

CF/HST/1985/34/Annex 01/08



UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
FONDS DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENFANCE

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

E/ICEF/Misc.305
August 1978

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

CF/HST/1985-034/Anx.01/08

The UNICEF experience from programmes for children
- and needs for the future

A paper prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund on the occasion of receiving the René Sand Award from the International Council on Social Welfare, at its nineteenth international conference, Jerusalem. 23 August 1978.

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The great honor which UNICEF feels - as an organization, as a member of the United Nations family and as a global community of concerned individuals - in receiving the 1978 René Sand Award is a humbling but invigorating experience. That any organization should be so recognized while the needs of the world's children are still so grossly underserved can only increase the motivation of us all in trying to meet those needs.

It would be a less than human reaction, however, not to acknowledge a genuine pride in this recognition of UNICEF's work. But such an emotion can only be fleeting in the face of the magnitude and extent of the problems which still remain to be solved if the lives of millions upon millions of children are ever to be freed from the deadly effects of poverty, of injustice, of ill-health, of ignorance and, perhaps worst of all, of our inadequate concern for fellow human beings.

It is not empty rhetoric to remind ourselves that, even as we discuss their welfare, so many of the world's children continue to suffer, and die, in conditions which we know in our hearts should not prevail: if we accept the idea of a global community, then we should automatically accept global responsibilities. The world has the resources, human, physical and intellectual, to eradicate the blight which threatens the light of life among a majority of the world's children: what we often lack in considerable measure is the will to effect necessary changes and to learn from others.

We think that the memory of René Sand would best be served if this paper, prepared in his honor, attempted to share in a modest way some of the experiences of three decades of co-operation by UNICEF with countries in programs to improve the situation of their children. Such an exercise is particularly appropriate in this the fiftieth anniversary year of the International Council on Social Welfare, and particularly so given the theme of this 19th ICSW International Conference and its emphasis on human well-being, on challenges for the 1980's and on social, economic and political action.

This opportunity of sharing experiences with such a distinguished international audience is also especially welcome as UNICEF itself is currently deeply involved with a special year in its own history - the International Year of the Child, which begins officially in January 1979, and during which time all countries are being encouraged to prepare and commit themselves to major, long-term improvements in the well-being of their children.

This paper will, therefore, discuss some major areas which we think are of mutual concern, with emphasis on the well-being of children.

The emerging needs of children's welfare

The need for modesty in an exercise such as this is paramount: what has been learned is still far out-weighed by what we have yet to learn. The very creation of UNICEF, however, in late 1946 following the devastations of the 1939-45 War, was an indication that humankind did possess the will and the capacity to progress on an international scale: for the first time in human history there was international recognition that children - and the state of childhood - were both valuable and vulnerable in a rapidly changing world, and that specific efforts were needed to guarantee their welfare - to help countries care for a category of human beings almost universally recognized as "special". Thus, the founding of UNICEF reflected the conception of the need for human values to predominate. It is only an acknowledgment of human imperfection, however, to recognize that this need still must be restated.

The need for human values

If there is one outstanding lesson from the last three decades, it is that social and economic development can never fully succeed unless human beings are recognized as both the ends and the means of that development.

It is therefore encouraging to see that there is an increasing acceptance that economic development needs a more human focus, based on a recognition that mankind does not survive by economics alone, and that economics alone can solve only part of the problems of the human condition. While there have been notable economic advances over the last three decades, we have also seen that these advances benefited only a minority of the world's peoples and that, much worse, the condition of the majority of people improved little, if at all. And for the world's poorest people - many millions of them children - their lives were blighted, indeed ended, by poverty while the aggregate levels of world prosperity reached new heights.

This changing focus of development is inherent in the international community's recent acknowledgement of the need for a New International Economic Order - with its emphases on economic redistribution as well as economic growth, on the need for social justice at all levels - international, national and local - and on the idea that interdependence rather than competition is a better strategy for human survival. Above all, the new wave of development thinking recognizes that human values should be paramount, and that the most tragic waste of resources is the waste of human resources.

In this context, the evolution of the developmental aspects of welfare and their contribution to self-reliance can play an important role - the old idea of welfare as a luxury to be afforded only when certain levels of material prosperity have been achieved, are replaced by a recognition that

adequate standards of well-being are not only a pre-condition and continuing requirement of societies but also a basic human right. At their most positive, the new ideas of welfare set their sights on realizing the full human potential - through human involvement, education, individual and community participation in social and economic development - for the common good.

In the field of children's welfare, it is also possible to see a related emerging concern for meeting the full human range of children's needs: the utilitarian concept of children (as future members of the labor force, as economic assets, et cetera) is being succeeded by a richer concept of children which emphasizes humanistic as well as national development objectives. This new concept regards children not only as human beings with rights to a full adult life but also with rights to develop the particular human potentialities available to all of us in the years of childhood.

Thus, the need for activities which improve human well-being can be seen as emerging from a position in which welfare is often a secondary priority, into being at least an equal partner with economic and political factors in development, and perhaps leading to a future where it will be a recognized human right.

For those of us concerned with human well-being this can only be an encouraging trend, and one which deserves the highest consideration. Philosophically, the causes of this trend may lead to some cautious optimism that human values are now being accorded higher priority. But in the everyday world we must also acknowledge that such values can be clouded by other more pragmatic considerations encountered in socio-economic-political processes. It is, therefore, necessary to consider strategy.

The need for strategy

The evolution of UNICEF's outlook on a strategy for programs benefiting children has been based on experience in many countries in many years, and has involved countless organizations and individuals. It can be seen, therefore, as an international, interdisciplinary endeavor. It represents a consensus which has emerged on general guidelines, within which there can be considerable differences of national emphasis and priorities.

Very broadly, this strategy for UNICEF, in its co-operation with efforts of countries to improve the situation of their children, has evolved through four stages. The first was the concentration on meeting emerging post-war needs of children, mainly in Europe. The second, which took place throughout the 1950's, shifted attention to the longer-term needs of children in developing countries. The third stage was the change from a series of single projects in a country in sectoral fields (health, nutrition, education, social welfare) to emphasizing the delivery of services at the community level so that they complement and reinforce each other, and which would fit

more logically and effectively into overall national development efforts. The fourth stage, which recognized that the "reach" of programs needed dramatic improvement, has been the development of a "basic services" approach in which there is a concentration on the mobilization of the interest and the involvement of people at the community level.

Related to this has been the need to improve the organizational means of meeting children's needs; the need to recognize the linkages between various services to children; and the need for innovative approaches and "starter" activities which help prepare a country's base for expanding services for children. This has required the development of a comprehensive view of children, both in terms of their vulnerability and their potential as individuals and as future participants in social and economic change.

It is essential to recognize that the problems of children cannot be solved in isolation from services benefiting their family and community. The availability of water, food and health services, for example, interact on the well-being of children, and they are all affected by education and the integration of women in the process of development. The latter, in turn, can improve nutrition, which because of its impact on health care reduce the load on health services.

This programming perception requires flexibility and a high awareness of a "broad front" for action. To encourage this, UNICEF follows a number of guidelines in its co-operation with developing countries relating to a "country approach" to programming, the building of national capacities, advocacy on behalf of children, and the application of a "basic services" approach.

A "country approach" to programming

In no country can the indirect consequences of economic development alone be relied on for meeting children's needs. Some of these consequences may even be unfavorable unless precautions are taken. Specific services and activities benefiting children are required. Experience has shown that these services are most effective when they are part of a systematic approach towards improving the situation of children within the framework of a national policy for children, which in turn forms part of the country's development effort. So far as UNICEF is concerned, there is no centrally decided standard pattern of co-operation to help further this approach. UNICEF is ready to co-operate with each developing country regarding the priority problems of the country's children about which action is possible.

The building of national capacity

The success of longer-term efforts to meet children's continuing needs is now recognized as being critically dependent on improving national

capacities of developing countries to be self-reliant in the whole range of child related services. This includes:

- strengthening the organizational capacity of ministries and governmental units and the capacities of their personnel;
- orientation and training of staff in planning and delivering services;
- the strengthening and greater use of national technical institutions and resources;
- promotion of "appropriate" simple technology that help improve the nutrition, health and well-being of children and their families;
- increasing the local production of supplies and equipment for services benefiting children;
- encouraging local production and preservation of nutritious foods;
- improving local supply logistics and delivery management;
- strengthening national evaluative activity and procedures;
- facilitating the exchange of relevant experience between developing countries.

Of key importance is an emphasis on the training of those involved in the delivery of services - ranging from volunteer village-level workers to professional staff involved in planning, directing and supervising services. In this, increasing attention is now being directed to the content of the training, including its relevance to local needs, to its imparting of attitudes as well as skills, to the training of community leaders and to developing managerial skills in middle-level staff.

Advocacy on behalf of children

Advances in services to children have not prevented many millions of children suffering from what has been called in recent years the "quiet emergency". There is considerable need to raise the level of consciousness of children's needs, both at local and national levels and throughout the international community. Such advocacy is intended to both reflect and strengthen demands for economic and social justice for the impoverished majority of the world's people.

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As part of its advocacy role UNICEF attempts to focus attention on the critical needs of children and the opportunities to meet them, and tries to secure a larger priority in national and international development efforts for services benefiting children. This includes the greater deployment of resources for these services, both by the developing countries themselves and by outside aid through the United Nations system, bilateral aid and non-governmental services. In the countries with which it co-operates on programs, UNICEF seeks to promote adequate provision for children in national development plans, or development plans for particular areas or zones within a country.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of policies and programs to benefit the majority of children in a country, it is necessary for advocacy to focus attention on the needs of those who are often especially difficult to "reach" through overall programs, for instance, children in underserved rural and urban areas or in certain ethnic or geographic groups.

Advocacy should include a concern not only with the physical needs of children but also with their intellectual and emotional needs and their preparation to function in society. Particular attention should be given to the needs of young children because they are the most vulnerable, with a recognition that progress at that stage in a child's life can be undone by neglect in another.

The basic services approach

In partnership with other agencies of the United Nations system, and on the basis of local experiences in many developing countries, UNICEF is now trying to accelerate the extension of services benefiting children through what is called the basic services approach.

It is clear that in many countries it is not possible by extending the present pattern of services to reach, in the foreseeable future, the very large numbers of children now poorly or not at all served. In order to bridge this gap, the basic services approach provides for:

(a) The provision of simple services at the level of villages and urban communities in the fields of maternal and child health, safe water supply, better nutrition and local food production, responsible parenthood, literacy, elementary education and the advancement of women. It is not essential that all these services be started simultaneously in a given area, but it is important that they all be established as soon as possible in order to gain the advantages of their mutually supporting and reinforcing nature;

(b) A main emphasis on involvement and active participation of the people of the communities, especially through the use of responsible volunteers or part-time workers who can be trained for specific duties;

(c) The orientation of the relevant national and district governmental structure to direct and support this approach, using, for example, many more para-professional workers as part of the support system for the community workers, allowing the professional workers to devote more time to direction, supervision, training and related activities.

Within the basic services concept, the development of community-based, self-help primary health care systems is currently the focus of much attention. Primary health care involves an extensive use of community workers to carry out front-line curative, preventive and promotive tasks. Community involvement in planning, supporting, staffing and managing the community's health services is an essential element. Primary health care workers are selected by the community and trained to diagnose and treat normal ailments by using simplified medical technology. The complex cases are referred to health centers and hospitals. Such an emphasis is in stark contrast to today's reality in developing countries where only about 20 percent of the population have access to health services, and where, moreover, such services are concentrated in urban areas and absorb four-fifths of all public sector expenditure on health.

The urban/hospital approach to health care has been largely influenced by the adoption of western-style health policies in situations to which they are not suited or relevant. The development of primary health care systems, as part of a basic services approach, thus offers a vital opportunity to effect the drastic changes necessary in health policy if even minimal improvements in health services are to reach the vast majority of people presently totally unserved.

The increasing dissatisfaction now being expressed in even the richest countries about health care systems which concentrate on the needs of urban and high-income groups also points to a significance for primary health care which is in no way restricted to developing countries.

It is hoped that an international conference on primary health care held in Alma Ata U.S.S.R. in September 1978, jointly sponsored by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, will lead to stronger governmental and international commitments for primary health care.

The policy guidelines which have emerged during the evolution of the basic services strategy for children are, of course, applicable to a wide range of developmental activity. Mention must be made, however, of certain pragmatic advantages which often emerge from programs focused specifically on children's needs. These include the value of children's programs as a focus for multi-sectoral action, the motivational effects of considering children as today's investment in a better tomorrow, and the essentially apolitical "constituency" of children which is often insulated from the political upheavals which can severely affect more sectoral and "adult" developmental activity.

It would be easy to overstate such advantages and the present situation of children around the world quickly belies them. But, as we turn to the future, we must acknowledge that, in the struggle to secure scarce resources and in mobilizing popular participation, a mandate for children can be a valuable asset.

A look to the future

The dark shadows from our imperfect past can, fortunately, be lightened by our hopes for the future - if not our own future, then our children's. But we live in a world where the future of millions of children threatens to be as dark as the past, unless we can mobilize our resources and ourselves to improving their future. Experience cautions against excessive optimism, and it is with due temerity that we suggest three possible areas of activity which may yield pragmatic benefit to the world's children: (1) improvements in our concept of children - and of childhood; (2) a review of the role of children's welfare services; and (3) improvements in our commitments to children.

Towards a better concept of children

Childhood as a social issue has only emerged in the last century. Even within the period of recorded human history this is a very brief span of time in which to acquire a sufficient body of knowledge about children - and the literature of childhood bears witness to our levels of ignorance. In recent years, however, childhood has attracted an increasing volume of scholarly attention, the results of which are both invaluable additions to our knowledge and an indication of how much yet remains to be done.

We must also recognize that there can never be a single universal conception of the child; this would be a denial of the value we place in human and cultural diversity. Our views of childhood will always be conditioned by the societies in which we live, by religion, by socio-economical class and by rural-urban differences. Nevertheless, the emerging historical studies of childhood demonstrate very real value in understanding how different societies and groups view their children: The purpose of such study is understanding diversity, not the furtherance of universality.

Such a view was presented in a paper to the ICSW conference in Helsinki in 1968 by Herman Stein, who is a long-time consultant to UNICEF. Having pointed out that the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child could not have been promulgated in any other century than this one, he stated that even the conception inherent in the Declaration was still from universally accepted. "It (the Declaration) affirms that the child must be viewed as an individual, that the responsibility of the family is superordinate to that of the State, and that the State has responsibility not only for protecting the child physically but for making sure that his imagination

and spirit are nurtured. These are not universally held views, nor have they been so in the course of history."*

Various studies have suggested differing conceptions of the child - as a miniature adult, as an economic asset, as a future public servant, as a soul to be saved, as an agent of family continuity, et cetera, and it is not difficult to illustrate such conceptions with examples from our own experience. The contemporary conception of the child, as reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, is more composite, accepting parts of early conceptions, rejecting others. "The best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration" and "the child...needs love and understanding", says the Declaration, which also makes repeated reference to the paramount responsibility of parents and the need for protection against employment before minimum age. The child is seen as having an identity partly unrelated to the family or State although with obligations to both. The idea of the child as a servant of the State, which dates from Ancient Greece, is not entirely dropped in the contemporary view, but has been modified by seeing the child as a potential agent of change, with the State responsible for creative development.

There is keen interest in studies of the relationship between conceptions of the child and national development. The general relationship - that investments in children, social and psychological as well as economic, are extremely important to a national development - is increasingly recognized. But there is still a great need for knowledge about the requirements of children beyond those of physical welfare.

Stein's paper concluded by saying that

"there is reason to believe that the capacity for innovation, for experimentation, the acquisition of new knowledge, and invention are necessary to development. To develop these capacities requires that children be exposed to an atmosphere where their curiosity is stimulated, their right to ask questions insured, where they have ample opportunity to play that gives free expression to imagination as well as to physical skills, and where their health is protected. If these conditions do not exist, economic and social development is retarded.

* Conceptions of the Child, Herman D. Stein, in Social Welfare and Human Rights, Proceedings of the XIV International Conference on Social Welfare (Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 230-236

"It is important, however, that we do not exclusively emphasize these grounds of social utility in order to justify greater investment in the child, particularly the young child, and so fall into a variant of the conception of the child as a servant of society. We should pay heed to enhancing the joys and wonders of childhood as objectives in their own right".

Further studies over the coming years can be of the greatest value not only for UNICEF's own work but for an improved universal understanding of the value of children and the state of childhood.

Reviewing the role of child welfare

Many if not most of the components of today's welfare services for children have their origins in the social movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when childhood emerged as a social issue, an issue which was related to changing conceptions of the child, and the influence of urbanization and industrialization. During this period many child advocacy movements led to the creation of new institutions and professions, which today constitute the fields of child welfare, such as early childhood education, child development, child psychology, pediatrics, public health and social welfare - all of which are of vital concern to both UNICEF and the ICSW.

At the same time many of the reform movements concentrated on remedial work for specific disadvantaged groups of children (the handicapped, neglected, impoverished, et cetera). One of the results of this was to have child welfare generally regarded as a marginal operation for which financial backing by governments need not have a high priority.

This has relevance to our understanding of the modern role of welfare services in all societies, but especially in developing countries. The slow emergency of welfare services as a human right is welcome, but the dangers remain of seeing welfare as a need of the minority rather than the majority of developing countries. Moreover, in the transfer of welfare models and expertise from more developed to developing societies usually insufficient attention was given to different values, priorities and needs in the "importing" countries. The transfer of models, even with the best will and understanding as, for example, in the health field, can create future problems. The trend now in a number of countries is to ascertain their own most effective approaches. This generally requires some undoing of old concepts and patterns of operation as well as the building of new ones along developmental lines appropriate to national situations and goals. In this process, which UNICEF is trying to encourage, there is a growing interest among developing countries to learn from each other's experience.

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We must face the evidence that the "reach" of our services is far from adequate, in part due to the legacy of the past. The development of the basic services concept - with its emphasis on meeting the basic needs of the majority through community participation and the use of relevant and available technology and expertise - is an attempt to develop a better strategy for development and human well-being. The use of a basic services approach in the field of health services is resulting in encouraging developments in primary health care. But we are also conscious of the need to undertake a similar reassessment and review in the field of social welfare services and training.

Such a review is of the greatest importance given the importance of community participation and involvement in present developmental strategies. In its early years UNICEF was closely involved with much work in the field of "community development" in which multi-purpose governmental workers were sent into communities. Drawing upon the weaknesses as well as the strengths of this experience, the community participation aspect of the basic services approach has taken on some new dimensions: primary health workers, for instance, are not civil servants but are chosen and employed by the community in which they serve; the community itself determines its own priorities for action; the government provides support rather than direction. Non-governmental organizations which have a long history of active involvement in the promotion of human well-being can work as dynamic agents in the process, providing important links between the community and the government. It is within such contexts as these that a comprehensive review of existing social welfare services and organizations is required.

Improving the commitment to children

Having pointed to some of the problematic legacies of the early child advocacy movements it would be less than fair not to point to their strengths, particularly their resolve in affecting the socio-political structures of their day to achieve lasting benefits for children. Ruby Takanashi makes this point - one which is particularly relevant to this ICSW conference - in a recent paper:

"People in the child-helping professions...owe the very existence of their roles to the political activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These individuals carried out 'scientific investigations', gathering large amounts of data for lobbying and legislation. Once the programs were funded, they actually brought them to life. Throughout the entire process, they grasped what we have lost - an understanding of the power of political action for the promotion of children's rights.

"We are beginning to rediscover our historical roots which could once again move us to integrate our scientific activity with advocacy and social action"*

* Ruby Takanashi, Childhood as a Social Issue: Historical Roots of contemporary Child Advocacy Movements, Journal of Social Issues, Vol: 34, No. 2, 1978, pp. 8-20.

Similarly, over a somewhat shorter time span, covering the last three decades of concerted international development assistance, there is growing acknowledgement that the necessary improvements in the majority of people's lives depend on our will, especially our political will, to apply the necessary material and human resources to the solution of these problems. As a result of the impetus of the International Year of the Child, which will involve a worldwide series of national reapraisals of policies on children, it is hoped that these resources will be substantially increased.

International Year of the Child

The main objective of the International Year of the Child (IYC) is to have all countries prepare and commit themselves to long-term measures to improve the situation of their children. In many countries the Year is being seen as an opportunity to identify and analyze in depth the complex problems which affect so many of their young generation, and to institute concrete action programs. The Year provides a unique opportunity for advocacy on behalf of children, especially to heighten the awareness of their special needs among decision-makers and the public.

The need for national action has been emphasized by a decision not to have a major global conference in connection with the Year, but to encourage the formation of broadly representative national IYC commissions, or some other central national point, for planning and co-ordination which will bring together government ministries, national organizations, community groups and individuals interested in the objectives of the Year.

In the industrialized countries, it is hoped that, in addition to setting general goals and specific targets for achievement over an appropriate period of time for the children of their own country, IYC national commissions will also generate enhanced awareness of the needs of children in developing countries and increased support for programs to assist those children.

As part of its input to the Year, UNICEF is helping developing countries defray the costs for inventories and reviews of existing policies, legislation and services affecting children; for identifying opportunities to improve services especially in the context of a basic services approach; for setting of priorities and operational objectives and preparation of national programs; and for the mobilization of popular support.

Non-governmental organizations have been in the forefront of planning for the Year, and their role in the success of the Year is crucial. Many international NGO's are in a position to inform, guide, and to some degree, co-ordinate the activities of their national affiliates. For organizations specifically addressing themselves to children's needs, IYC is resulting in the expansion of existing programs, and some new activities. Other NGO's,

not directly providing services for children, will be featuring the IYC theme at their meetings and conferences, arranging symposia on children's problems, sponsoring or supporting legislation on children's affairs, and adopting projects for support by their members.

A Committee of Non-governmental Organizations for IYC has been established and is very active in the preparation for the Year. Membership is open to any international non-governmental organization interested in the welfare of children or any non-governmental organization with programs international in character. The Committee's aims are to help the exchange of information, to help communication with the IYC secretariat and to encourage the development of non-governmental programs related to children's needs in both developed and developing countries. Over one hundred organizations are now members of the Committee. They represent people from all walks of life, from every geographic region, from different ideological, cultural, and religious persuasions, who are concerned with the wide variety of subjects which touch the lives of children throughout the world. The ICSW is a member of the co-ordinating group for the Committee, and the Secretary-General of the ICSW has played a leading role in the organization of the Committee and the development of its policies.

On the national level, NGO's, such as the national affiliates of the ICSW, can encourage the establishment of a national IYC commission and participate in its activities. Because of the expertise and experience it commands, the ICSW national affiliate in many cases can provide co-operation, and in some instances leadership, to the IYC national commission, particularly in the co-ordination and planning of social welfare activities.

In addition, national NGO's and their affiliates at regional, provincial and local levels can reach down to the grass roots in eliciting citizen support at the community level for causes benefiting children. In some places they have played an important role for involving local participation and eliciting local resources in programs benefiting children, as well as in focusing attention on neglected problems. Through innovative projects and experimentation, many of them are in a position to demonstrate what might later be undertaken on a broader scale. This is especially true of the ICSW national affiliates which serve as co-ordinating bodies of multidisciplinary social agencies and whose members agencies can reach down into the provinces and localities. We are pleased to note that the ICSW has asked each of its national committees as part of its IYC effort to choose a specific aspect of the well-being of the child and to search for new approaches or ways to deal with that aspect.

The activities of the IYC are not conceived of as an end in themselves. A number of governments, as a result of their own aspirations, but stimulated by IYC, will undoubtedly wish to set targets in fairly specific terms toward meeting the needs of their children as soon as possible. ICSW national

committees could play an important role in this process, and in the education, advocacy and action required to achieve the targets. It is conceivable that national IYC commissions might, in a number of countries, serve as a start for permanent national bodies concerned with children. ICSW national committees could make important contributions toward such a development.

It is, with these goals in mind - goals with which we feel sure René Sand would fully concur - that we invite the co-operation and involvement of ICSW with UNICEF in work for children in the years ahead.

With increased and imaginative efforts, and with investments well within current capacities, it is possible to see to it that millions of children in the developing world, as well as the industrialized, have a decent start in life. The quality of the future of children yet unborn represents, after all, the future of the world.
