

## Feature

## Development

THE PROGRESS  
OF NATIONS

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SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA MIDDLE EAST and  
NORTH AFRICA SOUTH ASIAEAST ASIA and  
PACIFIC CENTRAL AMERICA SOUTH AMERICA INDUSTRIALIZED  
and CARIBBEAN COUNTRIESMeeting 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!

**Family Planning**

The industrialized world is entering an age of doubt about material progress. Many of its citizens are experiencing what the economist Robert Heilbroner has called "the startling realization that the quality of life is worsening...

that people who are three or five or ten times richer than their grandparents do not seem to be three or five or ten times happier or more content or more richly developed as human beings."

Coinciding with such doubts is the gradual realization that such progress is also no longer limitless, that what was once the clear and infinitely extending horizon of material advance is now becoming closer and darker as ecological limits loom.

But for at least a billion people in the world, material progress has very different connotations. It holds out the hope of adequate food, clean water, safe sanitation, decent housing, reliable health care, and at least a basic education. This is a definition of progress which remains entirely valid. And it is one with which the rest of the world must keep faith.

**DISILLUSIONMENT**

In the 1960 and 1970s, hopes rode high that national and international efforts would soon enable all people to meet these needs. But over the last decade, such hopes have been replaced by a widespread disillusionment, a sense that development has not worked, a feeling that the effort to end the worst evils of absolute poverty has been tried and failed.

This perception is wrong on both counts: it has not been tried; and it has not failed. At a very rough estimate, the governments of the developing countries have been devoting, on average, only about 10% of their annual budgets to nutrition, water supply, primary health care, primary education, and family planning. Similarly, only about 10% of all international aid for development has been specifically devoted to these purposes. This means that many governments of the poor world have been spending less on meeting human needs than on meeting military bills and debt-servicing obligations. And it means that the total amount of aid being given for the specific purpose of meeting these most obvious and basic of human needs is less than the amount that the people of the industrialized world spend each

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

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.

**MONITORING PROGRESS**

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

port. It is a very concise, 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

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