

PROBLEMS OF CHILD AND YOUTH WELFARE

On the initiative of the Executive Board of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), a conference was held at Bellagio, Italy, in April 1964. The aim of those taking part—pediatricians, economists, leaders of social service organizations, representatives of international institutions—was to study ways and means of including the needs of children and youths in the economic and social planning of developing countries.

This was one of a number of measures decided on by the Board to promote appropriate consideration of children and youth in national development programmes. Established late in 1946 as an agency of emergency relief to children in war-ravaged countries, UNICEF was instructed, in 1950, by the United Nations General Assembly to give assistance in relation to the long-range problems of children in the developing countries. In the execution of this task it became clear that it was not sufficient to protect the child from death or illness, but that it was advisable also to assist countries "to prepare him for life." For many years, the Fund has been trying to assist projects that countries would develop and carry on from their own resources, rather than special projects introduced from the outside. The increasing attention to planning in nearly all developing countries means that the kinds of projects aided will only be fully effective as they become part of each country's own development effort.

The following were some of the conclusions which were adopted by the Bellagio meeting and recently published. They show a similar concern with certain matters as was expressed during the World Conference of Educators, held in Lausanne in 1963, under the auspices of the Red Cross on the occasion of its centenary.

Planning approaches

5. Whatever the degree of development of the country, periodic and systematic assessments of the situation of children and youth

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are urged, in order to determine the most important problems, to evaluate the results of previous actions, and to select logical points on which to concentrate.

6. Planning for the interests of children and youth would be aided by the expression and stimulation of public awareness through a national group composed of governmental as well as non-governmental leaders, who would serve to highlight the needs of children and youth and help in the formulation of a national policy for them. A committee of the legislative body should be formed to sustain governmental interest in this field. The organization of planning for the needs of children and youth should be co-ordinated at an inter-ministerial level and in the planning commission (or other corresponding central planning mechanism). Other means, more appropriate to the socio-economic structures of various countries, might be used to achieve the same objectives.

7. The final goals of a policy for children and youth can often best be expressed in terms of social values rather than in quantitative terms. It is, therefore, sometimes necessary to quantify means rather than ends. The planner should be supplied with as much quantitative data as possible, however preliminary and approximate they may be. Insufficient effort has thus far been devoted to locating and preparing relevant data in the quantitative terms most useful to planners. Efforts to remedy this situation should be encouraged. Education and vocational training have been recognized as investments. Similar recognition should be accorded to health, nutrition, and social welfare services.

8. Insufficient quantitative data need not preclude a programme of action. Among the guiding criteria for such action may be: the correction of flagrant distortions or inequities, such as imbalances in the development of the educational system or unusually high rates of nutrition disorders in certain geographical areas within the country; the removal of bottle-necks and preparation required for programmes in future development plans; feasibility rather than optimisation when few choices are possible; comparison with standards in other countries of similar economic position; the choice of simpler rather than more complex programmes;

the economy, or better returns, to be obtained from developing complementary services ; the choice of low-cost programmes based on local resources which would otherwise not be used. Where the limitation of resources requires partial goals in social sectors, priority should be given to the needs of children and youth.

**Main needs of children and youth to be considered
by the planner**

9. Indirect as well as direct means of improving the situation of children and youth should be considered. Indirect means of great importance can include the use of fiscal policy, redistribution of income, price policy directed to foods, subsidized family housing, and other economic measures designed to help children within their families, particularly those in lower-income groups.

10. Many countries are concerned with the rapid growth of their population in comparison with their rate of economic growth. Programmes, addressed to the survival and well-being of infants and young children and the improvement of family hygiene and education in family life generally, may be expected to encourage family planning.

Health, and food and nutrition

11. The leading sources of child mortality and morbidity are malnutrition, infectious diseases, and poor sanitation. The plan should give emphasis to well co-ordinated preventive services, and the progressive extension of maternal and child health services in the framework of basic health services.

12. The problem of food and nutrition is most important in the pre-school age when the requirement of protein is high, and when the damage done by malnutrition and under-nutrition can be irreversible. Special attention should be given to the production of protein-rich foods and also to ensuring their availability to children and youth. There should be co-ordination of food planning policy and of nutritional programmes ; this co-ordination could be secured either within the planning commission or at a high inter-

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ministerial level. At least health, agriculture, and education should be represented in such a policy-making body. Similarly, the training of professional personnel in these fields should include nutritional orientation. There is also a need for wide-spread diffusion of nutrition education in the population at large through home economics, community development, social work, agricultural extension and multi-purpose workers at the village and local community levels.

Education and vocational training

13. One of the functions of education is to prepare the child for a constructive life. A long-term educational development plan should take account of the goals of the general development plan, and in particular of those goals relating to population policy, civic education, manpower needs, the preparation of managerial and supervisory personnel, and nutrition and health education. Educational development plans should try to meet the needs of children and youth who have not had any schooling or who have dropped out before completing it ; literacy and other programmes outside schools for young people and adults should be extended. Pre-vocational and vocational training, including apprenticeship, should also be expanded through the use of resources in the public and industrial sectors. The planning and development of networks of both vocational training and educational facilities should be closely integrated, and related to the occupational opportunities for young people.

Urban and rural needs

14. Rapid industrialization, unless well planned, may lead to the creation of slum conditions which adversely affect the welfare of children and youth. To deal with this problem there should be co-ordinated action of health, sanitation, social welfare services, education, and training ; low-cost food for infants and pre-school children ; and low-cost housing and recreation areas.

15. A similar co-ordination is required in the case of rural children, including special attention to the provision of wholesome drinking water and proper environmental sanitation.

Social welfare services

16. Social welfare services for children and youth should not be exclusively provided for vulnerable groups. Social welfare services should become available to all children and youth, and their objectives should include improving the adaptation of the family to changing social conditions and social demands. Emphasis should thus be given to such measures as those designed to strengthen family life, to educate parents in child rearing and to help working mothers. Specific attention should be paid to prevention of emotional as well as physical deprivation. As resources permit, provision should be made to meet the needs of major vulnerable groups such as abandoned, neglected, illegitimate, delinquent, and handicapped children. In general, priority should be given to preventive rather than to remedial services, and to rehabilitation rather than to palliative assistance.

Youth employment

17. Many countries foresee a continuation of their grave problems of unemployment and under-employment of youth, even after their prospective plans have been completed, despite all measures currently being undertaken and planned for the future. It would be important to review whatever experience is available as a result of the attempts by various countries to cope with this problem, and to initiate further study and pilot projects.

Training and research

18. Training possibilities should be expanded as a priority for all those concerned with the welfare of children and youth, with particular attention to the preparation of auxiliary workers, and on-the-job training.

19. There is need for more research, especially applied research, in several fields bearing directly on aspects of planning concerning children and youth. Research programmes, both inside and outside the family of the United Nations, could contribute greatly to

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resolving some of the pressing problems of services and planning related to children and youth.

Information for planners and specialists in the problems of children and youth

20. Those to be concerned with the planning of the social aspects of development, whether at the level of the general plan or in ministries, should be given basic knowledge of the specific problems facing children and youth in the developing countries. There is a parallel need for those in ministries who are to be concerned with the planning aspects of services bearing on children and youth, to be given some basic knowledge of planning methods. For both these purposes, use may be made of existing training institutions and programmes, both inside and outside the United Nations family.

International action

21. The needs of the children and youth of the developing countries are such that external assistance continues to be required on a much larger scale than at present. All sources of aid, bilateral as well as international, are encouraged by the conference to consider how their programmes might take fuller account of the needs of children and youth.

23. It is recommended that UNICEF, in co-operation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and with the specialized agencies concerned, should explore the possibility of a thoroughly prepared World Conference on the place of children and youth in economic and social development. It is similarly recommended that UNICEF should explore, together with UNESCO and the other international agencies concerned, all possible measures to promote international understanding among children and youth.
