

What young people are saying... State of the World's Children 2005

Young people, aged 8-18, from Malaysia, Nigeria, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the United Kingdom came together on December 8th 2004 to discuss the key themes of UNICEF's State of the World's Children report 2005. They discussed:

- Children and young people living in poverty
- Children and young people caught up in conflict
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on children and young people

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY

How do we define poverty?

- Participants came up with many definitions of poverty. War, corruption and lack of a decent standard of living were key points. Others are listed below.
- "Poverty means not having all you need"
- "Poverty is the lack of essentials like food, clothes and living place"
- "Poverty is no love and no one wants you"
- "Poverty is when a person or child is deprived from their basic needs, like money, love, attention and food"
- "Children need: education, health, food, security, a place to live in, and a safe world"
- "Poverty is the deprivation of those basic needs that one needs to have a good standard of living like security, social, political etc."

"When it comes to kids' poverty, you really need to break the cycle, otherwise they'll have limited opportunities and so will their kids and their kids . . ."

"When they know their rights they can defend themselves and demand their government secure their needs."

- "Plain neglect also causes poverty"
- "Lack of opportunities for young people makes poverty"
- Child labour: "one effect of poverty on children is that we can find some children selling gum or tissue packs in the street"
- Corruption was also seen as a key cause of poverty.

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How can we reduce poverty?

- Aid, education and debt cancellation were offered as solutions to poverty. It was also suggested that young people need skills and opportunities and that they should be at the centre of all poverty reduction programmes. Fundraising locally, nationally and internationally as well as an international fund for children were other ideas.
- "The rich countries could give the poor countries some of their money"
- "To a large extent if it is utilized for the purpose it is meant for and does not end in other peoples' pocket, aid could really help"
- "If you do not know how to manage the money you will still remain poor"
- "The rich countries should help the poor countries organise a poverty eradication programme"
- "Teach a man to fish and he will never go hungry but give him fish and he will be back for more"
- "If aid is channelled to 'teaching people' it can help"
- "Poverty can't be ended until conflict is resolved"

" When there is no money, children are exploited and made to do things that will deny their rights"

Related Comments

- "Poverty leaves children with low self-esteem and a feeling that they are not loved"
- "Poverty may make poor children hate rich children"
- Poverty eradication without absence of conflict (safety) will not make children happy.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAUGHT UP IN CONFLICT

"War and politics are an adult's game but the losers are always the children"

"What I want to know is why world leaders feel free to sideline the children who die as 'collateral damage'"

"The kids are forced to fight for themselves and lose their right of being a kid"

How are children and young people affected by conflict?

"We are in conflict between shooting and military tanks without any protection. We need you as the world's children to shout for us"

- Children suffer mentally, physically and emotionally. They lose lives, homes, properties, parents, siblings, the right to play. War destroys families. Children miss out on school and medical facilities. They are

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injured, killed, raped or disabled.

- The reality of conflict is "meeting soldiers in every aspect of your life, when you want to go to school, to meet friends"

How can conflict be reduced?

- Conflict can be reduced by "education, a changing of people's attitudes toward children".
- Peace zones should be established for children
- Young people can apply pressure to governments
- Children should be protected by their governments during conflict
- Trauma counselling and rehabilitation should be offered
- Develop a "children's network against wars"
- "Raising awareness regarding the results of wars"
- "I think that the best way to stop or even prevent most of these wars is to make people know and respect the right of others starting with those of children"

"They'd have to listen if an army of children speak up in unison"

Child Soldiers

- "I think it's impossible to completely rehabilitate child soldiers after conflict - which means we HAVE to prevent them from being in conflict in the first place"
- Establish half-way houses that guide child soldiers toward integration in society
- "Child soldiers need to be helped to feel that they are not to be blamed"
- Provide them with jobs and let them go to school
- "Child soldiers need a stable, loving, guiding atmosphere after the trauma they've suffered"

"children should not go to war because they will not have a chance to have a childhood"

- "We think that after a war a child should go and live an ordinary life and play to get out the horrible things"
- Make child soldiers "goodwill ambassadors for peace"
- "transform child soldiers into positive role models, and to find themselves some talents and to engage them in constructive activities to benefit themselves and other children"

THE IMPACT OF HIV/AIDS ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Stigma

- Stigma was discussed as a very real problem with young people "shunned by kids their age and the community they live in"
- "Children may inherit the disease from their parents and their peers stigmatise them."
- "It affects their rights to association"

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"We have to break the ice. Because if we just keep tip-toeing around the subject, no-one is going to be helped."

- "If we were educated enough about it, it wouldn't be such a taboo"
- "If we want to break the silence regarding prevention of HIV/AIDS, we can use role models in the society, such as religious leaders to talk about these issues."
- "Just knowing it's rampant isn't enough. People have to know HIV happens to people like them - who might look like them, live in the same area as them, drive the same car, work in the same industry."

How are young people affected by HIV/AIDS?

- The affect of HIV/AIDS on orphaned children was discussed in depth.
- "Kids whose parents are weakened by HIV have to stop school to be breadwinners"
- "it jeopardises their right to education if their caregiver is sick or dies."
- Children can be exploited and exposed to danger and violence

"HIV/AIDS can be destructive to the lives and future of children . . . the issue of parents dying young is very bad . . . but also it can affect them in being transmitted through their mother at birth".

Prevention

- Prevention, education and advocacy were highlighted as key
- It was noted that education should not only be in schools, but in homes and on television too. Other ideas were "gingles, rallies, seminars and working with various existing youth organizations"
- "Children can raise awareness by joining campaigns or rallies to tell their parents of the consequences of being unfaithful or contracting HIV/AIDS"

"It is the duty of the government to create awareness but the duty of people to change behaviour."

- There was some debate over whether abstinence was a realistic method of prevention with some arguing that HIV/AIDS is rare when religion prohibits sexual intercourse outside of marriage. This was a controversial view with some participants pointing out that intercourse is not the only method of transmission and others arguing that religion does not necessarily prevent pre or extra-marital intercourse.

- "When people know about the dangers involved with HIV/AIDS they stay away from the causes"
- Celebrities and religious leaders should be used to advocate on HIV/AIDS
- Different methods should be used to appeal to young people in different way - "Subtle messages on TV or something like that"
- "Telling kids not to have sexual intercourse just like that won't always work. Letting them know what HIV does to you, letting

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them meet people who've had their lives ruined by the virus and lastly, knowing that there is a way to protect themselves against such a fate . . . this is what is needed"

- It was noted that sexual harassment was a factor in transmission of HIV/AIDS.

What can young people do?

- Peer education and advocacy were considered key - examples were using newspapers and quizzes, working in schools or with voluntary organizations.
- "We need more people sharing their stories"

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