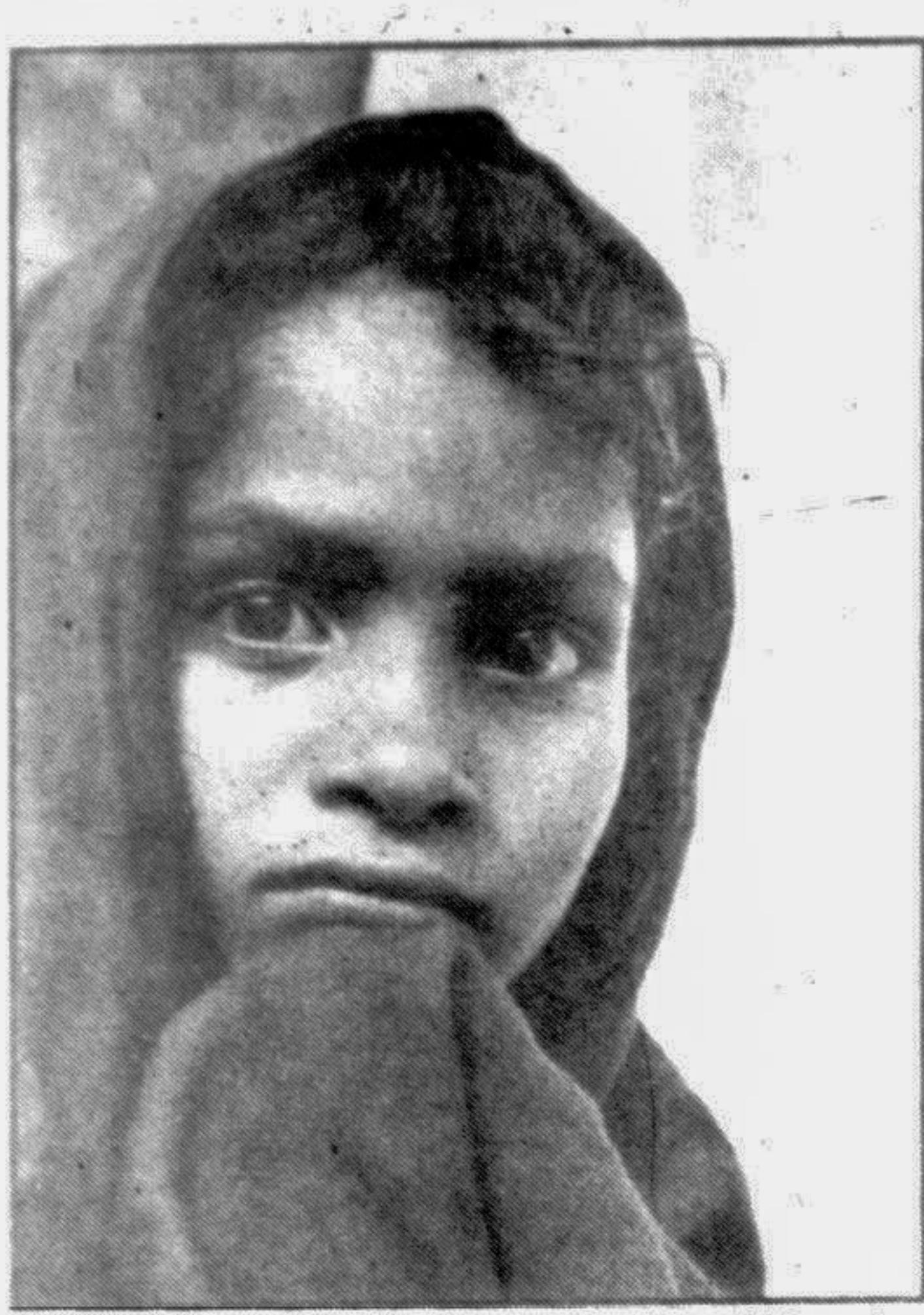


## Feature



"Our age is the first generation since the dawn of history in which mankind dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective." —Arnold Toynbee  
photograph: Claude Sauvageot

## The Unfinished Business of the 20th Century

**M**ORE progress in human well-being has been made in the last 50 years than in the previous 2,000, according to a new report from the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF.

On the eve of the UN's fifth anniversary, the 1995 State of the World's Children report lists the achievements that UNICEF says are too often overlooked.

Average life expectancy, for example, has risen from about 40 years to more than 60 years since 1950. "This increase is as much as was achieved in all previous history," says UNICEF Executive Director James Grant, "and it reflects a wide range of improvements in income, nutrition, health care and education."

### The Cost

The principal technologies for meeting children's needs at low cost are already available," says the report, "and the financial cost is negligible in relation to what humanity has at stake."

Money alone will not be sufficient, admits UNICEF. Political commitment and competent management are just as important. "But the idea that the world cannot afford the financial cost of meeting its children's needs," says UNICEF, "is plainly absurd."

UNICEF estimates, for example, that the total cost of providing basic social services in the developing countries, including health, education, family planning, clean water, and all of the other basic social goals agreed on at the 1990 World Summit for Children, would be in the region of an additional \$30 billion to \$40 billion a year, two thirds of which could come from the developing countries themselves.

"The world spends more than this on playing golf," says the UNICEF report. — The state of the World's Children, 1995.

## Millions will be Spared Mental Retardation

**I**n 1990, some 18 million women became pregnant while suffering from a little-known dietary disorder. In almost all cases those women did not know, and still do not know, what that problem was.

In approximately 60,000 cases, the damage caused was so severe that the foetus died or the infant survived for only a few hours.

For approximately 120,000 of those women, pregnancy and delivery proceeded normally, and an apparently healthy baby was born. But in the first few months of life it became clear that all was not well. The infant was slow to respond to voices, and did not seem to recognize familiar faces.

### Lowered IQs

The story does not end there. In approximately 1 million more of those pregnancies, early childhood appeared to proceed quite normally. But today, as many as 1 million children reach school age, many are being found to have poor eye-hand coordination; others have become partially deaf, or have developed a bad squint, or a speech impediment, or other neuromuscular disorders.

Meeting these unmet needs," says Grant, "is the chief unfinished business of the 20th century. Vast increases in productive capacity have made it possible to meet basic human needs. And not to do so is unconscionable in a world made one by communications. Morality must march

of them, even the brightest, would be found to have significantly lowered IQs. And in the years to come, they will merge into the estimated total of 75 million young people.

Meanwhile, those most seriously affected, the 120,000 four- and five-year-old cretins born in 1990, will not be going to school at all. They will remain in the ranks of the dependent, eventually becoming part of the estimated 5.7 million people alive today who have been affected by cretinism from birth.

### Salt Solution

An inexpensive solution has

been known for most of this century: iodine can be added to the one commodity that is consumed by all — common salt. That was how the problem was eradicated from most of the industrialized countries, led by Switzerland and the United States where edible salt supplies were iodized during the 1920s.

But in the developing world, the tragedy has been allowed to continue.

The cost of salt iodization is approximately 5 US cents per person per year.

### Target Set

On 30 September 1990, the

World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF confronted the world's political leaders with the challenge of salt iodization. The occasion was the World Summit for Children, held at

the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York and attended by approximately half of the world's Presidents and

Prime Ministers. A total of 27 specific goals were adopted — including the elimination of all new cases of iodine deficiency

## A tragedy coming to an end

The world is on the verge of a great victory over the biggest single cause of preventable mental retardation.

Worldwide, 26 million people are brain damaged by lack of iodine in the diet. Almost 8 million suffer outright cretinism, over 600 million suffer from goitre and are physically or mentally affected in some way. The solution is to add iodine to common salt.

With UNICEF's help, countries that in three or four years from now, the overall goal will be achieved: no more infants will be born as cretins; no more parents will suffer the agony of discovering that their children are permanently retarded; no more sons and

daughters will be mentally and physically impaired by through iodine deficiency.

WHO and UNICEF have reasonable confidence that, in three or four years from now, the overall goal will be achieved: no more infants will be born as cretins because their mothers' diets lacked iodine. Twelve years old and living in Ning Xia province, China, Juno is unable to

speak or to feed himself.

Photo: Emily Beale

You Juno is one of the millions of children in the world who were born as cretins because their mothers' diets lacked iodine. Twelve years old and living in Ning Xia province, China, Juno is unable to speak or to feed himself.

Photo: Emily Beale

## Development

# The Daily Star WORDS INTO ACTION Special on

December 19, 1994

*The State of the World's Children, 1995, released on December 15, 1995 worldwide, seeks to assess the progress that has been made since the 1990 World Summit for Children, when specific goals were adopted for improving the lives of millions of children in the developing world.*

*In recognition of the importance of the themes of the Report, a Unicef contribution to the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development to be held in Copenhagen in March 1995, The Daily Star brings out this special page.*

## Protecting Today's Children and Tomorrow's World

### HIGHLIGHTS

The following are the highlights from the presentation made by Rolf C Carriere, Unicef Representative in Bangladesh, on the occasion of the launching ceremony of the State of the World's Children Report, 1995.

- ★ A survey completed last year found that seven out of every ten people in Bangladesh are affected by some degree of iodine deficiency.
- ★ Unlike almost every other country, where children grow taller than their parents, Bangladesh today is unique in having a population which has actually grown shorter because of poor nutrition.
- ★ By international standards, only seven per cent of Bangladesh's children can be considered nutritionally normal. The rest, more than 90 per cent are underweight and stunted before the age of two.
- ★ In Bangladesh, until recently 100 children went blind every day. With Vitamin A supplementation and the promotion of dark green leafy vegetables that number is now declining.
- ★ Efforts in Bangladesh are underway to free the country's children from the threat of polio before the turn of the century.
- ★ As the result of unique efforts covering more than 13 million households 90 per cent of the Bangladeshi population is now aware of ORT.

## CENTS OF THE ABSURD

**T**he 1995 State of the World's Children report from UNICEF says that we need to kindle a sense of absurdity at the idea that the world cannot afford to meet the needs of all the world's children for adequate nutrition, basic health care, primary education, and clean water. The following figures are offered as kindling:



body." Drawing the link between economic exclusion and social tensions, the report points out that millions of families are becoming destitute and desperate. "Most of the victims are young, uprooted, and urbanized," says the UNICEF report.

"They know far more about the world than their parents did, and they expect far more from it. The almost inevitable result is an increase in social tensions, ethnic problems, and political turbulence."

Inevitable also, says the report, is the rise of crime, vio-

lence, alcoholism, and drug abuse, "by which a minority of the aggrieved and the discarded have always sought to console themselves."

### Practical Proposition

The report argues that protecting the normal development of children is a practical proposition as well as a logical one. "At least the most basic needs of all children — for nutrition, health care and primary education — could and should be met within the next few years," says Grant.

Specific year 2000 goals in

the report are:

— Protecting the normal development of children.

— Ending discrimination against women and girls.

— Ending child mortality.

— Ending child malnutrition.

— Ending child disease.

— Ending child exploitation.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.

— Ending child abuse.

— Ending child neglect.

— Ending child poverty.

— Ending child discrimination.

— Ending child violence.