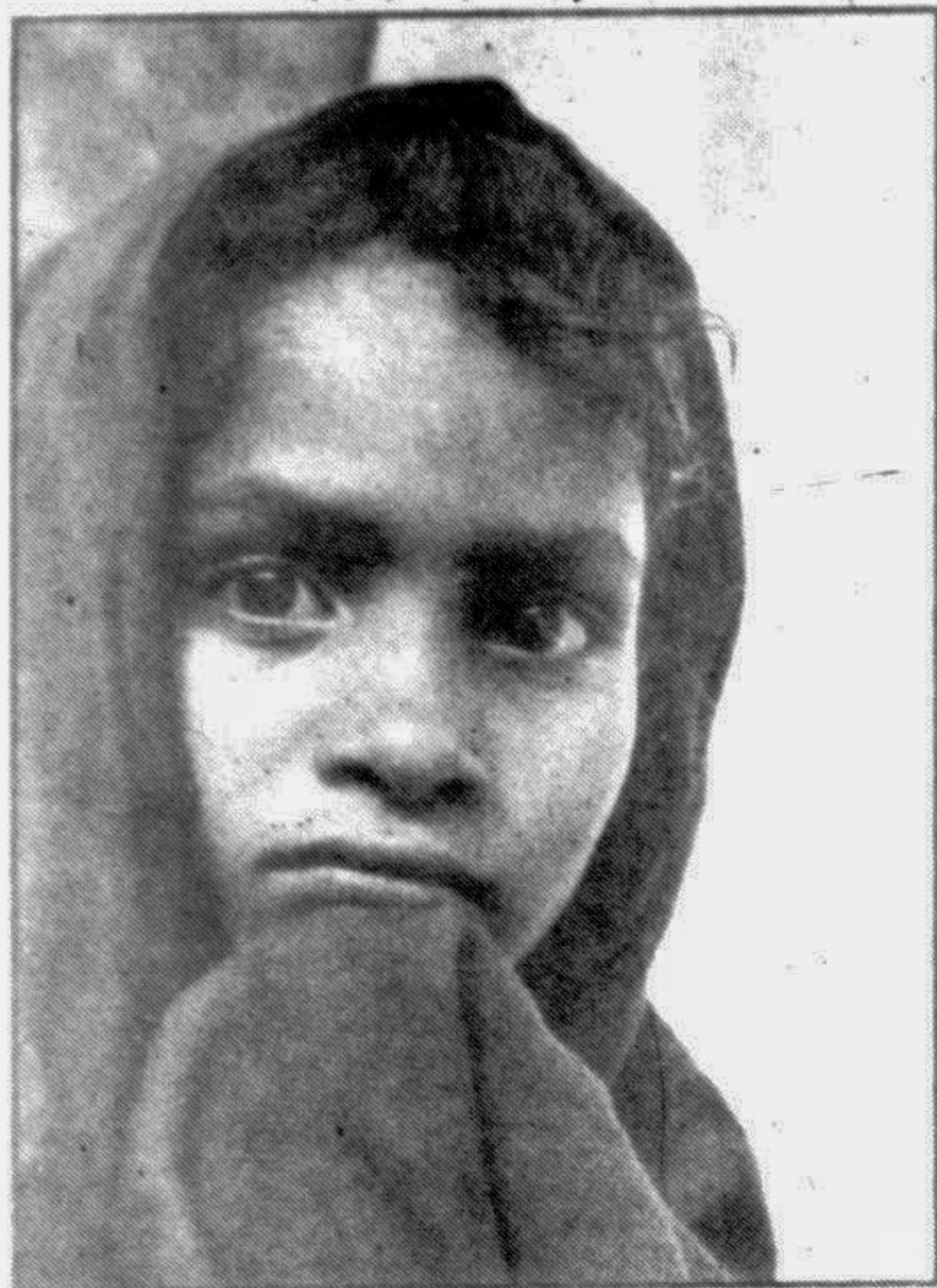


Feature

Development



"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

MORE 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 fiftieth 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."

A similarly revealing indicator is the proportion of children who die before the age of five. In the last 50 years, the developing world has reduced this figure by about two thirds — from 300 to 100 per 1,000 live births. At the same time, adult literacy rates have doubled to approximately 70%.

Other significant advances include victory over smallpox, which was still killing 5 million people a year in the early 1950s. More recently, rising immunization levels have eradicated polio from the western hemisphere and many other areas of the developing world. The virus could be banished from the earth altogether by the year 2000.

The UNICEF report cites the British historian, Arnold Toynbee, who predicted in the 1940s that "the 20th century will be chiefly remembered ... not as an age of political conflicts or technical inventions, but as an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective." Judging from the headlines of the 1990s, this prophecy may seem hopelessly optimistic.

Politically, also, half a century has brought remarkable changes. Fifty years ago, only a very small proportion of the world's people had the vote; today, between half and three quarters of the world is democratically ruled. Fifty years ago, over 60 nations in Africa and Asia were governed from London, Paris, Lisbon, Moscow, Brussels, or The Hague. Communism was closing its grip on Eastern Europe. Apartheid was being introduced in South Africa. Women still did not have the vote in Japan or France. And across much of the United States, a black person could neither vote nor serve on a jury.

Children's Needs

Despite these achievements, says UNICEF, a fifth of the world's people still live in absolute poverty. They are the 1 billion absolute poor — those who are without the basics of life, those without education and jobs, those without clean water or basic health care, those whose children die and become disabled in such numbers, those who are forced to ruin their own environments and futures for the sake of staying alive today.

"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

with capacity." UNICEF's principal concern is meeting the needs of the poorest children in the developing world.

Four years ago, the UN World Summit for Children adopted specific goals for children — including a halving of malnutrition, control of the major childhood diseases, the eradication of polio, the elimination of micronutrient deficiencies, the achievement of primary school education by at least 80%, the provision of clean water and safe sanitation to all communities, and the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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
IN 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 those 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.

In another 5 million or so cases, the parents may never know that there is anything specifically wrong. But if measurements could be taken as those children embark on their first year at primary school, all

Words INTO ACTION

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

IN the build-up to the World Summit for Social Development, scheduled for March 1995 in Copenhagen, UNICEF has issued a new appeal for children to be placed at the centre of international development strategy. The issue can be simply put," says UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant. "The world will not solve its fundamental long-term problems until it learns to do a better job of protecting and investing in the physical, mental, and emotional development of its children."

The State of the World's Children 1995 is UNICEF's contribution to the Copenhagen Summit, and it makes a powerful plea for putting the needs and the rights of children at the centre of the world leaders' deliberations. "The malnutrition, ill health, and poor growth of millions of young children is no foundation for sustainable development," says Grant. "Childhood is the time when minds and bodies and values and personalities are being formed. And it is a time when even temporary deprivation is capable of inflicting lifelong damage on human development. It follows that the vital, vulnerable years of childhood must be protected at all costs."

Poverty and Childhood

Armed conflicts attract the headlines. But UNICEF also claims that economic forces are depriving far larger numbers of children of the kind of childhood which will enable them to become part of tomorrow's solutions rather than tomorrow's problems. Over the last 10 years, says the report, real incomes have fallen for approximately 800 million people in 40 poor countries. "For many millions of families in the poorest villages and urban slums of the developing world," says UNICEF, "the daily consequence of these economic forces, over which they have no control, is that they are unable to put enough food on the table, unable to maintain a home fit to live in, unable to dress and present themselves decently, unable to protect health and strength, unable to keep their children in school."

"At the same time," says Grant, "cuts in essential services have meant health centres without drugs and doctors, schools without books and teachers, and family planning clinics without staff and supplies."

The impact of these forces on nutrition, health, and education, means that the heaviest burden has fallen on young children. "The very young are paying the highest price of all," says Grant, "because they are paying with their one chance to grow normally in mind and

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

The 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:

\$ Needed	Billions per year	\$ Spent	Billions per year
Estimated extra cost of meeting worldwide need for:		Estimates of amount spent worldwide on:	
Basic child health and nutrition	\$13	Golf	\$40
Primary education	\$9	Wine	\$85
Safe water and sanitation	\$6	Beer	\$160
Family planning	\$6	Cigarettes	\$400
Total	\$34	Advertising	\$250
		Military	\$800

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

Specific year 2000 goals in

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.

these basic areas were agreed on by almost all nations at the World Summit for Children. "Since then," says the UNICEF report, "most nations have taken large-scale action and at least half are on target to reach the goals that were set for the mid-point in the decade."

Recent achievements include: the reduction of malnutrition; the maintenance of 80% immunization levels; an 80% fall in measles deaths; the banishment of polio from large areas of the developing world; rapid progress against iodine deficiency disorders and vitamin A deficiency; the spread of oral rehydration therapy (now preventing more than a million child deaths a year); a resumption of progress in primary education; and the ratification by almost all nations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

By mid-decade, says the report, this progress will mean that 2.5 million fewer children will be dying each year than was the case in 1990. Millions more will be protected from malnutrition, and at least three quarters of a million fewer children each year will be disabled, blinded, crippled, or mentally retarded.

"These successes show that there is a real momentum for children in the 1990s," says Grant. "And they show what can be done by deploying today's new knowledge, new low-cost technologies, and new communications capacities. If the effort can be sustained and increased, then the year 2000 goals for protecting all children from malnutrition and preventable disease — and ensuring that the vast majority have at least a primary education — can certainly be achieved."

More Support

UNICEF now wants to see more support for these efforts from the industrialized nations. "Aid that is specifically directed towards meeting the basic needs of children is essential if the momentum is to be maintained," says Grant. In addition to more financial support, UNICEF also wants to see the effort to protect children placed firmly on the agenda of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen.

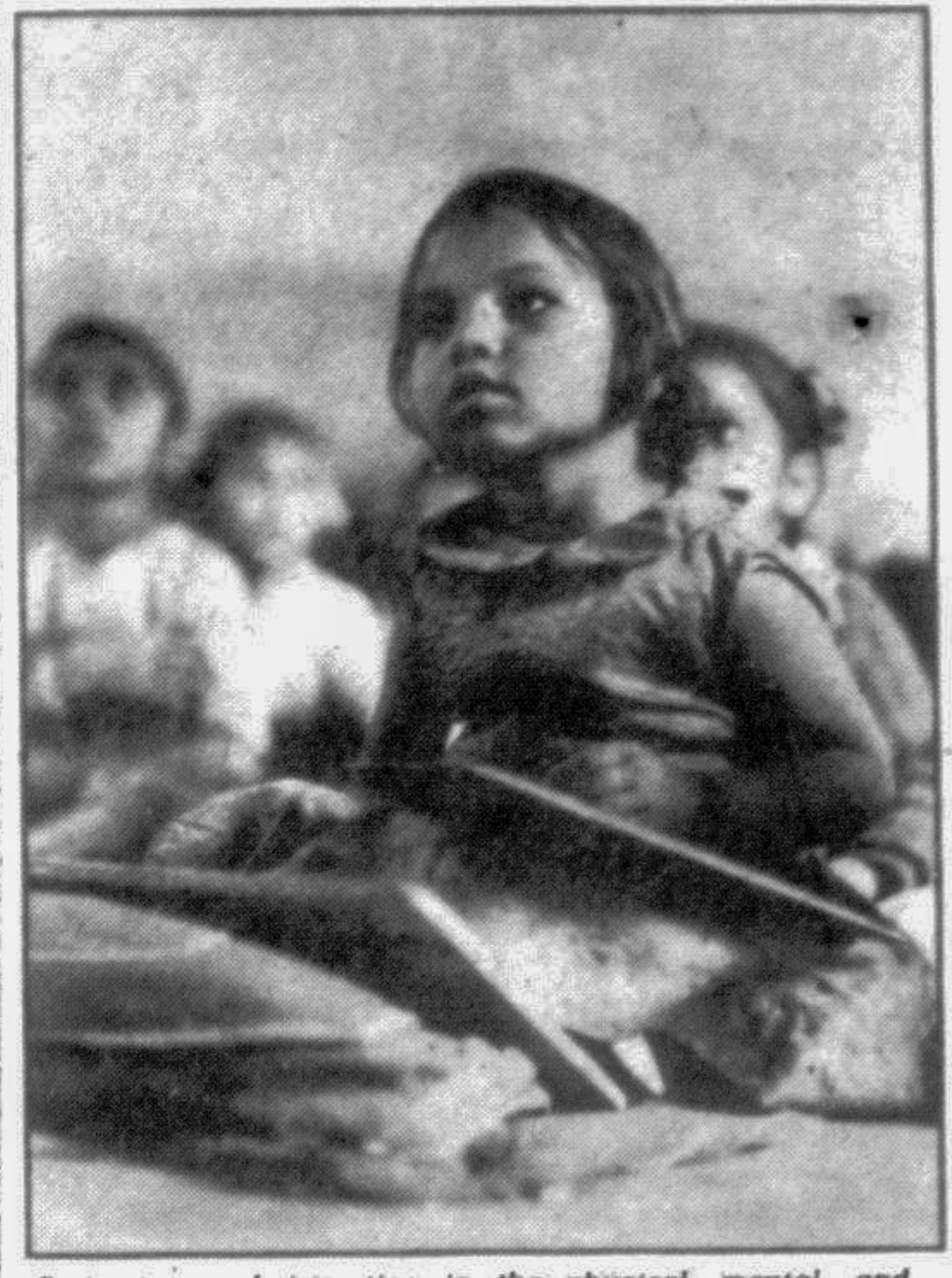
"Action to protect the rising generation could and should be a leading edge of any new effort to bring about sustainable development," says the report. "With the Copenhagen Summit, the time has come to see the issue of protecting the growing minds and bodies of children not as a matter of peripheral concern, to be dealt with by a little extra sympathy and charity, but as an issue which is central of development strategy." — *The State of the World's Children, 1995.*

disorders by the year 2000.

Of the 94 countries with IDD problems, the great majority are now implementing national plans for the iodization of all salt, and 58 are on track to achieve the goal of iodizing 95 per cent of salt supplies by or before the end of 1995. Those 58 countries are home to almost 60 per cent of the developing world's children. Another 32 countries could achieve the 1995 goal with an accelerated effort.

In the Middle East and North Africa, 10 out of 17 nations will have iodized all salt within the next 12 months. In Asia, 7 out of 20 countries (including Bangladesh and India) are within a year of universal iodization.

Remarkably, salt iodization is also being achieved in 28 of the 39 affected nations in sub-Saharan Africa. After taking such a toll on the mental and physical health of so many and for so long, the iodine problem is therefore now being forced to give ground. 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 being born as cretins as a result of iodine deficiency; no more parents will suffer the long-drawn-out agony of discovering that their children are severely and permanently retarded; no more sons and daughters will be mentally and physically impaired by this age-old disorder. — *The State of the World's Children, 1995.*



Protecting and investing in the physical, mental, and emotional development of all children is the foundation of a better future, the end and the means of progress, the very foundation for economic development and social cohesion. — UNICEF photograph: Claude Sauvageot

A World of Difference

WELL within the expected lifetime of a child born today, total world population could be either 8 billion and falling or more than 12 billion and still rising — depending on the decisions made in the years immediately ahead. The difference between these high and low projections — over 4 billion people — is more than the entire population of the developing world today. But it could also be a world of difference in another sense. It could mean the difference between success and failure in preventing ecological and social catastrophe.

"Given the choice," says a new report from UNICEF, "every sane person would opt for the lower population figure."

But after the recent International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, says the 1995 State of the World's Children report, "it should be clear that population growth cannot be contained by family planning alone."

Only a comprehensive approach — giving women more control over their own lives, making progress against gender discrimination, raising the level of female education, reducing child death rates (so that parents can have confidence that their children will survive), and making high-quality family planning universally available — can keep world population down to the low estimate of 8 billion by the middle of the next century, says the report.

Slowing population growth therefore means making faster progress towards better health care, nutrition, and education, and ending discrimination against women and girls. "Such progress has long been demanded on humanitarian grounds and as an investment in economic growth, and would cry out to be achieved even if there were no such thing as a population problem," says UNICEF Executive Director James Grant. "But the population problem is lending a new urgency to these old demands."

The 21st Century

To reinforce the point, UNICEF offers a disturbing vision of the next century. This is what the world children's organization sees in its crystal ball for the year 2050 if no new effort is made to overcome the worst aspects of poverty in the years ahead:

"Continued malnutrition and poor health care have left child death rates at relatively high levels for large numbers of people. Little has been done to achieve equality between the sexes. More than 100 million primary school age children, two thirds of them girls, are not in school. Secondary school remains the preserve of a minority, and average age at marriage has risen only marginally. Many of the poor have therefore continued to have large families to compensate for high death rates, to ensure surviving sons, and to try to insure themselves against destitution. Women still do not have the power to control their own fertility, and many families who want fewer children still do not have access to high-quality family planning."

"As the year 2050 approaches, world population exceeds 12 billion and is continuing to rise. Vastly greater numbers of the poor are working ever more marginal lands. Millions have migrated to urban slums, where poverty,

overcrowding, and poor sanitation make life almost unbearable and where the chief form of entertainment involves sophisticated communications technologies constantly parading the images of wealth before the realities of poverty.

"Social divisions and old ethnic tensions have increased and, in the resulting political turmoil, democracies have faltered, leaving the way open for demagogues and dictators. More resources are being devoted to the military, and to the security forces on whom they depend. Increasing civil and international conflicts are providing a ready market for an arms trade that has been allowed to continue unabated. Many civil wars have degenerated into causeless struggles for power and territory. Refugee problems have multiplied. Internal and international migration pressures have increased. Acts of international terrorism have become more common, committed both by increasing numbers of criminal groups and by the many organizations motivated by frustration and deeply felt injustice. Many airports have become unusable. Insurance costs have risen steeply. Travel and commerce are disrupted. Investment and tourism have declined. The number of failed states increases. International intervention becomes more common in an attempt to cope with instability, and limited global resources are diverted not to development but to peacekeeping and emergencies."

From this view of the future, UNICEF argues that the issue of world development is being transformed from a timeless into an urgent issue. "In the past," says the report, "the international development effort has lacked any real urgency; there have been no deadlines attached, no imperative other than the humanitarian, no spur other than the nag of conscience, no consequences of failure other than for the poor themselves. All this is now changing. Development now has a deadline. And failure to meet it will bring consequences not just for the poor but for all. Instead of being a timeless problem of concern mainly to the poor, the challenge of development is now becoming a race against time in which we all have a stake. And overcoming the worst aspects of poverty is now not only a moral minimum for our civilization but a practical minimum for ensuring its survival."

Progress for Women

Above all, says UNICEF, anyone concerned about population should concern themselves first and foremost with progress for women.

Hundreds of millions of women in the developing world today do not have the right and the means to decide when or whether to become pregnant, says the report. As a result, they often bear too many children, at too young or too old an age, and with too little time to recover in between births. An estimated half a million women die each year — and many times that number suffer injury and disability — from the complications of pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and giving birth. About a third of those pregnancies are unplanned and unwanted, and most of them fall into high-risk categories.

— *The State of the World's Children, 1995*

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, 18 million people are being damaged by lack of iodine in the diet. 400 million suffer from iodine deficiency and are at risk of mental retardation. The solution is to add iodine to common salt.

Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, most developing countries have taken steps to iodize their salt. In the next few years, it is expected that all salt will be iodized. The goal is to prevent the birth of a new generation of mentally retarded children.

WHO and UNICEF have demonstrated worldwide that, in three or four years from now, the overall goal will be achieved: no more infants will be being born as cretins as a result of iodine deficiency; 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 this age-old disorder. — *The State of the World's Children, 1995.*

You Jian 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, Jian is unable to speak or to lead himself.