

Right Time for a "Rights Approach"

by Rolf C Carriere

WORLDWIDE, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has become the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. Only 13 countries have neither signed nor ratified this document. It is also one of the most comprehensive human rights documents, including civil, political, economic and social rights of children.

This widespread recognition of every child's right to **survival, protection, development, and participation** reflects the beginning of an historic international movement which has been gaining momentum daily. Its ultimate success depends on the involvement of people both in official and unofficial capacities — government policy-makers, NGOs, private business, professionals, artists, thinkers, religious leaders, communities and families.

Mid-decade Goals for Children and the Right to Survival

Bangladesh's accomplishments in the field of child **survival** — family planning, sanitation, and access to water supply and health services — have been significant.

Bangladesh is on target to meet all mid-decade goals except those related to malnutrition. Most of these end-1995 goals for immunization, water and sanitation, and school enrollment have already been attained. Vitamin A supplementation, breastfeeding promotion and salt iodization programmes are all underway, and show good success.

The scale of the problem of malnutrition can be intimidating. Recognizing the complex dynamic between malnutrition, poverty and behavior can easily lead to cynicism and resignation about the inevitability of hunger and malnutrition in Bangladesh. But we must not allow ourselves the luxury of such passive attitudes. If we do, we will find ourselves believing that nothing can be done, and then nothing will be done.

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Reporting on the Convention

Bangladesh showed its commitment to child rights at an early stage. It was one of the first nations to ratify the Convention, which became international law in September 1990. Just over five years ago. Meanwhile, the Government of Bangladesh has been actively preparing and refining its first country report to the Convention's "Committee of Experts."

The purpose of this report is to monitor the progress of individual countries in im-

plementing the Convention, and to provide the basis for constructive comments on the important issues the country faces in implementing the Convention. In contrast to other human rights groups the committee's approach is not to condemn and accuse, but to ask: "how can we help?" The Committee's review also can provide a useful exchange of ideas on how other countries have tackled certain issues, and what might work for Bangladesh. UNICEF is deeply committed to this process, and will continue to offer assistance to the Government of Bangladesh as they work to fulfil the provisions of the UN Convention on Child Rights.

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Institutional Set-up and Preparedness

As mentioned before, the physical intervention is almost complete in three north-western subcompartments (Cluster IB). The responsibility of water management in these three and other subcompartments lies with Subcompartmental Water Management Committees (SCWMC). Each SCWMC headed by chairman union parshad, is composed of representatives of four different interest groups: farmers, fishermen, landless and women selected by local people.

Members of the SCWMCs were given seven-day residential training, through Dhaka-based NGO named TARD, on aspects of water management, group leadership and conflict management in the field.

A Half-completed Project

With the revised target for completion of the project in '98/99, the progress in development of physical infrastructures is 56 per cent. Divided the total project area into four clusters for physical development, work is almost complete in Cluster IB (NW), and 50 per cent in Clusters II (N) and III (NE) and nil in Cluster IV (S). At this rate of progress, it was premature to expect the desired functioning of a completed project, as indicated in recent news reports.

The Silimpur-Karatai Embankment: Criticisms and Facts

The degree of protection the project has provided to the area during the flooding of '95 is mainly due to popularly known Karatai-Silimpur Embankment. Naturally due credit goes to people of Tangail, who around two decades ago, opted for this embankment. This irregular horse-shoe-shaped embankment runs very often through settlements, besides the kitchen of a house or by the vegetable gardens. Certain NGOs, linking this embankment to the CPP, blames the project on grounds of environmental consideration.

It is worth mentioning an incident regarding this embankment. During the early years of this project, many reports used to mention that the CPP is engaged in massive construction of an embankment. A high-ranking visitor from overseas concerned about embankment and its relationship to envi-

ronment, was particularly interested to see this embankment. He had a preconceived negative attitude to the project (expressed during discussion in office). The project officials did not try to refute him. Soon, everybody started for a field visit. An hour later, the distinguished visitor could not resist himself to ask us to show the embankment. We politely showed him that he was standing on the embankment. He had his day and hurriedly left. In general, most European visitors had similar experience.

Experiences Shared and Verified with Local NGOs

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In another place (Birnabali) in Cluster III along the Pungli river there was an eroded embankment section. Because of delayed land acquisition procedure, the project could not do the necessary repair work. How ever during this flood, at the request coming from a gathering of 2000 or more, the project repaired that section within three days. Land and earth were arranged by the people.

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