

A New Order for Children

THE United Nations Children's Fund has made an impassioned plea for a renewed international commitment to the task of ending mass malnutrition, disease, and illiteracy in the poor world. Governments of developing countries are indicted for spending, on average, only about 12% of their budgets on basic health and education services for the poor; rich countries are criticised for allocating only about 10% of international aid to health, education, and family planning.

At a time when a new world order is struggling to be born, says the 1992 State of the World's Children report, the voice of the poorest quarter of humanity must be heard. One billion people still lack adequate food, safe water, primary health care, and basic education. For almost half a century, war and ideological division have distracted attention and diverted resources from this task, says UNICEF. Those threats are now receding. And the time has come for the world to recommit itself to meeting basic human needs and building a new world order which will reflect mankind's brightest hopes rather than its darkest fears.

Ending the worst of world poverty is far from being a lost cause, says the report. "We have already travelled three quarters of the way towards a world in which every man, woman, and child has adequate food, safe water, basic health care, and at least a primary education. There is no financial or technological barrier to prevent the completion of that journey in our times."

Children

The ones who are being most shamefully failed by the present world order, says UNICEF's Executive Director James Grant, are the quarter of a million children who are

dying every week and the millions more who survive into a half-life of malnutrition and almost permanent ill health.

"This is not a threatened tragedy or an impending crisis," says Grant. "It happened today. And it will happen again tomorrow. It is a problem which should rank in importance with any on the human agenda. But in practice, it has been given a low priority because it is primarily a problem of the poor and the powerless."

There are some signs that this may be changing. "The needs of children are beginning to feature on the political agenda in a way that is unprecedented in UNICEF's forty year history," says Grant. "The most obvious sign of that new priority was the convening of the World Summit for Children in September 1990. It was the largest gathering of Presidents and Prime Ministers in history, and it met specifically to discuss the problems of the world's children. The outcome was an agreed programme for, among other things, preventing 4 million child deaths a year, ending mass malnutrition, eradicating polio, and ensuring clean water, family planning services, and basic education for all."

The emergence of such an agreement, at a time when the existing world order is rapidly changing, says Grant, "means that there is today a better chance than ever before of finding a place on the world's political agenda for the rights of children and for meeting the minimum needs of all families."

Immunization

The setting of such ambitious targets was prompted by

the growing realization that the world now has both the low-cost means and the outreach capacity to achieve dramatic gains in children's well-being.

The most convincing demonstration of that potential has been the successful attempt to reach 80% immunization coverage by the end of 1990. When that target was set in the late 1970s, vaccines

were reaching barely 10% of the developing world's children. Today, immunization is saving the lives of over 3 million children a year and protecting many millions more against infection and malnutrition.

"Such programmes also help to slow population growth," says UNICEF, "because parental confidence in

the health and survival of children is vital to family planning efforts."

Skewed spending

It is still too early to tell whether the new commitments made at the World Summit for Children are real or rhetorical. The 159 nations represented agreed to draw up, within one year, national plans for achieving the new

goals by the year 2000. So far, over 60 nations have completed such plans and that number is expected to rise to over 100 by early 1992. Some, like Mexico, have already begun to move; President Carlos Salinas de Gortari has instituted a six-monthly cabinet meeting to review progress towards the goals and approved a 40% increase in the budget of PRONASOL, the gov-

ernment programme which aims to provide basic services to the poorest fifth of Mexico's people and which has received \$1.7 billion in 1991 — over 8% of the government's total social expenditure.

As agreed at the Summit, some industrialized nations have also been reviewing aid programmes to see how they can promote progress towards the new goals. "The public in the industrialized world has long believed that the great majority of the aid it gives to the developing world is spent on directly meeting the basic needs of the poor," says Grant, "whereas in fact only a tiny percentage is used for that purpose."

Only about 1% of aid goes to the primary health care systems which could prevent or treat 80% of the disease and malnutrition in the developing world. Only about 1% goes to family planning services. And less than 1% goes to primary education.

The same distortion can be seen in spending patterns within the developing world itself.

UNICEF estimates, for example, that three quarters of

all health budgets go to urban hospitals, usually serving only a small minority of the population.

According to some estimates, 80% of the \$12 billion allocated each year to water-supply systems is spent on putting private taps in the homes of the not so poor and only 20% is going to the wells and stand-pipes which, with today's technology, could bring

clean water to the very poorest communities at low cost.

Spending on education is similarly skewed in favour of the few rather than the many.

Finding the funds

In total, the financial resources required to reach all of the ambitious health and education goals agreed at the World Summit for Children would amount to an extra \$20 billion a year throughout the 1990s.

UNICEF suggests that two thirds of this sum could be found by the developing countries themselves, leaving one third to be funded by aid programmes.

This could be found within existing budgets, says the report, if there were to be a shift in spending, and in aid, towards low-cost services for the many rather than high-cost services for the few.

Another possible way of funding progress would be to allocate a small fraction of military expenditures to the year 2000 goals.

The developing world's share of \$12 to \$13 billion a year could be found by diverting about 10% of its military spending. The \$6 to \$7 billion required in outside aid could be found by reallocating only 1% of the rich world's annual military expenditures.

Cuts on a much greater scale than this are already under way in many nations, says UNICEF, "but what is missing is any coherent and agreed plan to link even a small part of these potentially vast savings with the desperate needs of the developing world."

— (UNICEF)



Promising smiles for the next century

Photo: Jorgan Schyette

Poverty Traps 550 Million Rural Women

THE figures are stark. Over 550 million rural women in developing countries now live in chronic poverty, 50% more than 20 years ago. Of these, according to a recent analysis by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 363 million live in Asia, 130 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 43 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 18 million in the Near East and North Africa. The increase in poverty for women has come despite the economic gains made by many developing countries over the past two decades, showing that poor rural women are the most vulnerable group in the world.

Correcting a False Picture

Poor though they may be, it would be a mistake to view these women simply as a social burden, or as people in need of charity. Rural women make vital contributions to the welfare of their families and communities as producers of food and income, and they have the potential for contributing even more. Most are farmers who work 14 to 17-hour days in the fields and at home. According to an IFAD survey of 114 developing countries, 67% of rural women are engaged in agriculture. In Africa, women produce an estimated 70% of the continent's food, and 55% of the food grown in the developing world as a whole. And the poorer the household and country, the more hours women work and the more important their contributions.

Once this fact is recognized, once poor rural women are seen for what they are — an invaluable asset for the household, the community and the nation — then they can be helped to become even more productive. The beneficial effects of increasing their productive potential will be felt directly by their families in the health, education and welfare of their children, but they do not stop there.

With women growing more food and earning more income, the demand for goods and services will grow, a catalyst for a more vigorous, self-reliant rural and national economy. With women employing more efficient farming methods and technologies, the natural resource base on which the lives of future generations

depend can be conserved and enhanced.

Ending Traditional Neglect

Too often, developing projects and programmes have bypassed rural women, either out of ignorance of the role they play or on the faulty assumption that aid to men will automatically benefit women. This failure is sometimes painfully obvious. For example, a project provides households with animal traction and transport, but women in these same households often continue to cultivate their fields with hand hoes and householders often continue to cultivate their fields with hand hoes and carry their produce to market on their heads. The introduction of mechanization may ease men's soil preparation tasks and extend the acreage of cultivable land, but it can also increase women's weeding harvesting and crop processing chores.

In many regions of the developing world male migration to urban centres is placing heavier burdens and greater responsibilities on rural women, a growing number of whom are de facto heads of household and so full-fledged farmers in their own right. The rural exodus of men tends to increase most rapidly in those regions where droughts, erosion and deforestation have sapped the productivity of agriculture.

Thus women often alone face the challenges of providing food and other basic necessities for their families. In fact, they also face more formidable obstacles than men do. Law or custom may deny them legal rights to land. In Honduras, for example, only 3% of those who benefited from agrarian land reform were women. The corresponding figure in Peru is 5%, while in Colombia it is just over 11%. This lack of ownership is a major reason why banks often refuse rural women credit, believing them to be poor risks. The result is that they are cut off from this important source of funds, to invest in improvements. For instance, only 12% of loans disbursed through national-wide programmes in

Brazil have gone to women.

In many countries, women are trapped in cultural patterns that exclude them from the training and services they need. Illiteracy among rural women is, overall, 21% higher than among men. Agricultural extension services have traditionally been staffed by males and geared solely or primarily toward men: only 11% of all extension staff in Africa are women, and less than 15% are women in Asia and Latin America. Where tradition restricts women's contacts with men outside the immediate family, women are effectively barred from technical assistance and improved technologies.

The IFAD Experience

When it was founded in 1977, the International Fund for Agricultural Development had a single mandate: to assist the rural poor in the world's poorest countries to improve their nutritional and living standards. It has done this through designing and financing 302 projects in 93 countries that are creating some 2.5 million jobs and increased global food production by 29 million tons annually, enough to feed 180 million people, almost a fifth of the world's poorest people. And this at an average cost of only USD 14 per person.

IFAD has been able to achieve this record of success by actively involving the rural poor in their own development. This means listening to their needs, building on their knowledge and rekindling traditional livelihoods and land management practices.

IFAD has found that loans of as little as USD 50 have been enough to start a woman on the road out of poverty. Experience has proved that poor rural women are credit-worthy. The rate of repayment by women borrowers in the Production Credit for Rural Women Project in Nepal for example has been 95%. This is a rate 20% higher than farm credit repayment in many industrialized nations.

Women use their loans for a wide range of purposes. Some buy seeds, fertilizers, tools and other inputs to increase har-

vests. Many invest in small livestock. Others purchase equipment and materials for food processing or cottage industries like weaving or basketmaking, while still others use their funds to set up trading or community services. In all cases, the aim is to grow more food or earn more income.

But assistance does not stop with credit. The right extension services and technological information, are keys to the advancement of poor rural women. This often involves recruiting and training female extension staff — something a number of IFAD projects have accomplished. Literacy programmes, training in nutrition and child care, and the formation of self-help groups all provide women with vital support. The introduction of fuel-efficient stoves, planting of fuelwood trees and the construction of village water supplies significantly reduce women's drudgery and give them more time for productive tasks.

Economic Advancement

As an important part of its continuing effort to bring rural women into the mainstream of development, the Fund organized a series of four regional consultations on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women. These meetings — in Cyprus for the Near East, North and Anglophone Africa, in Costa Rica for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Senegal for Francophone Africa and in Malaysia for Asia and the Pacific — have brought experts together to discuss the issue and share experiences, both failures and successes.

In October 1991, an International Consultation reviewed and finalized the findings of the Regional Consultations. A Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women will be held on 25-26 February 1992 in the Palais des Nations in Geneva under the High Patronage of Queen Fabiola of the Belgians. A number of wives of Heads of State or Government of the developing world: Mrs Ana Milena Munoz de Gaviria, of Colombia; Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, of Egypt; Dato Seri Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah, Bte Haji Mohammad Ali, of Malaysia; Mrs Maryam I. Babangida, of Nigeria; Mrs Elisabeth Diouf, of Senegal; and Mrs Semra Ozal, of Turkey have inspired the organization of the Summit. The Summit will bring together women leaders from around the globe.

"This important event," IFAD's President observes, "will focus international attention on both the plight and potential of the developing world's 550 million poor rural women. It will produce an agenda for action in the coming years — action that, if carried out with determination and collaboration at all levels, will be a major step in the crucial fight against poverty and hunger."

— (IFAD)



Experimenting with growing of vegetables in the east.

Bangladesh Steady at world Food Fair

BANGLADESH continued to demonstrate its determination to enter the mainstream of international trade through its consecutive presence at ANUGA, the biennial world food fair in Cologne that brings together a dazzling palette of food and food products from all corners of the world and sets new trends in cross-cultural food trade. The event also sets the stage for bilateral and multilateral negotiations of a magnitude that can make all the difference to the short and long-term prospect of a commodity or product in the exporting country.

The Bangladeshi pavilion was a composite presentation by five companies whose products included frozen seafood, freshwater fish, tea, coffee, canned fruit juices and spices. Organised by the Export Promotion Bureau, Dhaka, the national presence served to point to the steady effort of the Bangladeshi food and processed food sector to adapt to the consumer preferences of the European buyer. Each participation at the food fair helped to bring the exporters

a step nearer to securing a foothold in the German market and subsequently in the enlarged European market.

Said the Bureau's Director A.K.M. Nizamul Alam: "We are constantly upgrading our products, packaging and effecting economies of scale so as to get a fair price for our product. Tea was being exported in larger quantities to Germany and a Bangladeshi membership of the German

Tea Council was quite likely, it was understood. The vastly expanded German market due to unification was also being looked forward to for suitable exploitation as it would make a qualitative and quantitative difference to the country's exports, it was pointed out.

In the event, Bangladeshi products found good response from the trade as was reported by the exhibitors. The national presence and the export effort was supported by the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ). GTZ operates under the motto "More Trade Worldwide" and has been instrumental in promoting trade

between industrialised and developing countries since the seventies through its product-oriented marketing advisory services. It has cradled developing countries like Bangladesh to internationalise the range of their export products by assisting their presence in German trade fairs.

Understandably, the food fair also focused on Germany as a free trading partner. German Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl touched on this aspect during his inaugural address at the fair by stating that as one of the largest trading nations of the world, Germany had a special interest in open world markets. He stressed that Germany would continue to give its partners in the Third World the opportunity to earn their own revenues to support their development in fair trade.

Statistics also reflected Germany's stance. With import and export performances of DM 59 billion and DM 31 billion respectively in 1990, Germany was among the world's leading food exporters and the world's largest im-

porter of food products, ahead of Japan, the USA and Italy. ANUGA also saw the presence of some 100 exhibitors from the new German federal states, showing a remarkable sense of realism in coming to grips with market forces on the basis of quality, suitability and competitiveness.

The international ramifications of ANUGA have turned the event into an indispensable avenue for the world's food producers to congregate in Cologne once a year and lake stock of some of the most competitive products emerging from the world's increasing food produce. This year saw some 6000 exhibitors from over 90 countries stage a spectacular display of countless varieties of dairy and meat products, dried fruits, canned and frozen marine products, beverages, ethnic specialties, vegetables, fresh fruits and fruit juices, cereals and many more. Indeed, there were more than 200 varieties of cheese and 400 qualities of wine, for instance, to tease the palate of the bewildered consumer.

Inter Nations Bonn

Responsibility For the 'One World' Highlighted in German 'Info' Tour

WHAT does the face of a hungry and crying child in a distant Asian country mean to you? Or the forlorn looks of an unemployed youth? Or the picture of teeming masses living in a bare subsistence with little or nothing to look forward to? Does poverty seem a reflection of some far-off planet in transition? These and other multiplying questions about what was com-

monly bracketed as the Third World were sought to be answered through a high-powered information campaign for the benefit of the German citizens who, perhaps, were not fully cognisant of the fact that rising poverty in developing countries was also of immediate concern to the Germans.

The campaign, organised by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation (BMZ), permeated the German consciousness through the length and breadth of the country through a month-long "Info-Mobile" on wheels, touching 60 cities in all 16 German federal states.

The BMZ-inspired information campaign was both timely and significant in that it was held at a time when the problems besetting post-German unification tended to preoc-

cupy most Germans and issues confronting their brethren elsewhere had little appeal for the moment. The country-wide "Info Tour", as it was called, also brought some one hundred organisations and initiatives from the areas of development assistance and the environment, from state governments, and city councils together in a comprehensive programme that underlined the message that with world-

from the press, radio and television that, through their "extraordinary quality", had promoted an awareness among the German public of the need for co-operation as partners between industrialised and developing countries. This year saw the prizes go to six journalists for their distinguished work in the areas of population explosion, problems of urbanisation, environmental protection, drug addiction, and social

problems in the Third World. Co-responsibility for the 'One World' has been exemplified through 40 years of German development co-operation that initiated its good work in 1952 with the first German contribution to the United Nations programme towards economic development of Third World countries.

Today, its record stands at a total of DM 335 billion in aid for developing countries around the world, incorporating both financial and technical co-operation. In 1990 alone, the BMZ committed DM 10.3 billion for development assistance that included credits, grants, humanitarian aid, and allocations for non-governmental organisations in the area of development co-operation.

North-South relations also found DM 1.2 billion

channelled as donations annually to private and church organisations.

The constellation of Asian countries on the global economic scene has found German development co-operation contributing to an impressive transformation of the economies, with particular emphasis on the expansion of infrastructural facilities such as in the energy, transport and

telecommunications sectors. In the process, the combat with poverty has been mitigated, if not eliminated. German development co-operation will make its own contribution to the World Bank-assisted scheme that expects to see a reduction in absolute poverty to the extent of 200 million poor in the world by the year 2000.

Whether it was Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea or Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and the Philippines or the giants India and China, German policy has adapted itself to the emerging needs. German aid to Asian countries crossed DM 47.4 billion last year.

(Inter Nations Bonn)

- Month-long educational campaign on wheels through 60 cities in all 16 federal states
- Perspective on rising poverty in developing worlds
- German development aid for Asia crosses DM 47.4 bn