

# Investment in Health is Good Economics

by Dr M Zakir Hussain

*As the world stands on the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is the quality of human capital that will determine a nation's ability to grasp and hold progress and prosperity. Investment in health is an investment in human capital. It makes more economic sense than ever before.*

INVESTMENT in health makes good economic sense. Health is at the core of human capital formation; it improves economic productivity and fosters creative enterprise, nurtures innovation at work place, and enhances quality of life. Economic development is both an outcome and a precondition for improved living standards.

Development experience confirms that human capital is an essential, if not the key, prerequisite for sustained socio-economic progress of nations. As the world stands on the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is the quality of human capital that will determine a nation's ability to grasp and hold progress and prosperity. Investment in health is an investment in human capital. It makes more economic sense than ever before.

## Yet Health Gets Lower Priority

Ironically, in many countries wrestling with economic development in a highly competitive global market place, health does not still get the priority it deserves. The historic Alma Ata Conference of 1978 adopted primary health care as the key approach to health for all. It also suggested that at least 5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product should be invested by countries in health.

Twenty years later, few countries are spending 5 per cent or more; most countries spend no more than 2 to 3 per cent, some even as little as 1 per cent. Worse still, even that low investment is not spent on primary health care approach. Much of it is still spent in urban curative care and much less in population based public health programmes.

Net health outcomes are not considered and allocative efficiency remains poor. Health for all is a distant dream in most countries; disparities in health status of people between countries and within countries continue to widen world-wide. This in spite of availability of affordable health technologies to make a significant improvement in population health in rich and poor countries alike.

## Enough Evidence But Little Action

There is enough evidence to show that primary health care is cost-effective, equitable, and affordable; that relatively modest investments in public health programmes for disease prevention and control, nutrition, sanitation, and environmental health improvements can produce large health benefits for the greatest numbers. There is enough evidence that malaria, tuberculosis, malnutrition and deficiency diseases cause low productivity in agriculture, industry, loss of millions of working hours, not to mention many premature deaths and severe disabilities.

Child malnutrition in particular causes stunting, learning disabilities, even mental retardation. These no doubt represent a huge economic loss even if it has not always been quantified in money terms. Yet the fact remains that chronic ill health and deficiency disorders in large segment of the child and adolescent population literally cripple the potential for growth and prosperity of future generations.

This is not a doomsday prediction; there are ways to reverse the present situation and trend if only right choices and adequate investments are made today. Long term evidence based strategic plans are needed; more than plans, however, are needed revised investment patterns

## with strong political will. More Money Yes, But in Right Places

All available evidence call for a significantly higher investment in health. Undoubtedly so and sooner than later. Recently announced national health policy of Bangladesh holds promise for action. By definition, however, any policy is tested more by implementation than by intention.

But more money for health is not necessarily more health for many. As it is, there is a persistent pattern of spending more on hospitals and drugs, on equipment and machines, on expensively trained personnel without sufficient evidence of corresponding health outcomes. The truth is that high technology and expensive medical care does not always result in high health outcome even for the individual let alone for a whole population.

In some industrialized affluent countries, notably in the USA, high health care expenditure (as much as over 14 per cent of GNP) did not necessarily result in equitable or effective health care for the population as a whole. But there is evidence of health status indicators of former Soviet bloc countries falling steeply after withdrawal of the State from essential public health functions and primary care services with nothing else to fill this gap. There is evidence too, how even in poor countries (and States), for example, Sri Lanka, Kerala (in India), Thailand, and Myanmar fairly modest health investments used judiciously achieved satisfactory if not remarkable gains in health indicators like infant, child, and maternal mortality, nutrition, life expectancy etc.

Historically, good nutrition, sanitation, education, with risk

ing standard of living following the industrial revolution in the West resulted in better population health and higher productivity. That achievement was not as much due to more hospitals and clinics.

The evidence is there before us; the choice too is there for us to make. By making the right choice, more investment in health care will give very high returns. But simply more investment without the right decisions will not do the job.

## Time to Treat Health as a Development Sector

Health situation and trends of Bangladesh and all available evidence suggest clearly that without a significant improvement in population health, the foundation of social and economic progress will remain weak if not be even further weakened. Too large a segment of the population is afflicted with poor health conditions that reduce their present productivity and forfeit their future potential.

It is time to treat health as a development sector; allocate at least a minimum 5 per cent of gross national product to health, improve allocative efficiency using economic analysis and population health outcome indicators. It will be extremely useful to concurrently secure reasonable investment in other human development sectors such as education (especially female education), food supply and nutrition, environment, and community development.

Equity in health investment is a cardinal principle as it not only gives equitable access but also brings health security to all. Health is probably the core of human capital of a nation. Investment in health is good economics. Do we need more evidence?

# Planting New Ideas in Traditional Medicine

Yildiz Aumeeruddy-Thomas writes from Dolpo, Nepal

*In the remote pastures of the high Himalayas, medicinal plants grow in abundance. But their survival may be threatened if harvesting is not regulated and the healthcare needs of local communities are not properly met.*

TUCKED away in the Himalayan range of Dhaulagiri, the high pastures of Dolpo near the Tibetan border are home to many of the most popular aromatic and medicinal plants used by practitioners of traditional medicine. But their very popularity means that such plants are now under threat, despite the remoteness of the area and the restrictions in the 3,555 km<sup>2</sup> Shey Phoksundo National Park that limit their collection.

The fact is that the park has insufficient manpower to enforce the rules on collecting medicinal plants, while the building of two airstrips around Dolpo has allowed greater access to the region for plant traders, whose business is mainly with India. In addition, the park itself is home to some 3,000 people whose health depends almost entirely on amchis, practitioners of ancient Tibetan medicine. Six thousand more people live in proposed buffer zones on the southern boundary of the park and they are mostly Hindus, relying on what is known as Ayurvedic medicine.

Given this significant local demand, the Nepal office of WWF-World Wide Fund For Nature and the Nepal Department of National Parks and

Wildlife Conservation are running a joint project to determine how the people of Dolpo value and use plants, particularly medicinal ones. The programme is part of the People and Plants initiative — organized by WWF, UNESCO and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, in the United Kingdom — to study the role of plants in traditional societies with a view to conserving threatened species.

Two local amchis are taking part in the project at Dolpo, with a view to encouraging people to reach agreements with the national park authorities on the sustainable management of plant resources. The scheme began with a survey that recorded 279 species of economically valuable plants in the area, of which no fewer than 205 are used in traditional medicine. Twelve types were identified as being commonly traded, with official records showing that 50 tons are exported annually — although that is almost certainly underestimating the trade.

Already, some of the slopes around the park show signs of over-harvesting and commercial collection inside the park itself is increasing. Even the abundant jatamansi (*Nardostachys grandiflora*) plant could eventually disappear

because of its high market value, its slow growth, and the destructive method of its collection, which involves pulling up the whole plant.

The People and Plants project is beginning a number of small field experiments this year to determine the effects of various levels of harvesting on selected species of medicinal plants. It is hoped that general guidelines on intensity of harvesting and other management techniques will emerge. But it is clear that the plants cannot be managed effectively without full cooperation from local communities, which have extensive knowledge of their distribution, abundance, ecology and methods of harvesting.

One possible solution is for the park authorities to confer certain rights and responsibilities relating to medicinal plants on particular communities, so that people see it as being in their own interest to conserve them. It may be possible to prevent destructive harvesting by outsiders if it is clearly understood that the livelihoods of local people will be safeguarded and these valuable resources will be protected.

At the same time, studies are under way to improve the health of the Dolpo communities. While the amchis will con-

tinue to play a dominant role, they face many difficulties. Many lack training, access to medical texts and the ability to obtain medicinal materials not available locally. Most serious, perhaps, is the fact that traditionally amchis are not paid for their services, which leaves them with severe problems in supporting themselves financially.

So the project aims to provide assistance by drawing up a blueprint for the sustainable management of medicinal plants and by supporting the work of the local amchis, all 45 of whom attended a planning meeting in the area in June. Among other things, it has been suggested that the amchis should provide village women with some medical knowledge so that they can play a role in the primary health care of their own families.

Conservation of threatened plant species may be the primary aim of the project, but it is clear that little can be achieved unless the medical needs of local communities are also given priority.

— WWF Features  
The writer is Regional Coordinator of the People and Plants Asia Himalayas Programme based in Montpellier, France.

# It's Not All Swotting at Schwaebisch-Hall

by Fayza Haq

*"I'm studying in Germany because the Goethe-Instituts in my country are too far from my home. I find that studying languages is better in whichever country it is spoken in because you get working hour 100 per cent immersion."*

SCHWABEBISCH Hall is a sleepy town in Southern Germany with cobbled stones on pavements, winding undulating streets, smoke coming through the chimneys, picturesque solid geometrical patterns on wood walls, churches, cafes and winding streams. The place plays host to Indians, Chinese, Turks, French, Americans and Japanese to learn German for their work and also as a hobby.

When I met Dr Eswara Prasad, an amicable and helpful 35-year-old, research fellow of Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation at Stuttgart, he was speaking Telegu like the beating of drums to his wife in Hyderabad on the phone. As there is no Goethe Institution his native city, he has decided to study here for two months, before commencing with his research in metallurgy, related to aircrafts. Telegu is his mother tongue. He knows Hindi and English besides that.

"I spend 50 DM a week calling my wife. I call India, especially my wife Swarna Latha, an accountant by profession, who will be joining me here in a month's time, with my five year old daughter, Shanti Ravi. If it were not so, expensive, I would have called more often. I send regular e-mails — three to four a week in which two are for my family, and two are for my friends and colleagues. My letters are in English, whereas I speak to my wife and family in Telegu. I am now concerned about my research project that I will be undertaking at Stuttgart and have no more time for my relatives or friends."

Dr Prasad says that he does not miss his country's food, as he eats vegetarian curry and daal with rice with three Indian friends. However, he says, "I would like to know about the German food and climate. I have reserved my tours of the country till my family joins me." He has been to Rothenberg and Stuttgart so far.

As for his opinion of the unification of Germany, Dr Prasad says, "It is good and I fully support it. The greatest advantage is the lowering of the cost of living because of the cheaper man hours of earlier East Germany and superior technical advancement of erstwhile West Germany. This makes it an ideal situation for unification."

His impression of Germany is that they are a highly cooperative and "professional" in their approach. He feels that they are very hard-working and always aim at perfection.

Dr Prasad, who wakes up at 6.30 am and sleeps at 10.30 pm misses his daily morning newspaper. However, he watches BBC regularly at his Indian friends' place. He goes for walks and listens to Indian music before sleeping.

He has not spent time in buying goods as they are cheaper in India. However, he will buy quality items like a camera, a video camera, microwave oven etc.

Dr Qian Wei, 35, an Associate Professor from Nanking, People's Republic of China, is here to study German as he has finished his research project in Electrical Engineering in Fach Hochschule Esslingen before schedule. He deals with visual instruments to test electrical motors.

His wife Zhao Lei is also a lecturer in his university and they have a seven year old son Qian Yili.

Qian says, "I e-mail a full, page every second day. I have no time for letters as the course is too intensive and e-mails are

more convenient. I write about my progress in Goethe Institut; whether I am getting along well with my studies, my friends and my walks. I discuss the visa application of my family for coming to Germany for three months. Moreover, my students in China are doing, their M A dissertation and I deal with this too. One of them will go to work in a German company so I average these formalities too. It is a technical exchange programme. So was mine though mine was at a professor's level. The company will have joint research programme with me in my department in China. I keep in touch with my school friends too."

Qian adds, "After my two months at Goethe Institut Schwaebisch Hall, I will travel with my family to Berlin, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Munich etc. and to Vienna and Paris."

He misses his native food although he makes Chinese food himself by mixing noodles, eggs, meat and vegetables. Qian says, "I eat whatever I can prepare quickly so that my time is spared for my studies. Of course it is not like home cooking."

Frankfurt and had a so-so time but I'm not used to big cities. I like the countryside in Schwaebisch Hall much better and I have a TV in my room and I listen to the radio."

"I study 2-3 hours a day and enjoy walking, TV and reading. The teachers in Schwaebisch Hall are very good, but I think that they should teach something about the literature, music, painting and history of Germany too, if possible. I don't do much shopping here as I can get almost everything I want in the US and there it's much cheaper. I miss my steaks as most people here eat pork or lamb. I enjoyed the GI breakfast here with cheese and chocolate and chestnut spread on butter," Robert continues.

Talking about the unification of Germany, Robert comments, "I'm in favour of the unification, but I think they paid too much exchanging marks for East German currency, and that there is too much of socialism (i.e. making of jobs), wherever there is no free enterprise."

He adds, "I know there is racial problem but not in Schwaebisch Hall. I've heard about trouble in East Berlin with Neo-Nazis who set fire to places where Turks lived. There is a lot of racism too in USA, and this is to further their own causes. (Louis Farakhan for instance is a known trouble shooter in US). Racism in my country bothers me though some people say it doesn't exist. I believe the mark was marked down during the unification. The unemployment of East Germany was twice that of West Germany, I believe, and this has got worse. Unification is good for world peace and for the East Germans but not for the West Germans."

Robert Falls, aged 64, with three grown up daughters, misses his family and two dogs too. Scooter and Maggie. He is a retired banker who worked with banks with trouble. He wrote about 50 postcards the first week he was here. He telephones home almost everyday and talks to his wife and children. He talks about family matters, friends and sometimes gets nostalgic about his boyhood days on the phone and in his postcards.

Robert, although in the first grade, has had four years of German in school and college. This is more of a hobby rather than a serious study. He has travelled to Stuttgart, Rottenberg, and Bamberg, and hopes to travel every weekend apart from touring Germany with his wife when the course is over.

As it was equally expensive to study in Atalanta, the nearest place near Columbia, Robert decided to come to Schwaebisch Hall. For him German is a fun thing as he carries his school and college books along with the Goethe Institut books cyclo-styled sheets.

Xinchang Zhang, 28, who has a master's degree in Nature Science, has studied German for six months before beginning the grade I in Schwaebisch Hall. He hopes to study in the University of Wurzburg in September. He speaks Chinese, English and a little German.

Xinchang sends e-mails often enough, telephones his wife and parents once a week and sends home a letter a fortnight. He misses Chinese food and the work environment at home. However, he enjoys the beautiful scenery in Schwaebisch Hall, the fresh air and the unpopulated natural surroundings. He visited a museum of houses near Schwaebisch Hall and although it was not an old one, the spirit of preserving the heritage left a deep impression on his mind.

He hopes to stay in Germany for two years and can now speak a little German, where as he could not at all, when he first came here.

Babongile Benedicte Dube, 28, a teacher from South Africa knows Afrikaans, apart from Zulu, Xhosa and Southern Sotho, and this helps her comprehension of German at Schwaebisch Hall. The place of study was chosen for her by the Lutheran Church in her country. She plans to stay here for four months of study before proceeding to Heilbronn, where her husband has a job with the church for five years.

Babongile wears bright attractive clothes, smiles often, hums sometimes and appears perfectly contented with her husband and her six year-old daughter. Of course, she says, "I miss my family, colleagues and friends but I've family here and so it is not all that stressful. I came here in May, and have written home many letters telling them about Schwaebisch Hall, the people, the language and the food."

She adds, "I miss my old environment very much. The food is not very different but there are many food items that I cannot find here and this makes me homesick at times. I plan to do a lot of shopping, specially

clothes and shoes because I find them cheaper here than in South Africa. I spend a lot of time in household chores like cooking supper and ironing so I do not have much time left for homework. The first day I felt lost at first in class, but at the end of the day, I could construct a few sentences. I spend my spare time in watching TV 'indoors'."

Babongile continues, "I've been to Heilbronn and Crailsheim and enjoyed myself there. I hope to tour Germany in the year's to come."

Yosuke Kawakami, 28 from Japan, is learning German because his company, which deals with cars and bicycles, wants him to work in Germany on their behalf. "I write home approximately 3 times a week and my wife writes back in the same frequency. I wish I had a PC to send e-mails. I miss home very much and I always look forward to hearing from Japan. I miss my country's food too. As for the climate, it is better than in Japan."

Yosuke continues, "I hope to go to Dusseldorf and work there. So far I've only been to Stuttgart and Rothenberg. I'll travel more frequently when I've stayed here a bit longer. I hope to do more shopping when I'm stationed in Dusseldorf."

He adds, "From this course I'm not only learning Deutsche but also meeting many interesting people."

As regards the unification of Germany, Yosuke comments, "It had been separated by politicians — it is perfectly natural to have the two parts united."

As for racial conflicts in Germany, Yosuke believes, "I think poverty and unemployment are the biggest causes of racial tension."

He finds, the people in Schwaebisch Hall friendly and co-operative. "This could be because this is a small town," he comments.

The people at Goethe Institut at Schwaebisch Hall appear to be a contented lot and are friendly with one another despite their different racial backgrounds. The weather is pleasant although it sometimes gets unusually warm in the afternoons. It rains too with thunder and lightning at night at times. The people in the streets, specially the old ladies, are friendly and helpful. The prices of goods are high compared to those in Bangladesh but window-shopping here can be fun. I myself have made a few friends here and I shall miss them some when I leave Deutschland."

This piece was written when the writer was in Germany few weeks ago.



Xinchang Zhang, Robert Falls, Dr Eswara Prasad and Babongile Benedicte Dube (from left to right).

# Anti-narcotics Fighters Bring in the Tanks

WHEN Zarzameen saw the blue uniforms of the militia as they leapt down from their jeeps, he knew he was ruined.

They had come to destroy his crops, and thus, effectively, condemn him and his family to poverty for years to come.

Like many of his neighbours in the villages that line the northern Nihag valley in Dir province, high in Pakistan's Hindu Kush mountains, Zarzameen was growing opium poppies. Earlier this year, under massive pressure from Western governments and the United Nations, the Pakistan government launched a campaign to eradicate the crop.

In a two-month drive using tanks and artillery against the rugged Pathans who farm the crop, government forces destroyed thousands of acres of opium, the primary ingredient of heroin.

For the West and the UN, the operation was seen as a great success. Pino Arlacchi, director-general of the UN Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP), even wrote to Prime Minister

Thousands of acres have been destroyed in a military campaign against poppy farmers in Pakistan. One unintended effect, reports Gemini News Service, has been to speed up the drift to the towns.

Jason Burke writes from Dir, Pakistan

Nawaz Sharif to "personally commend" him.

But Zarzameen and thousands of other opium farmers in the North West Frontier have been left with nothing. Now, there months after the destruction of their livelihoods, the effects of the campaign are beginning to bite. Many are leaving their farms and heading to local towns or overcrowded cities hundreds of miles away in search of work. Urban drift is an unforeseen side-effect of the campaign.

"We have to eat," explains Zarzameen, who has six children and needs thousands of rupees worth of medicine each month to treat his chronic arthritis. "It will take months and months for another crop to grow and I can't wait that long. I'll have to find some work somewhere."

Zarzameen says his crop, worth 6,000 rupees, took six months to grow, with the help of back-breaking effort to keep the plot free of weeds and disease. Like many farmers, Zarzameen had borrowed heavily from opium dealers confident that he would be able to repay the loans when the harvest came in.

In other tribal areas, such as the Mohmand agency to the south of Dir on the hot plains north of the frontier city of Peshawar, farmers say they, too, are planning to head to the city to find work to pay off their debts.

"We had taken loans and bought essential items with them. How can we pay them back now?" asks Jan Badshah, from Kotratrap village in the Anbar Valley. Many of his neighbours have already left for

Peshawar, Lahore or Karachi. The UN and the Pakistani government have been trying to use a carrot-and-stick approach, with mixed results. The stick is easy to administer: when people from the Anbar valley turned their guns on the militia forces trying to eradicate their poppies earlier this year, they were shelled by artillery and at least one of them was killed.

But the carrot is more complex. In Dir, UNDCP has spent millions of dollars on the construction of roads and bridges, irrigation and electrification schemes, schools and hospitals. But these developments have not been enough to stop people planting the poppy crop. Employment-generation schemes have been equally unsuccessful.

Development in the Anbar valley has been even slower. Projects have been planned but the money allocated for implementation is inadequate. Washington is funding a crop substitution programme and some infrastructural development, but the Pakistan government has found only Rs 9.2 million for its own schemes. Malik Izzat Khan, an elder from Kotratrap, says that faster development is the only way to keep people on the land, halt the rush to the cities and stop poppy cultivation.

The government should compensate farmers whose poppy crops have been destroyed and help farmers grow substitute crops," he recommends.

Crop-substitution programmes, however, have had mixed results. Last year, many farmers in Dir province were persuaded by UNDCP to plant onions instead of poppies. Unfortunately, the price of onions slumped and much of the crop remained unsold. With no storage facilities, it rotted.

The writer is a freelance journalist based in Pakistan.

TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera



HOW THOUGHTFUL BREAKFAST IN BED.



JAMES BOND



PRESENTLY, THE



WHAT IS IT, BOY? WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND?

