

Feature

Development

THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA MIDDLE EAST and NORTH AFRICA SOUTH ASIA

EAST ASIA and PACIFIC CENTRAL AMERICA SOUTH AMERICA INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES and CARIBBEAN

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Meeting Basic Human Needs

by Rolf C Carriere

YOU will be pleased to know that this first PROGRESS OF NATIONS report finds Bangladesh's recent 'child survival performance' much better than would be expected for a nation at its present socio-economic level. To calculate whether a country's performance is above or below expectation, THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS compares key statistics with the average for countries at similar levels of per capita GNP.

Bangladesh is assessed as having a 'plus 41' performance level on child survival. This means that, with the country's per capita GNP at \$ 220, it would be anticipated statistically that 174 of every 1000 children under-five would die. In fact, from the latest information available to the UN, THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS states that Bangladesh now has an under-five mortality rate of 133, thus yielding a 'plus 41' rating.

Not that this should be cause for complacency. The under-five mortality rate in Bangladesh remains above the South Asian regional average of 131, and we still have a long way to go when compared with the world average of 97, East Asia and the Pacific's rating of 57, and the average for the industrialized nations of 11. The goal Bangladesh has set for itself for the Year 2000 is 70!



Rolf C Carriere, UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh, discussing UNICEF's latest Publication 'The Progress of Nations' with colleagues. — photo: UNICEF

While THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS' rating for Bangladesh on child mortality is encouraging, its rating on nutrition is a saddening 'minus 33'. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world today, with at least 66 percent of under-fives (that is, 13 million children) estimated to be underweight.

Bangladesh has begun to address its malnutrition problem. It has designed a comprehensive large-scale nutrition programme aimed at preventing malnutrition in very young children, with a focus on growth monitoring, and support for household food security, improvement in health services and better caring practices.

Moreover, along with 70 other developing countries, to support breastfeeding Bangladesh has banned the distribution of free or low-cost infant formula products in hospitals. Now the challenge is to ensure compliance and, simultaneously, to motivate mothers to breastfeed their babies for the optimum period, rather than switching to inferior substitutes.

Like 24 other developing countries, Bangladesh will soon have a fully-operational programme to control iodine deficiency disorders, the biggest single cause of mental retardation in the developing world. This will increase the nation's intelligence and productivity, and reduce neonatal mortality. By 1994 Bangladesh will be the second country in the SAARC region to achieve universal salt iodization—after Bhutan.

Bangladesh's commitment to child survival, protection and development is evident in other sectors as well. The Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) is cited in THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS as 'one of the biggest success stories of the last decade'. In 1985, barely two per cent of infants were fully immunized. Now, seven years later, 74 percent of children under two (and 50 percent of children under one) completed their immunization schedule. That is the good news. However, Bangladesh's rate of full cover-

age, as measured by the completion of immunization against measles, at 53 percent is still well below the South Asian average of 79 per cent.

Bangladesh's performance in the education sector—47 percent of children completing the fourth year of primary education—in improving with the new legislation which has made universal primary education compulsory and education of girls free up to class-VIII in rural areas. The Government of Bangladesh, for its part, is using both formal and non-formal systems to achieve the goal of 'Education-for-All by the Year 2000.' Successful experiments by NGOs are being put to good use.

Family Planning in Bangladesh is another programme on the way to success, with the contraceptive use rate going up from 15 percent in 1975 to 40 per cent in the early 90s. Even so, 50 percent of pregnancies are still unplanned, and often unwanted. On average, Bangladeshi women have 4.8 children in their lifetime compared to the regional average of 4.4. The average number of births per woman is a vital indicator of the progress towards smaller families and stable populations.

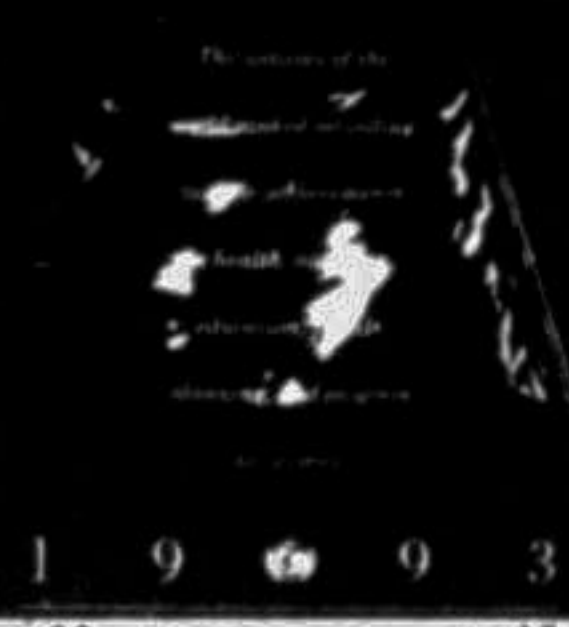
The bad news is that for every 100,000 births in Bangladesh, 600 women still die from pregnancy-related causes. This appalling statistic

The day will come when the progress of nations will be judged not by their military or economic strength, nor by the splendour of their capital cities and public buildings, but by the well-being of their peoples: by their levels of health, nutrition and education; by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their labours; by their ability to participate in the decisions that affect

their lives; by the respect that is shown for their civil and political liberties; by the provision that is made for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; and by the protection that is afforded to the growing minds and bodies of their children. The Progress of Nations, to be published annually by the United Nations Children's Fund, is a contribution towards that day.

Considering the commitment The Progress of Nations highlighted, The Daily Star publish here the excerpts from its first issue, particularly where the issues have reference to Bangladesh, launched world wide on September 22, 1993.

THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS



Keeping faith with progress

by Peter Adamson

year on sports shoes.

A serious attempt to meet minimum human needs has therefore not yet been made.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

There is a clear danger, in the years ahead, that the combination of an unjustified disillusionment with development, and an understandable preoccupation with new challenges, may cause the international community to bestow even more neglect on the issue of basic material progress for its poorest members.

This would be a mistake both in principle and in practice. For a renewed effort to

Advances in knowledge and technology mean that many of the most serious problems could be overcome at relatively low cost.

POLITICAL COMMITMENT

Advances in knowledge, technology, cost reduction, and outreach capacity are not enough. The political determination to get the job done is also essential, and too often this has been the missing link.

In the case of the immunization achievement, that determination was forged in many different ways. But the common elements were a clear and measurable goal, a public commit-

ment to meet minimum human needs. Each year, it will bring together the statistics on the progress being made, in each country, towards basic human goals. For it is time that the standing and prestige of nations was assessed less by their military and economic prowess and more by the protection they provide for the lives, the health, the growth, and the education of their children.

The closer monitoring of social indicators allows nations to see their achievements and rates of progress and to compare them with the record of other nations in a similar geographic region or economic grouping. Internally, monitoring informs policy, introduces accountability, galvanizes and rewards effort, and is a means by which sustained pressure can be brought to bear for the fulfillment of political promises.

SYMPTOM AND CAUSE

The social goals that have been adopted by the international community amount to a programme to meet minimum human needs and, in particular, to protect children from the worst effects of poverty.

The placing of children at the centre of this process, and of The Progress of Nations, is neither an act of sentimentality nor a narrow interpretation of UNICEF concerns.

Progress of all kinds is undermined when millions of children are malnourished and uneducated. Their prospects for future employment and self-reliance are set back by polio, blindness, deafness, mental retardation — disabilities which affect many millions of children and which could now be prevented at very low cost. Specific action to protect children against threats to normal health and development therefore amount to an attack on some of poverty's most fundamental causes as well as some of its most distressing symptoms.

Ninety per cent of the growth of the human body and brain occurs in the first few years of life. The intricate processes of that growth cannot be postponed. That is why action to protect the normal health and growth of children should be at the forefront of development strategies. And that is why children have a legitimate first call on the capacities and concerns of the adult world.

The writer is the general editor of The Progress of Nations.



The under-five death rate is therefore, a measure not just of the quantity of death but of quality of life. — photo: Anwar Hossain

overcome the age-old problem of absolute poverty is essential if the world is to meet the new challenges that lie ahead. As better nutritional health would improve productivity, so it would allow the poor to make economic progress. As education would enable people to participate in political and economic life, so it would foster the democratic process. As primary health care would give people more confidence in the survival of their children, so it would lead to smaller families and slower population growth. And as material progress would ease day-to-day pressures and give the poor a stake in the future, so it would help to protect the environment.

The case for renewed national and international efforts to meet minimum human needs is therefore more compelling than ever as the 20th century draws to a close.

The task is also more achievable than ever before.

ment to that goal by political leaders (virtually every president and prime minister in the developing world formally signed a commitment to the immunization goal in the 1980s), and the mobilization not just of health services but of almost every other organized resource — the schools, the mass media, the religious orders, the non-governmental organizations, the business community, and the professional organizations.

Without such a mobilization, goals and targets have often been mere rhetoric, promises made on public platforms, echoing ever more faintly down the years. But with sustained public support, specific social goals can help to catalyse progress: they can serve as a stimulus to long-term effort, as a focal point for management by objectives.

MONITORING PROGRESS

The Progress of Nations is a UNICEF contribution to this re-

Not Wealth of Nations, But Health of Nations

by Eimi Watanabe

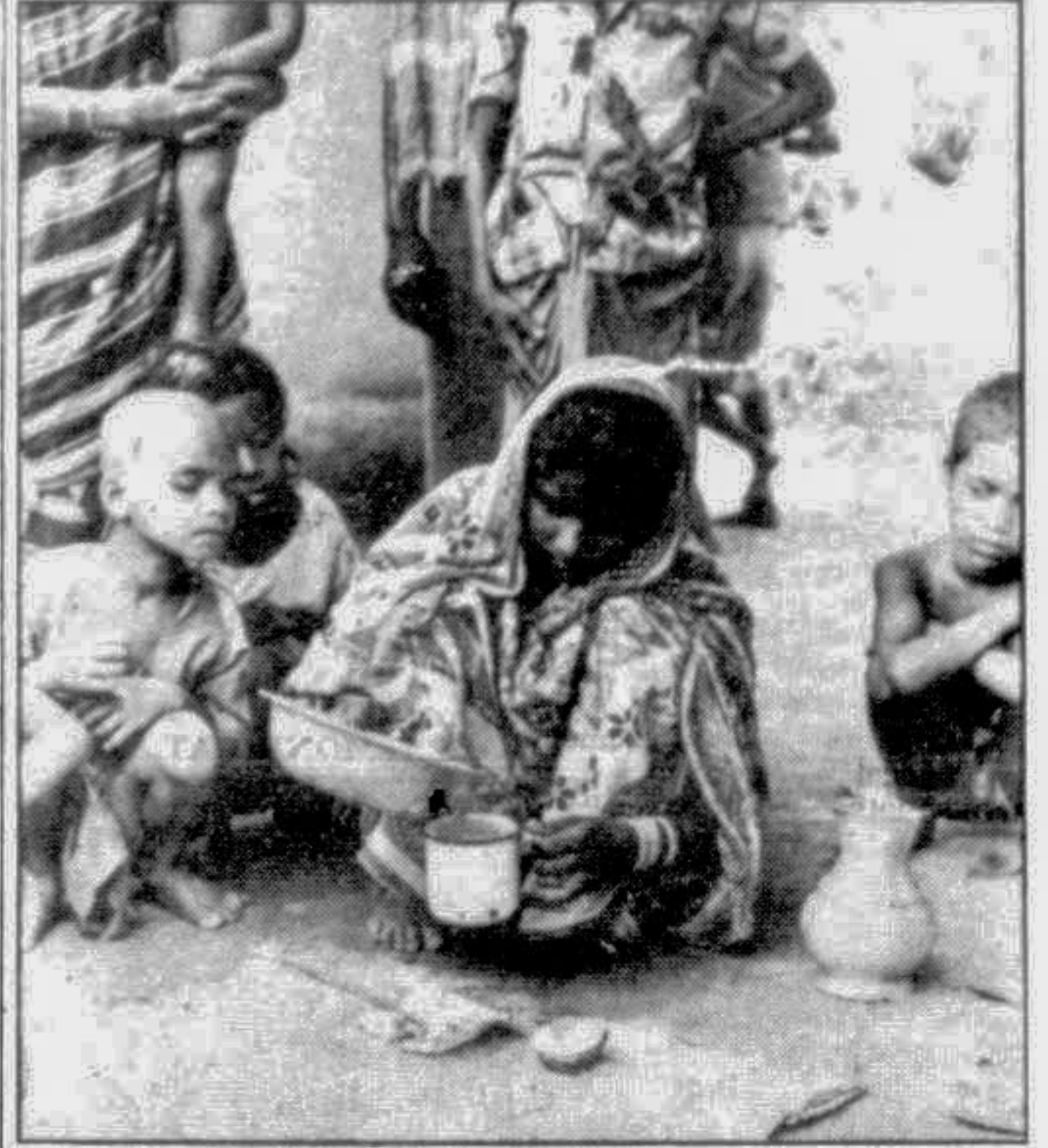
ON behalf of the UN System in Bangladesh, I am very pleased and honoured to be able to join UNICEF colleagues at the launching of this very important publication. It seems particularly apt that my first public engagement in Bangladesh is on this occasion.

During the past decade, in the context of the global development debate, there has been a gradual but important shift in the understanding of what progress is — a shift from measurement in terms of economic growth to measurement of human development as the key indicator of growth. Or, to put it another way, from measuring growth in terms of how much a nation is producing, to how its people are faring. Or, from the wealth of nations to the health of nations. UNICEF has been a leading proponent of this shift in the understanding of the measurement of growth.

This publication is another

averages often mask very important differences within countries, between regions, between urban and rural areas and between various socio-economic groups. And perhaps most importantly between men and women, between boys and girls — the gender difference.

The indicators that are discussed in this publication, as well as the goals that have been highlighted in the banners decorating this hall, are those goals which have evolved and have been endorsed through various important global processes, including the Global Conference in Jomtien, Thailand, on Education For All; The World Summit for Children; and more recently the Rio Environment Summit which endorsed Agenda 21. These goals, therefore, have been accepted and endorsed by the global community including, of course, by the Government of Bangladesh. And these are also goals that are included in the



13 million Bangladeshi children under five are estimated to be underweight. Photo: Mishuk Munir

important addition emphasizing this shift. It is a very concise, well-presented, easy-to-read publication. The Progress of Nations brings in a comparative element to the analysis of the key indicators of human development. It is comparative from various perspectives. First, it compares countries within regions, and secondly, it compares countries across regions. And then it introduces a new concept — that of the national performance gap. This compares a country's achievements relative to its own economic progress measured in terms of GNP. This national performance gap is a new concept that has been introduced by this publication and will add to the understanding of human development.

The Progress of Nations also highlights a very important point which is often left out in the understanding of measurement of indicators. It highlights the fact that there is disparity within countries, that national

UN International Development Strategy for the 1990s, and are therefore goals that guide the work of all the Agencies of the United Nations system.

Finally, while this publication has been described as a 'report card' which assesses the performance of countries — what the countries have been able to achieve — it is also important to note that the measurements of indicators are useful not only for monitoring and assessing, but for the purpose of planning, i.e. by comparing performance in various sectors. It helps countries and organizations to prioritize, to see the sectors and areas that remain as challenges — where more work needs to be done.

I congratulate UNICEF in the publication of this very useful and important document. Thank you.

Dr Eimi Watanabe is UN Resident Representative in Bangladesh. This is the full text of her speech delivered on this occasion.

"Child Survival in Bangladesh Better than Expected"

BANGLADESH'S recent 'child survival performance' is much better than could be expected for a country at its economic level, according to The Progress of Nations, a new publication issued today by UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund.

NUTRITION: 13 million Bangladeshi children under five are estimated to be underweight. At 66 per cent, this is one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world and represents a 'minus 33' national performance. At its economic level, Bangladesh could be expected to have a child malnutrition rate of only 33 per cent.

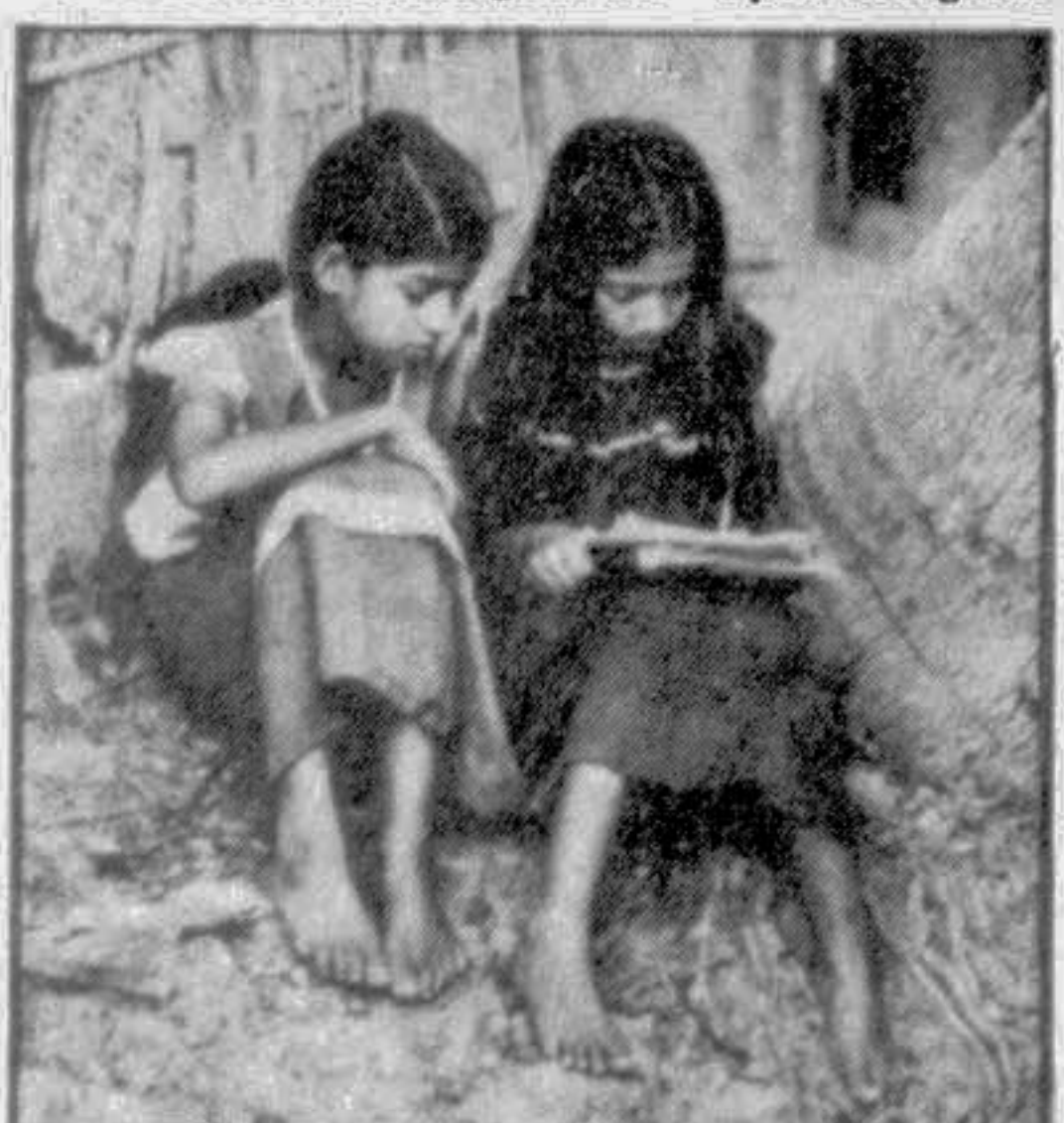
Bangladesh is cited positively as one of more than 70 developing countries that have banned the distribution of free or low-cost infant formula products in hospitals to support breastfeeding. And it is also listed among 24 developing countries that have fully operational programmes to control iodine deficiency disorders (which cause goiter and cretinism), the biggest single cause of mental retardation in the de-

veloping world. CHILD HEALTH: At 53 per cent in 1991, Bangladesh's rate of immunizing its children against measles is still below the South Asian average of 79

per cent. But its progress in raising this rate from barely 1 per cent in 1985 is mentioned as 'one of the biggest success stories of the last decade'; despite being one of the world's

poorest countries, Bangladesh is listed as one of the 20 countries that have made the swiftest progress on measles immunization.

The progress of nations uses



Over 90 per cent of the developing world's children start school, but a third drop out before completing four years. — photo: Shehzad Noorani



Malnutrition takes many forms and has many causes. Photo: Shehzad Noorani

the measles immunization rate as the indication on child health because it is a reliable barometer of a country's commitment to bringing basic medical advances to its people. Measles immunization saves the lives of about 1.6 million children a year and prevents millions more from suffering the malnutrition, diarrhoea, vitamin A loss, blindness and deafness that can follow measles.

EDUCATION: The 47 per cent of children in Bangladesh completing the fourth year of primary education is rated by The Progress of Nations as a 'plus 9, national performance. But the UNICEF publication pays special tribute to BRAC for its work in 'making national primary education systems work better.'

'In eight years, BRAC has opened over 10,000 schools, mainly for children of the poor and the landless. Most of its pupils either never started formal schooling or dropped out at an early stage.

But the total number of pupils in BRAC's 10,000

schools amount to under 2.0 per cent of the primary school age population in Bangladesh.

FAMILY PLANNING: The Progress of Nations uses the average number of births per woman (total fertility rate) as a vital indicator of the transition to smaller families and stable populations, and of the well-being of mothers and children. On average, Bangladeshi women have 4.8 children in their lifetime, compared with the regional average of 4.4. The only two countries in South Asia with a lower average are Sri Lanka (2.5) and India (4.0).

PROGRESS OF WOMEN: For every 100,000 births in Bangladesh, 600 women die from causes related to pregnancy or giving birth. This compares with the South Asian average of 490 and a global average of 310. Put another way, women in South Asia have a 1 in 40 lifetime risk of dying because of child-bearing — compared to 1 in 20 sub-Saharan Africa and 1 in 3,600 in the industrialized countries.

— UNICEF

Rolf C Carriere is the Resident Representative, UNICEF, Bangladesh. This is an extract from his speech, delivered on the occasion of the launching of 'The Progress of Nations'.