

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1992-0059b

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for the  
*UNICEF 1992 Annual Report*

New York  
Fall 1992



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



Rcf000621E

Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01105**

ExR/Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1992-0059b**

UNICEF 1992 Annual Report / Steele. Introduction by Mr. Ji  
Date Label Printed 20-Aug-2002

cover + 4pp + 0b

UNICEF Annual Report/steele

Introduction  
By the Executive Director  
James P. Grant

Dramatic events last year overturned the old world order and promised a more secure future for our children. In a head-long rush to a more democratic order, maps were redrawn, states became nations, countries were renamed and a host of new flags were hoisted. The United Nations began the year with 159 member states and closed with 166. When this report went to press there were 175 member nations, with more on the horizon. It also began the year with new leadership and new expectations for its capacity to strengthen and adjust itself to new realities, new possibilities, and new challenges.

Profound political reforms in Eastern and Central Europe and in many developing countries heralded an era of peace and prosperity in which societies could become more democratic and economies more efficient. We have entered an era in which human concerns might take their rightful place at the centre of policymaking and development.

Hopes that there would be a peace dividend for children were very much alive, but we were reminded that the wages of peace will have to be cut many ways. Celebration was tempered by the global economic recession and an increasing caseload of suffering and want brought on by man and nature in many of the developing world's poorest countries.

The year was a reminder, also, that transitions of great moment are rarely swift or painless. Scores of developing nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have endured the pain of economic adjustment and political transition since the 1980s. Established ways of providing for people's needs have been shaken to the core and, as always, children have been among the first to suffer. Early warnings of children in dire need cast an ominous perspective on the euphoria which accompanied independence in Eastern and Central Europe last year. UNICEF provided modest emergency relief for children in several countries of the region. But assistance to Eastern Europe will not undercut our programme support to developing countries, where the need is greatest.

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For the better part of a decade, UNICEF has challenged the remote, statistical perspective of those who would allow the hard edge of structural adjustment programmes to fall without protection for the poor. Adjustment has been necessary for growth in many developing countries, but it is the poor who suffer most when currencies are devalued, when food subsidies are eliminated, when public payrolls and services are cut. People on the fringes of economic life have no cushion against these prescriptions. Restructuring for them and for their children is a life -- or even a death -- sentence. Our message has been that children cannot wait for a return to growth and that adjustment, at its core, must have a human face. No nation can be expected to build a sustainable future if its foundations - its children - are malnourished, illiterate, and restless for leaders who care. Adjustment must protect the nation's human capital by supporting basic services, by preserving jobs for teachers and healthcare workers, by safeguarding the development of its children. National policymakers and donors must understand that a child's health and productive development is not something which can be turned on and off with a budget. A lost generation is not a recoverable asset.

We saw encouraging signs again last year that this message is taking hold. Our main development partners have endorsed it, as have many of the African nations currently embarked upon radical restructuring programmes. A study for UNICEF, entitled 'Africa's Recovery in the 1990s - From Stagnation and Adjustment to Human Development' was completed during the year and will be published in 1992. Part and parcel of UNICEF's approach to the needs of children in low- and middle-income developing countries, has been our advocacy for substantial debt relief, debt forgiveness where possible, and innovative debt swaps for child survival and development activities.

As nations chart new courses for growth, and give voice to their people's aspirations, the opportunities to build a better world for their children are truly extraordinary.

The tally of signatures on the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action rose to 135 last year and more than 100 of those countries indicated that the Summit's 27 goals for child survival, protection and development were being incorporated in National Programmes of Action. Those goals could save 50 million lives during the remaining years of the decade. They could halve rates of illiteracy and malnutrition. They could save the lives of some 1.5 million mothers who would otherwise die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth. And they could improve immeasurably the quality of life and productivity of many millions more.

The roster of signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child also expanded during the year, to more than 110. The Convention's 54 articles detail children's rights to survival, to healthy development, to protection from abuse and exploitation, and to participation in matters affecting their own lives. The Committee established to monitor progress toward implementation of the Convention started its work and will soon begin to review national reports on compliance.

A number of developments during the year illustrated just how doable the complementary propositions contained in the Convention and the World Summit Plan of Action are. In partnership with the World Health Organization we were able to confirm officially that our goal of 80 per cent immunization coverage for children against measles, tetanus, whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis and polio had been achieved. In the decade since the Expanded Programme on Immunization was accelerated, the global effort saved some 15 million lives and spared many millions more from the crippling effects of diseases such as polio. Because of this programme we have in place a system which is reaching about 100 million infants a year on four or five separate occasions before their first birthday.

This logistical connection between committed leaders and their children is unparalleled. And the cost is extraordinarily low - just US\$13 per child. Capitalizing on this access during the year, vaccination days in many developing countries included a range of other life-saving services for children at similarly low cost. In communities with poor nutrition, the distribution of vitamin A capsules prevented blindness at a cost of 4 cents per child per year. Iodine supplements prevented physical and mental impairments at a cost of about 5 cent per person per year. Poor communities which had relied upon polluted water sources drew safe drinking supplies through systems installed at a cost of about US\$20 per person.

Low-cost interventions gave cause for celebration in Peru and neighbouring Latin American countries during a resurgence of cholera in 1991. Between January and September, more than 256,000 Peruvians in ill-served communities contracted the disease through contaminated water and food supplies. Cholera, accompanied by acute diarrhea, can kill a healthy person in six hours if inadequately treated, but less than 1 per cent of the victims in Peru died -- as opposed to the 10-30 per cent rates of past epidemics. This extraordinarily low mortality rate was directly attributable to national stockpiles of oral rehydration salts and local knowledge of how to use it. Women's organizations played an especially significant role in saving lives. UNICEF had supported the programmes which developed those responses since the 1970s. Peru is now largely self-sufficient in ORS, which is distributed nationwide in sachets costing about 10 cents each.

We have estimated the cost of meeting the 27 goals of the World Summit for Children at an additional US\$20 billion a year during the 1990s. It sounds like a lot of money. But it pales to very modest and achievable proportions when measured against two brutal facts of life. I urge you to consider the following: Our community of nations will spend about US\$20 billion on the military this week as 250,000 children die from preventable illnesses.

Can we afford not to beat our swords into ploughshares of human development -- for our children, for our future?

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