

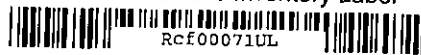
File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1993-0032

Address by James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
Assembly of Heads of State and Government
of the
Organization of African Unity

Cairo, Egypt
30 June 1993



UNICEF Alternate Inventory Label



RcF00071UL

Item # **CF/RAD/USAA/DB01/2002-01128**

ExR/Code: **CF/EXD/SP/1993-0032**

Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organizat
Date Label Printed 21-Aug-2002

cover + 10 pp + 0 b



United Nations Children's Fund Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia
Детский Фонд Организации Объединенных Наций 联合国儿童基金会 منظمة الأمم المتحدة للطفولة

File Sub: CF/EXD/SP/1993-0032

DISTRIBUTION VERSION

Address by Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to the
Assembly of Heads of State and Government
of the
Organization of African Unity

Cairo - 30 June 1993

It is a great honour to address the leaders of Africa once more. The conviction that I am among old friends, to whom the subject of children and the work of UNICEF are "family matters", moves me to speak to you today directly from the heart.

Africa: first priority

As you know, Africa is UNICEF's first priority. This is a policy our Executive Board has mandated year after year in recognition of the magnitude of the problems you are confronting on the road to development, and of the need to constantly remind the international community of its responsibilities toward Africa and its people. UNICEF devotes more of its human and financial resources to Africa than to our programmes in any other region of the world.

But this priority is also a very personal one. Nowhere have I witnessed more courage and dedication; more creativity and humanity; more dignity and willingness to beat the odds; more

smiles in the face of deprivation; and more determination to change and move forward, than in Africa. Working with you on behalf of Africa's children has enriched my life -- and that of our organization -- immeasurably; we have learned from you and from your peoples that progress is possible in the hardest times and under the most adverse circumstances, and for all of this we could not be more grateful.

The first time I had the privilege of addressing the Organization of African Unity -- during the OAU's 25th anniversary summit in Addis Ababa in May of 1988 -- I urged you to explore what is doable for children during the decade of the 1990s and take decisive action to see that it is done.

Cover + 10pp + 06

Africa's commitment to children

It gives me enormous satisfaction to be able to say that Africa responded enthusiastically -- which did not surprise me, of course, given the special place tradition reserves for children in African hearts. You have made unprecedented efforts over the past five years. You are taking advantage of the remarkable opportunities for progress that have been opening up for children -- that you have helped open up for children -- in this period of extraordinary global, and African, change:

* The leaders of Africa have repeatedly demonstrated that they possess the critical ingredient of political will to accelerate human development, and a particularly strong commitment to improving the lot of children.

* You formally dedicated the 1990s to Africa's children, making the same kind of visible, public, decade-long commitment that our host country, Egypt, made in the 1980s.

* Africa embraced the historic Convention on the Rights of the Child earlier and more massively than any other region, and you went further, adopting an African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. To date, 45 African countries have ratified the Convention and action towards ratification is underway in several others -- feeding our optimism that the Convention can become the first virtually universal law in history by 1995, year of the United Nations' 50th anniversary. I appeal to the African governments that have not yet ratified the Convention to do so as a matter of urgency.

* You gave enthusiastic support to the idea of a World Summit for Children at a time when leaders of North, South, East and West had never met, and there had never been a summit-level meeting on the topic of children. Of the six initiators of the World Summit, two were from this continent, including Egyptian President Mubarak, your host and incoming Chairman. Africa's strong participation helped make the World Summit a genuine breakthrough for the world's children and the entire development process.

* Africa's follow-up to the commitments made at the World Summit for Children has been most encouraging. Your continent leads the world in the number of countries that have issued National Programmes of Action (NPAs) to reach the year 2000 goals agreed upon at the World Summit: 31 African countries have completed NPAs and 14 others are actively working on them now. The commitment to serious follow-up is palpable throughout the continent.

* Our Chairman, President Diouf of Senegal, hosted the OAU-sponsored International Conference on Assistance to African Children (ICAAC) in November of last year, which mapped out national, regional and international strategies and partnerships for the remaining years of the decade, and even established a series of crucial targets to be reached by 1995. Your willingness to publicly commit yourselves to meeting concrete, measurable goals within short- and medium-term timetables bespeaks a seriousness of purpose and a willingness to take risks for causes you deem just.

Dramatic progress is possible now

Excellencies, Africa is now poised to make remarkable progress on the children's front -- and the human development agenda as a whole -- over the next few years. As I stated in an article in the current issue of the journal Foreign Policy: with the right mixture of domestic and international support, and with apartheid ending in South Africa, we could see dramatic progress in most of Africa by the year 2000.

But how can Africa make such a breakthrough amidst debt, disasters, drought and conflict? How can the industrial countries, faced with their own economic problems, provide the help Africa needs? Permit me to address these concerns in turn.

First, can Africa vastly accelerate progress for children and give a major boost to the development process at the same time? The answer is yes, and you have already demonstrated what can be accomplished when political leadership is wedded to people's power and the power of modern communications, and simple, low-cost technologies; I am referring, of course, to the lessons and achievements of the remarkable immunization effort of the past six or seven years.

As part of the worldwide push for universal child immunization (UCI), Africa committed itself in 1986 to raising immunization levels from about 20 per cent of all under-one-year-olds, to 75 per cent by 1990. Fully half of your countries achieved or surpassed that goal, and many more attained over 50 per cent coverage. Thanks to this extraordinary accomplishment, **more than 500,000 child lives are being saved each year in Africa**, and there is a strengthened public health infrastructure in place and networks of participation capable of reaching into the most remote villages and hamlets with other interventions that can make just as great an impact as immunization.

Excellencies, you mobilized your societies and motivated mothers and families to immunize their babies at a time when sub-Saharan Africa's crises and conflicts were at their peak. Imagine

how much more can be accomplished in the 1990s, now that the Cold War that tore much of Africa apart is over... now that democracy, decentralization and people's participation are being strengthened and expanded... now that apartheid in South Africa is on the way out... now that peace has come or peace processes are underway to end a number of major conflicts... now that macroeconomic reform has begun to show positive results in several countries. Without minimizing the difficulties still to be overcome, I am convinced that virtually all the African ingredients are falling into place for making an historic breakthrough on the continent's social front.

Leadership to meet critical mid-decade goals

The Consensus of Dakar resulting from last November's International Conference on Assistance to African Children constitutes the do-able proposition that will prove what Africa can do for itself and help set the global pace for progress in development over the decade. The single most important ingredient for moving forward now is your personal political leadership in meeting the set of targets ICAAC identified as being reachable by 1995.

Your personal attention to six critical but doable areas over the next two years would make a tremendous difference:

1. **Immunization** -- you reached the immunization goal in 1990 by using a host of imaginative approaches to mobilizing communities, but coverage of newborns has declined since then in a number of countries. Our challenge is to reach and sustain 80 per cent coverage, which is now the world's minimum standard, and even higher in the case of measles -- by far the most lethal of the vaccine-preventable diseases -- and tetanus toxoid for women of child-bearing age. With your leadership, whole countries and much of Africa will be made "polio-free" by 1995.

2. **Oral rehydration therapy (ORT)** -- most of you have seen me wave this little packet around before; if you or your health ministers also started carrying and showing it around... and if its benefits were publicized widely... awareness of this simple life-saving miracle costing a few pennies would skyrocket. Its use can save more lives -- even from cholera -- than any other single action. This was demonstrated by Egypt in the mid-1980s, where an amazing 40 per cent reduction in child mortality was achieved in only three years thanks to a national ORT campaign piggy-backing on UCI efforts. Use of these salts, increased fluid intake and continued feeding have been responsible for the unprecedented low mortality experienced in Latin America during the cholera epidemic

-- less than 2 deaths per 1,000 cases -- a world record. Cholera death rates have been twice and three times higher in Africa. So we need to get usage of ORT up to 80 per cent throughout Africa by 1995. There is no reason why ordinary diarrhoea should remain the biggest killer of your children on the threshold of the 21st century.

3. Iodization of salt -- Iodine deficiency is the single largest cause of preventable mental retardation. You could boost IQs, school performance and future productivity at an extraordinarily low cost by 1995 -- in some cases with the stroke of a pen, and in others, through legislation in parliament -- by making iodization of salt the law of your lands.

4. Vitamin A -- lack of this vital micronutrient found in green and yellow vegetables is the leading cause of blindness among children and it contributes to up to a third of all child deaths in Africa today. You can see to it that a single capsule is provided to every child twice a year -- delivered through already existing immunization networks and local health centres. For a couple of pennies per dose, this deficiency can be virtually wiped out by 1995.

5. Breastfeeding -- you can help reverse the harmful trend toward bottle-feeding by publicly identifying yourselves with campaigns to empower mothers to breastfeed their babies. You can immediately require all hospitals to support mothers in breastfeeding their newborns, and you can take action to ensure that manufacturers do not distribute free samples of formula through hospitals and maternity centres. Breastmilk is a cost-free resource worth some \$4 billion a year to Africa, and it saves babies' lives, helps ward off illness, and substantially enhances physical and intellectual development.

6. Dracunculiasis -- Guinea worm, the "fiery serpent", has virtually been wiped out elsewhere in the world, but it persists in pockets in 17 African countries. Your efforts between now and 1995 could make this scourge only the second disease in history -- following smallpox -- to be completely eradicated.

A major strategy for achieving the World Summit for Children and the Consensus of Dakar goals is embodied in the Bamako Initiative. Now at work in 22 African countries, it is proving beyond any doubt the power of the community to guide and finance essential health care. In the context of growing democratization

and decentralization, and severe central government budgetary constraints, Africa's Bamako Initiative is clearly a critical strategy for community empowerment and self-help. Similar support for "going to scale" needs to be given to successful models you are developing in other fields, including nutrition, basic education, water and sanitation, women's empowerment, family planning, street children, AIDS prevention and care, refugee children and those who are traumatized by war. The international media rarely report on Africa's success stories, but you yourselves know that you have many important accomplishments to build on.

As you pursue the goals -- and development efforts in general -- it will be important to keep in mind the fact that any significant improvement in children's lives will require significant improvement in the status of women... not just in Africa, but everywhere. Inevitably, as the rights of women are affirmed and protected so, too, are the inseparable rights of the girl-child acknowledged. Indeed, we feel so strongly about the predicament of girl children in so many societies, that in our 1992 State of the World's Children report, we characterized the situation as the "apartheid of gender". The particularly coarse range of discriminatory behaviour directed at the girl child, from the denial of education to the abomination of rape, is a pattern of behaviour which must end. And pragmatically speaking, experience has shown that investment in female education -- of girls and women -- yields far greater benefits to society (and of course to women themselves and their families) than any other investment in development.

The results you will obtain

If you do the six things I have mentioned, Excellencies, then by the end of 1995 you will be saving the lives of another 3,000 children a day, a million a year, and African children will be stronger and healthier, better equipped to learn and contribute to the brighter future each of you is trying to build,

If you do these things, Excellencies, then you will be slowing population growth and easing stress on the environment, while spurring economic development, strengthening democracy, and improving the status of women.

If you do these things, Excellencies, then you will pave the way for achieving the more complex year 2000 goals set at the World Summit for Children, in primary health care, nutrition, basic education, safe water and sanitation, and family planning.

If you do these things, Excellencies, then human development can open the way for the Green Revolution that will make Africa food self-reliant and banish mass hunger and famine forever.

The rapid results that you will be able to show for your immediate efforts to meet the mid-decade goals for children will inspire men and women, governments and agencies of good will everywhere to follow your lead. The real, measurable, visible progress you will be making shortly will challenge the industrialized world to increase ODA and solve the long-standing problem of African external debt.

Restructuring budgets for human development priorities

I have emphasized the "doability" of the 1995 targets and their low cost, but it is clear that reaching them will require additional resources -- resources that the vast majority of African countries will be hard-pressed to find. Permit me to suggest, Excellencies, that most of the funds you will need can be made available if you restructure your existing budgets and donor countries restructure their bilateral assistance, so that limited resources are put to work where they yield the greatest benefits: in decentralized, community-based primary health care; in basic and non-formal education; in low-cost rural and peri-urban drinking water systems, in family planning information and services, among other preventive and low-cost approaches.

Spending in these human priority areas remains inadequate. With the United Nations Development Programme, we estimate that current expenditures need to be doubled -- from around 10 per cent of national budgets at present to at least 20 per cent -- in order to reach the goals. The peace dividend that a number of African countries are beginning to reap as a result of the end of the Cold War can and must be enlarged and tapped to the maximum.

No discussion of contemporary development prospects would be complete without sounding a strong alarm on HIV, AIDS and our youth. In countries where national leaders have dared to open the long taboo subject of sexuality and have publicly endorsed use of condoms and responsible sexual behaviour, we see at last the slowing of the pandemic and at least some prospect for its control. AIDS can only be defeated by enlightened leadership in each and every community. Two thirds of infections occur in young people below the age of 25; only with frank and open discussion with and among our young people on informed and responsible sexual behaviour can we hope to contain this pandemic. Failure to slow its transmission will not only endanger achievement of the goals for children and women in the 1990s, but threaten economic and social stability for decades to come.

Donor community responsibilities

Earlier I asked how the industrial countries can -- and must -- help Africa reach these goals. As I wrote in the Foreign Policy article:

"The new spirit of democratic change and economic reform in Africa will not survive if its creditors do not give it some debt relief. Together, the sub-Saharan countries pay over \$1 billion in debt service to foreign creditors every month, and its debt is now proportionately three to four times heavier than that of Latin America. At the November 1992 ICAAC meeting in Dakar, donor countries and lending agencies alike pledged to promote more debt relief while expanding or restructuring ODA in order to help Africa protect and nurture its children."

The industrialized countries must follow through on these commitments. First, far more must be done to solve the problem of sub-Saharan external debt. Total debt stock has grown from \$56 billion in 1980 to \$183 billion at the end of 1992, and the region's debt service obligation is now nearly \$20 billion per year -- equivalent to more than 10 per cent of GNP and 35 per cent of export earnings. Last year, Africa used more than \$10 billion of its scarce foreign exchange to service its debt. In spite of nearly 200 structural adjustment programmes since 1981, Africa's economies remain weak and simply cannot continue to bear the burden of external debt of this magnitude.

Fully 47 per cent of Africa's long-term debt is official bilateral debt and is, therefore, most susceptible to political solutions. UNICEF supports the proposition that creditors should now give preference to total write-off, as suggested by the Netherlands Minister of Development, Mr. Jan Pronk, in 1990. As for multilateral debt -- which is owed primarily to the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the IMF, and represents about a third of sub-Saharan debt -- we believe that the adoption of IDA terms of rescheduling and relief of Paris Club debt have proven to be the appropriate solution to the overhang of IBRD loans to low-income countries that are no longer considered capable of servicing debt on the original terms. Such concessional terms should now be extended to ADB loans and the conversion of outstanding multilateral loans to IDA terms should continue to take place whenever changes in country circumstances so dictate. A similar approach to IMF credits would provide consistency and equity to the lending practices of Bretton Woods institutions to low-income countries.

Debt swaps for social development or child survival programmes offer another avenue for reducing Africa's debt burden. Following successful swaps along these lines in Madagascar and the Sudan, UNICEF is helping governments explore similar conversions in ten other African countries. Although small amounts of foreign exchange are typically involved in these operations, they free up large amounts of national currency for priority areas of human development. The potential of this option has only begun to be tapped.

On the ODA side, current levels of foreign assistance to Africa remain sorely inadequate, in spite of the gradual increase -- from 24 per cent in 1980 to over 30 per cent today -- in the proportion of all bilateral ODA going to Africa. Aid levels have stagnated over the past 3-4 years, and concessional flows are down. A continuation of this trend -- fed by recession in most of the industrial countries -- will cast a dark shadow across Africa's prospects for recovery.

The improbability of winning increases in ODA in the short to medium-term means that pressure must be increased for restructuring of existing aid budgets. The doubling of domestic resources for priority human needs called for by UNDP and UNICEF also applies to ODA: we refer to this as the need for "20/20 vision". On average, less than 10 per cent of ODA is devoted to human development priorities; a doubling of the proportion going to primary health care, basic education, nutrition, low-cost water and sanitation, and family planning would, we estimate, provide the additional external funds needed to complement your own additional allocations to these areas. There needs to be a reciprocity of commitment on the part of development partners to the objective of eliminating the worst manifestations of African poverty by the end of the century.

We sincerely hope that the upcoming G-7 Summit and the International Conference on African Development -- to be held in July and November, respectively, in Tokyo -- will give African debt relief and human development a tremendous boost.

The better off countries need to do more -- far more -- to support Africa's investment in its people, in its children.

UNICEF's commitment

This is the pledge which I make on behalf of UNICEF:

1. To continue to provide assistance to Africa as the region of highest priority, maintaining funds at least at current levels until the year 2000;
2. To advocate strongly on behalf of African children and African needs in political, economic and social forums, with particular emphasis on obtaining concrete results at the World Social Summit in 1995;
3. To provide programme support for implementation of your National Programmes of Action;
4. To utilize and advocate a development approach that stresses empowerment and capacity-building for sustainable development;

5. To provide specific support for the achievement of the mid-decade goals, as stated in the Consensus of Dakar;

6. To vigorously promote debt relief and swaps for children and increased social investment;

7. To contribute strongly, with other United Nations agencies, to the development of the UN common country strategy in African nations, incorporating the goals of your NPAs;

8. To contribute as best we can to the UN response to Africa's emergencies, doing what can be done to ensure that humanitarian relief lays the groundwork for a return to development.

Changing history

Together, Excellencies, we have the opportunity, in the 1990s as never before in history, to change history as never before. Starting with children -- and first and foremost, Africa's children -- we can attack and defeat the malnutrition and disease and ignorance that are not only the worst symptoms of poverty, but some of its major causes. Never before have the opportunities for success been so readily at hand; never before have the consequences of inaction been so grave. You, the leaders of Africa, must lead the world in this noble endeavour. The future of Africa lies with its children -- and they must grow up strong, healthy, free and cared for if they are to contribute to the productive, peaceful and purposeful world we all seek in the 21st century. Today, their future is in our hands; tomorrow our future will be in theirs. If we do not fail them, they will surely not fail us.