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Pre-DRAFT Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the annual meeting of the
American Evaluation Association

San Francisco, California
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I am pleased to add my voice to the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) discussions on the important theme, "New Perspectives from International and Cross-Cultural Evaluation".

The choice of this theme reflects a most welcome and positive step by the AEA into the international arena - a step also reflected in the most recent issue of your association journal, which was dedicated to "International Innovations in Evaluation Methodology".

Nearly 50 years ago, the historian Arnold Toynbee observed that his was the first generation in history which had the potential to bring the benefits of modern progress to all people. Yet during this decade of the 1980s which is now closing, for almost 900 million people, approximately one sixth of humankind, the march of human progress has become a retreat. In many nations, development is being thrown into reverse. And after decades of steady economic advance, large areas of the world are sliding backwards into poverty.

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It is hard for us to imagine, but it is true, that Third World countries are now sending tens of billions of U.S. dollars to the industrialized countries each year, due in part to the shocking debt total of the developing world, which now equals US\$1.3 trillion. And we have learned that it is often the poor, and the most vulnerable among the poor - especially children and women - who suffer a great disproportion of the burden.

Throughout the field of international development, efforts are being redoubled to achieve more in terms of alleviating the worst effects of poverty, with often dwindling resources. Thus as the 1990s approach we see a strong attention - at least rhetorically - to guarding the "human dimensions of development" even during the structural adjustment process; to restructuring social services in order to achieve maximum effectiveness; to mobilizing human resources within developing countries; to strengthening national capacities; and to advocating for increased financial resources from industrialized nations in order to fully exploit low-cost high-impact knowledge and technology capable of alleviating some of the worst effects of poverty.

In all attempts to make development efforts more effective, one of the many keys, of course, is evaluation of existing programmes and innovations. We join with those who hope that the AEA's concern with international issues is an indication that the benefits of the full expertise of the evaluation field will increasingly be made available to peoples throughout the world.

It is important that mechanisms exist, for example, to share new evaluation methodologies which have been developed in industrialized countries, with developing countries. Similarly, sophisticated methods can often become far more effective by adopting lessons learned from very rapid assessments that feed quickly into a planning process, or from methods that effect programme output by involving target groups as participants in data gathering.

UNICEF is, of course, involved in several types of programme evaluation at once, and we eagerly welcome the expansion of cross-cultural links in the field. While the organization has been doing development work for more than 40 years, the nature of that work is always evolving. The success of programmes in which UNICEF is involved is perhaps a testimony to the wisdom of constant insistence that only by an honest and sustained commitment to evaluation of our own projects, is it possible to:

- a) validly assess the effectiveness of messages and inputs;
- b) adjust projects and correct the course of activities in accordance with experience;
- c) obtain the necessary facts and data to initiate dialogues at the highest level of governments - both to strengthen national capacity and to advise as to what is most cost-effective, feasible and affordable; and

- d) develop a foundation on which to base social mobilization efforts at all levels. Evaluation is yet one more tool to open and sustain dialogue with not only national decision-makers, but also community leaders, women's groups and even individual mothers and fathers.

Evaluation can have a broad range of purposes; UNICEF has learned that there is significant benefit in using a wide variety of them. Evaluation can be used to inform decisions and planning, but it can also be used to mobilize people and to reinforce commitment.

In a world where development resources are dwindling, and finances for health and child welfare are limited and becoming more scarce, programme effectiveness is a crucial issue - a life and death issue. And the stakes are huge.

For example, it is difficult to imagine, in a world which sent people to the moon more than a decade ago, that, still today, 40,000 young children die each day, and comparable numbers are crippled for life as a result of childhood diseases. Still more difficult to fathom is the fact that two-thirds of these deaths are due to causes for which we have long-since discovered low-cost cures and preventions.

If these children were dying from causes which we could do little to prevent, or if we did not know that this was happening, the situation would be tragic, indeed. But 10,000 children are dying each day for lack of 50 cents

worth of vaccine in each. And another 10,000 are dying each day from the dehydration associated with diarrhoeal diseases, even though a simple sugar and salt solution - oral rehydration salts (ORS) - costing 10 cents to prepare and administer at home, could save these children. For these vulnerable lives to continue to be snuffed out in this way with our full cognizance - is not only tragic; it is obscene. Morality marches with capacity, and ethics with awareness. We know now that a reversal of this unconscionable situation can be accomplished through low-cost means. These unprecedented possibilities can be transformed into reality, however, if, and only if, the will is manifest by peoples throughout the world - by politicians, physicians, local women's groups, scientists, and more - to do what is do-able. And one of the things which must be done is effective evaluation of programmes aimed at reversing this situation.

UNICEF is engaged in joint projects with 122 countries, coordinating with a vast network of governmental and non-governmental organizations, public and private institutions, peoples' groups, etc. The obvious complexity of the development issues involved require a systematic, accurate and practical use of programme evaluation.

Information, and particularly monitoring and evaluation information, are fundamental to the planning and executing of innovative, multidisciplinary, and multi-institutional projects, especially when they are designed to meet the needs of poor people in environments replete with natural, economic, cultural and administrative obstacles.

It is worth emphasizing that a principal objective of our information efforts is to develop the capacities of member governments to know how best to solve their own problems, and to meet the needs of their children.

The vital functions of evaluation in UNICEF's child survival and development work have this in common with other international social issues: they require the expertise of the broader evaluation community - responding with creative and culturally sensitive adaptations of available methodologies.

In closing, one might ask if Toynbee was in fact right: Can the benefits of modern progress be made available to all people?

With active leadership by groups like the AEA - and by individuals such as AEA members - and by working together intensively, surely it is within our reach to, still in this century, alleviate the worst effects of poverty for the vast majority of the world's poor.