

The State of the World's Children 2002

LEADERSHIP

I Broken promises

It was September 1990, a time of unusual optimism in the world. The cold war was over and there was widespread expectation that money that had been spent on arms could now be devoted to human development in a 'peace dividend'. An unprecedented number of country presidents and national leaders gathered at the United Nations for the World Summit for Children, as the world considered how to guarantee children a better life.

The World Summit for Children reflected the world's hopes for children. Leaders promised to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been unanimously approved by the United Nations General Assembly just the year before. They signed up to ambitious goals to reduce child mortality, increase immunization coverage, deliver basic education and a whole raft of other measures by the year 2000. The World Declaration to which the leaders signed their name was bold and unequivocal: "The well-being of children requires political action at the highest level." The cause of children, for perhaps the first time in human history, was at the top of the world's agenda.

The State of the World's Children 2002 is about leadership: about the leadership that turned the commitments made at the 1990 Summit into actions that improved the lives of children and families, and about the leadership that is still needed to ensure the right of every child to live in peace, health and dignity. Presenting models of leadership from individuals and agencies, or-

ganizations and alliances, this report spotlights the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign and the United Nations Special Session on Children.

Unfinished business

UNICEF is determined to focus attention on the unfinished business of the World Summit for Children, on the children who have not yet been reached. Every child has a name and a story; every one has the right to health, learning and protection, the right to their full potential and the right to participate in shaping their world – rights which have in all too many cases been violated.

Leadership

Governments, as well as international institutions, must be held accountable for their leadership in putting the rights and well-being of children above all other concerns. And those that fail to do so must also be held accountable.

Ensuring the rights and well-being of children is the key to sustained development in a country and to peace and security in the world. Meeting this responsibility, fully, consistently and at any cost, is the essence of leadership. Heads of State and Government hold the lion's share of this responsibility. But commitment and action are also called for across the board: from community activists and entrepreneurs, from artists and scientists, from religious leaders and journalists – and from children and adolescents themselves.

Challenges for leadership in the face of HIV/AIDS

The impact of HIV/AIDS is crushing the attempts of countries all over the world to put human development and the rights of women and children first. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, for example, an estimated 210,000 adults and children contracted the virus in 2000, bringing the total number of people living with HIV to 1.8 million. Haiti is the worst affected country in the region, with an estimated 74,000 children orphaned by AIDS. But the epidemic is at its most devastating in southern and eastern Africa where, after decades of steady improvement, life expectancy figures are plummeting.

In his report to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan spoke of the AIDS epidemic as a “crisis of governance and a crisis of leadership.” And he went further to say that “leadership – at the global as well as the country level – is the single most important factor in reversing the epidemic.” Launching an intense campaign at the highest levels of international cooperation in 2001, the Secretary-General proposed a multi-billion dollar a year Global AIDS and Health Fund, with support to come from donor and developing country governments and the private sector.

Leadership in policy-making

Some national governments have shown leadership by recognizing the paramount importance of a particular policy and moving heaven and earth to bring it about. The decision by Malawi in 1994 to guarantee universal free primary education was just such a case. This enormously popular move resulted in school attendance skyrocketing from 1.9 million to 2.9 million. The school system is still straining now to meet the demands – but the fee-free schooling remains in place.

Cambodia, China and the Lao People's Democratic Republic have shown leadership in the field of immunization. Through multiple

National Immunization Days backed by strong governmental commitment, both China and Lao PDR reached the goal of polio-free status by the end of 2000. Cambodia succeeded in eliminating polio in three years despite huge obstacles, and in 2000 the country showed a particular commitment to spreading the benefits of immunization to people in remote, underserved areas, reaching more of these – 65 per cent – than ever before. In Thailand, meanwhile, immunization is close to universal: The Government sustains the vaccination programme out of its own budget and has stressed that no children under five die of vaccine-preventable diseases. The goal of freedom from polio has also been achieved by Pacific Island Nations, which are also well placed to eliminate measles and neonatal tetanus as seven countries in the region have achieved and maintain 90 per cent immunization coverage.

Corporate leadership

Instances of leadership are by no means confined to the public sector. There is a particular need for corporations, those in the pharmaceutical industry in particular, to exercise leadership in the world's fight against HIV/AIDS, and many have stepped forward in response to intense international pressure to do so.

The Coca-Cola Company recently announced that it would put its enormous distribution network – which manages to get soft drinks to nearly every part of the African continent – to help bring condoms, testing kits and literature to remote clinics. Coca-Cola is one of many corporations to join the Global Business Council on HIV and AIDS, an effort to mobilize the private sector that is chaired by William Roedy, president of MTV Networks International and includes such companies as AOL Time Warner, Daimler Chrysler, MAC Cosmetics and Unilever.

Some private companies have shown a different kind of leadership in finding a way in which high-tech commerce can serve the needs of the poorest. The Finnish mobile-phone giant Nokia launched child-oriented social initiatives in many countries. The sale of mobile phones



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also benefited Palestinian children: The Egyptian company MobiNil donated \$140,000 of its proceeds to UNICEF programmes in the West Bank and Gaza area. Meanwhile in Bangladesh, GrameenPhone is donating \$2 to UNICEF for every mobile phone sold.

Leadership by individuals

Individuals who use their celebrity and popular respect for the greater social good can have a huge influence. A classic example of this kind of leadership on behalf of children was seen when 23 of the leading intellectuals in Latin America and the Caribbean, including writers Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Elena Poniatowska and Ernesto Sábato, issued a moving and outspoken manifesto challenging

governments and citizens throughout the region to put aside their differences and establish a 'social pact' for the region's 192 million children and adolescents.

Internationally, Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, together with Graça Machel, a former Minister of Education in Mozambique and a world leader on the issue of children caught up in armed conflict, together with UNICEF and other key children's agencies, aimed to enlist the commitment of leaders to do whatever it takes to create a world fit for children. "The future of our children lies in leadership and the choices leaders make," they have said. "We call on those we have called on before to join us in a new global partnership that is committed to this change. We invite those whom we have never met to join us in the global movement for children."

II “To change the world with children”

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 by the UN General Assembly and coming into force a year later, profoundly changed the world’s engagement with children. Like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Convention articulated something fundamental about humanity’s sense of itself and acted as a watershed and reference point for future generations. It presented a coherent vision of children’s rights and how society should provide for them – expressing it in the terms of a legal document, and asking national governments to sign up to those terms and thereafter be held accountable for them.

Seen through the Convention’s lens, the child is an active and contributing member of a family, community and society. Children’s participation changes thinking and alters the design of projects and programmes. Yet the systematic soliciting of children’s and adolescents’ opinions has until now been rare. So, in an attempt to garner their views in a more systematic way, UNICEF embarked on a series of regional youth opinion polls, with the long-term aim of constructing a database that will help the organization evaluate whether children’s rights are being respected.

Governments must find ways of taking more serious account of the views of children – and



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of adolescents in particular. The proliferation of youth parliaments, for example, is an important development. Some of the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States – notably Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova – are blazing a trail in this regard. In Africa, too, children’s parliaments have been launched in one form or another in nearly every country on the continent.

The Global Movement for Children

Six leading organizations that work with children – the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Netaid.org Foundation, PLAN International, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision – announced their commitment to build a Global Movement for Children. This worldwide movement aims to draw in all those who believe that the rights of children must be a first priority: from caring parents to government ministers, from responsible corporations to teachers and child protection officers. It is a movement that is gathering the kind of momentum and moral force that politicians will ignore at their peril. In all its aspects – including the fact that children are full and necessary partners – the Global Movement for Children is about leadership.

The Global Movement for Children has mobilized support all over the world for a 10-point agenda that aims to “change the world with children”, moving into villages, towns and cities in a massive grass-roots campaign. Young and old alike have been asked to ‘Say Yes for Children’. The same challenge is posed on the Internet as people log on to www.gmfc.org and offer their pledge. The website was set up and



maintained by the Netaid.org Foundation – itself a joint public-private venture between the UN Development Programme and Cisco Systems of the kind the Global Movement aims to inspire – and which World Vision, another founding partner of the Global Movement for Children, is making a particular effort to promote.

The national launches of ‘Say Yes for Children’ all over the world beginning in March 2001 were spectacular for both their diversity and their high profile: Presidents and prime ministers, musical and sports celebrities, religious leaders and writers joined forces with thousands of children and adolescents – all with a shared agenda – “to change the world with children.”

III

Actions that can change the world

Investing in children is, quite simply, the best investment a government can make. No country has made the leap into meaningful and sustained development without doing so.

Strategic leadership

Decisions by political leaders have profound effects in the private lives of families in the years from the prenatal development of the baby through school age; in the years of primary school; and the adolescent years, when the child is grappling with the full complexity of the world.

ECD

High-quality care in early childhood is a prerequisite of healthy human development. It is also a fundamental human right. The world's leaders must ensure that every child, without exception, has their birth registered; that they start life safe from violence or abuse; that they have sufficient nutrition, clean water, proper sanitation and health care. And just as importantly, communities must ensure that the emotional needs of children are being met; that they are given the requisite intellectual stimulation and early learning opportunities; and that their parents and other primary caregivers receive enough support and information to provide a nurturing and enriching environment. If national and local governments do not deliver these things, they will be making a costly mistake – as well as failing their moral and legal obligations as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Good ECD programmes encompass all of the child-survival goals with which UNICEF is traditionally identified: maternal health, safe childbirth, regular postnatal check-ups, immunization, growth promotion through breastfeeding, complementary feeding, provision of

micronutrients and parental education about nutrition and health. But they extend also into the mental, social, emotional and spiritual development of children in their early years: both the physical and psychosocial care they receive and the stimulation they enjoy.

Basic education

The case for investing in basic high-quality education – particularly in the education of girls – has been well established. It enhances life and expands opportunities for all and its benefits can be seen across the board.

Girls given the opportunity to go to school tend not just to improve their own life chances and potential but those of their future children and families – and of society as a whole. Girls' education has been proven to reduce child mortality, improve child health and nutrition, improve women's health, and to reduce population growth – given that educated women tend to marry later and have fewer children. Societies that invest in educating girls and boys equally reap huge development dividends.

Adolescence

Governments that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child must accept that adolescents have inalienable rights. Adolescents have the right to relevant and reliable information from a variety of sources, including parents, teachers, the media and peer educators. They have the right to be taught the life skills they need for the teenage years when they are exploring their own identity and independence – skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision-making, communication and earning a livelihood. Securing and guaranteeing these rights would not only help young people, it would help human society as a whole.



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Leadership responsibilities without borders

All countries have economic incentives to invest in children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that ratifying governments must implement all of the children's rights recognized in the Convention "to the maximum extent of their available resources" and have accepted the legal and moral obligation to use the best interests of children as the mediating principle when tough economic decisions have to be made. National and state level finance ministers and financial institutions must accept their responsibilities for the ways in which countries use the public purse to invest in children.

The Convention does add a rider, however, stating that "where needed," the resources should be sought "within the framework of international co-operation." Developing countries must do all they can, but it is abundantly clear that most of them will fall short of the 2015 targets reaffirmed by the international community at the Millennium Summit unless there is a significant increase in external assistance – and a major infusion of the resources from debt relief.

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which was painfully slow and circumscribed at first, is finally starting to kick in. By early 2000 HIPC had provided debt relief to only

four countries: Bolivia, Guyana, Mozambique and Uganda. Now, the 'enhanced' version of HIPC has at last begun to make a difference, and 22 poor countries receive varying amounts of relief that should eventually amount to around \$34 billion. This should help reduce their debt to one third of what it was at the start of the process.

Another extremely welcome development has been the announcement by the G7 countries that they will forgive 100 per cent of the bilateral debt owed them by HIPC-qualified countries.

Nations that claim leadership of the global economy must set behind them the broken promises of the last century and respond to the call by the Managing Director of the IMF, Horst Köhler, for "a campaign to mobilize public support for action by all OECD governments and parliaments to reach the 0.7 per cent target within this decade." That public support should not be difficult to enlist: A recent poll in the United States found that respondents believed their Government to be spending well over 20 per cent of the federal budget on foreign aid. When asked what they considered to be an appropriate level of foreign aid, the answer averaged out at 14 per cent of the budget.

An encouraging event took place in London in February 2001. The UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, and International

Development Secretary, Clare Short convened a one-day conference on International Action against Child Poverty that marked a notable change of emphasis. Finance ministers from many parts of the world were invited, along with the heads of the World Bank and IMF and delegations from key UN agencies and NGOs. It was a recognition that the development goals that the international community has undertaken to meet by the year 2015 have little chance of being met unless all parties work together with markedly more commitment than has been shown hitherto – and most particularly unless the finance ministers and international financial institutions that control the resources are on board.

Speaking by satellite link at the event, Nelson Mandela challenged those in the audience, “We must move children to the centre of the world’s agenda. We must rewrite strategies to reduce poverty so that investments in children are given priority.”

The Special Session on Children

The UN General Assembly’s Special Session on Children, the culmination of years of work by literally thousands of organizations, was scheduled to be held in New York in September 2001, when it was postponed following attacks at the World Trade Centre. It is to be rescheduled for early 2002. The ground had been prepared for it, as with any major UN conference, by a series of preparatory gatherings at which key issues were debated and explored, and guiding principles and targets to which national governments will be asked to commit themselves had been painstakingly drafted and revised.

The widest possible range of civil society organizations working with and for children played an active part in the debate from the start. Representatives of NGOs had broad access and made significant contributions to both the process and the draft documents. They created an alliance aimed at ensuring that the world takes seriously the idea that children have

fundamental human rights, that they must have the first call on our energy, commitment and resources.

It is an alliance, moreover, which did not just aim to represent children’s needs and concerns but was founded on their participation. So it was that in Jomtien, Thailand, in April 2001, there was an unprecedented gathering of children aged between 11 and 18 from countries all over East Asia. In the same month, children from 27 countries across Europe and Central Asia met in Budapest to work on a Young People’s Agenda for Europe and Central Asia. There was a similar Regional Youth Forum in Amman, in November 2000, involving children from the Middle East and North Africa, while in April 2001 in Kathmandu, a group called The Change Makers, with children from the eight countries of South Asia, presented their own vision of the future to corporate leaders from the region.

A world fit for children

When it is finally held, the Special Session will be a unique opportunity for the world’s nations to make a clean break with the tradition of leaving hundreds of millions of children abandoned in poverty or exploited in labour, condemned to everyday hunger or denied the benefits of learning.

We have learned a great deal over the decades of development about the way in which promises are discarded or evaded – always leaving children to bear the brunt of the betrayal. We have learned that targets and goals have to be specific, time-bound and measurable – and that progress towards them has to be carefully monitored and reviewed.

Now it is the turn of those who hold in their hands the greatest power – and the greatest responsibility – to bring about change. As Nelson Mandela has said: “Any country, any society, which does not care for its children is no nation at all.” Those who would call themselves leaders must give all that is needed – no less will do – to create a world fit for children.