

Kathmandu Understanding

Investing in Children in South Asia

WE, the delegations of the Governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, along with corporate leaders and young activists (Change Makers) from our countries met at the South Asia High Level Meeting on Investing in Children in Kathmandu, Nepal on 22-23 May 2001. This meeting was preceded by consultations between Change Makers and corporate leaders. These meetings were organised as part of the Global Movement for Children and in preparation for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session to be held in New York 19-21 September 2001.

WE agree that children are the future of our nations and, therefore, investing in children should be a national priority.

GUIDED by the spirit of the draft outcome document of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, *A World Fit for Children*, we recognise that each child needs a good start in life; completion of basic education of good quality, and the opportunity for adolescents to develop their individual capacities to the fullest.

WE note the progress made by countries of South Asia towards achieving the goals of the World Summit for Children and the 1996 SAARC Ministerial Conference on Children held in Rawalpindi. We also note examples of large-scale actions taken by governments of South Asia, non-governmental organisations, international agencies, civil society and communities in areas such as early childhood development, universal primary and elementary education, and immunisation. But

WE acknowledge that there is still much to be done to attain most of the goals and to fulfil the rights of all girls and boys to survival, health, development and protection through access to quality basic social services, including health, nutrition, education, and protection against neglect, abuse and exploitation. In particular, we note that birth registration, low-birth weight, infant, under-5 and maternal mortality, malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies such as Vitamin A and iodine, maternal and child anaemia, quality water supply, sanitation, salt iodisation, access to primary school and learning achievement, and care of the girl child and the adolescent girl remain areas of concern. In most situations girls are worse off than boys.

WE recognise that poverty denies the fulfilment and enjoyment of human rights of children and robs them of the nurturing care that is crucial for their physical, cognitive, and psychological development, and the inculcation of a sound value system to lead healthy and productive lives. Impoverished children are victims of the vicious cycle of poverty, which perpetuates into the next generation. Providing a safe and healthy start to all children is important for breaking the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition and poor health which links an infant, adolescent girl and mother.

WE affirm, therefore, that investing in children is a priority issue and that poverty reduction should begin with children.

WE affirm, once again, that there is no greater investment than laying a stable foundation for every child by ensuring the fulfilment of rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It is our obligation to allocate the required financial resources and take all requisite actions towards the survival and development of all children in South Asia. This covers good health and nutrition of the populations, especially infants, adolescents and women, quality education for girls and boys, improved drinking water and environmental sanitation, and protection of children from all forms of discrimination, exploitation, violence and abuse, trafficking, and hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour. We

recognise the urgent need to protect adolescents and young people from HIV/AIDS and children affected by armed conflict.

WE recognise that universal access to quality education is the critical foundation for economic growth. However, the quality of education and learning available to the majority of our children is a matter of great concern. We strongly affirm that South Asia cannot afford disparities in education between boys and girls. Efforts, therefore, must be intensified to achieve gender parity in access and learning.

WE recognise that governments, the corporate sector, civil society, communities, young people, international organisations and media need to work in partnership to ensure adequate, timely and productive investments in fulfilling the rights and achieving the well-being of all children in South Asia, and in strategies towards poverty alleviation.

WE call upon the international community to create a supportive environment for the survival, development and protection of children and promote a non-violent, non-exploitative international order. We urge the donor countries to meet all their commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, implement measures for debt relief, assess and monitor the impact of sanctions on children and ensure humanitarian exemptions that are child focussed to address the possible adverse effects of the sanctions. We also urge donor countries to earmark a higher percentage of their Official Development Assistance for the welfare of children under the 20/20 Initiative. We urge UNICEF and our development partners to reaffirm, in spirit and in actions, the need for structural adjustment with a human face, and trade and tariff arrangements for preferential access to developed country markets.

Noting the situation of children in South Asia we:

- Reaffirm our commitments to accelerate progress to achieve the goals for children agreed at the World Summit for Children in 1990 and the 1996 SAARC Ministerial Conference on Children;
- Support and call for increasingly greater investment in children;
- Urge our development partners to enhance their aid and assistance to support higher investment in children in South Asia;
- Recognise the need to listen to children and actively explore ways of involving them in decisions that affect them at all levels;
- Recognise the importance of partnerships between government, private and corporate sector, civil society organisations, communities, individuals, children, international organisations and media;
- Call for the sharing of national experiences and best practices, and common strategies, which reach families and communities at the grassroots level for fulfilling the rights of children;
- Recognise the importance of regular monitoring and review of progress as part of the accountability for results;
- Propose that this Kathmandu Understanding be brought to the attention of UN General Assembly Special Session and the Third Special Session of the Standing Committee of SAARC which will meet in Colombo 8-9 June 2001, which provides another opportunity for a common position to be taken by our countries to the UN Special Session.

WE pledge to work towards the implementation of this Understanding.

WE adopt this Understanding as the outcome of our Meeting.

WE thank His Majesty's Government of Nepal and UNICEF for organising this South Asia High Level Meeting on Investing in Children and for the hospitality extended to us. We also thank Save the Children for organising the Change Makers meeting and their participation.

South Asia High Level Meeting on Investing in Children
23 May 2001
Kathmandu, Nepal