiac research or child immunization programs.

This is not to suggest that economic constraints can be disregarded. It means, rather, that the maximum protection for the most vulnerable has to be squeezed from every dollar available for health care, education or social welfare. One of the best ways to do this is to teach parents about basic health actions - immunization, oral rehydration therapy, birth spacing, breast-feeding, safe weaning, growth monitoring, control of respiratory infections, safe motherhood and basic hygiene.

These are the battlegrounds of child health. These are the areas where action is possible at such low cost that almost any nation and almost any family can afford them even in difficult economic times.

Some countries are trying to pioneer this response to recession. Indonesia, for example, faced with the need to cut overall spending as a result of falling oil revenues, has cut back its hospital investment costs by 75 percent. At the same time, funding has increased to speed up the development of the posyandus (200,000 of them by March, 1988) which provide immunization and family planning services and help parents with oral rehydration therapy and growth monitoring in over 47,000 villages. India is also restraining spending on hospitals while stepping up programs to provide immunization and other vital low-cost services to the majority. Chile has increased spending on social services targeted to the poor even though overall government expenditures have been cut back. And in Algeria, where spending cuts have been made this year in every ministry except the Ministry of Health, hospital

Highlights of the Convention on the Rights of the Child



Handicapped Children: The right of handicapped children to special care and training designed to help achieve self-reliance and a full and active life in society.

Health: The right to the highest standard of health and access to medical services; the State's obligation to ensure primary and preventive health care, health care for expectant mothers, health education, the reduction of infant and child mortality, and the abolition of harmful traditional practices.

Name and Nationality: The right to a name from birth and citizenship of the country of birth if the child benefits from no other.

Parental Responsibilities: The State's obligation to support parents or guardians as those with the primary responsibility for their children.

Sexual Exploitation: The State's obligation to protect the child from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

Standard of Living: The right to an adequate standard of living; the State's obligation to assist parents who cannot meet this responsibility and to try to recover maintenance for the child from persons having financial responsibility, both within the State and from abroad.

Grant: An Interview

(continued from page 43)

Seeds: *What's ahead in the 1990s?*

Grant: I would see two complementary directions. The first is for UNICEF to continue to push forward on the Child Survival and Development Revolution. After all, if the child death rates of 1980 were to prevail until the year 2000, there would be some eighteen million children dying every year. Our goal is actually to halve the child death rates in all countries by then. We would be saving seven million children's lives a year.

The second possibility is that with the coming East-West thaw, and hopefully a recovery of momentum on North-South problems, the world community will agree to take children as the issue on which they would be prepared to move first. Possibly there could be a summit devoted to children. Such a summit could be either fairly narrow, focusing on how to actually achieve these dramatic gains in immunization, oral rehydration and monitoring growth. But, frankly, it ought to be broadened to ensure basic education for young children, literacy for mothers, and a clean drinking water supply for all families. It's clear that if the world really did put its focus on the poorer half of the world, these needs could be met quite successfully in the 1990s.

As we run into obstacles, it's worth reminding ourselves that 150 years ago slavery was accepted. But a group of determined people led the way and made it unconscionable to continue slavery. Again, it was a group of people that sought to end colonialism. Gandhi was very much in the lead, and over time the world saw a transformation. Similarly, on civil rights, with pioneers like Martin Luther King. If you look at these transformations of recent generations, there is no reason why, by the end of this century, the world community should not have decided that it is unconscionable for tens of thousands of children to die each day from preventable diseases.

Taken from Seeds February, 1989

spending has been held back while the nation attempts to put oral rehydration therapy, immunization and clean water at the disposal of every family in the nation.

The International Responsibility

But for some countries, national action alone cannot be sufficient, even with the most heroic political and economic efforts. If long-term economic growth is to be restored, and if the most vulnerable members of society are to be protected in the process, then the industrialized world will have to offer fairer aid and trade policies and further financial help.

In many nations today, children are going without food or health care or schooling because of a financial drought which cannot easily be captured by television cameras. Yet the lack of financial resources can be just as harrowing as lack of rainfall for those who are its victims. In Brazil alone, for example, an estimated 60,000 children have died as a result of recession in the 1980s.

This crisis is not only of the poor world's making. Despite all past mistakes in policy or priority, the fact is that many of the elements in the economic storm - falling commodity prices, high interest rates, an unstable

dollar, fluctuating oil prices, falling aid levels - have been beyond the influence of those who have been hardest hit.

Such a dramatic deterioration in the developing world's economy in the 1980s is not widely appreciated in the industrialized nations. Perhaps this is because its causes cannot be so readily understood or its consequences so easily photographed as the deterioration in the physical climate which has become part of our standard imagery of the developing world. The net flow of financial resources between rich and poor worlds has been almost completely reversed in the last five years. When all the calculations are done, the bottom line is that the developing world transferred more than \$30 billion to the industrialized world in 1985. That is a dramatic about-face. In 1980, the net transfer was more than \$40 billion from the rich to the poor. Even the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund themselves are now net recipients of resources from Latin America and Africa. They have been since 1984. And, with current policies, they will be for the rest of this decade. ♦

James P. Grant is executive director of UNICEF and a Seeds contributing editor. Taken from Seeds February 1988.

