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The Reasons and Objectives of a Policy for Children

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The objectives of a development policy

1. During the last fifty years, there have been many outstanding achievements in the developing countries on the economic side; while at the same time no solution has been found to the "human" problem. We have witnessed the springing up of flourishing industries, the creation of new cities, the valorization of natural resources, and the establishment of solid infrastructures, without necessarily much progress in human living conditions; for if a minority of the population has benefited from this increased well-being, the great majority is still living in miserable conditions.
2. This lesson should, at a time when the richer countries are intensifying their help to the developing countries, inspire reflection on the problems of development as a whole.
3. The objective of a development policy should not only be, as has too often been the case, the development of the economy of the country and of its natural resources, but the advancement of man. It is of course true that no real social progress can be achieved or maintained unless a country is building up its own wealth; but one should not confuse the means with the end, and draw the conclusion that the economic considerations have absolute priority. Progress should be placed under the sign of humanism, the objectives being above all to enable the inhabitants of the less-favoured countries to develop their aptitudes and thus arrive at greater physical, mental and social well-being. This orientation began in the 18th century, when the rights of man in society were proclaimed; this trend has been continued by the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the working classes, and has opened up all frontiers to the broad ideological currents which have placed the advancement of man, as an individual, 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 the individual is the essential aim to be achieved, and that of the economists who consider economic development as a pre-requisite of such 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.

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4. The development of these aptitudes represents a most difficult task, since one has to work on the human being - to change his habits and his mentality: in a nutshell, mobilise man in the service of his own destiny. For that, men must be put to work, improve the fruits of their labour, and - in order to forge the "cadres" and the élite of the nation, there must be a training of men in relation to the task they will have to assume.

The importance of the child

5. Such considerations are obvious, and we have to accept their implications: the development of the individual, and thus 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, and that the development of the individual has been considered as an abstract process, without taking into account the physical and psychic repercussions which such elements as sickness of the mother during pregnancy, illnesses of primeinfancy; malnutrition, the social environment, and education - among other factors - may have on him. The building up of the personality is certainly not achieved in adolescence, for it 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 culture, are greatly influenced by the first period of his life? On the basis of a given heredity, the personality begins to build up from infancy onwards, and the years often only add a sort of superstructure to the foundation. Even the conflicts, latent or open, which will arise from 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."

6. 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. If there have been isolated cases of ignorant adolescents who, in a few years, have become "scientists" these are exceptions; and the training of "cadres" has to begin in early life.

7. In conclusion we may affirm, without being audacious but simply realistic, that any development plan must foresee measures for the protection of children and their preparation for a useful role in life, whatever may be the conception of the valorization of the individual: as an essential objective, as a necessary means towards the economic equipment of the country, or both.

Study of the needs of children

8. 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 evolution of the countries. This has come to light in the survey made a few years ago by UNICEF, with the participation of the United Nations Specialized 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. If there exist certain cases of unhappy, unadapted or handicapped children, such 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. Poverty, sickness, malnutrition, ignorance, and all their consequences, create a static of under-development in which all these elements are interwoven. Against this background, the dynamics of evolution often tends to aggravate the problems: when demographic expansion adds to the number of mouths to feed, while agricultural production is insufficient; when families leave their traditional surroundings to swell the miserable shanty towns, while not even 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 the needs varies with the geographical latitude, the social environment, and the degree of evolution of the

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population. 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 foyer has been created); and elsewhere again, it is ignorance that must be fought before any progress can be achieved.

9. Since there is thus no situation which exactly resembles any other, nor any magic formula for detecting the basic needs and determining priorities to remedy them, 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.

Demographic expansion and its consequences

10. The first problem is obviously that of demographic expansion which, while bringing to a country its future "human resources" with a percentage of perhaps 45% of children, can represent for the community a burden all the heavier because of the state of under-development of the country. When the annual gross national product of a country is increasing at a lesser rate than the population, demographic investments needed for maintaining standards of living are no longer possible; and in this case we have to abandon any social and economic investment which would permit an improvement in the living conditions. This raises the question of birth control, with all its attendant difficulties because of the different religious and moral attitudes as between one region of the world and another. And in practical terms, no satisfactory solution seems to be immediately in sight, although a slowing-down of the demographic expansion seems to be in many less-developed countries a pre-requisite of progress.

Conditions of birth and survival

11. The second problem is that relating to conditions of birth and survival. Neonatal mortality is usually very high in the developing countries, and the same goes for infant mortality. There is an enormous difference in the mortality rates for children from 1 to 4 years old, as between the under-developed countries and the 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 economy to a market economy; bad hygiene in the environment; and a high incidence of communicable diseases (malaria, tuberculosis, etc...).

12. The first thing to establish is which among these ills are those which 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 main diseases? Creation of a public health infrastructure? Health and nutrition education? Speeding-up of the production of protective foods at the village, provincial and country level? Even if infant mortality may have been considered as a natural brake on population increase, nobody can pretend that the morbidity and mortality of the pre-school child, although he may more or less "weigh" on the national economy before having any productive role, must not be fought against on humanitarian and economic grounds.

Social environment

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

14. The examination of children's needs should first consider the protection of the child in his social environment - registration, and protection against everything which tends to dislocate the natural family group. Certain countries of Latin

America have an extremely high rate of illegitimate births (70% to 80%). The child finds himself linked to the fate of his mother; and when she contracts a series of unions, followed each time by new births and abandonment by the father, when her income is poor or non-existent, the child is without defence in his social environment. He may react more or less happily by taking a little job as a shoe-shine boy or delivering newspapers - but from time to time this turns into begging or pre-delinquency. 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 family or by the group where he is living; but there, it is his future which is in danger, since analphabetism is often his lot.

Education and training

15. This is a domain of capital importance for the preparation of human resources; but it is also one where the needs of the child are conflicting with those of the collectivity, or of the whole country.

16. On the human plane, the problem is obviously to give to all these children a minimum education to prepare them for useful work and a better life.

17. On the national plane, universal schooling appears impossible in many countries, because of their poor budgetary 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. After that, a small minority will be able to accede to secondary or technical education, which will prepare them more directly for work. Finally, a tiny percentage (0,5%) will be able to enter the university and constitute the "cadres" of the country.

18. Everywhere, however, and even in the countries where the percentage of schooling 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, it is wise to continue educating children living in the rural areas in an academic way, 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.

The minimum to be guaranteed to the child

19. 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.

20. A planning for the valorization of human resources - even 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 domain; 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 measure of the country's resources.

21. In preparing a child for active life, the first need is to determine the trends of the country on the agricultural, industrial, mining, etc. side, the employment prospects and the professional qualifications needed for such employment; this will help in defining the system of education necessary for acceding either directly, or by successive stages, to such employment.

22. In the last analysis, all this complex of health and social protection, education, and professional training, calls for qualified personnel; and priority in all cases should be given to training "teachers of teachers". The creation of training centres, whose functioning is assured by teachers and monitors, is a prerequisite of all activities in the field. The order of priority thus becomes clearer - one must begin by the top of the pyramid before getting down to the executive level. Perhaps this is where external aid can play its most important

role - firstly by the sending of experts to advise governments and begin the training at the higher level, and then by helping governments in their efforts to create this national capital of high value composed of professors and technicians.

Conclusions

23. In this perspective of development, the place of the child appears in the forefront. His health, his physical and moral force, his education and his personality will determine the future of the whole nation; and it would be just as dangerous to forget this as to try to build a policy for children outside the general framework of planning.

24. Finally, the planner should seek over a number of years a compromise between what it would be desirable to do (in the name of the rights of the child) to ensure, on the one hand, for all this complete protection against hunger, sickness and social injustice, and to provide 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.

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