



Impact of the Economic Crisis on Children

PRESS CLIPPINGS:

Economic crisis damaging Asia-Pacific children's chances

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/connectasia/stories/200901/s2461401.htm>

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The United Nations has warned the global economic turndown could have serious knock-on effects on the children of poor families in the Asia-Pacific region. Indonesia's Finance Minister delivered the key-note address at the two-day meeting hosted by UNICEF in Singapore, where delegates heard calls for wealthy nations to honour their commitments to the world's poor.

Presenter: Parthena Stavropoulos

Speakers: UNICEF spokeswoman Anapuma Rao Singh, child labour expert Dr June Kane; health expert Dr Zulfiqar Ahmed Bhutta, Pakistan's Aga Khan University

STAVROPOULOS: The United Nations Children's Fund known as UNICEF has hosted the conference bringing together government ministers, policy advisers and experts to discuss the impact of the current global financial crisis on children. UNICEF's Anapuma Rao Singh.

SINGH: Poor families in Asia spend up to 60 per cent of their income already on food, and if you combine food as well as fuel that they spend about 75 per cent of their income on this food and fuel alone, which means that their capacities to cope with any further declines in their incomes are going to affect women and children, both in terms of their access to food and their eating and nutrition as well as their access to education and health services.

STAVROPOULOS: She says government and countries must work together to ensure the progress made in the past seven years isn't compromised.

SINGH: A 10 per cent increase in food prices alone is perhaps will push around the world about 105 million people into poverty and if this happened it would mean that all of the progress made over the last seven years in helping people out of poverty would just be wiped out.

STAVROPOULOS: The 1997/98 Asia crisis saw a decline in birth rates, an increase of malnutrition in children under the age of five and a rise of up to seven per cent in child mortality rates.

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Health expert Dr Bhutta from Pakistan's Aga Khan University says the current crisis is in some ways worse.

BHUTTA: The previous crisis was largely economic and the current crisis is a triple whammy, initially a food price increase, which was unprecedented earlier on this year. And just around the time that that began to stabilise, food prices began to come down, we had the unprecedented increase in fuel prices, which had its own implication on economies, followed by global economic meltdown starting with the major economies in the west. So to a certain extent the current crisis may have longer term effects.

STAVROPOULOS: He says the implications on women and children are huge.

DR ZULRIGAR AHMED BHUTTA: The major impacts of the health and nutrition crisis, which typically occur in women, leading to poor weight gain and growth in pregnancy, higher rates of anaemia and then effects in children such as stunting or wasting, which is acute weight loss.

STAVROPOULOS: The professor says simple support mechanisms such as cash injections to families and appropriate maternity leave for women should be put in place.

BHUTTA: We had a review of what kind of government response to economic crisis were seen in the wake of the 1997/98 events and it was clear that many governments responded by putting a lot of money in, not necessarily where the best buys were. For example fuel subsidies, now fuel subsidies are a pretty natural knee jerk response to economic crisis, but they don't benefit the poor, the benefits of fuel subsidies largely go to the rich.

STAVROPOULOS: The previous economic crisis also saw children from poor families forced out of schools to enter the workforce.

But it doesn't have to be all bad news, according to child labour expert, Dr June Kane.

KANE: If we can make it more profitable to the family for them to send the child to school, there is a real possibility that they'll take the child out of work and send the child to school and that can be a very simple thing, we might just offer school feeding programs so that the children are getting free food, or we might offer the family a small cash advance in return for them sending the child to school. And that might just outweigh the benefits they're getting from the work of the child.

STAVROPOULOS: She says such incentives are not unrealistic.



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KANE: We spent eight trillion dollars shoring up the financial institutions, we don't need to spend anything like that to be able to protect our children, probably just a couple of million dollars in this region would make all the difference.

STAVROPOULOS: UNICEF'S Ms Singh echoed the concerns raised by Indonesia's Finance Minister that the industrialised countries may not honour their commitments to the developing world.

SINGH: She was making a plea that the measures they put in place to actually turn the situation around in terms of their own economic growth, should not be at the cost of their continued provision of official development assistance to the developing countries.

Financial crisis' young victims

http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/abcasiapacificnews/audio/200901/r328644_1477953.mp3

<http://www.radioaustralianews.net.au/story.htm?id=14118>

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Connect Asia

Asia must act to prevent growth in child labour: expert

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5ghnXh8dJMIvfZnoVRGZv9yWAI0Gw>



SINGAPORE (AFP) — Asia must act quickly to prevent millions of children dropping out of school to go to work as the global economic crisis worsens, a rights expert has warned.

June Kane, an independent adviser to the United Nations and national governments on child rights, told AFP the crisis was a chance for authorities in the region to tackle child labour by giving parents incentives to keep minors in education.

But she warned that authorities in Asia -- the biggest employer of the world's estimated 218 million child workers -- must act now to provide help to parents who might otherwise be forced to send their children out to work.

"I think this crisis gives us a real opportunity to tackle child labour and to stop more children going into child labour," said Kane in an interview on the sidelines of a UN conference about the impact of the global economic crisis on children.

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"We can respond to the economic crisis, particularly amongst the poor and vulnerable families, by giving them incentives to send their children to school, whether they are cash incentives or feeding programmes."

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child workers as those under 15.

While many of these children work in the agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors, some are lured into slavery and prostitution, while others are recruited into armed groups, Kane said.

Protecting vulnerable children during economic crises was a major theme at the two-day Singapore conference sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

UNICEF's top official in East Asia and the Pacific, Anupama Rao Singh, said the global recession could significantly raise infant mortality and malnutrition rates, and appealed to Asian governments not to cut back on social spending.

While research showing a direct link between economic crises and a rise in child labour remains scant, Kane said governments should implement measures now to curb any potential impact.

Only a "couple of million dollars" are needed to finance such incentives, Kane said, comparing this with the eight trillion dollars used by major economies to bail out ailing banks at the heart of the global financial crisis.

"Let's not think that automatically more children are going to go to work. We have an opportunity to actually stop that from happening."

Experts say child labour thrives in underground economies because employers can get away with paying underage workers less than their adult counterparts, and they are often hard to detect because they are illegal.

Consumer activism in the world's major economies, however, has helped check the problem as shoppers refuse to buy products made using child labour, Kane said.

She cautioned against "knee-jerk" reactions by governments to focus aid automatically on the poor, saying that middle class families were also affected by the current crisis.

WWW.XINHUANET.COM

UNICEF, Asia-Pacific countries convene to address impact of economic crisis on children

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/06/content_10613449.htm

Special Report: Global Financial Crisis

SINGAPORE, Jan. 6 (Xinhua) -- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and countries from East Asia and Pacific regions convened here Tuesday to discuss policies and measures to address impact of the current economic crisis on children.

The UNICEF said at a press conference Tuesday morning that the global financial crisis is amplifying the effects of the food and fuel prices crisis. Reduced food

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consumption, particularly among poor families, can lead to stunted physical growth and decreased intellectual capacity of children. And more children were forced to leave school because of the falling household income.

"Children should have the first call on resources, especially in times of economic challenge," said Anupama Rao Singh, UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Director.

During the two-day meeting at the National University of Singapore, participants will have discussions on how best to protect children by maintaining or scaling up social spending despite tightening budgets, and share lesson learned from the 1997-1998 crisis and good practices in health, nutrition, education and family income maintenance.

"The economic crisis has major implications for countries' economic and social resilience, and for children given the added vulnerabilities. We must not compromise their future, even as we deal with the current economic challenges," Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore's Minister for community Development, Youth and Sports said during the meeting.

The event attracted more than 150 academics, policy advisors and government officials from East Asia and Pacific regions to discuss the issue.

Impact of crisis on kids (Xinhua)

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/06/content_10613449.htm

By Melissa Sim

MORE than 150 academics and policy makers gathered on Tuesday at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy to discuss the impact of the economic crisis on children.

The two-day conference organised by Unicef in conjunction with the school and Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will cover topics such as social protection, health and nutrition, education and child labour. Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan, who attended the conference said that while discussions on economic resilience is important, it is equally important to focus on the 'social impact of this crisis, and in particular, its implications for children'.

He said that the recent crisis could increase low birth weight by five to 10 per cent, and increase overall under-five child mortality in severely affected countries of Southeast Asia and the Pacific regions by three to 11 per cent.

Experts say children are a vulnerable group affected by economic crisis

By Dominique Loh, Channel NewsAsia | Posted: 06 January 2009 16:14 hrs

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<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/400520/1/.html> (2 of 5)7/1/2552 9:19:51

SINGAPORE: As the world economies grapple with the financial turmoil, a group of humanitarian experts said children will be a vulnerable group affected by the crisis. If their needs are not addressed, it could lead to health and developmental problems.

The rise in oil prices, the bankruptcy of financial giants and the volatile stock markets, all have had its domino effect on the world.

Adding to the crisis is higher inflation. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that a 10 per cent rise in food prices will push another 105 million people into poverty.

Based on data collected during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, experts have also found a 10 per cent increase in underweight babies. Infant mortality was up between three and 10 per cent. Anaemia among pregnant women also rose by 10 per cent.

To help reverse this trend, about 150 policy makers, academics and government officials from East Asia and Pacific countries have gathered in Singapore to explore the issues confronting the children of the world.

Experts at this conference believe there are three key issues developing nations need to address in helping children.

UNICEF warns of effects of financial crisis on children (Earth Times)

<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/249085,unicef-warns-of-effects-of-financial-crisis-on-children.html> (1 of 2)7/1/2552 9:22:57

Singapore - Governments should not abandon women and children who need their help most, even as tax revenues shrink because of the global financial crisis, the UN warned Tuesday. Anupama Rao Singh, UNICEF director for East Asia and the Pacific, urged governments not to forget those dependent on public aid.

"The UN Convention on Children's Rights, which has been ratified by all nations, is clear: children should get help first, especially in economically difficult times," Singh told a Singapore conference. People around the world are losing their jobs because of the crisis, affecting families' ability to pay for schooling, or forcing them to

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end the children out to work, UNICEF said. Malnutrition endangers growth and intellectual development.

"We must not endanger the future of our children," Singapore's Minister for Youth Vivian Balakrishnan said.

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Millions of children vulnerable in economic crisis: UN

<http://www.intellasia.net/news/articles/society/111255315.shtml>

The deepening global economic crisis could significantly raise infant mortality and malnutrition rates, a UN official said Tuesday, urging Asian governments to protect millions of vulnerable children.

Despite budgetary constraints, there is no reason to cut back on social spending, said Anupama Rao Singh, director for East Asia and the Pacific at the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef).

Singh warned that, based on previous experience, the current economic crisis could result in a 5-10% increase in anaemia among pregnant women and a 10% rise in low birth weights among babies in severely affected countries.

Child mortality is expected to increase between 3.0 and 10% and the malnutrition rate among children could rise by 10%, she said, without specifying exactly the number of youngsters at risk.

Real data on the impact of the global meltdown was not yet available, Singh said at a conference to assess the impact of the global economic crisis on children. The event was jointly sponsored by Unicef and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

While economies in the region have been affected by the global slump, many are still expected to post economic growth, although at a slower pace, Singh said.

"In this context, I think the first implication for us is that there is absolutely no justification for cutting back programmes and services for the poor or for children. This is not the time to do it," Singh said.

"On the contrary, this is the time to sustain and actually expand social investments."

She suggested that social protection programmes be made an integral part of government stimulus packages aimed at reviving economies. That

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would create jobs for teachers, healthcare workers and social workers, she said.

There are concerns that shrinking national budgets could force governments to cut back on social spending in areas such as health care, nutrition and education, potentially affecting a huge number of children, according to experts.

During the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, Thailand's public health budget shrank by 9.0% and its education budget fell 6.0%, according to figures cited by Unicef.

At that time, the infant mortality rate in Indonesia rose 14%.

In the Philippines, the immunisation rate fell nearly 15% and public health expenditure tumbled six%, while school enrollment rates for children declined and the number of child labourers increased, Unicef said.

Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore's minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, suggested refocusing on the social impact of the crisis.

"Remember that there are real human beings at the end of these numbers and this indicates real suffering," he said, referring to children likely to be affected.

Governments should get their priorities right, said Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School.

He cited data showing that the total cost of launching feeding programmes for malnourished schoolchildren worldwide would be six billion dollars a year.

The **money** may appear massive but it pales in comparison with the eight trillion dollars used by governments to bail out the world's richest banks over the past few months, he said.

"Eight trillion dollars is 8,000 billion dollars. We can find 8,000 billion dollars to bail out rich banks, but we cannot find six billion dollars to feed the children of the world. Something is very wrong here," he added.

Indonesian Finance minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati called on international financial institutions to increase lending for social programmes.

Developing countries previously depended on raising funds in the global bond markets to support projects targeted at the poor, but borrowing costs have become prohibitive, she said.



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Indonesia's Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati speaks during a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) conference for East Asia and the Pacific on the impact of the global economic crisis on children in the region, in Singapore January 6, 2009. REUTERS/Vivek Prakash (SINGAPORE)